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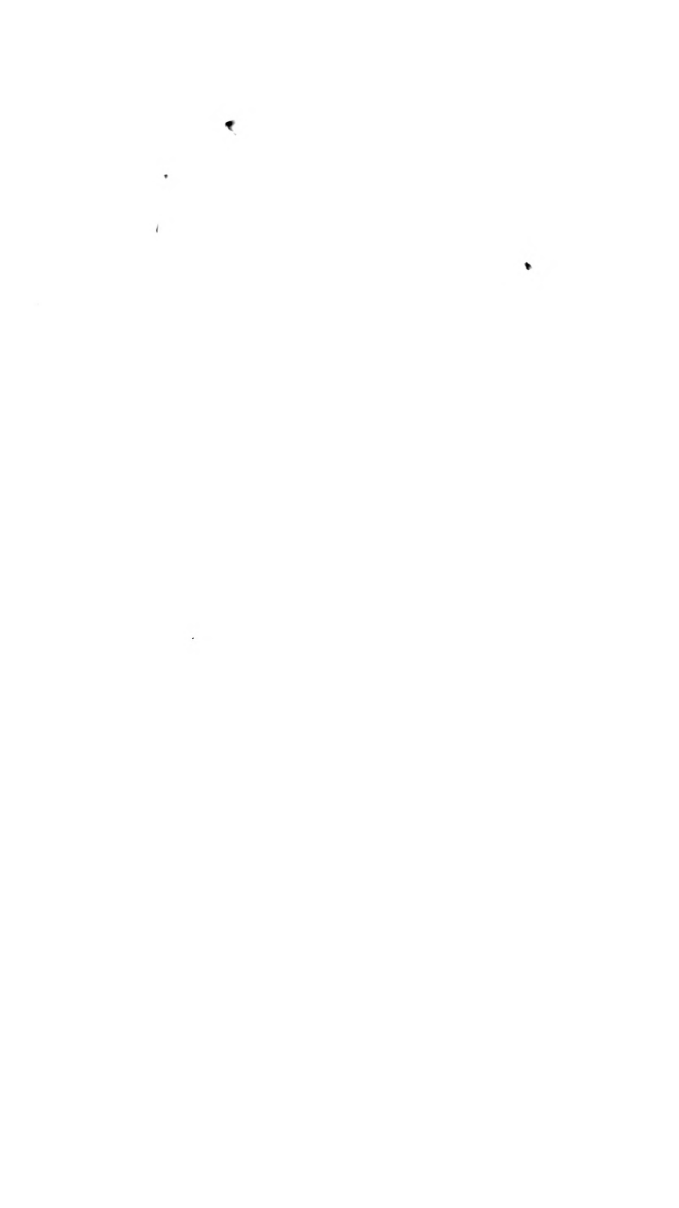
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TYNG

William Whitlock Esq

from his father, as per

Deed of H. J. J. J.

March 1. 1857



THE
ISRAEL OF GOD.

BY

STEPHEN H. TYNG, D.D.

RECTOR OF ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, NEW YORK.

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INTRODUCTION.

It is nearly ten years since the present volume was first published in the city of Philadelphia. The simple purpose of its publication then, was to gratify the wish of a large circle of personal friends, who had often expressed the desire to have in print, some of the discourses which they had been accustomed to hear from the author in the pulpit. Since the first publication of this volume, more than three thousand copies of it have been sold. And in bringing out another edition, to which he has added some further selections from his sermons, the author would record his gratitude to God who has thus given his humble labors so much acceptance among his people,—and his affectionate expressions of thankfulness to the many Christian friends who have so liberally encouraged and sustained his ministry of the Sacred Word. Great indeed is the privilege of proclaiming that glorious and finished salvation, which the Gospel offers to perishing men, as laid up in Christ alone; purchased by the merit of his righteousness, and bestowed by the exercise of his power. Never was there a time, when it was more necessary to preach and teach this great salvation, in the simplicity of its divine revelation, in the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth. The author trusts that this volume will be found to do this clearly and faithfully.

The years and experience of his past ministry, and the whole course of his study and observation have served to deepen his convictions of the value and importance of the truths which are here, as in his other works, proclaimed. He can have no change to make in doctrine, or in methods of teaching, in the years of his ministry to men. Whether they be few or many, he earnestly desires that they may be, by the help of God, all devoted to the one great purpose of preaching the Gospel of the Son of God,—and spreading, to the extent of his ability, what appear to him the only just views of this precious revelation of grace to man. In the preaching of this great salvation, he trusts that a gracious God will mercifully continue to bless his labors, and give him many seals to his ministry, in the new and important field of effort which is now opened before him, and among the interesting and valued flock now gathering under his care. At the feet of the Glorious Saviour, the author humbly desires to lay down all his labors, and to ascribe all the glory forever, to his wonderful and glorious name.

S. H. T.

ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH,
January 2, 1849.

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I.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO ISRAEL.

AMOS iv. 12.—*Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*

WE commence this day, the course of another ecclesiastical year, with the season of Advent. Our attention is particularly, and properly called, to the consideration of the coming of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, as God manifest in the flesh. The special services of the Liturgy for this season, have reference to this great fact; and it becomes the preacher's duty to lead to it also. This view of propriety, leads me now to call your minds to the solemn message of our present text.

“PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD, O ISRAEL.”

In the language of the Scripture, the design of Almighty God in any way to bless or to punish mankind, is often represented by the declaration of his coming among them for that purpose. The peculiar connexion which existed between the Israelites as a people, and God as their particular Ruler and King, may be referred to, as rendering this form of expression entirely intelligible, and manifestly appropriate.

As earthly rulers move from place to place in their dominions, to administer justice, and to fulfil the purposes of government, so the Almighty Ruler, as the special King of Israel, was exhibited to their view, in the various dispensations of his providence, and in the employment of his chosen instruments of blessing or chastisement, as coming personally among them.

In his own existence, God necessarily fills all space, and is at all times, equally present, in every portion of the universe which he hath formed. Yet he frequently speaks of himself, sometimes as *dwelling* among his people, and then as *departing* from them; sometimes as being *near* to them, and a God *at hand*, and at others as being *far from* them, and a God *afar off*; sometimes as *visiting* the earth, to bless it with plenteousness, or to punish it for transgression, and at others, as *looking down* upon its inhabitants, in observation, either of their uprightness and integrity, or of their depravity and alienation from himself. All these forms of expression arise, from the peculiar government which he exercised over the Israelites, often called a *theocracy*, under which, he condescended to fill the office of their ruler, allowing them to choose him as such, as he says to them, "the Lord your God was your King," and they as a chosen and peculiar people, were considered as the special subjects of his authority.

Because every instrument, either of good or evil, was powerful and effectual only as employed by him, God is also often said to have personally done, that which was done by his permission. And because the accomplishment of the good or evil referred to, was an especial manifestation of his power and provi-

dence, and he seemed to be particularly present, where the effects of his influence were thus exhibited, under such circumstances, he is spoken of as being nearer to the subjects of his authority, than upon ordinary occasions. When by the famine, the pestilence, or the sword, he was to punish the transgressions of the ungodly, and the loftiness of man was to be bowed down, and the haughtiness of man was to be made low, he speaks to them in the language of solemn personal denunciation, that he will arise, and shake terribly the earth, that he will come near unto them, as a swift witness against their guilt. And when he would deliver his people, by conquest over their enemies, or establish them in prosperity, in the land which he had given them, he proclaims in the sublime expression of his triumphant purpose, that he would ride upon the heavens for their help, and in his excellency upon the sky; that he would move in the whirlwind, and in the storm, and the clouds should be the dust of his feet. While he thus warns his people of his approach, either for purposes of mercy or judgment, he commands them also, to prepare for his reception; to be ready to meet him, with that reverence, and gratitude, and submission, which comported with his high authority, and with their dependance upon his power.

In the particular message of our text, there is a reference to the severe and painful chastisements, which the Israelites had already received from him. These afflictions had not been allowed by them to produce their proper effect, in bringing to repentance, those who had before transgressed the divine commands. God threatens them therefore, with the

further execution of his determinations for punishment, and solemnly admonishes them, to be prepared to meet him at his coming among them, for this purpose.

At the time in which this message was delivered by the prophet, the people of Israel, to whom it was addressed, may be regarded as exhibiting the two distinct characters, of the SPIRITUAL ISRAEL, and the IDOLATROUS ISRAEL. A very large majority of them had gone astray from God, under the idolatry which had been established in their land. But, as God had informed Elijah in a previous time, there was still a remnant who had not bowed the knee to Baal. There was a nominal Israel known to man, and there was a spiritual Israel also among them, secretly discerned by God. In my present application of the message before us, I wish to consider it under these two aspects; and first, as addressed to the latter class; as the divine message to the SPIRITUAL ISRAEL, the chosen, peculiar people of God.

The selection of the Israelites from the other nations of men, to be the depositary of God's revelations to the world, is frequently used in the Scriptures, in illustration of the election of a people under the Gospel dispensation, from all classes of men, to become the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ; who, as believers in his Gospel, are accepted in him, as the peculiar people of God; and by the power of his Spirit, are created anew in holiness after his image, and made zealous and persevering in their obedience to his laws. This people are called in the Scripture, "the Israel of God," in distinction from "Israel after the flesh." The contrast between them is recognized

in that one declaration of St. Paul, "all are not Israel that are of Israel." To this people, in all lands, converted and sanctified by the Spirit of God, and justified in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, are the promises of the Gospel made. And the divine method of government over the nation of Israel, illustrates the Lord's system of spiritual discipline over those who are thus called according to his promise.

To this people before me, I now address the message of the text. As the spiritual Israel, I refer to those among my hearers, who have come unto Christ, as a people that shall serve him; who have accepted him as all their salvation, and all their desire; in whose eternal security he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied; and over whose redemption through his blood, he will rejoice forever. To these I speak. To the Christians of this congregation, as the children of God, the believing, obedient subjects of our divine Emmanuel, whose hearts the Lord the Spirit hath directed into the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ, I address myself as to God's spiritual Israel:—"Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

I. We will remark upon the *events* which may be referred to as the *coming of God*.

Beside the minor and local dispensations of the divine providence which are spoken of under this character, there are two grand events in the history of the world, which are referred to in the Scripture under this peculiar designation. They are, the personal advent of God in his incarnation, for the redemption of his people, when the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily among men; and the second per-

sonal advent of God the Saviour, to judge the world in righteousness, when every one of us must give an account of himself to God. To these two great events our reference will be made, and the people of God are exhorted to prepare to meet them.

1. The first advent of God to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, in some of its aspects, may be considered as a past event. But in regard to its final object, the accomplishment of man's salvation, it must be considered as enduring until every ransomed soul has been brought home, converted from the world, and fully devoted unto God. Through a long succession of ages, believers in the divine promise, had looked forward to this coming of God, as the great object of their desire. They were waiting in expectation of the full consolation of the people of God. They expected a Redeemer, who should speak in righteousness, and be mighty to save; who should be able to say, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else;" and of whom they could reply in thankful welcome, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us." The purpose of his first advent, was not to condemn, but to save. It was to collect into one fold, his sheep who were scattered in the midst of this sinful world, that they might be saved through him forever.

This great purpose of his coming, he is effecting every day. In each instance in which he converts a sinner unto himself, and takes possession of a mind thus renewed, he may be considered as having come anew with the Holy Ghost and with power, to seek and to save that which was lost. He has yet abroad

in the world "much people," as he said to Paul of guilty, unbelieving Corinth, who know him not, who have never been taught to call upon his name, and who, perhaps, are now like that same chosen vessel, persecuting him ignorantly in unbelief. Millions of souls yet unborn, undoubtedly will be born again for the inheritance which he has provided for his children. Among those who hear me, there are doubtless many, to whom the glad tidings of his salvation will yet be made known, and into whose hearts the word shall yet come with power, and with much assurance, though they are now wandering in all the follies and guiltiness of the world. Under this view, the exhortation of the text may still be addressed to the Israel of God, in reference to the first coming of their King. To the heart yet unchanged, the real advent of Christ for man's salvation, is as much a future event, as it was to Abraham. And when the glad hour of its conversion shall come, God will, for the first time, be effectually manifested to that heart, as a Saviour. He will then become its salvation. To very many souls his way is not yet prepared. He has not come to them because they are not ready to receive him. He stands at the door, and knocks; and whenever there is in them a willingness to admit him, and they are ready to open the door, he will delay no longer, but will come in to them, and will sup with them, and they with him. Then the converted soul shall be able to say, "Behold, God is become my salvation, I will trust, and not be afraid;" "my flesh shall rest in hope," "for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

2. The second advent of God the Saviour, which is for all who listen to me, still a future event, will be

for the full salvation of his people, for the universal judgment of the world, and for the final settlement of his glorious and everlasting kingdom. Then, he who was once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear without sin unto salvation, for all who have believed on his name. All that the Father hath given him, shall come to him; and of those who thus come to him, he will lose none, but will raise them up at the last day. This glorious advent of the Redeemer as the universal Judge, is exhibited in the Scriptures in the most sublime and glowing language. He is to come in the clouds, attended by innumerable hosts of angels, with the instant manifestation of the lightning. He is to be seated on a throne of glory, and all nations are to be gathered before him. One grand division shall separate forever the immortal spirits for whom that day has been prepared; and to its own abode, its final dwelling place, shall every soul depart.

This solemn day is a future one; but how far removed, neither men nor angels know. It cannot come until God's purposes of grace in reference to this fallen world have been all fulfilled; until all Christ's sheep have heard his voice, and followed him; until those who are unholy, are so perversely and voluntarily unholy, that they must remain unholy still. But though the actual day of universal judgment may be far remote, the coming of Christ to call us personally to account, cannot be. This is near at hand. For this most important change, his people are to be well prepared. "Behold, I come quickly," he says to every one who has entered into covenant with him, "hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take

thy crown." Few will be the years before every child of God in this assembly shall have been called to meet the God of his salvation; to stand before the throne of him whom his soul loveth, and to rejoice in the eternal possession of the riches of his grace, and of an unfading crown of glory. The day of reunion with the body spiritualized and rendered holy, as an eternal companion for the ransomed spirit, may be far postponed; and long may our mortal part sleep under the care of Jesus, before the arrival of the hour in which the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and return to life. But not so far postponed, the hour of bliss for us. To-morrow we may be with Christ. This night may finish our wanderings in a land of strangers, and call us to our final home with him. How solemn, how tranquil, how secure, the joy with which the believer may look forward to this hour of permanent reunion with his Lord!

Yet a few years, or days, perhaps,
 Or moments pass in silent lapse,
 And time with me shall be no more—
 No more, the sun these eyes shall view,
 Earth o'er these limbs, her dust shall strew,
 And life's delusive dream be o'er.

To this second coming of Emmanuel, our glorious King, the exhortation of the text directs the watchfulness of the people of God. Much is to be done for every one of us, before we can feel altogether willing to say in reference to it, "even so, come Lord Jesus, come quickly." And O, let us make it the subject of earnest effort and prayer, that by the indwelling of the Spirit, we may be prepared to appear

unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

These two great events in the history of the world, and in the history of each redeemed soul, which is but the world in miniature, are known in the Scriptures, and are to be considered by us, as the coming of our great God and Saviour. He first comes, as a crucified, atoning Saviour, to the hearts of his people; to give them pardon and peace; to take from them, all hardness of heart, and contempt of his word; to bestow upon them the grace, which is able to keep them from falling; and to present them before the throne of his glory, with exceeding joy. He comes to raise them from the ruins of the fall, and to make them an holy temple, an habitation of God through the Spirit. And happy is he who has part in this first resurrection; over him, the second death shall have no power. Having thus perfected the purpose of his first advent, in the soul of every child of God; having brought the wanderer home to his fold, and taught him to go in and out, and find pasture, he comes yet again, to carry this child of grace, to a better country, that is, an heavenly. He comes to make an eternal end of sin and trial for his soul, and to crown him with unspeakable bliss, in the presence of his God. He comes to carry him in his arms, to living pastures, and to fountains of the water of life; to that river of love, whose streams make glad the city of our God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. To these two important days, the day of our new birth of grace, and the day of our new birth to glory; the day in which Christ comes to our hearts, to make us his servants, and the day in which he comes for

our souls to make us his saints;—I would direct the attention of the Israel of God, as the events pointed out, in our present exhortation, “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.”

II. This leads me to describe the *state of mind*, which is implied in this call for preparation. I must ask your distinct attention to the required preparation for each of the two advents of Christ, which we have now separately considered. His people are to be prepared for his coming to bless them with forgiveness of sin, and with a spiritual renewal of their mind; and for his coming to take them to himself in everlasting blessedness.

I. In regard to his first advent, a divine messenger was sent to make ready his way; and in the wilderness of a guilty world, a voice from God was heard, crying, “prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make straight in the desert, a highway for our God.” Such is the message to be still delivered, and such is the work to be still perfected, in the case of all who are led to receive Jesus as their Saviour, and to become in him, by a spiritual regeneration, the children of God. To every unconverted soul, he is waiting to be gracious. His arm is not shortened, that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy, that he cannot hear; but the sins of men separate them from him; and they have no part in his salvation, because they are not ready to receive him, as their Lord and their God. When you are humbled under a deep conviction of sin; when you are made to feel the dangers which your transgressions have brought upon yourselves; when you see that you have provoked against you, the wrath of an holy God; when your souls can thus be made

athirst for God, and long for the free and full salvation which Christ bestows; he is ready to enter into your hearts, as his permanent abode, and to bless you with the possession of a hope of glory. But this work of preparation must be finished, before your hearts can find peace with him. The world and self are to be forsaken and denied. Your own righteousness as a ground of hope, is to be relinquished. A deep sense of the holiness of the law and government of God, is to be impressed upon your minds. And you are to be made to feel, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, without that hope in Christ, which maketh not ashamed.

In a multitude of cases, in which this work will be accomplished, it has not yet been done. There are many wanderers from the fold, still lost in the mountains, thinking not of the kindness of the shepherd, and conscious of no wish to return to him. There are many too, who though they are partially awakened, are not yet willing to yield themselves to the will of God, or prepared to choose him as their final portion. How appropriate to all such, in reference to the first advent of Christ, is the exhortation of our text!—"Prepare to meet thy God." Be ready to receive him, as your shield, and your exceeding great reward. Allow yourselves to be convinced of the vanity of the world, of the insufficiency of all self-dependence, of the necessity of a living, lasting union by faith, with Jesus Christ. He is ready to bless you with a full redemption through his blood. But he cannot pardon, while you will not confess your guilt. He cannot raise you up, while proud and boastful in your self-reflections, you will not believe

that you have fallen. He cannot bind a heart that is not broken, nor heal a spirit which has not been bruised. They who are whole need not a physician, but they who are sick. Long since might you have been rejoicing in the salvation of the Gospel, but for the obstacles, which you have voluntarily thrown in a Saviour's way. And before the morrow, you may be happy in the enjoyment of a Saviour's love, if you can now be persuaded, to prepare the way for his coming to your heart, and to yield that heart to his control. But if you voluntarily remain alienated from him, and put far from you the grace which he so freely offers, year by year will still pass by, and find you yet, a poor captive of Satan, bound in chains of darkness, and still less and less inclined, to come to Jesus for the life you need. I beseech you, my friends, to lay aside this spirit of enmity, and to become prepared for this first advent of the Lord the Saviour. Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him, while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

2. In regard to the second coming of Christ, when every eye shall see him shining in glory, and among all the kindreds of the earth, they who have pierced him by their ingratitude and sin, shall wail because of him, the exhortation of our text becomes still more solemn and important. What progress in holiness shall be too large a preparation for that momentous hour of the soul's existence? What life of faith can be too elevated? What heavenliness of character can

be too exalted? What spirituality of affection can be too intense, as an education for that day of God? To all the spiritual Israel must this address be solemnly applied. There must be with you, my brethren, a consistent, growing life of faith and piety; affections set upon things above; and a disposition to find all your treasures hid in Jesus Christ.

Your own souls are to be purified in holiness; to be exercised in communion with God; and to acquire the taste, the habits, and the dialect of heaven. The peculiar employments and joys of an holier world are to be made the subjects of your study, and the objects of your desire. It must have become the portion of your choice, to depart hence, and be with Christ, before you will be prepared to meet your God, or be able to assure your hearts before him.

The souls of others are to be saved. The holy kingdom of the Lord Jesus is to be established in the world; and the various means which he has placed in your hands, to build up this kingdom, are to be employed by you, with ardour, and thankfulness, and success. But alas, how little of your portion of this work has been accomplished! What darkness and misery prevail over large regions of the earth, while perhaps, to very few, have you ever given the cup of living water, for Christ's sake! What precious souls have you assisted to save? Are there any in heaven, are there any on the earth, who can praise God, that they have lived in the same age, or in the same world, with you? O, you have yet much, very much to do. And every grain which you can take from the vast heap of human wretchedness, is so much done towards breaking down the power

of Satan, and establishing the dominion of the Lord Jesus among men.

Personal holiness and active beneficence constitute the whole amount of pure and undefiled religion, as exemplified in the character which is required of the people of God. And though no worth can appertain to either, as proceeding from an imperfect and sinful being, yet undoubtedly, the higher are our attainments in both, the more full of peace and comfort will our souls be, at the coming of our God. Our triumph in that hour, will not rest indeed upon personal excellence, but upon the unsearchable riches of Christ. We shall look far higher, than to ourselves; and much farther back, than to our own lives, for our objects of praise. We shall ascribe all the glory, to that God who hath from the beginning, chosen us unto salvation, through the sanctification of the Spirit, and a belief of the truth. But we shall remember our work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father, as testifying to our hearts, our election of God.

In all the duties of an holy, active life, the spiritual Israel are to be prepared to meet their God. Beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. You have a great work to do, and but little time in which to do it. Many souls around you, are yet unconverted. Many are growing cold and careless. Many are but slowly progressing in grace. And for all, much sin is to be subdued, and much likeness to God attained, before they shall become meet to be partakers of the inherit-

ance of the saints in light. All this is to be done quickly. God's appointed hours are rapidly approaching, and his plans of providence are fast developing. The Judge standeth at the door. O, when he comes, shall he find faith on the earth? Shall he find you waiting for his approach? Shall you be clothed in his righteousness, and presented without spot before him? Be ye sure of this. See to it, that your souls are safe in Jesus Christ. Be anxious and watchful for this great concern. And when the door is shut, irrevocably shut, be certain, that it shall be closed for your security, in an abode of eternal peace and triumph.

II.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO ISRAEL.

AMOS iv. 12.—*Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*

IN presenting this message from Almighty God to his people, as a subject for your consideration, I proposed to speak of it, first, as a message to God's *spiritual Israel*, and secondly, as addressed to the *idolatrous Israel*. In one discourse upon this first division, I have spoken of the *events* which are to be referred to, as the coming of our God; and of the *state of mind*, which is required, as a preparation for these events.

III. The third topic for remark in this view of the text, will be the *character* under which God will come to his spiritual Israel. He is *theirs*, and he is their God. "Prepare to meet *thy God*, O Israel." Whether our reference be made to the first, or to the second advent of our God, the message of the text may be welcomed with joy by all his people. If he comes to them in their unconverted state, to deliver them from the bondage of their sins, to ransom them from the power of eternal death, and to make them

free with the liberty of the sons of God; or, if he comes to them, when their earthly probation has been finished, to bring them unto Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; he comes to them in each case, as their God; as a Saviour who is welcome to their hearts, and whose love to them, is an everlasting love. To this attractive and precious character of an approaching Redeemer, I desire now to direct your notice, while I ask you to consider the relation which he sustains to his people, and the mutual property which they have in each other.

He comes to them, not as an enemy whom they fear, but as a friend in whom they delight; not as a Ruler, whose power only makes him the more terrible, but as a protector, in whose ability to save unto the uttermost, they can altogether confide. There is a charm given by the personal possession of a treasure, which can never belong to that which is not our own. However valuable an object may be in itself, it cannot fail to become in our estimation, far more so, if we are permitted to appropriate it to ourselves. Now the glorious Emmanuel, is in himself, an inexhaustible treasure. All riches of wisdom, and power, and love are laid up in him. But he becomes to our view, still more precious, as his Spirit enables us to make him our own. When we have been taught to say in the assurance of a vital lasting union with him, "my beloved is mine, and I am his," we have learned a full answer to the inquiries of the world, "what is thy beloved, more than another beloved?" To those who believe, he is precious; and though now they see him not, yet believing in him, they rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. They

experience from day to day, his reviving, transforming power. And in the enjoyment of peace with him, and with all the charms of property and personal interest, they can say of him, "this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death."

1. Beloved Christian friends, God the Saviour is ours, by *his own election* of us to be his people. Before we were brought into being, we were his. When we were dead in trespasses and sins, he loved us, according to the riches of his mercy. When we knew him not, perhaps had never thought of him, he called us to receive the fulness of his grace. This is the great reason for our gratitude and praise to him, that he waited for no merit in us; but from the overflowing of his own compassion towards us, he had mercy because he would have mercy. How often does the Apostle Paul make this the subject of thanksgiving unto God, in behalf of the believers in the Lord Jesus, to whom he wrote! To the Ephesians he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." To the Thessalonians he says, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing, your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God, and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." This is the fundamental ground of the property which God has in his people, and

which they have in him. By his own unbounded love, he has thus become our God; and we feel constrained to give him all the glory, for that grace which has saved us from everlasting ruin, and given unto us, exceeding great and precious promises in Jesus Christ, without any reference to merit, or worthiness in ourselves.

2. God the Saviour is ours, by a *voluntary donation* of himself for us. When we were without strength, or hope, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. Sin against God had placed the whole race of man under a curse. The wrath of God was revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Without the shedding of blood there was no remission. Either the sinner or a substitute must die, to preserve the majesty of God unstained, and to reconcile the justice of God to the pardon of the guilty. To make the necessary atonement for sin, and to accomplish the perfect righteousness which man required, God became man, and opened in himself, a fountain for sin and for uncleanness. Burnt offerings and sacrifice for sins, could offer no hope to a fallen soul. Then, said God the Son, "Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God." From this voluntary, cheerful submission of himself to be the sinner's propitiation, as early as the existence of human want, he is called, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." By this donation of himself, he purchased for himself a peculiar people, who shall glorify him on the earth, and become partakers of his glory in heaven. They were the subjects of the promise to him, in the great covenant of redemption, which is the whole foundation of human hope. In them he

was to see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. By their knowledge of himself, he was to justify them, when he should bear their iniquities, and make his life an offering for sin. He has thus purchased them, with an inestimable price, and they are his people, and he is their God.

3. God the Saviour becomes ours, by our *voluntary acceptance* of his mercy. The rich and glorious privileges of his Gospel are freely offered to the enjoyment of all who hear the message which presents them. The terms of the divine invitations are unlimited, and whosoever will, is invited by the Saviour, to be partaker of his grace. But vast numbers despise the riches of his long suffering, trample under their feet God's dear Son, and count the blood of his covenant an unholy and worthless thing. There are thousands who speak evil of the way of truth; who hate the pure and perfect commands of God; and who live without a desire for conversion, under the dominion of that carnal mind, which is enmity against God, and is not, and will not be, subject to his will. But while this is the character of many, there are certainly many also, who have received Jesus in their hearts, as their hope of glory; and have rejoiced in the acceptance of the loving kindness which he has offered them. They have felt their deep necessity for such a Saviour. They have been convinced of the wretchedness of their natural condition without him. They have found themselves to be without hope, because they were without God in the world. They have been wearied with the hard service in which they have been held; and have sought for redemption and peace in the blood of Jesus, even the

forgiveness of sins. They have thus gratefully received the offer of salvation, which God has been pleased to make to them, and to cast themselves humbly, and wholly, upon him. By this acceptance of the riches of his mercy which are in Christ Jesus, God becomes their Saviour and their covenant God.

4. God the Saviour becomes ours, by the *personal consecration* of ourselves to his service. If we are his people, we have come out from this evil world, and separated ourselves from its vanities and sins. We have named ourselves by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and have bound ourselves in a covenant with him, to be his forever, and to depart from all iniquity. We are not our own, and we have not the right to live unto ourselves. He has sealed us with his Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption; and we have promised to live in the remembrance, that our time, and talents, and opportunities and power to do good, are all the Lord's. We are to feel it as our highest privilege, that he is willing to accept our imperfect services, and to look down with compassion upon such sinful and unworthy creatures. There has been a solemn agreement registered in heaven, between every Christian before me, and the Master whom they are all bound to serve; an agreement voluntarily entered into by themselves; that they will have no other God but him, that every idol which their vain hearts may have set up for their homage, shall be relinquished and cast away, and that their whole affections shall be consecrated unto him, and to his glory, forever. This devotion of ourselves to God, is recognised in all our approaches to his throne of grace, whether in public or in private. We come

unto him as our covenant God, to whom we have made the voluntary donation of ourselves, to be a living sacrifice unto him, and whose promises mercifully established in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the right therefore to plead before him. We have thus avouched the Lord to be our God; and we become witnesses against ourselves, if we forsake his service, and yield our affections to the enemies of his will.

This is the fourfold ground of that reciprocal property which subsists between God and his people. He is *theirs* by the free donation of himself to be a Saviour and a sacrifice for their souls. They are *his* by his own merciful election of them before the foundation of the world; by their thankful acceptance of his mercy when it was offered them in the Gospel; and by their solemn devotion of themselves to his holy service. By his Holy Spirit, they are united in faith unto Christ. And being thus made the members of his body, where he is, there must they be also. This is the divine promise to them, "they shall call upon my name, and I will hear them; I will say, it is my people, and they shall say, the Lord is my God." How glorious is the privilege of this union! The high and lofty One, even the God who ruleth in the heavens, is ours. We may faint and be weary; we may be cast down and despondent. But God still says to us in our lowest depressions, "fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer, the holy One of Israel. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee."

Under this character, does God come to his spiritual

Israel, whether for their conversion, or for their final triumph. He is theirs, and they are his. What force does this consideration add to the address of our text, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." "What an assemblage of motives to holiness, does the Gospel present!" said the spiritually-minded Payson, "I am a Christian. What then? I am a redeemed sinner, a pardoned rebel; all through grace, and by the most wonderful means which infinite wisdom could devise. I am a Christian. What then? Why I am a temple of God, and surely I ought to be pure and holy. I am a Christian. What then? Why I am a child of God, and I ought to be filled with filial reverence, love, joy, and gratitude. I am a Christian. What then? Why I am a disciple of Christ, and must imitate him who was meek and lowly in heart, and pleased not himself. I am a Christian. What then? Why I am an heir of heaven, and hastening on to the abodes of the blessed, to join the full choir of the glorified ones, in singing the song of Moses and the Lamb; and surely I ought to learn that song on earth."

But while we are remarking upon the character under which God will come to his spiritual people, we must consider him, not only as theirs, but as their GOD. "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." In the governments of this world, the more elevated is the station of a ruler, the more grand and extensive will be the preparations to receive him among his subjects. In the intimacies of domestic life, the dearer is the character of a friend, the greater joy will the anticipation of his arrival produce. The message of the text may well lead the children of Sion

to be joyful in their King, both from the glorious character of the Being whose coming it proclaims, and from the intimate relation which he sustains to his people. "Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him." "This is our God, and he will save us." He is the strength of our heart, and our portion forever. It was he who formed us for himself, and called us into being, that we might glorify his name; who made us in his own image, that we might show forth his praise, and be able to enjoy him forever. It was he who sustained and protected us in the early dangers of infancy and youth; who has watched over us in every period of our lives; and whose goodness and mercy have followed us all our days. It is he who hath redeemed us, and purchased us by his own blood; who hath been made sin for us, when he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him; who hath called us to a knowledge and enjoyment of his grace, and by his Spirit hath rendered us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. He is our sacrifice, who hath borne for us the curse of the law; our High Priest, who hath entered into the heavens for us; our Advocate, who ever liveth to make intercession for us; the Captain of our salvation, who was made perfect through sufferings for our sake; the glorious King of saints, under whom are placed in subjection, the powers of the world to come, for our everlasting benefit.

This is the God for whom the Israel of promise are to be prepared; the Maker, Redeemer, Husband, unchangeable friend, and everlasting portion of his people. He is our God, and we are bound to receive

and reverence him; our God, and we may surely confide in him; our God, and he cannot be overpowered; our God, and he will not forsake us. Tell ye the daughter of Sion, thy King cometh unto thee, having salvation. Proclaim unto all his waiting people, that he is at hand, with an everlasting recompense; and let them all be ready to receive him, as the messenger of salvation, and the Prince of Peace.

IV. Having viewed the relation which God sustains to his people, and the character, under which he comes to them, let us now consider what will be the *results* of his coming to them.

1. His first advent is to their hearts, with the demonstration of the Spirit, and with divine power, and its result is, that they are born again, and made new creatures in Christ Jesus. The natural condition of all men, in regard to God, is the same. Without any difference, all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Every mouth is stopped before him, which attempts to plead an excuse for guilt. By nature, the children of God were the children of wrath, even as others. There is not a saint in heaven, nor a new born soul upon the earth, but was born, and while in an unconverted state remained, a vessel of wrath, fitted to destruction. But to as many as received him, to them gave he power, to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe on his name. The hour in which they received Jesus Christ as their Lord, was the hour of their new birth; and in that hour did salvation come to their souls. The deep convictions of sin which they had before felt; the earnest desires which had been awakened in their hearts, that some one would lead

them into a way of peace ; the solemn determinations which they made that they would cast away the sin which did so easily beset them, and count every thing but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ the Lord, were the preparations by which the Holy Spirit was leading them, to accept the rich mercies of Jesus, and to yield themselves as a willing offering unto him. And when the moment came, that they were ready to do this, to become the temples of the living God, and to choose Jesus as their Saviour, and their eternal portion, then he entered into their hearts, to dwell there by faith ; and they were converted by his grace, reconciled unto God, and made the children of God, by faith in Jesus Christ. Then they experienced the power of the Gospel. They tasted that the Lord was gracious. They enjoyed the testimonies of his love. They found peace in believing. They received the spirit of adoption in their hearts, teaching them to cry unto God, Abba, Father. This was the day on which they began to live, so far as concerned the great purpose for which they were formed. And God rejoiced over the workmanship of his own hands ; souls which he had created anew, after his own image, unto good works, to the honour of his name.

This acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the great offices which he exercises for men, is the characteristic distinction of the people of God ; the grand discriminating mark of converted souls. They have now put on the Lord Jesus Christ, as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption which they need ; while all others are just where they were by nature, without Christ, far off from God, and

strangers to the constraining power of his grace and love. But why are there so many, to whose hearts the Saviour is yet a stranger? Why do men drive him from their bosoms, and reject all his designs of mercy? What is there repugnant or terrible in the spiritual advent of a Saviour like this? He desires to come to the heart of every one before me, that there may be no longer a stranger or foreigner among you, but that ye all may be fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. He would come to you as the minister of everlasting salvation; to make you, to heaven, and earth, and hell, the glorious monuments, of what such a Saviour can do for sinners. He commands you to do no great thing. He calls for no treasures of gold or frankincense, or myrrh. He asks only for yourselves to be laid at his feet, with all your unworthiness and sins, and he will speak the words, by which you shall be saved. O, how affecting is the consideration, that it is the sinner's *will* alone, which separates him from a pardoning Saviour! How solemn is the thought, that while there are here present, perhaps, those who will lie down in hell forever; there is not one, but might find eternal peace in God's dear Son, if he would but submit to his holy and merciful dominion. This day, nay, this hour, may every sinner before me find salvation, if he will but resist the power of Satan, and yield himself as a willing servant unto Christ. O, my friends, throw away your self-dependence, and prepare to meet your God. That will be for you a day of joy, on which you find spiritual peace in Jesus Christ. It will be a day of security, a day of triumph. You will find yourselves in the hands of a Saviour,

whose love cannot fail, and under whose feet every enemy must be placed in entire and final subjection. In sickness and suffering; in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, you will look back upon this birthday of your souls, as the great point of remembrance in your lives. You will sing the praises of Almighty God forever, that you were led thus to receive the mark of the Lamb, and to follow him with thankful confidence, whithersoever he should lead you.

2. If this radical conversion of heart be the result of the first coming of God our Saviour, we are then redeemed from captivity, and there will be nothing disheartening or terrible in his second coming to finish his purposes of love for us. When a reconciled Father calls us home; and a beloved Saviour says to us, "make haste, and come, for this day I must abide at thy house;" there should be no feeling within us, but unmingled joy. The thankfulness with which prophets and righteous men looked forward to the first coming of the Lord Jesus upon the earth, his people may now feel, in expecting him, the second time without sin unto salvation. The valley of the shadow of death may be dark without the presence of a Saviour; but for those who follow him, the Lord is an everlasting light, and their God their glory. Let every true Christian remember that the same Lord, who loved them, and gave himself for them, will uphold and bless them there. The gates of hell shall not prevail against them. God shall make them conquerors, and more than conquerors, through him that loved them. They may think of him, and trust in him, as one for whom they have waited, and believing in whom, they have eternal life. For them he

comes, that he may make up his jewels; that he may write up the number of his people, and give them the rest they need, and the inheritance which he has provided for them. It will be a day of glory, and triumph, and songs of praise, when Jesus, and the whole church of the first born whose names are written in heaven, shall meet to be separated no more forever. Every redeemed soul shall be there. Not one poor, trembling saint shall be lost. Of all whom the Father hath given him, Jesus shall lose none. Saints of all ages, believers of every land, shall be seen collected. And while all ascribe the praise and honour of their salvation to the Lamb, he shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in them that believe. When a Christian dies, he is born anew to glory. And far rather should we praise God, that he is safe, and a conqueror, than lament over his remains, or speak mournfully of his departure. Better is this day of his death than the day of his birth. Now, he is crowned, exalted, and happy, beyond the reach of suffering or fear. And we are to give glory to God, that he has taken one more wanderer unto himself, and secured him eternally in his fold. Soon this hour will come for us, and if we are now in Christ, we shall then be with him. O, happy will be that moment of return to God, when we shall be acknowledged as the friends of Jesus, and stand forth with him before the universe, crowned with his free salvation! And welcome may be disease, and languishing, and death, which shall bring our Emmanuel a second time for our deliverance, and transfer us under his guidance to an eternal home with him.

III.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO ISRAEL.

AMOS iv. 12.—*Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*

I HAVE twice spoken upon this text, as God's message to the spiritual Israel. I come now to apply it with seriousness and affection to another class of my hearers, of whom I shall speak under the title of the IDOLATROUS ISRAEL. After what you have heard from me upon this subject, it cannot be necessary for me now to say, that under these two appellations, I have designed to represent, the converted and the unconverted portions of my hearers; the religious and the irreligious classes of men, who are now before me.

To the one class, the message of the text, as already considered, is a joyful annunciation; a call for thankful preparation for the coming of a triumphant Saviour. In view of his approach, they are to lift up their heads, to rejoice and be exceeding glad, for their redemption draweth nigh.

To the other class, it is the solemn warning of an approaching judgment; the annunciation of a day of

God's own appointment, when the measure of human trial shall be finished, and every immortal soul shall receive a just recompense of reward; when he that is righteous, shall remain righteous still, and he that is unholy shall be unholy still.

Into these two classes of persons, every congregation is divided. But the division is generally a very unequal one. There are probably, but a small portion of the members of any of our public assemblies, who can be reasonably addressed, as converted, or pious persons. For this reason it is, that the faithful exhortations of the pulpit must be generally addressed to those, whose attention has yet to be awakened to the claims of religion, and whose affections are to be drawn to the high and important objects which the Gospel presents. True believers in the Lord Jesus, the Israel of God, are to be comforted, encouraged, and built up in their most holy faith. The exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel belong to them; and they are to be applied to them without fear. But we cannot cry peace to the ungodly, when there is no peace. And there is no peace to the wicked, saith our God. The same fidelity which will lead us, on the one side, to speak comfortably to the people of God, will compel us on the other, to cry aloud, and spare not, to lift up our voice like a trumpet, in proclaiming to unbelieving men, their dangers and their sins.

We are not the enemies of men, because we tell them the truth. Did we hate them indeed, we should leave them to become the victims of their own infatuation; we should combine with Satan, in persuading them to hold on upon the belief, that they are

safe, and may be happy as they are ; we should soothe them in their fears ; we should lull them into still deeper slumbers. We know that this would infallibly accomplish their eternal ruin. We cannot conceal from ourselves the painful fact, that the far greater portion of those who listen to us, from week to week, are in a state of alienation from God, and under the curse of his broken law ; that they are without his love in their hearts, and enemies to his holy will. They are not our personal foes. In some cases, they are our dearest friends, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh ; and God is our record, how greatly we long after them all, in the bowels of Jesus Christ. We love them as our own souls. And loving them thus, we would arouse them from their sleep ; we would convince them of their dangers ; we would draw them, the Lord being merciful unto them, to a city of refuge, a place of eternal safety. To accomplish this most important of all objects, we warn them with all long-suffering, we preach to them with all boldness, we keep back nothing that is profitable unto them, hoping through the boundless mercy of Almighty God, that we may be made the instruments of saving some.

To this class of my hearers, I come this day, with another serious warning. I have no message of consolation for unconverted sinners, no words of peace, unless the invitations of the Gospel prove effectual, and their hearts are brought home in a spiritual conversion unto Jesus Christ the Lord. The address of the text, is to them, a solemn admonition.—“ Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.”

The prophet Amos ministered to the ten tribes of Israel, during the reign of the second Jeroboam ; of

whom it is said, that "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." Under his idolatrous government, this prophet was sent with a heavy burden from the Lord, of warning and condemnation. The exhortation of the text urges them to take heed of the Lord's designed dealings among them. In our present application of it, the circumstances of the history which are connected with it may be employed, as illustrating the characters of the individuals, to whom the address is to be made. These circumstances will present three different aspects of the persons to whom I now refer.

I. It was addressed to those whose service and affections had been voluntarily withdrawn from the living God, and devoted to objects prohibited by him. The Israelites had openly established idolatrous worship in their land; and had secretly withdrawn their hearts from God, even while professing outwardly to serve him. When the first Jeroboam was made king of Israel, lest the hearts of his subjects should be drawn back to the successors of David, by assembling for divine worship at Jerusalem according to the Lord's command, he set up two golden calves, the one at Dan, and the other at Bethel, the northern and southern extremities of his newly acquired kingdom, and commanded all his subjects to worship before them. The idolatry which he thus established, was continued under all his successors, of each of whom it is said, "he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." Besides this open idolatry, their

affections had been devoted to idols, even when they had professed to offer sacrifices unto the Lord; for he denies that even those sacrifices had been offered at all unto him. He declares, that he hated, he despised their feast days, and though they offered burnt-offerings, and meat-offerings, he would not accept them. To this nation thus marked by their idolatry, the prophet Amos was sent. His message to them was solemn and faithful. "Seek ye the Lord, and ye shall live. Hate the evil, love the good, and establish judgment in the gate; and it may be, the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Jacob. Prepare to meet thy God; for lo, he that formed the mountains and declareth unto man what is his thought, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, the Lord, the God of hosts is his name."

In applying from this illustration, the term idolatrous to a portion of my hearers, I shall undoubtedly be considered by some as harsh and unreasonable. But every heart before me has its peculiar object of affection and worship. All whose hearts have not been surrendered in a new creation, to the will and service of God, are devoted to some opposing service, and are fixing their affections upon fading and unworthy objects. Every unconverted man is an idolater. The covetousness of the world is idolatry "Many walk," says St. Paul, "of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." The proud, and vain, and envious, are all idolaters. All who are not with Christ

are against him. The Scripture places before us but one possible alternative, in the consecration of our hearts and affections; the service of God, and the service of Mammon; the love of the Father, and the love of the world. This alternative divides the world. All who have not been taught to serve Almighty God, in the spiritual obedience of the Gospel, and are not known to him as the subjects of a new creation, are walking in the ways of their own hearts, and are idolaters.

Such as these, I address in the solemn message of the text, who like the Israelites have voluntarily withdrawn their affections from the Creator, and have bestowed them upon the creature. The occupations, the cares, the connexions, the pleasures of this world, are ruling in the hearts of many who have been repeatedly called to the privileges of the Gospel, and have voluntarily refused to come. Their consciences bear witness, that the service of sin is not an involuntary service; that this they have chosen, rather than a hearty subjection to an holy God. The man who is destitute of spiritual religion, is remaining so by his own choice. There is no necessity imposed upon him to forsake God, and to refuse him the devotion of the powers which he hath formed. The affectionate and open invitations of the Gospel, place all beyond excuse, who continue in sin, while grace abounds. My friends, it is this voluntary idolatry of your hearts, which forms the guiltiness of your unconverted state. Christ and Satan, this world and the world to come, are placed before you, as the objects of your own selection. You are personally

called upon to make your determination in this serious alternative; and this determination you do individually and finally make for yourselves.

Here is one who has made his deliberate choice. He has cast from him the cords of divine authority. He has recorded his resolution not to submit to the King of saints. He has yielded his understanding to the temptations of infidelity. He is desirous to think, and ready to say, "there is no God. Who is the Almighty that I should serve him? and what profit shall I have if I pray unto him?" The Scriptures seem to him to have no marks of authority or truth. The character of the Saviour appears clothed in his view, with no reverence or majesty. He fancies that there is an absurdity in the habitual declarations of the preacher of Christ. He thinks himself safe and wise, in having thrown away what he considers the bonds of early superstition, and in refusing to yield to the professed revelation of the Most High.

Here is another, who has clothed himself in the dignity of total indifference upon this important subject. He has found such differences of opinion among professing Christians, upon the various topics of religious faith, that he will not suffer himself to interfere at all in the matter. When all men who profess to have found the truth, are perfectly united in their views of truth, he will stop to consider its claims. But until that time shall come, he claims the liberty of despising altogether, a religion which is the subject of so much contention. The religion of nature, and the morality of his own attainment, are enough for him. He has no fear, that God will cast him off, although God is not in all his thoughts. He has never

doubted his personal security, although he has never bestowed a single serious thought upon the subject.

Here is a third, who is really so busy that he has no time to think of God, or of his own soul. He imagines that he would gladly do it, if he had the opportunity. But when he rises up early in the morning, some engagement presses upon his time. Hour after hour, some one is waiting for him, who cannot be put off. Thus days pass away with him; and God is obliged still to wait upon him without effect. His unconverted soul is still without Christ. He has no peace with God. He has no comfort of future hope. All because he has no time to think of any thing, but the business which presses him around. He will not allow that he despises the solemn claims of the religion of the Son of God. But it is quite evident, that he deems them of less importance, than the claims of worldly business and gain, because they are always required to give way to these. He has not seriously determined, that he will never yield to the Saviour's demands. Perhaps, he really intends the exact opposite of this. But he has now lived so long without finding time for that attention to religion, which is required of him, that the probability is now very small, that the hour of conversion will ever come to him.

Here is a female hearer who trifles too much to think of her soul. She might as well have been made without an immortal nature, for she has never regarded its interests, or its value. She is dead while she lives. She is without seriousness, without fear, without any concern for the realities of an eternal world. She forgets how soon she will lie down in

the grave, where the worms shall be spread under her, and the worms shall cover her; how soon she must stand before a judgment seat, to give account for herself, of an abused and wasted life; and how little she has in her own character and recollection, to comfort her in either of these prospects.

Here are four classes of persons, and they might be enlarged in their enumeration to many more, who have voluntarily withdrawn their affections from the God who made them, and have fixed them upon objects opposed to him, and prohibited by him. The fundamental principle of all these characters is the same. It is the carelessness of a carnal mind, and the hardness of an unconverted heart. If they were but made to feel the power and danger of their sins; the infidelity, and indifference, and occupation, and levity, which severally characterize them, would all give place to that one, anxious, important question, "what shall I do to be saved?" Outward differences in their characters are but of small consequence. The one great question to be settled for them all, is whether their hearts shall be submitted to the spiritual dominion of the Redeemer. They do not like to retain God in their knowledge. They cannot walk together with him, for they are not agreed. The principle of indwelling, dominant sin, manifests itself in their different characters, under different aspects, precisely as the waters of one grand ocean receive their different names as they wash upon the shores of different lands. But it is the same principle of sin in all. It is the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, and which results in death.

These persons are called *idolatrous*, for they have

set up their idols in every place. They have forsaken God, the fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water. I call them voluntarily idolatrous, for they have made their present course the object of their own choice; and there is no other reason than their own choice, which can account for their remaining in an unconverted state. They might come to Jesus, and find everlasting acceptance and peace with him, if they could be persuaded to prefer the reproach of Christ to the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season. To such as these, the solemn message of the text comes with power. Prepare to meet a God in vengeance, whom you have rejected in mercy. Prepare to meet a God on the throne of judgment, whom you have neglected in his atonement upon the cross. Prepare to meet a God exalted with unlimited power, whom you have forsaken when he was humbled in love. This personal, chosen, determined rejection of the mercies of the Gospel, this voluntary alienation from God, this continuance in an unconverted state without necessity, marks the first distinction of those to whom the message of the text is now addressed.

II. The exhortation of this text was addressed to those who had experienced many chastising visitations from Almighty God, without effect. Under the peculiar government by which God controlled the Israelites, he visited their transgressions with immediate temporal punishments. Thus had he done in the time of Amos. But it had been without any good effect. Punishment had not led them from their idolatry, nor brought them to repentance. "I gave you," says the Lord, "cleanness of teeth in all your

cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord. And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest; and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city; one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not, withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew; when your gardens, and your vineyards, and your fig trees, and your olive trees, increased, the palmer worm devoured them; yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have sent unto you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt; your young men have I slain with the sword, and I have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up into your nostrils; yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord." This is the catalogue of judgments, which God had unavailingly sent upon them. They might have seemed to be sufficient to have humbled and corrected them. Yet as they are here recited by the Lord who had sent them, the same mournful conclusion follows upon the recollection of each; "yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord."

How plainly descriptive is this statement, of some to whom I am now addressing the same solemn message! Precisely such has been the growth of carelessness and ingratitude with them, under the corrective visitations of divine Providence. He has stricken them, but they have not been made to feel their spiritual sickness. He has beaten them, and they heeded it

not. They have revolted more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. How various are the charges of this description, which he must make individually against you! I laid you upon a bed of sickness, says God to one of you, yet you have not returned unto me. You promised to serve me upon the return of health. Your health has been restored, and you have not served me. I sent the angel of death into your family, he says to another, and the affliction has produced no submission. While the wound was fresh and open, your spirit seemed for a little while humbled. But it has been closed and forgotten, and you have not returned unto me. I have reduced you to poverty, he says to a third, and still your spirit is rebellious and proud. I have brought many of you to the edge of another world; I have awakened you with the fearful prospect of eternal judgment; I have showed to you that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; and yet you have not returned unto me. You still remain stout-hearted, and heedless, and bold, in the enmity of your heart against me.

Such instances are before me in great numbers; souls that have been hardened in the fires of Providence; that have grown callous and impenetrable in a state of sin, under all the instruments which have been employed to arouse them to think of the things which belong to their peace; that have showed to what an extent, the creatures of God, poor and insignificant as they are, may resist his will, strive against his power, and defeat the operation of his offers of mercy. O, how dreadful is the thought, that this resistance against God may be carried on until, as its

necessary result, God shall say of them as he did of Pharaoh, "for this cause have I raised thee up, to make in thee, my power known," to show that none can harden himself against God and prosper! It is a mournful view which these facts present of the character of irreligious men; that the very dispensations which are made the instruments of saving multitudes, only serve to ripen them in their sins, and to fill up the measure of their condemnation.

The children of God may praise him for his chastisements. They may look back upon sickness, and sorrow, and want, as the blessed instruments of arousing them from their carelessness in sin, of making them feel for the necessities of their souls, and of bringing them to ask at the feet of Jesus, for a hope of peace. Every painful providence dispensed to man, is either a blessing or a curse. If it be made the instrument of calling home the heart to God, however severe it may be, it is an evidence of God's kindness and compassion, and a reason for new gratitude to him. If it merely hardens us in a state of sin, it is a punishment, a portion of that wrath which must be poured out upon sinners, throughout eternity. And in proportion as such dispensations are multiplied in the history of irreligious persons, the guiltiness of their character is aggravated, and the terror of their prospects is enlarged. When God has been thus unavailingly dealing with you, by many different instruments of good, the prospect of meeting him in a personal account, becomes still the more serious and repulsive. And this is the point to which I would now call your special attention.

You have resisted his government, and have made

all that he has done for you, of none effect. Your own recollections furnish you with many instances, in which, under the weight of his hand, you have determined to submit to him, and yet you have not done it. Had he left you entirely to yourselves, unnoticed, unwarned, unawakened, there might have been urged something for your excuse. But there is not a habitation among you, in which God has not made bare his arm, for sickness, or sorrow, or cause of lamentation of some description, showing you, that you were objects of his regard, and that he wished you to become partakers of his holiness. And yet, how many unrenewed, and perhaps, careless souls, does every habitation contain; testifying still, that however abundant have been the kind warnings of the providence of God, ungrateful men are still able to receive them all without effect. To such, as the last remaining communication from God, the message of the text is addressed, "Thus will I do unto thee, therefore prepare to meet thy God, O Israel," even God who cometh with a recompense!

III. The warning of our text was addressed to those who had been the peculiar objects of divine forbearance, without repentance. Thus God says to them, "I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a fire-brand plucked out of the burning; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. Therefore, thus will I do unto thee, O Israel, and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." The destruction which had been brought upon others, was immediate, and without a remedy. It was like that awful destruction which God had brought upon

the guilty cities which are here referred to, as an "ensample unto those who should after live ungodly." Amidst this dreadful judgment upon others of the people, the Israelites to whom the prophet speaks, were mercifully protected and preserved, "as a firebrand plucked out of the burning." But the divine forbearance was without effect. They still remained in a careless state of disobedience to God, and had not returned unto him. And now divine forbearance was exhausted, and God commanded them to be ready to give an account of all that was past.

Thus, my brethren, do many despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not willing that the goodness of God should lead them to repentance. The Lord is long-suffering unto all. He desires not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. This long-suffering of our God is salvation, if it be not rejected and despised. In sparing men from year to year, amidst all the privileges of revelation, God proves to them, that he wishes them to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. But in how many instances, is all this forbearance insufficient to lead men to seek after, and to embrace the riches of his love! Notwithstanding all the mercy with which he has endured towards them, they remain still idolatrous and unconverted. It is of his mercies, that they are not consumed. But these mercies excite no gratitude with them. Though he is pleased to postpone the hour for the execution of his judgment against them, if peradventure, they will be persuaded to return to him, they yet stand in his vineyard, as cumberers of the

ground. The companions of their youth have, perhaps, long since passed into a world of recompense. The partakers of many of their scenes of folly and guilt, have gone to answer for their transgressions. The members of their family and household have been suddenly cut off, and that without remedy. And in many instances they are left, standing almost alone in a world of strangers. And yet, wonderful to tell! these children of many providences, these objects of much long-suffering, are still unchanged in heart, and living without God in the world! The extent to which they have made the forbearance of God without effect, is indeed distressing. But the amount of danger and suffering, which this neglect of God gathers for such sinful souls, around the personal appearance of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, to judge the world in righteousness, and to reward men according to their works, is far more distressing. O, it will be a mournful account which they must render unto God, who have turned the grace of God into licentiousness, and sinned when grace abounds; who have pressed God under the weight of their iniquities, and made him to serve with their sins! But it is the account which is certainly before them, and for which sinners must prepare themselves. Though they do evil many years, and sentence against their evil works be not executed speedily, yet in the end, which will soon arrive for them, their iniquity shall not go unpunished.

Under these three aspects, as illustrated by the history connected with the text, may their characters be considered, to whom we address this message, as to the idolatrous Israel. Their guilt is in their volun-

tary choice of the paths of sin, amidst all the chastisements and judgments which they endure, and all the forbearance which is exercised towards them. Charged with this guilt, they are to be brought into account before God, in the day of his appearing. For this account they are warned to be prepared. Who can abide the day of his coming? and who can stand when he appeareth? When he riseth up, what will they say? When he visiteth, what will they answer him?

IV.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO ISRAEL.

AMOS iv. 12.—*Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*

I AM engaged in applying this solemn message to the unconverted portion of my audience. The various aspects of their character, to which the history connected with the text directs us, have already been made the subjects of consideration. I would now direct your notice to the great day itself, of the approach of which, the text admonishes them.

The purposes of Almighty God are ripening fast. He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. It is to a settled, determined, inevitable approach of God, that the attention of men must be directed. His coming as a final Judge cannot be postponed. It is not left to us to say when it shall be, or whether it shall be at all. But it is left with us to determine whether we shall be prepared for its arrival. That solemn day may find us altogether wanting in a readiness for its events. It may find us busied in our numerous engagements here, without one thought of their result hereafter. It may find us glorying in

earthly and perishable treasures, without any weight of incorruptible glory laid up in another world. Or it may find us living by faith, watching unto prayer, and zealous of good works. Much in reference to this all-important alternative rests upon ourselves. And while God has given us abundant grace, it is that we may improve for our own salvation, the privileges we enjoy, and be left entirely without excuse, if we are negligent of his love.

The peculiar characteristics of men as connected with this accountability to God, we have considered. The only guilt which we charge upon them, and the only guilt for which they must answer, is a voluntary guilt. It is the consciousness of this voluntary guilt which clothes the establishment of a judgment seat with such terror, and which will stop the mouths of ungodly men, in the great day of the Lord. Then the revelation of the wrath of God shall have come, and no sinner shall be able to stand.

In making my present final application of the message of this text to the idolatrous Israel, the subject will bring before us some considerations which will render that day intolerable to those who have impetently done evil, and who must be judged for the evil they have done. The accusations which men will then make, will rest entirely upon themselves. They will see, that God could have done nothing in their behalf, which he has not done; that the clearest discoveries of divine love have been neglected; that the most expensive and glorious system of redemption has been slighted; that the highest possible messenger of mercy has been despised; and that the most wonderful patience and long-suffering has been exhausted.

Convinced of all this, their mouths will be stopped in the presence of a heart-searching God. No vain plea will answer their purpose, and no just plea will they be able to urge. The serious alarm with which they will be seized, the revelations of the Scriptures have already set before us; and no rational man, I think, can avoid the deep impression of reverence and fear, as he reads the descriptions which they have recorded. "The heavens departed, as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand?" To those who have lived and died in carelessness about their souls, that day will be a day of sorrow and mourning; a day in which all their faces shall gather blackness; a day in which tribulation and anguish will be the portion of every soul of man that has impenitently done evil.

1. In that day of God's coming, such among you will think of the clear and inestimable manifestations of divine love which they have neglected. No human beings have had the opportunity of being acquainted with the character, requisitions, and purposes of God, which have been granted unto those who have lived under the light of the Gospel revelation. Heathens, Mahometans, and Jews; men of all ages, and all

nations, shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and shall condemn them. My friends, you stand before God, under a weight of responsibility which no human beings have ever borne before. There is not a conceivable privilege connected with salvation, which your souls do not enjoy. All other discoveries of the love of God are far inferior to that light of the knowledge of his glory which is displayed to you in the face of Jesus Christ. And of necessity, the guilt of rejecting this wonderful display of love, is just so much the more increased. If he that despised Moses' law, died without mercy, under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?

All other ages of the Gospel dispensation have afforded far inferior opportunities of acquaintance with its plans of grace, and of embracing its glorious invitations of mercy, to those which you enjoy. Many a broken and humbled spirit in the darkness of heathenism, is feeling after God, if haply he may find him, and vainly trying to satisfy his mind, that the Godhead is like unto gold and silver, graven with art, and man's device. Many a despondent Jew is anxiously waiting for that salvation of God, that coming of his Messiah, which he imagines to be still a future event. And many a worshipper in a decayed and corrupted Christian church, is truly longing for that acceptance before God, which he falsely supposes saints and angels can procure for him; while the ful-

ness of a salvation already accomplished in the infinite sufficiency of one glorious Mediator, shines around you, as the brightness of the divine glory, inviting you to become partakers of the heavenly benefit, and to taste of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come. The pagan, the Jew, and the darkened member of the professed Christian church, will appear against you, before the throne of God. Many of you think little of these discoveries of divine love and compassion now. But in the day of God's coming they will arise before you, as fearful aggravations of your guilt. Every faithful exhibition of the Gospel which has been made to your souls; every affectionate persuasion which you have heard to lead you to Christ; the tender and earnest intreaties which almost persuaded you to become the disciples of the Lord Jesus; the moving appeals which have so often melted you into unavailing tears; the startling admonitions which have compelled you to stop and question with yourselves, all these will crowd before your recollection in that day, as so many reasons for inevitable and just condemnation. While you allow all these privileges to pass by you now without profit, you are laying up sorrow against the last days. The negligence of them is exceeding guilt. The recollection of them then, will show you that you have been treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and of the revelation of the righteous anger of God.

2. You will think in that day of the laborious and expensive system which was devised and executed for your redemption. Angels will seem to have no theme of praise compared with the ransomed members of

the human family; and fallen spirits from among their number, no heinousness of guilt, when viewed in contrast with the sinfulness of self-destroyed man. The Lord Jesus will then be manifested in unlimited glory and exaltation. All the woes which he sustained in his humiliation for man, and the condescension and pity which he exhibited in the days of his flesh, will be remembered, as enhancing the dignity of that elevation which he will then display. The love which he felt for men before the foundation of the world, the kindness with which he watched over their interests from the hour of their creation, the cheerfulness with which he gave up the glory which he had before the world was, that he might be made in all respects a proper substitute for them, will then appear as aggravations of their ingratitude and guilt, who have crucified him afresh, and put him to an open shame. Love and suffering beyond the power of man to understand, have united to effect the redemption of sinners. And yet in a vast multitude of instances, the labour and the sorrow have been wholly in vain, in their efforts to lead guilty men to safety. But this cruel ingratitude of men cannot go unpunished. It will add fierceness to the just anger of God, and exceeding pain to the unavoidable consciousness of the sinner's soul. The neglect of less mercy would have called for the infliction of a less condemnation. But there is not here one heedless sinner, who has not with perverse determination rejected the unspeakable compassion of a crucified Redeemer, and rendered unavailing a system of deliverance, upon which the hosts of heaven look down with unceasing astonishment. O, unconverted hearers of the Gospel, your

sins are crimsoned with the despised blood of Jesus; and that blood testifies against you before the judgment seat of Almighty God. It has a voice to pierce the skies; and it calls for a retribution still the more fearful and heavy, upon those who have declared in their rejection of its saving power, that they counted it an unholy and worthless thing. The immoralities of men will be forgotten. The violated law will cease to accuse. Every other charge and witness will be silenced, in view of that fearful guilt, which is involved in your rejection of the Son of God, and your compelling of him to die in vain.

3. The recompense of that dreadful day of God's coming will be farther aggravated, by a clear view of the dignity of that holy and merciful Being, who has been thus despised. Patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs, are but of small account, when the character of that messenger who was sent last of all to men, is made the subject of consideration. Angels bow around his throne of inaccessible light, and acknowledge him, the blessed and only Potentate, the Lord of lords, and King of kings. Redeemed saints cast their crowns before his feet, in the united declaration, that he is worthy to receive all riches, and honour, and glory, and blessing. But by men on earth, by many of you, my friends, he is treated with contumely and neglect. When his ministers are despised, or his word is rejected, it is his own dignity which is the real object of man's contempt. These instruments of his, are in themselves, of but very small account. The real question before your hearts, involves his personal authority, and an acceptance of his personal offers of grace. Amidst all your hesita-

tion to yield to him, and to believe in him, he forbears with you now. He conceals amidst clouds and darkness, the justice and judgment which form the habitation of his throne. But in that great day of his coming, he will say, "those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me." This is an inevitable result. The dignity of his own person affixes the measure of guilt to the conduct of those who have thus despised him. The contempt of an inferior being would be of less consequence. But while he is revealed as the Infinite and Almighty Saviour of men, transgressions against him rise up to a measure of guilt, which demands a punishment totally inconceivable to us in its degree.

4. Beyond all these, you will reflect in that great day of God's coming, upon his long-continued forbearance, which has been abused and exhausted, by your perverseness in sin. How clearly will all the merciful dispensations of his providence be set before you! Every favour which you have received, every joy which has crowned your days, will press upon your recollection. "Many years did God surround me with his goodness;" will your hearts exclaim, "his candle shined upon my habitation; I had daily new proofs of his merciful kindness towards me; often, when my sins had provoked his anger to arise, and he was justly excited to cut me off from the earth, he has still endured with me, and has spared me still, as a witness of his love; and notwithstanding all his long-suffering, I lived and died in rebellion against him." You will reflect upon the fearful fact, that all this goodness towards you, has been in vain; that it

has been to no purpose, that he has prospered and blessed you. He wooed you to embrace his love without effect. He intreated you to become partakers of his holiness in vain. Even unto grey hairs, he has waited upon some of you, to see whether amidst all his long-continued goodness, you would turn unto him and live. But all his kindness has been without advantage to you. In his great day, all these abused mercies will be charged upon you, with undeniable truth. Your consciences will own the justice of every charge. And O, how mournful will it be, to be banished from the holy presence of God, to be made the eternal companion of lost and despairing spirits, to lie down amidst unchanging sorrows, to feel that you are lost without recovery, and without hope, simply because you have rejected the blessings which were freely offered you, and have despised a Redeemer, who was able and willing to have saved you to the uttermost! Nothing will tend to make your condemnation so intolerable, as this indelible conviction, that it was unnecessary, and might have been avoided. You will see, that instead of lamenting your miserable portion forever, you might have been praising God in the habitation of his holiness; instead of being bruised forever under the feet of Satan, you might have been sitting eternally at the feet of Jesus, and following him gladly whithersoever he went. This conviction will make a worm that never dies, a sorrow which is perpetual; a wound for which there is no remedy. "Depart from me, ye cursed," will Jesus say, "into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. I know you not. I was a stranger, ye took me not in. This is your condem-

nation, that light, even the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, has come into the world, and ye have loved darkness rather than light, because your deeds were evil." God will appear to you still infinitely glorious, though he condemns you. No censure will affix itself to him. No charge can be made of want of mercy. You will see, that all which could be done, has been done; and that the only reason which can account for your destruction, amidst such forbearance, is the perverseness of your own will.

These are some of the considerations which are calculated to make the judgment of the day of God's coming, entirely intolerable to those who have refused to love and obey God, or to embrace the call of mercy which has been given them in the Gospel, according to his promise.

And now, in the view of this solemn and alarming day of the coming of our God, I intreat you, my friends, to look at the character of your own lives, and see if you are prepared to meet your God. I have before me many upright, and kind, and excellent persons in the intercourse of this world, whose characters are in many respects, just objects of esteem and love. But they are living without any principle of deep, spiritual piety; without the reconciliation of their hearts to God; and without any hope depending upon his favour. I would not class such valuable members of human society, altogether with the out-cast profligates who roam the streets. They have their reward in the uniform respect of mankind. But can I comfort them with any prospect of blessedness hereafter? Can I tell them they are safe, when I am perfectly convinced that they are not safe?

They will acknowledge themselves to be without a renewed heart. They will confess that they have never been brought to make the surrender of their affections, and their lives, to Christ. And yet it is upon this single point, that all the promises of a future life are rested. "Except ye be converted, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." There is no hope of future blessedness offered to man, but in connexion with this plain and indispensable point. To such of my hearers would I address the question, with the faithful spirit of kindness, "are *you* prepared to meet your God?" Could you stand this day before the Judge of all the earth, and appeal in the assurance of faith to himself, and say, "thou wast made sin for me, when thou knewest no sin, that I might be made the righteousness of God in thee; thou wast offered to me in the gracious provisions of the Gospel, and I gladly received thee to my heart, and put thee on as wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption for my soul." Could you thus, with humble confidence claim the fulfilment of his promise unto you? Could you look upon the face of Jesus, as a friend, for whom you have counted every thing else but loss, and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee; Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief?" If you have no such connexion with the Redeemer of sinners, then how are you prepared to meet your God? You would be rejected by him. You would be cast away from his presence. The kindness for which men love you; the integrity and honourable character for which they respect you, have not been acquired or

cultivated, in reference to him, and can challenge no acceptance at his hand. This is the outward appearance upon which men look. God asks for the devotion of the heart. You need an inward, abiding principle, of love to God, of delight in his character, of submission to his will, of joy in his perfections, shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost. It is this alone, which will enable you to assure your hearts before him, and give you boldness in his presence. Without this spiritual devotion of the heart, all other attainments will be of no avail. Your souls, still unconverted and guilty, will be lost forever.

You think it hard, that there should be no permanent discrimination made between your characters, and the abandoned portion of mankind. You deem it harsh and cruel, that the flames of hell should be threatened, to those so educated, and so restrained, and so respected as you have been. But when your consciences acknowledge that you are not prepared for the presence of God, and cannot, therefore, expect to partake of the rest prepared for his people, what is the alternative? Is there neutral ground between heaven and hell? "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" that the servant who did not his lord's will, had his portion appointed him with unbelievers? What then shall I say to you in this dilemma? Shall I tell you that you are righteous, acceptable to God, and therefore will be saved as you are? Your own hearts would contradict me in every assertion, for you are convinced that you are neither. Shall I tell you that you are unrighteous, without holiness, and therefore, cannot see the Lord, or inherit his kingdom? Here

your feelings revolt, and you think that some better place than hell, might have been provided for persons of your description. My friends, God has provided some better place, which he offers freely to your possession and enjoyment, if you will have it. But he offers it, as he must offer it, in his own way, and upon his own terms. And if you would attain his promises, you must enter in by the door which he has opened.

Now it is not your outward morality, or immorality, which affects this question. It is your simple rejection of salvation when it is freely offered to you, which rejection leaves you in your own condition, to perish. God proposes to save you, and you refuse. He intreats you to be wise; and you refuse still. What then is to be done? The alternative is, that you are lost. You cannot escape, if you neglect so great salvation. You take a mendicant from the street, and bring him to your house, and make him your son; he is ungrateful and disobedient; you still forbear with him; he leaves you with contempt; you go for him, and bring him back; he pursues again the same course; this round of kindness and ingratitude is gone through again and again. At last, wearied with his perverseness, you leave him to his own course, and try to forget him. Would others be most likely to speak of you, and would you be most likely to think of yourself, as unjust in leaving one who had rejected all your kindness, or as forbearing and liberal in doing so much for one, for whom you were under no obligation to do any thing? And would it be your cruelty, or his perverseness, which must be alleged as the proper ground of responsibility, for his final poverty and sufferings? Transfer this illustration to

yourselves, and you are condemned out of your own mouth. God requires from you a certain well-defined submission, as a preparation for the day of his coming. He gives you the ability to be prepared, according to his will. But rejecting his grace, as offered in Jesus Christ, he can offer you no other way of deliverance. In the strong expression of the poet,

“You read your sentence at the flames of hell;”

or in the stronger language of the Scripture, “he that believeth not shall be damned.” “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God.”

Let me then, earnestly press upon your notice, this message upon which we have dwelt so long.—“Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.” Whatever be the outward habits of your lives, whatever be the opinions which men entertain of your characters, without the power of godliness in your souls renewed by the Holy Ghost, you are weighed in the balance, and are found wanting. Acquire then, this spirit of true religion. Awake to the importance of your future prospects. Consider the value of your eternal interests. Esteem it no weakness to acknowledge that you have precious souls which must be saved, and that every thing else is for you of small importance, when compared with them. If ardent, spiritual religion be enthusiasm, fanaticism, may God be pleased to send such fanaticism abundantly into his church! If it be rude and vulgar, to call upon men as helpless, miserable, ruined sinners, to flee from the wrath to come, to turn unto God and live, may God grant such a vulgar spirit to all who profess to be his ministers. We are not of

those who deem it shocking to mention hell to ears polite. Beloved, the solemn question is before you, and must be answered by you, "who shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?" Every soul here present that is not bound to Jesus Christ by a living, lasting faith, is without hope, under the wrath of God, condemned already, and cannot escape the damnation of hell. Turn unto him, and be ye saved. Acquaint yourselves with him, and be at peace. You cannot stand before God, unwashed in the blood of the Lamb, unrenewed by the power of the Spirit. Your weight of guilt will sink you into eternal condemnation. O, then, I beseech you, prepare, by embracing the hope which Jesus offers you, to meet your God, and to receive that recompense of reward which he brings to those who wait for him.

V.

THE NEW CREATURE.

2 CORINTHIANS v. 17.—*Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

THE Apostle lays this down, not as a transitory precept, but as a rule of universal application, and which is to be made the standard of genuine Christianity, to the end of the world.

To be in Christ, is to be united unto him by the power of his Holy Spirit, in a living, active faith. It is to be connected with him as the branch is connected with the vine, or as the members of a living body are joined to their head. It is to be made, in this uninterrupted communication, a partaker of his fulness, and to receive from him grace for grace. To be in Christ, is to be a Christian, not in name only, but in deed and in truth. It is to have Jesus Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, as our hope of glory; and to abide with love and confidence in him, as the only source of happiness or peace. To be in Christ, is to be delivered from all condemnation and fear. "There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ

Jesus." It is to be secure under his protection, safe in his righteousness, and able to answer and confound every tongue that riseth in judgment against the soul. "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord of hosts." To be in Christ, is to be in the enjoyment of every blessing, and in the possession of every privilege and joy. "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." In this relative gradation, the omnipotence of Jehovah is secured to the weakest believer in the Lord Jesus, because he is Christ's. All things work together for his good. There cannot be a conceivable comfort which will not arise to the man who is in Christ, from this connexion, while all power in heaven and on earth, is given unto him, and he gives his heavenly blessings to whomsoever he will. To be in Christ, implies that we have come unto him, from our native rebellion; that we have yielded to his authority, chosen his salvation, are confiding in his atonement and righteousness, and submitting ourselves completely and forever to his will. The man who is in Christ, has been led to his feet, in the voluntary and thankful conversion of his heart, with a contrite and believing spirit, and has found in the acceptance of his redemption, peace and blessedness. He has been brought from darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God, and is walking in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, in a new, and holy, and obedient life.

Such are the privileges of being in Christ. If any man then, our text declares, would be united to Christ in a living faith; would be a Christian, not in name

merely, but in the real experience of his heart; would be delivered from all condemnation, and be in the possession of every blessing, he must be a new creature, old things must pass away, and all things must become new. If any man has already attained these privileges, and is living now in their assured and conscious possession, he is a new creature, old things have passed away, and all things have become new. The assertion of the text thus considered, presents itself,

I. AS A REQUISITION UPON THE SINNER; and

II. AS A PRIVILEGE TO THE CHRISTIAN.

We will consider these two, in their order. Our text is to be viewed,

I. AS A REQUISITION UPON THE SINNER.—“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” That is, nothing short of a new creation can constitute any man a Christian. The extent of this requisition is described, both in its application to *individuals*, and to *personal character in each individual*. Under the former application, it refers to all men, without the exception of any. Under the latter, it requires in every one, the same work, which is a new creation.

1. If we consider the extent of the requisition, as applied to individuals, the emphasis rests upon the word “any.” “If *any* man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” It matters not who he may be, or what the relative and changing circumstances of his life. The assertion supposes only that he is a man, one of the human family. Whatever may be his character, or reputation, or privileges, no stress is laid upon, no reference is to be had, to either. If he would be in Christ, if he would be a Christian, he must be a new creature.

The Apostle previously allows of himself, that there was a time when he “knew both Christ and men after the flesh;” that is, he judged them altogether upon a worldly and personal calculation. He thought of Christ with opposition and contempt; and he thought of men, with respect for the pretensions which they set up. So the flesh had taught him. He imagined that there were great differences of character among men; he thought much better of some than of others; he respected the claims for merit which they asserted. But the true knowledge of Christ, and the experience of his new creating power, had overthrown this false system of determination. Henceforth, he could know no man, and estimate no character, according to this standard. The Spirit of God had taught him better. A new view had been given to him of his own real character, and of the universal character of unrenewed men. The conclusion which he had derived from the information which he had thus received, this light which had been bestowed upon him from heaven, he gives us in our present text. Here, he overturns all those false assumptions in which proud and ignorant men indulge, and proclaims that doctrine, which to those who receive not, and love not the truth, is so deeply repulsive and hateful. It is the doctrine which declares, that in the natural relation in which sinful men stand to God, against whom they have rebelled, there is no difference among them; for “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” “every mouth is stopped, and the whole world is counted guilty before God;” that there is but one “name under heaven given among men, whereby they can be saved;” and that no man can

become interested in this name, or be found in Christ Jesus, unless he be a new creature.

The Gospel of the Lord Jesus, in making the claim upon the heart of man, which accompanies its offer of mercy, refers to the universal fact of the enmity of this heart to God, and it refers to this fact alone. It stops not to ask whether the man be a Jew or a Greek, moral or profligate, wise or ignorant, bond or free. It has but one requisition to make, which must be equally insisted upon every where. He must be born again. Old things must pass away. They cannot be repaired or improved, so that God will accept them. All things must become new.

No natural difference in the human character has the least connexion with that grace by which we are saved; or any influence upon the relation in which man, as a sinner, stands to God. Temper, amiable, or unamiable, forms no more ground for difference of claim for merit in the sight of God, than a countenance beautiful or repulsive, or an intellect cultivated or darkened. Without respect to any attainments of men in their natural character, and while unreconciled to God, we have but one grand message to deliver to all without exception. It is, that they "repent and be converted, that their sins may be blotted out, when the day of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

Every unconverted man, whether baptized or unbaptized, whether a nominal Christian, or a professed Mohammedan or Pagan, is proclaimed in the divine word, to be by wicked works, an enemy to God, alienated from his favour and presence, and a rebel

against all his purposes and commands. A desire to glorify God, does not influence one of his actions. His motives arise from himself; and his whole object in life, is either immediately or remotely, to promote his own advantage. Whether he pursue his favoured, chosen object, in a course of integrity and upright dealing; or whether he attempt to secure it in a shorter method, by violence or fraud; it is the single principle of selfish interest, and the single desire for personal gain, which excites him to diligence. If one course were as honourable in society as the other, and it would be so, but for the blessed influence of that very Gospel, which sinful man despises, the only determining motive for the conduct of unconverted men, would be the likelihood of gain. And God may say to the most high-minded and unblemished man, whose heart is still unreconciled to him, of his highest, and purest, and best actions, "hast thou done these things at all unto me?"

The grand characteristic of unconverted men, is that "God is not in all their thoughts." He makes no part of their plan or object. "According to the flesh," in the expression of St. Paul, that is, judged by a merely human standard, there may be vast differences of character among them. But according to the standard of the Bible, where men are known only in their relation to God, there are none. Examined by the commands of the divine law, the whole world will come under the condemnation of God. Judged according to the offers of the Gospel, all who accept them not, are equally condemned. The wrath of God abideth on every one that believeth not in the

name of his only begotten Son. None do or can believe in him, who are not born again, not of the will of the flesh, but of God.

This is the extent of the requisition of our text, as it is applied to individuals. It belongs to all men, without exception. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." No man can become a Christian in any other method. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

2. The requisition of the text may be considered in its application to *character in each individual*. Here the emphasis is on the words *new creature*. The text declares, that while for all men some change of character is necessary, that change can be no less in any case, than a new creation.

The question which is agitated among men upon this subject, is not so much about the necessity of some renovation in the human character, as a preparation for the eternal blessedness promised in the Gospel, as about the extent of this demand. It is not, whether any change at all be necessary, but what that change shall be. There is not a man living, who feels himself absolutely fit and competent to appear in judgment before a heart-searching God. All see much deficiency in themselves which must be supplied, and much error which must be amended; and therefore, all acknowledge, that there must be some renewal in the character of all, before they can see the face of God, and live.

But then the question is immediately proposed, 'what must be done?' We answer in conformity to the word of God, that there must be in every man living, a new birth, a spiritual conversion, a renewal

of the mind and heart, before he can enjoy the hope which the Gospel gives. In Christ Jesus, in whom alone man is safe, nothing availeth, but a new creation.

The object to be obtained, the end professedly in view, marks this necessity for a new creation. This object is not, to be in the church. That may easily be secured by a conformity to appointed outward ordinances. It is not to be upright and reformed in external conduct merely. This may be accomplished by man's own determination and exertions. It is not to obtain a good reputation among men. That may be acquired by due attention to the outward relative character, of which alone man can judge. But it is to be in Christ; to have a spiritual and unchangeable union with him; and to be made with him, a joint heir of everlasting glory. This object no partial change of character can secure. The natural man cannot enjoy, any more than he can understand, the things of the Spirit of God. The blessings which are promised in Christ Jesus, are altogether spiritual blessings; and the preparation of character, which shall enable us to possess and enjoy them, must be spiritual also. To attain this important end, nothing which is merely outward is of any avail; nay, every thing outward is worse than unavailing, if it be put in the place of this grand point of Gospel requisition, the renewal of the soul by the Holy Spirit, after the image of God. God alone reveals the things which he has provided for them that love him; and he alone can make the way plain and open, in which they are to be obtained. If these unspeakable blessings are our object; if it is our wish to be in Christ,

when God maketh inquisition for sin ; the holy Scripture gives us both its commands and promises, leading us to seek for a new heart, and to desire to have a right spirit formed within us. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God."

This new creation of the heart, we are commanded everywhere to require. In our demands upon men as the ministers of Christ, we dwell upon this alone. The propriety of our unceasing urging of this, as universally necessary, is farther manifest from the fact, that generally speaking, we have but comparatively few charges to make against the outward conduct of men. Such is the extended influence of the religion of Jesus, and such is the power which its reflected light exercises, to purify and restrain the character of human society, even among those who deny its actual claims upon the heart, that the greater portion of those to whom the Gospel is here offered, are externally respectable and correct. It is not, therefore, to the outward deficiencies or transgressions of men, that our attention is particularly called. There are many of you, my friends, without love to God, and by your own acknowledgment, without the spiritual submission of your hearts to Christ, who are still in external deportment correct, perhaps exemplary. And there would be no essential change in your discharge of relative and domestic duties, or in the fulfilment of the business of your various stations, except that the sweet influence of true piety would be thrown over the whole, and you would do all for Christ, if you should become in the Gospel method, the true followers of the Lord Jesus.

This is not only true in moral deportment. In the ser-

vices of religious worship also, many unconverted men are found exceedingly precise, and strict, and regular. None were more so than the Pharisees of old, who attempted thus to work out a righteousness for themselves, while they were hateful and abhorrent to God for their sins, and assumed upon themselves, the curse of a rejected Saviour. Like them, there are many in our day, who have no knowledge of vital religion, the religion of the heart, nay, who even deride and oppose it, who are still, quite marked in their attention to the outward services of religion, and in their conformity to modes of worship.

Now, in all these cases, the difficulty which separates such persons from God, and from all hope in him, is not an external one. It is a radical perversion of motive and principle. They are doing nothing for the Lord. The change which is required for them is not a mere change of outward character. It is a change of the heart, a new creation of the soul in its principles and objects of pursuit. They are without Christ; and they are perishing in their sins, although they are moral in deportment, and strict in ceremony. No mere external demand or precept will reach their case. They have but one simple want. But that want is a total one. They must be new men. They need to be in Christ; and to be in him, they must be begotten again, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to the enjoyment of the lively and glorious hope which he bestows. To do them good, this necessity must be exhibited. They must see how entirely defective are their best services. The solemn and unrelaxing demands of Almighty God, for inward purity, for spiritual cleanness, must be pressed upon their con-

sciences with power from on high. For them every thing is unavailing, but that which can be made the instrument of converting their souls to God, and making them like little children before him. This they must be made to feel, or they perish without hope.

Again, we are at all times to insist upon this new creation of the soul, because all demands for mere outward changes of conduct are so limited and partial in their application. There is no one external reproof or requirement, which can be enforced with an universal application. This constitutes the utter inefficacy of all that may be termed mere moral preaching. Let our attention be directed to whatever partial change of character it may, we cannot call upon all men with it. Some on the one side, and some on the other, are found beyond its reach. No external characteristic of immorality, is to be found in all men. All are not Sabbath breakers, or drunkards, or thieves. If we admonish for a particular transgression, there are some whose consciences do not acknowledge the reproof. If we exhort to a particular duty, there are others who are ready to thank God, that they have never failed in its performance. These varieties in the outward characters of men, are quite innumerable. But in the dispositions and purposes of the natural heart towards God, there is no difference. All men in their own nature are without love to God, without a desire for a Saviour, without a purpose or wish to glorify him. Here is a characteristic which is absolutely universal. The Gospel therefore, settles its grand requisition, upon that which is the universal deficiency. Man looketh upon the

outward appearance, and supposes that a partial reformation will supply every want, and answer the whole necessity. God looketh upon the heart, and proclaims that to be full of evil. He calls, therefore, for the cleansing, and the submission of that; and directs the exertions of all to make the tree good, that its fruit may be good also. The Gospel in its solemn requisition upon the unrenewed sinner, stops not to enjoin one particular duty or another. It fastens its hold simply and wholly upon his alienated heart, and demands the entire and cheerful submission of that to God. The simple fact of danger and guilt which it announces to him, is "thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God; thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." Revealing to him this one fact beyond dispute, it insists upon his gaining a new heart, and having a right spirit renewed within him, and putting on the new man, that he may be found in Christ Jesus, and be justified freely through him.

This is the extent of the requisition of the text, as it is applied to personal character in each individual. There must be in every sinner, a total change of motive and principle, before he can find acceptance with the Lord. His spirit of rebellion and personal independence must pass away; and the spirit of entire submission to God, and of full delight in his perfections, and his glory, must assume the place of it. The transforming influence of true religion must govern every principle of the character, and every motive of the conduct. The sinner is pursuing a road entirely wrong, and utterly ruinous. He is without the least conformity of his character, to the

will of a holy God. The revolution in his character must therefore, be an entire one, before he can be safe in the prospect of eternity. Inferior purposes may be obtained by partial alterations. But if you would be found in Christ, clothed with his righteousness, and purified in his blood; if you would be made partakers of his unfading and eternal inheritance; this is to be accomplished solely in the immediate and entire conversion of your souls to him. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature."

3. As a proper improvement of this subject, I pray you, my brethren, to bring your attention simply and fairly to the point which has been placed before you. You cannot set it aside. You cannot get by it. The solemn requisition of the text stands directly across your path. It is there immoveably fixed before you, and by it alone will your characters be tried, and your eternity be determined, at the last. All the glories of the Gospel are offered for your attainment. But it is only in the acceptance of this, its first privilege, that the succeeding ones can be enjoyed. The city of the living God offers you an abundant and everlasting shelter. But upon its very gate is written, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It is vain and useless to plead the possession of any other qualification, while this is wanting. All allegations of amiableness of temper, of a restrained and well-regulated course of life, of habits of integrity, of civil, harmless, or affectionate deportment, of benevolent exertions for the good of mankind, are answered immediately, by a repetition of the same testimony, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

My friends, you may excuse yourselves as you will upon the ground of education or personal conduct, but you will be brought to this standard for trial, as your final test. You may foolishly postpone from year to year, all concern about it, and refuse to submit to the requisition which it lays upon you, but all your efforts will only serve to increase your difficulties and your condemnation. You will find it made at last, the alternative to eternal ruin. You must become converted unto God, renewed in the spirit of your mind, made new creatures in Christ Jesus, or your souls are lost.

If this be truth, why should you not yield at once to the new creating power of God's waiting Spirit? What can you gain by refusing to submit to the Redeemer of men? His terms will not be relaxed. What he now offers to you freely, you may hereafter ask for in vain. You may now yield yourselves to him, and find peace in believing in him. You may become vessels of his mercy, and experience the comforts and benefits which will flow from this delightful privilege. But carelessness of future responsibility, or a procrastinating spirit, or a love of the pleasures of sin for a season, leading you to a rejection of the Saviour and his Spirit, will certainly shut out your souls forever from the hope and the opportunity of eternal life; and you will find yourselves in the end, rejected and renounced by the Saviour, by whose name you are called, as those whom he never knew, and who are cursed forever under the burden of unpardoned sin.

VI.

THE NEW CREATURE.

2 CORINTHIANS v. 17.—*Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

THIS assertion may be considered, either as prospective, declaring what is necessary for him who would obtain the character and privileges of a Christian; or as retrospective, announcing what has been already accomplished in those who have experienced the change of character and condition which it describes. Under the first of these forms, as a solemn requisition upon the unconverted sinner, I have already spoken of it. My present object is to speak of it under the second, as a *delightful privilege to the tenewed Christian*. Considered under this aspect, the text declares a fact of immense moment to those of whom the declaration may be truly made, and containing advantages which are unspeakably important and precious. This fact is the thorough and permanent renovation of character in all those who are in Christ; in all the people of God.

“If any man be in Christ,” if any man under the

blessed influence of the Gospel, has accepted the offer of divine acceptance, and become really a Christian, "he is a new creature." He is so now; this is his present condition, his blessed and unchangeable privilege. "Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." The point which is to be settled is, is any man in Christ? To decide this, the text announces that, which if he be so, is at once his evidence and his privilege. He is a new creature. There has been accomplished in him, by divine power, a new creation. He is a new man. And as such, he may be easily examined, and must be readily known. In the character which he now bears, and in which he appears both to the divine and human inspection, there is decision and permanency. Mere changes in the outward conduct of man, like the change of his garments, may in some degree alter his appearance to others; but they leave the man himself, in reality, just what he was before. He has partially assumed a new aspect and attitude, to those who can see only the exterior, but his heart and principles are left altogether unchanged and unaffected. The bringing of the same man to Christ, and uniting him to Christ, by the power of the divine Spirit, effects within him a total change and revolution of motive and principle. This makes him another man. It puts another heart within him. It sets him out in a progress of character, directly opposite to that which he has pursued before; a progress in which there shall be no return; but in which he shall be kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. This is the view which is given us in our present text. The man who is now in Christ, has passed through this important requisition;

has undergone the change which is declared to be thus indispensable; and is enjoying the peculiar comforts which this new creation is designed to communicate. Under this application I would now present the text for your consideration. It exhibits the privilege of the Christian; the actual and assured condition of the true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. For him "old things are passed away, behold all things are become new."

The application of this text is confined, by some, whose views of religion are far too low, and too loose, for us to copy, to those Gentiles who were brought into the Christian church, immediately from heathen idolatry. It was certainly true in reference to such; but upon no ground which was peculiar to themselves. When the blinded mind of man is enlightened by the Spirit of God, and the heart which has loved the creature more than the Creator, is changed and renewed by his power, the very same work is accomplished, and by the same power, and to the production of the same effects, in every age, and in every portion of the world. All the descriptions of man's natural character in the word of God, precisely meet the experience of man, in the most refined state of human society; and all the exhibitions of his renewed state, are entirely accordant with what every Christian throughout the world, finds to be the operation of divine grace upon himself. The text will be found, therefore, to be universally applicable. And as it proclaims without exception, when it comes as a requisition, if *any* man would be in Christ, he must be a new creature; so it announces in an expression equally unlimited, when it comes as a privilege, if any

man *be* in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.

II. This PRIVILEGE TO THE CHRISTIAN, we proceed to consider under the various aspects which its different circumstances and parts present.

1. In the personal relations which the Christian sustains, "he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new."

This is the fact, in his relations to God his Creator and Judge. The violated law which heaped its curses on his head, while he was an impenitent transgressor, a rebel unreconciled to God, and in its condemnation, delivered him over to the vengeance of eternal fire, has given place to that new covenant of promise and mercy, which offers peace and salvation in the obedience of the Lord Jesus, and secures to him the everlasting favour of God, being in all things well ordered and sure. He stands in the divine presence no longer under condemnation. No charges of guilt are made against him now. The penalty for his sin has been endured. The offering for his justification has been made. God is no longer angry with him every day; but as a reconciled Father, shines unceasingly upon his soul, in the fulness and tenderness of grace. He enjoys the comfort of this new relation. His conscience is peaceful through the blood of sprinkling, and perfect love has cast out fear. He trembles no more in the presence of a Judge rising up for vengeance upon the ungodly; but rejoices in the guardianship of a divine protector, and an unchangeable friend, who is faithful in all his promises, and abounding in grace in all his provisions for his people.

Such is also the fact in his relation to Jesus the Sa-

viour. Once, like others, he despised and rejected him. He turned away from all his offers of pardon and love. He walked in regard to him, in the blindness of his mind, having his understanding darkened, and his heart hardened, through the power of sin. Now he acknowledges and feels the inestimable importance of such a Saviour; and has embraced him in the warm affections of his heart, as his comfort, and hope, and portion forever. Jesus is not only a Saviour, but is now *his* Saviour. There has been between them a reciprocal imputation. His guilt has been laid upon the Lord, who has endured its curse, and carried it away forever; and the perfect obedience of the Lord has been put upon him as his glorious and everlasting covering, and he enjoys the reward of it for eternity. The Son of God is no longer driven from his affections, to make way for inferior objects, but is the one grand object of all his desire, and of his supreme love. Mutual tenderness and mutual delight, make the friendship which has been thus formed, animating and precious. The influences of the Saviour's Spirit are welcomed, and encouraged, and prized, and no longer resisted or quenched. The presence and favour of the glorious Emmanuel, revealed by the agency of this blessed Spirit, are constantly desired and sought after; and Jesus as a personal Saviour, appears in the highest degree estimable and precious.

This is also the fact in his relations to men around him. Here all things are become new. To the children of God, the converted and believing, wherever they are, he is a brother and a friend. While he

loves God supremely, he loves every one who bears the image of God. He is a member of that holy body of which Christ is the head, and he feels himself to be thus united unto all who partake of the same fulness, with an abiding spirit of love. The spontaneous expression of his heart, is "Grace be unto all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." He rejoices to do them good. He loves to labour with them for Christ. He finds his chief delight in this communion of saints.

To the unconverted, he feels a bond of pity which he never knew before. He now knows the galling chain which they ignorantly wear. Earthly friends who are without Christ, have now a tenfold interest in his heart, beyond what he felt before. He labours with earnest desire, and prays with deep anxiety in their behalf, that they may have the eyes of their understanding enlightened, and discern the things which are freely given them from God. He longs to see them also, become new creatures in Jesus Christ. He feels the same pity for all the impenitent among men. Wherever they are, he desires their full conversion into God, their everlasting salvation in Jesus Christ. And to gain this end, he willingly spends, and is spent, in the service, and for the glory of the Redeemer.

In all these relations, the Christian is a new creature. And in his state of mind and spiritual condition, under this aspect, "old things are passed away, and all things are become new."

2. In his personal character, the Christian is a new creature. He has been renewed in the spirit of

his mind, after the image of him who has created him. He has thus put on the new man, which is renewed in holiness, by the Spirit of God.

He is released from the dominion of sin. Having been received under the covenanted power of divine grace, sin shall no more have dominion over him. It may dwell within him, but it dwells there as a captive, not as a ruler. Its influence may be often felt. It may sometimes obtain a short ascendancy. When he would do good, he may often find evil present with him. He may often groan in anguish, over the body of death which he finds himself compelled to carry about with him. But all this evidence of his infirmity is suffered for his good, to settle him the more completely, in humility, and in dependence upon God. He is sinful in himself; but he is not regarded, or dealt with as a sinner in the sight of God. He is imperfect and infirm in his character and purposes; but he is not, and he shall not be, governed by the principles, or the power of sin. God is daily giving him the victory; and he will finally accomplish it for him, through Jesus Christ. The hour is at hand, and will soon arrive, when the Spirit of holiness which has been implanted in his heart, shall become a triumphant and overruling spirit for eternity; and when the sin, which in its power is already conquered and crushed, shall in its very existence, be destroyed forever.

He is released from the darkness and confusion of mind, which sin has produced. He has been brought back by the Holy Spirit, to that order of character, in which man was formed at first. The image of God which was lost in man's apostacy, has been restored

to him, in his conversion. His understanding is enlightened from above, and controls his will, drawing it back into a cheerful submission to God. His will thus regulated and conformed to God, governs his affections, and leads them to the things which are above. His heart is fixed, trusting in God. Thus in the true order of his powers, his whole soul is devoted to the service of God. He is enlightened to discern the things which are excellent. He is able to choose them according to their worth. He loves those most, and with the most elevated feeling, which are most desirable. He follows after them, as they are held up before him; and reaching forward to the things which are above, he presses to the mark of the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus. Thus his heart has become right in the sight of God.

He has received a principle of divine grace within him, which shall flourish and increase forever. The work which is progressing in his heart, is the work of God. It may now be small and weak, like the mustard seed. But it shall grow and spread itself abroad eternally. The promises and illustrations of the Scripture point to this continual growth of the kingdom of God in the Christian's heart, and encourage him with the assurance, that the Lord will perfect that which he has begun for him, and carry on the good work unto the day of the Lord Jesus. Thus in his personal character, old things are passed away, and all things are become new. All former reformations were limited and temporary. This renovation of his soul, is entire and perpetual. He remains fixed in his determination of obedience to God, and no fears need rest upon his mind, nor any doubts

to agitate or distress him. His rock is sure. His hope shall not be overthrown. Lust, and passion, and pride, and devotion to the world and self, are conquered by divine power; and he shall be kept by that power, through faith, unto everlasting life. His religious interests and hopes are safe, because they are not entrusted to his own care, but preserved for him, by divine power and faithfulness. His bow abideth in strength, and the arms of his hands are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

3. In his associates, the Christian is a new creature. Old things are passed away. His delight is in the saints that are in the earth, and in such as excel in virtue. There was a time when he avoided the society of the pious; when he felt opposed to the assemblies for worship and religious instruction; when he turned away from those who set God always before them. There was a time when he loved the associations of the worldly, the haunts of giddiness and mirth, the marts of wealth and emolument. The profanity of the ungodly gave him no pain. Their devotion to this life did not seem to be unreasonable. Their forgetfulness of God excited no astonishment. The gilded attractions of the present world led him astray with others, in a voluntary delusion.

Now there has been a total revolution in all his intercourse with men. He has turned away from all the vain things which charmed him most. He finds no pleasure in the follies of the world. Its scenes of recreation do not attract him. Its temptations cannot deceive him. He has forsaken the society of those who fear not God; and he selects for his companions and friends, those in whom he can find the

divine image, and the mind of Christ. One hour passed with them in the worship of the Redeemer whom he loves, gives him more real pleasure than he ever found, in all the trifles by which his unrenewed heart was drawn and governed. He looks back with wonder and shame, to the time when he roamed in utter thoughtlessness about his high vocation, and was wholly occupied with the most vain and worthless objects. He now regards men according to their character in the sight of God. He respects them, as they love and adhere to the truth of the Gospel. He seeks their society, as he finds Jesus with them, and finds them to be helpful to him in the things which belong to his peace; or as he may be able to do them good, for the sake of Jesus Christ. If his necessary business drive him into the world, he regards it only as his place of duty and labour, not as the source of his pleasure and enjoyment. He thankfully returns to the society of those whose character can give him pleasure, and who are pursuing, with him, the path of spiritual holiness and life. He would rather be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, than dwell in the tents of ungodliness, as their possessor and lord. In this entire change of his taste and dispositions, in reference to present associates, he finds one valuable evidence, that he is indeed in Christ, and a new creature; that for him, old things are passed away and all things are become new. God has bestowed upon him this love for holy society; and it is the comfortable foundation for hope, that it shall be forever gratified also by him, in the eternal fellowship of saints and angels, around the Redeemer's throne in heaven.

4. The Christian is a new creature in his occupations and enjoyments. Here, all things are become new. The meat which perisheth, is not that which he now supremely desires; but he seeks for that which endureth unto everlasting life. His motives for present exertion arise from a far higher source than any earthly things. His wish and purpose are, to glorify God in his body and his spirit, which are his. He feels that God has given him a work to finish, and that an account of his stewardship must be rendered up to him. His desire is, in the fulfilment of every required duty, to honour the great and perfect name of his covenant God, whom he delights to serve. His occupations are still in the world, but he is not of the world. Religion sanctifies his daily engagements. True piety reigns over all the works of his hands. And through the divine blessing all things are made to work together for his good. His grand concern is to glorify God in his own salvation, and in promoting the salvation of others. All his plans and occupations in life, are in some way designed to unite in promoting this great end. This occupation and purpose is to him altogether new. He was not before accustomed to care for the souls of any. The religion and hope of the Gospel did not before appear to him the one thing needful. But now, however he may be occupied in life, he can say with St. Paul, "This one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forward unto those things which are before, I press to the mark of the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Every thing in life is with him in some degree connected with the cause of religion. He surveys the

map of the world, as a religious man. He views the concerns of human society, and marks and estimates the occupations of men, as they stand related to this great subject. And he makes it his own plan, to begin, continue, and end all his engagements, in the service and to the glory of God.

While his occupations are thus new, his enjoyments and pleasures are so also. His comforts and joys come to him from above. In the multitude of his thoughts within him, divine comforts delight his soul. He looks beyond the bounds of sense, to find his joy and his crown of rejoicing in eternity. The delight which he once received, and which he still sees others to take in the vanities of the world, is now a subject of astonishment with him. The repulsive aspect which the services of religious worship used to wear to his mind, is equally so. Prayer is no longer a task, but a pleasure. The Bible comes to him, not so much to remind him of a duty, as to call him to a privilege. It is a high enjoyment to worship God in spirit and in truth; and a delightful thing to be thankful to him for his gifts of love. Unbounded mercies continually surrounding him, call for new praise from his heart, from day to day. Every gift, whether of Providence or of grace, exhibits to his mind a new aspect of his Father's goodness, in the contemplation of which he takes great delight. This is all new. The love of the world used to reign where the love of the Father now controls. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, used to govern where the glory of the cross is now the only boasting. The affections of his heart are now set upon things which are above, which be-

fore had no higher object than the perishing vanities of the world. Thus for him all things are become new, because he is in Christ. Life is happy, not in proportion to the abundance of things which he possesseth, but in the dominion over his heart in all its concerns, of that peace of God which passeth understanding.

5. He is a new creature in his prospects. Here old things are passed away. He is released from the bondage of the fear of death, from the condemnation for sin, which made the wrath of God to abide upon him. He has in the blessed promises of the Gospel, the assurance of that perfect love in God for him, which casteth out all fear. He has an abiding testimony, that he has been bought with a price, and an abiding hope of a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which has been also, by the same price, bought for him. His actual expectations are thus changed, because the facts before him are immeasurably changed. He looks forward to no sorrow, or pain, or death, in eternity. No flames of anguish rise up in his path. No undying worm is preparing for ravages upon his soul. God the Saviour has opened the way to bliss and glory; and there is prepared by him, for the new creature whom he hath formed, a crown which is incorruptible, and unfading for eternity. All that God can bestow to fill up the measure of his perfection and bliss, is secured to him by a covenant, which cannot be removed, and which equally keeps, and keeps with equal certainty, him for glory, and glory for him.

This is a brief view of the text, considered as a privilege for the Christian. "If any man be in Christ,

he is a new creature, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." This is the present actual privilege of the renewed man. It is now his property, and he now enjoys it, far more certainly than the house in which he dwells, or the food by which his body is sustained.

6. My brethren, you see here the worth of real piety, the true value of the religion of the Gospel. It can be regarded only as a source of lasting enjoyment and peace, to the heart which is governed by it. He who considers the service of God but as a duty which must be accomplished, sees none of its real worth. He who looks upon it as the perfect freedom which man desires, the highest honour, and the only happiness of an immortal being, sees it, as it is revealed, and finds it even more to his soul than he could have anticipated. O, my friends, thus seek, and thus embrace the Gospel! It is all you want; and your regenerated souls will rejoice forever in the unsearchable riches of its grace.

You see here the actual encouragement for the Christian's hope and the Christian's effort. There is no uncertainty in his attainment of the end he seeks. He is pressing forward in a path of life. He is a new creature; formed by God, with whom there is no change or shadow of turning, for high, and noble, and heavenly ends. No created mind is competent to describe the issue which awaits him, and for which he is set apart by the grace of God. Between him and that glorious issue, though there are many difficulties, there is no uncertainty. He may soar upward through the shining path to glory, perfectly confident, that what God has undertaken, he will certainly

accomplish, to the eternal honour of his own most holy name. He has in this certainty of the result before him, the greatest possible encouragement to steadfastness and effort.

Here we also see the real test of human character. Is man a new creature? Has he passed from death unto life? Has he been begotten again by the power of the Highest, to the enjoyment of a Gospel hope? Is he a converted man? The answer to this single question involves all that man can look for for eternity. Heaven and hell are suspended upon the decision of it. This question must be answered here or hereafter. Its affirmative answer will be here, the only fountain of peace; hereafter, the only possible charter of hope, and preparation for glory. The unrighteous cannot inherit the kingdom of God. May God give you grace to seek this glorious character, and glorious hope! May he lead you thus, at once, to enter upon that progress of conformity to him, which shall result in the bliss of his own presence forever!

VII.

THE LORD'S SIDE.

EXODUS xxxii. 26.—*Who is on the Lord's side?*

IN man's apostacy from God, the native dispositions of the human heart have become universally opposed to the divine will. The carnal, or natural mind has become enmity against God, and refuses to be made subject to his commands. Its affections are enchained by concerns of transitory interest, and follow without control the attractions of sensible objects. Its will is determined in the way of selfish gratifications, and has no ability to withdraw itself from them, to seek after the things which are above. Man has become the slave of appetite, the victim of corruption, and by wicked works the enemy of God. This aversion to the divine government, exists in every unconverted heart; and it is the difference of circumstances alone, which causes a difference in its development in the outward character and conduct. The exercise of amiable and affectionate dispositions towards man, may gild and conceal its purposes. Education and the restraints of surrounding society

may prevent the full exhibition of its odious characteristics. The very principle of its own selfishness, may often cloak its plans of sin. But the native enmity of the heart to God still remains. Often it betrays his aversion to the purity of the divine commands, to the view of his fellow-men. Often it rises up to his own awakened conscience, under a terrific and remorseful aspect. By the searching eye of Almighty God, it is unceasingly marked with abhorrence for its guiltiness, and with sorrow for its effects.

This fact of the natural and universal enmity of the human heart to God, is made the foundation of all the plans of divine grace. While we were enemies to him, and because we were enemies to him, God hath given his only begotten Son to die for us, that whosoever believeth in him, might not perish, but have everlasting life. In the midst of this world of enemies, God hath accomplished this mysterious and glorious scheme of redemption for man. By a method which angels desire to understand, but which is elevated, in its operation and influence, above the reach of all created comprehension, he has reconciled rebels unto himself; and has gathered from among them a peculiar people, who, by his own Spirit, have been made submissive to his holy will. He has established a spiritual and unchangeable dominion in the very midst of the powers of darkness, against which the gates of hell shall not be permitted to prevail. Thus the world has been divided. Its unconverted portion of men still remain the children of disobedience, the subjects of the prince of darkness, vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction. But God has drawn out also, from among them, another portion by

his Holy Spirit, a ransomed flock, who are called by the name of his own Son, marshalled under the banners of this glorious Redeemer, to be made victorious in him over all their enemies, and to be kept by his power through faith unto salvation. These followers of the Son of God are in the world. They are connected with the children of the world, by a thousand ties of nature. But they are not of the world, even as he was not of the world. They have a spiritual birth, a spiritual character, a spiritual home. They have come out and separated themselves from the principles of the world, and are bound together by a new tie, under a new ruler, Jesus Christ the righteous. They constitute "the Lord's side," in the present world, as I may, without injustice, apply the expression of my text. And in reference to such a division among men, I propose to you the question of the text: "Who is on the Lord's side?" Where are the lines of demarcation among you, my brethren, between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan? Who among you are the unpardoned and unrenewed children of this world? And who are the purchased and purified children of God?

There is a sense in which all who hear me, may assume to be upon the Lord's side. They have voluntarily assembled in the house which he has sanctified, avowedly to worship him, to make an offering of praise and prayer to him, and to listen to the messages of his word. Should our examination proceed no farther than the mere language of personal assertion, this claim might be allowed. But, alas, the Lord sees in his holy temple, many things which must be taken hence. The sinful hearts of men still bring all

the business and the follies of the world into the sanctuary of God; and the inspection of them by a divine eye, shows the abomination which maketh desolate, standing in the holy place. This is an undeniable fact; and while it is so, we are bound to carry our investigation much farther than this apparent purpose of men, in asking and determining who are on the Lord's side.

I. In outward profession they are on the Lord's side, who have become partakers of the peculiar ordinances which the Saviour has established for his church. These ordinances he has made imperative. The authority which has appointed them is supreme, and no subordinate power can in any wise reverse them, or set them aside. Until men have become members of that body which is "sanctified by the washing of water, through the word," in outward baptism; until they have established the covenant into which they have thus entered, by "the laying on of hands," which two appointments constitute "the first principles of the doctrine of Christ," in regard to outward ordinances; until they are led to continue in this fellowship, in the breaking of bread, in memory of Christ; they cannot be said to be on the Lord's side in the world, whatever be the state and preparation of the heart. Both the body and spirit of man are required to glorify him who hath bought them both with a price. The faith of the one, if it has been wrought there by him, will not be separated from the open, appointed profession of him with the other. While the heart believeth unto righteousness, the mouth must make confession unto salvation. These two God hath joined together; and the nature

and constitution of man, as well as the authority of God, make it impossible that they should be safely put asunder. By the outward fruits of simple obedience to the commands of Christ, are we to show the faith which dwells in our hearts; and a professed faith which does not result in such works of obedience, is declared to be dead. But then the utmost conformity to ordinances, without the attending, adequate renewing of the Spirit, is useless also. The most solemn outward profession may cover an unsubdued, nay, a cherished enmity to God. All are not Israel in heart, who are of Israel in name. Tares are growing with the wheat. Children of darkness, fitting for their own place, assemble with the sons of God, in all these privileges of the outward sanctuary. This leads us to the necessity of a more intimate examination. The Saviour has said, "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This must be received as the law of his kingdom. Man has no authority to say that either may be dispensed with. On the one side, we may not say, that he may certainly enter into the kingdom of God, who believes himself to have experienced a spiritual birth, but discards the appointed outward profession of the fact; nor on the other side, that he is secure who is a participant of ordinances with the utmost accuracy, but wants the spiritual new creation within. The two united, constitute the new birth, without which no man can enter into the kingdom of God. But neither by itself, comes up to the Saviour's demand for a regeneration in man. And we are not authorised by the Scripture to allow either, in separation, to be a sufficient preparation for eternal

life. While, therefore, this outward profession in the Lord's ordinances, is the personal, public assertion, that we are upon the Lord's side, it opens the way for a further examination of the real spirit and character of men. There is another standard which looks far beyond all outward professions, in a determination of this question. There are sure and incontestible evidences that our profession is a just and sincere one. There is a character which the power of man cannot feign, and which accurately marks those who have enlisted themselves under the banner of the King of saints. These evidences are to be presented, not as the marks by which we may form an opinion of others, but as the testimony by which we may examine ourselves.

II. To these characteristics of those who are on the Lord's side, I would now direct your attention.

1. They who are on the Lord's side, have been converted by the power of the Holy Ghost, from their natural state of blindness and enmity to God. They have been formed anew, after the pure and perfect image of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have passed, in their experience, from death unto life. This spiritual conversion is the sole commencement of a spiritual life. Man at enmity with God, is by divine grace subdued and reconciled. Blind and careless, he is by the same power awakened and illuminated. In bondage to fleshly appetites and lusts, he is made free with the liberty of the sons of God. His affections fixed upon the world and self, are drawn off to God and heavenly things. All this is done for him, when the Spirit of God forms him anew for the love and service of God. This must be done, equally done

for all. It is not only necessary for those whose external conduct has been grossly corrupted and depraved, but for the most restrained and estimable among men, who have lived unto themselves, and not unto Jesus Christ the Lord. No advantages of education, or example, or outward influence, can do away in any case, the indispensable requisition of a new creation of the soul. God may sanctify and bless a thousand different instruments for the accomplishment of this important end. He may effect it for different individuals in every different period of life between infancy and death. But he will not suffer its necessity to be set aside for any. Man must be brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel by this manifest conversion of his heart, or he will be an inheritor of the blackness of darkness forever. When this spiritual birth takes place, in addition to the required outward profession, you come upon the Lord's side, and all your relations to God are changed forever. From the children of wrath, you are made the children of God; and heaven, in all the brightness of its glory, opens upon you, as an everlasting home, in the stead of that unutterable wretchedness and despair, which was, in a state of sin, your only prospect beyond the grave.

Let your character and condition be tried by this standard. Who among you have been thus brought to a knowledge and love of truth? You were born without distinction, under the curse of a violated law, dead in trespasses and sins. Have you been raised to a new and spiritual life? Have you been made to experience and to rejoice in the pardoning love of God our Saviour? I have no doubt that some of

you can point to a period in their lives, before which they felt no care for their souls, no interest in the great concerns of the Gospel, no anxiety for the things which belong to their peace; but since which, they have been seeking for heavenly treasures, and the great object of their life has been, to glorify God, and to find a gracious acceptance at his hands. Others may be ready to say that they know no precise period of any change in their hearts, but they do know that it is now their supreme wish, and their highest effort, to be delivered from the bondage of sin, and to be made conformable to the holy will of God. I rest no authority upon the hour, or the instrument of this conversion. Whether God have gently inclined the tender shoot, or, with resistless power, have uprooted the tree at its maturity, is not the important question. But the result must be manifest; your change of feeling, and purpose, and desires, must be clear and evident; your love for Christ, and your hatred of sin, conscious and distinct; your possession of a spiritual mind, known and experienced; and then whatever be the instrument, the work is the same, and you are put by it, on the Lord's side forever.

2. They who are on the Lord's side in this division of the world, make it their object to live by faith in his promises and power, and as pilgrims on the earth, to become prepared for a better country, that is, an heavenly. Nothing more clearly distinguishes a renewed and spiritual mind, than the habitual operation of this principle of faith. In the various changes of the present world, this spiritual mind exercises a filial confidence in God, that all things shall work together

for its good. In the darkest hours of earthly discouragement, it can repose itself upon the assurance of divine protection, and derive from that assurance, thankfulness and peace. It looks not at the temporal things, which are seen, but at the eternal things, which are unseen. Its prevailing tendency is to reach far beyond all mortal changes, to a city eternal in the heavens, and to rejoice in the hope of the rest which remaineth for the people of God. My brethren, how is it with you, in regard to this? Are you, in the exercise and enjoyment of this spiritual faith, upon the Lord's side? Are you thus resting upon the Lord Jesus for pardon and acceptance? Are you confiding in his grace and presence, to make you conquerors? Are you enduring as seeing him who is invisible? Are you forgetting the things which are behind, the world, with all its gains, honours, and pleasures; and, reaching forward to the things which are before, the full sanctification of the Holy Ghost, the final enjoyment of the glory of God, the blissful presence of the Redeemer? Are you pressing on to the mark of the prize of your high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Are you labouring to live above this world, and to pass through life with your hearts and your hopes in heaven? Is it a subject of experience with you, that there is nothing on earth which you desire in comparison with the love of God your Saviour?

3. They who are on the Lord's side experience a daily conflict with the principles of sin. While men are unconverted, this contest is unknown. They have often a struggle between appetite and character, between immediate and remote interest, between conscience and temptation. But in all these cases, the

man himself is on the side of the transgression; and the opposer which is found in character, or conscience, or supposed ultimate interest, is an opposer to himself. Every thing like contest, then, is between himself and some better principle, that would lead him in some respects to a better course. He has no desire to do the will, or to promote the glory of God, and he resists every effort of the Spirit that would lead him to it. The converted man has changed sides in this contest. Instead of warring against conscience, and the Spirit of God, he is now, with them, conflicting with the principles and power of sin. He sees his unworthiness. He abhors his transgressions. With the power of the Holy Spirit on his side, he contends against them, and the temptations which lead to them. Thus an unceasing warfare is carried on within him. He mourns over the discovered inroads of sin, and is determined to resist them, and drive them back. He is resolved, that however sin may press upon him, it shall not have dominion over him. The subject of his prayers, his tears, his earnest exertions is, that he may be kept back from presumptuous sins, and cleansed from his secret faults. If he wander from God, it is not wilfully. If he forget him, it is not with an ungrateful design. He frequently finds himself tempted to do what he would not. But his determined will and purpose are on the side of duty, and the temptation is no longer he, but sin that dwelleth in him. The prayer and unceasing desire of his heart is, that God, by his own Spirit, would deliver him wholly from this death. His only confidence and hope is, that he who has begun a good work in him, will carry it on with increasing

power, even unto the day of the Lord Jesus. Try yourselves by this. Are you thus upon the Lord's side? Is sin a burden to your souls? Is holiness of character the object of your desires and labours? Are you contending against the predominance of unholy appetites, passions, and pursuits? Are you resisting the prevalence of a carnal, worldly mind? Do you feel it to be the greatest of all evils to be alienated from God? Is it your daily prayer, that he would deliver you from the bondage and danger of such a spirit? Does the consciousness of sin, however involuntary, fill you with grief? If you have no experience of this inward conflict, and are not daily, by the Spirit of God dwelling in you, resisting the power of sin and death, you cannot be on the Lord's side.

4. They who are on the Lord's side, are going on from grace to grace. They are daily gaining victory over sin, and drawing more near to the true and holy God. The mind of Christ is forming within them. The Spirit of Christ is shedding his lovely and holy influence over their hearts. The fruits of grace are exhibiting themselves with increasing brightness in all their conduct. Holiness and pureness of living, meekness of spirit, a contented and thankful temper, a readiness to do good, and to endure evil, form the characteristics of their lives. As years pass by with them, they are continually rising above the vanities of the world; acting upon the belief, that they have here no continuing city; labouring not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life; rejoicing more and more in the favour of God reconciled to them through Jesus

Christ. Life is with them, not only a conflict, but also a progress to victory. The grace which as an incorruptible seed was implanted in their hearts, in the hour of their conversion, expands, and grows, and matures, till, as the full corn in the ear, it brings forth the fruits of holiness, unto everlasting life. From the hour in which they were brought over as captives upon the Lord's side, and their affections and wills were enlisted in his cause, they are promoted in his service, and advance every day the more nearly unto him. From babes in Christ, they pass through every intervening period of a spiritual life, till more than perfect men in Christ Jesus, they shine forever, as the angels in the presence of God.

My beloved brethren, are you upon the Lord's side? O, decide for yourselves this all-important question! Have you ever given up your habits and determinations of rebellion against him, and humbling yourselves before him, besought him to lead you into captivity by his grace? O, deceive not yourselves in a matter of such unspeakable consequence. Take the description which has now been given to you of the Lord's people, and by it, faithfully try your lives and hearts. Rest not in a heedless uncertainty regarding the state of your souls. In God's controversy with sin, there is no neutral ground. "He that is not with me, is against me." Every individual before me is either the child or the enemy of God; is either ripening for unfading bliss, or withering for a changeless sorrow.

Can it be, that you feel no concern in the decision of such a case as this? Can you suffer the conviction that God is angry with you every day, and yet feel no

anxiety, and make no exertions to obtain your peace with him? Are you in a state of warfare with the great King of heaven, and yet refuse while he entreats you to return unto him, to give up your opposition to his will? Have you reflected how short is the period in which this reconciliation with an offended God must take place? A few more days, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. Will you choose the despondency and fear of a death without hope? Will you choose to meet a Saviour then, who has been driven from you before, by an inexcusable ingratitude? Will you rush unpardoned and accursed, into that presence, where the holiest of the holy veil themselves with reverence? Will you reject the comfort of a Redeemer's grace, despise the riches of his forbearance, and cast from you the assistance of the one, who alone has power to defend you in the hour of trial? Will you give up here, the pleasantness and peace which Jesus offers, and the glorious inheritance which he has provided, and make your souls, with their immortal welfare, a sacrifice to your determined rebellion against God? Alas, if this be your decision, if you are resolved not to be on the Lord's side, man can do nothing for you. Your hours of regret are coming, when tears of blood will not repair your loss, nor anguish unutterable purchase peace.

But if you will return, come. Lay aside your repugnance to the will of God, your contests with his authority, your resistance of his Spirit. Let nothing detain or discourage you. Offer yourselves to God, and in that divine Saviour in whom he has laid up the treasures of his grace for you, seek pardon and life, and you shall in no wise be cast out.

To those of you who are on the Lord's side, let me say, come daily anew to him, with humble, believing hearts, and he will strengthen and bless you. Live more entirely by faith in him. Suffer him not to be wounded by your negligence or worldliness. Crucify him not afresh, by going back to the elements of the world, and drinking again out of broken cisterns. Never forget that there is no concord between Christ and Belial, no halfway ground in religious character or profession. There can be no giving up one hour of conflict for the sake of worldly peace. You must bear about with you the marks of the Lord Jesus, and never leave it as a doubtful matter to whom you belong. O, that you may have grace to live ever mindful of your eternal obligations, and always as becometh those who are on the Lord's side.

VIII.

THE PROTECTED PEOPLE.

EZEKIEL ix. 3—6.—*And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side ; And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry, for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in my hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite ; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity : Slay utterly, old and young, both maids, and little children, and women ; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark ; and begin at my sanctuary.*

To understand adequately, both the circumstances which are related in this passage, and the application which I design to make of them, it will be necessary to refer shortly, to the history which the prophet himself gives.

He was sitting in his house, and the elders of Judah were sitting before him, when the hand of the Lord God fell upon him. He beheld, and lo, a likeness as the appearance of fire. He saw a hand which was put forth, and took him by a lock of his head. And the Spirit lifted him up between the earth and the heaven, and brought him, in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the inner door of the temple. And

the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision which he had previously seen in the plain. There, God displayed to him successive scenes of the iniquity of the people; and carried him forward through different parts of the temple, and of the city, to witness the increasing abominations which were committed by various classes of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The whole city seemed to him to be filled with crime. Even the sanctuary of the holy God, was desecrated by the polluting devices of wicked men. He beheld seventy of the ancients of the house of Israel, each provided with a censer, offering a thick cloud of incense to every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, which were portrayed upon the wall round about, saying to each other, "the Lord seeth us not, and the Lord hath forsaken the earth." He saw the women engaged in all the superstitions of their idol worship; and the men even between the porch and the altar of the temple, with their backs to the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east, worshipping the sun.

When all these varied scenes of guilt had been exhibited to him, the Lord said unto him, "Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah, that they commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger; and lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury; mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity; and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them."

The Lord then proceeded to show him the fulfilment of this solemn denunciation. "He cried in mine ears," says the prophet, "with a loud voice, 'cause them that have charge over the city, to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand.' And behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man with a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen with a writer's inkhorn by his side; and they went in and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub whereupon it was, to the threshold of the house." The Lord forsook a sanctuary which had been so polluted by man's transgression, and stood at the door of the temple, to direct the work of separation and punishment among the people, which he had determined now to accomplish. He had come forth in his anger, to take vengeance on the iniquities of men, and to deal with them in his fury, for all the abominations which they had committed, and for the hardness and impenitent heart with which they defended themselves in them.

But the inhabitants of Jerusalem had not all thus forsaken or provoked him. The Lord had reserved to himself, as in the time of Elijah, a remnant who had not bowed the knee to the pernicious influence of a majority; who had dared to be "faithful found among the faithless." Before the work of determined destruction could commence, he must take forth the precious from among the vile. They had manifested their zeal for his honour, and their love for his service, to the utmost of their power. And though they

had not been able to rule the characters, or to limit the wickedness of the residue of men, they should certainly be protected amidst their dangers, and rescued from their destruction. The prophet says "he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; and the Lord said unto him, 'go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry, for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.'" Thus were the servants of God to be distinguished. They had done all that they could do, to maintain the authority of God among the people. And when all their efforts were vain, they still sighed and cried over abominations which they could not prevent. In the spirit of David, rivers of water ran down their eyes, because men kept not the divine law. Like Jeremiah, when men would not hear, their souls wept in secret places, for their pride. But even this the Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And now, when sudden destruction was coming upon ungodly men, which they could not escape, these faithful servants of God, should be infallibly preserved. As the Israelites were distinguished in Egypt by the blood of the lamb, and the destroying angels were to pass over every house on which there was seen the lamb's blood, so these were now to be marked by divine appointment, that they might be secure from evil.

When this command was obeyed, the Lord said to the others, the six men who had the slaughter weapons in their hands, "Go ye after him through the city,

and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity; slay utterly, old and young, both maids, and little children, and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark: and begin at my sanctuary." This dreadful order was immediately executed. The destroying angels began at the brazen altar where they stood, with the ancient men, who were before the house. No place or circumstances were to be a protection for impenitent guilt. God said unto the executors of his wrath, "defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain;" and then, "go ye forth." "And they went forth, and slew in the city."

"And it came to pass," says the prophet, "while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and said, Ah, Lord God! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel, in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem? Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness; for they say, 'the Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not. And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head. And behold the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, 'I have done as thou hast commanded me.'"

My brethren, "whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our admonition." And the propriety of the extension of this instructive passage of Scripture, in an application to our own time and circumstances, is so manifest, that there is hardly

required of me any thing more than a conclusion of solemn and awakening exhortation, to the various classes of those who hear me, and who may be included in it. As it is a history of facts which are past, it refers to those whom it describes by name. But as it is an exemplary instance of the dealings of Almighty God with sinful men, it is an illustration of facts which are to come, in reference to ourselves. May the Lord, the Spirit, be mercifully pleased to make us wise in its consideration, and faithful in its improvement, for ourselves.

The simple general subject which the text offers to our notice, is AN EXHIBITION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD, PROTECTED IN THE DESTRUCTION OF A WORLD OF THE UNGODLY. Upon this important subject, I remark first,

I. That God has a people of his own in a world of sinners, who feel for his honour, and desire to sustain his authority. This is at all times a most important and precious fact. It never was more important than it is in our day. God *has* such a people. Whatever may be the amount of human iniquity, however overspreading and fearful, the surrounding abominations of mankind, there is still a remnant, upon whom the Lord looks with favour. They are men who tremble at his word, and who, as they are mutually acquainted, speak often one to another. These are the salt of the earth; the preservation of men. Set apart by the Lord, for himself; made by the Holy Spirit, new creatures in Christ Jesus; standing with his robe of righteousness, complete in him; instant in prayer; fruitful in holiness; and preferring the reproach of Christ, to the treasures of the world;

they are at once, the ornament and the defence of mankind. And it imports an amazing amount of corruption and guilt in a land, when it is proclaimed, that such men can but deliver their own souls, and shall be no longer the instruments to convey divine blessings to others.

That God has such a people in our day, a seed of grace still remaining among us, is an assurance of unspeakable comfort. The death of the last servant of God among a people, fills up their history; completes the purpose of God, and their trial; and they who have rejected his grace, to remain finally in sin, are rejected by him, as unjust, to remain unjust still. While we look abroad upon the abominations which encompass us in this day of evil, this is our comfort in the house of our affliction. There is still salt in the earth. The Lord has not left himself without witnesses. There are yet in the land many precious, praying sons of Sion, comparable unto fine gold, each one of whom, in the Lord's esteem, is as the apple of an eye.

We behold the misrule of intemperate lusts driving in scathing fire, over every thing which is honourable to the character of man, and indispensable to the good order of society; literally, death on the pale horse, and hell following; we behold drunkenness and licentiousness writhing like insatiable serpents through the land, and feeding daily upon more victims, than the cruelest superstition on the earth has ever demanded; we see impiety with an unblushing front, setting her polluting foot upon all that is sacred in the institutions of the Gospel, trampling down the Bible and the Sabbath, sounding abroad with a trumpet her blasphemies against God, while infidelity

stands by, and claps her hands in triumph, and shouts encouragement as if it were the path of glory; and the order, and the interests, and the happiness of man, fair flowers that bloom only beneath the favour of the Most High, all crushed into the dust behind, like the hard-trodden surface of a battle field. These are the abominations of men around us; so overspreading, that even the wise men of this world, who have connived at the whole, and grown rich with its gains, begin to tremble amidst the results of their own allowances, for the security of their own property and life.

And where, amidst all this anarchy and noise, are the people of the living God? Has the whole family of man gone after the idols of sin? Is there nothing left to show what man under a better dominion might become? Is there no green spot in the desert, as a sample of what blooms and flourishes in other climes? O, yes, my brethren, thanks be to God, he has left us a remnant, and he knoweth them that are his. They are described in our text. They sigh and cry for the abominations that are done. In the secrecy of the closet, amidst the little social circle for prayer, in the house of God, the eye of the Lord still sees them; perhaps unknown and unnoticed by the world; and he says of each of them, as if turning off his attention from apparently greater objects, to mark them the more intently, "upon this man will I look, even the man who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

These people of God have not sighed in listless idleness, or wept tears of fearful indolence, without an effort to stop the progress of man's iniquity. No. They are those who have first done all in active effort

which they could do, to restrain the wickedness of others; and who now, while they are mourning for their sins, are bearing their testimony with fidelity against them. They are not partakers of other men's sins. They do not join with them in unnecessary disturbances of the holy rest of the Sabbath, nor legalize by even partial indulgence in intoxicating drinks, that drunkenness wherein is excess. They withhold their hands from the taking of bribes. They will not gain their emolument from that which is made the instrument of dishonour to God and ruin to man. To them the wealth which is the price of blood, the gain in any degree of breaking God's law, is an accursed thing. They will not touch it. They do not shrink from sight behind a multitude, nor attempt to cover their responsibility with the plea, that they are single amidst the many, and that their influence is therefore, nothing. They stand out openly for God, and for the truth of God, though unsupported by human power, and discouraged by all the influence of man. And if they can do nothing by active effort, they still mourn over evils which they cannot cure. They cannot feel or profess indifference to the conduct and condition of mankind. Jealous for the honour of God, happy in the acceptance of a Saviour, knowing the comforts of the Holy Ghost, believing the revealed responsibility and destiny of sinful men, they long to the end of life, for the salvation of the ungodly; and sigh and cry unto God, while they live, over a destruction in which they have no participation, and which men bring wholly upon themselves. Such a people God has in the midst of a world of sinners. I remark secondly,

II. This people are entirely protected in the destruction which God brings upon the ungodly.

“Go,” says the Lord in our text, “set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry, for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof;” a mark which shall be easily discerned; a mark by which they shall be known without hesitation or doubt. What this mark was in this particular case, it matters not for us. The fact is all that we need. These servants of God were thus marked. Then says God to the destroyers, “Go through and smite; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark.”

Thus the people of God are marked and sealed amidst the world in which they dwell; and God spares them in the hour of punishment, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. It is not exhibited as a mark for man’s discernment, though open as it was upon the forehead, it need not be concealed from man. But it was to guide the instruments of death; to preserve the people of God from the destroying weapons; and to constitute the evidence of his acceptance of them, and of their title to his eternal favour. Amidst surrounding ungodliness, the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will hide them in his tabernacle, until the danger be overpast. They are marked by his infallible determination, and are sealed by his Spirit unto the day of redemption.

They are marked in their conversion unto himself, having been begotten again of an incorruptible seed, of the word of God, by the Holy Ghost; and they are living and walking in the Spirit. They are marked by their increasing separation through the

Spirit, from the defilements of sin, and their withdrawal from the secret and the assembly of the ungodly. They are marked by the manifest fruits of the Spirit, the holy graces which spring from his operations within the heart, exhibiting them as living to God, and for God, among men, and seeking in the meekness of wisdom, to bring all men back to him. They are marked by the prayers which ascend night and day from their hearts to heaven, cries which come into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, bringing down his blessings upon sinful men, and turning away his anger from them. They are marked in all the appointed ordinances of his house, and seek in all things, to know what he would have them to do. They will be found abiding in the communion of his church; walking in the light of his word; and honouring him in their glad conformity to all his institutions among men; rejoicing there to dwell where the Lord hath established his blessing, even life forevermore. Thus God knows, and makes known his people; not by their assertion of privileges, and professed subjection to his will alone; but by the manifest and undisputed exhibition of that holiness of character which is the earnest of the purchased inheritance, and without which no man shall see the Lord.

Thus marked, they are entirely protected in the hour of danger. When the Lord cometh out of his place, to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, he turneth his hand upon these little ones, and shelters them in the cleft of the rock, from the sorrows which compass the sinner forever. It is not from earthly troubles that they are protected. These

form no discrimination of character ; nor are they the designed punishments for human sin. The generation of God's children have often, in this respect, a measure of a full cup poured out for them. But their sufferings are precious and indispensable blessings ; and they are the happier and the holier in heaven, for all which they have been required to endure upon the earth.

But when God, in his justice, punishes the ungodly, and makes his inquisition for guilt, the destroying angel comes not near a man upon whom is the blood of the Lamb. In the temporal visitations which he makes for sin, when kingdoms and communities are desolated and overthrown for their iniquity, God selects his people, and shields them completely from that result of mortal death which sin produces ; and makes the pestilence, or the earthquake, or the conflagration, the chariot which is to bear them up to glory. It becomes a blessing to them, and a welcome messenger from God to their souls. Their minds are kept in perfect peace, because they are stayed upon him. And in the scenes of a world to come, when the wickedness of the ungodly has come to a perpetual end, he will establish the just. No despairing anguish shall arrest them upon the bed of death. No biting remorse shall attend them to the presence of an heart-searching God. No pang of unpardoned guilt shall fester in their bosom. No banishment from the Most High shall clothe their souls with darkness. No angry spirits shall vex them on to madness. No scorching flames shall feed upon a soul that cannot die. God says to all the messengers and instruments of wrath, "Come not near any man

upon whom is the mark ;” and the law stands off, and conscience is silenced, and guilt hides its head, and Satan shrinks away. Known by the mark of grace—grace which loved them, bought them, found them, brought them back, kept them, and crowned them—they stand before God, sanctified and secured. Happy in their eternal enjoyments. Happy in all their earthly sorrows. Happy, peculiarly in this, that they sighed and cried for the abominations of men, in their zeal for the honour of the Lord of hosts.

The text leads me to remark thirdly,

III. While the people of God are thus distinguished and protected, the destruction of the ungodly will be entire. Their abominations long forborne with, are at last brought into judgment ; and tribulation and anguish cometh upon every soul of man that doeth evil. Amidst the overspreading of sin around us, we might almost be tempted unbelievingly to say, “the Lord seeth not.” The wicked are often they who seem the most to prosper in the earth. But faith assures us that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth ; and though sentence against an evil work be not executed speedily, nothing is forgotten before him, and he will bring every secret thing into judgment, and fully repay them that hate him. The punishment which is described with so much minuteness in our text, is a full illustration of his final dealings with the ungodly.

Their destruction will be unsparing and without mercy. “Go ye after him, and smite ; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity.” The hour for merciful intercession will have passed by. Long has God endeavoured to lead them to repentance ; long has

the Saviour stood waiting to receive them; long has the divine Spirit exerted himself to bring them back to Christ. And while all this was passing, they might have found a refuge in the Gospel, and have gained eternal life. But now the dispensation of mercy has been closed, and they are left, as they have chosen to be left, to the unbending operation of law. They are to stand upon their own ground. Their iniquities start up, a resuscitated multitude, to testify against them. Guilt, like a millstone around their necks, hangs upon their souls. And unmitigated wrath, following in the train of unerring justice, seizes upon them, as its portion forever. No circumstance alleviates or lessens the ruin which sin has brought upon them. No eye pities, and no arm interposes for their good. They die without mercy. They perish without redemption. They are destroyed forever.

Their destruction will be an universal one. None who bear the burden of unpardoned sin can in any wise escape. "Slay utterly, old and young, both maids, and little children, and women." All who have partaken in the abominations of sin, must share also in the misery which impenitent sin entails. No age, or character, or circumstances, among sinners, who are alike unconverted, can be urged in arrest of judgment, or be allowed to turn aside the punishment of transgression. The daring violator of holy things, the man who has sinned with determination and power in the world, shall find no defence against the destroying weapon of the Most High. The secret, gilded transgressor, who was known in his iniquities to none but himself and God, shall be dragged from his hiding-place, and be made to feel the holy, search-

ing power of the wrath of God. No veneration shall be paid to aged guilt, nor any tenderness be indulged to more youthful transgression. Families who are now entailing the example and the influence of irreligion and vice upon their posterity, shall find that they have sent down with it a scorching stream of vengeance and suffering. God will not be mocked. And whatever softening appellations men may give to their iniquities, when God lays judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, all will vanish and be forgotten. Sin will stand out in its own nakedness, and will eat into the souls of ungodly men, as it were fire.

This destruction will begin with those who are most highly favoured with religious privileges. "Begin at my sanctuary," says the Lord to the angels of destruction. No circumstance can extenuate impenitent guilt. But there are many to aggravate the enormities of transgression. They who have sinned under the law, shall be judged by the law, is the principle of the Scriptures. They who know the Lord's will, and do commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with many stripes. "Judgment must begin at the house of God," says the apostle Peter, as if in reference to this very passage of our text. Neither the pulpit nor the sanctuary; neither profession nor self-complacency shall afford protection to the sinner's soul. O, how alarming to the man who covers actual iniquity with the garment of piety in profession; to the man who has enriched himself by ministering ruin to others; to the man who may number his gains and honours by the wretched souls he has led forward to eternal despair; and yet professes

himself to have done no harm; is the command of Almighty God, "Begin at my sanctuary!" There is no respect of persons before the tribunal of the living God. The hypocrite shall be unveiled; the false professor shall be exhibited as he is; the self-righteous man shall be held up to view in his own deformities; and unrepented sin shall every where see the destroying weapon, with an irreversible energy, coming upon itself.

This destruction shall spare only those who have been marked. "Come not near any man upon whom is the mark." An unconverted soul is guilty in the mere fact, that it is an unconverted soul. "All who are not written in the Lamb's book of life, shall be cast into the lake of fire." Amidst the privileges which men have enjoyed, they are without excuse in their sins. And when God has numbered up all his people; and received and blessed all who would return to him, the residue are left to perish in their guilt. O, my brethren, it has been long your duty to return unitedly to God, and to gain his indelible mark of grace, in the full restoration of your souls to him, by humbly coming to the Lord Jesus for pardon and righteousness. That any of you are without the Lamb's mark, is wholly upon your own responsibility. None other can bear the blame. But being so, you must look forward with certainty to the fact, that destruction awaits the unrenewed soul. The man who is not, by his own choice and act, spiritually and wholly, on the side of Jesus, is certainly opposed to him; and must reap the harvest which he has sown for himself.

In the midst of this unsparing, universal destruction of all who have not the Saviour's mark, where will my present hearers stand? My brethren, what side have you taken in God's great controversy with sin, and sinful men? Where among you, are the men who sigh and cry for the abominations which they see? who are zealous for the glory of the Lord of hosts? O, allow not judgment to come upon you without mercy; nor the blessings of the glorious Gospel to testify against your souls! See to it, that you are bearing about with you, the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ; that you have a conscious, assured interest in his perfect righteousness; that you may stand with him in white among his people, when he cometh to judge the earth; rescued from his displeasure, and partakers of his glory. Make clear and evident your title in him, to the kingdom which he has prepared; and be sure, that you fall not into the hands of the living God, with the fearful, eternal burden of unpardoned guilt upon your souls.

IX.

THE RESCUED BRAND.

ZECHARIAH iii. 2.—*Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?*

THIS is the divine description of a justified and converted man. It is contained in a few words, but they are words of an exceedingly comprehensive import. They present at once to our view, the sinner's worthless character by nature, his dangerous and dreadful condition while in this natural state, and the fulness of unmerited grace and love of which he has been made the subject. It is under this view of its meaning, that I present the text to your consideration.

The Lord had sent his angel to instruct the prophet in his captivity, by many figurative representations in regard to his dispensations with his people. The encouragements and consolations which were given to him for them, are not to be limited in their application to the Jewish nation, then on the eve of their return from Babylon, but belong also to the people of God in every age, and in every land. In the vision from which the words of our text are selected, the prophet says, "he showed me Joshua, the high priest,

standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, the Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered, and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre on his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord protested unto Joshua, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by. Hear now, O Joshua, the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee; for they are men wondered at." Joshua was here the representative of all the true people of God. Like him, they are all "brands plucked out of the fire." Against them all, the same power of Satan is employed to resist them. In behalf of them all, the same boundless grace is exercised on the part of the Lord God.

The angel of the Lord, or Jehovah-Angel, before whom Joshua stood, is the great Mediator between God and man, who is frequently presented to us under this title, in the Old Testament, and who is called in this passage, according to the uniform habit of the Scriptures, both Jehovah-Angel, and Jehovah simply.

This glorious Mediator, the Jehovah who has been sent as a messenger to man, is our righteous Advocate with God. He opposes and destroys, by his intercession, the resistance of Satan to our acceptance with him. He plucks us by his Spirit, as brands out of the fire of merited condemnation and punishment. He takes away the filthy garments of sin in its guilt, by his atonement; and in its corruption, by his sanctifying Spirit. He causes the iniquity of his people to pass from them, having himself borne its penalty for them. He clothes them in his own righteousness imputed unto them, with a change of pure, heavenly, and imperishable raiment. He urges in his opposition to the great adversary of man, the accuser of his saints, the arguments which arise from the fulness of divine grace and power. The free mercy of God, as exhibited in plucking the brand out of the fire, and in choosing his people for his own habitation, furnishes his rebuke of the malicious enemy; "the Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

Thus the Mediator silenced the accusations of the enemy, and condemned the tongue which rose in judgment against his servant; and then he manifested the power of his grace, in converting, sanctifying, and saving his accused disciple. "He answered, and spake to those who stood before him," the angels who are sent out as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation, "take away the filthy garments from him." And then to the penitent and thankful believer before him, he said, in terms of most encouraging compassion, "behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass

from thee, and I will clothe thee with a change of raiment; and if thou wilt walk in my ways, and keep my charge, I will give thee a place to walk among these that stand by."

How striking and admirable is the illustration which is here presented of the grace of God in the salvation of sinful men! How significant is the description which is given of the character and condition of those who have obtained his mercy, and are set forth as patterns of divine long-suffering! "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" This RESCUED BRAND furnishes our subject for discourse.

I. How unprofitable and worthless in itself! A brand! useless for any purposes of man; having no value annexed to it in his estimation. Is not every unrenewed sinner precisely this in the sight of God? If he be rescued from the punishment which his sins deserve, it is not for any worth which is seen in him, or for any benefit which can subsequently arise from him. As a fallen creature, man cannot be profitable unto God. In the pure and discriminating eye of his Almighty Maker, he is a broken vessel, wherein is no pleasure. He is clothed in the hateful garments of repeated and long continued guilt. From the head to the foot, he is a poor, diseased, and ruined being, without any claim upon the mercy of his God.

It is true that no creature can ever render any thing to the Creator, which shall merit a continuance of blessings bestowed by him. The highest heavenly being has received from God's free gift, the power to obey him; and is as much bound to exercise that power to the uttermost in his service, as the meanest creature upon the earth. He lives upon the kindness

of the Almighty, and by that he is upheld continually. The Creator may delight in his own image impressed upon the work of his hands ; but that creature, though perfect and without transgression, can render back nothing which shall be a claim upon God. But how completely unprofitable and worthless is sinful and polluted man ! Depraved in voluntary rebellion, ruined by continued guilt, what ground has he for claim, even upon the compassion of his Maker ? His very birth constituted him a child of wrath. Sin has perverted and corrupted him from the beginning of his life. He has followed the inherent propensities of his polluted nature, through every period of his life. He has thus accumulated upon his soul, a burden of wrath which he cannot bear.

God, indeed, beholds him with pity, cast out as he is, and perishing in his blood. He has compassion upon him, though so ruined and unprofitable. From the fulness of his grace, which has respect to his own glory alone, and regards not the worthiness of the object upon which it is exercised, which is as much beyond the comprehension of man, as it is beyond his desert, he plucks the brand from the burning, and transforms the child of wrath into a child of God.

This affecting illustration of man's unworthiness, is of universal application. We are all, by nature, these worthless brands. In how many instances we have been personally rescued from merited destruction, God only knows. O, that you might all be made to feel the truth of this representation of your sinful character ; and to look back upon the guilty lives which you have passed without God in the

world, with deep humiliation and sorrow! You can have no hope until you do feel this; until you have cast out of your minds, every vain idea of human merit or excellence; until you have been humbled under the conviction of the weight of your actual sins; until you are thus willing to lay yourselves in the dust, at the feet of Jesus, the great Mediator for man, to supplicate the bestowal of his unmerited mercy and kindness, relinquishing all selfish hope and confidence, and thankfully receiving the salvation of your souls, as the free gift of God through the righteousness of his Son, to the lost and perishing.

II. Consider this brand again. How dangerous was the condition in which it was found! The fire from which it was plucked, has not reference, in its application to the sinner's condition, to the many present trials and sorrows which come to him as the result of his transgression, so much as to those everlasting burnings which are his heritage in a world of recompense. All earthly woes are temporary. These sorrows are unchangeable and eternal. Time may often repair the injuries which earthly sufferings produce. Eternity will not renew the soul which has been destroyed under the condemnation of sin. No fears of man, however awakened his conscience may become, can magnify the dangers and miseries which attend this everlasting banishment from God.

Under this tremendous load, the unconverted sinner lies, condemned and perishing, as a brand burning in the fire. The wrath of God abideth on him. In every passing moment of his life, there is but a step between him and that death which will bring down this wrath upon him to the uttermost. He has

made himself an enemy to God by wicked works. He has heaped curses, like coals of fire, upon his own head, by continued transgression. He has wrapped the poisoned garment of condemnation around his own soul, by his choice of a state of separation from God. And yet amidst all these fearful dangers which surround him, he flatters himself with the hope, that though he never turn to God, he shall have peace in his latter end.

O, my brethren, could the unconverted portion of my present hearers but have a view of their sinful character and ruined state, as they are beheld by the eye of the Almighty; could they behold the wages which the guilt of their own transgressions is preparing for them; how soon would it stain the pride of their glory, sour all the pleasures which disobedience can give, and kindle up the fires of deep remorse and bitter anxiety in their breasts! But, alas, ungodly men see nothing of their true characters, or of their real condition; and apprehend nothing of the dangers which actually surround them. They are pressing forward, heedless amidst a thousand warnings, planting every footstep upon some concealed entrance to a world of woe, and yet as unconcerned in regard to the alarming fact, that they are condemned already, as full of confidence in the safe result of their mad experiment, as if the shining light of heaven were certainly and openly leading them on to glory. They walk in the blindness of their inexperienced and unbelieving hearts, alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them.

None can truly appreciate the dangers of an unconverted soul, but they who have been plucked from

the fires in which it is still consuming. If you have been with Jonah in the midst of the seas; if you have felt the burden of a guilty conscience, charged with treading under your feet God's dear Son; if you have found yourselves struggling in the very mouth of the pit, without the power or the hope of restoration; if you have felt a deep conviction of God's just anger against your sins; you know something of the condition of the man who is ruined by transgression, a brand still burning in the fire. No representations of the danger of this condition are then beyond your own conviction of the fact; no warnings appear to you too solemn, no exhortations seem to be too earnest, no expressions too strong, which are addressed to sinners, to persuade them to flee from the wrath to come. How wonderful is that grace and power, which can rescue such brands from such burnings! which can bring men from these fearful consequences of their own guilt, to the glorious liberty and blessedness of the family of God!

III. Consider this brand again. How glorious and worthy of praise, is that divine power which can pluck it from the fire, and transform it into an eternal monument of love, and a vessel of everlasting holiness! In the midst of the ruin of the world, and the guilt of man, God proposes to the ungodly a reconciliation to himself. He was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. But after he makes his gracious proposition, men still draw back, and refuse the mercy which is so abundantly provided. The only begotten Son of God is set up as the great Mediator for their souls, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and love. But sinners will not come unto him, that

they may have life. Here then, is displayed the power and plans of Almighty grace. The Holy Spirit comes with his divine energy; reveals to the sinner his awful guilt; gives him a godly sorrow for his sin; takes away his rebellious dispositions; and inclines his will, long perverted by transgression, to embrace and obey the glorified Saviour. He takes away from him the polluted garments in which he has been clothed; destroys his spirit of hostility to God; covers him with the garments of salvation, and the robe of righteousness; and restores him, finally, to the Lord who has bought him with a price. God thus passes by the sinner's guilt, and freely bestows upon him, the ability to obey, and to glorify him. He does not look to the worthiness of the sinner, nor to his capacity to serve him, for he does not need him. But, moved by his own purposes of love, according to the riches of his mercy, he visits him when he is dead in sin, rescues him from destruction and despair, and owns him as one of his jewels—his eternal possession.

If our attention should be turned only to the unworthiness of sinful man, or to the danger in which his guilt has placed him, we might well ask, who can cause this wilderness to blossom as the rose, or make the tongue of the dumb to sing? Certainly no created power can do it; no freedom of the human will; no remnant of strength in the depraved heart of man. But God can say to the mountain of human guilt, that before his transforming, conquering Spirit, it shall become a plain. He can change the brand into a living stone, and build it up in that everlasting temple, which is enlightened by the presence and

glory of the Lamb. He would have us despair under no accumulation of guilt. He would have us never doubt, that the dead may hear the voice of the Son of God, and live. He has laid help on one mighty to save. Whatever danger there is in the sin of man, there is a corresponding sufficient antidote in the obedience and power of Christ. His unsearchable riches of grace supply our deep poverty. His infinite power is made perfect in our weakness. Though the sinner's condition be one of entire ruin, the provisions of Gospel grace are more than adequate for all his wants. Wherein his adversaries are lofty, God is higher than they. Until the inestimable blood of the Lamb shall become without value, and the perfect righteousness of the great High Priest be found defective, and the accuser transcend the Advocate in power, and grace which is unsearchable become exhausted, no unworthiness, no dangers of sinful men, shall interpose an insuperable obstacle to the provisions of divine redemption, or the power of God's new creating Spirit.

IV. Consider this rescued brand again. How infinite is the extent of that love, of which it is the object! While we admire the grace which can give a brightness above the sun to a thing so unprofitable, we may equally adore the compassion which is willing to exert itself upon an object so degraded and low. The foundation of all our hope is, that God's love is infinite and free. We do not, we cannot first give to him, that he may render to us again. We turn to him, we are converted and healed, not because he sees any thing in us which is desirable or useful in his estimation; but as the mere effect of his absolute

and unsearchable mercy. We learn to love him because he first loved us. Should God ever measure his love to man, by man's fruitfulness to him, how wretched would be our prospect! how entire our want of a foundation for hope! We might reasonably stumble at the very threshold of his requisitions, and sit down, at once, the victims of final despair. The glorious prospect which is held out in his word, we could see indeed. The city, the temple, the paradise of God might exhibit to us all their attractions and all their worth; but there would be the sad conviction left upon our minds, that they were beyond our reach. The invitations and promises of God would but mock our weakness and our wants, for this gulf of human unworthiness and impotency would remain impassable forever.

How full of encouragement and comfort is the reflection, that God is willing to exercise his almighty power in our behalf! His love can pardon the greatest and the most multiplied transgressions. He who spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, will with him also, freely give us all things. What then though man be ruined and an outcast? What though he be forfeited to God's avenging justice? What though Satan accuse him of uncounted transgressions, and everlasting death assert its claim to the victim of disobedience? If he can be made to feel his want, and to look up in prayer to God, as to a Being of unbounded love, there is hope even for a brand. There is a healing power in the Sun of Righteousness, which can restore his soul, and enable him to rejoice in the everlasting riches of divine mercy. Thus God displays the boundless extent and opera-

tion of his love to man, contriving first, the way in which the sinner may be saved; bestowing then, the gift which rendered this salvation possible; applying the blood of sprinkling, the garment of righteousness, and the renewing Spirit, to render this salvation secure forever. The dangers of man arise from himself. His safety and deliverance come wholly from the power which can, and the love which will, pluck the brand from the fire, to manifest the unspeakable goodness and glory of God. And to God alone, belongs the confidence which we repose in the fulfilment of the undertaking, and the praise which we render, when the work is done.

V. Consider this brand once more. How precious is the Christian's ground of hope, the glorious union of divine power and divine love, in the work of his salvation! From the beginning unto the end of this gracious work, he rests undividedly upon him, whose mercy rescued him from ruin, and who is able to keep him from falling, and to present him before the throne of his glory with exceeding joy. If we were to be saved by our own righteousness, or in any degree in proportion to our own righteousness, a total want of merit would condemn us altogether. But where every thing is of grace, a free gift, in a simple, cordial reliance upon what God the Saviour has done for us, there salvation is made sure. Past mercies accepted and improved, are pledges of far greater ones to come. If we grieve not the Holy Spirit by a voluntary rejection of his power; if we labour to improve his visitations, and to glorify him in the duties of holy obedience, he will carry on unto perfection the work which he commences, and for which he is sent upon us.

The same hand which plucked us from the fire will carry us to the temple. He who laid the foundation, in his love from everlasting, will also bring forth the headstone, with everlasting shoutings to his grace. Having changed the sinner's garments, and given him new and heavenly raiment, in the place of the filthy garments, in which his sins had clothed him, the Lord says unto him, "If thou wilt now walk in my ways, and keep my charge, I will give thee a place to walk among these that stand by." He shall be equal unto the angels, and shall, with them, surround the throne, and enjoy the presence of his God. Here is a plan which renders the Christian's hope perfectly secure. God comforts him under all afflictions; arms him in every conflict; silences every adversary; and makes him victorious over all things that war against the soul. The man who has found peace with God, has no enemy in the universe to fear. He who has delivered his soul from death, will keep his feet from falling, and his eyes from tears, and enable him to walk before God in the land of the living. He will carry him in safety through the changes of a mortal life. He will protect him in perfect peace, through the dark hours of dissolution. He will welcome him in heaven with immortal bliss.

VI. How inestimable is this privilege of being the objects of God's unchangeable love! of having our names written in his book of life, and of receiving in the daily supplies of his Spirit, an earnest that we shall never perish, and that no one shall pluck us out of his hand! These are the privileges of the justified and converted man. This is the portion of his cup, and this is his inheritance forever.

These are privileges, my brethren, which you all need; for which you will all at some time seek; for which, while they are now rejected, many of you in future years may sigh in vain. Why then should any of you cast away the pearl of great price? Why should you reject that friend, who is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether desirable and lovely? You will feel the want of his presence in your hours of trial. You will see your need of his power to advocate and save, when you stand before the throne of God; when a thousand witnesses of your guilt are at your right hand to accuse and to resist you, while there is no shelter for you from the punishment of sin. You will realize the misery of being brands left in the fire, when the purposes of divine grace have been all completed, and heaven has received its innumerable company of ransomed souls, all of whom have been plucked from the ruin which sin brought upon them as upon you, while you yourselves are cast out. Why then will you not now be persuaded to feel and own your unworthiness and guilt, to supplicate the mercy of God, to seek for the salvation which is so freely offered to your acceptance? Behold, how many around you have been plucked out of the fire, rescued from the punishment of sin, redeemed from the everlasting condemnation which awaited all! O, do not suffer yourselves to be left to perish! The divine power and love is abundant for the conversion of every soul. God is willing that you should all be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. Do not then persevere in the rejection of his goodness, provoking the exercise of his wrath. You know not how near to you, may be the hour of recompense, the

last point of divine forbearance. See how many around you have been sealed for final condemnation. They are given up to the hardness of an impenitent heart, and are ready to be delivered over to the vengeance of eternal fire. O, prize your opportunities while they remain; improve your privileges while they are bestowed; make full proof the blessings which God now confers upon you; and be sure that you are sealed by his Spirit unto the day of redemption.

X.

THE SINNER'S CHOICE.

ST. JOHN xviii. 40.—*Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.*

I do not select these words to speak particularly of the conduct of the Jews. It is of little avail to our benefit, to reproach them, or to hold up their conduct to reprehension. I suppose them to be no exceptions to mankind; but a fair and distinct exhibition of the human character, and an accurate development of the human heart. Their opposition to Jesus was but the natural opposition, which conscious iniquity generates, to the light and power of excellence. They hated him not for himself, but for his character. Their aversion to this, was the simple result of man's native dislike to purity and holiness. Their obliquity of purpose, and cruelty of spirit, did not arise from their being Jews, but from their being men.

The reception which they thus gave to human perfection personified in the character and life of Jesus Christ, was no peculiarity in their circumstances.

Had he chosen Rome or Athens for the scene of his manifestation and his mighty works, the result would have been undoubtedly the same; nor is there the slightest reason to imagine the contrary. This rejection of Christ was no mere incident of that particular age. In the attainments and cultivation of the human intellect, it was far from a barbarous age. In the inventions of a luxurious taste for man's indulgences, it was greatly the reverse. The same claims and character would have experienced the same repulse, in every age, and in all the circumstances of human history. The very general rejection of the Saviour's authority and invitations, under all the influence of a Christian education, and a prejudice (if I may so call it) in their favour, in our time; the infidelity and contempt of the Gospel, which stalks with such demoniac confidence throughout our land; in my judgment, compel the conclusion, that had the Son of God delayed his incarnation to our day, and selected this continent and city, for the revelation of himself, in his doctrines and miracles, to mankind; the same experience would have awaited him here; and as many voices as shouted in that hour of darkness around Jerusalem, would raise the awful cry upon our soil also, "not this man, but Barabbas."

I did not select these words, therefore, to speak particularly of the conduct of the Jews. They are to be viewed as the expression of **THE CHOICE OF A CARNAL MIND**. They will be found to be the actual expression of multitudes around us every day. And the worst result of their first utterance by the Jews, becomes their everlasting result, in the case and experience of thousands, of the state and choice of whose

minds, they are now the declaration. It is under this view that I propose to consider our text; a view which leaves its circumstances behind, to present its principle; a view which brings out our own concern with the transaction which it records, as well as that of the first actors in the scene. In pursuing this view, I remark,

I. The great and peculiar sin of man under the Christian dispensation, is the rejection of the authority and offers of a Saviour, for the sake of some opposing interest, or proposition. Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, men are not only called upon to choose whom they will serve, and with whom they will be identified; but in the actual necessity of circumstances also, they do make this choice. Jesus insists upon an absolute union and copartnership with him, to be regulated according to his single will, as the proper, and the only allowable course, for all who listen to his word. He declares, that whosoever is not with him, is against him; and whosoever gathereth not with him, scattereth abroad. He allows no pretended, passive neutrality, no alleged quietness, and abstinence from interfering, in the cause which he sustains among men. All such negative assumptions, he deems a positive and designed opposition. Men are required to make a selection between two interests and schemes, which are in irreconcilable hostility to each other; of which, whichever becomes triumphant, the other must be destroyed. This choice between two plans which can never even approach to conciliation, is demanded, and is made, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and heard. When the call for repentance for sin, the offer of free forgiveness

through the Saviour's blood, the demand for simple submission to the Lord's authority, are heard, though but for a single time, this choice between two opposing schemes, is proposed on the Lord's behalf, and made on the part of man.

It cannot be doubted, that he who immediately embraces the proposal which is thus made to him from heaven, who submits himself to the divine governance, who, as a redeemed sinner, casts in his lot with the Redeemer who hath ransomed him with his blood, and enters into the required partnership with him, has made a distinct choice. He is henceforth identified, in all his interests, efforts, and hopes, with the gracious friend who hath bought him with a price. He will abide with him. If he conquers, he will partake of the glory of his triumph. But it can no more justly be doubted, that he who does not thus embrace the principles and offers of the Saviour in his Gospel, though he make no positive resolution to the contrary, nor is conscious of any thing in his state of mind, but a simple unwillingness to become yet a disciple of Jesus, under the influence of which, he goes from the Gospel message still unsubdued and unconverted, has as actually made his choice of that stand and service which Jesus opposes. Whether this shall be a permanent choice, does not depend entirely upon himself. God may give him no opportunity to reverse it. And for the time being, and to the utmost extent of his own power of determination, it is a positive and unqualified refusal of the Saviour's invitation, and an equally unqualified rejection of his authority. It is a distinct and positive choice by the sinner's mind and heart, of which the direct expression is, "not this man, but Bar-

abbas ;" not Christ and his salvation, or not now at least, but something which opposes them. It matters not what that something may be. It is Barabbas still. It is the direct and designed opponent of the Saviour. There may be a thousand extenuations suggested. Barabbas may be refined, and clothed, and made respectable. But it is Barabbas still. It is an object which is in appointed and selected opposition to Christ, which has been chosen in preference to Christ, and for the sake of which, Christ has been refused. Here immovably remains, the point of the character, of the responsibility, and of the condemnation. The act of man has been a voluntary choice. The position of the man is, that he has made this choice. The guilt and the punishment of the man, rest also upon this simple fact. He has chosen death rather than life. He has preferred Barabbas to Christ.

II. I would illustrate this choice in some instances which display it. There are many such. The rival claims to the affections of man, for which the service of the Saviour is refused, are exceedingly various. They are as various also in their character of guilt, as they appear to the eye and the estimation of man. But they all come to the same result. They are constituted into representatives of the same spirit of hostility to Christ. They become, in this relation of hostility to him, in his view, the equally guilty personifications of that carnal mind, which is enmity against God, and will not be subject to his will. Coming under this uniform character of guilt, in the rejection of Christ which they produce, there is no regard to be had, in our estimation of their character, either as it regards their danger or their responsi-

bility, to their minor differences of circumstances. Rejecters of the Lord are heirs of an indiscriminate condemnation. "The wrath of God is revealed against every soul of man that doeth evil." "Those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me."

But what is the Barabbas for which the human heart rejects a Saviour?

I see the young man following the pleasures of sense, and for these, despising and driving from him the claims of piety. He walks in the delusive paths of sinful indulgence. He follows the heated guidance of unlawful appetite. He drinks continually of that vainly sweetened cup, which, in his bitter remorse, he as continually nauseates. He runs to riot with the noisy and sensual. He chooses these baser gratifications for his present portion; and lays down his head, to slumber for destruction, in the lap of gross enjoyment. For these, he rejects the Saviour's invitations. He counts all religion as a series of contemptible austerities. He hardly persuades himself to be respectful to its ministrations. If in public, or in solitude, his conscience ever becomes awakened; if God speaks to him in anger, in the deep recesses of his own soul, he turns from the alarm with undisguised aversion, and rushes again into the madness of his indulgences, to bury himself up from a meddling Deity. What is his whole conduct, but the unceasing brazen boast, "Who is the Almighty, that I should serve him?" What is the expression of every act of his life, but the declared, yes, the vehemently declared choice, "not this man, but Barabbas?"

I see the giddy daughter of vanity and fashion. Her whole thoughts are occupied with the changing scenes of a world, the fashion of which passeth away. She lives for a vain exhibition of herself. The low vanity of outward decoration, the poor ambition of arranging her tinsel with taste, the round of giddy society, the feverish excitement of the dance, and the gay assembly, shall I say the theatre?—no, this is almost too disreputable for my present supposition—all these occupy and rule her affections and her mind. For these, the offers of the Gospel are despised. For these, the glories of eternity are vilely cast away. The world can have the thoughts, but Christ cannot. The mirror and the novel can command the time, but the Bible cannot. And the intellect, and the affections, and the life of the soul, are all frittered away, in this ceaseless sifting of earthly giddiness. What though there is nothing there which the world calls vice? What though refinement and elegance have adorned and dignified the whole scene; and this daughter of folly is to be led on to her immolation, ornamented with garlands, and surrounded by joyous strains? Is it not hostility to Christ? Is it not direct aversion to his service, that constitutes the principle here? For these vanities, she has cast away the favour of her God. For these, she exchanges the blessed hope and portion, which the Saviour gives. These are but the representatives of her refusal of his love; and in her devotion to these, she is daily shouting in her insensate giddiness, “not this man, but Barabbas.”

I see the man of business, in his neglect of godliness, for the following of gain; devoting all the ener-

gies of his mind to the amassing of wealth; with his head bowed down to the earth; his eyes fixed upon earthly goods, and his mind digging into possible mines of treasure for himself. But with him, all is as if there were no God, and no future eternity, for he acknowledges no authority, but present interest, and asks for no portion, but the present world. His soul is mammonized completely. The desire of his heart is simply for present gain. Now, why do you tell me, that he is respectable, and moral, and upright, and domestic, and affectionate? What is all this? It would be as much to the purpose, to tell me that he clothed himself from the winter's cold, and guarded his appetite from the approach of want. I tell you, his unconverted heart rejects a Saviour. His proud will refuses submission to God. His carnal mind is upon earthly things. All his boasted excellencies are but the glitterings of his selfishness. They have their own reward, but they can expect none from a God who has been entirely forgotten. For this busy, accumulating life, he rejects all the admonitions and offers of the Gospel. He drives away from him the demands of the Redeemer, and of his own soul. He passes his time amidst all the privileges of the Gospel, keeping and cherishing an unconverted heart. The whole language of his life, and if you press upon him the obligations of piety, the language of his lips, is, "not this man, but Barabbas."

I see the toiling aspirant for human honour, climbing the slippery steep where so many fall, and the summit of which so few have gained. Reputation, and the influence of reputation, are the all with him. For this he studies, and plans, and labours. So much of

the form of religion as is respectable, he will have. Where popularity with men plants the stake of limit, there he stops. His Barabbas is the praise of men. For this, he rejects the honour that cometh from God only. Polite, decorous, and respectable toward religion, for he loves the praise of good men too, he will give his countenance and example to apparent religious worship. But his heart deliberately stands in the determination, not to lose the influence of popularity in his profession, for the favour of God. And with all his outward smoothness, his speaking fairly of religious things, there is a deep and determined hostility, in his heart, to the claims and the power of the Gospel. He remains, by his own distinct choice, an unconverted man. He drives from him the charges of the Bible, with affected disdain. He will not seek his life from Christ. And the language of his unchanging course, as it speaks in every act, and in every determination of his life, is, "not this man, but Barabbas."

I see the self-righteous man in his false estimation of his own character, weighing and measuring future expectations, by present imaginary deeds; congratulating himself upon his spiritual security; and putting far from him the imagination of an evil day. His pride of character will not stoop under the acknowledgment of sin. His confidence in his own worth, forbids his seeking a shelter in the righteousness of another. I press upon him the charge of guilt in the sight of God. I warn him of an abiding insufficiency in himself. I announce to him a condemnation, from which, superabounding grace to sinners, furnishes the only way of escape. But he knits his brow with dis-

pleasure; and presses his lips with determination; and his whole countenance speaks the choice which his whole heart makes and cultivates, "not this man, but Barabbas."

I see the healthful, procrastinating all regard to God, to the hours of sickness; looking upon the Gospel only as a remedy, and refusing to receive it until they shall feel sure that they must perish without it. And for this they now choose the portion which is opposed to Christ, meaning and hoping, to use it only for a time, and to renounce it altogether when sickness and death shall come. I see the prosperous and gay, waiting until the season of distress shall compel them to seek their shelter at the cross; refusing to follow Jesus, until they must follow him in garments of mourning, but not of mourning for sin; thinking of the Gospel only as a consolation for weeping, a residuum for days of grief; and thrusting it from them till these days shall come. I see the young, refusing to offer unto God the morning sacrifice, and looking forward to the time when the shadows of the evening are stretched out, and the remnant of life flickers in the weakness of old age, as the season when the wants of the soul shall be considered, and a provision for the peace of eternity shall be made. And as I see these things, I cannot but mourn, that even God's blessings to man, health, and prosperity, and youth, should be converted into a Barabbas of opposition to him; that even his unspeakable mercies should be transformed, by man's depravity, into the instruments and occasions of more determined rebellion against himself.

I need not multiply these illustrations more exten-

sively. They all result in the very same point, a refusal of the favour and the promises of the Redeemer, for something which is preferred in opposition to him. Their guilt is not in the wickedness of the object which is selected; but in the rejection of the Saviour, whose service and authority are renounced, for the sake of it. They are in all cases, instances of the same choice of a carnal mind. They bring upon each individual who makes this choice, the same solemn condemnation of those who reject the light, and prefer the darkness to it, because their deeds are evil. The responsibility and the guilt of all, is fastened upon the very same point, the voluntary refusal and neglect of that great salvation, which God has offered to man in his dear Son. From this responsibility and guilt they cannot escape.

III. Consider how fearful is the guilt, how alarming is the danger of this choice! "Barabbas was a robber." And is not Barabbas a robber still? In each of these instances, of the forsaking of Christ for the love of this present world, there is an actual robbery of the deluded soul that is guilty of the choice. Whether the selected alternate be giddiness, profligacy, or self-righteous morality, Barabbas is a robber. And all that is precious and important for the soul, is stolen from it. The loss which the sinner bears cannot be estimated in this world, nor can it be calculated by worldly measures. It is eternity, which is at stake. It is the happiness of eternity, of which he is robbed. It is the wretched despair of eternity, which is his selected alternative. O, foolish nation and unwise, who thus despise the rock of your salvation; and renounce a Saviour to embrace a robber!

You are robbed of the favour of God forever, of all peace with him, and all hope before him. You cannot stand before him, in any righteousness of your own. You must be interested in the atonement, and clothed with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, or you have no hope at the judgment seat of God. In Jesus only, is he to be found, as the reconciled Father and the friend of sinners. While you are rejecting this Saviour from the dominion of your hearts, you are throwing from you the possibility of reconciliation unto God. You stand in judgment with him in your iniquities. And the life which, for its guiltiness, your own conscience cannot justify, a holy and heart-searching God will drive from him, with utter abhorrence. He will arise against you in his anger, and will deliver you over to the vengeance which sin deserves. You will find him a consuming fire; and realize in the bitter experience of eternity, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. You bear all this, because for the love of this present world, in some one or many of its Protean shapes, you have rejected the love of Jesus Christ, and refused the blessed salvation which he has offered you in his Gospel. Yes—a world which scorns you, and deceives you, but cannot help you, has robbed you of your God.

You are robbed of the compassionate intercession of a Saviour. There was a time, when through many days and years, Jesus pitied you, sought for you, and would have clothed you with himself. But when he called, you refused; when he stretched out his hand, you did not regard it. You would none of his counsel; you despised all his reproof. He pleaded for

you, and pleaded with you, with great long-suffering and forbearance, that you might be rescued and saved. But you rejected all his efforts; you disregarded his warnings; you despised his mercy. When he stood before you in all the attractions of overflowing kindness, in all the exciting power of his disinterested grief and suffering, you turned away from him, to a waiting robber that was thrust before you, and madly said, "not this man, but Barabbas." And now you stand in judgment, in the length, and depth, and all the aggravation of your guilt, and there is no Advocate to plead for you, no Redeemer to interpose in your behalf, no all-prevailing High Priest, who can say, "spare him, for I have found a ransom." The Lord Jesus stands aloof from your calamity; and you struggle in the darkness of death, and tremble in the terrors of judgment, and contend with the strangling serpents of eternal remorse; and there is no hand of grace to grasp you now, and no voice of friendship, to assure you of your safety, or to hush your fears to rest. The enemy that derides you, and tramples upon you, has robbed you of your Saviour.

You are robbed of the immortal interests and welfare of your soul. What will all the perishing things which you have chosen, avail you in your future hour of need? What will you carry away with you, from this vain world, for the love of which you have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ? O, consider that change, that solemn change, in which mortality is swallowed up by enduring life! When your body returns naked to the earth, to say to corruption, "thou art my sister," what does it carry away with it? Its appetites have been fed; its lusts have been

indulged; its appearance has been adorned. But now all these things have passed. They perished in the using, and are forgotten. The cultivated and ornamented form lies cold and mouldering, in its bed of darkness. But where is the soul? What does it carry away? Alas! no peace or hope. It is laden with the dreadful responsibility and consciousness of all this catering for earthly lusts; the guilt of thus making the body which has perished, the object of its idolatry. Beyond this, dreadful as it is, it bears the load of its own iniquities, in which the flesh did not participate. But it takes from this life, no ray of comfort, no ground for peace, no repository in itself, for future satisfaction. All its recollections are only painful and distressing. All its prospects are even worse. The only peace of the soul has been perversely thrown away. The only hope of the soul has been heedlessly rejected, in the rejection of the Saviour who died for it. Wretched and outcast, driven from a world in which it cannot remain, this is all that it has for its folly, that it lies down in sorrow. It has fallen among thieves indeed, and it is left stripped and perishing forever. The Barabbas whom it preferred to Christ, has robbed it of every comfort. Its welfare is forever gone. The everlasting result of its folly, is everlasting burnings. The only price for its contempt of the Lord of all, is the devouring fire. It is rejected, and driven from his presence, forevermore undone.

IV. This is the necessary, universal result of your choice, when Christ in the blessings of his salvation is rejected, for the love of vain and perishing things. O, I would solemnly and affectionately warn you against

the indulgence of this carnal mind. It is death; it will be death forever.

I would stand by your own eternal interests, and beg you, do not barter them for that which will ruin you, but cannot profit. Behold, the peace which passeth understanding, the hope which maketh not ashamed, the glory which excelleth, the habitation not made with hands which faileth not. Behold, the favour and approbation of God, the friendship and love of the Saviour, the joy which the Holy Ghost bestows. Behold, the innumerable company of angels; the church of the first-born which are written in heaven; the spirits of the just made perfect; all these are yours, if ye are Christ's. These are the privileges of a converted and justified soul. They may all be yours when your souls become the habitation of God through the Spirit. O, do not part with them, nor be deluded into an exchange of these eternal blessings, for any of the pleasures of sin for a season.

I would stand by the bleeding side of Jesus, and beg you, do not ungratefully refuse him, to choose a robber. O, consider all his sufferings in your behalf; his humiliation under your burden of guilt; his agonies in bearing the chastisement of your peace. Behold him under the curse, that you might not be cursed; dying, that you might live; rising, that you might reign forever. Behold him, pleading the worth of his sacrifice for you, in heaven; crying amidst all your guilt, spare them this year, and this year also; pressing the arguments of his love in your own conscience; urging you to receive his kindness, and live to God with him. O, do not turn a deaf ear and a

hardened heart to all the solicitations of his mercy, and wound and crucify him again, and put him to an open shame, by joining with those who oppose and despise him.

I would stand by the sovereign authority of the living God, and entreat you, do not treat it with contempt, for an adversary to him and to yourselves. He demands your submission. He can compel it. He has declared he will. Your knees must bow to him, though in the anguish of a destruction which you cannot resist. Do not provoke him to swear in his wrath, that you shall not enter into his rest. O seek him, as a God of mercy and consolation, as he is offered in the Gospel, and seek him now while you may, that you perish not.

I would stand by the momentous issues of eternity, and beg you, do not lose your crown in them, for any thing which perisheth here below. There is set before you an open door, and you are invited to enter in and be safe. Behold the heavenly rest which is set before you; the everlasting recompense of reward, which is freely offered as the purchase of a Saviour's blood; and do not cast them from you for the temptations of sin. God waiteth to be gracious, when you shall be found believing in his Son. O, come then unto him, and take his yoke upon you, and you shall find rest unto your souls.

XI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S ROCK.

DEUTERONOMY xxxii. 31.—*For their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.*

THIS assertion is a part of the song which Moses taught to the Israelites, on the borders of the land of Canaan. He was at the close of a long life of trial and labour. He had finished the work which had been given him to do; and being prohibited from entering the land of promise, he records, by divine direction, for his people, in this song, a testimonial of the goodness of God, and their own ingratitude, that it might remain with them in all their future generations.

After having spoken much of the power and kindness of the God of Israel, as they had been displayed in his past dispensations with his people, he compares him in our text, as the rock of Israel, with all the gods of the surrounding heathen nations, whom he styles their rock; and asserts in this comparison, his entire superiority over them. To sustain this comparison, he appeals, not to the experience of the

Israelites, but to that of their enemies. He demands the judgment of those who have opposed the Lord of hosts. He calls for their acknowledgment of his power. He summons them, to bear their present testimony. Where are the Egyptians who perished in the sea; or the Amorites who fell in the wilderness? Where is Pharaoh, who refused his submission to God; or Sihon and Og, who came out to destroy his people? What is their judgment? What is the estimate of the power of the God of Israel, which their knowledge and experience has led them to form? He thus appeals to an evidence which was incontestable; to a history of facts which had been so plainly exhibited, that there was no room for hesitation or doubt. And while he makes this appeal, he proclaims that there is none like unto the Lord, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders.

In selecting this assertion as a subject for discourse, I have before my mind, a similar comparison to that which Moses makes, and evidence of a similar character to sustain and enforce it. I wish to transfer the assertion of the text to our own circumstances. And as the God whom we worship, is the God who revealed himself to Israel, by Moses, the present application of the text, is in no degree, a perversion of it, from its proper meaning. In the Gospel of Jesus, we make the Lord of hosts our rock. In choosing him, and resting upon him thus, we are encompassed by enemies, both to him and to ourselves. And in the view of all these enemies, we make our choice. We adopt, therefore, as entirely appropriate to our own condition, the strong testimony before us.

“Their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being the judges.”

The subject upon which I design to speak, as suggested by this text, is THE CONCESSIONS WHICH THE WORLD MAKES TO THE WORTH OF THE RELIGION OF THE GOSPEL. In considering our text under this view, we have,

I. THE COMPARISON WHICH IS TO BE MADE, and

II. THE TESTIMONY WHICH IS TO BE ADDUCED TO SUPPORT IT.

I. We will consider the comparison which is to be made. “Their rock is not as our rock.” What is “their rock?” and what is “our rock?”

1. What is the rock of the world? It is the special foundation which it lays for present peace and future hope. When the Christian's rock is rejected, and the foundation which is laid in the Gospel is refused, the wisdom of man must find some other foundation for confidence. There are but three possible systems, upon which dependence may be placed, by men who have not embraced the hope of the Gospel. Upon one of these every unconverted man, every lover of this present world more than God, is fixing all his expectations of comfort and rest.

He may make a bold system of Atheism his rock. He must say in his judgment, and in his profession, as he actually does in his heart, “There is no God;” and, of course, no future responsibility for his soul. In theory, there are few, perhaps, who suppose themselves to be Atheists; who can look abroad upon all the wonderful works of God, behold their contrivance and variety, and deliberately deny that there is a Being who made them all. But in a practical de-

velopment of principles, there are vast multitudes who are without God in the world; whose whole life and character is precisely as if there were no God. And it would be but an honest avowal of the actual dependence, if they should openly announce the theory by which they are manifestly guided, to be the theory which they intentionally and systematically adopt.

If however, the worldly man shudder at this assumption, and is not willing to avow absolute Atheism to be his rock; he must, with the acknowledgment of the existence of a God who judgeth in the earth, rest his confidence of acceptance with him, upon his own integrity and obedience, and make his own righteousness his rock. This dependence is far more common than its evident worthlessness might lead us to suppose. While men are ignorant of the deep corruption and guiltiness of their souls, they form a false estimate of their own character. They vainly imagine that what meets their own partial and blinded approbation, will also meet the approbation of God. They thus pretend to claim as a right, as the reward of their own works, the future blessedness which God has promised to his people. They imagine it would be unjust in God, to condemn and destroy them, and suppose therefore, that he will not do it.

If a partial knowledge of his own sinfulness destroy the confidence, which a worldly man would be disposed to feel in himself, the only remaining ground of hope for him, is, that though there is a God, and though he, as a sinner, can claim nothing from such a being, yet the mercy of God will not suffer any man to be destroyed. This is the only remaining rock.

It is the hope, that God will still receive and save men, though they are sinners, and none shall be cast into the sorrows of hell forever.

Here is a choice among three distinct systems of confidence. One of these is always the rock of the world. Upon one of these, as a selected foundation, every unconverted man rests his confidence, and in its possession, comforts himself in a present course of sin. To give them their technical names, they are Atheism, and Deism, and Universalism. No other position can be imagined as held by the man who rejects the Gospel of Christ, and the foundation which the Lord Jesus has laid for human hope. One of these three must be the rock of the world. And the examination of his own state of mind, will show to every unconverted man who hears me, that he has adopted, and is carrying out, one of these three systems, as the balm of comfort to his soul.

2. Now what is "our rock?" the rock of the Christian? Certainly, neither of these three. We know that there is a God. We know that in our own righteousness, we cannot stand before him. If he shall enter into judgment with us, our iniquity will certainly be found out. We know that though he is plenteous in mercy, he will by no means clear the guilty. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." All these vain grounds of hope, we utterly renounce. Our rock is Christ. God reconciled unto us, through the one offering of Jesus once for all, is our whole dependence, our only ground of hope. On this rock, we feel secure. It allows us no room for fear from past transgressions, because it exhibits a full and all-suffi-

cient satisfaction for them all, in the blood of Jesus. It suffers us in no apprehensions from present deficiencies, because it reveals the perfect obedience of Christ as counted unto us, for our complete acceptance. It permits no fear from future weakness, because it shows this Almighty Saviour to be all-sufficient in strength, and able to finish the work which he has undertaken for us, and by his equal Spirit to accomplish all his good pleasure within us also. It leaves no room for distress from surrounding dangers, because it conveys the assurance, that all things shall work together for good to them that love God, who are called according to his purpose. This is "our rock"—the rock that is higher than we, to which we cry to be led, when our heart is overwhelmed within us. It is ours, because God, according to the greatness of his mercy, has given it unto us. It is his provision in our behalf. It is ours, because he has enabled us to accept it with our hearts, as our whole dependence and defence. It bears us up above our sins, and our condemnation. It bears for us our hope of glory. And this is the rock which we compare with the rock of the world. "Their rock is not as our rock." We place them side by side, in fair examination, and intend to show the truth of the assertion which we make, of the entire superiority of our dependence.

II. I proceed to consider the testimony which is to be adduced to support the comparison thus made—"even our enemies themselves being the judges."

Observe, my brethren, I do not now rest upon the experience of Christians, the people of the living God, who have built upon this rock, and tested its worth

and strength. This would certainly be an abundant, and a most legitimate and proper source of testimony. But I waive it for the present. We will not go up to heaven, amidst the uncounted millions that encompass the throne of God in triumph, and fill the atmosphere of glory with their shouts of praise; though should

We ask them whence their victory came?

They, with united breath,

Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,

Their triumph to his death.

They would furnish a glorious testimony to the worth of the Gospel, and the power of Christ, as they answered us, "we are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore, are we before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among us; we shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on us, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed us, and shall lead us unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes." But we will not dwell upon this.

We will not go abroad upon the earth, to gain the testimony and experience of the millions of the friends and followers of the Lord Jesus here, though they would all proclaim with united heart and voice, that they "have none in heaven but him, and there is none upon the earth they desire in comparison with him." He is "all their salvation and all their desire;" "the strength of their heart, and their portion forever." We waive the right, however, to all this cloud of wit-

nesses to the exceeding value of "our rock." Just, and convincing, and abundant, as their testimony would be, to the power, and sufficiency, and glory of Christ, we will not appeal to, or rest upon this. We commit our whole cause to the judgment and decision of the world itself. We place the enemies of Christ, upon the bench of determination, and stand before them, to plead the claims of our Saviour and God. And we leave to the decision of their own consciences, the question, whether upon the simple and manifest concessions of the world, to the worth of the Gospel, the assertion of our text is not abundantly supported.

The spirit and principles of this world, are undoubtedly opposed to the religion of the Gospel. The carnal mind, under all its possible outward refinements, is still enmity against God. The Saviour comes daily unto the world, and the world receives him not, and knows him not. Whatever concessions, therefore, are made by this ungodly world, to the worth of his Gospel, are of the greater value, from the fact, that they are entirely undesigned, and involuntary. The inconsistency with which unconverted men applaud and uphold the Gospel of Christ, while they reject its whole operation for good upon their own souls, condemns them out of their own mouth. And the result of our present examination will be to show, that the assertion of our present text must be acknowledged to be truth; or carnally minded men, to sustain their own principles, must pursue a course of conduct totally different from their present one. What then are the concessions, which the world makes to the worth of the religion of the Gospel?

1. The first is, in the general respect which men render to the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, though they feel not its renewing power, and reject all its spiritual operations upon their own souls. Two things are exceedingly manifest in the character and appearance of the world around us; that the majority of men yield no subjection of their hearts to Christ, but are living in all respects without him, and regardless of him, as a Saviour for them; and yet, that the external services of his religion are treated by them with peculiar respect, and supported at a great expense. From these two facts, what conclusion must we draw? When a man has selected the present world as his portion, in a rejection of the claims of the Gospel upon his heart, by the Saviour's testimony, he is acting really against Christ, and the love of the Father is not in him. His real spirit is hostility to the Gospel; and every tribute of regard or reverence which he pays to the commands of Christ, from whatever motive, is just so far a concession on his part, to the worth and importance of the religion which Jesus Christ has established among men. What argument must we derive, then, from their attendance on the worship enjoined by the Gospel, who reject the power of the Gospel over themselves? What from their regard to the institution of the Sabbath? What from their costly preparation for the religious services of this holy day? Why do not unbelieving men occupy all this time, and devote this cost simply to the engagements and pleasures of the present world? Why do they erect a temple for the worship of the Son of God, which is to stand as a monument against themselves, if they submit not to the government

which he claims and exercises among men? Why do they sustain a ministry, which is to be for their own condemnation, and to stand up as a witness against them, in the great day of Almighty God? Why do they unite to support a system, which openly declares, that "the wrath of God abideth on them," notwithstanding all their reverence and their expense? What means it all, but that it is a marked concession on the part of worldly men, that "their rock is not as our rock?" However inconsistent on the part of worldly and unconverted men, such conduct is, with the principles of opposition to Jesus, by which they are really governed, it is a direct and unceasing acknowledgment of the superior worth and claims of the Gospel. Every dollar which a man, in whose heart the Lord Jesus Christ does not reign, gives to the support of the Gospel, and every occasion on which he unites in the worship of the Christian sanctuary, is a simple and repeated confession of the importance and value of that rock which he still rejects. He stands condemned out of his own mouth.

2. A second concession which the world makes to the religion of the Gospel, is the high standard which its judgment establishes for Christian conduct, and its immediate and uniform detection and exposure of the Christian's personal deficiencies and inconsistencies, as compared with this standard. This must be a subject of universal observation. A course of life which is considered in no degree derogatory to the character of a professedly worldly man, becomes, in the opinion of the world, absolutely ruinous to the professed Christian. How common is the remark, when some minor fraud is discovered in the business

of a Christian professor, some apparent unfaithfulness in the settlement of his monied transactions; or when some man calling himself a Christian, is found in the haunts of giddiness or sensuality; or when he is subdued even temporarily by the indulgence of appetite; or found to grasp with a greedy spirit, the emoluments of the world; "if he did not profess to be a Christian it would be of no consequence!" How is this? What does it mean? Will the world allow its votaries a standard of character, which the Gospel will not allow to its disciples? Can a worldly man be still honoured, though charged with conduct which in his own opinion, would disgrace him if he professed to be a Christian? Yet this is the fact. There are hundreds and thousands of the men of this world, who feel that the indulgence of their own lusts, an indulgence which is in no degree disreputable to them in their present circumstances, and shuts them out of no society, even genteel female society—so called,—(I mourn to say it,) is the great obstacle to their becoming disciples of a religion, whose very purity compels them to respect it, while they hate the authority which it exercises. They can be respectable in the world, though they are steeped in iniquity. They cannot be respectable as members of the Christian church, if even suspected of crimes in secret, which they now unblushingly commit. When a professed Christian is found in conduct inconsistent with this high standard which the world has fixed for him, though still on a far higher ground in moral character than is perfectly respectable in the world, and than worldly men around are perfectly content to occupy, the world says, he has fallen. **FALLEN!** Why?

Does the world acknowledge itself in excellence beneath the Gospel? If a man, once a worldly man, having professed himself a Christian, has *fallen*, when he returns to his former position, and becomes a mere worldly man again, must he not have been *exalted* according to the same standard, when from his original character and profession, he became a Christian? Now we do not complain of this. We are not sorry that the world establishes so high and perfect a standard for us, as the servants of Jesus Christ. No. God forbid that it should be lowered. But how very important and remarkable is the concession which this standard makes to the worth and the dignity of the Gospel! The world allows that I may do on its rock with honour and without fear, that which I cannot do upon our rock without disgrace. This is its universal acknowledgment. What is it, but a distinct concession, that "their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being the judges."

3. A third concession is in the frequent conversions which are made from the world to the religion of the Gospel, while there are no corresponding conversions, back from this religion to the world. On the one side, there are uncounted millions. The history of mankind, ever since the actual coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, presents an incessant train of such conversions. Three thousand on the day of Pentecost; five thousand immediately afterwards; in the age of the apostles, a great multitude, more than man could number! Down to our day, the work is still progressing. There have been literally countless numbers on the one side of this comparison. They have

all been deliberate conversions from the world; each of them has been the personal, voluntary, determined forsaking of the rock of the world, for the Christian's rock, by one who was before on the side of the world, and merely loved his own. But where are the corresponding conversions to be produced on the other side? There are none. It is vain for the world to boast as instances in contradiction to this assertion, the victims of appetite, and self-indulgence, and folly; persons, of whom itself says, they have fallen. The conversions of which we speak, are no yielding to the lures of sense, or the temptations of outward interest. They have been in the very face of all that the world could offer, as attraction or gain. The subjects of them have had much, often very much, to count as loss for Christ. They have been required to suffer much in coming to Christ. The very invitation which was given them to follow him, specified the taking up a cross for his sake. Their expectation was the endurance of persecutions with his people. And in the face of all this, these children of the world, who loved the world, and whom the world loved, have chosen rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the world. Now we ask for such instances as corresponding on the side of the world; instances of those who from conviction and judgment, have forsaken the service of Jesus Christ, and gone back again to the world. We ask for those who have done it, not to gratify sensual appetite, but against their present worldly interest. We ask not for those who have fallen from a high profession, and have become

despised by the very world, to which they have returned, but for those who have been purified, elevated, ennobled in their character, by the change; or, at least, have not been lowered in their standard of character. But all the world produces not a single one. Millions of its votaries have forsaken it for Christ, and they have shined in the world with a new and glorious light, and been crowned with a real and undeniable excellence of character, as the result of their conversion. In each of these cases, the world has given up a separate child to the Saviour's service, and made a new concession to his worth. Not one of the real disciples of Christ has ever forsaken him for the love of the present world; nor one professed disciple, who has not, in the acknowledgment of the world to which he has returned, fallen, when he made the change of which it boasts. How remarkable is the concession which the world thus makes, that "their rock is not as our rock."

4. A fourth concession, is in the remarkable, and almost universal fact, that worldly men desire to turn to the religion of the Gospel, in all their hours of distress. They reject it in their prosperity, and say they will not hear. But when sorrow visits their habitation, or sickness lays hold of their body, or death standeth at the door, they call for the very ministrations which they have so long despised. But if the Gospel be really valueless, why do they ask for its offices now? Why cannot worldly pleasure relieve their sorrow, or worldly gain console their disquietude? They have been, thus far, building upon their own rock; why do they now forsake it, and cry out for some other ground of hope? Is not this a

distinct acknowledgment, that "their rock is not as our rock?" But while this is the general course of worldly men in hours of distress in life, still more universally do they ask for the ministrations of the Gospel, in the hour of death. Here, they all want, and almost all ask for, the comforts and promises which Jesus gives. But upon their own principles, how mean, how consciously weak, is this concession? Why do they not brave out the difficulty? Why do they not strew the dying bed with flowers, and wake the songs of mirth, and the music of the dance, around the chamber of death? Why do they not call for their companions in pleasure or gain, and make the transition from life, as easy and as delightful as has been the passage through it? O, it is a mocking at distress; they cannot do it. There is a majesty in an approaching Deity which they cannot resist. There is a poverty in a world which has been tried, which they cannot deny. Their very souls sicken at the recollections of it.

O, pleasures past, what are ye now,
But thorns about my bleeding brow?
Spectres that hover round my brain,
And mock and aggravate my pain.

The rock upon which they have attempted to maintain themselves, sinks beneath them. They are left to float in the ocean, distressed, despairing, struggling for life, and crying out with heart-rending exclamations, "O, lead me to the rock that is higher than I." But what means all this change of purpose, and desire, and judgment, so common in the men of this world, under the circumstances which I have described? Is it not on the part of the world, one of

the most marked and decided of all possible concessions to the truth of our present text? No dying Christian was ever deserted by his beloved Lord. No departing believer ever called for the world to come in, to supply his wants, because the Saviour in whom he trusted, had neglected and forsaken him. Millions of dying sinners have besought, often with deep anguish have besought the Saviour, for a comfort which the world has proved totally unable to supply. How important and distinct is this acknowledgment! How manifest in it is the concession, which the world makes to the worth of the religion of the Gospel, in the most momentous circumstances in which the issue between them can be tried!

These are some of the concessions which the world makes, that their rock is not as our rock. This is the testimony which we adduce, as sufficient to sustain the comparison we have made. Our enemies are the judges. We argue the case before the consciences and perceptions of unconverted men. We hesitate not to leave the decision with their conscience, relying upon the manifestation of the truth in the sight of God.

III. Let us sum up the conclusion of this case, in a more direct application of it to our personal character and choice.

Let its consideration lead all of you who have built upon the Christian's rock, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be steadfast, and fear not. O, place your entire confidence here! When sickness visits you in your lonely chamber, think of your rock, and commune with him in your own heart in renewed faith, and be still. When distress comes upon you, think of your rock, and fly for shelter there. God will hide you in

its cleft, until every danger be overpassed. When the shadows of death gather around you, O forget not your rock; it will be all you want, all you can want forever. Be still, and wait in the calmness of an humble clinging to Christ, to see the salvation which God will bring to you, in that day. Whatever outward storms may threaten or harass you, there will always be repose and comfort here. You cannot rely upon Jesus too entirely, or too confidently believe that he will bless you forever. Honour your Lord, by unshaken trust in his power to save. Cast yourselves wholly, humbly, and cheerfully upon him, and make him your rock indeed; your fortress, your high tower, into which you may run and be safe.

Let this subject persuade all before me, to build upon this glorious rock in time. Full salvation is offered to the world, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Whosoever cometh unto him, shall in no wise be cast out. In him; and with all who are in him, the Father is well pleased. The worth of his promises you see continually acknowledged. The very world which, with its indulgences, tempts you for your ruin, in its concessions and failures, warns you to flee for your life. If you are convinced of your necessity, you are condemned out of your own mouth, for your refusal of salvation. If you attend upon the services of religion, and still reject the Saviour who is offered there, you are still condemned. In every such feeling and act, you acknowledge the worth of a Gospel which you still refuse. O, build upon this rock in time. You will not always have the time. Escape from the opposing one while there is hope. There will not always be hope. Make full proof of your privileges, and your salvation sure.

XII.

A SPIRITUAL FAMINE.

AMOS viii. 11, 12.—*Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water; but of hearing the word of the Lord. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.*

IT is a characteristic principle of divine warnings, that the woes which they denounce upon guilty men, generally consist in the mere withdrawal of abused privileges, and the desertion of men to gain their own ends, in their own ways. So very distinct and determined is the tendency of the human heart to an entire and eternal alienation from God; so incurable by any self-possessed power, is the spirit of its rebellion and hostility against God; so certain is the progress of the unconverted soul, from iniquity unto iniquity, down to that death which is the wages of sin, that if man be only left to himself, unrestrained from on high, and unassisted by divine power, he becomes inevitably destroyed. There needs nothing for his everlasting ruin, but that God should let him alone. If he deprive him of the life-giving power of his Spirit, and of the blessed

instruments of his appointment through which this Spirit acts for his salvation ; and exercise no positive energy of his grace to rescue him from destruction, all is done that need be done to make this destruction sure, and without a remedy. As directly as the stone seeks the centre of the earth, under the power of gravitation, does the unconverted soul sink into the darkness of everlasting despair and condemnation, under the unrestrained influence of its own purposes and desires. Accordingly, Almighty God threatens nothing, and does nothing, more directly and dreadfully calculated to consign the ungodly to eternal misery, than to forsake them with his grace, and to suffer them to fill themselves with their own ways. It need never be said, that he casts the sinner into hell. Let him only depart from him, and exert no special power to arrest and save him, and he sinks there of himself. He remains, and must remain forever, a sinner against God ; and as such, he must be forever the victim of unalleviated, unchangeable despair.

As a practical illustration of this principle, you find the Scriptures warning men of their dangers in an unconverted state, under the simple idea and shape of destitution and want. God departs from them, leaves them, forsakes them, hides his face from them, lets them alone ; and they thus gain the punishment which their guilt deserves, as the harvest of their own sowing, and the fruit of their own planting. This principle forms the point upon which the warning of our present text is rested. Famine, with all its attendant, multiform evils, is the simple result of continued want and deprivation. And if God withholds his rain and his snow from heaven, all

its horrors come upon man without any direct effort or act on his part to confirm or increase it. Applying this shape of illustration in our text, the Lord God proclaims to sinful men, the result of their negligence of his grace, and contempt of the spiritual mercies, which have been long continued to them in vain. He announces no direct infliction of positive punishment from his hand, like the fire which should consume them, or the pestilence which should cut them down. He simply declares, that he "will send a famine among them, a famine of hearing the words of the Lord;" that he will withdraw all direct spiritual interposition, and leave them to the barrenness of their own nature; that they shall no more hear the word of the Lord, which they have despised; and shall find themselves to pine, and waste, and perish, under its loss; that they shall wander unsatisfied, in search of nourishment and food for their souls, under the simple withholding, on his part, of privileges which they have so much neglected and abused. This address, though made to the Israelites, is as applicable to all who have received the privileges of a revelation from God. With them, it has been fearfully accomplished. Its fulfilment with ourselves, must depend upon our improvement or abuse of the privileges we enjoy.

This SPIRITUAL FAMINE, I design to make the subject for your present consideration. I would speak,

I. OF THE EVILS OF IT.

II. OF THE FACTS WHICH CONSTITUTE IT.

III. OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LEAD TO IT.

IV. OF THE WAY IN WHICH IT IS TO BE AVOIDED.

I. In speaking of the evils of a spiritual famine, com-

paratively little need be said. The Lord denounces it in our text, as a curse, and a punishment. He speaks of it as far more dreadful than a famine of bread, and a thirst for water; that is, as more to be feared and avoided, than the worst sufferings of the body, and the earthly estate of man. This is simply upon the Saviour's principle, that the one kills the body, and after that hath no more that it can do, while the other casts both soul and body into hell. Man lives not by bread only, but by the words which proceed out of the mouth of the Lord. His present life of years or days, is sustained by bodily food. But this is not worthy to be called life, so soon passeth it away, and he is gone. His real life, the life of his spirit, the existence of his immortal part, is to be supported only by the words of the Lord. It is fed by communications of divine grace. It is sustained, invigorated, and made happy, by those precious revelations of truth, which the word of the Lord contains. The soul of man lives upon an appropriated Saviour, with whom its life is hid in security with God, and from whose fulness it receives grace upon grace. Give to the soul of man, as its own possession, all that the word of the Lord reveals, the new created image of the holy God which it offers, the completeness that is found in Christ which it proclaims, the exceeding great and precious promises which it unfolds; and you shelter that soul in everlasting security, and feed it upon the living and life-giving bread, in the strength of which it may rejoice throughout eternity. Take from the soul of man, this heavenly nourishment which giveth life unto the world, and you leave it a prey to the gnawing of

eternal want, and the mere vessel of eternal wrath and anguish. Nothing can supply to it the place of the incorruptible word of God.

The full evils of this spiritual famine, the result of an entire loss of the word of the Lord, this world cannot display; nor can man, in his present state, apprehend them. You have no power adequately to conceive them, nor I to describe them. You must pass from the confines of the present life, to gain this awful view. Follow the unconverted, lost soul, to its chamber of final despair. See it there, dark, and lonely, and unpitied; sitting in solitude, among millions like itself; renewing daily its embittered regrets over the folly of a life of wasted privileges which has passed; in the gloomy pinings of introverted observation, feeding only upon its own recollections of unnecessary guilt; groaning in anguish, over the remembrance of days of mercy unimproved; yet groaning in more bitter anguish, that they cannot be forgotten; crying in sorrow, where there is no sympathy; uttering its piercing complaints to ears, too filled with the sounds of personal distress, to hear the lamentations which others make; lingering on in this perpetual starvation; shrinking, pining, under the wrath of a neglected God; dying an eternal death; seeking for an end that never comes; longing, struggling, for an annihilation which is impossible; and all this, spread out through eternity, as the necessary condition of a sinner who has compelled God to leave him alone; *there*, O *there*, you find a spiritual famine, exhibiting its real evils, and shewing its actual, mature character. And is it for this, my brethren, that foolish men reject the claims of religion and a Saviour, because they are

supposed to be hard and burdensome? Is it to take up such an eternity in weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, that the unrenewed man casts from him the invitations of the Gospel, continues to live without God in the world, and turns away his ear and his heart from the law of truth? O, how wonderful is such a choice! How wonderful would it be, if the alternative were really unrelieved distress for the whole period of the present life! How much better will it be for you to endure with Christ and for Christ's sake, the utmost extreme of present suffering and persecution, than to inherit the least part of these woes of a sinner who dies without a Saviour; these final evils of a spiritual famine! Yet Jesus calls you to no such suffering. He gives in this life, peace which passeth understanding; while he promises in the life to come, the fulness of joy, and pleasures forevermore. The soul which in its real conversion unto God, receives him, feeds upon heavenly food for time and for eternity; and in both, nourished and supported by divine power, enjoys the entire and happy contrast, to the evils of a spiritual famine.

II. I would speak of the facts which constitute a spiritual famine. The evils which attend it, are developed only in the fearful consummations of another world. The facts which make it up, are facts of man's experience here. To these I now refer. It is described in our text as "a famine of hearing the words of the Lord;" and it is exhibited as so entire and overspreading, that the men who suffer it, wander through the whole length and breadth of the land, in search of the spiritual food which they need, without success.

To constitute such a famine, both in appearance and in fact, there will be found, sometimes, an entire removal from a people, of all the ordinances and privileges of the Gospel, that only life-giving word of God. The history of the Christian world abounds with instances of this, when, as a direct punishment for the abuse of the privileges of the Gospel, by those who have enjoyed its light without improving it, God has removed the candlestick out of its place, and the immoralities of absolute imposture and falsehood, or the superstition and darkness of a total corruption of Christianity, have been allowed to occupy the entire place which the bright kingdom of the Saviour's truth had filled before. The face of the nominal Christian world in its eighteen centuries of exhibition, has presented numerous illustrations of this remark. And young as this land is in its Christian history, there are already facts in its record, exhibiting a removal of the ordinances and provisions of the Gospel, from portions of its community, almost as entire. Such a removal of the appointed instruments of salvation, constitutes a spiritual famine. Men cannot believe in him, of whom they do not hear, nor hear without a preacher.

Next to this, there is found often, a withdrawal from a community who still retain the name, if not the external form of Christianity, the preaching of the Gospel in its peculiar truths. An entire defection from the vital doctrines and principles of Christianity, is suffered to take place among large bodies of professed Christians, as the simple result of a failure in the improvement of the blessings which were thus bestowed. What numbers in our day have sunk down into the

frozen depths of Socinianism in actual profession ; nay, verging apparently upon the very border of Atheism ; who once possessed and neglected the blessed offering of a pure Gospel ! What numbers in the retaining of a theoretical orthodoxy, have filled the pulpit with the morals of Seneca, to the exclusion of the crucified Christ, whom Paul preached ! So that within the limits of our knowledge of men around us, there are thousands who never hear of the revealed way of divine salvation ; and who, in regard to all peculiarities in the doctrine of the Gospel, are as much in a famine of the word of the Lord, as if absolute heathenism had reared its temple, and they had gathered for the worship of its gods. Multitudes around us, hear no more of man's conversion by the Spirit of God, or of his justification in the perfect righteousness of Christ, than if there was not a preacher of the truth of God standing upon our soil. Now, whatever privileges may elsewhere be found among us, this is, for them, a spiritual famine, almost as entire as is to be found in lands without even the form of the Gospel. And while faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, it is as certain a preparation for all the evils of a spiritual famine, as if the bread of God could nowhere be found.

Next to this, in fact, if not in appearance, is there a spiritual famine, when, though the truth of God be still proclaimed, there is no power communicated from above, to carry it with life-giving efficacy to the souls of men. Sinful men are to be sanctified and made holy through the truth ; but it is God who sanctifies them. And if they waste the opportunities which he affords them to gain this spiritual increase, or if he

withhold the power of his grace, Paul plants, and Apollos waters, in vain. How often, how perseveringly sometimes, is Christ preached among men, as the wisdom of God, and the power of God, when no heart yields to the sacred message, and no soul is born for God, under the operation of the truth! Men have wearied God with their sins, and made him to serve with their iniquities, until he has arisen and departed from them. They have turned the grace of God into licentiousness, and have corrupted the practice of religion with a conformity to the course of this world, until, it would seem, that if Noah, Daniel, and Job were among them, these should but deliver their own souls by their righteousness; men around should not be benefited or blessed by them. Now, whatever appearance there may be of church order, or spiritual authority connected with it, this is a real famine of the word of the Lord. All that was nourishing and saving in the dispensation of the Gospel, has been separated from it, and the preaching of it now, is without effect. There is no going forth of religion in its progress to spiritual conquests. No gathering souls are enquiring with eagerness, the way to glory and to God. Coldness, and lethargy, and spiritual apathy and slumber creep over the minds, and bind up the affections of men. They hear without feeling, almost without consciousness. They are exhorted without effect. The good seed is choked and destroyed, before it can spring up to bring forth its fruit; and no converted souls rise up to give the glory of the work of grace to God. Under such circumstances, as far as it regards the real, spiritual condition of men, whatever soundness, or spirituality, or

ardour may characterize the preacher, there is a spiritual famine among the people; and the evils of it, in their dreadful aggregate, will come upon perishing souls. This is sent by the Lord of hosts as a punishment for man's iniquity, a recompense for the neglect and abuse of a life-giving Gospel. The word no longer profits, because it is not mixed with faith in them that hear. And men pine and perish in this spiritual atrophy, though the food which ought to give them life, and which would have done it before they were so hopelessly diseased, is still abundant. O, what numbers among us are thus suffering all the incipient evils of spiritual famine! Their cold, and careless, and dead souls, are sinking down to eternal sorrow. Bread from heaven lies all around their tents, and they tread it under their feet, but will not gather and eat it. God is sending them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, because they take pleasure in unrighteousness. The days of final and entire desertion are rapidly coming on for them; days when they shall wander to and fro for spiritual bread, and shall not find it; when they shall desire to see the days of the Son of Man, in vain; when they shall utter the exceeding strong and bitter cry of rejected Esau, "wilt thou not bless me, even me also," and find no merciful response; when no place shall be found for repentance in the Judge by whom they are condemned, though they "seek it carefully with tears." In the dark hours which lead down to death, and the far darker hours which lead on after it, they are preparing to find, in the entire deprivation of spiritual comfort and safety, the real character, and the real result, of a famine of the word of the Lord.

III. I would speak of the circumstances which lead to this spiritual famine. Some of these are certainly on the side of the preacher of the word. And if I were addressing the company of preachers, it would be my duty to enlarge upon them. When there is in the pulpit, a hiding of the light of the Gospel; when,

'Though Paul may serve him with a text,
Yet Epictetus, Plato, Tully, preach;

when, in the exalting of inferior things, and in negligence of greater, Christ is thrust from his own sanctuary, and some other name predominates, and some other master is served; the preacher leads on to a famine of the word of the Lord. Wo unto them by whom such offences come! But to this large class of circumstances, I cannot now particularly refer. My duty at this time, is to warn and admonish those who now listen to me; and to point out the facts among us, and perceived by us, which are likely to lead to a famine of the saving truth of the Gospel—facts which, to a great extent, are found among all bodies of professing Christians, and which especially concern us, in the communion to which we belong.

Among these, I name first, the spirit of sectarian division and controversy; the fondness for partisan warfare among the various denominations of the church of Christ, which is so exceedingly manifest. If there is an aspect of religious things in the present day, over which the soul of a true Christian must sicken, it is this fruitless disposition to magnify outward distinctions above spiritual realities. Whether a man be found on one side or the other, of some uncertain, arbitrary line of difference, seems in some

minds, to be of more consequence, and to be more considered, than whether he be as a converted, or an unconverted man, a child of God, or a child of the evil one. This dividing spirit appears to be a characteristic of a portion of all Christian denominations in the present day. And when all the people of God should be thoroughly united in the great controversy of the Lord with sin, the strength of numbers is diverted in the attempt to depreciate, if not to destroy, others, because they follow not with them. The indulgence of this dividing spirit, leads directly to a spiritual famine. I believe Satan could in no way be better served or pleased, than to have every pulpit in the land occupied thus. While all time, and tongues, and talents, are given to this work of self-exaltation, and mutual depreciation, Christ is put out of view, and the result of persisting in it, will be the extinguishing of the light of Gospel truth in the land. As far as my voice may have influence, I would urge you to watch against this sectarian spirit, as leading directly to a banishment of the Gospel. Rejoice when Christ is preached. Rejoice when the numbers multiply who preach him. Rejoice if God confirms his word with the power of his grace. Allow not yourselves to be pleased with expressions of hostile or contemptuous feelings in reference to other classes of the followers of Christ. Contend only for the precious faith of the Gospel, and for that only with the spirit and the mind of Christ.

Another circumstance leading to a spiritual famine, is a conformity among professing Christians, to the course of this world. I do not mean to touch that deluding question, "to what extent *may* we go in the

giddiness of this world?" a question, which in the hands of a skilful enemy, leads off the point of division, till man has passed far beyond it. The point of sinful conformity to the world, however difficult to mark out in a circumstantial, calculating theory, is quick and open to the perception of conscience, and to the decisions of the common sense of men. And it is a manifest violation of both, to say that a spiritual mind may be carried, or found, in the gay and brilliant assemblies of the thoughtless children of the world, where the mention even of the name of Deity, save in the idle exclamation of the unsanctified mind, would be counted an intrusion, and rejected as intolerable. Such scenes in human society, though elevated, and attractive, and refined, according to the standard of the world, are the abode and nursery of undisguised hostility to Christ. And it exhibits a state of coldness in religion, and indifference to the respectability of religion, little less than shocking, when the professed participant in the body and blood of the Lord avows himself to find nothing in them, incompatible with the life and power of his devotion. This practical betrayal and wounding of the Saviour in the house of his friends, leads directly to a spiritual famine. In the individual, it is found to be, not the attendant, but the alternative of religion. If it progresses as the spirit of the professed religious community, it results in a simple and confirmed sacrifice of the life-giving power of the Gospel, for the mere friendship of the world, which is enmity with God. The spirit of prayer faints and dies. The meetings of Christians for prayer, flag and fail. The cold and haughty temper of the world stands with its proud

fect to rule the sanctuary. And however faithful, and bold, and persevering, may be the watchman upon the walls, the people take no warning, and he but delivers his own soul. Principles and habits of this destructive character, like poison in a fountain, are sent down in every family stream. And God withdraws every gift of his Spirit from a people, who thus strengthen each other in their sins, and say in the pride of their boasting, "we are delivered to do all these abominations."

An unbelieving rejection of the spiritual claims of the Gospel, and a misimprovement of the mercies which a Saviour bestows, lead a people with certainty to this famine of the word of the Lord. The habit of unmoved and heartless hearing of the Gospel, prepares the way for the certain loss of all the blessings which the Gospel gives. It is a most fearful circumstance in the life and destiny of a man, if he has been long sitting under the preaching of the truth, and remains still an unchanged man. He has then, so often rejected the message from God, which said to him, "to-day, hear my voice, and harden not your heart," that it has lost its power upon his conscience. He has resisted so many arguments of the holy Scripture, that he is now fenced in, and protected by his own embankments. And however light and giddy may be his worldly heart, while the present world remains unseathed for him, he is rapidly approaching to a wilderness where there is no water, and where the whole staff of bread is broken. A sad and lonely place, indeed, he will find it. He is there without God, for he has driven him from his heart and thoughts. He is without other comfort, for it has failed and perished

from him, in its own decay. And he lies down to perish in wretched despair, simply because he rejected the bread of life, when it was bountifully provided; and it is now offered to him no more. There is found much in a spiritual and animated body of Christians, to influence the feelings and determinations of sinners around, and to call them into the fold of Christ, by God's employment of the power of sympathy. And there is much also, in a cold, and formal, and worldly-minded congregation, to repel the progress of each other towards God, and by the same power of sympathy to drive others back to the service of the world and sin. Thus as a spirit of indifference to the truth, of procrastination of the service of God, and of careless hearing of the divine message to man, spreads among a people, it becomes itself established there, and leads directly to a famine of the word of the Lord, for the souls over whom it reigns.

Connected with this spirit of unbelieving indifference, a neglect of the appointed ordinances and institutions of the Gospel leads to the same result. When the Sabbath is but little regarded; when the sanctuary of God is neglected; when the Lord's table is surrounded but by a few of the many to whom its privileges are offered; when the assembling together of the people of God, either on occasions of public worship, or on the more private occasions of the evening lecture, and the meeting for prayer, is but the bringing of two or three in his name; there is a rapid progress among a people to a total famine of the word of the Lord. True religion will not, cannot flourish among us, nor a revival of effectual, active piety take place, but in proportion to our eager atten-

tion to these occasions of united worship. I would that all the Lord's people were prophets; and that we had in every congregation, active, zealous, and pious laymen, to help the pastor in his work, and to maintain the habitual, weekly meeting for social prayer. It is this which draws down a blessing upon a people, and makes the Sabbath's preaching of the Gospel, effective and powerful. It is here, that the heavy laden find comfort, the weary refreshment, and all the people of God life and peace. And when these meetings are neglected, or opposed, among any people, soon all other shapes of religious service become formal and useless. Could I make the voice of my own experience sound throughout the whole borders of our church, it would be to urge all who seek the divine blessing, and the prosperity of our communion, to establish and maintain, and prize, as a chief means of benefit, and a chief promoter of a revival of religion, the habitual, social meeting of Christians, for exhortation and prayer. How many souls have found the blessing of the living God recorded here, for them! Who hath ever opposed them, and found spiritual prosperity bestowed from God upon himself?

But upon these circumstances which lead to a famine of the word of the Lord, I can enlarge no more. Consider whether they are to be found among yourselves. See whether the worm of sectarianism is eating at the heart of your religious character; or the blight of worldly conformity is withering it from the exterior; or the chill of indifference is binding it with its frost; or the rude hand of neglect of spiritual duties and privileges, is plucking it roughly away. In all these circumstances, you will find a separate, but

certain introduction to that spiritual famine in which you will be stricken through, in want of the blessed fruits which have thus been despised and destroyed.

IV. I would speak of the way in which these evils may be averted. Much that might well be said on this point, has been already anticipated. My time will allow me but little in addition. That little, however, I would earnestly press upon your attention. I feel the danger of which I have spoken, to be an actual and an immediate one among us. I feel bound to do my poor utmost to avert it.

I would urge you to prize highly the faithful dispensation of the word of God. If an unveiled Gospel is presented to your minds, and the Almighty Spirit of God is ready to apply it to your hearts, learn to estimate it, as the happiest, and the most important distinction of your lives; never undervalue the precious blessing of having the truth of God spoken to you, as in the sight of God who searcheth the hearts, however humbling or alarming may be many of its declarations. If the ministers of Christ ask their counsel of him, and not of the lusts of men; if they draw their arguments and motives from eternity, without any truckling to the course of this world, they may often appear to ungodly men, as Elijah did to Ahab, as men that trouble Israel. The proud hearts and wills of unsubdued sinners always kick against the truth, and always resist the Holy Ghost. Faithful ministers are not alarmed, or surprised at this. My brethren, be not you among this number of opposers. If the men of God dare to save you, in defiance of your own esteem of them, prize and honour such ministrations, as God's chief

blessing to you. Encourage them, hold up their hands, defend their efforts in doing good, and bless God, that your eyes are permitted to look upon, and your ears to listen to teachers, whom he has made faithful in all his house.

I would entreat you to pray for the success of the word of God. Its great object is, the conversion of the ungodly, and the restoration of this fallen world to God. Let this object in all its magnitude and importance, be kept before you. In private and in public prayer, seek from God the power of his grace, to attend and bless the preaching of his truth. The great instrument for the use of which he has commissioned his ministry, and by which he will save the world, is what men may call the foolishness of preaching. The more spiritual, constant, and bold are the preachers of the Gospel, the more abundantly will the world be blessed. But all the power to bless must come from God. To him, therefore, learn to look habitually, and earnestly, for his blessing upon the labours of his ministers. Let all the hearts among us that have found access unto God in an accepted Saviour, cry unto him, for the demonstration of his Spirit, and divine power, to carry home the truth to those who hear it, that multitudes may be brought in to be with us, on the side of the Son of David, in this ungodly world. And whether within the limits of your own special congregation, or amidst the necessities of the world abroad, your hearts and thoughts be at any time fixed, O pray for the success of the word of God, in the Gospel of his Son, in the conversion of the lost, from the power of Satan unto him.

I would press upon you, to profit yourselves by the publication of the Gospel. Seek the conversion, the sanctification, the edifying of your own souls under its influence. Your days of grace are precious. Precious to you, is every offer of a Saviour's love, every awakening admonition of the Spirit of grace, every dispensation of the truth which makes men free, every Sabbath's privilege, every hour of prayer. O, suffer not your opportunities to pass, and your hearts to remain unaffected, and cold, and alienated from God, amidst such dispensations of divine mercy. It is high time you had all awaked out of sleep, and were found in a new birth of the Spirit, accepted before God, and sheltered in the provisions of his love. Trifle no longer with the proffers of divine grace. O cast in your lot even now, with a waiting Saviour. Return with him to that Father's house, where there is bread enough and to spare, and where you shall find eternal life for your souls. And in the certain hope, which is the privilege of his people, the assured salvation which is covenanted to them in the sufferings and obedience of their great Redeemer, bread shall be given you, and living water shall be sure forever.

XIII.

LITTLE SINS.

GENESIS XIX. 20.—*Is it not a little one? and my soul shall live.*

OUR blessed Lord lays it down as a principle of human conduct, and of human responsibility, “he that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.” Though a man start back, and shrink from great transgressions, if he allow himself in known offences against God, which appear to him of a smaller character, he manifests that the spirit and disposition of his heart are still guilty, and opposed to God. The claims of true piety and obedience not only require that we should be kept back from presumptuous sins, but that we should be cleansed also from secret faults.

The incident connected with our text, may be viewed as an illustration of this. Lot hesitated in an entire and thorough obedience of the divine commands, and would have compromised with their claims upon him, by the offer of an inferior submission. He had come out of Sodom, as God had directed him.

But when the heavenly messengers had brought him forth abroad, and said, "escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed;" he hesitated in following out their earnest address. He had shewed himself willing to obey to a certain extent. But he was not willing to obey to the utmost extent of the requisition. He answered to the angel, "O, not so, my Lord! behold now this city is near to flee unto; and it is a little one. Let me escape thither. Is it not a little one? and my soul shall live." God would teach him by his own experience, and for a little while endured with his folly, that he might learn how poor a refuge his sinful heart had selected for himself. The result was as the Lord designed it. He was soon glad to escape from the little city which he had selected, and which had been spared for a time, for his sake, to the mountain which the Lord had pointed out.

Lot stands before us as an example and testimony; and it is the principle which is displayed in this illustration, of which I wish to speak. I see in the incident, a principle which is exhibited in the conduct and character of multitudes, who profess to be the servants of God, and who attempt to cover up transgressions because they are esteemed little, and pass over faults which they deem of little consequence, in the hope that their souls shall live. But it is a principle which will be found in all cases as great a mistake in calculation, as it was in the case connected with our text. An inattention to those which are considered small things in religion; a disregard to the guilt of those which are supposed to be little sins; and an

allowed commission of these sins, on the ground that they are of inferior consequence; are the source of vast evil, and of vast danger to the souls of men. However long endured, they are uniformly found at last, a Zoar, in which the soul of man cannot live. The evil and danger of this inattention to little things in the cultivation of religious character, is a subject which I propose now to consider.

The men of this world understand the necessity of a vigilant attention to the smaller outlets of waste, in order to the attainment of success and prosperity, in earthly pursuits. It is deemed a wise proverb in their affairs, "take care of your pence, and your pounds will take care of themselves." They will ask for no surer indication of a spendthrift, than the habitual contempt of little things, in the system upon which the business of life is conducted. Negligence in this respect, will go far towards clothing a man with rags. Diligence, assiduity, and persevering economy in small expenses, not disjoined from a spirit of liberality and kindness to the needy, have raised multitudes, who had no remarkable share of natural talents, and no peculiar experience of what the world calls good fortune, to the highest posts of earthly influence and honour.

This is equally the principle of certain success in the concerns of the soul. There must be in that merchandise which is better than silver, to which the heart and thoughts of the real Christian are directed, and to an interest in which the hearts of all are invited in the Gospel, the very same attention to matters which are too often considered trilling and indifferent. The most lamentable consequences in a

Christian's life often date their origin from some small act which is suffered to grow into a principle; from some incidental occurrence which ministered temptations that were heedlessly encouraged; or from a failure in habitual watchfulness in something which was considered unimportant in its influence. The conflagration which fills the proudest city with desolation and ruin, was in its first appearance, a little spark, which a single drop of water would have easily extinguished. The storm which covers the face of the heavens with its blackness, and pours its torrents of devastation upon the earth, was seen in its incipient state, to arise a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. Thus will it be found also, in the most destructive concessions in a Christian's life. The unheeded lusts of the eye, the disregarded risings of mental passion, the momentary excitement and indulgence of sensual appetite, only serve to lay open a way which will continually widen, to habitual transgression, irreparable loss, and even the final destruction of the soul. You may as easily set bounds to the flowing of the sea, and in the tempest's raging, command the swelling wave to stop its course, as arrest the triumphant progress which you have given by indulgence, to a headstrong lust, and say, "hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther." The man who will walk with God in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, must fix his unremitted and suspicious inspection upon the smallest incidents of his life; and test the power of his principles, by the minuteness of application, to which they can be carried. If a man finds that he is not always a religious man; if he perceives that the great principles by which he professes to be

governed, are not habitually carried out, he will undoubtedly find the reason, and the commencement of the deficiency which he laments, in the point of warning and experience of which we are now speaking. It will be instructive and useful to us to look into this subject more minutely.

1. This inattention to little things will be discovered in the frequent excitements of a naturally irritable temper. That ardour of temperament which gives the ability for great achievements, opens also the source of great sorrows. It is a strong man armed, which no power but the Spirit of God can spoil and bind; and which often breaks loose, even from the constraint of his hand. It requires a much larger measure of divine influence to produce in a heart of this strongly marked character, any desired effect of submission to the will of God. And there must be allowed to such an one, the enjoyment of comfort in reflection upon the work of the Spirit, from a much smaller amount of positive evidence than can be assumed as sufficient, where there were fewer obstacles to overcome. This excitable temper, in the full sanctification of the soul by the divine Spirit, is to be transformed into the mind of a little child. The Christian, to whose lot a contest with such a spirit has been assigned, must not be satisfied until the lion has been not only chained within his den, but actually transformed in his nature, to a lamb. Inattention to this development of individual character, opens a breach for probable final destruction and loss. Our trials of temper are usually found in small incidents; chiefly in the little and private concerns of domestic life. How many do we see, who can sustain with an

unmurmuring fortitude, the severest pressure of affliction and pain; who can glorify God in fires which burn with a fearful strength; who can lie long on the bed of suffering, and have many of the dearest objects of human affection, taken successively from them, without complaint; who yet will allow themselves through mere inadvertence, to be extravagantly excited, by the impertinence of an inferior, or by the worrying of a fly; like the elephant, whose skin can resist the force of the musket ball, but is said to be goaded to madness by the sting of the mosquito. What is the reason of this singular difference in their endurance of trials, except the single fact, that they gathered up all their strength in watchfulness against the greater difficulty, but were heedless and unguarded on the arrival of the less? Such inattention, my brethren, is the parent of much sin, and of much sorrow. It uniformly opens the way to backsliding from God. It wounds the conscience, until it becomes seared and hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. It destroys the conscious influence of the character for good to others, until sometimes, under the mortification of this loss, even the profession of piety is laid aside. It degenerates into a proud and peevish state of mind and feeling, far too turbulent for a dwelling place for the calm Spirit of eternal peace. If in this point, I am speaking to the conscience of any of my hearers, I would speak the language of anxious warning and affectionate admonition; language, the necessity of which, deep experience has taught. Esteem nothing of this kind a little thing. There is no "little one" opened as a refuge here. Do not flatter yourselves that the life of the soul can be

maintained, while this point is compromised and covered, or while your increasing watchfulness is not solemnly directed against it.

2. This disregard of little things will be exhibited in the many small and unnecessary indulgences, which Christians too often allow themselves for appetite or ease. How often are such indulgences made the substance of a permanent and unchangeable habit! We see many who are never positively intemperate, nor extravagant perhaps, in their gratifications, who yet perceive no evil, in providing for every desire however foolish, and perhaps hurtful, its demanded object. They have no practical knowledge of any system of self-denial, in following the steps of Jesus, their professed Lord. They cannot specify any cross which they have taken up to honour him. The marks of unqualified worldliness, of undisguised intemperance, may be supposed to be far off, and the habits of life may yet be so allied to them, in principle, and in spirit, and in tendency, that the distance may be much greater in appearance than in reality. The man who sets out with the principle of allowing himself every indulgence which is not known to be unlawful, will inevitably find himself, before he has gone far upon his way, in the depths of positive sin. My brethren, if your plan is thus to live upon the borders of religious character, you will be open to the aggressions of foes, whose assaults cannot, upon your own principles, be resisted. While you are thus frequently standing upon, or crossing over the line which separates you from known transgression, you will be taken captive, and led off in the chains of bondage, when you least suspect it. See, I beseech

you, whether you will not find many Zoars of this kind in your experience. See, if there be not, in your personal habits, or your family habits, such a planning for indulgences; such a disposition to make important points, of preparation for food or raiment; such a calculation to eat, and drink, and live; as if the glory of God were in no way concerned in what you do. O, will you not find much here that will appear the openings of serious evil? Much that may account for the dominion of a worldly spirit and calculation? We may err when we fasten too much importance upon little matters, in forming our opinions of others; but we are not likely to be too sensitive, or too minute, in judging of ourselves. Be content, my friends, to follow Jesus in his own way, mortifying the whole body of sin, and making no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. For all these things, God will bring us into judgment. And it is well for us, in every view of character and responsibility, to use the world as not abusing it; to refuse the temptations, and to avoid the chains of a worldly, self-indulgent temper. Let us esteem no questionable pampering of ourselves, as "a little one," in which our "souls may live."

3. This inattention to smaller things will be detected in the light and unimproving recreations and amusements, which are often allowed. I do not speak here of the bold licentiousness of theatrical exhibitions; I cannot descend so low. The professing Christian who gives a personal countenance to this system of contempt for God, and of destruction for man, has already sunk too far, to be reached by the language of my present admonition. The assump-

tion of the name of Christ in such a connexion, is only a remarkable instance, of the power which the human heart has to delude itself, or of the audacity with which man attempts to impose upon others. Passing over all these glaring and public scenes of dishonour to God, I refer now, to amusements which come in a more questionable shape, in the recreations of private society. There is a giddiness and levity in conversation; a trifling, gossiping, thoughtless spirit; an utter rejection of all seriousness in habit and character; which, without the card-table, or the mazy dance, or the race-course, or the demoralizing public spectacle, may degenerate into a confirmed and unconquerable habit of worldliness, while the victim of the process, hardly recalls a single instance in which the actual limits of propriety in his own view, were overstepped. The parent legalizes all this system of actual unhinging of mind and principle, this railroad plan of destruction for the soul, not, it will be alleged, for the gratification of personal desire, but to introduce a child to scenes, which on the parent's part, it is avowed, have been long outgrown and renounced. That provision for levity of character, and levity of feeling, is esteemed proper, perhaps necessary, for the young, which, it is still hoped, they will live long enough to be sorry for, and to forsake. O, how shocking to every fine and holy feeling in the Christian heart, is a plan like this! Let me say to young professors of the Gospel, that these innocent scenes, as the apologists for this world style them, are the very fields in which the fowler spreads his snares with the most success. Of many a one, who by a life of habitual, guarded separation from this

light and scattering society, would have been secure, may the Lord now say, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world;" and that too, even before that fallen professor imagines, that there is a danger of such defection from Christ. Is this a picture of any who hear me? Then mark the commencement and the process of your ruin. Do not say, "is thy servant a dog, that he should do such things?" Your condition is most alarming. May God give you grace to perceive it in time. Vain will be your escape from Sodom, if you cling to the fancied protection of Zoar. While the world says to you, in so many preparations for giddy enjoyment, "come and see;" I beseech you stop, and reflect most deliberately, what sacrifice may be required of you for one trifling, thoughtless, self-indulgent hour, spent among the enemies of God, in a conspired forgetfulness of him!

4. You may discover this inattention to smaller matters in religion, in an increasing spirit of idleness and sloth. God has formed no human being to be useless, or idle. He has assigned to man, his proper duty in every station, that he may go forth unto his work, and to his labour, until the evening. And though there are many who have been raised by his divine providence, above the necessity of labouring for actual subsistence; there is not one, who will not be called upon for an account to God, for the employment of every hour of his life. If the precious and important time of the soul's probation, be consumed in unreasonable sleep and sloth, and the claims of duty to others and of improvement for ourselves, be disregarded in the listless indolence of a self-indulgent

spirit, shall not he find it out? And did he form this curious tabernacle for the soul, so marvellously arranged with all its powers of action, merely to be fed a while, and then to die? Did he constitute the mind, with its mysterious and multiplied faculties, to be vacant and neglected, and then to pass into another, and an unchanging world, for its reward? The human character is far too active, and far too propense to sin, to be trusted uncontrolled, and unwatched, to the tendency and result of its own operations. The necessity for continual active employment, in the station of man, is a blessing, not an evil. And it is undoubtedly, not one of the least reasons of the remarkable preponderance of religious character, as it is beheld among men, always noticed among that class of persons whose circumstances compel them to be industrious, that they have not the time or means to waste themselves with indulgence, or to melt away in sloth. This indolent spirit is always ready to open the door of the heart to every intruder, from its empty desire for company. The instances have not been few, in which the man was an useful and active servant of the Lord, while narrow circumstances obliged him to labour, and became bent to backsliding from God, and useless in the cause of Christ to men, when in the change of his outward condition, by the accumulation of wealth, the necessity for personal exertion and actual labour had passed away. My brethren, how is this case with you? Does time ever appear long and heavy? Is there any hour which has no employment? Is it becoming difficult to you to be actively engaged? Is it an effort to keep yourself employed? O, then, do not persuade yourself to call

this thing "a little one!" It will lead to great and dangerous results. It will stifle and destroy all your efforts to do the will of God. The life of religion will become by its indulgence, dormant in your heart. The duties of religion will be a yoke which you cannot bear. The victory of sin over your soul will be the more permanent for having been thus slowly obtained. The Zoar of indolence will be no refuge. It may be made the prison of bondage. It can never be the abode of peace.

These are some very manifest instances, which show that inattention to the guilt and danger of little things in the formation of religious character, in which so many vainly try to shelter themselves, and in which so many are destroyed. Their result will be uniformly the same. It will always be an entire and open desertion of the ways of religion and peace, unless some merciful hand shall pluck the lingering sinner from this destructive refuge, and place him upon some safer ground. It is always in the abuse of the things which are really lawful, that we begin to perish. The man who pleads for a doubtful or suspected indulgence, and says upon the approach of the temptation, "Is it not a little one? and my soul shall live," is in this concession, already beginning to yield himself in captivity to the enemy of his soul. In the things which are considered trifling matters, is our chief reason for fear. Great transgressions come to the heart unaccustomed to them, with no attraction. Man's first downward step towards them, is far off from them. But in religious character there is nothing unimportant. The smallest inlets for sin must be closed. He who hopes to be kept back from the do-

minion of presumptuous sins, must seek and resolve to be cleansed from his secret faults. We are required to abstain from all appearance of evil; and to give all diligence to our growth in grace, that our calling and election may be made sure. Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

If you find in yourselves this heedless and secure habit which casts out fear; if you find that your watchfulness is directed to things which are seen and known by others, and that it is relaxed in those things which are considered of less moment and influence; you may be assured that your condition is one of exceeding danger, and that the natural result of such a state of mind, is a permanent and final backsliding from God. The spirit of rebellion against him, is easily excited. Temptations to it enter at the smallest breach; and if they enter with your consent, you will be exceedingly in danger of finding at the last, that this spirit has dominion over you. Inconstancy and instability will mark all your conduct, and become settled principles in your character, even if you retain your profession of being the servants of the Lord. And you will find yourselves deserted by him; his Spirit departing from you; and yourselves left finally to perish, as the result of your own folly and sin.

What then, my brethren, ought to be the conclusion of such a subject, but an earnest exhortation to you to live near to God, in the light and power of his Holy Spirit; and to strive to walk circumspectly and faithfully in the path of his commandments? O, make it your object to be as nearly as possible, holy as God is holy. Seek the deeper work of his Spirit in your hearts, that you may become

under his dominion, in all things conformed to the perfect image of Jesus Christ. How much easier it is to please but a single master; to follow out a single line of personal duty; to sit down in the calmness of an uniform affection, at the feet of Jesus; than it is to work out that difficult, dangerous problem, how near you may live to the world, and how much you may have of the spirit of the world, and yet not become final castaways from God! If you really desire and determine to be perfect in all the will of God, the Spirit of God will hold you up in your determination, and enable you to accomplish it. If you seek to grow up in the perfect likeness of Christ, you will find yourselves upheld and guided by a secret power, which shall give you the image you desire. O, make this then, your purpose. See, how circumspect, how holy, how pure, how thoroughly conformed to the character of Jesus, you can become, by prayer for his Spirit, by recollection of his commands, by meditation upon his example, by study of his word, by communion with his people. Avoid all these "little ones," that stand between Sodom and safety; and fly to the mountain, that glorious mountain of salvation in Christ, which is exalted above all the mountains. Walk thus in him, with him, under him, by his power; that when he shall come to ask an account of your stewardship, you may give it with joy; and be made partakers with him of that inheritance which he hath purchased, and for which you will have thus become prepared.

XIV.

THE VALLEY OF DECISION.

JOEL iii. 14.—*Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision; for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.*

A SENSE of ultimate personal responsibility is inseparable from the mind of man. There is a consciousness within him, which announces the existence of a God who judgeth in the earth, and warns him that the great object of his life must be, to prepare to meet him in a final account. The holy Scriptures unite in the same solemn testimony, enlarge and confirm it with most awakening and important descriptions, and call upon men to be ready for the day of God's coming to judge the earth.

In the passage which I have selected for my present text, there is a striking exhibition of this final judgment of man, the great day of his account with God. The Lord calls upon the heathen to assemble themselves together before him, and for his mighty ones to come down in attendance upon him. "Let the heathen be wakened and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there will I sit to judge all the

heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe; come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision." The harvest for man is the close of his probation for eternity. And when this harvest is ripe, either for glory, or for ruin, God puts in his sickle, and by his angels, reaps both wheat and tares, for their final destination. "The valley of Jehoshaphat," in which this vast congregation of accountable beings is supposed to be collected, means, "the valley of the judgment of the Lord." Here in the valley of his judgment, in the time and manner of his own appointment, will the Lord collect the beings whom he hath formed, and proclaim to all, the final condition and character of each. All nations shall be gathered before him. The heavens and the earth shall be moved at his presence. But the Lord will be the hope and strength of his people.

In its practical application to man, however, the day of final judgment makes no change in his real character. It simply proclaims that which was before the fact. It announces the issue of human conduct. It declares the sentence which has been long determined. It delivers over every accountable being finally to his own place. Man's real time of probation is in the present life. Here, is the valley of decision, and the only valley of decision for eternity. As the tree falleth, so must it lie. No man's everlasting condition will be rendered more sure in the day of judgment than it is in the hour of death. Whether he leaves the present world as a child, or as an enemy to God, as such he remains forever. He

that is then holy, is holy still, and he that is then unjust, is eternally unjust still.

I would call your attention to a view of this VALLEY OF DECISION, in the humble hope, that God may be pleased to make our consideration of this subject, a means of profit to us all, and of preparation for its issue. In remarking upon the subject, I would first consider,

I. What may be understood as the valley of decision for man. The question is answered generally, that the whole life of man upon the earth is given to him as his time of education for an eternal state of being; and every question which is connected with his eternity, is to be decided by him here upon the earth. While this day of privileges lasts, man must accomplish the whole work of safety for his soul, when the night cometh at its close, no man can work. Within its limits every thing must be done, which is necessary to be done, that he may appear before God in peace.

But while we speak of questions to be decided here, there is actually but a single question proposed from God to man. As a wandering, rebellious creature, he is invited and commanded, to come back in the spirit and act of reconciliation unto God. He is called upon to submit himself to the will of his Creator, and to find all his comfort and enjoyment in his favour. In the full provisions of the Gospel, the means of entire and eternal union with God, are offered to his acceptance and the only question for him to decide, is, whether he will accept them. Will he lay hold of the hope which is set before him, and with a new heart, and a right spirit, glorify him who hath

bought him with a price? This is the question proposed to man, in all the messages of the Gospel, and urged upon his consideration, by all the acts of divine Providence in his behalf, and all the operations of the Spirit of God upon his mind and heart. This practical question he cannot leave undecided. It meets him face to face, day by day; and it must be met by him, and settled by him for himself, and that for eternity.

This is the great question of human life, and it is generally determined by man, long before the last hours of his life have come. Many who are yet living on the earth, have settled this question finally for themselves, and have, therefore, actually passed out of the valley of decision, though they have not passed out of the present state of being. Some have come upon the Lord's side; have thankfully accepted the privileges of the Gospel; have become converted in their hearts unto God; and they are the Lord's forever. They are no longer hesitating whom they shall serve. Their hearts have been fixed, in the determination to serve the Lord. They have chosen that good part which shall never be taken away from them. For them every thing is decided for eternity. He who hath plucked their feet out of the net, will keep their feet from falling, and their eyes from tears, and they shall walk before him in the land of the living. He will guide them by his counsel and receive them to his glory. The final day of the Lord for them, will not alter, but announce their character. It will give them the crown of righteousness which fadeth not away, which the Lord, the righteous Judge hath reserved for all who love his appearing. And

happy in that day will be found the people whose God is the Lord.

Others yet upon the earth have also decided this great question, but in another way. They have chosen death rather than life. They have finally refused the invitations of the Lord. They have turned their hearts away from him; rejected all his mercies; and driven from them the renewing influences of his Holy Spirit. From them too, the Saviour has departed, and withdrawn from them the quickening power of his grace. They are left alone. The providences of God do not affect them. The ministers and messages of God do not influence them. They are barren and unfruitful in every thing which God can look upon with favour and acceptance. Jesus has called, and they have refused; he has stretched out his hands, and they have not regarded it. They have distinctly declared that they will not come unto him for life. Some have decided this great question proposed to their souls, in entire infidelity. They have denied even the authority by which they are called back to exercise repentance towards God. Some have sunk down into confirmed worldliness of character, and have thrown away all sensibility to unseen and eternal things. Some have immersed themselves in unfeeling vice, and have broken and cast away all the cords of grace and purity. Some in mere thoughtless giddiness, mock at all the solemn messages of the Most High. Now all these have, in reality, passed out of the valley of decision. There is no question before them to be settled. Their eternity has been fixed, and fixed by their own choice and determination. Death will make no change with

them for the better. The day of the Lord will only declare that which they have previously determined for themselves. Their harvest then will be from their own seed. They have sown to the flesh, and from the flesh they shall reap corruption.

We cannot, therefore, justly say, that all men now alive, are in the valley of decision. We must narrow down our view of it, to that condition in the history of man, in which the great question for heaven or hell remains yet to be decided; in which men have not finally come upon the Lord's side, nor yet finally rejected him. The mind is then called to the consideration of the great demand, shall I prefer the reproach and promises of Christ, or the treasures of the world, and the pleasures of sin? Each time a message of the Gospel is heard, this question is distinctly proposed again, and again answered by man. We may not say of individual cases, that men are not still within reach of a Saviour's mercy. It is always true that whosoever cometh to him shall in no wise be cast out. But we know that they are within the limits of his offers, by whom this great subject is still considered, who are reflecting upon the wants and the prospects of their souls, halting upon the edge of a journey which they are required to undertake, and still undetermined between the diverting motives which are presented to them, in what direction they shall finally go. For them, conscience is awakened, fear is excited, consideration is exercised. But no action has yet taken place. They are still waiting upon the edge of the pool, but still only upon its edge. The question before them in the circumstances which attend it, is momentous. All others are nothing in

comparison with it. Every thing really important for time and for eternity is involved in the decision of it. This time and state of character are peculiar. And these may be considered by us, as the real valley of decision for man.

II. I would remark, secondly, that the greater portion of those to whom the offers of eternal life are here made, are in this condition: "Multitudes, multitude in the valley of decision." The grand question which man must decide, is proposed to all to whom the invitations of the Gospel come. The way of return to God is opened to all, and all are urged to press into it, and gain the blessing.

But, very few comparatively, have determined the question for their souls upon the Lord's side. The proportion of truly spiritual, separated, holy Christians in any community, is small indeed. Here and there, like a berry upon the topmost bough, we find a single soul, who has, and who gives, evidence of that radical, entire change of heart which constitutes a true follower of the Lord Jesus, among many who have no such precious faith. But few, we would hope, have finally determined this great question against themselves, and said to Satan and the world, "with you will we go." Whether any such now listen to me, I know not. I would fain hope that none of you, my friends, have said to the Redeemer of fallen man, "depart from us, for we desire not a knowledge of thy ways."

The residue, probably the great majority of those who listen to the Gospel, are still in this valley of decision. A blessing and a curse are yet before them. Opposing offers and invitations are still presented to

them. None are without some convictions of their wants. There are few who do not make resolutions of personal amendment; few who do not often desire a better portion than this world can give them. My friends, the great concerns of a world to come, are spread before you, and it is for you now to determine, whether you shall be saved or lost forever. Now is your accepted time, your appointed opportunity for this determination. You would be unwilling, probably, to enter into a covenant with your real adversary, that you will never lay yourselves down as a sacrifice to him who has loved you, and purchased you with his death. And yet you are unwilling, also, to take upon you the yoke of Christ, to follow him. You are thus still halting, unstable, between two opinions. The Saviour waits to be gracious unto you; and Satan waits to destroy. But this condition cannot be permanent; this state of mind cannot abide. You must come to a final choice in this great controversy around you. And however long you may try to put the decision from you, and however earnestly you may shrink from, and endeavour to escape this final decision, it cannot be long postponed.

Some of my undecided hearers are, undoubtedly, much nearer this determination than others. Some are inquiring the way of life, and asking for the gift of the Holy Ghost, while many have not so much as thought whether there be any Holy Ghost. Peculiar circumstances will often bring larger numbers together than usual, into this condition. Their minds are aroused and made to think, and their consciences are compelled to feel, and to acknowledge their feeling, upon this all-important subject. They become con-

vinced of their wants, and almost persuaded to accept the proffered remedy. Their position is then, in the highest degree affecting, solemn, and critical. Jesus pleads with them, his wounds and death. He offers them full, instant, everlasting salvation. The Holy Spirit urges them to accept it, and strives with them to lead them to a decision for Christ. Their means and opportunities of mercy are numerous. But they are transitory. All heaven seems to be waiting the event. All hell seems to be looking on too, for the issue. Shall they cast away the works of darkness, and in the real conversion of their hearts to God, go with Jesus, and become his forever? or shall they refuse his voice, and join themselves finally with those who hate him? Their minds dwell upon this question, and consider it again and again. It must be decided; and it must be decided by themselves. God has not decided it for them in any manner by which the choice is not left to them, though he knoweth the way that they take. The mercies and privileges of the Gospel are freely offered to them, and if they will, they may embrace them, and rejoice in them forever. If they do not enjoy them, it is because they reject them; and where then is the just condemnation, but on their own chosen guilt? What ruin awaits them, but that which they voluntarily pluck down upon themselves?

The Holy Spirit is thus rapidly leading you on to a point where this issue must come. He will not always strive with you. He will then either have sealed you unto the day of redemption, or have withdrawn his power from you forever. What condition can be more important than that in which you stand who are

now pressing forward to an eternal world, and are still undecided amidst all your privileges, what you shall select as your portion and your inheritance there? Yet such is the probable condition of the most who listen to me. O, that you may know, at least, in this your day, the things which belong unto your peace, for soon they will be hidden from your eyes.

III. The text admonishes you, that this decision must be speedily made. "The day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."

"The day of the Lord" is the hour of final determination of the destiny of the children of men. It is the day when his purposes are completed; when the actual trial for man is closed; and when the character and condition of each one are finally settled as they are to remain forever. According to the character of man, it is an hour of joy, or of deep and dreadful mourning. It is the day on which he makes a final separation between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not; the day in which he makes up his jewels, gathers his wheat into his garner, separates the precious from the vile, binds the tares in bundles for the fire, and delivers over the ungodly unto eternal perdition.

Soon for every man, this day must certainly come at the period of death. The hours of consideration will thus be finished, and the actual enjoyment of the glories of heaven, or the actual endurance of the pains of hell, will close all opportunities to make that great selection, for which life was prolonged amidst the privileges of the Gospel. But when men are awakened to consider their spiritual interests, to see and feel the necessity of some salvation, their day

of decision is probably, much nearer, than the day of their death. An anxious and inquiring mind cannot long remain undecided, in regard to the course to be pursued. While men are unmoved and careless, they may suppose themselves to be postponing the determination which they are required to make. But when their attention is arrested, and their thoughtfulness is excited, by the infinitely important concerns of the soul, the mind of man is brought to a point, and cannot remain hesitating long. While the wax is melted the impression must be made. And in the case of the awakened sinner, whatever the choice may be, it is generally a final one. He is made now to see the facts in his case as they are, and while he thus sees them, it is impossible to postpone his decision concerning them. It is his privilege and his duty, immediately to embrace a Saviour, and to rejoice in him. The Lord Jesus is willing, and waiting to receive him; and he is invited to come unto him, ignorant and perishing as he is, to obtain the mercy and the help he needs. His first, instant duty is, to accept the promises of the Gospel. And whenever he shall yield his will to Christ, and submit himself wholly to the Saviour's will and power, he is safe. But this state of mere conviction, while he refuses to seek for pardon in a Saviour's merits, is a state of continually increasing guilt. If he continue to refuse an acceptance of the Gospel, and a submission of himself to God, he remains more certainly a rebel than he was before. He now goes on in his guilt, with his eyes fully opened to his danger. And every hour increases the hopelessness of his condition, and his despair of ever attaining the life he needs.

My friends, you cannot remain long in a state like this. You must decide, and you will decide, in some way, for the character and prospects of your souls. The day of the Lord is near. It cannot be postponed. This is, in a peculiar sense, your accepted time, and this is your day of salvation. The night is before you, when nothing can be done, and nothing can be gained for your souls. Some of you will resist the Holy Ghost, until he will depart from you. You will be left in a hardened, careless state of mind. Your consciences will relapse into unconcern; you will sink into forgetfulness and aversion from God; and go down from depth to depth, to final loss and ruin. It will have been better for you, if you had never been awakened, if you had never thought of your souls, if you had continued from the beginning, and perished in an originally careless, hardened state. Now you have chosen, in the face of every motive, and duty, and privilege, the inheritance of sorrow which is laid up for unbelieving men. O, how painful is the thought, that this will soon, perhaps, be the case of some who now hear me! They will go on rejecting the goodness of God against themselves, until no place will be found for repentance, and no room will be left for hope. It is rare indeed, after a man has been once solemnly aroused to think of the things which belong to his peace, if he reject the offers of the Gospel, that he feels any willingness to have his attention again called to them. He passes out of the valley of decision, and the Lord departs from him. God waits among you to be gracious, but he will not be mocked. How important then becomes your present condition! While you are candidates for eternity, encompassed with pri-

vileges, how serious and influential, may be the next step you will take in the great concerns of your souls! Who shall estimate its consequences for you? Who shall retrieve its possible errors?

For others, the day of the Lord is near, as the commencement of everlasting liberty and hope. They will be led to build themselves on the Lord Jesus Christ. They will lay themselves down on his merits, as their chosen foundation. They will be safe in him forever. They will pass from a conviction that they are lost and need a restoration, to a godly sorrow for sin, to a full submission to God, to an entire renovation of heart; and in this change of heart and character, they will have that repentance unto salvation, which is not to be repented of. They will be welcomed to the favour of God, and into his abode of everlasting peace, and made the objects of his peculiar and unchanging love. How happy will be their condition! How precious their privilege! How joyful for them, is the fact, that the day of the Lord is near!

My friends, many of you are this day in this narrow valley of decision. It will soon be passed by you. But whither will you pass from it? Will you return to impenitent sin, and unchangeable ruin? Or will you ascend from it with Christ, to glory and to God? This is the question, for which I press your determination. In the presence of an heart-searching God, it must be decided by yourselves. What multiplied and powerful motives combine to urge you to make your calling and election sure! To-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, as in past days of provocation; but hear the voice, embrace the promises, and obey the commands of God your Saviour.

XV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S HINDRANCES.

GENESIS xxiv. 56.—*And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way.*

THE energy and self-devotion with which men pursue the business of the present world, furnish us with many illustrations of that total surrender of ourselves to the service of Almighty God, which he requires of us all. We daily behold instances of men, who in their ardent desire for some distinct, and in their estimation, valuable object of pursuit, are willing to banish all other purposes from their minds, and appear to consider the whole value of life, as consisting in the opportunity, which it presents for this single selected pursuit. The man of industry, the child of pleasure, the victim of sensuality, the aspirant for the honours of the world, are accustomed to set up their individual plans as the sun in their firmament, and to consider the time occupied in them, as the main engagement of their life. They have made an unequivocal surrender of themselves to a peculiar end. And whatever attempts to interfere with their attain-

ment of this end, they arrest and repel with the exclamation of the servant of Abraham, "hinder me not."

From an observation of this singleness of purpose among men, directed to the acquisition of supposed advantages in the present world, our Lord derives one of the serious admonitions which he gives to his disciples; "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." If there were no room for this comparative reproof, who can calculate the beneficial results which would flow for the church of Christ? If the same monopolizing spirit which is seen to mark the affairs and course of those who have laid up their treasure on the earth, should constrain and govern all the members of Christ, elevated above all worldly engagements, and directed to the salvation of souls, and to the imperishable glories of an eternal state of being; how soon would the church of the Lord Jesus arise and shine, and the glory of the Lord be seen rising upon her.

Let us announce some brilliant scheme of gain, let us scatter the invitations of gayety and mirth, let us exhibit the little elevations which are bestowed by popular breath, and how eager and pressing are the hearts of men for their attainment! Nothing else appears in their view to be of comparative importance. "Give me this, or I die," they are ready to exclaim. But when we would lead the affections of men to glory and to God, then a lion is in the way; something else must be first attended to; a more convenient season will certainly arrive; at any rate, they desire to be excused. In this course of effort, a thousand hindrances interfere, and very few are found willing to con-

tend with them all, and to hate and renounce all other things for the sake of Christ. This cross to be immediately borne, is frequently an insuperable obstacle; and the prospect of self-denial is almost as repulsive as the fear of death. Many who hear, and apparently desire to embrace, the invitations of the Gospel, thus go away from Christ, and walk no more with him. They cannot endure the difficulties which they meet, and the words which they hear. Instead of girding themselves for a race, with a fixed determination so to run that they may obtain, they give up their first desires for salvation, and lie down in despondency, if not with contentment, amidst the snares and dangers of a state of unpardoned sin.

There are, doubtless, many hindrances, and great hindrances, arising from a variety of sources, both from our own hearts, and from the course of the world around us, in every stage of our Christian course. Some of these I purpose to consider. Whatever they may be, the reason which the servant of Abraham gives in our text, for his haste in the performance of duty, and which I design to accommodate to our present purpose, may be used as an answer to all attempts to lead us away from God. "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way." The Lord hath prospered our way. He has provided means for our return to him. He has awakened us from entire carelessness. He has bestowed upon us thus far, all the comfort and peace which we have received, and enabled us to do all that we have done for him. These past manifestations of his goodness to our souls, encourage us to strive for greater attainments, and excite us to press forward to a full experience of his renew-

ing and saving power. Our past prosperity is an unceasing encouragement to future effort, and may be employed as an answer to every hindrance. Under this view would I adopt the expression of our text.

I. It is the entreaty of an awakened sinner returning to the Lord. "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way." An open door is set before him. A new and living way of salvation invites him. But there are many adversaries. Just awakened to know and feel his own unworthiness and danger, his heart is tender and fearful. He would gladly indulge the hope of safety, but a thousand apprehensions break in upon his peace, and fill him with mourning and bitterness. When he looks upon the misery to which he has been reduced by sin, he gladly resolves, "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But when he remembers the rebellious discontent which first led him from his Father's house, the ungrateful and proud spirit with which he has wandered through the world, and the hateful appearance of his whole character in his Father's eye, he is almost ready to despair of acceptance with him, and to resolve never to attempt a return which seems so little likely to be successful.

In this state of hesitation and difficulty for the convicted sinner, a thousand hindrances are suggested to his mind. His sins are too many and too great to be forgiven. His name is not in the book of life. God will not accept his return. He has no true penitence for sin. He but deceives himself in the idea, that he is sorry for his transgressions. His tears are selfish

and vain. His awakened feelings are but a delusion. He can never hope to be better. He can never overcome the evil habits of his life, or the sinful dispositions of his heart. He will be, and must be ruined, and it is wiser for him to sit down, and try to make himself contented with the prospect. So much disquietude and concern are altogether unnecessary. His life has never been especially immoral. There are many others far more depraved than he. There is, therefore, no peculiar reason in his case, for so great excitement upon the subject. These, and many like them, are in different cases, specimens of the method in which the tempter argues. The answer of the awakened soul may be the same to all, "hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way." "Salvation is freely offered, and I will embrace it. There is a wrath to come, and I will hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest. Jesus the Saviour, declares himself ready to receive me, and nothing shall separate me from his love. My mind has been graciously awakened by him, to seek for the things which belong unto my peace, and I will not suffer it to sink again into lethargy and spiritual death. I have had a full experience of the condition of an unpardoned sinner. I will not again willingly yield myself to its bondage. O, that I had the wings of a dove, then would I flee away and be at rest."

The worldly and careless around him scoff at his fears, and deride his apprehensions. They feel not the burden of guilt. They know not the terrors of an awakened conscience, and they can mock when fear cometh. They say he is insane, or foolishly and unnecessarily excited. There is no reason in his

views of his own condition. It is enthusiasm and cowardice. They would lead him back again to the exhilarating amusements of life. They would persuade him to brush off in the recreations of society, the gloom which hangs upon his spirits. They would urge him to be himself again, and not to yield to these unmanly terrors and apprehensions. "Hinder me not," the persecuted penitent replies. "I have seen enough of worldly cheerfulness and mirth. I have seen that the end of that laughter is bitterness. The sorrows of a sinner's death-bed I will not try. The portion of the worldly shall not be mine. The just indignation of a holy God I will not provoke. He offers me forgiveness, and I will embrace it. He promises life, and I will not refuse it. He has prospered my way and drawn my heart to him, and I will run after him. I will seek a treasure in heaven, and where my treasure is, there shall my heart be also."

Many such hindrances the awakened sinner meets, before he can shake off the arts of Satan, or the scoffs of the worldly. The accumulation of his difficulties will sometimes almost drive him to despair. But it is a race in which he cannot rest. He has set up his standard towards Sion, and he must press on in the warfare, till he gain the victory. He knows that there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and he will not rest until he has there washed his sins away. This is the seed-time for his soul; and a season so valuable, so full of hope and advantage, shall not be allowed to pass without an adequate improvement. His mind was never before so excited by the revelations of an eternal world. The hopes of the Gospel never before seemed to be the things

which belonged to his peace. A Saviour's invitations never exhibited the worth which they now display. He cannot doubt that these new feelings are evidences that the Lord hath prospered, and will prosper his way. If he now seek him with sincerity, he shall find him. Should he now forsake him, he may well fear that he will cast him off forever.

If any of my hearers are thus described, I pray them to make a personal application of this important subject. Let nothing hinder you from finally obeying the truth. Cherish, cultivate, pray over the feelings of contrition which God has excited in your hearts. Vain and foolish men may scoff at your plans. But a future day will proclaim the wisdom of your choice, and the ruinous folly of theirs. The Lord has set before you a blessing which it is beyond the power of man to remove. If you deliberately and solemnly resolve upon your faithful return to him, he will hold you, and sustain you, and make you a conqueror, through him that hath loved you, and given himself for you. Press forward then, in a simple desire and determination to gain a final and everlasting interest in the Lord Jesus, and you shall not be disappointed in your hope, nor come short of the end you seek.

II. The words of our text may be the prayer of the new convert to Christ—the Christian who has just experienced the new creating grace of God; “hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way.” Interesting beyond the power of description, is the state of that person who is called in the Scriptures, “a babe in Christ;” who has just been brought from darkness into light, and for the first time in his

life, has tasted the powers of the world to come. If we can imagine the emotions which swelled the heart of the first man, when in the full power of intelligence, and with quick and strong perceptions, he opened his eyes upon the fair scene in which he had been placed, and saw every object around him, ripe with beauty, and glowing with a thousand attractions; we may have an interesting illustration of the new scenes, and unknown aspects of spiritual gifts and treasures, which press before the mind of one who has just tasted that the Lord is gracious. The Scriptures are found to have contents which he never saw before. The character of God appears to him full of glory, and shining in love. The great salvation which he has offered, seems worthy of all acceptance. Jesus appears infinitely precious and desirable. And he wonders that all these glories were never seen before. His whole heart is arrested and occupied with the objects and excitements of this first love.

But there are many hindrances surrounding this infantile state of grace. Though at first, the young believer fondly imagines that he has escaped beyond the reach of his enemies, that they have sunk as lead into the waters, to rise no more; he soon hears behind him, that cry of hell, "persecute him, and take him, for there is none to deliver him." The enemy presses him with innumerable difficulties, because he fears that his hour is short. He collects all the varied instruments of temptation which are furnished by a world lying in wickedness, to cast down one whom the Lord hath chosen. Every child of disobedience, every unconverted, careless man, is ready to cast a snare in his way. On one side, the syrens of worldly pleasure

are chanting their death-songs in the abodes of the thoughtless and giddy. On the other, all the opposition of malice, the open derisions even of worldly relatives and friends, like the howlings of evening wolves, unite to drive him back from his hope of peace. At one time he meets a sneer from some former companion in folly, at another, a false and unkind construction of the motives, by which he is governed in his new determinations. The merely nominal Christian, the cold and carnally minded professor, hates him, as one who assumes a higher standard of religious character, than he is pleased with. And all unite in the gratification which is felt and manifested, if in any thing he seem to come short, or if any accidental failure in duty shows him to be but partially subdued by grace. These various outward trials are severe. He looks round upon them all with sorrow; but he has no desire to yield to their proposal of desertion from the cause in which he has engaged. "Hinder me not," he cries to all. "Enjoy your follies if you can, but do not hate or persecute me, because I will rather love him who has redeemed me from them. I will not turn back. My heart and my hopes are fixed upon things which are above. I was a poor lost creature once, and Jesus loved me and called me by his grace. He has made me his servant, and I will not forsake him."

His own heart too, begins to show him more of his native character, and a greater portion of its extent of guilt. A fear of difficulties, an unholy desire for personal ease and indulgence, rise up within him, and give him frequent pain. Then he imagines that he could bear any outward trials; but these wicked

tempers and appetites, these unreasonable doubts and fears, ascending like the smoke from the bottomless pit, and clouding the comforts, and obscuring the peace of his mind, and shutting out his enjoyment of the reconciled countenance of God, form a new trial for him, which seems far more difficult to bear, than any thing which is outward. How often as he kneels before the throne of God in prayer, will his burdened spirit cry out in agony, "hinder me not, ensnare me not for my ruin; give me liberty of access to the throne of my Redeemer. O, thou Captain of my salvation, suffer not mine enemies to triumph over me." Then, how encouraging is the recollection, that the Lord hath prospered his way; that Jesus sought him in mercy when he was dead in sins, revealed to him the glorious sufficiency of his cross, and came to dwell in his heart by faith, as his hope of glory! The remembrance of what the Lord hath already done for him, raises up his heart again with confidence and rejoicing. The blessings which have already attended him, inspire him with new ardour, and render yet more eager and determined his desires and exertions for victory and rest. He is strengthened even by the conflict, and grows in an humble and active dependence upon the Lord his Righteousness, as his selfish trust is overthrown, and his own weakness is displayed to his view.

III. But hindrances do not disappear, even when men become old in grace. Our text may, therefore, be the petition of the Christian who is established in the faith, "hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way." Through the whole period of a mortal life, he not only dwells in the land of enemies,

but drags about with himself, a weight which is painfully retarding. The negligence, and sometimes the contempt, which he must consent to endure from the careless and ungodly, the opposition to which he must be frequently exposed, even from those of his own household, the evident contradiction to all his principles of conduct, by which the characters of others around him are marked, and the difficulties with which he contends, in his efforts to establish the Redeemer's truth, are often painful and oppressive hindrances. He may have passed beyond the attractions of sinful indulgences, and have risen altogether above the fear of man. But in his intercourse with other men, he experiences new difficulties which are by no means of less importance. He has deeper views of the fallen character and miserable condition of unregenerate men. He has more ardent desires for their salvation. He mourns with deeper feeling for the wickedness which overspreads the earth. As he looks around among men, truth seems to have perished, and righteousness to be clean gone forever. His heart sinks within him, at a view of the dangers and destruction which ungodly men bring upon themselves. So limited are the effects which the Gospel appears to have produced, so many and great are the inconsistencies with its holy principles, which he sees in many of its professors, such is the hardness of heart with which its sacred truths are repelled by the majority of men, even among some who are most dear to himself, that he finds in all these things a severe trial and temptation to his mind. Often, as he seeks to do good to men, these difficulties crowd together before him. Often, as he seeks an access to the

throne of God, they overwhelm all his efforts to pray. Exerting himself to rise above them, he cries, "hinder me not;" "draw me not back from him whom my soul loveth; destroy not my efforts to labour for him; for, though all others forsake him, yet will not I."

Besides these outward hindrances, he has also peculiar temptations within his own heart. There arises often around him, a cloud of darkness, which hides all his evidences of grace, and conceals the blessed witness which God has given him within himself. Momentary feelings of unbelief intrude themselves into his breast. Occasional coldness and torpidity spreads itself through the members of his spiritual man, threatening permanent paralysis and death. He obtains larger conceptions of the depravity of his own heart; and his soul often sickens over the views which are presented to him, as the Spirit of God carries him still farther into its recesses, and exposes to his observation greater abominations than he has seen before. Humbled and cast down with a consciousness of his own unworthiness to appear before God, he can hardly look up to the pure and holy character of him who inhabiteth eternity, without a feeling of despair. So ungrateful, so wandering, so unnecessarily sinful, has been the whole conduct of his life, that he deeply realizes the shame and confusion of face which belong to him, and his unworthiness to be called a child of God. Defects of character which used to be overlooked, and to give him no pain, now fill his mind with distress. He looks upon himself with more and more aversion, and with a deeper consciousness of his guilt. He feels more conscious also, that God must abhor him, and cannot

behold him but with displeasure ; except as he is seen in the righteousness of God his Saviour. Such feelings press upon him as a heavy burden ; often crush all his attempts to pray ; and compel him to cry out in the agony of a broken spirit, “ wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? ” Then does he exclaim in the language of our text, “ hinder me not, for the Lord hath prospered my way. ” “ Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, though I fall, yet shall I rise again ; and though I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. Sin has been pardoned ; God has received, and is able to keep me. I have entered into a covenant with him, from which I will never shrink, to walk before him, and to be his forever. And though I be not so with God, as I much desire to be, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, in all things well ordered and sure, which is all my salvation, and all my desire. ”

IV. Lastly, I may consider this as the demand of the faithful minister of the Gospel. “ Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way. ” The evidence that God has prospered his way, that through his labours, the Lord has added many souls unto his church of such as shall be saved, furnishes a comfort beyond expression, to the faithful minister, the man who watches for souls, as one that must give an account. This joy would be vastly increased, were there none disposed to hinder his way, and to retard the progress of the word of God. But the opposing passions and habits of sinful men, the long-indulged unbelief which has taken possession of their minds, the cold and lifeless system of religion which has been adopted by many professors of the Gospel, the

indolence of multitudes who are not willing to count all but loss for Christ's sake, are important hindrances in the way of his success. If the shepherd be smitten, the sheep will be easily scattered abroad. Whatever, therefore, the adversary can do to hinder his usefulness, and to counteract his exertions, will undoubtedly be called into requisition. A thousand worldly inducements are presented to draw him back. A thousand discouragements in the character and examples of professed fellow-labourers are thrown in his way. If a deep solicitude for the souls of men lead him to exhort, admonish, and entreat, with all long-suffering and doctrine, a strong repugnance is often excited against his preaching of the truth. If any are awakened under the word from his mouth, by the Spirit of God, an opposing influence is immediately brought into operation. Some enemy will scoff, or some false friend will lead away those whom God hath thus far blessed, from an influence so exciting. Trials from the world abroad, and trials from the professing church around him, continually beset his path. And what can sustain the minister of Christ in such a contest, save the prospering power of God, and the affectionate co-operation and prayers of those surrounding friends in Christ, whose hearts the Lord hath opened to receive the truth? His solemn demand upon every opposer of the Gospel, is, "hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way." "I have a momentous undertaking committed to me. The souls of men are perishing around me. Sinners must be rescued from eternal ruin. Multitudes are desiring salvation, and must be guided to the holy and immaculate Lamb of God. Wolves are ready to

break in upon the fold, and the flock of the Lord must be protected and sustained. God has set me forth for the defence of his truth, and wo is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel.”

This is my present petition to every sinful heart before me. Hinder not the operation of the truth of God. Let the Holy Spirit produce his perfect work of mercy in your hearts, showing your unworthiness, and displaying to you the new and glorious way of life eternal, which is laid open to you in the Gospel. Make no efforts to countenance your native alienation from God. Nothing can effectually hinder your conversion unto God, but the obstacles which yourselves interpose. If you are ready to yield to his will, he will overturn within you every sinful feeling, and bring your whole soul into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Upon yourselves God has made it to depend, whether our way shall be prospered among you. O, may he mercifully lead you to give his word free course, that it may be glorified here, in persuading you all to seek the salvation of God.

XVI.

DIFFICULTIES OF OLD AGE.

JEREMIAH vi. 4.—*Wo unto us! for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out.*

THE subject which from this text I design to commend to your notice, is an old age without piety. It is truly a painful subject. But it is one to which faithfulness in duty requires us to call the serious attention of procrastinating man. In the remarks which I shall have occasion to make upon this subject, so far as they are addressed to those who have not yet attained this late period of life, it will be my duty to employ the most solemn admonition and warning. In regard to those among my hearers, who are already aged, or who are verging upon it in the declining years of manhood, it becomes me to use the utmost tenderness of manner, without yielding at all the solemnity of warning, or the ardour of persuasion.

The command of St. Paul to Timothy was, “rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father, and the elder women as mothers.” The same spirit of compassionate respect, the law of God has also enjoined,

in directing our deportment towards the aged. "The nakedness of thy father, and the nakedness of thy mother, thou shalt not uncover." "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God; I am the Lord." In the spirit of these precepts, would I govern my present remarks. It is my desire, in the meekness of wisdom which the Gospel requires, to show the inevitable danger and sorrow which they must entail upon themselves, who come to the winter days of man, unpardoned, unclothed, and without hope; and in opposition to this, the comfort and peace which he will enjoy, whose hoary head is found in the way of righteousness.

It may be that some who hear me, will feel constrained to adopt the mournful exclamation of the text in regard to themselves. Their time for labour is drawing to its close, and in the deepening shadows of the evening, no light is seen to guide and cheer them through the approaching darkness. If I address any who have lived for many years in the midst of divine mercies, and of the abundant privileges of divine grace, and are conscious that they are yet unreconciled to God, I would not utter to them a single word of reproach. I would entreat them as fathers and mothers, to give glory to the Lord their God, before he cause darkness, and their feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while they look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. If they begin to see and to feel, the desolate condition of an old age without the presence of a reconciled God; if they find themselves fast hastening to an eternal world, without the certain hope and comfort which the Gospel gives; I would beseech

them to devote with just so much the greater earnestness, their few remaining days to the vast concerns of their approaching judgment, and their endless being.

None of you can think the present subject an inappropriate one, who have observed how many of the most respected portion of our community, in an advanced period of life, have yet made no open profession of their attachment to the Saviour, but still habitually turn away from the table of the Lord, as if they had no need of the provisions of divine grace. To such would I seriously and affectionately address the considerations arising from our present text. I desire them to receive the word of exhortation to which they listen, while we speak of the difficulties and sorrows of old age without piety, the trials and cares of the aged sinner, who has found no personal interest for himself in the merits of a Saviour, and in the abiding comforts of his love.

The DIFFICULTIES OF THE AGED SINNER, is the subject of our present discourse. "Wo unto us! for the day goeth away, and the shadows of the evening are stretched out."

I. "The day goeth away;" this presents the first difficulty to be noticed. That period of life during which the Saviour grants to men the privileges of his Gospel, is known in the Scriptures under this designation. It is a day—the day of salvation. It is a day in which he waits for the sinner's repentance, and is especially ready to aid and to bless his efforts to return to him; a day in which the Holy Spirit attends the preaching of the word, and makes it effectual in the hearts of those who believe. The great object

to be attained by man during the continuance of this day, is a reconciliation to God, and the consequent enjoyment of his favour and love. They who seek him early in this day, have a promise that they shall find him. Then, the way of return to him is open and easily found, and is filled with assurance and encouragement to those who enter upon it.

But in advanced age, this reconciliation to God is rendered embarrassing and painful by this first difficulty, "the day goeth away." The appointed period of grace is coming rapidly to its conclusion. The aged sinner looks back upon a long duration of mercy which has passed by him unimproved. Every privilege of the Gospel has brought with it an individual responsibility. None of its advantages can have been enjoyed without the attendant obligation to render an account. And O, how solemn, how accumulated, is the record which must stand against that man who has for twenty, perhaps, for thirty years or more, received from God the ample provisions of the Gospel, and yet derived no benefit from them for his own soul! The heathen, who in his old age, for the first time listens to the invitations and promises of the Gospel, has in them but the commencement of this day of grace, and is regarded under the same aspect as a child in a Christian land, with similar opportunities of attaining religious knowledge. But the aged man in a land of Christian light, has had from the beginning of his life, the privileges which are first offered to the idolator in his latter days. And how responsible and hazardous is such a condition! Two thousand solemn public calls of the Gospel are to be accounted for by some of my hearers, besides the vast

multitude of private opportunities of knowledge, which have produced no beneficial influence upon their character or their prospects. How alarming is the danger of being thrust down to hell under this load of wasted privileges and blessings from heaven! How serious is the difficulty which this neglected period of mercy interposes to a spiritual return to God!

“The day goeth away.” It has been enjoyed in the fulness of its privileges. It has been for some, far protracted. But while it has been thus unimproved, it has tended only to increase the guilt and danger of the soul. For fifty years the Redeemer has called upon some now aged sinner to turn to him and live. For fifty years, angels have watched for the hour of his conversion. For fifty years, divine Providence has crowned his ways with loving-kindness and tender mercy. For fifty years, there has been consternation in hell, lest he should be persuaded to accept the Saviour’s invitations, and flee from the captivity of Satan. But, up to this hour, amidst the whole of this surrounding interest in his determination, his mind still remains alienated from God. To drive away the convictions of his youth, the Saviour was answered by a promise for the years of maturity. In maturity, he was put off to a yet more advanced age, by the cares and labours of life which had then so multiplied around the man, that no time could be given to the soul. And now the declining years of life have come, and what is to be the final result? Satan is now tempting him to sit down in sullen despair, under the feeling that when so much time has gone by, there can be no remaining room for

hope; that he is too old to change a course of habits which have been for so many years contracted and indulged; and that it is better for him now to submit with fortitude to that which has become a kind of necessity for his soul. When we offer to him now, the kind and precious invitations of the Gospel, he can answer, "I would gladly accept them, but alas, I have wasted so much time; I have lived so long in a careless state of mind upon this great subject; I have had so many mercies which have not been improved; that I have now no hope of being able to return. The day goeth away; and I fear I must submit to a night of darkness, without comfort and without hope." O, how distressing is this condition of an aged sinner! How difficult is it to arouse him to a consciousness, or belief, of the privileges which are yet remaining, and of the duty which yet rests upon him! He thinks he would rejoice to return to an offended God, but the recollection of wasted opportunities drives him to despair, and he fears that there remains no hope for his soul, if he should attempt it.

II. A second difficulty which the text suggests as attending upon the aged sinner, is the short period of grace which is now remaining for him. "The shadows of the evening are stretched out." Many years have passed by him without improvement. But few, very few, at the best, are now left for the attainment of his soul's salvation. As life passes by, the work to be done increases, in the same proportion that the time in which it is to be done is diminished. That reconciliation to God, which in youth was comparatively easy, becomes in this advanced period of life so difficult, that it seems well nigh impossible.

The man who has postponed the care of his soul to the last hours of life, finds when these hours arrive, that he has so much work to do in other relations in which he finds himself placed, that his soul's salvation becomes almost hopeless. Standing upon the verge of eternity, and looking into the darkness which there spreads before him, the aged sinner feels, that the danger which was before little heeded, and considered quite remote, is now near and dreadful. Beholding the unchanging holiness of God contrasted with his own continued alienation from him, he sees that the distance between himself and his Creator, has been immeasurably increased by this voluntary estrangement. In his youth he had wandered widely from his God. But now he finds himself to have gone so much farther astray, that the period of youth seems to be comparatively, a period of innocence.

And now, how shall he travel back over this whole distance by which he is separated from an holy God? It has taken him, perhaps, fifty years, to accomplish his outward bound journey. Can he hope for fifty years more, as a period for his return? He set out early in the morning to go astray from God. Through the whole day, he has been pressing forward in his course, with unabating rapidity. And now, when the day has gone, and the shadows of the evening are stretched out, and exhausted nature is asking for repose; alas, is this an hour in which to commence the journey of a day? Is this a time in which to begin a work, which as soon as it is commenced, midnight darkness may at once arrest forever? Death now stands at the door. The line which separates him from eternity, has dwindled to a hair. And he is

tempted to yield to total despair of escaping at all from the ruin which is so close upon him. The difficulty which his own heart presents as thus arising from his shortened remaining period of probation, Satan employs as a temptation to him, to be quiet and careless under his conscious load of sin. He acknowledges that he ought to have made up his mind before this time, as to a course of duty, for his life. But he answers all the admonitions which are given him to excite him now to action, that if he has been all this time wrong, it will be a hopeless undertaking, at this late period, to enter upon a better course and system. The pride and the stability of age interfere. He cannot yield to those strong cryings and tears, which might make up in some degree for the loss of time, and do in a little while the work of many years. He cannot make any sudden changes now. He cannot, and he does not wish, to obtain or exercise a spirit of deep and agonizing earnestness for his soul. There is no opportunity for the perfecting of any slower or more gradual work. There is no time left him to finish such an undertaking. Thus he argues against himself, and against those who love his precious but ruined soul. If he had to begin his life anew, he freely confesses that he would not pass it as he has done. He cheerfully advises those who are young, by no means to follow his example of procrastination, but in the commencement of their life, to make provision for their eternity. But while he gives this advice to others, he feels himself compelled to pursue the course in which he has been so long engaged. Thus it is, that aged parents can behold their children experiencing the power of religion, rejoicing in

the life and happiness of the Gospel, and uniting themselves to the people of God; and can even feel a degree of pleasure at the sight, because they know it is the only path of safety or peace; while they themselves remain far from the ways of God, and are living, and are willing to live, without any interest in the covenant of redeeming mercy; so many difficulties surround the possibility of their return to God, that the remaining time is not sufficient to remove them.

III. A third difficulty in the way of the aged sinner, arises from the increased hardness of his own heart. He cannot now attain the liveliness of feeling which marked the period of his youth. When he was young, conviction of sin impressed his mind. The solemn proclamations of religious truth awakened his attention. His eyes could weep under the preaching of the Gospel. His affections could be attracted by the inviting hopes and promises which it offered. He then often felt strongly excited towards a life of holiness and piety. But now he has no such feelings. He sits unmoved beneath the preaching of the divine word. The rain which descends to refresh others, seems rather to hasten his decay. In the pathetic description of Barzillai, "he can no more hear the voice of singing men, or of singing women." His ears have grown dull with age, and the most awakening calls of truth can produce no influence upon his mind. He often wishes that he were as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shined upon his habitation; that he could renew again the awakened feelings and anxious desires of an earlier period. He sometimes looks with a kind of envy upon younger persons who

are brought under the renewing influence of the Gospel; and he longs, as he thinks, to bend in humbleness of mind, at the Saviour's feet. But he can find no place for repentance. He cannot exercise a godly sorrow. The summer and the harvest have passed without advantage, and every succeeding day of autumn, seems only to dry, and harden, and seal up the earth, against the arrival of a frost-bound and cheerless winter.

This hardness of heart, the necessary effect of a long continuance in an unconverted state of character, forms a most serious difficulty in the way of an aged sinner's return to God. I do not here speak of any judicial hardening of the heart by the power of God. Under such a sentence, it is vain to talk of difficulties. But I refer to the universal and natural effect of a continued rejection of the Gospel, to show how entirely unfit, a late period of life is, for the attainment of the deep and pervading emotions of a renewed and spiritual mind. The rapid passage of the day renders every hour which is left, of tenfold importance. The stretching out of the shadows of the evening, admonish the aged man, "what thou doest, do quickly." But this encasing of the affections, this hard and callous state of the heart, blocks up the way, and prevents the accomplishment of the work which remains still to be done. A tyrant necessity drives man on to run with untried rapidity, and he has so bound fetters around his own feet, that he has not power to move. Many a long-lived sinner attempts in the last hours of life, like aged Joab, to cling to the horns of the altar for protection, and finds that even there, his hoary hairs, the monuments only of long-continued

rebellion and sin, cannot come down to the grave in peace.

IV. The fourth difficulty in the way of the conversion of the aged sinner to which I would refer, is the pride of character which is always an attendant upon advanced periods of life. There is but one way of salvation opened for man whether young or old. He must come down at the Saviour's feet as an humble, heart-broken sinner, to obtain pardon and peace in his atonement, and acceptance with God freely through him. This implies an acknowledgment, that through the whole preceding life, he has been in a state of rebellion against God, that he has gone astray from his birth, that he is now anxious to come entirely back to the point from whence he at first set out, and to seek the free and undeserved mercy of a Saviour, whom he has hitherto rejected. This to the proud nature of man, is a most humiliating course. The pride of age rebels at once against it. The wandering child can go home to a pious parent, with a broken spirit, and a weeping eye, and confess the shame and sorrow, which the remembrance of a life of sin produces. But a parent who has grown old without an experience of religion, cannot come down, to ask the counsel and prayers, of a child who has found the Saviour and is rejoicing in his love. The pride of age prohibits such a course. The heart may be often moved, the conscience awakened, and the emotions aroused, in the bosom of an aged transgressor, and a strong desire be felt, to lay down his burden, and find peace in believing in Jesus. But an assumed dignity and coolness of manner are drawn over a broken, bleeding spirit, because an acknowledgment of these awakened feel-

ings, will be so humiliating to the age and station of the individual concerned. But there remains no other course of safety. To this humbling ground, sinful man must be brought, or he will assuredly perish. Age furnishes no exemption. Nay, so far from doing this, it requires still deeper abasement, from the longer continuance in guilt.

This difficulty is now preventing, and has long been preventing the return of many aged hearers of the Gospel, to God. They are convinced, as they listen to its calls, of the necessity and advantage of the course pointed out. They almost resolve to pursue it. But when they return from the sanctuary of God to their own homes, the confession to children, and servants, and friends, that they have been all this time in the wrong, is so painful and repulsive to their minds, that they cannot yield. Perhaps the determination is made to commence a course of family worship, to enter upon a succession, of Christian duties and requirements, long neglected; perhaps the hand is actually laid upon the Bible, to commence the work; when the heart flutters with indecision, and the pride of age rises up, and chokes the utterance, and takes away the strength. If there were some more secret, and less humiliating way opened, they would embrace it; but probably this increasing pride will always forbid their coming down to the humbled spirit of a child, to seek the salvation which is freely offered to their acceptance. With such a difficulty thus submitted to in their way, they may well adopt the exclamation of our text. "Wo unto us! for the day goeth away, and the shadows of the evening are stretched out." "The harvest is past, and the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

Their whole work of salvation is to be accomplished, and their hearts are now found so hardened and proud, that they are unable to set out upon the great work, which the whole of life is little enough to finish.

In concluding this discourse, I would earnestly impress upon your minds, the thoughts which have been presented. Many of you, my friends, have lived past the middle point of life, and yet are without God in the world. How improvident would you consider yourselves to be, if you had waited until this time, without selecting for yourselves, a business for the present life, or without beginning to lay up any thing in this world, for yourselves, or your families! What would you think of the man or woman, forty years of age, who was just agitating the question, what course of life shall I pursue to obtain my bread? If this subject had never gained attention until then, you would deem it almost an hopeless attempt, to consider it at all. But how many have passed this age, and have never entered upon the work of their soul's salvation! Perhaps some of them have hardly thought of the question whether they have souls to save. How sad is this condition! How many difficulties surround their way! The path of religion seems so much blocked up, that salvation appears almost beyond their reach.

You will say, that this view is most discouraging. Nothing, my brethren, is so discouraging, as this carelessness of habit, from which I desire to arouse you. You had far better feel despair, than feel nothing. When you do despond, we may hope, that you will embrace the arm extended for your rescue. The thoughts which have been now pressed upon your attention ought to excite you, to an earnest, deter-

mined exertion for your eternal safety. Your time is short. Your difficulties are many. Your work is arduous. Still eternal safety is within your reach, and your escape is not impossible. If you would set yourselves immediately and earnestly about it, God would remove the difficulties, and give you success. Nothing is wanting in God. You are not straitened in him. If you will be reconciled to him, in his appointed Saviour, you will find peace. If you will still reject him, your difficulties will still increase. And as the day sinks in darkness, and the shadows of the evening are stretched out, to be soon lost in unchanging night, a deeper, and a deeper wo, will be sounded from your souls, and echoed back upon you, from the regions of despair. O fly from impending ruin to the arms of Jesus. However painful and humbling the outset may be, the humbling step is but one. Be willing to be abased before God, that he may exalt you in due time. Accept the righteousness of Jesus, and be found in him, converted and sanctified, and you shall be happy and secure. But if you still delay, every day will make the matter worse; and what the end shall be, your own consciences are fully able to declare.

XVII.

THE SORROWS OF OLD AGE.

ECCLESIASTES vi. 3.—*If a man live many years, so that the days of his years are many, and his soul be not filled with good, I say that an untimely birth is better than he.*

LONG life has ever been esteemed by man as a great and desirable blessing. In the early periods of the world, the number of years which were comprised in such a life, was so great, that in our present experience, we can hardly imagine the appearance or the feelings of a man, whose locks were the growth of centuries, and who had lived, to behold the descent of many hundreds of immortal beings from himself. When the fallen nature of man had transformed this lengthened period of trial, into a more extended progress of iniquity, a more unfathomable depth of sin, the divine Creator cut down in successive generations, man's opportunity of rebellion against himself, to less than one-tenth the period first granted to the human race. No longer like the oak witnessing the passage of centuries, now, we all do fade as a leaf. At the utmost ordinary limit, the days of man are but threescore years and ten. The wish for long life can hardly extend itself, beyond this narrow compass of man's numbered days.

Few in fact attain this utmost limit. And men are accustomed to arrange their plans for business and exertion, within a far narrower compass, than the hope of this would allow them. In our worldly occupations, we are governed by the principle, that what is to be done, must be done quickly. No man in the possession of his reason, thinks of laying out a plan for the acquisition of wealth, or for the attainment of any object of mere worldly desire, which is to be commenced, when he has attained the age of threescore years and ten. To say, that he would then set out, upon a business which his whole life should have been employed in finishing, and the care for which should at that time be dismissed, from a mind which needs to be at rest from labour, would justly stamp a man with the reputation of insanity. He who should announce his intention to bind himself when he had attained the age of seventy, as an apprentice to a trade, or to enter as a pupil in a school, or even to plant an orchard in his ground, with the hope of eating of the fruit which it should bear him, would be an object of pity or ridicule. And yet how many are hoping to prepare for an eternal occupation, and to attain an inexhaustible knowledge, in this last flickering of human existence! In the business of this world, men are wise. It is only when we bring them to the concerns of a world to come, that they seem to have laid the dominion of reason aside.

But what is the real object, for which the present life of man has been bestowed, and is prolonged? Is it to acquire a trade? to obtain an education in science? or to lay up treasures which may be moth-eaten and destroyed? If we should derive our answer from the

habits of mankind, it would seem to be this. But if we go to the wisdom of God, for our reply, there is presented before us a far different end. In our text, the wise preacher supposes a man to have seen the utmost possible limit of human existence. And then he estimates the worth of the whole of this proud and protracted life, if it has passed without the acquisition of that object which the word of God proposes for the attainment of man. "If a man live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, I say that an untimely birth is better than he; for he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness." One far wiser than Solomon, has given us the same estimate, in that striking demand which he has built upon man's universal love for gain, "what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" When he has examined his account in the light of eternity, how much will it appear that he has gained in exchange for his soul? Perhaps the experience of some who hear me, may soon furnish them, the exact, and the only adequate reply to these demands, and constrain them to adopt our Lord's assertion in reference to Judas, in its application to themselves, "it had been good for us if we had not been born." "For who can dwell with the devouring fire? who can dwell with everlasting burnings?"

In speaking upon this all-important subject, we will consider first,

I. WHAT IS THE GREAT OBJECT OF HUMAN LIFE.
And,

II. THE SORROWS OF THE MAN WHO HAS LIVED LONG WITHOUT ATTAINING IT.

I. The great object for which the present life of man was given, is that "the soul may be filled with good." It was to gain this, that each one has been placed in his period of earthly education. It is for this alone, that divine forbearance lengthens out to grey hairs, the life of man who has not yet secured it, to give to men, the full opportunity to be wise, and to think of the things which belong to their peace. The possession of an immortal soul, a soul which must be rejoicing in unspeakable good, or lamenting in unutterable evils, ages after the body in which it has dwelt, has returned to dust as it was, forms man's chief distinction from the brutes which perish.

How then shall this soul be filled with good? Is there any thing within the limits of the gifts of this world, which can thus fill it? Is there any creature on earth, which can form a recompense for its loss? Can any proud neglecter of God carry the wealth of the present world, to bribe the flames, or to corrupt the tormentors, of a world to come? Can he buy out his pardon with money? When he can sow grace in the furrows of his field, or fill his barns with glory, when he can plough up heaven from the earth, and extract God from perishing creatures, the world may fill his soul with good and furnish an adequate exchange for its loss.

But who does not see, the utter disproportion between the desires of the soul, and all the fruits which earth produces? The sinner is descending, where his earthly glory cannot descend after him, and where, for a soul unredeemed, all redemption ceaseth forever. Naked he came into the world, and naked must he leave it again. He has to stand, where his soul will

constitute his all; where the crowns of kings, and the shackles of prisoners, the robes of princes, and the rags of beggars will form no distinctions: where all classes of men must answer upon an equal footing and plea, for eternity; and where, an experience of the power of godliness in a life of probation, will form the only ground for hope. What then is the good, with which the soul must be filled?

That man who has found a reconciled God, has filled his soul with good. There is none good but one, that is God. He who has received Emmanuel into his heart by faith, so that God dwells in him, and he in God, has found the one great abiding good for man.

The privileges of the Gospel are bestowed, and the Saviour's voice is calling, upon man, through his whole period of probation, his day of grace, that he may be led to seek salvation in that infinite atonement which is offered as his only good. In himself, there dwelleth no good thing. None of the attainments which are within the reach of man's own powers can procure for him, the least permanent good. In the unconverted soul, there dwelleth nothing, but defilement and guilt and ruin. And man has no experience of good, until he has been brought, with a broken and contrite spirit, to lay down his hopes and desires at the feet of Jesus, and to seek for peace and salvation, through his death for sin. The converted and justified soul is filled with good, because it is made the habitation of God through the Spirit. The unconverted soul has not seen God, neither known him, and has therefore no good.

How important then, becomes the doctrine of our text! "If a man live many years, so that the days of his years are many, and his soul be not filled with

good;" if he be still in an unconverted state; if he has never submitted his heart to the dominion of the Saviour, and has, therefore, no hope or treasure laid up for himself in another world; "I say that an untimely birth is better than he." Any state within the conception of man, short of the final and interminable agonies and despair of a world of recompense, is preferable to the state of an old man, who still refuses the hopes and offers of the Gospel.

II. I am thus led to my second and main topic of remark, the sorrows of the man who has lived long, without attaining this great object of life, whose soul is not "filled with good." If there be such an one before me, I pray him to consider the evils which he is bringing upon himself, the sorrows which are multiplying around him, while he is thus without God in the world.

1. The first of these which we may notice, is that he has passed through a life, a reflection upon which gives him no comfort. So has the divine Creator constituted the human mind, that man is frequently impelled to look back upon his own conduct and character. Even when he desires to forget himself, he finds that he cannot do it. Past days and years rush spontaneously upon his recollection, and bring with them their several loads of joy or sorrow, to lay them down before him, for his deliberate and inevitable inspection. Man is thus constantly laying up something for his latter days. And according as he has sown, so must he then reap.

To the true Christian, this review of life, humbling as a knowledge of sin makes it, is in many respects highly comforting. It gives him new cause of thank-

fulness, when he can look back from the vale of age, or the bed of death, and see that his life has been cheerfully consecrated unto God, who made and who has upheld it; and that Ebenezers, as monuments of gratitude for divine goodness, have been set up in every path through which he has passed. In the midst of all the trials of Job, this retrospect upon the divine goodness to him, gave him unspeakable comfort. "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness unto me, because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him; the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." Such reflections gave him no pain, and he gladly ascribed all the glory to the Almighty who was with him, and whose candle shined upon his habitation. David could say, "I have been young, and now am old, and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken." Paul could look back upon a long ministry for him who loved him when he was in the ignorance of unbelief, and say, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me in that day." In a similar spirit, and with like comfort, every aged disciple may look back upon his life, and the reflection will be made to impart to him, real and important consolation.

But what sorrow and self-crimination arises from the recollection of a wasted life! No beam of light is cast upon the mind from any act or feeling which

memory brings to view. Every hour rises up as the accuser of a guilty conscience. The remembrance of youth, is a remembrance of convictions smothered, the Holy Spirit resisted, and a Saviour's love despised. The thoughts upon manhood present the awful picture, of the self-immolation of the sinner's soul to the enemy of God and man, upon the altar of worldly gain. The latter years as they have collected upon each other, and are thrusting him down so rapidly from the earth, seem ready to fall upon him with their neglected privileges, and to grind him to powder. All the resolutions and plans which were made for life, have gone by unfulfilled. Every opportunity has been lost. Every mercy has been abused. The various scenes of past years, which in their approach, seemed to be a pillar of light and hope, now they are looked back upon, show no aspect but a thick cloud of darkness and despondency. O, what sorrow for the aged sinner, does such a life produce! How often does it lead him to exclaim, "O that I had been cut off from the womb, that I had perished from my birth!" And yet, how many of you, my friends, are thus laying up sorrows, which shall consume your flesh, as it were fire! Nothing but sorrow will arise to you, from a life which has thus been spent without Christ. Old age may be crowned with human glory, loaded with earthly wealth, and having every comfort which the power of man can give; but this reflection upon a soul destroyed, a Saviour crucified afresh, will tear the glory from the royal diadem, and turn the sweetest joys of earth into anguish and poison.

2. A second sorrow of old age without piety, is that man is pressing onward to a near eternity, for

which he has no preparation. The only preparation which any sinner can have for a happy eternity, consists in his being found in the Lord Jesus Christ, clothed with his righteousness, and freely ransomed through his blood. Eternity itself cannot be avoided. There is no discharge in that war. Man is pressed forward to the valley of the shadow of death with a resistless force. Whether he be prepared or unprepared, he must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. This course is altogether inevitable. In youth, the thought of it seems to be easily removed, because the day of parting appears to be so far off. The youth may live to be an old man, and he imagines that he will then find time and opportunity enough, to take care of his soul. But when old age has actually arrived, the hour of death cannot be far removed. Soon then, the body must dissolve, and the immortal spirit must go to bear witness for itself before the throne of the heart-searching God. The prospect which was before a distant one, now comes to the very door. The man stands upon the margin of the ocean. It spreads itself before him, with an inconceivable magnitude. But what is the peculiar view upon which his eye must rest? Does this ocean shine beneath the glories of the sun? Does every image of beauty seem to be reflected from its waters, and sweet and enduring peace to abide upon its glassy surface? Does its attractive stillness tempt him to launch upon its bosom with confidence and hope? or, does he see it agitated with tempests, lashed into fury with a mighty wind, rising up in anger to the very heavens, exposing in its heavings the deep abyss of hell, tossing upon its waters the sad mementos of a

thousand shipwrecks, and proclaiming in every roaring which strikes upon his ear, that there, there is no safety for his soul? Does he feel himself drawn forward by the joyous notes and cheerful music of those who are floating in everlasting security upon its bosom? or is he driven back upon himself, by the wailings of anguish which burst from its depths, and finally, in defiance of his last convulsive grasp upon some poor shrub of earthly confidence, is he plunged forever into the terrors which an avenging Judge has prepared for his guilty soul?

O, how much is involved for man in such a contrast! It all rests upon the single point, the one grand fact, has he made provision for judgment, has he sought and obtained a refuge in the abundant redemption of a Saviour's obedience unto death? How truly is that old age which has no such provision for eternity, and to which "hope comes not, that comes to all" besides, an evil day, in which man finds no pleasure! I wonder not that the aged sinner clings with such tenacity to life. I wonder not that he dreads to leave a world, beyond which there is no hope for his soul. I wonder not that he fears an endless condition of sorrow and anguish under the wrath of an offended God. But O, how unwise is he, to expose himself to this! Whatever he may have gotten of earthly goods, how is he profited? Every day is now counted, like the days of a criminal condemned to die. To-morrow, and to-morrow, he may be here. But the last day is near at hand. The fearful hour cannot be far removed, when he must depart without hope or comfort, to the presence of an offended God. And while an eternity for which he is so little pre-

pared, presses so near upon him, he cannot but feel that "an untimely birth is better than he;" that it would be better for him, if he had never been born.

3. Another sorrow in old age without piety, is, that man has experienced the vanity of the world, and has nothing which can supply its place. The false paintings of the world may delude the young, and palm themselves upon them for realities. They love to be thus deceived. They make no opposition to the delusions which are thus practised upon them by these enticing instruments of Satan. Wealth, and pleasure, and reputation, seem to them to be reasonable and proper objects of pursuit; and in them, the young vainly imagine that they can find the satisfaction they desire. But the aged have outlived these deceptions. They have experienced too much, to be able now to believe that the present world can furnish them any abiding rest. I am addressing some who can tell me they have tasted of every fountain the world can offer, and know that but miserable comfort is to be derived from them all. Mere sensual indulgence, whether it be of a light and giddy character, or of a deeper stain of pollution, can offer them nothing. They have no desires for which such provisions are suitable. Money can do them no good. A grave and a coffin will soon be all that they can want, which it can furnish. Their own characters present them no consolation, though a thousand sycophants should praise their course of life, for they see that man judgeth only according to the outward appearance, while God looketh upon the heart. When they were young, they could be active and occupied, and could thus divert their thoughts from the deep consciousness of deficiency

which was even then felt. But now, other hands have taken their employments. They have been released from busy engagements. Many hours in the day must be passed in thought, and they cannot help thinking of themselves. They are obliged often to sit down in a contemplation of their own past and future existence; and so far as any source of comfort is concerned, their minds present a perfect blank. The world recedes and disappears. Its cisterns are all broken; its springs have become dry; its flowers have withered; its joys are tasteless. And in the midst of this wilderness of the soul, they can find no fresh springs of hope or peace. Their days are consumed from the earth, they flee away, and yet they see no good. There is nothing now which they think they would not give, for a well-grounded hope of everlasting rest. No joy seems to them so important as that which would have arisen from an early and cordial acceptance of the offered loving-kindness of a Saviour. But alas, vain as the world is, it is all they have. They have laid up their treasures here. They have here sought their joys and comforts; and they have no other more continuing city. They ask for religious hope; but it seems to flee from them. They call for a Saviour; but he appears to turn a deaf ear to their cries. They try to persuade themselves that they are safe; but conscience will not be charmed into silence. Neither alleged belief nor attempted infidelity, can furnish them the mental defence which they need. They would be glad to believe that there is no future suffering for sin. They sometimes say they do believe so. But their hearts cannot rest upon this hope. They are troubled and terrified

still, even with what they affect to call phantoms of the imagination. They are thus left without a single source of comfort; and while they are struggling thus with unconquerable despair, they feel that the man who has not an interest in the Saviour, and a sure acceptance in his redemption, has no hope, though he has gained, when God takes away his soul.

These three sources of painful reflection are surely sufficient to awaken attention to this important subject. "If a man live many years, so that the days of his years are many, and his soul be not filled with good, I say that an untimely birth is better than he." Why is it so? Because he has passed a long life, and has no comfort in reflecting upon it; for it is only by filling the soul with good, that the remembrance of many days can give us peace. Because he is pressed to the very margin of a boundless eternity, for which he has made no preparation; for it is only a soul filled with good, that can be a preparation for eternity. Because he has proved that the world can do him no good, and he has nothing to supply its place. O, how distressing and dark is an old age like this! How much reason has every unrenewed hearer to shake himself from the dust, and to consecrate every hour of his remaining life, to this great purpose of his soul's salvation! There are many in youth, and in the maturity of life, who are postponing to old age, that work which ought now to be undertaken, in preparation for the judgment-seat of Christ. I would convince them of the folly of this self-destruction. Why, my friends, why will you persist in seeking the living among the dead? What single rational excuse can you present to your minds, for the course which

you thus pursue? You are but laying up a store of sorrow for yourselves; provoking a God justly and exceeding offended, to withdraw himself from you. You are not postponing merely, the hour of your return to God; you are thrusting it from you forever. Do not deceive yourselves with any vain calculations upon a future repentance. You will never repent with any repentance which shall be unto salvation, and not to be repented of. Satan rejoices over every procrastinating soul, under the assurance, that he has accomplished his full design. Let him persuade you to abide in the plan of becoming the servants of God when old age shall admonish you that death is near, and your souls are lost forever. The door of hope will be closed. The Gospel, long neglected, will be neglected forever. You will go out in darkness. Evil days in which you find no pleasure, will be your eternal portion. Your name will be covered with darkness, as one of those whom God has rejected and dismissed into everlasting banishment, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. May he give you now the wisdom to lay these things truly and profitably to heart.

XVIII.

DISAPPOINTED PROCRASTINATION.

GENESIS xi. 32.—*The days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.*

SOME may be ready to ask, of what practical use, is this fact to us? An attention to the circumstances of history which are connected with it, will show the purpose of illustration for which I design to employ it, and the interest which my hearers have in the admonition which it gives.

Terah was the father of Abraham. He dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees, east of the river Euphrates. There, he was with his whole family in a state of idolatry, “serving other gods,” and ignorant and careless of the great Being whom they were bound to worship. While in this condition of spiritual darkness, “on the other side of the flood,” as the great river Euphrates was called, God commanded him to arise, and to go with his family to the land of Canaan, which from that time, became the land of promise, the appointed possession of the children of Abraham. “God said unto Abram, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and

from thy father's house, to a land that I will shew thee." "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot, the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife ; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan ; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." Haran was on the midway of their commanded journey. How long Terah lived here, we cannot tell. But either he could not, or he would not, go farther on towards the land which God had promised to his posterity. Abram, after waiting for his father, it would appear for some years, took Sarai and Lot, and went on to the land of his promised inheritance in obedience to the divine command, and left Terah the old man his father, in Haran, and there he died. Terah did not however, die immediately. He lived at least sixty years after he had seen his son thus go forward in obedience to God, being but one hundred and forty-five years old, when Abram left him. He had therefore abundant time to follow his son in the path of appointed duty. Yet after all, "Terah died in Haran."

At the late period of life in which he was induced to obey the divine command, and to leave his native land, to go in search of the land which the Lord had promised to him and to his children, he found himself unable to finish the journey which he had undertaken. He stopped in the middle of his appointed course. And here, though the command to arise and go, was again repeated to him from God, here, he remained for the residue of his days. While still in the land of idolators and darkness, he gave up his spirit, to be judged for his disobedient procrastination ; and left

his children to take possession without him, of the good land which God had promised them.

The simple fact, "Terah died in Haran," when viewed in this connexion, stands in the Scriptures as a monument, like the pillar of salt which uttered its warning to every passer by, "remember Lot's wife." It exhibits an old man, after his many years spent in idolatry and ignorance, attempting in a late obedience to divine commands, to remove from his native condition and home, to the land of promise; but wasting in procrastination, the time for his journey, and indolently staying, upon the road, over which he was required to pass, to gain the end placed before his view; and finding all his efforts and plans to accomplish his purpose, to prove unavailing for his good. He never attained the inheritance for which he set out so late, and which he pursued so carelessly. He saw his child and his grandchild, both go on before him, to the place of their desire and hope; while he was left, and alas, found himself willing to be left, to die alone, upon the road to that home, which they were to enjoy without him. And it remains on record, as a fact to warn procrastinating men in every age, of the disappointments which they are preparing for themselves, that Terah, amidst all the invitations and privileges which he received, died at last an idolator in Haran.

Has this fact then no practical connexion with ourselves? Does it not exhibit a striking illustration, of the folly and danger, of postponing until old age, our own commanded journey to the land of promise? May I not with much propriety, use it for an occasion, and as an instrument, of admonition, warning, and solemn appeal, to all who hear me, that they be wise in

time, and harden not their hearts against the voice of the living God? This is my present design. May God, in great mercy, by his own Spirit, make it effectual and useful!

I. Let us consider the work which God requires sinful man to undertake. The call of Abraham from his country and home, is frequently employed, to illustrate the great duty which is required of every sinful man. Like him, every one is commanded in the Gospel, to attain and exercise a simple controlling faith in the divine promises; to follow in this spirit of faith, the peculiar commands of God the Saviour; to go out in its reliance upon him, from a state of selfishness and idolatry, man's natural condition, to seek the better and heavenly country which is revealed in the Gospel, and offered in Christ Jesus, to every believing soul. The obedience of Abraham, in going out, not knowing whither he went, simply counting him faithful who had promised, and counting every thing else, as loss for his sake, exhibits just the duty, which the Saviour requires of all, to whom he gives the invitations of his word; and just the duty which multitudes like Terah, postpone, until it is too late to finish the work which is involved in it. Abraham's journey and the whole of his history, display the spiritual journey of the believing man, through the difficulties and obstacles of life, to a kingdom and home of everlasting glory. They show faith, triumphing in contests, hoping against hope, not staggering in weakness, but strong in giving glory to God, ultimately crowned with the full attainment of all that it had looked for, and finding its possession an unspeakable reward.

Such an exercise of faith developing itself in full and

permanent obedience to the divine commands, is the work which God requires of all who hear the Gospel. The sinner in the idolatry and unbelief of his natural condition, is called upon by the word and Spirit of God, to arise, and get him out of this state, this land of enemies, to a better one, which God will show him. But when is this great work to be undertaken? When shall man begin to subdue his rebellious heart into reconciliation to the will of God? May he select his own time for the work? May he make every thing, or any thing else, of prior importance? May he define for himself, what will be the most convenient season, the most acceptable time for this purpose?

Surely not. The Scriptures never intimate a moment beyond the time in which the command is actually given, as the time for man's obedience. The morrow is not given to man. "Now," "to-day," are the divine designations of the proper time for man's submission. Whenever God speaks, it is that his will may be done at once. In the earliest youth of man, the divine appeals sound upon his conscience and heart; impress solemn convictions of duty to God, and responsibility before him, upon the mind; and compel the sinner in the very morning of his rebellion, to reflect upon the wages which must be paid to his transgression, when the day has closed. If these appeals are then heard, and immediately obeyed; if the youth determine at once, to arise from his idolatry, to flee from his sins, and to return to the service and favour of God, for his shelter and delight, he is made secure forever. The journey upon which he enters, God will prosper. The Holy Spirit will lead him on, to a full enjoyment of the favour, and obedience of the com-

mands of God. He will find the ways of religion, to be ways of pleasantness. Its paths will minister peace to his soul. The promised land in all its glory shall be his. And he will never look upon the land from which he was taken, but with unfeigned gratitude, that God was pleased in such merey, to rescue him from its darkness, danger, and condemnation. They that thus seek God early, shall find him, and shall find with him, assurance and peace forever.

This return of the soul from sin to God, for which a new and living way has been opened in the death and power of the Lord Jesus, is the great work for which life is prolonged, and which man is required to complete in life, and is made able to complete, if he truly and early undertake it. But if the convictions of danger and duty, which are in youth impressed upon the mind, are made ineffectual, and man is not persuaded then to enter upon this work, most generally he finds no period arrive in mature or aged life, when the conscience and the heart are willing to yield to God, or when the mind has time to think with sufficient care and interest, of the peace and prosperity of the soul. He who rejects and disobeys the commands of God in his youth, is exceedingly unlikely to find the opportunity, or the disposition to obey in his subsequent years.

II. Let us consider the course which men generally pursue in reference to this important matter. Do they, or do they not, generally obey at once? Do they, with Abraham, arise and go? or do they more commonly with Terah, procrastinate the enterprise until it is too late to accomplish it at all? The Scriptures teach nothing more plainly than God's gracious

desire, that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. They assure us, of the efforts of the divine Spirit within the heart of man, from the earliest period of his youth, to bring him into a cordial submission of himself to God. I presume to say, that the instance cannot be found, of one to whom the Holy Spirit has never showed the guiltiness of his character; who has never had his conscience awakened to feel and to acknowledge to himself at least, the solemn truth, that he was a sinner against God; and who has, therefore, never been convinced of the necessity of going out from his own condition of selfishness and sin, to gain a refuge from condemnation, in the land and city of God.

Before we arrive at mature life, there have been very distinct views of duty impressed upon our minds under the religious instructions of the pulpit or the fireside, under the occasional reading of the Scriptures for ourselves, or under the varied dispensations of divine Providence, which place us entirely beyond excuse, in the sight of God, and in our own conscience, in going forward in the ways of sin, or remaining in our natural condition of alienation from God. Amidst all these varied privileges and mercies, the great questions, who shall reign over us? whom shall we serve? are to be determined. And they are habitually determined in the morning of life. Men are reaping subsequently, as they have sown then. Some few accept with gratitude the blessed invitations of the Saviour, and unite themselves unto him, in a perpetual covenant, never to be forgotten. But what is the course pursued by the great majority of mankind? Do they not altogether drive away the

convictions of this early period? They refuse to yield their hearts and characters, to be thus subjected by the Holy Spirit to the service of God. They bargain with their consciences, in order to silence their awakened demands, that at some future period, they will attend to the duty required of them. They overwhelm and destroy the calls of God in their hearts, by rushing into worldly follies, vain society, and giddy, frivolous recreation. They not only turn a deaf ear to his voice, but they immerse themselves in distracting noise around, raising up a multitude of voices, that they may not be compelled to hear him. They often try to argue themselves into comfort and security, by building up a system of self-righteousness which shall be sufficient for their wants. Amidst the heedlessness of youth, and the occupations of maturity, they can manage very much to forget the precious interests of their souls. And thus they allow their time and opportunities to pass silently away, all vacant and empty, in reference to any thing done for their soul's good. This is the course of multitudes, who find at last with astonishment, that age, and disease, and death, have come upon them, while no step has been taken towards the heavenly land to which God has so long invited them, and which he has been so willing to bestow upon them.

In these cases, there is not, perhaps, a positive denial of the authority which calls them, or an actual refusal to acknowledge and submit to it. The plea of some better time to come, is the prevailing and sufficient one. None seriously design to throw away all regard to their eternal interests forever. On the contrary, they hope, and they believe, that the time

will certainly come, when they shall find themselves to be so strongly drawn to an obedience to God, that they shall have no disposition to resist the divine control. They are far from wishing, or expecting to end their days in any other condition, than in the favour of God, and in the assurance of a participation of the inheritance of the saints in light. They always trust, however indefinitely and without reason, that it will in some way be well for them in the end. But the one single demand for an actual, manifest, positive, immediate return to God; the act of personal, voluntary reconciliation to him; the certain setting out upon a new and living way, so that they can say, "whereas I was blind, now I see;" this, though the work of a moment, a point of time in their lives, they are constantly postponing to some future period. Thus most frequently, they live and die in their chosen idolatry and guilt; always hearing the command, "arise and go," and always determining that they will obey it; but never putting their resolution into effect. Like Terah, they die in Haran; they perish amidst unfulfilled vows and attempts of obedience to God, and under the guilt and burden of actual rebellion against him.

III. Let us trace the usual result of this course of procrastination. It will be but tracing the history and experience of the great proportion of mankind. Twenty years of the sinner's life go by. They are the most important, and in most cases, the deciding period of his existence, in reference to his eternal welfare. But their close finds him still unrenewed in his character, and hardening his mind and conscience against the power of the truth. He is just so much

farther from God, and from hope, by all the years which have passed thus unimproved. He is still in the region of darkness, and of the shadow of death. During this period, he has had the question of personal piety repeatedly before him, and the influences of the Holy Spirit repeatedly contending with him. But he has thus far, succeeded in keeping the strong man of selfishness and unbelief armed, and in possession of his house. He is at twenty years of age, still in his sins, and still an unconverted man. In the wonderful forbearance of God, twenty years more are added to these, all of them crowned with privileges, and with invitations to a better land. But the lingering sinner still refuses to arise and go. By this time, he has seen and felt much of the folly of things temporal, and of the emptiness of the heart which depends upon them. But he is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; and he is unwilling to make the decided and violent rupture which seems necessary if he would now effect his escape from an impending ruin. With more light in his conscience, he has more dulness and obduracy in his affections; and the work of true piety grows more and more difficult. If twenty years more bring him to the verge of feebleness and death, he is still found more deeply anxious to obtain the hope which he does not possess, and which he finds it more and more impossible to get. By this time, he is mourning over nearly all his joys as departed forever. Almost every monument of his life seems to be a tomb. "Here lie the remains," is the inscription which he reads upon pleasures, and possessions, and hopes which are gone.

This whole period of life has been a succession of

disappointments of all his calculations, in reference to his own state of mind and character. Maturity when it arrived, was very different from the pictures of it, which were seen in youth. It did not bring that coolness of judgment, that weariness of earthly pleasures, and that disposition for serious pursuits, which were so confidently expected to be found as its characteristics. If it had not the obstacles of youth, it was found to have greater ones of its own. The Redeemer, whose invitations were answered by procrastination before, was found to be with still more ease, and apparently with more reason, put off with promises for the future, then. And now, old age is looked for to effect that, which youth and maturity have failed to accomplish. But here another disappointment comes. Old age also is very different in its character, from its anticipated appearance. Man then awakes to the sorrowful conviction, that he has been deluded through the whole of his course in life. He sees nothing of that spontaneous preparation for eternity, which he hoped to find in the later years of life. It is now harder, vastly harder, than it has ever been before, to lay hold of any adequate and abiding hope for a world to come. Lingerin^g Terah sits down to measure up, in the sad calculation of his own experience, the folly by which he has been so long deceived. The love of the world and the pride of self have grown upon his heart. Their roots have woven a complete, and an inextricable web, around his affections and purposes. The Saviour who seemed to be so near to him in his youth, that he might be embraced in any moment, now stands in the distance, almost unperceived, apparently entirely beyond his reach.

The line which then separated him from the salvation of the Gospel, has now widened to a gulph which cannot be passed. And hope seems to have gone finally down, behind the mountains of darkness which rise before him.

IV. What now becomes the result of this procrastination? Generally one of two things. Either total, hardened, self-defending negligence; or a partial, constrained, and unsatisfying attention to the duties of religion. That is, Terah either positively refuses to obey the divine command, and remains to die as he has lived, in Chaldea; or else, he unwillingly sets out under the lashes of an awakened conscience, and goes as far as Haran, and dies there, in a new condition indeed, but with the same character.

Some, as the result of this procrastination, finding every thing in their own state of mind, and in their facilities for reconciliation to God, so very different from their expectations, give up all hope of change, and resolve to die as they have lived. They try to work up a confidence which they do not feel, and to persuade themselves of a security, for which they have really no hope. They affect an indifference which they are far enough from possessing, and attempt to acquire an insensibility which is still very remote from them. They will not bear the kindest language of admonition, or exhortation, or warning. They are determined not to be disturbed. They do not feel themselves in the right. They know just the difficulty which is before them. Their consciences are as thoroughly convinced of the character, and of the justice, of the claims of piety, as they ever were. But they have resolved not to attempt a work which has

now been so long postponed. And the result of their long-continued procrastination is, that they go down into the grave, self-condemned, and without hope, and vainly trying to conceal the consciousness of the fact, from the view of others around them. They have seen thousands go on to the land of promise, a blessed home, to which they have been invited from their very childhood, and they remain still to die in the darkness of Chaldea at the last.

Others cannot bear the irritations of an awakened conscience, or the sense of want and danger which presses upon them, and they therefore urge themselves to do something to fill up deficiencies which are so plainly and painfully perceived; and to satisfy an eagerness, whose corrodings cannot be repressed. They put upon themselves, some kind of religious profession. They give their time and countenance to some degree of religious duty. They devote a portion of their property to some benevolent or religious object. All this is easily done. It is done without any change in the heart and principles of the man. And many who have passed their life in a protracted neglect of true religion, are found at the last, attempting in this way, to do some good thing to obtain eternal life. Unwilling to remain absolutely disobedient to God's command in Chaldea, they go forward on the road to safety, as far as Haran; they settle down in a form of godliness, without the power thereof; or in the approbation of religion, without experiencing it; and thus sink into the grave, with as little hope or comfort, as if they had not moved a step, from the condition in which they were found at first. They worship God because they are afraid to refuse it. They offer him

an unwilling, heartless service. They are drawn towards him by no desire but to escape his wrath. They are driven forward in all they undertake, by the resistless impression, that they shall perish if they do not do some thing, and by the selfish wish to do no more, than shall be absolutely necessary for their escape from woe. Though they go on to Haran, they remain the same disobedient servants towards God ; and they are as certainly rejected by him, who has announced to them in a great variety of forms, his solemn determination, to have all, or to take nothing.

In one of these shapes, you will find the result of procrastination in religion. It leads men certainly forward, to a miserable grave, a departure from the world, without pardon, or holiness, or hope. Has this subject no connexion with ourselves? Is it of no interest to those who hear me? It warns you, my beloved friends, that God the Saviour, must have your all, and be your all. You are not only to arise and go ; but you must go to the land which he will show you. Your hearts, the fountains of life, must be his. Your choice must be upon him, as the Being whom you will serve. Nothing short of a full conversion, an entire new birth, by the Holy Spirit, will answer your wants at any time. Christ dwells in no heart but where all things are made new. And without him, ye are nothing. It warns you also, to gain this blessing now. Go with youthful Abram, or yet more youthful Lot, directly from Chaldea to Canaan. Stop not upon the road for any temptation. Stay for no future period of life. In the Spirit and power of God, which wait for you, arise and embark with Jesus. Enlist under his banner ; follow in his steps ; and remember always,

that safety is in being safe, and not in expecting to be safe; in actually yielding the heart to the Saviour's will, and not in hoping to do it, or in determining to do it, in some future hour which may never arrive, and which if it does arrive; will bring with it, its own portion of sorrows, and cares. Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. Now is your accepted time; to-day is your day of salvation

XIX.

INEFFECTIVE REPENTANCE.

1 KINGS ii. 28.—*And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.*

THE holy Scriptures teach truth to man, not only by abstract precepts and instructions, but by living and impressive examples. They are for man a guide-book, as well as a history. They proclaim the principles by which he ought to be governed, and according to which he is to meet his final responsibility to God; and they exhibit in every variety of shape, the actual use or neglect of these principles, in the conduct of different individuals. In these important illustrations, they hold up virtue and excellence triumphing in multiplied conflicts; and iniquity however prospered and specious for a time, ultimately meeting its just and full reward. There is hardly an application of abstract principles of duty to the conduct and circumstances of man possible, of which there is not some full and remarkable illustration in the sacred Scriptures, in the character and history of some individual man. And a consideration of the principle as

it is developed and operating in the history, becomes far more impressive and effectual, than a contemplation of itself abstractedly could ever be.

Under this view it is wise in the preacher to select as a frequent subject for discourse, the actual examples which the Scriptures give, of the operation of the instructions which he wishes to enforce. With this intent, I would present to you, the history of Joab, as an illustration of the invalidity of a voluntarily late repentance; of the presumption of looking forward to the hour of death, as a time in which to call for protection and hope from him, to whom we have refused to yield obedience in life. Many of you are familiar with the incidents of Joab's history. He was in many respects a great and remarkable man. He was one of the most valiant and powerful men of his time. He performed important services for the king, to whom he was nearly related in blood, and he was faithful to his interests. He was made the general of David's armies upon the occasion of his conquest of the city of Jerusalem, when he displayed peculiar bravery, and he continued in this important post for more than thirty years. He was, therefore, an elevated, honoured, and prosperous man; one even too important for the just authority of the king. He had gained in earthly station, and in the wealth of this world, all that the ambition of a subject could ask; second to none but his monarch, and even rivalling him in influence and power. All he could imagine of human greatness, was in his possession.

He had also passed his life amidst all the privileges of religion. Although he was a man of war, he had all the advantages and opportunities which David himself

had, to gain and to cultivate the principles of truth and holiness. The worship of the sanctuary of Jehovah with all the blessings which it conferred, were freely his; and he might, and he ought to have laid hold on the hope of Israel, and to have had his hoary head found in the way of righteousness; and thus to have been in his old age, as much honoured for his piety as he was for his station.

But Joab passed a proud and prosperous life, without submitting himself to the authority, or seeking the favour of God. He was a cruel, revengeful, and imperious man. He suffered his own vindictive spirit to imbrue his hands in causeless blood. The will of his Creator kept him not back, even from revenge and murder; and he was too elevated in life to be restrained by inferior circumstances. He could carry out the purposes of his wicked heart, without fear of consequences from man; and no sense of responsibility to God was present in his mind, to keep him back, from the extreme of evil. In his long and prospered life, he might have been the instrument of vast blessings to others. But the man who lives without God cannot live as a blessing to his fellow-men. The blessing of God is not with any thing that he does.

But now Joab comes to old age, and his character remains entirely unchanged. He engages with Adonijah in his unnatural rebellion against the aged king, to whose cause he had been so faithful while the power was with him, and thus prepares himself for the punishment which must in justice overtake him. David delivers him over to Solomon his son, with the injunction, "thou knowest what Joab did to me, how he shed the blood of war in peace; do thou, there-

fore, according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace." And when the intelligence came to Joab, that Adonijah was put to death, and Abiathar the priest was banished, his guilty conscience warned him of his exposure to similar condemnation. He fled to Gibeon, and concealed himself for protection in the tabernacle of the Lord, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. Foolish man! If he had accustomed himself to seek for counsel at this tabernacle in previous life, he would not now have needed to fly to it for such protection. But the worst of men are glad to make use of God's ordinances for their own selfish advantage. Necessity will drive the most profane in a hypocritical profession to God.

But there was no protection for impenitent guilt at the altar. The divine law was, in regard to the murderer, "thou shalt take him even from mine altar, that he may die." And Joab, the aged rebel, perishes in guilt, even while he clings to the altar for protection. His flying there, driven by fear, when all other refuge had failed, and destruction was rapidly coming upon iniquity as its recompense, furnished him no deliverance. No desire for God led him to the tabernacle. A fear of punishment drove him thither. He had no longing to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord. He would far rather dwell in the tents of ungodliness. And this fear-extorted cry for mercy, in the hour of his sorrow, upon him whom he had despised, and whose law he had trodden under his feet, could furnish no expiation for his guilt, and no hope for his soul. Joab was not a penitent, though he clung to the altar. His soul could not go out in peace, though he expired in the

tabernacle of God. He died amidst cries for mercy, and yet he died without mercy, and without hope.

How very important is the admonition which is here furnished! What multitudes, like Joab, attempt to compensate for a life of sin, by an ineffectual attempt to return to God in the hour of death, and encourage themselves to hope, that their wicked and persevering neglect of him will be wholly forgotten, if they ask his forgiveness, when they can rebel no longer! This is the whole consolation and hope of an immense portion of mankind. The only answer which they make to the invitations of the Gospel, is, that though they acknowledge their importance, they are not yet prepared to attend to them; but they promise adequate consideration of them, when the more pressing business of their lives shall pass by. Their hearts are in the world, and they will live to that. But their future, everlasting safety, can only be with God, and they will still endeavour to die in peace with him. According to this vain and wicked plan, they refuse subjection to the Lord of all, during the period in which they can in any manner honour him, and promise to bring the lame, and the blind, and the torn, and the sick, as an offering upon his altar at the last. How solemnly God says to such, "cursed be the deceiver, that hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord, a corrupt thing; for I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen!" The Scriptures warn men very distinctly of their total want of hope and comfort in prospect, while they live in the midst of the privileges of the Gospel, in neglect of God, and design to embrace at last, the blessings

which they have so long voluntarily rejected. What the history of Joab illustrates, the parable of the ten virgins is designed expressly to teach and enforce; and many warnings of Almighty God, repeat the same testimony. The sinful man who is now living to himself, without God in the world, and hoping ultimately to find peace with God, in the return of his soul to him, in sickness, or age, or death, is certainly deceiving himself, with a promise which will be his ruin. Though fear may drive him at last to the horns of the altar, no protection will be there afforded to him, from the result of his own folly and guilt.

THIS LATE AND INEFFECTIVE REPENTANCE, I propose to consider, as a subject of important instruction.

I. I remark upon it, that such a running at the last to the tabernacle, will be wholly unavailing for any good, because it is entirely deficient in the proper motive of obedience. The distinguishing motive of an acceptable return to God, is a love for his character, and a desire for his service. This must always be the principle which guides a sinner in a true return of his soul to God. A godly sorrow for sin respects the honour of God which is involved in transgression. It is moved, not by a conviction of danger, and a fear of evil, but by a view of the dishonour which iniquity brings to God, and the ungrateful neglect which it displays of his kindness and mercy. It sees the love of Jesus, and the hatefulness of the sin which has repaid it; and turns back with mourning, for that which has crucified the Lord of glory. Affliction and distress as they reveal the emptiness of the world, may indeed be the occasion which arrests the attention of man, and in consequence of which he is led by the Holy

Spirit, to proper views of himself, and of God, and to a cordial desire to be made holy as God is holy. But when the worldly minded sinner calculates upon this in his dying hours, he is hoping for that, for which he will then have neither opportunity nor time. If he is awakened at all then, it will be by fear. A solemn conviction of the just wrath of God may press upon his mind ; and he may be compelled, under its burden, to ask forgiveness. But he has then no love for God, no wish to be like him, no real sorrow for having offended him. It would be a welcome relief to his mind, if he could be convinced, that there is no God, or that if he exists, he will not enter into judgment with ungodly men. These conclusions are both impossible. And as a cry for a Saviour's mercy seems to be the only method left, by which he may escape the perdition of his soul, he recurs to that. Let him live again, and he has no love for goodness. Even now he is more averse to the real character of God, than he has ever been. Heaven and holiness have no charms. But hell has unutterable terrors. He flies therefore to the tabernacle for refuge. But let the wrath to come be removed ; let the sword of justice be withdrawn ; and he would leave the tabernacle just as quickly. Such a professed return to God as this is wholly useless. The door is shut ; and loud as may be the cry for admission, it is uttered in vain. God is a God of love ; and he governs his creatures by love, and not by terror. When they return to him, because they love him, and wish to serve him, he welcomes and receives them. But when they are driven back to him, because they are afraid of him, although they hate him, he allows no such motive to operate in his

dominion. He will receive no subject whose conduct says. "I serve thee because I am afraid to rebel longer against thee." Yet this is the language of the sinner's late repentance, his final apparent return to God. Without penitence, without love, without desire for God, he wishes for just so much interest in the religion of the Gospel, as will save him from approaching ruin, and no more. And he clings to the horns of the altar, because he hopes, that he may there escape destruction. But while this motive is wholly unacceptable, the act to which it leads is equally vain. Even the altar affords him no protection then.

II. I remark that such an apparent return to God in our last hours, is ineffective, because it allows no time to accomplish the important work. I do not speak now of the man who has never heard the blessed tidings of a Saviour, until this late hour; but of the man whose life has been passed amidst the full privileges of the Gospel, and who has no new message to be delivered to him in the hour of his death. Such an one has professed that he had no time to perfect this return to God in his life and health, though he acknowledged it to be necessary; and he will in fact, have no time to do it in the hours of sickness, and age, and death. It is vain to say, that God may then pluck him in a moment as a brand from the burning. So he might have done at any previous time of his life. But he did not do it then; and there is not the slightest ground for hope, that he will do it now.

What is an acceptable return to God for sinful man? The point of turning is a moment unquestionably. Conversion is in this view an indivisible act. But how much there is of knowledge, and conviction,

and feeling, to precede it! And how numerous and important, are the duties which result from it! Now the dying man has no time for these. A real return to God is exhibited in the obedience which flows from conversion. And it is worse than vain, to found a hope upon any conversion which does not result in such obedience. It may be said, there is a promise, that he that believeth shall be saved. I answer it does not meet the case which I suppose. What remains to be told to any unrenewed sinner under the blessings of the Gospel, in the hour of his death, which he did not believe and know before? Will the simple cry for a Saviour's mercy which results in no obedience, is the parent of no new life, avail him now? And why will it be more availing then? You answer that there is no time then for any thing else. This is just my assertion. There is no time for any thing then, which can be effective. There is no time for a real return to God. And whose fault is it, that there is no time? Is it God's, who has lengthened out the sinner's days, with wonderful forbearance? or is it the sinner's, who has refused to do the work for which life was given, until there remains no time to do it at all? If you determine thus to rob God of that which he claims, it will be useless for you at the last, to bring the poor remnant which is left. Like Ananias, you keep back a part of that which is demanded, and bring a portion, under the false assertion that it is all you have. You may as well determine to keep the whole. You may as safely resolve to abide in your own house unto the end, as to plan a running to the tabernacle when all your many days have thus been numbered in guilt. It will then be impossible to accomplish what you propose to un-

dertake, and mercy so long despised, will have gone from you forever.

III. I remark upon this projected repentance, that it is ineffective for good, because it is itself an act of rebellion against God. He has in abundant mercy, opened a way for sinful men to return to him in peace. He gives them, all the opportunities, all the means, and all the assistance, which they need in order to perfect this return to his favour, and then solemnly warns them, that it must be done in a limited and appointed time. He urges them to strive to enter into the narrow gate which he has opened, under the assurance, that many will ultimately try to enter in, who shall not be able. He directs their notice to an hour, when the master of the house will have risen up and shut to the door; and he declares, that then all cries without for entrance, will be in vain. He teaches us that sinful man has no right to mercy, no claim upon God; and that all which is offered him, is upon God's own terms, and in God's own way; and that unless he take advantage of these offers in an appointed time, he will lose all hope arising from them forever. But what does the man do, who still looks for a more convenient season for his reconciliation unto God, but directly contradict and falsify, these positive assertions of the God of truth? And of what more positive act of rebellion against God can man be guilty, than is involved in this determination which says, "in defiance of all thy warnings, I will not return unto thee, till the hour of death, and then I know, that notwithstanding all thy threatenings so often repeated, thou canst not, and wilt not cast me out?" Here is a direct contest between man and his Creator. All heavenly beings

are looking upon the issue. And what would be the effect of God's acceptance of this wilfully postponed submission to himself, but giving countenance to rebellion against himself, and showing a fickleness of government, the supposition of which is impossible? How strange does it seem, that the very calculation which man thus makes, upon the actions of God, would, if they should be sustained by facts, so destroy the excellence of his character, and the stability of his government, as to annul all his claims upon the homage of his creatures, and make man's return to him at all, rather a disgrace, than a duty! And where is the difference in principle, between making a god of wood or stone, and worshipping that, and thus making a god in the imagination, supple to the purposes, and complying with the corruptions of sinful men, and promising to yield a final submission and homage to him? Either God is a faithful and true God, a great and everlasting King who changes not, or he is destitute of the attributes, which can claim or deserve the reverence of his creatures. Under the first view of his character, the hope of propitiating him in a voluntarily late repentance, by the determination to cling to the horns of the altar, after a life of impenitent sin, is a manifest rebellion against him, and contempt of his authority and truth. It can only become availing, upon the supposition that he is so changeable, that he cannot claim the return of man, nor be depended upon to reward it, if it be offered. How wrong, how ruinous is it, thus to indulge, and to act upon a hope, which involves in its very essence, rebellion against God, and conceptions most derogatory to his character and government!

IV. I remark upon such a proposed return as ineffective, because its allowed success would overturn all the purposes of God in regard to men, for which the Gospel has provided. Its acceptance by him would altogether annihilate the design and operation of the Gospel. The great purpose of God in the gift of his Son, is the restoration of man from sin to obedience; the cleansing of him from guilt and condemnation, that he may serve God in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of his life. The proper and designed operation of the Gospel, is to annihilate the actual rebellion of the world; to reduce its living inhabitants into subjection to their Creator, and thus to restore his dominion here, in perfect and eternal peace. Man can be a co-worker together with God in accomplishing this end, only by submitting his heart at once and entirely, to the holy and sanctifying power of the grace of God, by accepting forgiveness when it is first offered, and by gladly returning to the appointed Mediator for his soul, that he may be the Lord's forever. The Gospel offers him the unspeakable privilege of coming back into communion and peace with God. And unless he see it as a privilege, and gladly embrace it as such, it offers him no hope in its provisions. Should the Gospel accomplish this full purpose of God in the world, entire holiness would follow immediately upon its proclamation throughout the earth, and all men who heard it, would become under its influence, the people of God. But what would be the effect, should all men follow the example of him who looks for his comfort and security in a late repentance? God would have no servants upon the earth. None would

remain to proclaim the glad tidings of redemption to others. The very sound of the Gospel must cease among men, unless angels were sent from above to offer its mercies to their acceptance. The whole world would remain in a state of undistinguished rebellion against God, and not a witness for him would be left upon the globe. The very hope which men thus indulge, of turning at last to God, thus condemns and destroys itself. It is necessary in its calculation, that there should be others who are not guided by its delusion; others, who in greater fidelity, have before yielded to the divine will, and embraced the privileges which the Lord offers; and are, therefore, competent to act as the messengers of his mercy, to those who have thus postponed their return to him. And in making this calculation, the success of their own expectations can only be assured, in the acknowledgment of the wickedness and falsehood of the principles by which they are governed. How foolish and false is that hope which can only stand upon the annihilation of the very purposes and power upon which itself depends! Nay, which can be indulged in fact and form only, because some others at least, are supposed to be guided by better principles to a safer course! The very expectation, therefore, which plans such a return to God, shuts up against itself the avenue of mercy, destroys the design and usefulness of the Gospel, and like the scorpion in his circle of fire, puts an end to itself.

Is not this a calculation upon an ineffective repentance? Without an acceptable motive, without time to grow into life, involving in itself actual rebellion against God, and existing only upon the overturning

of his purposes, and the annihilation of his plans of grace to man, such a late repentance is wholly invalid and useless. Its root is rottenness; its blossom goes up as dust. The sinner who is thus looking forward to a future late return to God, is destroying himself. The man who comes to the last hour of his life without hope, will die without hope. We have an altar which furnishes abundant refuge to those who would escape from guilt; but no cover, or protection, or concealment, to those who would live in guilt, and still be rescued from its punishment and condemnation. If, like Joab, men will live to the world, and without God, like him they will indubitably find themselves left to perish without hope. They will die even at the foot of the altar, in agony and despair. They will sink in eternal condemnation, though they then call upon Christ with whatever earnestness, Lord, Lord.

What meanest thou, then, O sleeper? Arise, and call upon God, if so be, thou perish not! Awake to-day, and embrace the blessed hand of love and kindness, that would lead you back in reconciliation unto God. Let him have that which he claims, the service of your lives, all that you can do to establish his authority, and to promote his glory. And do not, O do not, I beseech you, in the very face of inevitable certainty of ruin, still walk on amidst the foolish indulgences of sin, in the delusive, destructive hope, that you may come to God when you can sin no more.

XX.

THE LATTER END.

DEUTERONOMY xxxii. 29.—*O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.*

WE have considered the difficulties and sorrows which attend the aged man who is without an interest in the privileges and hopes of the Gospel. We have traced the usual course of man's procrastination in the great business of securing his eternal salvation, and seen the loss and disappointment to which it leads him. We have examined the foundation of that hope in which so many indulge, that after a life of voluntary sin and selfishness, they may still in the end repent, and turn to God, and find acceptance and safety with him, and seen how delusive and unsatisfactory it is, how useless it will prove to those who trust it. And now, the present text gives me the opportunity to conclude this important series of remark, by pressing upon the attention of my hearers, a timely and practical improvement of the truths which they have heard, and a due consideration of the results which must follow from them.

The instances among men, of the sinner's ruinous neglect of his soul and God, are numerous and dreadful; but they form no part of God's plan for them, nor do they meet or promote his pleasure. With an overflowing benevolence, he desires all men to become wise unto salvation. With unspeakable grace and goodness, he has made provision for them, that they may gain this blessed wisdom. And with a forbearance, whose persevering watchfulness never yields, until they have finally cast away his cords from them, he continues to entreat them to take advantage of his mercies, and to gain the wisdom which he desires to impart. If they go on through life in the ways of sin, it is in direct defiance of his desires and efforts in their behalf. If they mourn at last over the evils which they find in their chosen path, they are compelled to acquit him of all blame in their sufferings, and to acknowledge that their disappointments and woes are but a literal fulfilment of his gracious warnings which they rejected. God renders himself in all things connected with them, perfectly clear; and neither his justice, his wisdom, or his goodness will be stained in the final punishment of the voluntarily ungodly.

In our text, he exhibits his ardent desire for the ultimate safety and happiness of his creatures. With an eye which looks accurately into the future, and brings remote and apparently doubtful objects near, and makes them certain, he warns men of the consequences of a present course of rebellion and sin. He sees rocks which are concealed from their view, and dangers which they cannot know, but by his warning, until they try them; and with the utmost faithfulness

and tenderness, he warns them of the approaching evil. And when he finds his warnings to be all in vain, and that men are determined to be taught, only by their own experience of evil; he utters over them, the language of affectionate lamentation: "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end."

This consideration of THE LATTER END for ourselves, will claim your present attention.

I. Reflect upon this consideration, as a course of wisdom. Man's comparative wisdom in the affairs of this life is wholly estimated, by his disposition to anticipate the results of his own actions, and his ability to calculate upon those results with success. He only is considered a wise man, who in every important engagement and undertaking, deliberately and seriously considers its latter end. If one should throw his capital into a scheme of merchandize, or embark with it in an inviting speculation, without a full consideration of the results to which he was likely to be brought, and a cautious inquiry into the steps by which his desired ends were to be gained, who would deem him a man of safe and practical wisdom? or who would pity him, but for his folly, if he was ruined in the adventure? If the mariner should loose his bark upon the ocean, without a plan for gaining any port or country beyond it, without a chart or compass to guide him on his way, nay, without having considered in what direction he should steer, who would connect the attribute of wisdom with his name? or who would wonder if he bilged upon the rocks, or was swallowed up in the fathomless abyss? The fact is, that in all the engagements of his present life, man

from the necessity of the case, considers their latter end, and with all the wisdom which he can command, provides for what he presumes their several conclusions may be reasonably expected to require.

The whole object of the Gospel is to bring to the service of God, and to the attainment of eternal gains, the same powers which man thus gives to himself and the world. The whole of human life may be viewed as an adventure or a voyage, the character of which must be displayed in future unchangeable results. And man's true wisdom consists in shaping it for that prosperous and desirable issue, for which the mediation and offering of a Saviour has opened the way, and made the full provision. He is required to take a full view of his permanent condition, and his ultimate responsibilities; and to act for the whole, upon the very principle of preparation for the future, which in the smaller parts, he finds to be the elements of success. And if the man is not wise who invests the whole of his earthly wealth in an unexamined scheme, and lightly says, "the end will take care of itself, or I will provide for it when it comes;" how can that same man be wise when he carelessly throws his soul's eternity into an adventure, and dashes headlong with it into a life of total disobedience to God, in the uncertain hope of amending deficiencies at the close of his experiment? Nothing but the fearful dominion of sin over the heart, alienating that heart entirely from God, can account for the strange inconsistencies which man thus exhibits. This latter end, this issue of man's probation is of infinite importance, and leads to unalterable consequences. It cannot be provided for when it arrives, but may be abundantly

so, if undertaken in season. Surely then, he that is wise will consider it, and provide for it, while the opportunity is granted to him. We cannot speak of any man who neglects its timely consideration, whatever pretensions he may make, but as of one who loves simplicity and hates knowledge. We may pity him, but we must mourn over him also, in the exclamation of our text, "O that he were wise, that he understood this, that he would consider his latter end!"

II. Reflect upon the circumstances connected with this latter end, which are especially to be considered.

Consider the trials which will be involved in it. No one can doubt, that the close of human life must be to a rational man, a period of great anxiety. When every temporal hope, and interest, and comfort, is passing away; when all the sweet and endearing connexions of the human station are to be broken up; when countenances that have been seen, and places which have been known, for so long a time, are to be seen and known no more; when unsustained by outward aid, and deprived of the possibility of resting longer upon the wisdom, or the affection of earthly friends, for encouragement or guidance, we are to be thrown as far as man is concerned, wholly upon our own resources, and must stand or fall alone; when we are to try an experiment, of which, though millions have tried it before us, no one can tell us the result; what man can doubt, that such circumstances must involve for us great and peculiar trials, or that the flesh and heart of man must fail beneath them? Our condition is new. It is deeply mysterious. It is a change, not from one visible scene to another, but from all things

which are visible, to something which is not and cannot be contemplated by the eye of man. In that hour, lethargy may seal up the sensibilities; rage and despair may overwhelm concern; perhaps acquired stoicism may deride the danger. But to a man under the clear and calm influence of enlightened reason, it must be a period of oppressive anxiety. Nothing known to man, but the ascending hope of the Gospel, and the assurance of faith in a Saviour's power and promise, that it will be fulfilled for us to the uttermost, can form amidst these trials an adequate support.

Consider the peculiar wants which it will manifest. There may be no deficiency around of earthly comforts. All that man or money can do, may be supposed collected, to mitigate the sorrows, to conceal the weakness, to alleviate the pain, and to dignify the condition of the dying man. A grateful family may minister with affectionate tenderness. Sweet sympathy may fan the fainting spirit. And attendants well provided may anticipate every bodily want. But after all these, there are necessities developed, which these cannot supply. Divine revelation does not create or call forth these necessities. The ignorance of revelation cannot banish them. What are they? The wants of a dying man! He is entering upon a world inconceivably vast, and entirely unknown. Many loved ones have accompanied him to the edge of the wilderness, and encouraged him not to fear, as he enters into it, but he is to part from them all, and to go out alone, into this pathless desert; shrinking, trembling, anxious, doubtful, afraid, yet compelled to travel onward; not knowing what shall befall him there, but unable to forget that most solemn, perhaps tremendous, results are to

issue from every step. He wants a guide who shall be infallible, to take the hand while it is warm from the last earthly pressure, and to lead him forward, with a certain and inspiring confidence. He wants to hear a voice that can utter to him, there, where the accents of human affection have died upon his ear, the language of undoubted, inspiring, and tender encouragement. He wants some garments of glory and beauty which may be clothed, upon a soul that is now unclothed from its mortal covering, and conceal the deformities which its nakedness displays. He wants an arm upon whose unbending steadfastness, he may rest the firmest pressure, when the last earthly embrace has been unlocked; and whose power can protect and shield him amidst whatever may betide. He wants, and he has no comfort unless he gains, the certain assurance of glory and immortality, which the accepted promises of the Gospel can alone impart. God the Saviour must be with him, in the fulness of his revealed sufficiency, or he cannot approach his latter end but with doubt and terror.

Consider the results which must flow from it. The changes in our present life, are not only alleviated, but often annihilated in their painful influence, by the probable revolutions which may soon altogether alter their distressing appearance and operation. But the results of man's latter end are unchangeable. There cannot be a more ruinous delusion, than that which exhibits to him, a possible future probation, after these issues of his present life have come to him in the hour of his death. The dying man is entering upon scenes whose character he has already fixed beyond the power of change. He is to reap a harvest which he has sowed for him-

self. And how momentous is its character! Shall he rise from the bed of death, like the phoenix from his ashes, in unalterable youth, and mount up the shining path to glory, amidst songs of surrounding praise, with a heart instinctively attuned to join this new song when it strikes his ear? Shall he find himself transported to unutterable elevation and bliss, standing before the Son of God, to partake of his glory and to triumph in his dominion? Or shall he sink into eternity, under a load which no created power can sustain, convulsing amidst despair and anguish, goaded by the consciousness of guilt, separated from all communion with the God of peace, crowded amidst beings who are only hateful and hating one another? This is the alternative, the choice of results before him. One of these is to be the subject of his unavoidable experience. And whichever it may be, its character and operation is unalterable forever. O, with what importance, does this succeeding eternity encompass the latter end of man! And how certain must it be, that he alone is wise, who timely and adequately considers it!

Consider the provisions which it will require. They must be something upon which the soul may feed, and in which it may stand secure. They must be furnished by some being who has power over the world to come. Plainly, man must have a perfect righteousness which he can present to God, in which all sin may be forgotten, and an undisputed title be found to eternal glory. Peradventures of safety will answer him no purpose. He must have a hope within him, and be able to give a reason of the hope which is in him; a hope which shall be firm as an anchor for his

soul. No inducement will lead him forward with desire, or willingness, towards God, which does not manifestly and entirely remove, the barrier between them which guilt has made, and assure the soul, that there is perfect peace for it with God. But nothing pretends to do this, save the sure mercies which are revealed in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. And no one, but he who has by a living faith appropriated these mercies unto himself, can ever say, that all doubt has fled, and calm full sunshine rests upon the bosom of eternity. All other hopes tremble and crack, and crush, beneath the weight which is imposed upon them, and leave the deluded man who has entrusted himself to them, to perish unprovided and alone. Man's latter end requires all the provisions of grace which the Gospel offers, and it will be satisfied and peaceful with nothing less.

Consider the serious question, whether you have gained these provisions, and are therefore ready now, to test in your own experience, all that this latter end shall be able to bring to view. You are now competent to understand this, in its importance, and its character; and to view it as it is presented to you, in all its magnitude and results. What you are thus competent to do, becomes a matter of absolute obligation upon you. And when you consider that it is impossible for a better or more advantageous time to arrive, for the arrangement of all your interests and hopes for eternity, and that it is extremely improbable, that any other opportunity will be granted to you equally desirable with the present, you cannot wonder, if your character as men of wisdom is wholly decided, by the course which you now pursue, in reference to this

important subject. If you are wise, you will understand this, and consider your latter end.

III. Upon the authority of the truths which have been thus presented to you, I trust I may now urge you, to a practicable fulfilment of this duty. The disadvantages of neglecting it, I have attempted at some extent to display; and it would certainly seem, that no rational man could assume these fearful evils upon himself. The immense importance of attending to it, and attending to it in the proper season, stands before you as an entire parallel. When you consider the latter end of others, and contrast together the various issues of their lives; when you behold the piety of youth and active life, rising into the joy and peace of a Christian's departure, and mark the final triumph of a soul, which has wisely considered and provided for its whole responsibility, you cannot fail to see, how much has been gained, by adopting the Gospel as the powerful and practical principle of conduct, in the morning of man's day of grace. When you contrast with this, the barrenness and doubt, the agitation and regret, the anguish and despair, which distinguish the latter end of a sinful, worldly-minded man; your whole soul rises up in the exclamation, "let me not come into their secret, nor be joined to their assembly!" Yet strange as it may seem, while all within, and all without, is thus urging you forward to a course of safety and interest, the trifling temptations which you perfectly understand, and altogether despise, though you submit to them, are sufficient to lead you away into the permanent and ruinous captivity of sin. And things of eternal moment, messengers of the most High God, must stand and wait in the vestibule of your

minds, while crackling mirth, and scornful gain, and scoffing unbelief, are rioting with the madness of successful usurpers, in the halls within. O, strange perversion of an immortal spirit! How unworthy does such a man become, of the dignity of his elevation, and the abundance of his privileges!

I would urge you with deep earnestness and affection, to an immediate attention to the things which belong to your eternal peace. Bring home those alienated hearts, whose affections are scattered throughout the earth, and let them take advantage of the noble offers which are made to them of peace with God, and glory in the highest. Without holiness, the product of God's operations in a renewed heart, no man shall see the Lord. Your latter end will find no quietness or peace, unless it has been thus provided for, in a new birth of your souls unto righteousness, through the power of the Holy Ghost. Let faith triumph over the temptations of sense; and prayer, in dependence upon God, assume the place of confidence in your own wisdom; and an humble seeking after God the Saviour, make the single principle and business of your life. Then shall your light break forth as brightness; and God, even your own God, shall shine upon your souls in the fulness of his approbation and favour. Make the Redeemer of sinners, in the power of his Deity, and the offering of his humanity, in the worth of his righteousness, and the atonement of his death, the portion of your heart, and the comfort of your spirits; and your fruit shall be unto holiness, and your end everlasting life.

XXI.

THE TRUE CIRCUMCISION.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 3.—*We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*

IN the midst of this guilty world, God has a holy, peculiar people. They are the special objects of his love, his tenderness, and his protection. To them pertain, the adoption into his family as children, the inheriting of his kingdom as chosen heirs, the present blessings of his pardoning and sanctifying grace, and the future and eternal results of his glory. They are endowed with many great and precious comforts by his gift, and are under very pressing and peculiar obligations, by his appointment. In the appropriate language of our 17th Article, “They which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God’s purpose, by his Spirit working in due season; they through grace, obey the calling: they be justified freely; they be made the sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk re-

ligiously in good works; and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity." These are called the people, the Israel of God, the true circumcision; and some very important characteristics of them, are described in our present text. They worship God in the Spirit; they rejoice in Christ Jesus; they have no confidence in the flesh. To consider their marks and character, becomes a subject of deep interest, both to those who trust that they already belong to this "blessed company of God's faithful people," and to those whose desires are awakened and excited, towards the privileges which God has laid up for them.

In our present text, the Apostle styles them "the circumcision." In the earlier dispensation of grace to man, this was the external mark of the profession of the true faith;—the sign upon those who had avowedly entered into covenant with God. The rite was confined to the descendants of a single man. All the rest of mankind were what the Apostle here calls "the concision," the cut off, from God's chosen and covenant people. But this rite was merely typical, even while it was established and observed. It referred to a circumcision of the heart, by the power of the Spirit of God, without which all men were really cut off, whether they were outwardly circumcised or not. The external circumcision or concision of the flesh, marked a division of men in profession and appearance. The spiritual circumcision or concision of the heart, were the evidence of the actual division of men in the presence and sight of God.

When the Apostle wrote, the outward facts in this case were changed, only so far, as that the outward sign which was referred to, had been abolished. The type was gone; and the reality of spiritual character which it had been used to represent, was alone to be considered. The things which concision and circumcision were designed to represent, still remained in two perfectly distinct classes of men, though the particular rite which had marked the difference, was no longer to be regarded. The spiritual reality was now to be considered and required. The figure and the shadow had been removed from view. Under the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ spiritual truth and character were the things of moment. Material indicative forms were comparatively of inferior consequence. The time had come, when the uncircumcision, if it kept the righteousness of the law, should be counted for circumcision; when circumcision was that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God. Now, the true circumcision were those who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. The Apostle gives us in our text, three marks of this peculiar people, the true Israel of God, *spiritual worship, single joy in Christ, and entire renunciation of self*. They must be considered, as points for examination into our own character, and as objects of cultivation and pursuit, of the utmost consequence in the work of religion upon our own souls.

The true circumcision are distinguished by a

spiritual worship of God. Baptism, as the outward rite of admission to the visible church, must be considered, in all important respects, analogous to circumcision, to which it has succeeded, and the place of which it has been appointed to take. We must therefore say also of it, that it presents the same important distinction between the mere outward rite, and the inward spiritual character which it is designed to illustrate and display, and the necessity of which it proclaims. Circumcision has been abolished. And baptism has been appointed, the typical sign of the regeneration of the spirit, and the sacramental pledge of the spiritual covenant which it indicates. But in reference to baptism also, we must say, "we are the baptism, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." The simple distinction between the two assertions is, that the one rite is completely renounced, because divinely abolished; the other, though divinely appointed and therefore necessarily still retained as obligatory in the church, is in itself made wholly subordinate to the spiritual character which it is designed to represent; and is no mark of the real people of God without that as connected with it. We are not permitted to stop in the outward rite, though ordained of God, but must go on to require the abiding spiritual characteristics, which it is intended to enforce and teach.

The true circumcision "worship God in the Spirit." The people of God are persons who *worship*. Nothing marks them more universally than the fact that they pray. This was the first indica-

tion of the work of grace in the heart of convicted Saul,—“ behold he prayeth.” There can be no professed religion without worship: and no real spiritual piety without an experience and habit of spiritual worship. Prayer is the very first instinctive acting of grace. Prayer remains the index of the actual state of grace in the heart. The awakened and convicted soul cries out for mercy. The penitent and sorrowing soul sues for peace and pardon. The believing soul seeks for increase and continuance of blessings which can only come from God. The heart is by the Holy Ghost touched, broken, melted, renewed in life. And the language of every stage of the work is prayer. Abounding blessings have been bestowed, in the forbearing with guilt, the arousing of the careless, the comforting of the penitent,—and the newborn soul has an instant, and a repeated offering of praise to bring, with its offerings of prayer. So that its new distinction is worship,—habitual worship,—continued, frequent, affectionate, necessary worship. The closet tells of it. The family announces it. The sanctuary records it. The wayside sets up monuments of it. The day bears witness to it. The night is broken by it. It employs the heart. It engages the mind. It occupies the tongue. And the instant, uniform, necessary distinction of the people of God is, they worship. “ We are the circumcision who worship.”

But worship is distinguished by its object. The pagan worships; and morning, noon, and night, cries out to a deity, inhabiting, as he imagines, his idol gods, like the ancient prophets, “ O Baal, hear

us." The papist worships; and counts his roses in prayer to the virgin and the saints; and throws himself in voluntary but rejected humility, before his wafer idol; the deity which dwells as he imagines, in the vessel which the priest holds up to view. But all creature-worship is under condemnation before God, who will not give His glory to another, and hath said, "Cursed is the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place." Whatever may be the concealment, or the palliation for idolatry, God places it everywhere under a curse. They who are truly His people, are distinguished by the total casting out of all inferior objects, and setting up the Lord Jehovah alone, as the single proper object of prayer and praise. The wants which they feel, God alone can supply. The blessings for which they are thankful, have been the gifts of His hand alone. They are taught by His Spirit, utterly to renounce all hope in any created arm; and to come directly and unceasingly, with all their homage and worship, to the One Living and True God. They glory in Him; they praise Him; they trust themselves to Him, and to Him alone. It is therefore not only their distinction, that they worship;—they have but one object of worship. The Lord their God is one Lord. And they are the true circumcision who worship God.

But the Deist and the Socinian professedly worship God. The Apostle brings forth another inseparable distinction of the true people of God,

in this one characteristic of their worship,—they worship God in the Spirit. The Deist who wholly rejects the guidance of the written revelation, and the Socinian who casts away the grand fact and subject of that revelation, in denying the Deity, Atonement and Mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, may profess to worship the One God. But such worship, like the proud offering of Cain, presenting a professed obedience, feeling no burden of guilt, acknowledging no need of a divine sacrifice and righteousness to be provided in man's behalf, is assuredly rejected. In reference to all such worship, however single may be its object, God will take the same attitude which He assumed towards the first offerer of such homage. “The Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering; but unto Cain and his offering, He had not respect.” The difference between them is declared to have been, that by faith in the divine revelations and promises, Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain; by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts. Abel becomes therefore the great leader of acceptable worshippers,—of whom it still remains the divine testimony, that they not only worship God, but also worship Him in the Spirit.

The Spirit, is here beyond all dispute, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. And spiritual worship is worship under the guidance of this Divine Spirit, in contrast to the mere offerings of blind and sinful human nature, acting according to its own will. The Spirit reveals to the people of God, God in His threefold distinction of persons,—the Father,

the Son, and the Holy Ghost,—as the great and glorious object of worship. The Spirit teaches, that there is access for sinful man to the Father, only through the atoning obedience and death of the Son—manifest in the flesh. He brings man to the mercy-seat, as guilty and deserving condemnation, to ask for forgiveness and acceptance, in single reliance upon this one sacrifice, by which God hath perfected forever, them that are sanctified. He opens in the word, to the view of man, this Glorious Covenant God, an Incarnate God, as the One who inhabiteth, filleth up, all the praises and worship of His people. He utters forth in every variety of expression, the great and all important fact, that HE is the only life, and way to life; the only salvation, and means of salvation, to fallen man. He shuts up every other access to God, declaring that no man cometh unto the Father, but by the Son; and unhesitatingly proclaiming to all others who would climb up some other way, “Ye know not what ye worship.” They are the true circumcision, who, seeking and following the guidance of the Spirit, in the instructions of the Holy Scriptures, believe that this God is, and is the rewarder of all who diligently seek Him. They worship God in the Spirit, because they worship God as the Spirit has revealed Him.

But the work of the Holy Spirit in the worship of the people of God, goes beyond the mere provision of written instruction upon this subject. The Apostle teaches us, that there is an actual, personal aid of the Holy Spirit in the believer's prayer; an imparting of divine power, an inward

support of experienced infirmities, a communication of knowledge and wisdom, most important to the ignorance which he feels, and to the blindness of which he is conscious. The Spirit creates the state of mind which calls for prayer; the appetite, consciousness, feeling which must pray. He makes our burdens heavy, so that we cannot bear them; our dangers and difficulties great, so that we cannot force our way through them; our sorrows many, so that we are oppressed by them. Then, because we feel wretched, guilty, lost, helpless and undone, we pray, we must pray. He shows us how fully God has provided for our wants; the perfect and adapted sufficiency of His redemption to meet our case. He makes us feel, that we must have just what Christ possesses; and to see, that Christ possesses, just what we need. He convinces us of sin in ourselves, and of righteousness in Him. He brings us to His finished perfect work of merit, to cast the incense of our worship upon the glowing fire of His righteousness, that the Father may receive the sweet savour of that offering, and look upon the face of His Anointed, and extend through Him, the riches of His grace to us. Then we worship in the Spirit. He dictates the prayer we utter. He moves and melts the heart which utters it. He writes upon our souls, the record of judgment and mercy, which we need and feel. And our prayer becomes the effectual inwrought prayer of the justified man, which availeth much. We are then the true circumcision who worship God in the Spirit.

Spiritual worship has reference farther, to the

inward seat of worship, in opposition to the mere worship in outward form. It is worship with the heart, and not with the lips and words only. The same Spirit who has revealed the object, and aided the infirmities of our worship, prepares the heart, and makes it active and earnest, in the sacred engagement to which it has thus been brought. Vain and worthless are all the costly oblations of outward prayer and praise, when offered by themselves. The publican's secret cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner," gushing forth from the full fountain of a broken heart;—the faint and half-formed whisper of the soul that first sees, in Jesus, a remedy for its conscious guilt, "Lord, remember me in thy kingdom;"—the lowly anxious call of the sinner who feels himself sinking in the waves of condemnation, "Lord, save me, or I perish;"—far outweigh them all. O there is a piercing power in prayer like this! Every throb of such a heart is felt in heaven. Every groan from such a spirit ascends like celestial music to the throne of God. This broken, unearthly dialect is there thoroughly understood. The Spirit recognizes the formation of his power. The Son acknowledges this travailing soul as the happy and desired reward of the sorrows of his own soul in the flesh. The Father welcomes this object of earth's neglect, as a shining jewel in the crown of his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased. And there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, when it can be said thus of the returning sinner, the heart-broken penitent, the humble, self-renouncing believer, "Behold he prayeth." They who stay not in the

outward form of words, but thus speak from the real experience of the heart to God, are the true circumcision who thus worship God in the Spirit.

But we must take a further step, while we say, that to worship God in the Spirit, intimates the actual state and action of this heart in prayer; in opposition to all coldness, indifference, or listless unconcern, in our approach to God. Spiritual prayer is fervent, animated, engrossing prayer. When the burden presses heavily, and the case seems instant and all-important, and the way is open, and the Saviour is near, and the blessing seems just ready to be given, then the soul is engaged in its work. It is deaf to outward sounds, and blind to sights abroad. It is dead to earth, and alive to God. It is doing a great work, and cannot come down to the trifles which are perishing while they are used. It is with Abraham in the mount, and with Moses in the cloud, and persons and things below are forgotten and left behind. Oh, how precious and important, are even moments like these, while the King is seen in His beauty, and liberty of access is found unto God in Christ. This is the state of a renewed heart in the lively actings of its grace. And though the people of God have not this blessed state of mind as a permanent state, yet are they favored often with these precious visitations of the Holy Spirit,—and learn for their enjoyment to prize them most highly, and to wish that it were always thus with them. They are thus excited and encouraged to desire the constant dominion of the Holy Ghost within them; so that they may, not only in

the object whom the Spirit reveals, and the prayer which the Spirit imparts, and the renewed heart, in which he writes for them, and reads to them, this prayer of faith ; but also in the constant fervency and love of this praying heart, in its most animated and holy state, worship God who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth.

This is a short and partial exhibition of spiritual worship ; one of the marks and characteristics of the true circumcision,—the real people of God. O my friends, what do you know of this ? Have you thus been led up into the mount, where God meets his people ? Try your secret prayers by this standard. Try your united public prayers by this. There may be many together ; but God is looking upon, and regarding the heart of each, as if he were entirely alone. Spiritual worship is not a partnership in a common offering, of which even the general character may be, that it is sincere and spiritual, that will render your worship acceptable, as if the fervency of some would make up for the dullness of others. It is your own personal, individual condition and offering which is alone to be regarded. If Jesus be in the assembly for you, he is dwelling personally within you. If the work of the Spirit be in the outward congregation, it must be experienced in your own heart to be of any avail to yourself. The Pharisee and the Publican prayed together in the same temple, at the same hour and offering of worship. The one went down to his house justified ; the other did not. O test and see the character of your prayers. If you are the true circumcision, you are taught to worship

God in the Spirit; and do habitually thus draw nigh to him. Still again, my friends, what do you desire to know of this? Here is laid before you one of the marks of God's family. Would you have your inheritance with them? Come, then. Christ is the way. The Spirit gives the desire, and will give you the ability to walk in it. Go to the exalted Saviour; tell him your wants. If your heart really feels, you will find words for prayer. Your words may be few and broken; but they are as intelligible as the cry of the young ravens, and God heareth *them*. He understands the language of the heart, and never rejects it, when it speaks in desires toward himself. This is the real character of man. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. Go with your heart to God the Saviour. You cannot go except the Spirit lead you. When you do go, it is the blessed, living proof, that God is teaching and guiding you for himself, with a divine power which can never fail. Then you are no longer the "circision," rejected with evil workers, and with dogs who are without, but are the true circumcision, worshipping God in the Spirit, rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh.

XXII.

THE TRUE CIRCUMCISION.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 3.—*We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*

THREE marks are here given of the church of the living God ; spiritual worship, single joy in Christ, and total renunciation of self. They are the designations of that true people, who are the habitation of God through the Spirit. There is an outward transitory church united together in the bonds of external profession and ordinances. And there is a spiritual, living, everlasting church bound together in that heavenly fellowship in Christ, which outward ordinances are designed to illustrate. A sacrament is defined by our church to be “an outward visible sign of an inward spiritual grace given to us.” The union in the outward visible sign indicates the visible professing church of Christ. The possession of “the inward spiritual grace” distinguishes the spiritual body, which is the true and abiding church. If these two went certainly and uniformly together, the outward and

the spiritual church, the earthly and the heavenly church, would be always precisely the same. But our church teaches us from the Scriptures, that there is no indissoluble union between these two; declaring, in the 25th article, that “in such only as worthily receive the sacraments, have they a wholesome effect and operation;” and announcing in the 29th article, that “such as be void of a lively faith, although they do press with their teeth, the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, yet in no wise are they partakers in Christ;” and in our communion office teaching us to pray that we who shall be partakers of the outward rite, “may also worthily receive the most precious body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, be filled with His grace and heavenly benediction, and made one body with Him, so that He may dwell in us, and we in Him;” and then to give thanks, that the due receiving these holy mysteries is the assurance that we are really members of the mystical body of our Lord, which is the blessed company of all faithful people. There is, then, a spiritual church which is not identical with the outward visible church, the graces of which, outward ordinances are intended to signify, and to a participation of which outward ordinances are designed to lead. Just the relation which the scaffolding sustains to the building, or the portico to the dwelling, does the earthly visible church sustain to this spiritual, abiding church. Of this spiritual church, the true circumcision, the characteristics are given in our text.

Having considered the first of these marks, I purpose now to pass to a consideration of the sec-

ond,—*Joy in Christ Jesus.* The true people of God are a joyful people. Whatever other characteristics may mark their condition, their joy is a peculiar and habitual one. “We are the circumcision who rejoice.” The Epistle from which these words are taken, is full of the expressions of joy, as the mind of the apostle himself, and as his view of the becoming spirit for those to whom he wrote. In the 1st chapter, 4th verse, he tells them that in every prayer of his for them, he made request with joy. In the 18th verse he declares that his present state was rejoicing, and he determined that this should be his continuing mind,—“I do rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice.” In the 2nd chapter, 2nd verse, he intreats them to give him new reason for joy, and to unite with him in the same spirit: “Fulfil ye my joy; be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” In the 3rd chapter, 1st verse, his repeated precept is, “Finally, brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” In the 4th chapter, 4th verse, he yet again enforces the same precept: “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say Rejoice.” In the 10th verse he announces of himself, “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly.” In the 18th verse he says again, “I have all and abound; I am full; my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus.” What an elevated, peculiar mind is this! And who is it among the sons of Adam who thus writes? Why, mark again, 1st chapter, 13th verse, he is a prisoner in chains; a prisoner for the very cause in which he thus rejoices. His devotion to this cause has already cost

him the loss of all earthly things. "My bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places." He is a literary, intelligent, highly-educated, refined and sensitive man, perfectly innocent of crime, reduced to the condition of a convict in public degradation. Whether the issue of this confinement shall be liberty or public execution, he declares himself wholly unable to say. And yet, under the burden of this suspense, with the most fearful shapes of death before him, he says, "If I be offered a sacrifice, upon the service or offering of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." What strange notes of music are these to come forth from a dungeon's walls! What a strange condition to select, as an illustration of the power of a Christian's joy! How justly may the man who possesses this blessed spirit,—who, though he is left without earthly sympathy, and must say of his companions, "I have no man like-minded, for all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's," yet can also say, "Not that I speak in respect of want, for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." How justly may he say, "We are the circumcision who rejoice in Christ Jesus!" But this joyful spirit was not peculiar to this apostle. It is the spirit of the people of Christ; the mind which he imparts to them, and the duty which he requires from them, in the exercise of this imparted mind. They are often under a peculiar pressure of trials. Deprivations have successively swept away precious portions of their earthly inheritance.

Sorrows have heaped their mountains upon their heads. Clouds and darkness have shrouded their earthly prospects; and often deep midnight in their condition makes surrounding landscapes undistinguishable and unnoticed. And yet they rejoice in the lot of their inheritance. Far heavier burdens have been removed, and far deeper sorrows have been relieved, and strange as may seem their path and choice to those who have never entered into their secret life, the reproach of Christ is for them a happier portion than the treasures of the world; and the afflictions of the people of God have attractions far transcending the temporary pleasures of sin. They groan under the burden of inward guilt. They are wearied with carrying within them a body of death. They sigh for the final conquest over enemies. They long intensely for an abode of peace; and yet, the heart that is thus sorrowful, is at the same time, and notwithstanding this, always rejoicing. This is at once a privilege bestowed, and a duty required. It brings before us, therefore, a note of actual character, and a standard for trial. Look into the state of your own minds. Search what manner of spirits ye are of. Do you find an inward abiding joy as your portion? Have you an actual inheritance, hedged as it may be with thorns, which you would not exchange for all the mirth of earth's prosperity, and all the grandeur of its gain? Do you realize the duty of being happy; the obligation, as well as the privilege of serving the Lord without fear, and walking before him with a free, thankful, and happy spirit? This is a line of requirement as well as privilege.

You cannot be too happy in the service of the Redeemer whom you love, and in whom you believe. It must remain ever the mark of his people, "We are the circumcision who rejoice in Christ Jesus."

It is joy in the possession of a peculiar object, a treasure of incalculable and inexhaustible worth. We rejoice in Christ Jesus. The peculiarity here, is in the object selected. All joy is the result of the possession of a desired object. It is necessarily proportioned to the estimation which is formed and cherished of the object desired. The bestowal of no gift would promote the joy of him who had no value affixed to the thing received, and no adaptation of mind and feeling to its possession. The bird who scratched the rejected diamond from the earth, would have rejoiced in the finding of a single grain of corn. The people of God rejoice in Christ Jesus. They have formed the highest conception of the Saviour's worth. They see in the revelation of Him, the attributes and powers which are most of all desirable and important to them. When therefore He is actually bestowed upon them as their own, they find a joy in the actual possession of Him, in exact proportion to their previous estimation of His excellence and value. This is the uniform measure of the Christian's joy, and its absence accounts most justly for the fact, that so many professing Christians rejoice so little. The single question, "What is thy Beloved more than another's beloved?" goes to the root of this matter. And the answer of the mind to the demand, will measure the joy of the heart in giving it. A mere teacher of duty, a revealer of

truth, a high and holy pattern of human excellence, will command the homage of my reason, and compel my reverence and respect. But to touch my heart, to strike the deep fountains of joy which lie buried in my sluggish spirit, requires something far beyond this. And because so many see nothing beyond this in the Lord Jesus,—realize no personal connection between Him and them,—understand no special needs which He alone can heal, and no special gifts which have been received from Him alone,—His name kindles no fire in their hearts, and the glorious excellence of Himself, as a possession, excites not the spirit which can say “Herein I do rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice.”

But O, how different is the estimation of the true people of God! In their view, the Saviour is chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely: and when the divine gift makes this Saviour their own portion forever, their joy in the possession is in proportion to their measurement of His worth. They rejoice in what he is in Himself, and in what He has become to them. A load of just condemnation rested upon them, and He assumed the burden upon Himself, and said “Spare them, for I have found a ransom.” Everlasting death was the wages of their sin; and He, by His own death, abolished death, and him that had the power of death, and delivered them who, through fear of death, were held in bondage. Total destitution of merit and obedience shut them out from the presence of a Holy God, and He was made under the law for them, fulfilled its righteousness in their behalf, and

proclaimed peace from God to them who were afar off. Continued weakness exposes them to the power of every enemy. But He is head over all things for them, and will suffer no one to pluck them out of His hand. Their Redeemer is mighty, and ever liveth, able to save unto the uttermost, those who come unto God through Him. But who is this? And what is their Beloved more than another's beloved? He is God manifest in the flesh. He is the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, dwelling in a lowly and contrite man. He is the Great Jehovah, who filleth all things, in the likeness of a suffering, dying man. He is Jesus, because he is a Saviour. He is Christ, because he has been anointed for this mighty work, and accepted and crowned for its triumphant completion.

O, there is a power here to arouse the deepest and the most abiding joy. And when the sinner sees the sacrifice upon the cross; and the guilty reads the pardon written there in atoning blood; and the creature is brought, in all his weakness, to the very throne of the Creator; and the dying rebel is made to see that he is a living son; and the dungeon is closed, and the home of peace invites him to an immortal dwelling-place with God as his Father; then the soul becomes fledged with wings of rapture; and an angel's tongue seems feeble, to tell the unutterable blessings which it has received, in this amazing GOD-MAN, who has brought it into communion with Himself, and made it one with Him, in destiny and hope forever. It is joy in Christ Jesus;—joy that there is such a

being;—joy that God and man are thus united for the salvation of a perishing race;—joy that He has finished the work which was given Him to do;—joy that He remains the same, yesterday, to-day, and forever. Every testimony of the Holy Spirit in the word, to His excellence in majesty and power; every revelation of the riches of divine grace and glory in Him; every verse of Sacred Scripture which assures of His ability to save, His love for sinners, and His everlasting life for the benefit of His people; awakens and increases this joy. And when the Bible speaks of Him in secret, and when the living ambassador proclaims the unsearchable riches of His grace,—joy, new joy, —real, increasing, flowing joy, comes in upon the soul of the child of God; and he realizes the truth of the testimony, “We are the circumcision, which rejoice in Christ Jesus.” No other intelligence sweeps the cords of his heart with such a master hand. No other name sends a thrill like this throughout his reviving soul. The annunciation of no other being so awakens his affections, to go forth in bands, to meet the approaching guest, and make him welcome.

But we take a step beyond this, when we say it is not only joy in what Christ is, but also joy in what He is *to us*. “We are the circumcision, who rejoice *in* Christ Jesus.” That is, not only in *Him* as an object, but *in* Him, as our own condition, in our relation to Him, our interest in Him, our portion with Him. This seems at once and evidently, necessary to make the former point complete. How can I rejoice in an object which is in no de-

gree my own? an object in which I have no participation? While I am perishing in poverty, can I rejoice in the wealth which is pouring into the rich man's doors, who dwells by my side? When my strength is famished, and my marrow dried up with hunger, can I rejoice in the fulness of bread which I see loading the table of another, of which no crumb is imparted to me? As well, then, might there be joy in hell, when sinners are saved, as in heaven, of which they are to partake. The people of God rejoice in Christ Jesus, because He is their own. The Holy Spirit in his gracious ministrations, has taken of His gifts, and shown them unto them, and made them to discern them, as the things which are freely given them of God. They realize their right to love Him, and to enjoy His love, as the gift of God to lost sinners, to be as complete as their right to the rain and the sunshine of the heavens. They hesitate not constantly to improve and enjoy this right, to which they are so freely and urgently invited by Himself. The blessed Spirit in the written word, calls and promises, and offers gifts which are without repentance to all who will receive them. And as they read and meditate upon these free and gracious provisions of love for man, there is a secret witness in their heart, which testifies all these are theirs; and they are conscious of that feeling towards them, and of that real interest in them, which is only to be awakened by the possession of things which are our own. This is the work of the Spirit writing the testimony of Christ upon the heart. They look back to the time,

when, from their condition of voluntary unbelief and selfish love of the world, they were brought as sinners, condemned and helpless, to the Saviour's feet. They realize, that, however infirm and sinful they still are, a mighty change has been wrought within them, which is not of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. They have hopes, and sensibilities, and fears, and desires, and purposes, to which their nature was an entire stranger. They have had conquests wrought in them, and over them, which they have never achieved for themselves. They have a hatred of transgression, and a love and desire for conformity to God, which no enemy to God could ever have bestowed upon them. They are really leaning upon Christ, and hoping in Him alone. They pray, and read, and hear, as they once could not. The great treasure for which they continually long, is that glorious Saviour Himself, whose beauty they have, in some degree, seen in the sanctuary.

O could they live wholly by faith, dead to earth, and the world dead to them, it would be all their desire, and the very joy of their hearts! Blessed testimony, the witness of the Spirit with their spirits, that they are the children of God! But who hath wrought all this? Who visited them when they were afar off, and sought them when they were lost, and has taught them all their need, and made them to desire the full riches of his power and glory? It is Christ, and Christ alone, that their souls hang themselves upon. They put every crown upon Him, and ascribe to Him all the glory; and while they hope in His everlasting

righteousness and power, and look for the time when they shall see Him as He is, their joy is in Him alone, thus made unto them of God wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. They are able to say with entire sincerity, My Beloved is mine, and I am His. Realizing the spiritual origin of this single joy in Christ Jesus, as the gift of His grace, and the work of His Spirit, they can humbly, but justly, unite with the testimony of the apostle, "We are the circumcision, which rejoice in Christ Jesus."

This is a note of spiritual character, and a standard for personal trial. Are we thus living upon Christ? Is He our bread, our meat, our living fountain? When we are happy, are we happy in Him? Can anything make us happy when He is absent? How wretched and transitory will be all other joy but this! Our brightest pleasures, our richest gains, will be but the winding sheet of bitter, piercing recollections around our lonely, guilty spirits, when God calls us to His throne, if we have not this joy in Christ. They will not have perished, but they will have become the embers of an eternal fire, which the judgment of the Most High shall fan into an instant and unending flame. O how great is the folly of the joys of earth as they are seen and examined, in the long-told experience of eternity! What is the hope of the sinner, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? Consider this, ye that forget God, lest He take you away in his vengeance, when none can deliver you. What *will* you do—what *can* you do, without a sure possession in Christ Jesus, when God maketh inquisition for your sins?

XXIII.

THE TRUE CIRCUMCISION.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 3.—*We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*

THE third mark of the spiritual church of God is the point which is offered to our present consideration. It is a total renunciation of self,—“We have no confidence in the flesh.” It is hardly necessary to dwell much upon the fact that the term *flesh* here, can have no limited reference to the material body of man. It describes his whole natural condition as a sinful fallen being. It includes all possible advantages and benefits which may arise from this state, through the exercise of its own powers merely, or by any attainment of its own wisdom and strength. Whatever appertains peculiarly to man’s mortal condition, or is a part of man’s present state of being, either as an inherited, or as an acquired advantage, must be considered as constituting a part of that concrete character which St. Paul here calls the flesh, and all confidence in which he entirely renounces, in the

name of the true circumcision, the real people of God. He explains his meaning of the term very much at large, in the several succeeding verses,—
“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.”
In his view, whatever might be considered gain to man, in his natural condition, as a sinful being, alienated from God, and without hope in Him, was a part of the flesh which was to be renounced, by the heart which would truly worship God in the Spirit, or really rejoice in Christ Jesus. It is not, then, man’s dying body in opposition to his undying soul, which is to be given up; but man’s own attainments, character and possessions, in opposition to the gifts of the grace of God. “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.”
It is man’s own self in opposition to an offered and provided Saviour; and this total renunciation of self, as a foundation for confidence in his religious hopes and prospects, becomes with spiritual worship and single joy in Christ, the peculiar mark and characteristic of the people of God. They have no confidence in the flesh.

To consider this subject adequately, we may regard it in a retrospective and a prospective view. In looking back upon life that is past, the true

circumcision have no confidence in the flesh. They wholly renounce all that is their own, as a foundation for hope of acceptance before God. In looking forward to the life which is to come, and the duties which are yet to be performed, as the servants and subjects of the Lord of Hosts, they have no confidence in the flesh. They wholly renounce all strength and power of their own as the means by which they may obey the will of God. There is much in these two views to attract the confidence of man toward works of his own; and the unrenewed in heart, ignorant of the perfect holiness of God, and of the deceitfulness and plague of their own nature, are deluded to place all their confidence in the works and power of self,—in the flesh. They accordingly walk and live wholly by sight and sense, and not by faith.

Confidence in the flesh is confidence in the works of unregenerate man as in some degree valuable and acceptable in his relation to God. This system of judgment looks upon two men who are equally, by their own confession, still unconverted by the Holy Spirit, but whose life and character have been marked by very different measures of outward transgression, and are, therefore, designated by very different epithets among men, as standing also in very different corresponding relations to God. It supposes, if they should both become renewed by the Spirit of God, the one would have far more that was excellent to bring to God, and far less to renounce before God, than the other: the one would possess works upon which he might look back with some degree of satisfaction as

something of his own of value in the Divine eye, of which the other was wholly destitute. And though it might hesitate, perhaps, to call this, actual merit in the sight of God, it would not hesitate to feel that it was a measure of excellence which was to be regarded, and which God certainly would not despise. It would view this supposed personal excellence as a lessening, in some degree, the actual dependence upon grace, and an attainment of something that went greatly toward the salvation of the soul; so that such a man might feel justly thankful that he needed less to be forgiven, and was therefore under less obligation to Divine mercy than another who was more manifestly guilty in human eyes, and whose character was registered in far deeper lines of apparent depravity among men. From such a view of the character of man, the true circumcision separate themselves entirely. All the merit and excellence of the works of nature they utterly renounce. Whatever has been the restraint or the regularity of their unconverted life, however removed from the stains of disgraceful guilt, or the pollutions of open profligacy, they feel themselves to be wholly destitute of any works which God can accept or regard in his judgment of them. They see in themselves secret sins enough to overbalance this supposed freedom from outward transgressions. They are consciously shut out from all thoughts of a boastful character as they compare themselves with other men. They are brought to the seat of Divine mercy, the throne of grace, in the mere attitude of needy suppliants, imploring the exercise

of love which they could never have deserved, and mercy of which they feel themselves to be altogether unworthy. At this point of their history, in an utter death to sin and self, they cast themselves upon the boundless compassion of God to the guilty, seeing in themselves nothing but guilt; and every thought and feeling of their souls unites in the solemn confession before God,—We have no confidence in the flesh.

Confidence in the flesh again assumes a more refined position than this. If there be nothing in unregenerate man, actually acceptable to God, so that he is wholly a sinner in the Divine eye, there is surely a character in returning, penitent man, which is to be regarded and valued. When he acknowledges his transgressions, and with a heavy and mourning spirit, comes to ask forgiveness of his sins, there must be a worth in his repentance, in which he may, in some degree, be allowed to rest. The more he grieves and suffers in sorrow for sin, certainly the more acceptable he must be in the sight of God. The tears he sheds, and the sighs and groans he utters, must have a value before God, which is not to be rejected, or put out of view. Thus this self-confiding spirit argues. And, accordingly, it measures the right to hope for pardon by the extent of conscious suffering for sin, and, on the other hand, drives to a despair of forgiveness those whose hearts are less moved, and the fountains of whose sorrows seem less deeply opened. It is willing to renounce all excellence of previous character; but it makes a righteousness out of sorrow for sin, which it was unable to

form out of apparent separation from sin. Instead of bringing the soul directly to the completely finished work of the divine Lord, to find all its hope, and all its reasons for hope, in that which he has done, it teaches man that the reason for his pardon is in his own repentance. It turns him away from Jesus to look upon himself. It makes all his inward, religious character, to consist, not in the resting of his soul upon the glorious sufficiency of a Saviour, but in the changing states and feelings of his own experience, the ebbing and flowing of the tides of his own emotions. All this is as certainly confidence in the flesh, as the resting of the soul for hope upon previous works of righteousness which we have done, in our natural state, and by our natural strength. The true circumcision entirely renounce it. However deeply and really they mourn under the burden of their guilt, they feel themselves in no degree the better because they are sorrowful, or having the more right to hope because their spirits are broken and contrite. They fly from their repentance as cordially as they fly from their sins. They still desire and seek to think only of a Saviour's finished righteousness and power, as the reason for God's mercy to them. The burden of their prayer is not, Look upon our sorrow, for it is great, but, Look upon the face of thine anointed, O Lord, and have mercy upon us, for we have no confidence in the flesh.

But confidence in the flesh travels far beyond this. Is man never improving in the sight of God? it asks. Allow his unregenerate life to be nothing, and his sorrow for its guilt, and his amendment of

personal character to be of no worth? Surely, when he has pressed forward in the path of life, and has received the gifts, and brought forth the fruits of the Spirit—when his life is adorned with all the graces of a divine character, and is closely conformed to Him who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,—when the irritable passions of his corrupt nature have been subdued, and his soul becomes matured for glory, and meet for the inheritance of the saints in light,—then there must be something in him which is praiseworthy and excellent. You will not say of such an one, whose mind is so irradiated with truth, and whose affections are so engaged in the single worship and love of God, that he is nothing still? Beloved, what shall we reply to a demand like this? Surely, only that which St. Paul avows, “I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing:”—“Not as though I had already attained, either were already made perfect, 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.” The true circumcision are perfectly settled in mind upon this great subject. Though in the view of others they may be rich in good works, in their own view they are destitute, unholy, and unclean. They turn from everything that is their own in their last hour, just as anxiously as they did in their first. Their consciousness of sin deepens and extends, in the degree in which they grow up in the likeness of God. They undoubtedly discern

a gracious improvement in their own character, but they also discern deeper and more hidden evils lying uncorrected still. Their need for mercy to unrighteousness, and of grace for guilt, is still entire. The works of the Divine Spirit in them, so far as they proceed from Him, are perfect. But even all these are corrupted and perverted by their own selfishness and sin; and, so far as they become their own works, are feeble and worthless. Looking at the whole history of life, from its beginning to its close, they feel this humbling view of their own character to be the state of mind which is divinely wrought in them. They strive for a spirit of total renunciation of self. They are constrained to say, and they feel able to say, We are the circumcision, which have no confidence in the flesh. Their own works furnish neither foundation for hope, nor reason for hope; but simply evidences to others that they are really possessors of a lively and glorious hope, a hope which is given to them freely, in the death and resurrection of their glorious Lord. The testimony of this hope to themselves is in the witness of His Spirit, bearing witness with their spirit, and leading them to the very state of mind which is described by the apostle in these words, "Worshipping God in the Spirit, rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh."

Confidence in the flesh takes a prospective view of duty to be performed, as well as a retrospective view of duty already fulfilled. In looking forward to future duty, it magnifies the sufficiency of human strength, exalts the power of man's own re-

sistance of evil, and leads to promises and resolutions of duty rather than to simple believing, self-renouncing prayer for strength, and renewal from God alone. Ignorant of the entire weakness of man, and of the strength of the evils which beset him, it forms future plans of conduct and life without reference to the fact that all our sufficiency for good is from God ; that He must work all our works within us, if they are to be honorable or acceptable to Him. Its uniform result is, therefore, woful disappointment, discouragement, and despondency. The mountain which stood so strong on one day, on the next is completely and easily overthrown. The enemy has come on so fast, and so powerfully, that all resistance has proved in vain. The man whose resolutions were formed with sincere determination, finds himself shattered and despairing, under the discovered and fearful power of the evil within. How much disappointment and distress arises from this vain confidence in the power of the flesh, many of you may bitterly feel. We have not room here particularly to describe it. This whole spirit and mind, the true circumcision entirely renounce. They are taught, by the Holy Ghost, to realize that their strength is all in God. Their life and power are hidden with Him. They conquer by faith and prayer. They cast themselves, in conscious weakness, upon Him who is mighty to save. They feel His strength made perfect in their weakness. In humble confidence, they repose upon His sufficiency, and rely upon his leading and guidance. While they do this they walk forward in peacefulness and security. The everlasting arms are un-

der them; and the power of God is abundantly competent to overrule and protect them. Their hope of perseverance is founded upon the certainty of the Divine promise. God hath made an everlasting covenant with them, in all things well-ordered and sure. He must be true. He cannot, therefore, fail them or forsake them. He that hath begun a good work in them, will carry it on, unto the day of the Lord Jesus. In looking forward to eternity, they hope, in the enjoyment often of a bright and glorious hope. But it is wholly resting upon what God is able to do for them, who hath himself become their salvation, and bids them to look unto Him, and trust, and not be afraid. As each day of their pilgrimage successively passes away, they feel themselves secretly and blessedly upheld, by a Divine power which is all-sufficient for their need, ever flowing in for their comfort, and constantly sustaining and encouraging them in the race in which they are engaged. As they look forward to future duties, and future trials, they are still confident, quietly hoping and waiting for the salvation of God; sure that every day will as certainly bring its grace as its cares, and its gifts as its demands. There is a living power in this trusting, self-renouncing spirit, which is perfectly elastic under all the burdens of life; lifting up the heart in joy and peace amidst all its trials; and causing the weary and heavy laden to sing for joy, in the assurance that He who hath loved them and given Himself for them, will give them the victory. This total renunciation of self, and of human power, brings them directly to the throne of God; gives

them spiritual fellowship with Him, and marks them, in their own experience, as the true circumcision which worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

You must receive this last characteristic, my friends, not only as a standard for examination, but also as a guide in the path of truth and duty. If you are the people of God, the living members of His dear Son, this will be the state of your mind and feeling. As the work of grace is carried on within you, this state of mind and feeling will become still more deeply fixed and settled, as the controlling influence upon your heart. You will discern the emptiness and worthlessness of all your own works and powers. You will cease from man, and learn to live alone upon the grace, and goodness, and faithfulness of God. If you desire to be registered among the people of God, thus only will you find the way of peace. You have no offerings to bring; no righteousness of your own; nothing but guilt to be pardoned, weakness to be upheld, and ignorance to be enlightened. In this emptiness of spirit you may come, and rest yourselves fully and confidently upon that which has been done for you. Come freely; come confidently; come cheerfully; come at once. The Lord waiteth that he may be gracious unto you, and have compassion upon you. There is no obstacle in your path, and no reason why you should delay in thus coming to an anointed Saviour, but your own aversion to God. Cast that away and come. Whatever may be your reflections upon the guilt of your past character, or your consciousness of the weakness of your present state,

let nothing be perverted into an argument for delay. The invitations and offers of the gospel are so perfectly free, so unclogged with any conditions, that you have but to feel and confess your deep and heartfelt need, and take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. O let the arguments of divine truth, and the power of divine grace, prevail with you. Let your weary and burdened spirits rejoice to repose themselves, as the true circumcision of God, upon One so mighty and all-sufficient to save.

XXIV.

THE GOSPEL THE ONLY ROCK.

ST. MATTHEW, vii., 24, 25.—*Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.*

“ I WILL liken him unto a *wise man*.” And who among men is not anxious to appropriate this title? To confide in his own wisdom, to exalt the claims of his own intellectual powers, to magnify the sufficiency of his own reason, to deny the authority of others, in questions presented to his own judgment and decision—are habits and traits of character perfectly natural to man. God has bestowed the powers of understanding and judgment upon men, as the distinction of their race, and He deals with them, and addresses them upon the ground of this distinction. He makes them accountable for their own conduct. He demands of them, as rational and responsible beings, why of their own selves they do not judge what is right.

But every day's experience shows a moral per-

version in man, which overrules his convictions of right, and brings him a willing captive under the power of conscious sin ; which leads him to establish a standard of wisdom, far different from the judgment of God, and deludes him into the sacrifice of unseen and eternal things, of inestimable value, for acknowledged trifles, which are seen and temporal. God's decision of real, practical wisdom is most distinct and intelligible : "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One, that is understanding." True piety, formed in a cordial acceptance of the offers of the divine revelation, and growing up in an affectionate obedience of God's perfect will, is wisdom, real wisdom in the estimation of heaven. The conversion of the heart by the Divine Spirit is its commencement—the life of faith, in submission to God, its consequence—the crown of glory, in the presence of a Saviour, its unchanging result. This is the divine judgment. But how different is the judgment of earth ! How generally, by man, is simple religious faith in the word and power of a Redeeming God counted as weakness and folly ; and that man considered wise who professes to have arisen superior to the influence of its fears, untrammelled by the bondage of its doctrines, and regardless of the peculiar motives of conduct which it presents. There is a fancied independence in unbelief, an imaginary freedom in professed scepticism, which, though it really casts off the only freedom for the soul, and brings man into a bondage which is actual and eternal, still deludes and ensnares a multitude of the unwary and self-willed. There are

wise, and scribes, and disputers of this world, to whom the wisdom of God appears as foolishness, and who imagine themselves elevated above the necessity or the propriety of recourse to the gracious provisions of a Saviour's Gospel. Whether this be really wisdom in man, our examination must show. That it is not wisdom according to the standard of God, is manifest and undeniable.

True wisdom our Lord illustrates in the text. The passage concludes his sermon on the mount. In that discourse he lays open the great leading principles of the Gospel, and carries those who adopt and those who reject these principles of conduct, to the opposite results which they severally attain; and having exhibited these different descriptions of character, and these contrasts of private experience connected with them, he declares the fact, that under the preaching of his Gospel, true wisdom will be displayed when men embrace and love it, and real folly exhibited in their refusal and rejection of it. "Therefore," he says—that is, not only because of the truth and excellency of these principles in themselves, but also because of their certain final result and the consequences of their rejection, "then will I profess unto them I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity,"—"Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock."

This illustration of the wisdom of universal sub-

jection to the commands of Jesus is, like all the comparisons of our Lord, perfectly familiar and intelligible. None could hesitate in the determination which were the wiser of two men, whom he saw engaged in building for themselves a habitation, when the one dug deep for his foundation, and erected his building upon the solid rock, and the other went by the seaside, to lay his timbers upon the sand, exposed to the power of every rising storm and of every returning tide. Yet thus the Lord illustrates the conduct of men in reference to the important communications which he has made to them in the Gospel. The same wisdom which would lead a man to make his earthly dwelling as secure as possible from harm, will lead him also to secure his eternal welfare, in a thankful conformity to the Saviour's will; and the folly which would be manifest in a recklessness of the lower interest, is far more seriously exhibited, in indifference to the higher concerns of the soul, which a neglect of the Gospel displays. No farther illustration could render this figure more intelligible. Let it be our object seriously and fairly to consider it.

Every man living is building for futurity. To-morrow and to-morrow, in a long succession of coming days, occupy his attention and his plans. But beyond the plans and purposes of the most, every living man is actually building for eternity.

“Eternity, that awful word,
To souls unpardoned and abhorred.”

He is to meet the results of his labor in an unchanging state. He is to receive the recompense

of his reward, in the judgment of an unchanging God. He is to abide by the full consequences of his present choice, in an unchanging life or death, as flowing from that judgment. And according to his building now, is to be the security or the overthrow of his habitation then. An acceptance of the redeeming offers of the Gospel, a submission to its authority, an embracing of its hopes, in a life of simple following of Christ, is one system of building for man. A rejection of the Gospel from its rightful claims upon the heart, an attempt to live and act independently of its communications and demands, a refusal to yield to the supreme authority and will of the Great Redeemer whom it reveals—is another system of building for man. The results of each, eternity will display. The simple question we now consider, is, which of these schemes of human conduct and character is building upon a rock. The Saviour solemnly affirms, in our text, the man who builds upon the rock is the one who hears and obeys the commands of His revelation, and the principle is therefore affirmed, that an acceptance and obedience of the Gospel is the mark of true wisdom on the part of man. The converted, believing, religious man is the only wise man.

The “sayings” of the Lord Jesus reveal a method of access and reconciliation for rebellious man to God, in the obedience and death of a Saviour who hath died a sacrifice for sin. They proclaim the utterly lost state of man without this provision. They declare that there is no other way of life, than that which he has opened; and solemnly an-

nounce that the everlasting condition of man will be happy or miserable according to his acceptance or rejection of this divine Redeemer. They may all be comprised in the simple testimony intended to convey them, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we may be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." By these all-important, all-absorbing "sayings," the professed believer in the Gospel declares himself governed. From these momentous sayings the sincere believer derives the practical consequence, that for him everything is here involved; it is his grand interest and concern, to embrace the promises which are here made, to yield himself completely to the commands which are here proclaimed, to follow in the course which is here laid open, that he may attain the eternal life which is here proposed. He counts all but loss for Christ, and renders himself up gladly, as a living sacrifice to Christ, to be His servant and friend, and property forever. The Saviour declares he builds his house upon a rock, a house that shall never be overthrown. He has chosen the good part which shall never be taken away from him: he is the wise man. The wisdom which he displays we will consider.

I. First, let us assume the point, that these "sayings" of the Lord Jesus are infallibly true; that God has really thus spoken unto man in the person of His Son, who is the true God and eternal life. It will not be my duty, nor a part of my argument, in such an assumption of the fact, to prove this point. No! in such a view, we lay our hands upon the Bible

now, as an infallible communication from God, connected with which there is no shadow of doubt. It was given by His inspiration. It is a complete revelation of His mind and will. It utters, upon all the subjects of which it speaks, permanent, intelligible, and eternal truth. Surely upon such a supposition as this there will be no hesitation in pronouncing upon the wisdom of man in connexion with it. The sincere Christian, in the unhesitating belief of this supreme authority and truth of the word of God, thankfully embraces the invitations which it presents, accepts the glorious Saviour whom it offers, casts himself with all his hopes for eternity upon His perfect sufficiency to save, looks for the promised help of His Spirit, and strives to live in conformity to His commands. He passes his life under a consciousness of the inspection of his Judge. He remembers the solemn account he must render for every act to Him. He lives in the world as one bought with a price, the property of God. He lives for a glorious eternity to come. He desires to glorify God in his body and his spirit, which are His. He feels his danger, from the weakness of his own nature, the corruption of his own heart, and the encompassing temptations of sin, and he walks through life with solicitude and caution. But if the Bible be true, he is secure forever. He has sought for pardoning mercy and eternal redemption through the cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus, in the way which this heavenly guide proposes. He has trusted himself to that perfect obedience of the righteous One, for the many sinners, which this revelation from God pro-

claims. He rests upon the guiding power of a covenanted Spirit, to enable him to do the will of God, and to form him after the image of Christ. He is sure, therefore, to be made victorious and happy. Undoubtedly, if the sayings of the Lord Jesus are infallibly true, he, and he only, is the man who is building upon the rock.

But then, what shall we say of the man who is convinced of the undoubted certainty of the revelations of the Bible, and yet lives and acts as if they were a known and undoubted falsehood? who acknowledges a final punishment for sin, in the hands of a resistless God, whose solemn threatenings hang unceasingly over his head, and yet pursues the broad and beaten path of voluntary sin, scorns the justice of heaven, and defies the utmost vengeance of the Almighty? who acknowledges that there is salvation only in the name of Christ, and in His power to save, and yet treads His blood beneath his feet, lives contentedly an alien from His favor, and is unconcerned whether His blessing or His curse shall rest upon him for eternity? who sees that the pit of destruction is bottomless and open, that the smoke of its torment ascends forever and ever, that all hope of return from it is desperate and impossible, and yet, while eternal ruin stares him in the face, and the sword of vengeance points directly at his heart, and he is upon the brink of everlasting woe, presses on to the soul-destroying embraces of sin, as the ox to the slaughter, or the bird to the snare of the fowler? What shall we say of such a man, who acknowledges that the damnation of the unconverted and

unbelieving is sure and just, and yet refuses to yield his heart to any entreaties to him to escape—but that sin infatuates before it destroys, and reason is dethroned while iniquity triumphs? Let the bold and careless rejecter of Gospel grace, the unconverted and worldly hearer of the truth, in this assembly, arrest his confidence; let him stop for awhile in his purpose of self-destruction, and consider the simple question: “Do you believe it really true that God hath offered eternal life in His Son Jesus Christ, and that His wrath abideth upon those who reject Him?” If you honestly believe this, upon what possible ground can you feel secure with a heart still unchanged, and a soul still unreconciled to God? Do you imagine that in your single case, a pursuit of the means of eternal death will not bring you to that fatal end? Do you think that you can grapple with the vengeance of Jehovah? that you can endure the everlasting burnings that you can arm yourself against the worm that never dies? Do you believe that, though there is an eternal hell for rebels against God, yet you can be a rebel, and escape or brave the fearful doom? No! surely! Deceived as you may be, and as you certainly are, this cannot be your foolish confidence. I can conceive but of *two* grounds upon which a man who professes to believe the Bible to be true, can feel himself secure in a course of unrepented sin.

You may flatter yourself that, though the “sayings” of the Lord Jesus are infallibly true, yet God is of boundless mercy, and will not execute His awful threatenings. You may imagine that His

solemn denunciations of punishment to the ungodly were designed rather as serious motives of conduct, excitements to human duty, than to be actually executed upon man. For this the Scripture gives you no authority, and the mere possibility, which your desires, not your judgments, suggest, is a thread far too slender, too manifestly insecure, to be entrusted with the interests of your immortal soul. Divine mercy is indeed surpassing all human power to recount. It is the exhaustless fountain of all the hope and comfort of man. But it has its appointed time and place for exercise, and when your present life is closed, in which wonderful mercy has been displayed to your guilty soul, all opportunity for its exercise has passed away; then comes the dispensation of simple, unbending justice, and to hope for the indulgences of mercy then, is to ask for seed-time in the day of harvest. In the inviolable order of God's appointment, there is a time to pardon and a time to punish, and the one will never be allowed to take the place of the other. When once the corn has fallen before the sickle, it gains no farther reviving from the sunshine. This confidence in the future interposition of mercy to remove the final effects of necessary justice, is an overturning of the whole fidelity of the word of God. Who can trust a single declaration which He makes, if there be still a secret reservation, an unrevealed purpose of indulgence, by which His open assertions are to be finally set aside? We were as well without a revelation from God, as with one that is thus unintelligible, unsafe, and useless. No! "God hath spoken, and shall it not

come to pass ? He hath said, and shall He not do it ? God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man, that He should repent.”

But it may be that your conscience is too faithful and apprehensive, while you thus reject all the offers and authority of the sayings of the Lord Jesus, still professing to believe them infallibly true, to permit you to rest upon this unauthorized foundation. You may attempt, then, to escape with the promise and hope of a future conversion. In this hope you are as irrational and deluded as in the other. I do not deny that God may bring you back from your folly in a future day, and by some future instrument. But how can you promise yourself the repeated offer of this rejected gift, the time in which it may be received, the means by which it may be obtained ? Your flickering, wasted life, is in the hands of an offended God, of whose mercies it is that you are not now consumed. You cannot secure to yourself the reversion of an hour. How many around you have fallen into the darkness of death, with all the guilt of a life impenitent, and of the promises of repentance unfulfilled ! and what was all their hope, when God hath taken away their souls ? O how vain are expectations and plans like these ! The times and seasons the Father keeps in His own power. Sinner ! the decree may have already passed concerning you, and your hour of probation be to-night completed, and long before your own appointed time of conversion comes, you may be cut down, as a guilty rebel, ripe for everlasting ruin. God will not always strive with you, nor suffer himself to be mocked

by you ; He will arise and depart, and will swear in His wrath that you shall not enter into His rest. These infallible sayings of Jesus give no encouragement whatever to the guilty man who is looking for a future convenient season for a penitent, obedient return to God. Their great principle for human conduct in this respect is, “ To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts : ” “ Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.”

Upon the supposition that the revelations of the Gospel are undoubtedly true, the man who rejects them from his heart, and continues in his rebellious disregard of their demands, can have no rational hope, either in the future mercy of God, or in his own plan of a future conversion. And while he encourages himself in such a hope, he is manifestly building upon the sand. He is preparing himself for everlasting destruction from the presence of God, and from the glory of His power. But if God be true, and the word of Christ be truth—if these things are indeed so, as He hath said—surely he is a wise man, and building upon a rock, who cheerfully accepts the promises and grace which the Gospel offers ; who heareth and doeth with a glad heart, sayings which he believes to be infallibly certain and true ; and who makes it his great endeavour to adorn the doctrine, and to honour the name of God his Saviour in a life of affectionate, holy conformity to His will. All that the Bible promises he secures, all that God can give, is his forever. His hope shall never make him ashamed. In this world he is guided by unerring wisdom, supported by unfailing mercy, and protected by im-

movable truth. The rains may descend from above in heavy afflictions and sorrow from the hand of God. The winds may blow from the earth, in the unceasing derision and infidelity of men. The floods may swell and gather around him in accumulated temptation and hostility from the ungodly. But he stands unmoved, his house is founded upon a rock.

Beset with threatening dangers round,
Unmoved shall he maintain his ground ;
On safety's rock he sits and sees
The shipwreck of his enemies.

The imagination of man can suggest nothing really desirable, which the word of God, who cannot lie, has not promised to him. It is beyond the power of his mind to comprehend the joys which actually await him, and which are all his own. And if all the precious sayings of the Lord Jesus be infallibly true, if they come with the authority of the mighty God, competent to fulfill them for fallen man, the real believer in these sayings can have no wish ungratified, no hope unfulfilled. In life, in death, for eternity, he is perfectly secure and completely happy. He has sacrificed nothing to his faith, but that which was really his dishonour, and a source of trouble. He has lost nothing by his faith, that is important to his real interest. He has gained everything which can be conceived as valuable, and has filled his coming existence with unspeakable and never-ending joy. His is free forgiveness ; his is perfect acceptance with God ; his is peaceful communion and partnership with Christ ;

his is a hope of glory which fadeth not away ; his is the assurance of a rest with God ; his, the crown of life, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give ; his, a peaceful departure from the earth ; his, a confiding appearance at the judgment-seat ; his, a kingdom which cannot be removed. Happy is he, however tried ; well shall it be with him, however persecuted and opposed. God, a redeeming, saving God, is his friend, and no one is able to pluck him from His mighty and faithful hands.

The hour is near when you will all desire his condition. You may now count his choice to be foolishness ; you may choose to sneer at his want of sincerity ; you may look forward to his end, as dishonour and disappointment. But the hour is before you, when this whole judgment shall be reversed ; when the saints, in their turn, shall judge the earth ; and when, rejecting the infallible hope which has comforted, supported, and rewarded them, you will find yourselves still unconverted and unpardoned, struggling with storms and winds, against which the pride of your heart will offer you no protection, and bearing forever that intolerable load of sorrow and condemnation which you have laid up for yourselves. May I beg you, in the name of this true but rejected Saviour, to consider this matter ? “ Whoso is wise, will understand these things, and to them shall be showed the loving-kindness of the Lord.”

XXV.

THE GOSPEL THE ONLY ROCK.

ST. MATTHEW. vii., 24, 25.—*Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.*

WITH what perfect confidence in the truth and certainty of His own revelations the Saviour speaks! There is no hesitation or doubt in His publication of His own sayings. They are truth, they are life, they are salvation for man. The man who is governed by them is a wise man, and has built his house upon a rock. The man who refuses to adopt them is a foolish man, who has built his house upon the sand. Upon the supposition that these sayings are certainly and undeniably true, there can be no question in this conclusion. He only is wise, or can be secure, who has accepted them as the principle of a new and spiritual life, and has founded upon them his hopes of future blessedness and glory, whose heart is governed by their commands, and whose desires are regulated by their promises.

But we will consider this standard of wisdom upon the supposition that these sayings of the Lord Jesus are not completely established in the view of man, as an undoubted and infallible communication from God. It is only in a high degree *probable* that this is the fact. What, then, is the course of wisdom for man ?

This probability, of which I now speak, does not affect the actual truth or falsehood of these professed revelations from God, in themselves considered. These sayings of Jesus must be absolutely either true or false; there is no middle ground between these two points. It affects merely the aspect under which they are presented to the mind of man. That is considered by us as probable, as likely to be true, which has more and better arguments in its favour than can be urged against it. Few will deny that the sayings of the Lord Jesus stand at least upon this ground. If any man be disposed to deny it, I shall be ready to meet him upon the only remaining ground, that there is certainly no truth in them. But for the present we assume the ground that their truth is extremely probable.

The actual testimonies, of prophecies fulfilled, and miracles performed, in favour of the revelations of the Gospel, the internal evidence of their own character and operations, the extent of influence which they have attained upon the earth, unaided by the means which uniformly govern among men, the power which they daily exercise over the hearts of those who believe, the perseverance with which they are maintained and defended by them

under all the changes of life, the fact that no exertions of men have been sufficient to overthrow them, while other systems of acknowledged human invention have crumbled into dust—afford ample ground of probability at the least, for the truth of the claims which they make, and render it undoubtedly sure that they are more likely to be true than they are to be false.

Now it is not necessary to demonstrate the revelations of the Gospel to be indubitably true, to make it wise in man to receive and adopt them. It is enough to render unbelief, or a practical rejection of the Gospel, utterly inexcusable, if the statements which this Gospel makes, carry with them a greater degree of probability than can possibly be urged against them. The habitual judgment of man gives its assent to this position, in all the business and conduct of human life. The universal concurrence of opinion and determination among men proclaims, that no man is wise, or can be secure, who refuses to act upon this principle, or to govern his habits and expectations by it.

In the affairs of this present life, no man requires an unerring assurance of the good which he designs to gain, or of the evil which he desires to avoid, from arguments demonstrably certain, before he enters upon the course to which, in either case, his interest leads. A persuasion of the probable results of his efforts is authority and motive sufficient to call forth all his exertions, and to bend his whole energies to the work he has proposed. What merchant defers his traffic with a foreign country, until he has opportunity to be convinced,

by his own actual examination, that there is such a land, and that it furnishes the goods he wants. He hazards the whole amount of his property and expectations, upon the report which he has received from others; that is, upon a probability against which there is no just exception. And he is acknowledged to be wise in such a course. The man who has probable reason for believing that he shall meet with suffering and loss, either in a journey which he has undertaken, or in a business upon which he has entered, feels himself to have sufficient reason to change his course and plans, though he is certain to sustain some inconvenience in such a change. There can be no certainty in the prospect of human temporal concerns yet future, and men consequently govern themselves altogether by probable grounds of expectation, and they are wise, and they are generally secure, in such a course. But if this be wisdom in temporal concerns, surely, when the interest involved in our decision is an eternal interest, and the consequences of that decision are everlasting and unchangeable, a far lower degree of probability should awaken our anxiety and engage our caution against the loss of which we are warned, than might be allowed to disturb us in any mere temporal concern. When the loss would be merely temporary, and may be repaired if it should occur, or, if it were not repaired, would not affect our highest interests, then a small amount of probability need not awaken an intense anxiety to prevent its occurrence. But when every loss is a remediless one, when every interest involved affects our eternal welfare,

when there are no means of reparation or recovery should the loss occur, when the alternatives are an everlasting heaven and an eternal hell, when the Saviour who is offered is the only possible Saviour, and the life which he presents the only possible hope of life for man, when everything dear to the soul for time and for eternity is involved—then he only is a wise man who is cautious at the least probable ground for fear, and solicitous to prevent the least possibility of disaster.

Again, the reason and judgment of man lead him cheerfully to endure a small evil or inconvenience in his present affairs, if there be a probability that the refusal to do this will lead to the endurance of a much greater evil, to which no remedy can be applied. Let it be supposed that the future salvation which the Gospel offers is only probably true, and that in the adoption of it as his hope and object, man must endure a positive present evil, in abridging his indulgences and appetites, and cutting off his opportunities for emolument and gain. But where the choice is thus between the probability of an eternal state of misery and sorrow, an unchanging condition of fearful despair, and the suffering of a present, partial inconvenience, can a man be wise, or pretend to build his house upon a rock, who hesitates in the course he should pursue? Will he reject this probability of a tremendous, incalculable result, for the trifling self-denial which is involved with it? Does he cheerfully submit to a painful surgical operation, which inflicts extreme actual distress, upon the probable expectation of prolonging for a little while his earthly being;

and is he wise in refusing, if it be manifestly necessary in his spiritual interests, to part with a right hand or a right eye, in securing, upon the same ground of hope, an imperishable existence hereafter?

Let us for a moment consider the two sides of this probability, to which I now direct your notice.

“It is *possible*,” the unbelieving heart suggests—“it is possible there may be no such thing as a future state, either of happiness or misery, or at least in any connexion with a regard or disregard for the professed revelations of the Gospel: it is possible that the book which claims to be the written revelation of the will of an unseen God, may be wholly an imposture and a falsehood, that no such Redeemer as it presents has ever been commissioned for man, that man has no real need of any such interposition in his behalf.” Suppose even this, and what evil does *he* sustain, who has honestly acted upon the opposite belief, and taken up his cross, and denied himself, and followed Jesus Christ? What sacrifice has he been required and compelled to make, but of the unbridled indulgence of mere earthly and sensual desires, the amount of which evil we shall have occasion hereafter to consider. But then, if this be *possible*, on the other side it is *quite probable* that there will be just such a state of future recompense as the scriptures proclaim, just such a result of human rebellion, just such a condemnation for those who obey not the Gospel of God; and then what is the loss of the unbeliever? How inconceivably miserable becomes his condition! For him there is no retreat, no

mending of his choice, no hope of restoration for his soul. His *all* is lost, and lost beyond recovery. Worlds want wealth to purchase back the privileges which he has vilely cast away. Surely the man who encounters a hazard like this, upon a mere barren possibility of the falsehood of his fears, cannot call himself wise.

The merchant with his richly-laden vessel is overtaken by a fearful tempest. The angry billows dash around him, and threaten the entire loss of his ship. He may save her, perhaps, and the lives of all on board, by throwing into the ocean his valuable goods, but apparently in no other way. It is *possible* the wind may lull, the storm may cease, and he and his goods may be both preserved: but the probability is wholly against him. Would he be wise to choose this meagre chance, and face the hazard, with danger so manifest and real? "Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life." None could pity him, but for his insane infatuation, should he cling to his possessions, and perish in a crisis like this. You awake at midnight in your bed. The suffocating smoke fills your chamber, and convinces you that the gathering element of destruction must be somewhere near. Your children are scattered around your habitation in the tranquillity of slumber. Your whole property is treasured in your house. Would you quiet your justly-awakened apprehensions of the probability of danger with the mere possibility that the fire might be in some neighboring house, or if in yours, yet it might expire of itself, or some other one might arise to extinguish it, and compose yourself

to sleep again, to wait until the flames actually seized your bed, and enveloped you with inextricable death? It would be a madman's course. No parent's heart could be still beneath the burden of this probability; no rational man could thus trifle with his property and life. Yet these cases fairly illustrate the point to which they are brought. Just the fatal course which they exhibit as one branch of the alternative involved in them, is the course which is actually pursued by every man who rejects the invitations and despises the commands of the Gospel. In every doubtful case, surely enlightened reason will determine for the safer side. And, beyond all question, will this determination be made, if the case be not only doubtful, but involving the venture of an imperishable soul, an eternity of peace. Even though a man's condition should be actually safe, yet a probable apprehension that it is not safe, is enough to make a wise and cautious judgment thoroughly examine it. Let the question of probability which we now consider, be settled on the side adverse to Christian truth;—let the unbeliever demonstrate that there is no God that judgeth in the earth, no immortality for man, no abode of sorrow for the despiser of his word;—let him prove Jesus to be an impostor, and His revelations of truth a fable without foundation—and he may certainly pursue his path of contempt for God and devotion to his own heart's lusts, with more reason, if he find pleasure in it. But until this be done, mere denial and rejection of the truth cannot be received for argument; and it remains still, on the one side, a case

of accumulated probability, and on the other a case exceedingly doubtful.

In considering this supposition, that the sayings of the Lord Jesus are probably true, let it never be forgotten that the whole choice for man, on this momentous subject, is between an acceptance of the Saviour's Gospel, and entire atheism. If this divine revelation cannot bring adequate evidence that it comes from God, if this produce not authority sufficient to control the will and heart of man, it will not be pretended that any other system has that which is wanting here. No mere negative position can be maintained upon this subject, until you have reached the most extreme one. You cannot stand upon a simple denial of the Gospel for want of evidence. You are driven back, by the force of your own principles, through every professed religious truth, until you deny the very existence of a creating and controlling God, and end in the cheerless and unfathomable abyss of universal scepticism. To this fearful, hideous issue is every man necessarily driven, who rejects from its rightful control over his heart, the record which God hath given concerning His Son. By this issue must every unconverted man maintain himself, who would not be condemned out of his own mouth, in the practical rejection of principles of truth whose real authority he is compelled to acknowledge. At this issue the question is to be settled, which is the more probable, that there is no God, and no eternity for man, and no spiritual existence in man, or that all grace and truth has been revealed to man, as laid up in the Lord Jesus Christ ?

Let it be remembered further, in settling this question, that unbelieving man must sustain himself in rejecting the Gospel from his heart, by an equal amount of evidence opposing it. Infidelity must exhibit apostle for apostle, and martyr for martyr, and witness for witness. It must show the same amount of benefit to have been produced for man by its instrumentality, and the same power to have been exercised by it over the welfare of men. The enemies of the precious Gospel of Christ must stand confronted with its friends, and speak for themselves. Whose life have they made more happy? Whom have they consoled in sorrow? Whom have they cheered in adversity? Whom have they enlivened and blessed in death? What have they offered, what can they offer, for the soul in eternity? I do not here speak of the actually cheerless and miserable character, and the yet more degraded and ruinous effects of worldly infidelity and contempt of God, as the world has seen them. I simply ask that the scheme which you are to adopt, as a system of professed religion, shall come upon grounds of benefit and authority which may compare with the Gospel, that you may justify yourselves in some degree, for the rejection of this for the sake of that. And until all, and more than I have specified, shall be done by some antagonist system, no comparison of probabilities can be made, and it remains probable, extremely probable, that the revelations which God professes to have made, dreadful as they are, are really revelations of facts from God, which will be immutable and eternal; and he only can be wise, or a secure man,

who resolves to yield his heart to their constraint, to make their promises the great object of his life, and to be found, in his daily, abiding character and course, the servant and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the unconverted man does not act as if this were a doubtful matter. If it were established beyond dispute that there is no God, no future judgment, no heaven or hell, unconverted men could not live more completely devoted to themselves, and without God in the world. God is not in all their thoughts. How can they forget Him more entirely? They do not make a single reference to the Gospel, the sayings of the Lord Jesus, in all the conduct of their lives. How can they treat them with more contempt and unconcern? Prayerless, scriptureless, thoughtless soul, whither further will you run? Is it not extremely probable that this rejected Gospel comes from God? that this despised Saviour is God manifest in the flesh, the last messenger of mercy to man? that the state of being before you is an eternity, to be settled wholly by His word and the operation of His truth? With this probability, where else is there a rock upon which you may wisely build? What other foundation is offered for human hope? In your unconverted state, what hope can you possess? The Gospel gives no hope to the unchanged, unpardoned soul. If it be not received into your hearts as the new-creating spring of spiritual life, as a treasure valued by you above all others, it is a curse, a condemnation, and it were better for you had it never been heard. To believe it in its theory

and reject it in its practical, controlling principle, is trifling with its majestic character, and despising its supreme authority. To those who by its operation are renewed and sanctified, it gives the utmost assurance of eternal peace, as the glorious issue of present trials and cares. But it proclaims, more fearfully than the violated law had proclaimed before, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that persists in doing evil, indignation and wrath upon all those who reject the mercies which it freely and abundantly proposes and provides. It is the jealous system of a jealous God. It will not accept the homage of the knee and the tongue, when these are separated from the heart. It will not receive half the affections of man, while the residue are elsewhere bestowed. It demands the complete subjection of your whole life to its authority, and your whole soul to its power. It comes before you as the practical standard to which you are to become conformed, and the living, vital principle by which you are to be governed. It claims to be received and tried as such, and it is only in this actual experience that its character and power are to be known. Supposing these sayings of the Lord Jesus to be probably true, all other claims are, with equal probability, false; and while no other system offers anything, or threatens anything, this divine revelation of the will of God, with the highest probability of truth, offering life eternal to every faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and threatening everlasting ruin to the unbelieving rejecter of its mercies, presents to every man who would be wise for himself, the only pos-

sible position of probable security. He, then, who embraces and holds fast the sayings of the Lord Jesus, even upon this supposition, must be likened unto a wise man, who builds his house upon a rock : and though the rains descend and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon that house, it falls not ; for it is founded upon a rock.

What, then, does this Gospel offer, and what does it demand ? It offers to every consciously-guilty man a divine Redeemer, and life and every blessing laid up in Him. It presents an immediate, entire forgiveness, through the value of His offering of Himself in death, and a perfect title to life everlasting, in His voluntary obedience for man. It presents the enjoyment of every mental comfort for man, amidst the anxieties and cares of the present life. It furnishes a precious and consoling hope of a future glory, to brighten every hour of darkness, to uphold in every sorrow, and to carry sinking man in triumph through the valley of the shadow of death. All this it offers freely, unconditionally, immediately, to every one who hungers and thirsts for the blessing, and is willing to receive it. It holds it all out to him as his own possession now, at once, forever ; and it promises to make him secure in the possession of it all, by divine power, for eternity.

It demands a simple, but instant acceptance in the heart of this intelligence and offer, as a personal proposal to the individual concerned ; an instant choice of it, in opposition to every other claim, as a portion for the soul ; an immediate adoption of the cause and side of the Saviour whom it presents,

in the division which His service makes in the world; a cordial and determined abiding with Him, in a partnership of interest, endurance, and hopes, in the work which He has undertaken in this present world. It demands of every individual in this assembly an affectionate choice of the crucified Christ whom it proclaims, as his ruler and his treasure, making him willing to deem everything else of no value in comparison. And it proposes thus the question: Will you have this Saviour to be your Saviour? this Lord to be your Lord? *now*, in an instant determination of your own choice and will, and go from this place, having made a new determination for the whole future current of your life? This it declares the only course of wisdom, the only possible path of security for man.

XXVI.

THE GOSPEL THE ONLY ROCK.

ST. MATTHEW, vii., 24, 25.—*Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.*

UPON the supposition that the sayings of the Lord Jesus are infallibly true, it is easy to shew the wisdom of receiving and adopting them. Upon the supposition that they are only probably true, the task does not appear to be much more difficult. If it be only *likely* that there is such a Being as the Scriptures reveal, and that He actually sustains the relations to man which they proclaim, it becomes manifestly the highest interest and duty of man to avoid the least hazard of offending Him, and to secure the utmost certainty of His kindness and love.

But if we take another step in our concessions to the unbelief of men, and confess that all claims to divine authority in the sayings of the Lord Jesus are unfounded; if we allow for a moment the sup-

position that, as a divine revelation, the Gospel is utterly a false pretence—can we then shew that it is still wise in man to receive and adopt it, and equally foolish in him to despise and reject it? This is my present purpose. It is to manifest the wisdom of those who embrace the Gospel, and love it, and cling to it, though it be considered merely a system of man's device. Even then, should this supposition prove at last to be true, we feel satisfied that we have chosen the only good part, and we alone are building upon a rock.

No unbeliever can desire from us a larger allowance than this: that all pretensions in the Gospel to be a revelation from God are a falsehood. And if, even upon this apparently untenable ground, we can shew that the scheme of character and conduct which the sayings of the Lord Jesus mark out for man is the path of wisdom, and the only safe path, there can remain no more opportunity to bring an argument against the cordial and complete acceptance of them, as the guide and ruler of men; and men are shut up to obey these sayings, whether true, or probable, or false in their claims to a divine original, or they are condemned out of their own mouths.

Now then, we discharge the Bible as a messenger from God; and what is the substitute proposed? Is there now anything else before us, professing to be a divine revelation? Whatever comes to us under this character must bring with it the evidence of attending testimony, and testimony sufficient fairly to convince the judgment and to compel the assent of those to whom it is offered. But if

we acknowledge that the religion which the sayings of Jesus Christ have taught us, so manifestly intrinsically worthy as it is of God, has no such testimony, we are left to stand alone. It will not be pretended that any other scheme has that which the Gospel wants. Mahomedanism, fired with lust and steeped in blood, avowedly seeking the dishonour of humanity, the oppression and sacrifice of the weak to gratify the lust of the strong, shrinks in the degradation of conscious unworthiness from such a comparison. Paganism, with its multiplied gods, and changing shapes of pollution and darkness, is cast immediately aside, as claiming no attention. Deism is nothing, a mere denial, making no pretensions to divine authority, laughing at the idea of a revelation, having no creed but that the Bible is false and the Gospel is a fable, and no system but unvarying hatred and opposition to these. There is then, nothing before the mind of man, claiming to be a divine revelation, after these sacred Scriptures have been set aside; and we now stand, of necessity, where there is either this revelation or none. We can find no substitute, and having renounced this, we are left with none.

But having discarded the Bible, and with no substitute as a revelation from God, what system are we to adopt? what is our alternative? Am I left entirely at sea, with no protector or guide? Am I the mere subject of brute force, to dwell among beings who are only to be restrained by actual fear of vengeance from me, from any excesses of unbridled lust or selfish appetite, upon my person or my property? Is there any God? No argument

can prove the existence of such a being when the whole light and machinery of the Scriptures have been torn away. Separated from that, all that I see and all that I feel would lead inevitably to the conclusion which has been actually adopted by every nation that has been without this written revelation: that there are two great, invisible agents, one the origin of good and the other the origin of evil, and that these two beings are in perpetual conflict with each other. Is there any future state of being for man? Reason tells of none that is lighted with hope; conscience tells of none that is not filled with despair; and the only alternative to the Bible is atheism in reference to God, and final annihilation in death as the only prospect for man. It is vain to urge that every man has a resistless impression upon his mind that there is a God, and a future existence for himself. We acknowledge it, certainly. But this is not the result of the unbeliever's argument or testimony, it is itself a part of the rejected revelation. It exists long before the ability to argue and to consider testimony can be attained. Revelation from God we have laid aside, and we maintain, that without it, it is impossible to prove the being of one God, or the future responsibility of man to Him. We are brought, therefore, for our contemplation of the subject, just where the apostle declares that men unreconciled to God actually stand, "without God," *atheoi*, atheists "in the world." On this position must the man who rejects the spiritual, saving power of the Bible maintain his ground, or be condemned out of his own mouth. The Bible

must be everything in reference to a future world, or it is nothing. If it be nothing, no other testimony for futurity is anything; and the man who rejects the sayings of this sacred book from his heart, as containing nothing for him, must make good and certain his chosen ground—that God is not, and eternity is not, and judgment is not, and damnation is not—or he is destroyed forever.

Here, then, is our present position. The sayings of Jesus, so far as they concern invisible things, are false; the promises of the Gospel for a future life are all delusive; all other hopes or fears of a future state of responsibility to God are equally so. Well, be it so. Of course, then, all the results of personal character in man, whether good or evil, are confined to the present life. He can look for no higher enjoyments than he can find here. He need fear no more serious difficulties than he here experiences. The only question, then, for him to consider is, what offered scheme opens to him the fairest provision for enjoyment in his present life, and makes him the happiest in his changing condition here? And here we feel satisfied to show, that the man who embraces the sayings of the Lord Jesus in his heart, believes their promises, and submits to their control, though he be deluded at the last, in all the hopes which they have encouraged him to cherish, is the man, and the only man, who really builds his house upon a rock.

We will adopt these divine sayings, then, as a rule for this life, not as a revelation of a life to come; and try the case, simply upon an examination of their tendency and operation, even within

these limits. And we ask, are they not calculated to give to those who receive them higher advantages for gaining all that man desires in life, besides many precious blessings entirely peculiar to themselves?

If man seeks the possession of wealth, who is more likely to secure it than he who has made the Bible the lamp to his feet? Can there be any rules for human prosperity, except those which are the invention of violence and fraud, that are not perfectly laid down there? Do not these sayings of God render man prudent and cautious in the management of his concerns, and save him from all those difficulties which an ungoverned impetuosity of temper, or a mind bewildered and brutalized by vice, inevitably oppose to profligate and sensual men? Do they not excite him to diligence and assiduity in the fulfilment of all that his hand finds to do? Do they not impress upon him that idleness is sin, and that for all his opportunities and time he must give an account to God? By cutting off the thousand nameless indulgences of sin, do they not rescue him from that bondage to unholy appetite, which enslaves the time and thoughts of the ungodly? Do they not inculcate the spirit and habit of frugality in the use of that which is gotten? They retrench the unceasing calls for extravagant expense, which free indulgence of sensual appetites and corrupted passions demand. By their rules modesty clothes without immoderation, temperance feeds without licentiousness, contentment dwells without ambition, and that whole outlay of vicious indulgence which, like a quick-

sand, so completely swallows up the character and the wealth of man, is immediately stayed. Do not these sayings require kindness and courtesy towards all, securing thus the assistance and the favourable regard of those who may be helpful in the acquisition of wealth? Open ungodliness may serve an occasional turn, guilt may sometimes become successful, violence and wrong may wear a transitory crown—but surely the whole history of man will shew, that no man is so certain, even upon the ground of mutual interest, to obtain friends in life, as the man who may be always depended upon by others with entire confidence, for probity, kindness, and truth. And if the increase of riches be established as the great object of life, man can devise no better system by which it may be attained, than the sayings of this divine word have freely laid down before him; and, in similar circumstances of life, the believer of the Bible and the subject of its commands is always more likely to be prosperous and rich than the man who rejects them.

If man seeks the influence and authority of honour and reputation among his fellow-men, who has a better system for the attainment of this end, than he whose director is the word of God? Such a man possesses in himself a worth and excellence which is the foundation of just esteem. He is to others useful, benevolent, and profitable, in a way that necessarily produces confidence and respect. Certainly, no man is ever the more honoured merely for the sinfulness of his conduct, or for his profligate contempt of God and man. Nay, no man is

ever permanently esteemed, but for his supposed excellence of personal character, whether it be pretended or real. The old age of vice is always loathsome and hateful, while the hoary head in the way of righteousness is ever a crown of glory. The course of outward conduct which the Gospel requires, includes whatsoever is pure, lovely, and of good report, and consists in the conscientious and unremitted discharge of every duty, and in the cultivation and exercise of every temper, calculated to promote the present happiness of mankind. The most depraved of men would gladly have the reputation for that virtue, the practice of which their base appetites forbid. There is no opposing habit of vice which is not found to be degrading and destructive to the reputation of man. Indiscretion and infirmity may often stain the name, and bring dishonour upon the reputation of a religious man. But the blot is simply for his want of entire conformity to the actual standard of his profession, and in the proportion of this very want of conformity is the stain upon his character. The whole experience of man will shew, that when all the glories of another world are set aside, nothing shines so brightly here, or is so really esteemed among men, as the sincere cultivation of a truly virtuous and religious character. It is said of David, who, save in one sad transgression, laboured to live as a man after God's own heart—that is, in entire obedience to his commands—that he “died, full of days, riches, and honour;” and it required no heaven to make him in all respects a more honourable and a happier man than Saul. No man

before me can doubt between the characters of Judas and St. Paul, of Paine and Howard, of Voltaire and Fenelon, of Washington and Aaron Burr, whose character is the most honourable, and whose reputation is the most to be desired—and who, therefore, if this be the great object for man, has been the wiser man—even though they have all died as the brutes which perish, with the certainty that there is no other life beyond the present. And if personal honour among men be the chosen object of human life, the sayings of the Sacred Scriptures are found, not only by a reasonable expectation from their character, but by an actual experience of their operation and influence, to open the surest path to this desired result.

If man desires his present enjoyment and gratification, and makes the pursuit of temporary, passing pleasure the main end of his life, even upon this road, where will he find a better guide than the Bible offers? It ministers most important advantages to the enjoyment of present health, the very foundation of all temporal enjoyment for man. By requiring the habitual cultivation of temperance, soberness, and chastity, by prohibiting all excess in the indulgence of appetite, and all slothfulness in the fulfilment of labour, it brings man through the vigour of healthful youth and manhood, to a calm, and happy, and satisfying age. The serenity of spirit which it bestows, the moderation of desire which it produces, tend, as much as any bodily regimen, to preserve that perfect character of health, a sound mind in a sound body. It increases the enjoyment which man derives from his present

sources of delight, and adds a charm to every instrument and means of human happiness. To no one is food so palatable, or recreation so refreshing, or sleep so sweet, or society so agreeable, as to him who follows out the regular and determined moderation which the Scriptures enjoin. He has a cheerfulness of spirit which sets off every gratification, and enhances every proper indulgence. There is no cure for the melancholy of the heart, no remedy for the gloominess of the mind, like the faith which he has embraced, and under the influence of which he lives. And his whole experience brings out the truth of that testimony of Solomon to the cheerfulness which true piety produces—"Wisdom maketh a man's face to shine." Then, further, these sayings of the Scripture remove all those innumerable disquietudes which occur to embitter the pleasures of human life. They allow not the fear of losing present enjoyments, or the desire to obtain greater ones, to occupy and harass the mind. They inculcate and impart that conformity of man's will to the will of God, that submission of his plans to Him, that satisfaction with His appointments, which remove the spirit of envy and disappointment from his breast, and deprive every real trial of much of its power to distress or injure. Though friends forsake, though sickness or pain may visit, though poverty may grasp, the man whose heart has yielded to the principles which the Scriptures propose, these principles enable him, not only in theory, but in fact, to rise above the reach of those anxieties which destroy the peace of wicked and unbeliev-

ing men. It is not that he does not feel as other men feel, that he is destitute of sensibility to grief—nay, the moral system by which he is governed increases the sensitiveness of his spirit in a very high degree, and makes him, not only more delicately cautious of offending others, but more delicately sensible of neglect or reproach himself,—but he has an impression and a conviction in his mind, of a superior protection, a divine watchfulness, which, like the imaginary power of the alchemist, turns everything to gold. But more than this, than all this, the sayings of Jesus have rescued him from that most dreadful of all distress, the pangs of a guilty and unappeased conscience. This is the great monster of destruction to the pleasures of man. No prosperity in the sinner's affairs, no pomp in his station, no costliness or variety in his pleasures, can shelter him from the power of this awakened, avenging agent. How sad a heart is often covered by a fair and smiling exterior! What sleepless vigils does conscious guilt often compel a man to keep, when no human eye has seen the fullness of his transgression! In distresses like these, the Scriptures interpose a balm of peace and comfort, and calm this troubled sea, and lay a sure foundation for confidence and joy. And in this mere negative view, by removing disquietudes and sorrows that nothing else can remove, they vastly promote the comfort and happiness of mankind.

But how very limited and partial is this view of personal enjoyment for man! The sayings of God not only remove harassing fears from the common pleasures of life, they add, also, peculiar delights

of their own ; pleasures which none but they who embrace and follow them can enjoy. The Christian, believing their record, delusive as we now consider it, becomes daily more acquainted with the character of God, and reposes more entirely upon Him. He feels the divine nature daily more formed and displayed in his own soul, in all the peaceful fruits of watchful and happy obedience to God. He enjoys not the pleasures of a man only, but the pleasures of an angel, while his spirit rejoices in the views which he receives of the goodness of his God. He finds, as the result of his own experiment, far more delight in one hour's enjoyment of peace with God, than all the sins of previous life have been able to afford him. One day spent in the courts of the Lord is better than a thousand passed in the tents of ungodliness. The Bible gives him a hope which lights up unceasing joy in his soul. The consciousness that from an enemy he has become a friend of God ; that he is pardoned, accepted, and beloved for Christ's sake ; that poor and guilty as he was, angels have rejoiced over him, and the glorious God delights in him ; the assured hope that he shall be received by Him, to be a partaker of His glory, to be acquainted with His counsels, to be known by and to know, in the light of His presence, angels and just men made perfect ; that he shall spend a glorious eternity in praising Him for His goodness, in singing the triumphs of the death of Jesus in his behalf ; communicates now, delusive as we suppose it, a delight which nothing on the earth can equal. All this may be delusion, but it is an actual experience and

enjoyment in fact. It is an enjoyment which no created power can prohibit, and from which no earthly means can separate him, and which no temporal difficulties can diminish or obstruct. And should the Bible prove to be a total falsehood, and all his confidence be found to be vanity, should he close his eyes in death, in a final annihilation, he cannot be deprived of the actual pleasure of this hope. He has lost nothing which others have gained ; he has found, in accepting and following the sayings of Jesus, a joy which none have ever found in despising them. He dies with a sweet delusion, a joyful, rapturous expectation, which gives him present, real, unspeakable delight, and the falsehood of which, if it be a falsehood, he will have no opportunity to discover. If the sayings of Jesus shall prove true, all that he can want he has. If these sayings shall prove false entirely, he sinks, like the infidel, into a hopeless annihilation. But he has passed a hopeful, happy day, and he sinks through a calm and sweet repose, like the setting of the summer's sun ; delivered from the despair of conscious guilt, and the overwhelming conviction of any possible result of evil to ensue. If, then, all the claims of the Bible to divine authority are absolutely false, still he only is the wise man, and he only is building his house upon the rock, who embraces it, and yields to it as his comfort and guide. Taking the sayings of the Lord Jesus merely as a rule, not as a revelation, the believer in their perfect and entire truth as a revelation may look back with thankfulness to the error which led him to receive them, and to trust to them

as such, as having bestowed upon him a pleasure, and furnished him with advantages, in believing and practising them, which were in no other quarter proffered for his enjoyment; and if they be false in all their claims, and false in all their promises, he still is the only wise, secure, or happy man.

But NO! thou precious, though despised, insulted, and rejected book, thou art not false! Thou more despised and insulted God, thou art not a liar! Thou injured and rejected Jesus, thou art no impostor! Thou grieved and forbearing Spirit, thy work is no delusion! We take back our Bible, as the grand message from God to man. It is our rock, we build our all upon it. It is our sun, we live in its light and follow in its guidance. It is our spring of life eternal, we drink from its waters and are refreshed forever. It speaks to the believer the language of comfort, but it speaks no language but truth. It has guided countless millions to a glorious eternity; it has fed them on their journey with heavenly manna; it has opened to them, at the close of their pilgrimage, everlasting enjoyments; it has been the seed of undying life, in many souls who are now before me; it has put into their mouth new songs of praise, for love which passeth knowledge; it will keep them in the possession of that love by the power of God forever.

It offers all its bounties, it addresses all its promises, it utters all its admonitions, to every soul that listens to its words. Come, taste of its joys, embrace its promises, lay hold of its hopes, yield to its commands. Rise, my friends, rise from the bondage of voluntary sin to the liberty of bound-

less, eternal grace ; from the humiliation of spiritual death, the slavery of earth, to a new and spiritual life, the honour and the happiness of heaven. O lift up your eyes, sinful hearers of the word. See what a bountiful God,—a dying, ascended God, has provided for your souls. Lay hold of the hope which is offered ; accept the treasure which is proposed. Make this blessed book your guide to Christ, and your director in the path of eternal peace, and though storms may rise, and winds may blow, your house is founded upon a rock. Sheltered for eternity from every ill and every sorrow, you will adore that redeeming God who gave you the Bible, and whom the Bible so clearly makes known.

