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ONE HUNDRED AND NINETY
SERMONS

ON THE

HUNDRED AND NINETEENTH PSALM.

BY THE

REV. THOMAS MANTON, D. D.

WITH

A COMPLETE ALPHABETICAL TABLE, DIRECTING TO THE PRINCIPAL
MATTERS CONTAINED THEREIN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

“All things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and
in the Psalms, concerning me.”—LUKE XXIV. 44.

Hic Psalmus est tautò præstantior, quantò prolixior.—MUIS.

THIRD EDITION.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY WILLIAM HARRIS, D.D.

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1842.

SERMONS
ON
PSALM CXIX.

SERMON CXXXVI.

VERSE 124.—*Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy; and teach me thy statutes.*

In this verse, we have two requests, the one general, the other particular; wherein he would have the Lord exercise his mercy to him, ‘Show thy mercy to me, in teaching me thy law.’ The one respects the privilege part of religion, the other the duty part. The one concerns time past, or the pardon of sin already committed, “Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy;” the other, prevention of sin for the time to come, That I may perform my duty for the future, “teach me thy statutes.” Mercy is the ground of his request; teaching God’s law, the matter of it. He would have this gift bestowed on him freely.

First branch, “Deal with thy servant,” &c. Where we have,—

I. His relation to God, “Thy servant.”

II. The terms upon which he would have God deal with him, not according to my works, but “according to thy mercy.”

I. His relation is mentioned either, first, as a part of his plea, as if he had said, ‘Lord, thou art merciful to all; for thy tender mercies are over all thy works (Psalm cxlv. 9), much more to thy servants; now, I am thy servant.’ God’s servants have a special claim and interest in God; besides his general bounty, they expect his special mercy and favour: “O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid” (Psalm cxvi. 16). Clear that, that you are some of God’s servants, once; and then you may the better expect your master’s bounty. Or, secondly, to show his need of mercy, though God’s servant. Such an emphasis it seemeth to have: “Enter not into judgment with thy servant” (Psalm cxliii. 2). *Non dicit cum hostibus tuis*; he doth not say, ‘Enter not into judgment with thine enemy;’ but, “with thy servant.” So here David, that was God’s servant, a man of singular holiness, desireth that God would deal with him in mercy: from first to last, the saints have no other plea. Theodoret on the text observeth, ‘Ο τοσαύτης ἀρετῆς ἐργάτης ἐλέος τυχεῖν, &c.; so great a worker of righteousness beggeth to receive mercy, and looketh for all his salvation by mercy. And again, *Ὀκ ἀπατεῖ μίσθον, ἀλλὰ φιλανθρωπίαν αἰτεῖ*. He doth not challenge a reward, but asketh favour and kindness.

DOCTRINE.—That God's best servants have no other and no better plea, than that God would deal with them in mercy.

First, Because there is and can be no merit on the creature's part towards God, according to the rule of justice. Adam in innocency could *impetrare*, not *mereri*. It was his grace to covenant with the creature, when innocency and purity did adorn our nature; how much more since the fall, and the distance between God and us hath been so widened by sin! What merits, must be *indebitum* and *utile*. It must be *indebitum*. When our righteousness was perfect, yet still due, by virtue of our relation to God as creatures; and paying of debts deserveth no reward. The lawyers tell us, *Nemo consequitur præmium, quod facit ex officio debitum*. We are bound, and do but our duty; but God is not bound to us. All that the creature hath, and is, and can do, it oweth to God, and hath received it from him; and God is in such a degree of excellency above us, that he cannot be obliged. Where there is so great a disparity of nature and being, there is no common right to make him obnoxious, to make it justice to any action of ours to reward us. Aristotle denied children could requite their parents, and merit from them, and that the obligation of merit is only between equals; certainly, not between God and men. There was nothing which bound him necessarily to reward his creature, but his free covenant. Again, that which merits must be *utile*, profitable to him from whom we challenge reward. If we be never so righteous, the benefit is ours, not God's: he is not beholden to us, useth us not out of indigence, but indulgence; not as if he needed anything, but we need his blessing. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants; and, "My goodness extendeth not to thee" (Psalm xvi. 2). God giveth all, receiveth nothing from us. The beam oweth all to the sun, the sun nothing to the beam.

Secondly, Because, since the fall, there is no claiming but by the covenant of grace and mere mercy. A sinner cannot expect anything, but upon terms of mercy. The covenant of works supposed us innocent and holy, and bound us so to continue; so that the law knoweth not how to do good to a sinner. Once a sinner, and for ever miserable; it leaveth no room for repentance. So that now there is no hope for the best, according to the rule of strict justice; but only according to the law of mercy. In the new covenant, there are special differences from the law of works.

Ist, That there is not only grace, but mercy and grace too. In the first covenant, there was grace, but no mercy: grace doth all things *gratis*, freely; but mercy pitieth the miserable: therefore, till sin and misery entered, there could be no room for mercy. There was grace in that covenant; for it was of grace that God did enter into covenant with man at all, and of grace that he did accept man's perfect obedience, so as upon performance of it to make him sure of eternal life. But now, in the new covenant, God doth show mercy and grace too; and grace in the most rich and glorious manner. Mercy and grace too in this way of salvation, in that there is hope for a sinner, a plank cast out after shipwreck. And grace in the richest and most glorious manner: partly, for the design and end that was driven at, it was the glory of grace: "To the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph. i. 6); and partly, the ground of it was founded upon the infinite mercy of God and the infinite merit of Christ. The infinite mercy of God: mercy is the infinite goodness of God, flowing out freely to the creature, without any moving cause or worth on the creature's

part to expect it: "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom. ix. 16). And the infinite merit of Christ: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (Isa. lv. 3); "And give thee for a covenant of the people" (Isa. xlii. 6); and, "I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant to the people" (Isa. xlix. 8). David, that is Christ, the seed of David; all the mercies of the covenant are exhibited in and by him, in whom the covenant is made with us, and made good to us (2 Cor. i. 20). And he is given for a foundation; that is, the foundation of a new and better covenant. And partly, because of the terms wherein it is dispensed, which is not unsinning obedience, but a sincere owning of Christ, unto the ends for which God hath appointed him. So that, in effect, a thankful acceptance of a free discharge, is all that we do for paying the debt, or to make way for our acceptance with God: "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed" (Rom. iv. 16). And, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. ii. 8). By the grace of faith, we lay hold upon, or apply to ourselves, Christ and all his benefits; and that faith God giveth us by his mere grace, not exhibited by any work of others. The whole work of salvation, from its first step in regeneration to its last step in glorification, doth entirely flow from God's free grace, and not from any worth in us. So that this being the end, grounds, terms of the new covenant from first to last, mercy doth all on which our hope dependeth. We must claim by mercy.

Thirdly, As there is no merit in the best saints, so there is much demerit; and, as there is nothing to induce God to be good to us, so there is much to hinder him, much that standeth in his way: yet God will do us good: "I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him" (Isa. lvii. 18). He taketh motives from himself to pity, when he might take occasion to punish. There are many sins to be forgiven both before and after conversion. We are not only undeserving, but ill-deserving. It was much that God would take us with all our faults, when he first drew us into acquaintance with himself, and entrust us with a stock of grace; but, after he hath done that, we still are faulting and sinning: yet now there is "no condemnation to them which are in Christ" (Rom. viii. 1); notwithstanding the relics of corruption, and its breaking out.

Fourthly, From the temper of the saints, their humility. None have such a sight and sense of sin as they have, because their eyes are anointed with spiritual eye-salve. They have a clearer insight into the law: "After that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh" (Jer. xxxi. 19). They are enlightened by God's Spirit: the least mote is espied in a glass of clear water. None are so acquainted with their own hearts and ways, as they who often commune with their own hearts, and use self-reflection. Others, that live carelessly, do not mind their offences; but they that set themselves, do more consider their ways; none have a more tender sense of the heinousness of sin. She loved much, wept much, because much was forgiven her (Luke vii.). Some are of a more delicate constitution; the back of a slave is not so sensible of stripes, as they that have been more tenderly brought up. The beams of the sun shining into a house, we see the dust and motes in the sunbeams, which we saw not before. They profess as Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of

all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant." They groan as Saint Paul, "Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

USE I.—Is information. We learn hence that we should not be discouraged, when our hearts are touched with a deep remorse and sense of our failings, and we are desirous to break off our sins by repentance: that mercy which is freely vouchsafed in the covenant, which all God's servants have so often experienced, which the best make their only plea and ground of hope, will find out a remedy for us. If you have a heart to give up yourselves to God's service, and so to get an interest in the promises and blessings of the covenant, you may come and sue out this mercy; for God desireth to exalt his grace. God saith, "Return unto the Lord thy God: I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely" (Hos. xiv. 1, 4). It is the delight of grace to do good, notwithstanding unworthiness. The worse of sins do not hinder God's help, are not above his cure. There is hope for such as are convinced, and see no worth in themselves why God should do them any good: God needs not, will not be hired by the creatures to do it.

USE II.—How inexcusable those are that reject the offers of grace. If they have any liking to the blessings of the covenant, they have no ground to quarrel and differ with God about the price: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money" (Isa. lv. 1). You have no cloak for your sin, if you will not deal with God upon these terms. Nothing keepeth you from him, but your own perverse will.

USE III.—What reason there is why the best of God's servants should carry it thankfully all their days. From first to last, the mercy of God is your only plea and claim. No flesh hath cause to glory in his presence, there being no meritorious cause in the covenant of grace, no moving and inducing cause, no co-ordinate working cause: "Not for your sakes do I this" (Ezek. xxxvi. 32). And in the I Cor. iv. 7, it is said, "Who maketh thee to differ?" We paid nothing for God's love; nothing for Christ, the Son of his love; nothing for his Spirit, the fruit of his love; nothing for sanctifying grace and faith, the effects of his Spirit dwelling and working in our hearts; nothing for pardon, we have all freely; nothing for daily bread, protection, maintenance; and shall pay nothing for glory, when we come to receive it: "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21). It is all without our merit, and against merit: we should regard this, especially when we are apt to say in our hearts, This is for our righteousness; as Haman thought none so fit for honour and preferment as himself: Haman thought so in his heart (Esther vi. 6). So proud-hearted, self-conceited sinners say in their hearts, God seeth more in them than in others. Alas! you are not only unworthy of Christ, the Spirit, grace, and glory, but the air you breathe in, and the ground you tread upon. What did the Lord see in you to judge you meet for such an estate? "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth" (Gen. xxxii. 10). Did not you slight grace, neglect Christ, as well as others? and doth not sin break out, and make a forfeiture every day?

USE IV.—That we should carry it humbly, as well as thankfully. The best of God's children should most admire grace and glorify mercy, set the crown on mercy's head. Consider,—

J. What was the first rise of all God's love, what set all a-stirring in

God's bosom (John iii. 16). There was no cause beyond this. In other things, we may rise higher, from his power and wisdom to his love; but why did he love us? There is no other cause to be given, he loved us because he loved us. It was love first moved the business in the ancient counsel of God's will. God's love is the measure of itself.

2. When he came to apply it, he found us in our blood. It was a great mercy that God would take us into his service with all our faults. We were his creatures, but quite marred, not as he made us. We are not what we were when first his: as we came out of his hands, we were pure and holy; but, since the fall, quite spoiled: "I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?" (Jer. ii. 21.) Strangely changed and altered! If a servant run from his master, and is become altogether blind, deformed, and diseased; will his master look after him, or care for him, or take him again? This was our case.

3. What is spoken already is common to others; you yourselves knew what you were (Titus iii. 3). Every man is soundly affected, more sensible of his own case, seeth particular reasons why God should refuse him; yet you are as brands plucked out of the burning; who did resist such powerful means, such fair advantages; you dallied with God. You know the case of others by guess, your own by feeling. You lay not only in the common, polluted mass, but had your particular offences.

4. When taken in a fault, that God will pity our weakness and infirmities in his service: "I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Mal. iii. 17); that is, he will continue his favour and good-will to them that serve him. So surely they that have a conscience, and are privy to their manifold infirmities and failings, will admire this.

5. Though for the main we give up ourselves to live according to the will of God; yet consider, notwithstanding our sins, what constant humbling considerations there are to keep us sensible of our defects. First, all that you do is not worthy of God; who can serve so great a majesty as the Lord is, according as he should be served? "Ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God, he is a jealous God" (Josh. xxiv. 29). Alas! such is the poverty of human condition, that they can never perform service becoming his majesty; have you a due sense of his purity and holiness? Nay, how jealous he is of the respects of his people! Secondly, not worthy of such a pure law, which requireth such perfect service at our hands: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul," &c. (Psalm xix. 7, 8.) What doth that speculation produce? that a short exposition of the law begetteth a large opinion of our own righteousness. Thirdly, not worthy such great hopes: "That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thes. ii. 12). Since we have such great wages, we should do more work. Is this for Heaven? Is this for eternity? Fourthly, not such as will answer our obligations. We are indebted to all the persons of the Trinity; God himself for our portion, Christ our Redeemer, the Spirit for our guide and comforter. The Gentiles greatly obliged to God for fruitful seasons. The Jews; though acquainted only with God's patience and forbearance, the ceremonial law was a testimony of guilt, or a bond that showed the creatures' debt; this bond was not cancelled. Fifthly, not answerable to the new nature in God's children; they would be in a state of perfect conformity and subjection to God.

A seed worketh through the clods, so they groan under the relics of corruption and sin (Rom. vii. 24), longing for the time when they shall be more like God, when they shall serve him without spot or blemish; therefore are unsatisfied with their present imperfections. These things considered, we should ever keep humble and thankful, praising God's grace: "I will mention the lovingkindness of the Lord and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness towards the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses" (Isa. lxiii. 7).

USE V.—Directeth us how to pray. Cast yourselves at God's feet, pleading his mercy. "We have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings" (1 Kings xx. 31); you have heard so of the God of Israel; try what mercy will do for you: say as David here, "Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy:" my prayers have no other foundation of hope, but thy mercy; I am nothing, and would be nothing, but what I have from thee; I have no merits, but thou hast mercy; all that I have, and expect to have, floweth, and must flow, from this fountain. Take heed of challenging duty as a debt. No, 'Lord, thy mercy is all my plea; as all thy servants before have done: Lord, remember me in thy mercy; if any have other things to plead, let them plead; I am resolved to use no other plea:' "But I have trusted in thy mercy" (Psalm xliii. 5).

Second branch, "Teach me thy statutes." This may be considered apart by itself, or with respect to the context.

I. Apart, as an entire prayer in itself: so the doctrine is,—

DOCTRINE.—It is God must teach us his statutes.

This will appear, if we consider,—

First, What it is to be taught of God. There is a difference between grammatical knowledge and spiritual illumination, or a literal instruction and a spiritual instruction; a greater difference than there is between teaching a child to spell and read the words, and a man to understand the sense. Literal instruction is when we learn the truths contained in the word by rote, and talk one after another of Divine things. But spiritual illumination is when these things are revealed to us by the Spirit of God; as we read of the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit (1 Cor. ii. 4). Others have a "form of knowledge" (Rom. ii. 20). Some have only the report of Christ, have but a human credulity, or the recommendation of others, that reveal the doctrine of God to them. Others receive a revelation made to their souls; their eyes are opened by the Spirit (Isa. liiii. 1). Once more, there is a difference between the Spirit's enlightening in a way of gifts and common grace, and his enlightening in a way of special and saving grace. Some that are enlightened by the Spirit fall away (Heb. vi. 4). Others are "taught of God," so as to come to him by Christ (John vi. 45). This latter sort, that are savingly enlightened, have not only their minds opened, but their hearts inclined. So to be taught, as to be drawn to faith and practice, this is proper to God, who is the Sovereign dispenser of grace.

Secondly, This will appear, if we consider the heart of man, which is naturally full of darkness, and oppressed by the prejudices of customs and evil habits: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. ii. 14); "The god of this world hath blinded the minds," &c. (2 Cor. iv. 4). This veil can only be removed by the Spirit of God.

After grace received, we know but in part (1 Cor. xiii. 9); and much of the matter which becloudeth the mind, still remaineth with us. And when our lusts are awakened by temptations, our old blindness returneth upon us, and we strangely forget ourselves and our duty for the present. Therefore we have need to go to God to be taught: "He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off" (2 Peter i. 9).

Thirdly, If we consider the matter to be taught, it is the mysterious doctrine that came out of the bosom of God. Every art hath its mystery, which strangers cannot judge of: "All Scripture is given by inspiration" (2 Tim. iii. 16). This was a secret which had not been known without a revelation. God hath his mysteries which no man knoweth, but by the Spirit of God: "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven; but to them it is not given" (Matt. xiii. 11). Those that have Scriptures, yet have scales on their eyes, they have not saving knowledge (1 Cor. ii. 14). How sharp-sighted soever graceless souls may be in things that concern the present world, yet they are so blind in spiritual things, as not to be affected and engaged thereby seriously to turn to God. Yea, how accurately soever they can discourse on the theory, and preach of Christ and his ways, yet they have no transforming light. God's mysteries must be seen in his own light, or they make no impression upon us: "In thy light shall we see light" (Psalm xxxvi. 9). The Scriptures containing the sum of the Lord's mind, none can of themselves attain to the meaning of them. It was not the device of man's brain. So none understand by their proper skill and invention. There are such knots as cannot be untied and loosed, but by imploring the help of the Spirit.

USE.—1. To press us to be often with God for this teaching, and make it our great request to him. A gracious heart would fain learn the right way to Heaven: "Oh! send out thy light and thy truth" (Psalm xliii. 3). Direction how to carry ourselves is a great blessing.

2. The blindness of our understanding should make us more earnest with God. We are apt to mistake our way, through the natural weakness of our understandings, especially when lusts and interests interpose: "The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. x. 23). As man understandeth not events, so easily mistaketh present duties.

3. Our present estate. The world is "a dark place" (2 Peter i. 19), compared with the light of glory; it is but a light that shineth out of a room where a candle is; and a room where a candle is not seen, the glimmerings of the ante-chamber of eternity. Our own reason, the counsel and example of others, will easily misguide us. So the more we depend upon God, the more he will undertake to teach us. Those that make their own bosoms their oracle, God is disengaged from being their guide: they need him not; but the snares they run into will soon show them how much they need him.

4. How unapt we are to see conclusions in the promises, and to apply general rules to particular cases and times; which most Christians cannot do *ἐν διαλογισμοῖς ἑαυτῶν*, in their inferences: "Vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. i. 21).

5. To bind all upon the heart, and to lie under the conscience of our duty, maketh the difficulty the greater; many imprison the truth in unrighteousness. Well then, beg the constant direction and illumination of God's Holy Spirit, cast yourselves upon him in the sense of your weak-

ness, and see if he will refuse you; say, 'I am blind and ignorant; Lord, guide me.' It is dangerous to be left in any part of our duty to ourselves.

II. If we consider the words with respect to the context. And first the remoter context, where David speaketh like a man under trouble and oppression: "Let not the proud oppress me," &c. (verses 121, 122.) Lord, show me what to do in this time of my oppression.

DOCTRINE.—Direction how to carry ourselves in trouble, till the deliverance cometh, is a great mercy, and should be earnestly sought of God.

Reasons:—

1. From the parties oppressing. They that oppress, watch for our halting, as Jeremiah complained (Jer. xx. 10). They accused the Prophet unto the ruler, and so to work his ruin, if they could find him tripping in anything. Now, when we are watched, we need special direction, that God would teach us to walk warily and safely: "Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies" (Psalm xxvii. 11), or those which observe me. They watch to get some advantage: therefore, that they may have no advantage against us, we should not trust to our own single wisdom.

2. Because the danger of sin is a greater inconvenience than the danger of trouble. In times of trials and troubles, we are in danger of soul-losing and sinning, as well as bodily danger; therefore we have need to beg wisdom of God to carry it well under trouble, because we are so apt to miscarry, unless God guide us continually in our dark condition, and take us by the hand, and help us over our stumbling-blocks. There are many sins incident to our condition.

(1.) Uncomely passion and unadvised speeches; therefore David prayeth in his trouble: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Psalm cxli. 3). In our oppression, we are under a temptation to hurt our own cause by unadvised and passionate speeches: when we have too great a sense of the temptation, something or other breaketh out to God's dishonour.

(2.) Some indirect course to come out of trouble (Psalm cxxv. 3). Men that make haste out of trouble, carve to themselves, break prison before they are brought out. Necessity is an ill counsellor, and will soon tempt us to some evil way for our own ease, some sinful compliance or confederacy. The Devil tempted Christ when he was hungry (Matt. iv. 3), hoping to work upon his necessity.

(3.) Private revenge, or meeting injury with injuries. We are apt to retaliate: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head" (2 Sam. xvi. 9). Revenge is soon up. No man is troubled if a shower of rain falleth upon us; but, if any cast a bucket or basin of water upon us, we are in a rage presently. We can better bear any trouble from God, than injuries from men: "Oppression maketh a wise man mad." A revengeful spirit is contrary to our heavenly calling.

(4.) Waxing weary of our duty, and quite tired and discouraged in God's service: "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Heb. xii. 3). Weariness and fainting belong properly to the body, and they differ gradually: weariness is a lesser, and fainting a higher, degree of deficiency; as when a man laboureth, hungereth, or travelleth, it abateth his strength, and abateth the active powers, or toileth the spirits, the principle of motion.

And from the body it is translated to the mind, to a less or higher degree of defection; and is thus, when troubles are many and long continued, then we begin to grow faint, and wax weary of the faith and service of Christ, and sink under the burden. It is the Devil's design to make us weary, and tire us out in the service of God.

(5.) Another evil is despairing and distrustful thoughts of God. David after all his experiences of God, though he had conducted him up and down, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1 Sam. xxvii. 1). He had a particular promise and assurance of the kingdom, and had seen much of God's care over him; yet, after all this, David doubteth of the word of God: "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless, thou heardest," &c. (Psalm xxxi. 32.) As if he should say, God hath no care of me, nor thoughts of me; and at that instant deliverance was coming.

(6.) Questioning our interest in God by reason of the cross. Our Lord hath taught us to say, "My God, my God," in the bitterest agonies, when he was upon the cross; but few learn this lesson: "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" (Judg. vi. 13.) Sometimes we question the love of God, because we have no affliction, and anon because we have nothing but affliction; as if God were not the God of the valleys as well as of the mountains. Well then, seeing all these distempers are incident to an afflicted estate, we should the more carefully watch against them.

3. Because our enemies make a great advantage of our failings, and harden themselves in their prejudices, if we carry not a holy, good cause, in a holy, religious way, and will take the least occasion given from a questionable practice to slander the truth: "Ought ye not to walk in the fear of God, because of the reproach of the Heathen our enemies?" (Neh. v. 9.) If you should trip in anything, you shall soon hear of it, to the reproach of religion. A holy and wise carriage in afflictions, is very honourable to the Gospel; otherwise, your testimony is rejected and blasted.

USE.—Well then, desire the Lord to guide thee in all thy troubles; yea, if God doth guide you, let this satisfy you before the deliverance cometh about. It is a mercy if you have direction, though you have not deliverance; for a godly man should not so much regard the ease of the flesh as the performance of his duty to God. If you carry your cross regularly, with faith and patience, God may have more honour, and you more profit, by your affliction than by your deliverance. Yea, to be instructed in the word, and be taught your duty, is in itself a greater mercy than a deliverance: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law" (Psalm xciv. 12). It is a blessed thing; yea, it is a deliverance itself; for it delivereth you from the spiritual evil of the rod, which is the curse. Suffering doth not come as a curse, when instruction goeth along with it. Yea, it is the means of our great deliverance from the present evil world, as it is a pledge of our future deliverance in due time; for God is not unmindful of us, and will not leave us without the conduct of his Spirit.

Secondly, To handle the words with respect to the nearer context in verse 123, "Mine eyes fail for thy salvation." This teaching is begged after he had complained of the delay of the promises, and so implicitly he complaineth, not of the falsity of the word, nor the non-performance of the promise, but of the weakness of his own faith.

DOCTRINE.—When the Lord suspends the promised deliverance, the godly suspect not the truth of his word, but the darkness of their own unbelieving hearts.

They think this failing is because they are no more enlightened; they are dull in conceiving, and misty and cloudy in their apprehensions, and therefore would have a clearer understanding of the promise, and a more quick-sighted faith. Or have failed in the performance of the condition required; therefore desire that God would teach them, and show them their errors, and cause them to profit in sanctification. Thus should we do in like cases, when there is a seeming contradiction between the word and the works of God, betwixt his promises and his providence about us: his voice is sweet like Jacob's, but his hands rough like Esau's. Do not suspect the promise, but your understanding; go into the sanctuary (Psalm lxxiii. 17), God will help you to reconcile things: otherwise, the difficulty will be too hard for you. The saints that have suspected or distrusted God, have found themselves in an error (Isa. xlix. 14, 15; and Psalm lxxvii. 8—10). First, you must not interpret God's promise by his providence, but his providence by his promise; and the promise is the light side, and providence the dark side, of the cloud: "Thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour" (Isa. xlv. 15); "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known" (Psalm lxxvii. 10). We cannot trace him, a man cannot find out the reason of everything that God doeth. Secondly, thou must distinguish between a part of God's work and the end of it. We cannot understand God's providence, till he hath done his work. In the last act of the comedy, all the errors are reconciled. Tarry till then: "At evening time it shall be light" (Zech. xiv. 7). We view providence by pieces, and we know not what God is a-doing, rending and tearing all in pieces; but view God's work in its whole frame and contexture, and it will appear beautiful. Thirdly, we must distinguish between what *is* best for us, and what *we judge* is best for us: "Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water, who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not; that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end" (Deut. viii. 15, 16). Other diet is more wholesome for our souls, than our sick appetite craveth. It is best with us many times when we are weakest: "When I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. xii. 10); worst, when strongest: "When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2 Chron. xxvi. 16). Many times the buffetings of Satan are better for us than a condition free from temptations; so is poverty and emptiness better than fulness. Fourthly, we must distinguish between what things are in themselves, and what in their reduction, use, and tendency. All things are for a believer in their use, though they may be against him in their nature: "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. viii. 28). All their crosses, yea, sometimes their sins and snares, God will over-rule them for good; and the work of grace sometimes goeth back, that it may go forward. Many such cases there are, which look like a contradiction, which we shall not know what to make of them, unless we bring it to Christ an interpreter, one of a thousand. But take heed, in these confusions and tossings of thy soul, how thou reflectest on God; a little experience will confute thy prejudices.

Thirdly, With respect to the nearest context, the former clause of this verse. After an appeal to the covenant of grace, or a petition for mercy, he asketh direction to keep the law.

DOCTRINE.—They that would have mercy by the covenant, must be earnest to be taught God's statutes.

Mercy and teaching are David's two great requests, throughout this and other psalms.

Reasons :—

1. The moral obligation of the law still lieth on God's servants, that are taken into the covenant of grace. There is an eternal obligation upon the creature, to love and serve the Creator, which cannot be dissolved. We are not redeemed from the service of the law by Christ, but the curse of the law : "Being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life" (Luke i. 74, 75). The end of our redemption was not to destroy our service, according to the law, but to fit and enable us to perform it, according to the image of God restored in us (Eph. iv. 24). The new man is created, to restore in some measure those abilities we lost in Adam. God never yet gave man a liberty to be free from the obligation of the moral law; he would not pardon any sin against it without satisfaction made by Christ, and believed and pleaded by sinful man. Christ merited, and God restored the spirit of sanctification, that men might keep it. He will not spare his own children when they transgress against it by heinous and scandalous sins, as to temporal punishments : "The righteous shall be recompensed in the earth; much more the wicked and the sinner" (Prov. xi. 31). David and Eli both smarted for their sins. No man hath interest in Christ, unless he return to the obedience of this law : "To them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law" (1 Cor. ix. 21); "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. viii. 1, 2). No interest in mercy else : "As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy" (Gal. vi. 16). We cannot have full communion with God, till we perfectly obey it : "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 27).

2. The great privilege of the covenant of grace is, to be taught God's statutes, or to have a real impress of them upon the heart and mind; which is the way of Divine teaching : "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb. viii. 10). He will cure us of our wickedness, weakness, and carelessness, and enable us to keep his law : it is God's undertaking to do so, and that of free grace and favour; for he is not indebted to us : it is to give us knowledge of them, and power to keep them. Much of the law natural cannot be severed from it; and that is the reason why the Heathens have the law written upon their hearts (Rom. ii. 15). But the writing is very imperfect, both as to knowledge and power to keep it. God will imprint them more perfectly, this is the true notion of the law. By the mind is meant under-

standing; by the heart, the rational appetite. In the mind is the directive counsel; in the will, the imperial and commanding power. There is the prime mover of all human actions; he giveth an apprehensive and perceptive power, whereby we apprehend things more clearly, and effectually desire and affect spiritual delights.

USE—1. Is to refute the claim of them that would plead mercy, but would still go on in their own ways, blessing themselves in their sins. Till our hearts and minds are suited to God's law by a permanent tincture of holiness, we are not fit subjects to ask mercy and the promises of the covenant.

2. If we would have this effect, we must go to God, who alone can work upon the immortal soul, to reform, mould, or alter it. A new man or angel cannot do it: they may by sense and fancy teach him many things; but to make these lively impressions must be the work of the Spirit.

SERMON CXXXVII.

VERSE 125.—*I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.*

In this verse, he repeateth his plea and request also. In the former verse, he mentioneth the relation of a servant, and prayeth, "Teach me thy statutes;" and here again, first, asserteth his relation to God, "I am thy servant;" and, secondly, reneweth his request, "Give me understanding;" thirdly, the fruit and effect of the grant, "That I may know thy testimonies;" or, then I shall know.

This repetition hath its use: this repeating his relation to God showeth, that, where the conscience of our dedication to God and our endeavours to serve him is clear and sincere, we should not easily quit our claim. Deal with thy servant in mercy; yea, Lord, I am thy servant: I have my failings; but, Lord, it is in my heart to serve thee, I can and will avow it as long as I live. Our defects and disallowed failings do not deprive us of the title of being God's servants; we may take comfort in it, and assert our interest in the promises as long as we delight to do his will. And, though unbelief opposeth our claim, we must remove it in the face of all objections. Christ puts Peter to a threefold assertion of his love to him (John xxi.). It is supposed we do not lie in these redoubled professions of our respect and service to God.

Secondly, this renewing his request showeth his earnestness to increase in spiritual understanding. Savoury and powerful knowledge of Divine things is in itself so excellent a benefit, and our necessity of it is so great, that we cannot enough pray for it. Only observe that, in the former verse, the notion was statutes, here testimonies. Statutes are that part of God's word which we should obey; testimonies, that part which we should believe; viz., the promises. But this may be too critical, the words being taken in this psalm in a greater latitude.

DOCTRINE.—That it is a good plea, when we want any mercy, spiritual or temporal, to be able to plead that we are God's servants.

I. That there are a sort of people, that in a peculiar manner are God's servants.

II. These may plead it when they want any mercy spiritual or temporal.

First, That some are in a peculiar manner God's servants. The saints of God are so called; it was Moses's honour: they sing the song of Moses, the servant of the Lord. So, "Now, after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord" (Josh. i. 1). So Paul asserts it of himself: "God, whose I am, and whom I serve" (Acts xxvii. 23). Here is a true description of a Christian man; he is God's, and serveth God. He is God's by special appropriation and communion with God; he serveth God; that is, walketh answerably to his relation, and is ever about God's work. Elsewhere he describeth himself by his service, "God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit" (Rom. i. 9); "God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience" (2 Tim. i. 3). But to know who in a peculiar manner are God's servants, we must distinguish.

1st, God is served actively and passively, by necessity of nature or voluntary choice. Passively, by necessity of nature, all creatures, even the inanimate, are his servants: "They continue this day according to thine ordinances; for all are thy servants" (Psalm cxix. 91). But actively, to serve him out of duty and choice; so do only men and angels, who were made immediately for his service; the brute and inanimate creatures only ultimately and terminatively. They have a principle in their nature to incline them to it; are not only overruled so to do by the conduct of general providence. The water that driveth a mill serveth my purpose, but otherwise than the miller or overseer of the work. Fire and water are my servants, much more he.

2ndly, We must distinguish between those who are God's servants *de jure*, of right, and those who are so *de facto*, indeed; servants of right, and actually his servants. *De jure* all men are God's servants; God made them for himself (Prov. xvi. 4), and Christ bought them for himself: "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Rom. xiv. 9). He is *δеспότης*, a Lord and master, where he is not *κόρητος*, a covenant-redeemer and Saviour: "Denying the Lord that bought them" (2 Peter ii. 1); *ἀγοράσαντα*, a master that bought them for service, and may challenge a right and interest in them, having shed his blood for mankind. But *de facto*, those are God's servants who yield themselves up to God's dominion, to serve and please him in all things with cheerfulness and consent. The covenant is represented under divers notions; as a covenant of friendship, Abraham "was called the friend of God" (James ii. 23); as a conjugal covenant, "I will betroth thee unto me" (Hos. ii. 19); as a covenant between king and subjects (Isa. xxxiii. 22); as a covenant between masters and servants, that take hold of his covenant, and join themselves to the Lord to be his servants (Isa. lvi. 6). The two former notions imply the sociableness and intimacy we have with God in the covenant; the two latter, our inferiority and subjection. Both must be minded, that, as, on the one side, we be not slavish and under bondage, so, on the other, we may not behave ourselves too fellowlike with God. We are such servants as are also friends; yea, as sons; yea, his spouse. The end of joining ourselves to the Lord, is not to be partners with him, but servants to him.

3rdly, Some are servants by visible profession and baptismal engagement; others really and indeed, by conversion to God, or an actual giving up of themselves to his use and service. By baptism, we are professed servants and subjects to the God of Heaven, bound to be so; for it is the seal of that covenant of service I spake of before, and so bindeth our ser-

vice in it. We renounce the Devil, the world, and the flesh, and dedicate ourselves to the Lord. Justin Martyr saith, they did ἀναθεματίζουσιν ἑαυτοὺς τῷ Θεῷ. And, “And entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God; and thou becamest mine” (Ezek. xvi. 18); “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us; not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Peter iii 21). By profession, all baptized persons are God’s servants; but, in reality, all converted persons are so, that are turned from idols to serve the living God (1 Thes. i. 9). Without this, Christ will not be contented with an outside acquaintance, and the flattery of empty titles; but will the more challenge us by virtue of our profession: “If then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?” (Mal. i. 6.) *Cui res subjecta nomine negatur, is nomine illudatur.* It was no honour to Christ, but a mere mockery, to be called King of the Jews, whilst they buffeted Christ and spat upon him. If God be a master, he will have the honour, fear, and obedience, that belong to a master, that we should be afraid to offend him.

4thly, There are some that are servants by general relation to distinguish persons, and some by way of special attendance. A servant in general relation, is every Christian servant; by special attendance, are either angels, and they are called his “ministers” (Psalm ciii. 21), as being in near and special attendance about their master’s person, courtiers of Heaven, most in grace and favour with God. A man may have one to his business, that yet hath not one to attend his person. Among men, the magistrate is the minister of God for good (Rom. xiii. 4). Ministers are servants in special attendance, therefore Paul so often calleth himself the servant of Jesus Christ: “Whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of his Son” (Rom. i. 9). Ministers of God; not of the people, but for the people, because of their near service about and under God. David was both a holy man, and a king, and a prophet. David, as a king, might use this petition: it highly concerneth one in public rank and office to say to God, “I am thy servant.” Yea, as private believers, I observe it not only to distinguish persons, but to distinguish the work of the same person. Christians have, besides their general calling, a particular calling, wherein to serve God. God hath given us all talents to trade withal, “Who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods” (Matt. xxv. 14); “Occupy till I come” (Luke xix. 13). *Dona talenta.* Every one of us, as instruments of Providence, are to serve God in our generations (Acts xiii. 36); and so not only to mind the work of our general calling, but that particular work which he hath given us to do in our way and place. The general and particular calling do not cross, but help, one another. In your particular calling, as instruments of God’s providence, you provide for your support, during your service, and the relief of others: so that, as God’s servants, you are not to be idle, but to have a lawful employment and calling, that you may not cast yourselves upon temptations of using sinful shifts for your support and living. It is also a remedy against the evils that flow from idleness and too much ease, and that he may promote the good of church, family, and kingdom. And then the general calling helpeth the particular, by limiting it, and our endeavours therein, that so we may have time to save our souls; and directing us, that we do all things holily and justly as becometh the servants of the Lord.

Secondly, These may plead it when they want any mercy, spiritual or temporal.

1st, It is not a plea contrary to grace. Indeed, no such plea can be allowed in the new covenant; partly, because it is the mere mercy of God to advance us to this honour, to make us his servants, and the fruit of his goodness, rather than our choice: "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom. ix. 16). Willing, and running, and working, and serving, are necessary afterwards (1 Cor. ix. 24), as our way and qualification. Again, our service is mixed with many weaknesses. Mercy there needeth to interpret our best actions, peace and mercy, when we have done most exactly (Gal. vi. 16); yea, the very plea of servant excludeth all thought of merit; for a servant *ipso jure ministerium domino debet*: "Doth he thank that servant, because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not" (Luke xvii. 9).

2ndly, It is not contrary to humility. It is not, we are thy children, we are thy saints; but, we are thy servants. It is the meanest of relations, it speaketh duty rather than perfection, and pleads not property of the house, but property and interest in God. The best of us are but servants to the high God, and therefore should not carry it proudly either to our master or to our fellow-servants. It is an humble claim.

3rdly, It speaketh comfort; for God will provide for his family, and will give maintenance, protection, direction, help, and finally wages, where he requireth and expecteth service; for the present, necessities by the way; for the future, a blessed reward. For the present, we may depend on him as servants on their Lord: "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress," &c. (Psalm cxxiii. 2.) Servants had their dole and portion from their masters; the males from the master, the females from the mistress; therefore is the expression of "looking" here used. First, God will give direction. In the text, David, upon the account of being God's servant, beggeth to know his will, as all good servants study what will please their masters; and will God appoint us work, and not tell us what it is? "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God; thy Spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness" (Psalm cxliii. 10). God doth not only show us what is good in his word, but teacheth us also by his Spirit, and directs us in every turn and motion of our lives; and we ask it of him, as he is our God and Lord. Secondly, help and assistance. God is no Pharaoh, to require brick and give no straw; his grace is ready to help the endeavouring soul: "Work out your own salvation, &c.; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do" (Phil. ii. 12, 13). He excitemeth the first motions, and still carrieth them on to perfection. Thirdly, protection while he hath a mind to use us: "Be surety for thy servant for good, let not the proud oppress me" (verse 122 of this psalm). Under the law, if a servant was hurt, the master was to take an account, and satisfaction to be made to him for his servant; so God taketh an account of the wrongs of his servants, and will demand satisfaction. Fourthly, maintenance. Every man hath a care devolved upon him, to take care of his family, and provide for them (1 Tim. v. 8), as instruments of God's providence; and will not God provide for his own? And then for time to come, God's servants have good wages: "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. xii. 6). We need not seek another pay-master, there is a sure reward: "But to him that soweth righteousness, shall be a sure reward" (Prov. xi. 18). And a great reward: "And in keeping of them, there is great reward" (Psalm

xix. 11). And a full reward, "But that we receive a full reward" (2 John 8). No desire remaineth unsatisfied.

USE.—Is to persuade us to become the servants of the Lord.

1. I will plead with you upon the account of right; you ought to be so *jure creationis*, you were created by him. As a man expecteth fruit from the vine which he hath planted, so may God expect from the creature which he hath made; yea, you were made for this end. If God had made us for another purpose, our living to that end and purpose had been regular. But this was his end, that he might be served by us. Let us lay these things together, consider what an absolute power God hath by creation: no lord hath such a right over his slave or servant as God over us. The slave or servant is either taken in battle, or bought and hired with our money; but God made us out of nothing: he that made a thing at his own pleasure, hath a greater right than another can have by purchase, yea, greater right than a master over his beast. A master hath a greater right over his beast than over his servant: the dominion over the beast is more natural to us than over a servant: the servant and master have the same common nature. When he gave us dominion over the beasts of the field, the one is founded in God's original grant, the other is but a civil right founded in temporal accidents. Something is due, even to a slave, as our own flesh. Yet a man cannot absolutely do with his beast as he will, the law of God interposeth: a good man is merciful to his beast: God will not allow a cruel disposition, nor give us the absolute disposal over the creatures which we made not. Nay, more than a potter over the vessels which he hath framed, or a workman over his work: he only giveth external shape or figure, by art out of matter already prepared; but God giveth the whole being out of nothing, nothing but what is his. A potter hath power over his work to dispose of it as he pleaseth; here the law interposeth not. Surely, if a potter hath power to dispose of his vessels, God hath an absolute power to smite or heal, lift up or cast down, save or condemn. None can say, What dost thou? He did not fashion us out of matter prepared, but out of mere nothing. But this was his end, that we should love, and fear, and serve, and glorify him. Our business was not to eat and drink, and please ourselves and others, and live a merry life. All things act to the end for which they were created: the sun to shine by day and enlighten the world, the moon and stars by night; and they answer their end. Their ultimate end is to serve God; their next end, to serve man. All things in the world are either subjected to our dominion, or created for our use: the heavens, though not under our dominion as beasts, yet are for our use; the lower heaven to give us breath, the middle heaven to give us light and heat, the highest Heaven for our dwelling-place. The sun runneth and hasteneth to give us light. The sun shineth for us, the wind bloweth, and the water floweth for our use. The earth and air are for our use; the earth to tread on, the air to breathe in; and shall not we serve him, that made the whole course to serve us? All the creatures are at work for us day and night, for a poor worm of six feet long! yea, the Creator is at work for us: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." We complain if the creatures do not serve us, and shall not we serve God who gave us those servants?

2. A right of preservation. He is Lord alone, because he preserveth all things: "Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made Heaven,

therein, the seas and all that is therein; and thou preservest them all" (Neh. ix. 6). At whose table are we fed? at whose cost and expense are we maintained? upon whom do we depend every moment, for being and operation? "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28). He upholdeth all things by the word of his power (Heb. i. 3); he doth every moment continue what he gave at first. Things were not made that they should act and subsist of themselves, as the house abideth when the inhabitant is dead and gone. A daily influence is necessary: as the beams depend on the sun, so do we every moment upon God; every day we are bound to serve him. If God should turn us off for preservation to ourselves, how soon should we return to our original nothing! God is disengaged, if we serve him not. If, out of indulgence, he continues our beings, what vile ingratitude is it not to serve him! "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isa. i. 3). Would you maintain a servant to do his own work? Since we live upon God, we should live to him.

3. A right by redemption: "And ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). If a man had bought another out of slavery, all his time, and strength, and service belonged to the buyer: Christ hath bought us from the worst slavery with the greatest price, and shall we rob him of his purchase? This was his end; he did not redeem us to ourselves, but to God; not to live as we list, to exempt us from his dominion, that is impossible. Saul promised to make him free in Israel that would destroy Goliath (1 Sam. xvi. 25); but to be free from God's dominion cannot be; that was not Christ's end in redeeming us, but that we might be put into a capacity to serve God. Well then, when God hath such a right in us, we ought to obey him.

Secondly, Consider, what an honour it is to be God's servants. *Servire Deo, regnare est.* The meanest offices about a prince are honourable. No such honourable employment as God's service, both in respect of the person whom we serve, the great God, and the service itself; it is a service of "righteousness and holiness" (Luke i. 75). This is no drudgery, our natures are ennobled; the liberty and perfection of human nature are preserved by this service. And then, for the quality of our reward, there is no such wages, no such reward in any service: "And where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour" (John xii. 26). Here is true honour, fitted for great spirits that will not stoop to trifles; and indeed, God's servant is the only great spirit. The most eminent servants in the courts of kings have but a splendid and more gaudy slavery, in comparison of God.

Thirdly, What a happiness, as well as an honour, both in respect of our present communion with him and future fruition of him! The queen of Sheba said of Solomon's servants, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom" (1 Kings x. 8). Happy those, indeed, that serve God, they are friend-servants: "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you" (John xv. 15). In regard of intimate communion, they are treated as sons, though they be servants. Now, it is very comfortable to be taken into God's bosom, and to have access to him upon all occasions. Besides the reward

and wages in the life to come, God's servants have great vales: our earnest is better than the world's wages. Consider,—

Fourthly, What a hard master we were under before: "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin" (Rom. vi. 17). You have obeyed many masters: ye were "sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures" (Titus iii. 3); you that were at the beck of every brutish lust, and were carried to and fro with so many contrary passions and affections, that have left so many wounds in your consciences, alarmed by terrors every day, when you denied yourselves nothing, thought nothing too much or too dear to spend or part with in a sinful course.

Fifthly, If once we come to choose his service, we shall find a difference between the Lord and other masters: "Nevertheless, they shall be his servants, that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries" (2 Chron. xii. 8). The sorrow of the one, the sweetness of the other; the misery of the one, the blessedness of the other; the bondage of the one, the liberty of the other; they that forsake or refuse God's service, shall soon find worse masters. God hath ways enough to punish our straggling from duty and slighting his service; either by putting us under hard task-masters, some that shall turn the edge of authority against us, push with the horns of a lamb, a barbarous enemy, making us to be mutual oppressors of each other, or by giving us over to Satan's power, or our own hearts' lusts.

Sixthly, Christ's service is not hard nor heavy: "My yoke is easy, and my burthen is light" (Matt. xi. 30), notwithstanding all your prejudices against it. These men live as they list: they think this is a sweet liberty, to be guided by their own wisdom, and live according to their own wills, according to their own ends; and that it is better than to be curbed (Psalm ii. 3); but, after a little while, they have other thoughts, they will find the bitterness of such a course. On the contrary, the more we try the service of God, the sweeter we shall find it to be: "And his commandments are not grievous" (1 John v. 3). And, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov. iii. 17). Our work is wages; and our very work carrieth a reward in the bosom of it, so sweet and comfortable it is. Now for directions.

1. If we would be God's servants, we must sincerely, wholly, and absolutely give up ourselves to do his will; and never more look upon ourselves as our own masters, to do what we please; but wholly to study what will please God. Isa. lvi. 6, they "joined themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and be his servants." "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?" (Rom. vi. 16.) There is a solemn dedication made; we take up his service seriously; not upon example barely, or tradition, or fear, or constraint, or some base respects or sinister ends, or some sudden pang or motion; but after serious and due deliberation, out of judgment rightly informed, and affection thereon grounded, do engage themselves to perform humble service to God; without limiting or power of revocation, give up themselves wholly to follow his directions.

2. God's servants have work to do; none of them must be idle: "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" (Matt. xx. 6); "Serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness" (Luke i. 74, 75); "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. ii. 12); "Herein do I exercise

myself, to have always a conscience void of offence" (Acts xxiv. 16). We must not put hands in bosom, having so much work to do. Many presume of being God's servants; but it is only in the notion, they do nothing for him.

3. This service must not be done grudgingly, but heartily: "Also the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and be his servants" (Isa. lvi. 6); "To love him, and to serve the Lord thy God" (Deut. x. 12). God will not be served but out of love, not by necessity and constraint. We must yield *obedientiam servi*, but not *servilem*: we are delivered from a slavish spirit: We "have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear" (Rom. viii. 15). God's service must be gone about with ready affection and goodwill. The respect which we show to God is called service, in regard of our strict obligation to it; but obedience, in regard of our readiness of mind to perform it. Secondly, not slightly; but with reverence and zeal: "If I be a master, where is my fear?" (Mal. i. 6.) "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Psalm ii. 11); and, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. ii. 12); and, "I beseech you, &c., by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. xii. 1). God will not be put off with anything by-the-by; it is a lessening of his majesty: "I am a great king." Thirdly, it must be done constantly, not by fits. He that is God's servant, never ceaseth from his work; their feasting, walking, sitting, sleeping, waking, hungry, thirsty, hearing, or praying, it is all for God: he that doth any of these things merely for himself, to gratify the flesh, doth not act as God's servant: "Instantly serving God day and night" (Acts xxvi. 16). Fourthly, orderly: all things in God's service must be regarded according to their weight: "For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men" (Rom. xiv. 18); that is, the main things, not in contests about ceremonies. If others carry these matters beyond their weight, let not us; it is not a pin to choose what party a man is of, if he doth not mind righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost: as if a servant should provide sauce for his master, and neglect to provide meat.

4. Our great end and scope must be to please God. They are true servants that make it their business to please their master: "Choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant" (Isa. lvi. 6); "The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John viii. 29); "Exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that, as you have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more" (1 Thes. iv. 1); and, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John iii. 22). So, Enoch "had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. xi. 5). The property of a servant is not to please himself. They that set themselves to please God, observe his will in all things. There is a great pleasing in the world; but few make it their business to please God. All inferiors please their superiors on whom they depend; and shall not we please God, who is infinitely greater than man, and on whom we depend every moment for all that we enjoy?

Use.—Are we God's servants? We all say so; but we speak out of conviction of conscience, rather than out of inclination of heart; not what

de facto is, but what *de jure* should be: and it is well that we come so far as to own God's right. *Professio ipsa* (saith Hilary) *habet conscientie necessitatem, non habet confessionis veritatem.*

1. If it be so, then God is our chiefest good and highest Lord, whom we study to please and gratify. It is certain, that is our master which hath the greatest part in us, and power and influence over us: "No man can serve two masters, &c.: ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. vi. 24); "They that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly" (Rom. xvi. 18); "Whose god is their belly" (Phil. iii. 19). It was a speech of Luther, *Inter in omni religione est potentissimum idolum.* It doth all with men. Where the belly is served, Christ is neglected. So far as his service will comply with the interest of the belly, or a quiet, pleasurable life, so far they can be zealous: their religion must feed them and maintain them; or else they care not for it. John vi. 26, they followed Christ for the loaves, mind religion for outward advantages. When our interest and Christ's service go contrarywise, we can dispense with our duty to God for the sake of this. It is clear, to be servants is to want a power and right to dispose of ourselves, our actions and employments. While any other thing hath an interest in us to dispose of us, we are not God's servants; but that thing that hath such a power with us, is our master.

2. A servant is chiefly known by obedience: "To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey" (Rom. vi. 16); "And that servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will," &c. (Luke xii. 47, 48.) Men may talk high for God, know much; but whom do we ordinarily obey? When the flesh bids us go, we go; come, we come. If pride bid us display the pomp of wit in our duties, or to hang out the ensigns of our vanity, we yield straight; if lust bid us pamper the flesh, we presently obey; if covetousness bid take the wedge of gold, we do it. But when a man knoweth anything to be the mind of God, and prepareth his heart to do it, he is one of God's servants.

3. A servant of God is one that the sight of God's will is reason enough to him: "This is the will of God" (1 Thes. v. 18). The will of God must be the prime and prevalent motive with a Christian: they are servants, not to do their own will, but his whose servants they are: they do nothing but what their master commandeth; and what he commandeth, they see reason to obey.

Second branch, "Give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies." This is subjoined to the former plea, first, because David would not be a servant in name and title only, but in deed and in truth; and therefore would fain know his duty: secondly, to show the difference between God's servants and the servants of other lords who command us: "The king's favour is toward a wise servant" (Prov. xiv. 25); they see them wise, find them wise, and then love them. But God must begin with us: his favour maketh us wise.

DOCTRINE.—God's best servants think they can never enough beg Divine illumination.

David doth often enforce this request.

Reasons:—

1st, Our blindness in the matters of God is a great part of our spiritual misery: "Ye were sometimes darkness" (Eph. v. 8). Their is a veil

lying upon our hearts not easily removed and taken away. All the mischief introduced by the fall is not cured at once, but by degrees: as spiritual strength increaseth, we grow up into it; so spiritual light. The maim of the understanding, as well as the will, is not wholly cured till we come to Heaven, for here we know but in part; till God give us understanding, we are utterly blind: the best of God's servants have cause to acknowledge it in themselves, the remnants of ignorance and ineredulity. The Apostle biddeth them to add to faith virtue, to virtue knowledge; that is, skill to manage the work of our heavenly calling.

2ndly, None are so sensible of this blindness as they. It is some proficiency in knowledge, to understand our ignorance: "Surely, I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy" (Prov. xxx. 2, 3). The most knowing see they need more enlightening. The best of our knowledge is to know our imperfections (1 Cor. viii. 2). He that thinketh he knoweth anything, knoweth nothing as he ought to know.

3rdly, There is room for increase; for, at the best, we never know so much of God's ways, but we may know more: "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord" (Hos. vi. 3); "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18). True sanctified knowledge is always growing. If we sit down with measures received, it is a sign we do not know things as we should know them. Christ grew in knowledge, not in grace; for the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily. Practical knowledge is never at a stand: though a man may see round the compass and light of saving truth, yet he may know them more spiritually and more feelingly.

4thly, The profit of Divine revelation, as to these three things:—

1. A clear discerning of the things of God, not a confused notion, as the blind man in the Gospel saw men as trees walking. So, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6); and, "And hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true" (1 John v. 20). Every degree of knowledge is God's gift. What other men see confusedly, we see more distinctly in this light.

2. Firm assent. Then shall I "know thy testimonies;" know them from others that have not Divine authority. It is the spirit of wisdom and revelation that openeth our eyes to see the truth and worth of heavenly things contained in the promise: "The Father of glory may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Eph. i. 17, 18); and, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee" (Matt. xvi. 17). Human credulity we may have upon the report of others, the evidence of the truths themselves; but this firm assent is the fruit of Divine illumination.

3. Hearty practice. Let thy testimonies not only strike my ear, but affect my heart, command my hand; let me know them so as to do them; for otherwise our knowledge is little worth. God doth so direct, that he doth also enable us to approve our obedience to him sincerely and faithfully. There is a knowledge that puffeth us up (1 Cor. viii. 1), which yet is a gift, and floweth from the common influence of the Spirit: "Was not

this to know me, saith the Lord?" (Jer. xxii. 16.) But there is a greater efficacy in practical knowledge, such as warmeth the heart with love to the truths known: "If thou knewest the gift," &c. (John iv. 10.) Such a light as proceedeth from the gracious influence of the Spirit.

USE I.—Let us be often dealing with God in prayer, that our judgments may be enlightened with the understanding of the word, and our affections renewed and strengthened unto the true obedience of it; beg for that lively light of the Spirit.

1. We need it. In how many things do we err in the things which we know! How weak are we both as to sound judgment and practice! The Apostle saith, "We know in part" (1 Cor. xiii. 9); "We are but of yesterday, and know nothing" (Job viii. 9). Therefore we have need to go to the Ancient of Days, that he may teach us knowledge, and kindle our lamps anew at the fountain of light. Alas! we take it in by drops, or by degrees, as a tender and sore eye must be used to the light. We have but little time to get knowledge in, and do not improve that little time we have.

2. We have leave to ask it: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (James i. 5); and why do we not, seeing we have a liberty to ask it?

3. God hath promised to bestow it: he will give his Spirit to them that ask it. And to beget faith in us, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke xi. 13.) Here is a notable argument, he reasoneth and promiseth. And Prov. ii. 3, we must cry for knowledge. Well then, let us be earnest, that we may not miss that which is to be had for asking; beg for a heart to know: "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord" (Jer. xxiv. 7).

USE II.—It informeth us, that there is somewhat more than the word necessary to give us knowledge. God must not only reveal the object, but prepare the subject. David, having a law, beggeth understanding that he might know God's testimonies. The literal sense and meaning of the words may be understood by common gifts and ordinary industry, unless men be exceedingly blinded and hardened by their own prejudices; but to have a spiritual understanding of them, so as to profit and increase in sanctification, that is from the Lord. These things may be drawn into a system, wherein there will be nothing that exceedeth the understanding of a man; but to understand it so as to be affected with and changed by it, that is from the Spirit: "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true" (1 John v. 20); and, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord" (Eph. v. 8). He is the purchaser and author of that light.

USE III.—Is reproof to those that presume on their own wit to understand Divine mysteries. Many think they have eyes in their head, and can see into a matter as far as other men, and conceive and judge of a thing as soon and as well as others can do; and so will not acknowledge their dullness and blindness in heavenly things, take it ill to be told of it: "Are we blind also?" (John ix. 10;) in a rage, scoff at those that talk of the enlightening of the Spirit, and being taught of God. Alas! you must be blind, and be fools, before you be wise (1 Cor. iii. 18), in your own conviction and feeling.

SERMON CXXXVIII.

VERSE 126.—*It is time for thee, Lord, to work; for they have made void thy law.*

In the words, we have, first, a prayerful suggestion, “It is time for thee, Lord, to work;” secondly, the reason of it, “For they have made void thy law.” In the first branch take notice of,—

1. The person to whom the address is made, “For thee, Lord.”

2. The suggestion itself, what and when; what they would have the Lord to do, to work; and when, even now, “it is time” to work.

To open these, I begin with,—

1. The person to whom the address is made, the Lord. Some read the words, It is time to work for thee, O Lord, because they have made void thy law. It is time indeed to work for God, when so many work against him in an evil generation. Lest the law should perish, and fall to the ground, some should keep up the authority of it; and they that fear God are to encourage one another (Mal. iii. 16). The Chaldee paraphrase reads it, It is time to do the will of the Lord; but the Hebrew original carries it as we do, It is time for Jehovah to do. The Septuagint, *Καὶρός τῷ ποιῆσαι τὴν κρισίαν*. The Vulgar Latin, *Tempus faciendi, Domine*.

2. Here is the suggestion itself, and that,—

(1.) What they would have God to do: it is expressed by a general word, “work;” as also Jer. xiv. 7, “Do thou it for thy name’s sake:” what should he do? *Tempus mittendi Filium Dei*, saith Augustine; to set about the work of redemption, to send the Son of God. But that is a work rather to exercise and show forth his justice, power, and truth, both in punishing his enemies and delivering his people; to work his own proper work of justice, as becometh the judge of all the world to do; namely, to punish the wicked, and help his servants out of their hands.

(2.) When it is time. Then it seemeth to be a time when man’s wickedness is grown to the height: “In the fourth generation they shall come hither again; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. xv. 16). Good men are put to the uttermost of their patience, and God’s glory abused beyond measure (Isa. lii. 5). Lord, it is time to work; they are as bad may be; thy people have quite spent all their faith and patience; when thine ordinances and word are despised and affronted, and thy people trodden under foot, it is time for thee to work.

Secondly, Let us explain the reason, “For they have made void thy law.” The law is made void two ways, *formaliter et interpretative*.

1st, Formally, when any deny the authority of God, as Pharaoh: “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?” (Exod. v. 2.) Or those rebels, “Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?” (Psalm xii. 4.) Or we make void the law when we deny it to be given of God; as Martian and his followers, that the law was given by an evil God. Many now question the Scriptures themselves, or deny the obligation of the moral law to believers, as the Antinomians and Libertines; as the Apostle telleth us, that we do not make void the law by faith; yea, we establish the law (Rom. iii. 31). It was the greatest ratification to it that could be. Or, finally, those that take upon them to enact things contrary to the law of God, or beside the law, as necessary to salvation, and enforce their own traditions beyond and before the law of God. These make void the law, as Christ telleth

the Pharisees, that they made the commandments of God of no effect by their traditions (Matt. xv. 6); especially when they obtrude these things upon the consciences of others under the highest penalties.

2ndly, Interpretatively, when men by consequence take away the honour and authority that is due to the law, by their wickedness and rebellion against God. Though in words they acknowledge the authority of God and the obligation of his law, yet they have no respect to it in their carriage and practice, doing whatever pleaseth themselves; stand in no awe of God and his word, reject it as a thing of nought. Obedience to the law is a ratifying and confirming the law by our consent: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law, to do them" (Deut. xxvii. 26). Our words do not confirm the law so much as our works. So, on the contrary, they repeal or make void the law, that observe it not in their practice. *Finis operis* is made *finis operantis*, as if they intended to abolish, whilst they make no reckoning of, the law. Where observe, that this is a notion to make sin odious to us: it is not only *ἀνομία*, "a transgression of the law" (1 John iii. 4), but a despising the law (2 Sam. xii. 9), a judging or censuring the law (James iv. 11); yea, a repealing and disannulling the law, which is the notion of the text.

DOCTRINE.—That, when a flood of wickedness is broken out, we may put God in mind of doing his work, of punishing the wicked, and delivering his people.

I shall give you the sum of this doctrine in these four considerations:—

I. That God doth for a while hold his hand, and bear with the wickedness of his enemies.

II. Though he doth for a while bear with them, yet he hath his times to punish and proceed to execution.

III. This time is usually when the impiety and insolency of wicked men is come to a height.

IV. When it is come to a height, we may and must mind God of doing his work, or arising to judgment.

The first consideration is implied in the doctrine and the text; the other three are express.

First, It is implied, that God doth for a while hold his hand, and not seem to mind his work. Though the least sin deserveth the greatest plagues, even when it is first committed; yet such is God's patience and long-suffering, that he will not at first punish even the sins of his enemies, but will let them ripen, and come to a height, before he smite. This he doth,—

1st, To show his bounty and goodness to all his creatures. He will not easily destroy the workmanship of his hands, even the provoking wicked; but giveth them time to repent and change their course: "I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not" (Rev. ii. 21). The worst have leave to repent, means to repent, time to repent; and, if they have not the grace to repent, they may blame themselves: "Endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction" (Rom. ix. 22), ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ. The reprobate taste of God's common goodness as they are members of the world, are forborne for a long time, till they be sear and rotten through, fit for the burning. Nay, let me observe this, God that is very quick with his people, is very patient towards them that perish. God is quick with his own people: he will visit their iniquities with scourges, and will not suffer sin to lie upon them; and therefore

they are chastened every morning. Yet this God is very patient to them that know no better, profess no better, have had no experience of his ways; and, though they finally perish, it is long first, till their sins do even extort vengeance out of his hands.

2ndly, To chastise, exercise, and prove his own people, he beareth with the wickedness of their enemies.

1. To chastise them for their sins, that they may be brought low, and their souls be humbled to the dust. Certainly, this God expects before he will appear for us: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God" (1 Peter v. 6). And because his people are backward to this work, he permitteth such instruments as will not spare, but lay on to the purpose: "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Isa. x. 5, 6). When God is angry with his people, he can easily find a rod for them; yea, not only a rod, but a staff, which is a more heavy instrument of correction. He can find instruments sufficiently exasperated, and full of malice, severe executioners; and he lets them alone till they have done his work, though they manage his controversy with cruel minds and evil and destructive intentions. Sometimes God punisheth his people with divisions among themselves; and, though they are very troublesome one to another, yet a sheep cannot worry a sheep, as a wolf will; they do it to the purpose, in a most cruel and a spiteful manner. Now, though he will reckon with wicked men for their violence, for transgressing their bounds, and going beyond his revealed will and approbation (Zech. i. 15), yet not till his work be done upon Mount Zion and Jerusalem: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria" (Isa. x. 12). He will not cast the rod into the fire, till we have felt the smart of it, and be thoroughly humbled under his mighty hand.

2. To exercise his people, that they may not contract rust, and languish and grow idle in Heaven's way. Alas! when we live at ease, and have nobody to trouble us, God is little owned, loved, and acknowledged, the throne of grace lieth neglected and unfrequented; and therefore he permitteth enemies to keep us in breath: "Slay them not, lest my people forget" (Psalm lix. 11). Things in conceit do not leave such an impression upon us, as things in feeling. Scipio would have Carthage stand, to whet and exercise the Roman valour. We need vigilant enemies as a guard upon us, that we may be kept awful, serious, mindful of God, constantly in the exercise of faith and dependence. Wicked men have their ministry and service, to be as goads in our sides and scourges on our backs, to whip us to our duty and make us mend our pace heavenward: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law" (Psalm xciv. 12): chastened by the molestations of the wicked, for all along he complaineth of the delay of vengeance on the persecutors; and in the next verse he saith, "Until the pit be digged for the wicked," as condemned men are suffered to live till their gallows and grave be made ready. If they trouble us in the mean while, it is to reduce us to a sense and practice of our duty, and that we may not securely go on in a course of vanity and sin. Till that be done, the pit is not ready for the wicked and ungodly oppressors: they dig their own pit by their sin and oppression.

3. To prove his people, as well as to exercise them. To prove their faith and their patience; their faith, to see whether they can live by faith, and not by sense and present appearance; whether we are persuaded that there is a just and righteous God, that is the supreme governor of the world, notwithstanding all the oppositions and confusions they groan under: "Because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith" (Hab. ii. 3, 4); that is, the Lord's purpose in delaying to perform the vision, is to try and discover who are the lofty and unsound, and who can subsist and hold out by faith on God's being, and providence, and promises, and world to come; and so wait upon God in hard times without fainting. If God should smite as soon as his enemies provoke him, faith would be of no use, and the whole world would be governed by sense. To believe the justice and mercy of God, though for the time we do not see any manifestation of it, that is the trial of faith. We know there is one that sits above and seeth all. Though the world be in an uproar, and they that work wickedness are set up, and God's servants persecuted, yet we know that God will reckon with them in due time. And, secondly, to prove their patience, in bearing the present difficulties, and tarrying the Lord's leisure: "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints" (Rev. xiii. 10); that is, a sensible proof of it, when a powerful enemy carrieth all before him: there would be little use of such a grace, but for such times. This is submission to God, when we are resolved to tarry for his season, though we know it not, and will wait as long as God will have us wait; when all human probabilities are taken away, and we have nothing but God's providence to live upon.

Secondly, Though he bear long, yet he hath his times to punish, and arise to judgment.

1st, With respect to himself and his own glory: "The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth" (Psalm ix. 16). Little of God would be taken notice of in the world, unless he did now and then give out sensible demonstrations of his power and justice, and mindfulness of human affairs. What strange conceits would men else have of God, as if no God, no providence, no distinction between good and evil; but as if God were indifferent to either, and did favour good and bad alike; and therefore it is in vain to trouble ourselves about the worship and service of God, no reward nor punishment. These are the uses the wicked make of God's forbearance, either to deny God and providence: "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God" (Psalm lv. 19). If they be shifted from vessel to vessel, they corrupt and settle upon the lees; they say, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil" (Zeph. i. 12), nor interpose; but suffereth enemies to trample upon his people and glorious name. Or else pervert the interpretation of Providence: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself" (Psalm l. 21); as if he did favour their ways. They misinterpret Providence, and make the sun go according to their dial, or else ascribe the act of Providence to themselves: "Lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this" (Deut. xxxii. 2). When long permitted to prosper, they think they have mastered Heaven, that there is no power superior to theirs, and they can carry all before them at their pleasure. Therefore God must vindicate himself by his works, and give out some demonstrations to sense, that there is a distinction between good and evil. That God is differently

affected to either, that he hateth the evil and loveth the good, and accordingly there is a reward and punishment: "Verily there is a reward for the righteous" (Psalm lviii. 11). God is fain to teach them by briars and thorns; or else the stupid world would not take notice of it, but think the world is governed by chance, not administered by an almighty, all-wise, and most just Providence: they knew not what to think of Providence, when they saw the godly oppressed, and the wicked high in power.

2ndly, With respect to his people. Surely God will not always chide; for God considers the weakness of man: "He remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm ciii. 14). The hearts of his people would fail and faint, and they would be tempted to some forbidden course to ease themselves (Isa. lix. 16). He knows our spirits would fail; God would not have us utterly to be discouraged. We are liable to temptations: "The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity" (Psalm cxxv. 3). Therefore he hath his breathing times, and times of intermission from trouble. The spirits of a poor creature would soon be drunk up, if there were not some well days: therefore he will show himself to his people.

3rdly, With respect to the wicked, who would grow excessive and outrageous in sin: "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath" (Rom. ii. 5); "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. viii. 11); grow bold, resolute, and settled in an evil way; go on without remorse, because they go on without trouble; and so grow to be monsters in sin. It is only faith that can see afar off; but infidelity and atheism mind not what is to come, and look only to what is present. Well then, lest wicked men should thus continue themselves in sin, God hath his time to reckon with them: his justice is not asleep all this while; but God keeps a petty sessions in this world before the general assizes. Now, concerning this time, let me tell you four things:—

1. There is a time appointed. There is an end of all things, not only an expected end, but also an appointed end: "The vision is yet for an appointed time" (Hab. ii. 3); things are not left to their own hazard and chance, to work out their own end; but ordered and appointed by the wise God: "Yet the end shall be at the time appointed" (Dan. xi. 27); "To try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end; because it is yet for a time appointed" (verse 35). There is a course of providence set by God, which shall at length come to its end and period.

2. This is the best time: "That he may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter v. 6). There is a due time, as well as a set time. There is nothing in the whole administration of God preposterous, unseasonable, or disorderly. Wait but a little, and you shall see the reason of all this course of dispensations; for God doth all things in number, weight, and measure. If it had come sooner or later, it would not have come so seasonably: "He hath made everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl. iii. 11). When God's work is done, and all things are put together, you will see a marvellous beauty in it. It is just with the work of providence as with the work of creation: every day's work was good; but, when God saw all his works together, in their frame and correspondance, all was very good (Gen. i. 31). We would think that God should come sooner to our deliverance: God is not slack, but we are too hasty; if he should come sooner, it would be the worse for

us. We would have thought God should have owned Joseph in the pit. No; God stays till he be cast into prison; and, in prison, Joseph would fain have come out as soon as Pharaoh's butler was come out; but he forgot him. God would not have it so; he must tarry there till God's time was come; and then had not only deliverance out of prison, but preferment. So many times we would be contented with half a deliverance, and would have it now; but God will give it us in the best season.

3. It is but a short time. Say sense what it will, it is but *μικρόν ὄσον ὄσον*, a little little while, "and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb. x. 37). It is not so long as enemies would make it; for they would root out the memorial of God's children. Not so long as sin would make it, or as fancy would conceive it. Suffering hours pass tediously; we count quarters and minutes when we are in pain or anxious expectation, we think an hour a week, a week a month, a month a year, and every year seven. Yea, not so long as reason would make it, as to probabilities, and the course of second causes; when things are fortified and backed with a strong interest, to reason it will be a long time. It is not so long as sense would make it; though we count the years, the winter is over, and the spring is come, and yet we are not saved, and can say it is thus long; yet this is not long in comparison of eternity (2 Cor. iv. 17). It is not long to faith; for to the eye of faith things future and afar off are present (Heb. xi. 1). Not long to love, seven years are as a few days (Gen. xxix. 20); they that believe an eternity, and have any love to God, will say it is short. But a short walk is a long journey to the sick and weak; the impatience of our flesh makes it seem long.

4. When the time is come, God will make speedy work: "The Lord will hasten it in his time" (Isa. lx. 22); "Shall not God avenge his own elect?" (Luke xviii. 7); "Therefore shall her plagues come in one day" (Rev. xviii. 8); "A nation be born at once" (Isa. lxvi. 8). All these places show (and it is a comfort to us) that no difficulty shall hinder, when the season calls for it. He that produced Heaven and earth at once, what cannot he do? We are dismayed when we consider an evil party fortified with combined interests, strength of opposite factions, force of laws and worldly powers; but God can make a nation be born in one day. It will be quick work, when God once begins.

Thirdly, This time is usually when the impiety and insolency of wicked men is come to a height. Indeed, there are other notes; as when his people's hearts are prepared to receive and improve deliverance, when God's glory calleth for it. But this is the season mentioned in the text; therefore I shall show you,—

1. That this is a season.
2. Inquire when iniquity is come to a height.
3. Why then God doth usually interpose.

1st, That this is a season: "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. xv. 16). God showed his patience to that wicked people, till the measure of their sins was filled up. So wrath came upon the persecuting Jews, when they had filled up the measure of their fathers (Matt. xxiii. 32). While the enemy's cup is a-filling, God delayeth, and we must wait. So, "When the transgressors are come to the full" (Dan. viii. 23). Once more, "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" (Joel iii. 13). The Lord compares sinners to a field of ripe corn ready to

be cut, full fats, and wine-presses to be trod out. When sin is ripe, the execution of vengeance will not be long forborne.

2ndly, When doth iniquity come to a height? I answer, their iniquities may be considered as to the two branches of them; their rebellion and disobedience to God, and their injuries and vexation of the saints.

1. Their disobedience and contempt of God. (1.) When this is general. All orders and ranks of persons have corrupted their way, as the Sodomites “compassed the house, both old and young, all the people from every quarter” (Gen. xix. 4). Usually, in making a judgment upon the state of a people, you will find it thus: if any part be right, it keeps off the judgment from the rest; if a zealous magistracy, though a corrupt people; or an unsavoury ministry, and a praying, mourning people; God holds his hand, and will not proceed to judgment. They are “the salt of the earth” (Matt. v. 13); and, “The holy seed shall be the substance thereof” (Isa. vi. 13). But, when all join in one, in a neglect of God, and common enmity to his ways, then, I say, the judge of the earth will do his work; then wrath breaketh out.

(2.) When it groweth impudent and outrageous, as if they would obliterate and extinguish the law of God, or take away all force and authority, from it, by their perverse actions and pernicious examples. They do not obliquely, and under the show of divers pretences, break God’s laws; but openly set themselves against him, and break a commandment without any shame: “They declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not” (Isa. iii. 9); yea, they “glory” in their shame (Phil. iii. 19), as if they would outface Heaven and religion at once, and all honesty and ingenuity, by their debaucheries. Bold-faced sin doth not go long unpunished.

(3.) Desperate incorrigibleness. All remedies are unprofitable, and hope of amendment taken away: when God would have purged them, they would not be purged (Ezek. xxiv. 13). He trieth them with several conditions, he hath a love for them as they are his creatures; judgments and mercies they had, yet they are no changelings, but go on as wicked as ever. God trieth key after key, one providence after another; yet not a whit the better or wiser; but are like men that have slept; still abuse his patience, and defeat all the methods of his grace, show the same corruption they did before.

(4.) When they run into unnatural sins, and the corruption of human society is endangered: “For all these abominations have the men of the land done,” &c. (Lev. xviii. 27, 28.) When men are so wicked and filthy, that a man needs to be a criminal to be acceptable to them; they think it strange that others run not into the same excess of riot (1 Peter iv. 4). Certainly, then God needeth to strike in, that virtue may be upheld in some kind of reputation.

2. Their violence and vexation of the saints. It was Bede’s observation, *Odiū in religionis professores, &c.*; that hatred of the professors of religion, was that which undid his country. God is angry when his people are wronged; the world is kept up for their sakes. Were it not for the elect to be gathered, time would be no more; for their sakes kingdoms and churches are preserved: they are the staff and stay, the chariots and horsemen of Israel. God is tender of them as the apple of his eye; therefore, when they are wronged, and men are not only evil themselves, but haters of those that are good; and do not only break God’s laws themselves, but would force others to do so, God will hold no longer;

as their violence increaseth, so doth their ruin hasten (Rev. xii. 12). When they abuse their power to such an end, though God may bear with them for a time, till they have done their work, yet he will reckon with them: "I am very sore displeas'd with the Heathen that are at ease; for I was but a little displeas'd, and they help'd forward the affliction" (Zech. i. 15). God will not forget his relation to his sinning people, and will not suffer them to be abus'd out of measure. When they would destroy and root out whom God would only correct and purge, it is a sign of their approaching ruin. Now, these things should be considered by us to a good end; not to feed an evil humour, or to increase our hatred and exasperation against a party, whom, it may be, we hate too much already with a carnal hatred; but to a good purpose, partly that we may not be too confident of carnal ease too soon. God will, it may be, have the enemy's cup yet fuller, and that they shall appear more in their own colours. And so our trials may be greater. We know not the bounds of the Lord's patience. We that are apt to extenuate our own sins, are apt to aggravate the sins of others, look upon them in the glass of passion, and cry too soon, It is time. But of this by-and-by. And partly, that we may see the greatness of our transgressions, by which we have provoked the Lord to give us up into the hands of such men as blaspheme his name every day (Isa. lii. 5). Our sins were full in our kind, in the abuse of God's truth and worship; and, though not such moral wickedness, yet a great deal of spiritual wickedness. And God is more quick and severe upon us, and will not bear that in a professing people, that he beareth in others: "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter iv. 17). The cup of trembling goes round, and his own people drink first, and our staggering is not yet over; in time they shall pledge us. God beareth with Balaam, though he tempted him again and again, when he would not bear with the young Prophet, whom the lion slew. He bore with the Philistines a long time ere they were plagued. We feel the smart of the rod sooner (Zech. xii.). Yet it is apparent our kind of sins were grown to a ripeness, our self-seeking, factions, turbulency, inquietness under government, abuse of Christian liberty, uncharitable divisions among ourselves, vexing one another, vain opinions, slighting God's ministers and ordinances. And partly, that we may be humbled for their sins. It should be a grief to us to see men break God's laws, to see men outdare Heaven. David fasted for his enemies: "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law" (Psalm cxix. 136), because God is so much dishonour'd, human nature so much corrupted. If more of this spirit were stirring, it were the better for us. And partly, that we may fear ourselves. We are bound up in the same community; and, when God judgeth them, how shall we escape? The Jews have a proverb, that two dry sticks may set a green one on fire. The meaning is, the godly man may fall in the common calamity. Wheat is plucked up with the tares. God saith in Deut. vii. 22, that they should not destroy all the Canaanites, lest the beasts of the field should increase upon them. The safety of his people is involved in the safety of their sinning and persecuting enemies. A hedge of thorns may serve for a fence to a garden of roses, and all the relief we have is, the Lord can make a distinction: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter ii. 9).

3rdly, Why doth God take this time? First, for his own glory. His

justice is more discovered, when men have filled up their measure: "That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest" (Psalm li. 4). It justifieth God's proceedings, and maketh us the more inexcusable. So also his power; it is God's time to send help and remedy, when all things are gone to utter confusion; when things are at the most desperate pass; in our low estate, then is God seen (Psalm cxxiv. 2—5). Secondly, hereby God's work upon Mount Zion is promoted: his people are humbled when their adversaries are chief, and rage against them: "Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud" (Psalm cxxiii. 4). When things come to extremity, their prayers are quickened: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord" (Psalm cxxx. 1). They are fitted to prize mercy: they that thought it no great matter to have a standing temple, delight in the dust of a ruinous heap (Psalm cii. 13, 14). Then shepherds' tents look lovely, we set a higher rate on despised ordinances. In short, they are waiting, and praying, and humbling their souls before God.

Fourthly, When a flood of wickedness is thus broken out, we may mind God of the deliverance of his people. But what needs that? Doth not God know his seasons, and will he not exactly observe them? In the answer I shall show you why and how.

1st, Why? Because, first, God loveth to be awakened by the prayers of his people; and, when he hath a mind to work, he sets the spirit of prayer awork: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me; and I will hearken unto you" (Jer. xxix. 11, 12). So thus and thus will I do: "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel" (Ezek. xxxvi. 37). We are to give a lift by our prayers; it is a time of finding (Psalm xxxii. 6). Secondly, he hath put an office upon us. God acts the part of a judge, we as solicitors and remembrancers: "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace night nor day: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Isa. lxii. 6, 7). We are to put God in mind, so that we but do our duty.

2ndly, How? The principle and manner must be right.

1. The principle: be sure it be not the impatience of the flesh, or love to our own ease, or a mere tediousness and irksomeness of the cross: be sure it be not passion and a principle of revenge; but a desire of promoting his honour, and vindicating his glory. David doth not say how troublesome they were to himself, but, "They make void thy law:" as if he had said, "Lord, if my own interest only were concerned, I would not open my mouth, nor ever call upon thee to revenge my private quarrels; but it is my zeal for thy honour and ordinances; not that I have received injury, but thy worship is corrupted; work, else what will become of thy name and poor people?" Offences done against God should grieve us more than our own injuries; and we should rather regard the general interest of religion, than any personal offence done to us. There is often a carnal spirit breathing in our prayers, and our zeal is fleshly; the people of God beat it back: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" (Psalm cxv. 1); and, "O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?" (Psalm lxxiv. 10.) The

godly can endure their own troubles better than they can bear the open dishonouring and blaspheming of God. This is the true sense; but, because the heart is deceitful, first, be sure your cause be good, your adversary's evil, that ye may say, "Arise, O God, plead thine own cause" (Psalm lxxiv. 22). It is not for your sins, but your righteousness; the hatred is not against the body. Indeed, they pretend some little faults. It is as if a leper should hate a man because he hath some pimples in his face. Something they would lay to their charge. Secondly, that we use all means with God and men to reclaim them, praying for them: "Pray for them that despitefully use you" (Matt. v. 44). Mourning for their sins: "My soul shall weep in secret place for your pride" (Jer. xiii. 17). Heaping coals of fire upon their heads by all acts of kindness, condescending to them as far as possibly we can (Rom. xii. 18). These arts become his kingdom, that is not to be planted by force, but consent; them that would have the zeal of God, not of a party. Thirdly, be sure your principle be zeal for God's glory, not a desire to establish your own interest, and to see revenge on a party that differeth from you: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (Luke ix. 55). Religious affections overset us, and fleshly zeal puts on a holy, spiritual guise and mask; and we think it is for the honour of Christ. Fourthly, not against particular persons, but the opposite faction to godliness. In general, destroy all the enemies of Christ, &c.

2. For the manner how. We must seek to God, first, with submission, not prescribing to God, nor making a snare to ourselves. We that have short and revengeful spirits, cannot judge aright of God's patience, which is infinite, out of fleshliness and affection to our own ease. And so our times: "Your time is always ready" (John vii. 6). If none of these be, yet we are limited creatures, and great is the wisdom of God, and his power admirable; it doth not belong to us to guide the affairs of the world. We must not prescribe opportunity to him, fixing times (Psalm lxxviii. 41). Besides that, it argueth a spirit too much addicted to, and eyeing of, temporal happiness. It doth much unsettle us, and harden others. The Devil maketh advantage of our disappointment. Therefore not only when it seemeth seasonable to us, we may seek to him for deliverance. Once more, there are other things concur, besides the enemy's ripeness for judgment, preparing his people's hearts, fitting those instruments for his work; therefore all is left to God's will, and let him take his time.

USE.—Of all is, to teach us how to behave ourselves in these times with patience, and yet with hope and waiting. It is the time of Jacob's trouble; but there will be a time of deliverance (Jer. xxx. 7). With patience, God will have a time to chastise his people. We must bear it patiently; it will make crosses sit easy; they may be greater and longer than our joys: "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil" (Psalm xc. 15).

Secondly, with hope let us expect it. Certainly it will not exceed the time limited by God. That time is not long: "Her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged" (Isa. xiii. 22); "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord, I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision; for

there shall be no more any vain vision, nor flattering divination, within the house of Israel; for I am the Lord. I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged" (Ezek. xii. 21—25). Faith should see it as present, approaching; and then let us wait his leisure, minding God in prayer.

SERMON CXXXIX.

VERSE 127.—*Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.*

In the words we have,—

I. A note of inference, "Therefore."

II. The duty inferred, "I love thy commandments."

III. The degree of that love, "Above gold;" amplified by the repetition with some advantage in the expression, "Yea, above fine gold."

IV. Gold, by a *synecdoche*, is put for all worldly things, the comforts and profits of this life, as in many other places; as, "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Psalm xix. 10). The two bastard goods with which the world is enchanted, are pleasure and profit. Old people are all for profit, young people are all for pleasure. Now, both these, truly so called, are found in the word of God. So in Prov. viii. 10, 11, "Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge, rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired, are not to be compared to it." So, "My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver" (Prov. viii. 19). So, "For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold" (Prov. iii. 14). So, "How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding, rather to be chosen than silver!" (Prov. xvi. 16.) The comparison is used so often, for two reasons:—

1. Because it is more prized in the world. All things that have a goodness in them, have a certain bait suitable to the several appetites of men; but, in most men's opinions, gold seemeth chiefly to be desired; partly for its beauty, but chiefly for its use, it being the great instrument of commerce, that doth all things in the world. The corruption of man's heart addeth a greater price to it; and therefore is the thirst of it so unsatisfied. Now, the word, and that wisdom and godliness which it teacheth, is far above gold, and fine gold.

2. Because it is the usual temptation to draw off men from the love, and study, and obedience of the word. Babylon's abominations are offered to the world in a golden cup: "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls; having a golden cup in her hand, full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication" (Rev. xvii. 4). Preferments are the baits of that black religion. True Christianity consists in sound graces; pseudo-Christianity, in pomp, and state, and worldly advantages; and the Apostle telleth us, that "the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith" (1 Tim. vi. 10). Therefore doth the Spirit of God so often compare spiritual things to gold; and here

David preferreth his love to the word, before worldings' love to gold, yea, fine gold: for mark, it is not, more than I love gold; but, more than any man. Some have an ardent desire of it; however, to be mortified in God's children.

I. For the note of inference, together with the duty inferred, "Therefore I love thy commandments." Some refer it to God's taking his time to work; as the Judge of the world, in punishing the wicked for their disobedience and contempt of his law: as if he had said, 'Lord, though thou dost connive, and hold thy hands for a time, yet I know thou wilt undertake the defence of the righteous, and not let the wickedness of the wicked go unpunished; it will cost them dear in the issue; "therefore I love thy commandments,"' &c. This sense I cannot exclude. If I thought fit to prosecute it, it would yield this doctrine, that a little faith would help us to continue our affection to the word of God, notwithstanding the wickedness of those that oppose it. For in truth, here this wickedness doth soon come to an end: "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction" (Psalm lxxiii. 18). But I rather refer it to the latter clause, "They have made void thy law; therefore I love thy commandments."

DOCTRINE.—The more others despise the ways and laws of God, the more should a gracious heart love and esteem them.

So doth David profess, that his love to God's ways was so far from ceasing, that he found it increased rather.

Reasons:—

1. Because the ways of God are still the same they were before; if there be any difference, they only need to be more owned by us, with greater zeal and cheerfulness, because they are despised and forsaken by others. God is the same still, Heaven the same, and the Scriptures the same, whether we have company to walk with us in heaven-way, yea or nay; and therefore why should not a Christian be the same he was before? Their contempt and hatred of God's ways, doth not make void our obligation to God, and the bonds of our duty to him. If God had only required us to be good when we may be so with safety and ease, and would dispense with us at other times, when religion is in disgrace, then, indeed, a Christian might change his course, and run with the cry as others do; but God hath required in the worst times we should take God's part, and stand for him in the worst places, and keep his name even there where Satan's throne is (Rev. ii. 13), and be saints, though in Nero's household (Phil. iv. 22), under the nose of a raging persecutor. And, as God is the same, so his ways are the same. Their contempt and hatred of holiness doth not hinder the loveliness of it to a spiritual eye. There is a beauty in God's despised ways: "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. xi. 25). He saw more excellency in the tents of Jacob than in the courts of Pharaoh. When the outward glory of his ways is darkened, and they are put under reproach and trouble; yet their inward beauty still remaineth, and may be seen by a spiritual, though not by a carnal, eye: by those that will not judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment (John vii. 24). The external glory, which is the favour of the world, outward prosperity and countenance, is foreign and accidental; but this is essential, and ever remaineth. And, as holiness is the same, so the Scriptures are the same; they do not speak one thing to-day, and another to-morrow, and leave us

at a latitude to put ourselves into all changes and postures: "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, &c., was not yea and nay (saith the Apostle), but in him was yea" (2 Cor. i. 10). The Scripture doth not allow saying and unsaying, and building again the things which we have destroyed: "For, if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor" (Gal. ii. 18). Truth is the same in all ages; not like an almanack, to be changed every year, or calculated peculiarly for one meridian. No; it is always the same. Indeed, in some lesser things, that serve only for the conveniency of religion, we may upon weighty grounds change practice, and do that which is good, where best may not be had. So Heaven is the same still; it not only serveth us as an antidote in prosperity, but as a cordial in adversity, and is at all times to be regarded. Well then, since God, and holiness, and Scripture, and Heaven, are always the same, why should not we? If there be change, it should be in the degree of our love, that it be greater than it was before, to repair God in point of honour, and to testify against the defection of others, that we are not of their stamp, who do not see by their eyes, nor walk by their principles, nor allow of their warpings.

2. God expects more from gracious hearts, because of their relation to him and acquaintance with him; and therefore, if others despise the laws of God, they should esteem them the more: "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then saith Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?" (John vi. 66, 67.) It goeth nearer to Christ's heart, that those should forsake him that are trained up in his bosom, that the Devil should steal away souls under his own arm. Whatever defection others make, yet that those who have tasted of his mercy, drunk of his cup, feasted with his loaves, have had experience of his grace, will ye also? He stood not upon the multitudes going, so much as his disciples. Therefore they should rouse up themselves in evil times.

3. The good and the bad do exercise and keep one another in breath and vigour. When there are but two factions that stand in opposition to one another, one apparently for God, the other apparently for Satan, it addeth zeal and indignation to both sides, and they mutually inflame one another, and are as Jeremiah's two baskets of figs, "the good figs very good, and the evil very evil" (Jer. xxiv. 3). When others are so very bad, it should not quench zeal, but inflame it; we should be not only good, but very good. Corruption, the more it is opposed the more it stormeth and groweth outrageous; as a river swelleth by opposing dams and banks against it, they rage upon restraints; now the floods break loose. So, on the other side, should grace be more earnestly and zealously exercised the more it is opposed, as the casting on of water sets the lime on fire. To be sure, their malice will put us to a great deal of trouble; and trouble is a time to exercise grace. To be much in prayer, and faith, and patience, and mortifying corruptions, and watchfulness, and wary walking, that we may neither take infection ourselves, nor give occasion to others to stumble at the ways of God: "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (Col. iv. 5). When they lived among unconverted Heathens, they should carry it wisely towards them, that they might not be occasions of stumbling or hardening. So, by proportion, those who profess the ways of God should carry it wisely towards such as they live amongst, who declare their non-regene-

ration by a profane life, and live like Heathens, that they give no occasion to such adversaries of truth and holiness to speak reproachfully; but they should observe the Apostle's rules (1 Peter ii. 12—15). Christians should be good in bad times, that the times may not be worse for them, nor they the worse for the times. They should labour to live down the vices and errors of the age wherein they live, and labour to save themselves from this untoward generation, and should cut off occasions from them that watch for occasions against them, and, like fishes, keep their freshness in salt water. Ham will scoff to surprise a Noah in a fault; when their foot slippeth, they will magnify themselves against them. Experience of the madness and fury whereby others are carried on in the ways of sin, should more confirm others in the ways of God, that are opposed by them. Surely, such men would not hate what is evil, and so earnestly persecute what is good: *Nou nisi grave bonum a Neroue dammari*. A good man would not choose by their liking and loathing. If any argument may be taken from them, it is to like the things the better, because they slight them; and to love them, because they persecute them. For it is to be presumed, they will hate what is good, and love what is evil; and, though no certain argument can be concluded thence, yet their love is but an ill token; for Christ telleth us, "The world would love his own" (John xv. 19). All things love what is suitable to themselves.

4. Unless our love be increased when men oppose and despise the laws of God, it will not hold out against so great a trial. Sin is very infectious at all times, and, when it is common, it is less odious; but the force of example is great, we think we may do as others do; a cold, neutral love, or loose and general owning of the ways of Christ, will not bear us out. I confess this is a very great temptation that prevaleth with many: "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. xxiv. 12). Loose professors are soon shaken off, and dead fish swim with the stream. Yea, some of notable eminency in the church may miscarry; but yet always they are such as had their worldly affections unbroken and unmortified. Some, through the love of money, have erred from the faith: "But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness; fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. vi. 11, 12). There needs great diligence and fervency to increase in solid grace, or else we shall not dare to own God and his ways; yea, I confess the soundest may be sorely shaken, and therefore need warning and confirmation. The godly have seeds of the same evils which draw away others. Evil example is very forcible, especially when it is general; in a time of public infection, it is hard to preserve health. And then, usually sin is disguised and carried on under plausible pretexes, and evil men blinded by their interests may easily warp. *Ingeniosa res est esse Christianum*, as Jerome of an Arian time. It is matter of skill to discern God's interest, and by consequence our duty. The Prophet complaineth, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. vi. 5). We contract some contagion and taint from those among whom we live; grow careless of Sabbaths, by general profanation; take more liberty for the flesh, when others wallow in all filthiness, and are given up to all manner of vanity. Therefore, as the force of example is great, the force of zeal should be greater, that we may stand for God, though we stand alone. As Elijah did: "And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts; because the children

of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword : and I, even I only, am left ; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 King sxix. 14). We must keep up our savour in a corrupt age, as Noah did : " Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations ; and Noah walked with God " (Gen. vi. 9). Lot lived more upright in Sodom, where he was besieged with temptations, that made him constantly to stand upon his watch, than he did in the cave, when he neglected and grew secure. As fire burns hottest in the coldest weather, so a Christian's zeal, by a holy antiperistasis, should flame most in a corrupted, debauched age.

5. Because it is very acceptable to God, and a note of sincerity, to hold out against trials ; yea, to increase in zeal when others desert him. Many will flock to Christ, and resort to him, in his prosperity. When religion is befriended, painted butterflies and gaudy carnalists will prove summer friends to him ; but, when winter frosts and blustering storms come, they are gone : like those that go to sea, not for a voyage to ride out all weathers, but for recreation. Christ maketh little of their friendship. But now, " Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations ; and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me " (Luke xxii. 28, 29). When David was crowned king in Hebron, then those that followed him in the wilderness were not forgotten, but preferred by him. To serve God in a crowd, and with store of company, is not so praiseworthy ; every one will be in the fashion, and there is a revolution of fashions in religion : but to own him in a time of defection, when others look strange upon him, then to keep our zeal and strictness, is commendable. *Temporibus malis ausus esse bonus.*

USE I.—Information. That the general corrupt custom and example of those with whom we live, is not a sufficient excuse for our sinning. It is so in the minds of many, but it is not so indeed. It is, indeed, a temptation, and a strong incitement ; but temptations to the contrary, do not excuse from duty. This will appear to you, if you consider,—

1. The state of a Christian ; he is not of this world : " If ye were of the world, the world would love its own ; but, because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you " (John xv. 19). He was separated for God's use in baptism, and must make good his baptismal vow, live as one that is separated from the world and their course of life, that he may act for God : " Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself " (Psalm iv. 3) ; therefore it is no excuse for him to say, I do but as others do ; he is to reckon his hours by the sun, not the town-clock ; to take God's direction, not the voice of the multitude, as one of their stamp, and at liberty to comply with their fashions.

2. The course of God's dispensations, which is to exercise and try his children before he crowneth them. None go to Heaven without their trials.

3. The duty of God's children, intimated in the cautions, and descriptions, and injunctions of the word : " Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil " (Exod. xxiii. 2) ; nor walk " according to the course of this world " (Eph. ii. 2), " the lusts of men " (1 Peter iv. 2), nor the corruptions of the times : " Be not conformed to this world," &c. (Rom. xii. 2.) Many such hints everywhere, that show it a crime, &c.

1. The opposition of the wicked should make us the more courageous; for then it is put to a plain contest, who shall have the better, Christ or Satan: therefore we should discover that he that is in us is stronger than he that is in the world (1 John iv. 4). Wicked men have their end and purposes, if they can overcome the disciples of Christ, and discourage them from owning their profession. We are to be "more than conquerors" (Rom. viii. 37).

USE II.—We ought to be so far from being involved in the conspiracy of others against God, that our zeal should increase by others declining, and we should love religion when it is commonly despised. That is our commendation, *Esse bonum facile est, &c.* Till we are *in termino*, we have our difficulties; till we are gathered to angels, ἔξωβίλας, out of gun-shot. Our business is not to give way to evils, but to resist them with the greater courage. Indeed, it is hard for a man to keep himself free from the infection of the times he lives in: we all complain of the badness of the times; but let us not make them the worse for us. If we would be good in bad times, we need,—

1. Much holiness and heavenly-mindedness, that we may be burning and shining lights, conducting men to Christ, as the star that shone at Christ's birth: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil. ii. 15). Noah, by preparing an ark, "condemned the world" (Heb. xi. 7). This is the way to appear for God in the lustre of real grace, when we are taken off from other means.

2. Much faith or foresight of things to come: "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark" (Heb. xi. 7). To see the ruin of the wicked when prosperous, this kept David in his integrity: "I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end" (Psalm lxxiii. 17). When he was once able to look through their honours, and greatness, and riches, by the light of the sanctuary, he overcame the temptation which did so greatly press and shake him. So here in the text, "It is time for thee, Lord, to work, for they have made void thy law; therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, fine gold." There is a worm in the root, they are under God's curse: "I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation" (Job v. 3); which predicteth their ruin, though little appearance of their fall.

3. There needs much zeal and strong love of God. When profaneness is in the fashion, let us give check to it in our place; either as magistrates, by appearing against evil-doers, as Nehemiah contended for God: "Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken?" (Neh. xiii. 11). And, "Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath-day?" (Verse 17.) Not like Gallio, that cared for none of these things. As ministers, more active against sin: "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. lviii. 1). As governors of families, careful of ourselves and families: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. xxiv. 15). As private Christians, give out more of the lustre of grace: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good

works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. v. 16); "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter ii. 12). Not only stop the mouth of iniquity, but bring about the conversion of wicked men. Thus should every one of us in our place glorify God, and strive to make the times better: "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. xii. 11). That is a good time; serving the Lord can make a change, if we would ply this means. Thus did David serve his generation: "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep" (Acts xiii. 36). When you die, people will be able to say, 'We miss such a man; he was zealous against Sabbath-breakers, and drunkards, and swearers, one that owned the people of God, a friend to religion.'

4. Caution, that we be not carried away with a deluge of corruption: "The other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation" (Gal. iii. 13). Example hath a kind of compulsion in it, the best men can hardly stand out against it. It secretly insinuateth itself, weakeneth our love to God, abateth our care; therefore we cannot be enough watchful, that we be not secretly tainted, as a man in the sun tans unawares. As, in times of common contagion, every man is careful of his diet and company, so should we watch to keep our garments clean and unspotted of the world.

5. Sincerity, not dissembling; as, "I wholly followed the Lord my God" (Josh. xiv. 8); not loving the ways of God on foreign respects, but their own internal reasons: otherwise, a man soon miscarrieth; for these motives will be changed, and those very inducements that moved him to take up religion, will move him also to cast it off. None but the solid Christian will hold out, whilst light chaff is carried about with every wind: and the carnal-minded cuts the coat of his profession to the fashion of the times. A false heart cannot long hold out: "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known" (Prov. x. 9); that is, to his shame, cannot long dissemble his nature.

6. A fixed resolution, that we may not be easy, and merely do as others do. It is the resolved man that encounters temptations, and maketh them fly back, as arrows shot against a brazen wall: though others fall, I will serve the Lord, whatever others do: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. xxiv. 15). If ye meet with reproaches and scorns: "And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight" (2 Sam. vi. 22). If enticed by evil company: "Depart from me, ye evil-doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God" (Psalm cxix. 115). If threatened: "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts iv. 19). Thus they stood by a self-denying resolution; whereas the unresolved man is "unstable in all his ways" (James i. 8), is turned like a weather-cock with every wind, fitteth his religion to every interest. God biddeth us thus unmoveably to fix ourselves: "Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them" (Jer. xv. 19). A man that would live quietly, must either bring himself

to the times, or expect the times should come over to him. A resolved man stayeth God's leisure; doth not serve his conscience to fit the times, but waiteth till God fit the times to his conscience.

7. A true sight of the worth of spiritual things above carnal. This is in the text, "Above gold; yea, above fine gold." Till a man cometh to this, his conscience will not be guided by his religion, but his interest, and give up all for the world's sake: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. iv. 10); "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. For our conversation is in Heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. iii. 19, 20). Loth to suffer, turn themselves in all shapes. God doth not command them, but themselves.

II. The degree of his affection; whence this doctrine,—

DOCTRINE.—We ought not only to love the word, but to love it above all worldly things whatsoever.

1. Let me explain the grounds of our love to the word.

2. Speak of the degree of it.

First, Let me explain the grounds of our love to the word. We love the word as it is the charter of our hopes and the rule of our duty. We have both respects in this psalm. As the charter of our hopes: "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart" (verse 111). As a rule of our duty: "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches" (verse 14); and, "Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it" (verse 140). So that—

1st, To love and esteem the word as the charter of our hopes, is to love and esteem spiritual privileges; such as the favour of God, pardon of sins, peace of conscience, taking away the stony heart, and eternal life. To have a deep sense and value for such things, is the fruit of faith. It is true, some loose velleities and general inclinations men, as men, have to their own happiness; but, being but weakly persuaded of these things, they are but slightly affected with them, and the promises that reveal them. Men that have no faith, but altogether live by sense, know nothing more excellent than gold or riches, which do all in the world. If God would let them alone here, to have their portion in Paris, they would part with their share in Paradise. Such dunghill souls have they, let God keep spiritual things for whom he will; so they may live at ease in the world, they never mind communion with God, or enjoyment of God; but gracious hearts love the word, as offering and revealing these things.

2ndly, To love the word as a rule of duty, is in effect to love holiness, loving things as suitable to our necessities, and as suitable to our dispositions. "I love thy commandments," saith David in the text, as urging and directing us to our duty. This is also proper to gracious souls; to them all outward things are but toys and trifles for our senses to play withal. The least grain of grace seemeth better to them than a mountain of gold. They have a spiritual discerning, and love things according to the nature and worth of them. The things themselves are not to be compared together, so should not our affections to them.

Secondly, The degree of it, "More than all riches:" "Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold." Take riches as riches, in that notion as the word implies happiness, abundance, content-

ment. The word of God containeth the true riches, both in the promises and precepts of it.

1st, In the promises. To us are given τὰ τίμια ἢ μέγιστα ἐπαγγέλματα, “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Peter i. 4). There the great controversy is decided about the true happiness and salvation, God or the creature; there you have “the unsearchable riches of Christ:” “That in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus” (Eph. ii. 7). The riches of the glory of the saints’ inheritance: “That ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” (Eph. i. 18). These are things that make us truly rich: “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich” (Rev. iii. 18). He is not rich that floweth in wealth and plenty; but he that hath Christ and an interest in his benefits. They are possessors of all things, though they have nothing: “As having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor. vi. 10). A little serves the turn; they have the good things purchased by Christ, happiness enough if he can make them happy. So—

2ndly, In the precepts. They are means to work grace, the least drachm of which is more worth than all things in the world. He is rich enough that is rich in faith: “Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom [in paradise] which he hath promised to them that love him?” (James ii. 5.) It is more precious than the trial of gold: “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter i. 7). The smallest measure of saving faith, or love to God, or fear of God, or repentance, is of more worth than what is most precious. The word of God does more enrich a man; and true benefit is to be preferred before counterfeit.

Reasons for the degree of our love:—

1. From the worth of the word, the reward, and those benefits that are gotten by studying and obeying it. They exceed worldly things; as will appear, because the one suits with our bodily necessities; the other, with our spiritual. Our bodily necessities are supplied by gold; our spiritual necessities, by grace. Gold will not comfort a distressed conscience any more than nosegay-flowers a condemned man. *Quod si dolentem, &c.*, saith Horace: “Riches profit not in the day of wrath” (Prov. xi. 4). The one renders us acceptable to men; the other, to God. The world knoweth all things after the flesh, they measure men by splendour and pomp of living; but it is grace that God approveth most, and accepteth most. Grace is of great price in the sight of God: “But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter iii. 4). The one much embarrasseth our nature, it is something more vile than we; therefore that affection is debased; but grace always ennobleth our nature, and is something above us. A greater affection is due to things above us, than to things beneath us. The one is useful to us *in via*; the other, *in patria*. Surely, that which is of eternal use and comfort to us, is better than that which is only of a temporal use. In our passage to Heaven, we need gold and silver for the supply of our bodily necessities, and the support of outward life, so far as we have to do

in the world; but, with respect to the world to come, gold doth nothing; there we leave our wealth behind us, but our works follow us. Our treasure we quit when we die; but our grace we carry with us. Once more, the price by which things may be purchased, showeth the worth of them. Wisdom is of so great a price, that all the treasures of the world cannot purchase it: "It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof: it cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire; the gold and the crystal cannot equal it, and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold: no mention shall be made of coral or of pearls; for the price of wisdom is above rubies: the topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold" (Job xxviii. 15—19). What cannot money do in the world? yet it can do nothing as to the procuring of grace. The Apostle telleth us this is a dear-bought blessing: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter i. 18, 19). To despise the favour of God, the image of God, is to despise the price that was paid for these things, to have lessening thoughts of the blood of Christ. To conclude, those we count lesser gifts which we bestow upon friends, than upon enemies; a man would give meat and drink unto enemies when they hunger and thirst, but other gifts of a greater value to friends and relations. God giveth his Christ, his Spirit, his grace, to his friends, children, servants; but corn, and wine, and oil, these he giveth promiscuously; yea, to his enemies a larger portion. Surely, then, these are better than gold. Our love should be according to the value of things.

2. Because, if the word be not preferred before earthly things, it is not received with any profit and good effect. Christ saith, "He that loveth [anything] more than me, is not worthy of me" (Matt. x. 37). He that studieth to please his friends rather than Christ, or to gratify his interest more than his conscience, within a very little while his Christianity will be worth nothing. It is not a simple love, but a greater love, that we show to worldly things: "Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. xiii. 44—46). We must part with all, rather than miss of his grace; all that is pleasant and profitable, renounce all other things. When Christ propounds his terms, he would have us surrender all to his will and pleasure: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke ix. 23). He must not avoid the cross by sinful shifts; we are ready to do so every day. These are the necessary terms, else we are not fit for the Master's use: "If a man therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. ii. 21).

3. Unless we love the word above riches, we cannot possess riches without a snare; then it will be not only hard, but impossible, to enter into the kingdom of Heaven: "And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of

God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches, to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus, looking upon them, saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark x. 23—27). Riches will so prevail over us, and wholly sway us, if they be our chief good and portion, and we have not a higher end to check our love to them. If a man would have all things cleave to him, he must be sure the world doth not sit nearest his heart; for, if it do, such a man, as he is unfit for Heaven, so he is unfit for the world too. If they be your good things, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things" (Luke xvi. 25); you will get, and keep, and use them otherwise than the word doth allow.

4. From the fruit of grace. Where it is planted in the heart and prevaileth, the desire of wealth is mortified, worldly lust denied: "Teaching us, that, denying all worldly lusts" (Titus ii. 12). And desires of grace enlarged and increased: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter ii. 2). And when it prevaileth further, and to a higher degree, they come to Moses's frame, to count the worst of Christ better than the best of the world: "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb. xi. 26); not only the graces of Christ, or the benefits of Christ; but the reproaches of Christ. So much is the world lessened, and the desires of grace increased. The heaviest part of Christ's cross is sweeter than the worldly plenty, where sin accompanieth it.

USE I.—To press us to get this esteem and love of the word above all earthly things by what names soever they are called, whether gold or fine gold.

Considerations:—

1. The word of God containeth the true riches, in comparison of which all other things are but a shadow.

2. Except God's word be clearly esteemed above earthly things, it is highly contemned. You would think yourself highly slighted, if once it should be put to the question, whether you, or an ass or a swine, be better. The case is as clear, whether it be better to have a child's toy or land of inheritance. You think it a disparagement of their reason. It is so, to compare spiritual things with carnal: "How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!" (Prov. xvi. 16.)

3. The word of God, observed and obeyed, bringeth all earthly things along with it. Gold and fine gold, so far as they are necessary and good for us: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 33); and, "Godliness is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. iv. 8). It hath all kinds of promises, it doth not come empty-handed; it bringeth in a portion in this life, and blessing in these outward things.

4. How constant the word is, and in one tenour: "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen; unto the glory of God by us" (2 Cor. i. 20). But worldly things are uncertain: "And the men of

Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye" (2 Sam. xix. 43). Compare this with the next words: Sheba "blew a trumpet and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse" (2 Sam. xx. 1). The people cry Hosanna to Christ, and presently after crucify him. Peter once made a glorious confession of Christ, and afterwards a gross denial. Paul was received as an angel by the Galatians: "My temptation which was in my flesh, ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus" (Gal. iv. 14), but afterwards accounted an enemy: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Verse 16.) Nebuchadnezzar flourishing in a palace of gold: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the glory of my majesty?" (Dan. iv. 30.) But a voice came to him from Heaven, "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, The kingdom is departed from thee" (verse 16).

USE II.—Have we such an esteem and affection to the word of God? Then.—

1. We shall do that which in other cases a greater love would incline us to do; otherwise it is but a compliment: we will diligently exercise ourselves in the word of God. Labour is the fruit of love: "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love" (1 Thes. i. 3). He that doth not take more pains in the pursuit of heavenly things than of carnal, doth not love the one above the other; for love is industrious: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John vi. 27). What a deal of pains do men take for a little pelf, to heap up treasure, and fill their houses with the good things of this world, and spend all their time and wit, their care and strength, on outward things! The stream runneth stronger for the world, when there is no proportionable care taken for the benefits which the word offereth. God maketh offer of grace and glory. Men are as those that travel by water, and see buildings ashore, and praise them as they pass by; but never enter into them, never look after them more. If you are ready and earnest in the pursuit of the one, careless and cold in the other; you think no time enough for the one, but grudge all time for the other, it is a sign the one hath a greater share in our hearts than the other. We are to seek worldly things in some measure, because God hath appointed every one some work to do; but, when there is such a manifest disproportion between our seeking the one and the other, it showeth which way our souls bend. If a nice difference, that hardly distinguisheth it, give suspicion, more especially when such a manifest disproportion.

2. We will part with the one for the other's sake. If carnal things can withdraw us from the pursuit of heavenly things: "As Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright" (Heb. xii. 16); and heavenly things cannot make us to part with carnal things. Many make void the law to seek riches and wealth: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. iv. 10); break God's commands for a small hire, and do so constantly, frequently, easily. It is a sign they do but compliment, and speak from their judgments, not from their hearts, when they say they love God better than the world, or fine gold, the chiefest excellency of it. Would a man dispense with his obedience to the word, and

be thus affected? What is deliberately, habitually preferred, that hath the greater love. We can neglect our duty to God, trample upon God, Christ, Heaven, Scripture, conscience, duty, in the way to make speed after worldly things.

3. Wherein do we place the happiness of us and ours? To carnal men nothing is so dear as their present prosperity. Do you value yourselves to be more happy when you have a little grace and sense of God's love, than if you had all the world: "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us! Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Psalm iv. 6. 7). And for your children, do ye rejoice to see them great or good? Many are delighted to see their children thrive in the world, do well in the world; but careless whether they have grace, yea or no. If you take the world still as a great part of your felicity, it is a sign you have low thoughts and respect for the word of God.

SERMON CXL.

VERSE 128.—*Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.*

In this verse, a child of God is set forth by two marks:—

I. His approbation and esteem of the law of God in all the parts and points thereof, "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right."

II. His hatred of all sin as contrary thereunto, "And I hate every false way:" the one as the effect of the other.

In the first branch, take notice of, 1. the illative particle, "Therefore."

2. His respect to the word, "I esteem thy precepts, &c., to be right." In the Septuagint, it is *προς πάντας τὰς ἐντολάς σε κατωρθῆμην*, I was directed, or set right, unto all thy laws. But it maketh no difference in effect from our translation; for they that esteem the law, will embrace and practise it.

3. The extent and universality of this respect; there is a double universal particle, "All thy precepts concerning all things;" the general drift of them, and every particular matter and circumstance that falleth under this law, it is all right; I approve of whatsoever thou commandest, without any reservation and exception; all, even all, have I approved.

1. Something might be observed from the illative particle: it is inferred from their making void God's law.

DOCTRINE.—In times of defection, when others slight, contemn, and forsake the ways of God, we should approve and esteem them the more

The reasons are,—

1st, To make amends for the contempt of others: "On their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified" (1 Peter iv. 14). Let not God want his glory; if he be dishonoured by their sins, he should be the more honoured by your obedience. It concerneth us to look that God be no loser. As the sea, what it loseth in one place, it gaineth in another; or as a river, what it loseth in breadth, and is pent within narrow channels, it gets in depth; so you should give him the more respect, the more it is denied him by others: the sincere professors of the name of God should be the more earnest.

2ndly. To show that we do not choose the ways of God upon foreign rea-

sons, as public countenance and consent. Many men owe their religion, not to grace, but to the favour of the times; it is in fashion, they may profess it at a cheap rate, because none contradict it. Indeed, it showeth they are extremely bad, that are bad when they may be good without any loss to themselves; but it doth not show they are good, that are only good in good times. Dead fish swim with the stream. They do not build upon the rock, but set up a shed leaning to another man's house, which costs them nothing; carried with a multitude, are not able to go alone in a good way; if they be religious, it is for others' sakes. Then is integrity discovered, when persons dare be good in bad times, as Noah was said to be an upright man, because he was "perfect in his generation" (Gen. vi. 9), when "all flesh had corrupted his way." And so it is said, "The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger" (Job. xvii. 9); that is, when there are discouragements and oppressions, as a resolved traveller holdeth on his journey, whether he meeteth with fair way or foul, good way or bad.

3rdly, There is an antiperistasis in grace as well as nature. Every quality, when it is pent up, is the stronger. Stars shine brightest in the darkest night. Fountain-water is hottest in winter, when the heat is pent up. In bad times, good men are best; wicked men's badness exerciseth and increaseth good men's graces. The more odious sin appeareth in them, the more grace is strengthened in the saints; their looseness maketh you strict, their vanity and carelessness make you serious, their intemperance maketh you sober, their worldliness and sensuality make you spiritual; as they are instances of the cursed vigour of nature, you are instances of the sacred power of grace, shining as lights in the world "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation" (Phil. ii. 15); to be eminently holy among a company of profane, Godless, atheistical spirits, showing forth the lovely beauty of holiness.

4thly, To show the difference between the people of God and others, and this as a fruit of God's eternal choice. God hath made a difference in the purposes of his grace, and they discover the difference in the course of their conversations: "The world hath not known thee; but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me" (John xvii. 25). The opposite ignorance and obstinacy of the world, showeth their acknowledgement of Christ was of more value and acceptation. When the world neither knew nor believed on him, but rather opposed and persecuted him, they owned Christ, and so walked in a countermotion to the times.

5thly, To defeat the enemy's purpose, which is to hinder the success of the Gospel, and destroy all affection and respect to the word and ways of God; and that the service of God should fall to the ground; as we hold a staff the faster when one would wrest it out of our hands: "Holding fast the faithful word" (Titus i. 9). The pastor of the church should be good at holding and drawing, as the word signifieth. So people's zeal should be the more kindled in the worst times. God hath a number that do fear him; Christ is never a king without subjects, nor a head without a church; he ruleth in the midst of his enemies (Psalm cx. 1); therefore he hath some to rule over. Where Satan's throne is, there he hath some to confess his name. Elijah thought himself left alone; yet then God had reserved to himself seven thousand, that had not bowed the knee to Baal.

USE.—It is very seasonable for thus in these times to mind this therefore,—

1. That we may increase in practical godliness. Now wickedness is broken loose, and the law is made void, this should not damp our zeal, but quicken it. You should walk with God, as Noah and David did, in the worst of times: yea, the badness of the age you live in, should make you the more wise, more circumspect, more humble, more heavenly, as fire burneth hottest in the coldest weather. Study to serve God in thy generation. A man that is not good in the age he liveth in, would never be good. A lily will thrive in a wilderness; and a brier is but a brier, though it grow in paradise. Their fury in sin should warn you of your duty to God. Shall a lust prevail more with them to damn themselves, than the love of God and the hope of salvation with you? shall they act more regularly to their ends? What zeal and earnestness have they in their course, and how open and bold-faced in sin! We read that Pambo wept when he saw a woman dressing herself curiously to please her wanton lover, to see her take so much pains to undo her soul; and that he had not been so careful to please God, and provide things honest in the sight of God, as she to please herself.

2. They are set up as warnings to us, as a beacon on fire warneth all the country to be in arms. You see what it is to give way to the beginnings of sin, not to be under the blessed conduct of God's Spirit. Some are notoriously wicked, judicially given up to be more visibly under the dominion of sin, that others may take warning how they come into that woful slavery: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things; for our conversation is in Heaven" (Phil. iii. 18—20).

3. It should make us fly to God for grace when the whole world lieth in wickedness: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. vi. 5). It is hard to converse with defiled ones, and not be defiled; to keep ourselves unspotted from the world: "But were mingled among the Heathen, and learned their works" (Psalm cvi. 35). The contagion of sin overspreads presently; as a man by touching that which was unclean, became unclean. We easily catch a sickness from others; but we cannot convey our health to them.

USE II.—Teacheth us to keep up our profession even in lesser truths: "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things." When men would wrangle us out of our duty, we are to be πιστοὶ ἐν ὀλίγοις, faithful in a little. Great matters depend on little things. We are tried, ἐν τῇ παρεσῆ ἀληθείᾳ, by "the present truth" (2 Peter i. 12), whether we will own the ways of God: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord [or for the Lord] from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours" (Rev. xiv. 13). Why "from henceforth?" Why, before, the sufferings of Christians were from Heathens, and professed enemies; and they were acknowledged blessed, as dying for the Lord. But now, when antichrist and false Christians came up, they did pretend to be for Christ, and friends to him, and this might be a discouragement to them in their suffering; but, saith the Holy Ghost, From henceforth blessed are they which die for the Lord, when pseudo-Christians begin to come up, and persecute the heavenly Christians. It is a blessed thing to suffer under pseudo-Christians and anti-Christianism, as it was to suffer under Heathens and Pagans, professed enemies to Christianity. I speak of this, because the orthodoxy of

the world is usually an age too short. In things publicly received, it is easy to be right. Christ is forced to gain upon the world by inches. A man may acknowledge the Trinity, the satisfaction of Christ, among Papists; but it is exceedingly praiseworthy to own Christ when others scorn and reject him. The world will allow us to esteem the ways of God in some lesser things, that are out of controversy and are not maligned; but this esteem must have that extent as becometh the people of God, to have a hearty esteem of all the precepts of God and all things contained therein.

2. Let me come to his respect to the ways of God; and from his respect, with the extent, I shall observe this doctrine,—

DOCTRINE.—That it becometh the people of God to have a practical, heart-engaging esteem of all the precepts of God, and all things contained therein.

Let me show you what is this esteem the children of God have for his precepts.

1. There is something implied and presupposed.

2. Wherein it doth formally consist.

3. The qualifications of a right and saving esteem of the ways of God.

First, There is something implied and presupposed, before we can come to esteem the precepts of God. As—

1st, Knowledge and a right discerning. This is necessary, partly that a man may be able to make a distinction between good and evil; otherwise, he cannot esteem the good and eschew the evil: for without knowledge the heart is not good (Prov. xix. 2). If we should stumble blindfolded upon a good way, we are not the more accepted with God, nor advantaged in our spiritual course. The clearer our light, the warmer our love. The more clear and certain apprehension we have of spiritual things, our faith is more steadfast, love more vehement, joy more sound, hope more constant, patience more sublime, our pursuit of true happiness more earnest. And partly, because a man cannot esteem that which he knoweth not. The will being *cæca potentia*, blind in itself, followeth the direction and guidance of the understanding. The ignorance of the nature and necessity of holiness is the cause of the neglect of it: “If thou knewest the gift,” &c. (John iv. 10.) Many condemn good for evil, take evil for good, boldly rush into sin, reject the ways of God, for want of knowledge. But then it is spiritual illumination that begets estimation (1 Cor. ii. 14). The truth and worth of spiritual things must be seen by a spiritual eye. When the Spirit enlighteneth a man, he beginneth to see that which he knew not before, to see things in another manner.

2ndly, Advertency, or application of the mind to the object or things esteemed; that he seriously consider of the matter, and what it is best to do; it is not a sudden, rash undertaking. The Scripture speaketh of “applying our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm xc. 12); and, “Apply thine heart to understanding” (Prov. ii. 2); “Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to words of knowledge” (Prov. xxiii. 12). Make it your business seriously to consider things that differ. But then,—

Secondly, Wherein lies this esteem, or wherein doth it formally consist? Esteem is an approbation of the will, or a hearty love. There is the approbation of the understanding, and the approbation of the will. The approbation of the understanding is, a naked sense, or an acknowledgment of what is good: “Thou knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent” (Rom. ii. 18). There is an excellency in holiness that

winneth esteem, even there where it is not embraced. All convinced men see the evil of sin, and are half of the mind to quit it; they approve the law which they violate, by a bare, naked approbation. But then, there is the approbation of the heart or will, there is love and liking in it; and this is called esteem. This is seen in two things, consent and choice: consent, to take this law for our rule; and choice, whatever temptation we have to the contrary. Men choose what they highly esteem. In short, it is such an approbation as doth engage affection, such an affection as doth engage practice. Esteem is the fruit of love.

1st, There is a "consenting unto the law that it is good" (Rom. vii. 16). There is a difference between assent and consent. A man may assent to the truth and goodness of the law, that doth not consent to the goodness of it; as the devils assent to the truth of God's being, that do not consent to take him for their portion (James ii. 19). Therefore, besides the advertency of the understanding, there is the consent or approbation of the will. Paul speaketh good words of the law: "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. vii. 12); νόμος and ἐπιτολή, the law in general, and that commandment which wrought such tragical effects in his heart, that rifled all his confidence and hopes, and left him wounded with the sense of sin; it is holy in teaching duty to God, just in prescribing duties to our neighbour, good in respect to ourselves; a law becoming God to give and us to receive, suitable and profitable. Thus should we approve and like the law of God.

2ndly, Choice, whatever temptation we have to the contrary. A preferring or prevailing love, a heart-engaging approbation, that doth prevailingly determine the soul to the ways of God. *Non differunt re consensus et electio* (saith Aquinas), *sed ratione tantum: ut consensus dicatur secundum quod placet ad agendum, electio autem secundum quod præfertur his quæ non placent*. Consent to the law and choice of the law are all one and the same act, distinguished by divers respects and considerations. It is called consent to the law, as it approveth of what the law adviseth; and it is called choice or esteem, as it preferreth the law and our obedience to it above other things. It is *actualis prælatio unius rei præ altera*; a preferring one thing above another.

Thirdly, I come to the properties or qualifications of this esteem.

1st, It is not a simple, but comparative, approbation. There is a twofold act of judgment, the first act and the second. The first act is that whereby I distinguish good from evil, and pronounce the one to be embraced, the other eschewed; approve the one, disapprove the other. But there is a comparative approbation; that is, that which the understanding judgeth best all circumstances considered, better than all other things that can be represented. This is the proper notion of esteem: "Esteeming the reproach of Christ," &c. (Heb. xi. 26.) We approve of many things simply, and in the first act, which we disallow in the second, when we consider them as invested with some difficulty and unpleasantness, or overpoised with contrary desires; when we compare them with the pleasure and profit which we must forsake: it consents to walk in the ways of God, as Orpah will follow Naomi into the land of Israel, if she may do it without inconveniency (Ruth ii. 14). The young man esteemed salvation worthy to be inquired after, but is loth to forego his earthly possessions to purchase that inheritance (Mark x. 22). When the judgment that we make of the thing simply considered in itself, and of the thing as considered with all

circumstances, as it cometh in comparison with other things, that must be endured or foregone.

2ndly, There is a judgment of general estimation, and a judgment of particular application. By the one I bind duty upon others, by the other I engage my own heart; as the expression is, "Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord" (Jer. xxx. 21); to engage his heart to take God for his portion. An instance we have in David: "But it is good for me to draw near to God" (Psalm lxxiii. 28). I may approve many things as good, for which I have no appetite myself. Many will yield that it is good to serve God, that cannot work, or do not engage their heart to it. Many approve piety in the general; it is good to be religious, to live a holy life; but, when it cometh to our own case, when we are to abstain from this or that sin, we draw back. Many know what things are more excellent, but do not practise or embrace them; commend those that are religious, but do not imitate them. Acts v. 13, the people highly esteemed the Christians, but yet would not become Christians themselves. "This God is our God for ever and ever" (Psalm xlviii. 14). Many a wicked man judgeth it best for him to continue his evil courses, and thinketh religion is good for other men, but it is not good for him; but God's children are of another mind.

3rdly, It is not a slight and superficial esteem, but such as is deep and solid: "He that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it" (Matt. xiii. 20). It is a blessed thing to hear of the pardon of sin, to taste "the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come" (Heb. vi. 5); as they that cheapen wines, taste, though they do not go through with the bargain. Some inclination of heart, half a mind to be thoroughly godly and religious: "Ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light" (John v. 35). They were much taken with John for a while, and the novelty and excellency of his doctrine. But when is this esteem deep and solid? It may be known,—

1. By the root of it.
2. The ground and formal object of it.
3. The manner or way how we come by it.

1. The root of it. When the root of this esteem is a vital principle of grace: "Yet hath he not root in himself" (Matt. xiii. 21); the word is not ingrafted (James i. 21). The people had a good inclination: "All that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it;" but, "Oh! that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments, always," &c. (Deut. v. 29.) They had a mind to do well; but, where faith, fear, and love are not planted, there may be some stirrings of conscience, but not a full purpose of heart. There is the approbation of an awakened and enlightened conscience, and the approbation of a renewed heart. A convinced man approveth, and a converted man approveth; but in a different manner; the one is but a flash like fire in straw, the other hath a durable affection.

2. When the ground and formal object of it is not a temporal, natural, or carnal motive, but the moral goodness of the law; because it is the pure and holy word and will of God, who is the lawgiver, whose authority is absolute. There may be carnal motives to incline us to esteem the word, as the novelty of John's doctrine: they rejoiced in his light for a season (John v. 35); delight to hear a plausible and rational discourse, as Ezekiel's hearers: "And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of

one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not" (Ezek. xxxiii. 32). Or carnal motives, as they, Gen. xxxiv. 22, 23: "Herein will the men consent unto us for to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised. Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs be ours? Only let us consent unto them," &c. And so temporal interests. Religion hath a portion for which it is courted. The consent of many to the law, is the same which Mahometans have to the Alehoran; education in it, ancestors embracing of it, the countenance of the law, the custom of the country, &c.

3. The manner or way how we come by it; by much prayer and serious deliberation. Some by chance are surprised and affected with a good motion; suddenly good, but habitually bad. They will in all haste become religious; but, alas! this estimation or approbation of God's ways is entertained but for a time, but afterwards vanisheth and cometh to nothing. There must be a clear, distinct knowledge of the excellency of God's ways: otherwise, in a fit, or in a good mood, we choose that which is good; but, the interest in evil not being renounced in heart, it causeth an easy retreat into the former sinful course.

4. It must be such an esteem as hath a lively and effectual influence upon our hearts and ways. There is a liking that only produceth a velocity and wish, and doth not engage the soul to prosecute the things willed, or forsake the things nilled; but there is such an effectual liking and esteem as will produce a constant, habitual willingness, that will have the authority of a principle, and hath a powerful command over the whole soul, to set it a-working to do the will of God, and will admit of no contradiction by contrary desires, but maketh us act with life, power, and earnestness. Cold and inconstant wishes produce no fruit in the heart; the general course of most men's lives is as if they had no liking to the law of God. It may be they may dislike and sacrifice some of their weaker lusts and smaller interests, which they can well spare; but corruption doth ordinarily bear sway in their hearts and lives. In the text it is, "I esteem all thy precepts, &c., and I hate every false way." It is true, a man that approveth the law, is not wholly freed from sin. There are sins of ordinary infirmity, that cleave to us while we are in the world; yea, taint our best actions: "But we are all as an unclean thing; and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. lxiv. 6). And sometimes, though there be a principle of grace, a child of God may be overcome by the violence of a temptation, carried into presumptuous sins, which may make strange havoc in the soul. David prayeth that God would keep him from presumptuous sins (Psalm xix. 13); but, for the most part, the children of God are influenced by their consent and esteem of the law of God. And the renewed part, for the generality, hath the upper hand, and prevaileth, and the flesh is weakened; as the house of David "waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker" (2 Sam. iii. 1).

5. It must be a universal, not partial esteem: "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right;" "When I have respect unto all thy commandments" (Psalm cxix. 6); Zachary and Elisabeth walked "in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke i. 6); "Him shall ye hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you" (Acts iii. 22); and he "shall fulfil all my will" (Acts xiii. 22). It is not enough to be right in commands in general, or the lump, but in this and that particular; not in

some, but in all. We pretend to give up ourselves to the will of God in the general, but particulars we stick at. Men are convinced that holiness is necessary, that they must have some religion; therefore, when they take up duty in the lump, and abstract notion or naked consent, it doth not exasperate opposite propensions: "Ye cannot serve the Lord," &c., saith Joshua (Josh. xxiv. 19); but, when they come to particulars, and see what it is to wait upon a holy and jealous God, they tire and grow weary: so that there must be a consent and purpose to obey, not some, but all and every one, without exception; not partial, like that of Herod to John: "He did many things" (Mark vi. 20). The worst man in the world loveth some good, and hateth some evil; but he doth not esteem all God's commandments in every point. Nay, the great enemy of our salvation, Satan, can be content to let us yield to God in many things, if we would be contented with half our duty; one sin reserved, keepeth afoot his interest in our hearts, as a bird tied by the leg is fast enough. The Devil will suffer men to do many things; but, if he hath them fast by one lust, be it an inclination to sensuality or love to the world, he is contented. The world likes many things in religion; they are good and profitable for men; but sticketh at others. To live godly in Christ Jesus, will draw on persecution (2 Tim. iii. 12). The flesh will dispense with us to do many things, for the more cleanly conveyance of others, if it can but get us to spare the bosom lust which the soul delighteth in. Every man, as he is enslaved by his own customs, opposeth, one this law, another that. The proud man doth not approve of that law that doth forbid his pride, nor the sensual man of that which toucheth his intemperance and unbridled appetite, nor the worldly man his covetousness, cannot endure that part of the law that would abridge him of his gain. Nothing more common than to cast off what liketh us not in the law of God, and to wish there were no precepts given in that kind; but our consent must be to all in general, and to this and that in particular. Many could be content with God's law, so far as it doth not cross their carnal interest, or hinder their corrupt desires; but we must esteem all the laws of God: they are all holy, just, and good, not one excepted; all conduce to perfect our nature, and make us happy creatures; they all conduce to the benefit of human nature; they are all enjoined by the authority of the same God: "God spake all these words." They are linked as rings in a chain; one preserveth another; they are all necessary for our eternal happiness, not one given in vain. So much thou continuest thine own misery, and art defective in the way that leadeth to true happiness, as thou art willing to indulge in any one sin. They are all written in the hearts of God's children (Heb. viii. 10), all suited to the new nature; and he hath given grace to keep all. Perfection of parts, not of degrees: the new creature is not maimed in the birth. A child hath not the bulk and strength of a man. Want of perfection of parts, cannot be supplied by any after-growth. Nay, all are necessary to our communion with God: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm lxxvi. 18); "Whosoever herefore shall break one of these least commandments," &c. (Matt. v. 19.) If we dispense with ourselves in the least things, we are not fit for communion with God. Having such promises of God's being in us, and dwelling in us, and maintaining communion with us, then "let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. vii. 1); "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, *εις παν ἀρέσκειαν* (Col. i. 10). If you do not con-

sent to keep all, you can keep none ; for the same reasons that move us to break one, will move us to break all. Herod, that heard John gladly, when his lust moved him to it, put him to death. To be sure it must be total.

Reasons of this esteem :—

1. From the excellency of God's law. The law of God deserves it : "Keep therefore, and do them ; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deut. iv. 6). We should esteem the law, because it doth not infringe our natures, but makes them perfect, puts an excellency upon us. But of this in other verses.

2. This esteem and approbation is the ground of practice. When we are convinced of the ways of God, and the excellency that is in them, the heart consenteth, and embraceth them, and then followeth a ready practice ; we shall observe what we do approve. Whereas, on the contrary, if we have no esteem for the ways of God, we shall take no care to walk in them, but could wish such laws expunged ; for still these two go together, hearty embracing and diligent practice. The will is the great master-wheel. Now, esteem implieth the bent of the will or heart, it implieth consent and election ; it is the act of the will is the act of the man : "My son, give me thine heart" (Prov. xxiii. 26). The man is never overcome till then. You may kill him ; but you cannot conquer him, till he give his consent. There may be a kind of force and violence offered to the other faculties ; the understanding may be overcome with light, which, though it would, it cannot keep out. The conscience may be awakened, though men endeavour to lull it asleep ; but the will is free, and is not conquered, but by his own consent and choice. The Lord will not force himself upon any ; he dealeth with the reasonable creatures in a covenant-way, to which our consent is required. It only bindeth as a law, till we consent to yield to it as a covenant : "Yield yourselves unto the Lord" (2 Chron. xxx. 8). Now, bring your hearts once to consent, and heartily approve of the ways of God ; and the rest will succeed without difficulty. It will not be hard to give a law to the tongue, to restrain the hand, govern the body ; our affections will more easily come to hand, if we have a will to the things of God. The smallest matters against our wills are grievous to us. It was no great matter for Haman to lead Mordecai's horse ; but it was an unwelcome and unpleasant service, he had no mind to it. It is no great matter for men to do the things that God requireth ; but they have no mind to it, and therefore are off and on : "The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James i. 8).

3. This is some comfort to a child of God, that, though he faileth in some part of his duty, yet he esteemeth all ; for, where this approbation is, you may use the Apostle's plea, 'Not I, but sin that dwelleth in me ;' "For that which I do, I allow not ; for what I would, that do I not ; but what I hate, that do I" (Rom. vii. 15). The allowance or approbation of the will is there spoken of ; he speaketh of willing and nilling, loving, delighting, and hating. Though you cannot do that good you would, in that purity and perfection which love requireth and the renewed heart intendeth ; yet your hearts are upon your work : 'The evil which I hate, I do.' The new nature hates and dislikes what the carnal part prompts to,

USE.—Learn to approve the law of God in all things, as right and good for you.

1. Do not dispense with yourselves in anything. In two cases, we are apt to do so. First, in small things; it is nothing we think, it is but a little one. Nothing that cometh from God should be light and contemptible; though the matter be never so small, if God hath interposed, it should be regarded by us. There may be great obstinacy in small sins, as a slender line may be very crooked; or as, in some cases, the dye is more than the cloth. Will you break with God in a smaller matter? If some great matter were required, would you not have done it? as 2 Kings v. 13. Dare you offend this holy God for trifles? Again, do not dispense with yourselves, though never so contrary to your humour and interest. This is to set up a toleration in your own hearts, or a court of faculties without God's leave: "When I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing" (2 Kings v. 18).

2. Do not so much as wish there were no such laws. It is a contradiction of the law, when you could wish there were no law to put a restraint upon your beloved lusts and darling corruptions. Carnal men wish there were no God; not as a creator and preserver, but as a lawgiver. There may be much enmity in such a thought; every thought must be brought into subjection to Jesus Christ (2 Cor. x. 5). Not a disallowing thought of God's government, but doth much prejudice your hearts. God hath given such laws, that, if all things were left to our own option and choice, nothing better could be devised to preserve the liberty and perfection of the human nature. It is an ill note to count the command grievous; holiness is so amiable in itself, that men are not frightened unto God's laws, but choose them.

3. Bring thy heart to approve the law by mortifying that distemper that ariseth against it. Be it pride and self-conceit, sensuality, covetousness; appetite, that is lost to wholesome food, is restored by purging the stomach; there is a preparation of mind required to receiving of moral things. So in Divine things: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit" (1 Cor. ii. 14). We are prepossessed; *intus existens prohibet exitum*. Therefore bring your heart to approve God's *removendo prohibens*, by mortifying those corruptions that rise against it.

4. When you see no other reason to yield to God's law, let his will and sovereign authority be reason enough to you. This is reason enough for God to use to his creatures, "I am the Lord:" "Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them; I am the Lord" (Lev. xviii. 4, 5). This is the will of God. We owe God blind obedience. This should silence all perverse reasonings against God, both as to his laws and providence: his will is supreme, and our will must be yielded up to his.

II. We come to the other branch, "And I hate every false way." Where we have the act, "hate;" the object, "false way;" the extent, "every." Whatsoever is contrary to the purity of God's word.

DOCTRINE.—That it is a good note of a renewed and obedient heart, to hate every false way.

This will appear from,—

1. The sorts and kinds of hatred.

2. The causes.

3. The effects, or the comparison of hatred with anger.

First, From the sorts and kinds of hatred ; which are reckoned up to be two, First, *Odium abominationis* ; Secondly, *Odium inimicitie*.

1st, *Odium abominationis*, a hatred of slight and aversion, called by some *odium offensionis*, the hatred of offence. It is defined by Aquinas to be, *Dissonantia quedam appetitu ad id quod apprehenditur ut repugnans, &c.* It is a repugnancy of the appetite to what is apprehended, as contrary and prejudicial to it. Such there is in the will of the regenerate ; for they apprehend sin as repugnant and contrary to their renewed will. To the unregenerate it is agreeable and suitable as draff to the appetite of a swine, or grass and hay to a bullock or horse. Now, this hatred is a good sign, that cannot be found in another that is not born of God. The mortification of sin standeth principally in the hatred of it. Sin dieth when it dieth in the affections. When we look upon it as an offence to us, destructive to our happiness, and as it is truly grieved for and hated by us. The unregenerate may hate sin materially considered ; that is, the thing which is a sin ; but they cannot hate it formally considered, as sin under the notion of a sin : for then they would hate all sin, *a quatenus ad omne valet consequentia*. As for instance, thus : a covetous man hateth prodigal and riotous courses, not as they are sinful and contrary to God's law, but as contrary to his humour and covetous will.

2ndly, *Odium inimicitie*, or the hatred of enmity. This enmity is nothing else but a willing of evil or mischief to the thing or person hated, and that out of mere displacency, dislike, or distaste of the person hated. This is a sure note, the regenerate hate their sins, in that they would have them arraigned, crucified, mortified : they would fain see the heart-blood of sin let out ; therefore they oppose, watch against, and resist it as their mortal, deadly enemy. When a man pursues sin, would have the life of it, this enmity cannot be quiet ; it is an active enmity, diligent in praying, mourning, watching, striving, using all holy means to get out of our hearts ; wishing, groaning, waiting, complaining, that we may get rid of it : "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 24.) They follow their work hard.

Secondly, The causes of this hatred. There are three causes of it.

1st, Spiritual knowledge and illumination, that is one cause of hatred : "Through thy precepts I get understanding ; therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm cxix. 104). When the heart is thick set, and well fraught with Divine knowledge, a man cannot sin freely. Those that are exercised in the word of God, find some consideration or other to quicken to the hatred of sin. The word is a proper instrument to destroy sin : "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm cxix. 11). Our affections follow our apprehensions. We come to the heart by the mind : "After that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh" (Jer. xxxi. 19). In the word of God, are the most proper reasons and arguments to kill sin.

2ndly, The love of God : "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil" (Psalm cxvii. 10). He doth not say forbear it, but hate it. The cause of hatred is the love of that good unto which the thing or person hated is contrary and repugnant. Love to the chiefest good is accompanied with hatred of sin, which is the chiefest evil. The one is as natural to grace as the other.

The new nature hath its slight and aversation, as well as its choice and prosecution, to things that are hurtful to it, as well as good and profitable.

3rdly, A filial fear of God: "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate" (Prov. viii. 13). Certainly, this is to fear God, to hate what God hateth, and as God hateth, and because God hateth. Now, God hateth all sin, pride, and arrogancy; that is, sins of thought, which put us upon vain and foolish musings. And then the sins of the tongue are expressed by froward mouth: nothing so natural to us as filthy and evil speaking. And then the sins of practice, the evil way. They that fear God will hate all these sins. These graces are strangers to unrenewed hearts. It argueth a Divine nature, when we hate when, what, and as, and because God hates it. *Eudem velle et nolle est summa amicitia.*

Thirdly, A third argument is from the comparison of hatred with anger. Unregenerate men may be angry with sin, because anger is consistent with love. One may be angry with his wife, children, friends, where yet he tenderly affects. First, anger is a sudden and short, hatred a lasting and durable, passion. Anger is *furor brevis*, curable by time; hatred, incurable by the greatest tract of time. The unregenerate are displeased with their sins for a spurt; but the regenerate are constantly disaffected towards them. There is (1 John iii. 9) *σπίγμα*, there is a constant principle of resistance in the renewed heart; passion is a casual dislike, but the new nature a rooted enmity, an habitual aversation to what is evil. Secondly, anger is only against singulars, but hatred is *εἰς τὰ γένη*, to the whole kind. Thus we hate every wolf and every serpent, every thief and every calumniator. So is this universal; it respects sin as sin, and hateth all sin, though never so profitable and pleasant. Not upon foreign and accidental reasons; as Esther iii. 16, Haman thought scorn to lay hands upon Mordecai, alone, but sought the destruction of all the Jews. The same reasons that incline us to hate one sin, incline us to hate all sin. The violation of God's law is a contempt of God's authority, a breach of spiritual friendship; one grieveth the Spirit of God as well as the other. Every sin is hateful to God; so it is to those that are made partakers of the Divine nature. Thirdly, anger may be practised or appeased with the sufferings of the thing or person with which we are angry; but hatred is implacable: nothing can content and satisfy it, but the ruin or not being of the thing and party hated. David was angry with Absalom, but loth to have him destroyed, only corrected and reduced: when he sent out forces against him, "Deal gently with the young man" (2 Sam. xviii. 5). So many deal with their sins: we reason, pray, strive, complain; but it is but an angry fit; we are displeased with them at present, but could easily be reconciled. They seek not after the death, but the restraint and imprisonment, of their corruptions and lusts, that they may not disgrace or otherwise prejudice them. Nothing contents the regenerate, but the killing and mortification of them; they would have them dealt with as Samuel by Agag, hewn in pieces; therefore they study revenge upon their sins: "Crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. v. 24).

Fourthly, From the state of the regenerate. They have sin in them, but yet they hate it. Their will and consent to sin is always abated, and made remiss by a contrary principle, the grace that is in their wills: "The spirit [lusteth] against the flesh" (Gal. v. 17). Sin cannot reign in them with a

full and uncontrolled dominion: "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Rom vi. 14).

USE I.—How few are there that are God's children; for how few are there that hate sin! Some love it (Job xx. 12, 13); and the love of sin is the life of it. And what is it they hate? They hate the word that discovers sin (John iii. 20); they hate God's messengers that do cry aloud against sin, and do rub their sores, as Ahab said to Micaiah, "He doth not prophesy good concerning me" (1 Kings xxii. 8); they hate the magistrate that would reform them, they hate God's image in his saints, they cannot endure the lustre of holiness that shineth forth in them.

USE II.—Do we indeed hate sin? We had need look after this.

I. Because this is the true principle of resistance against sin. Till a man hateth it, the soul is not thoroughly resolved against it; as a man is never thoroughly gained to God, till he love holiness for holiness's sake: his affections may be bribed with other considerations; but then he is rooted in godliness. So a man is not resolved against sin, till he hate it for its own sake. He may be frightened out of sin for a fit, put out of humour with it; but his heart is in again with his old lusts, till there be a detestation of sin. But, when once he cometh to hate it, persuasions cannot easily move him, nor example draw him, nor difficulties compel him, to that which is evil; nor allurements, that have a great force upon us. But they cast away sin with indignation: "What have I to do any more with idols?" (Hos. xiv. 8.)

2. This is a true distinctive note between good and bad. Men may forbear sin that do not hate it: they forbear it by constraint, for fear of punishment, shame, worldly ends; but regard it in their hearts (Psalm lxxvi. 18). The dog hath a mind to the pail, but feareth the cudgel. But God judgeth not as man judgeth.

SERMON CXLI.

VERSE 129.—*Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore doth my soul keep them.*

In these words are two parts,—

I. The dignity and excellency of God's testimonies, "Thy testimonies are wonderful."

II. The effect it had upon David's heart, "Therefore doth my soul keep them."

Accordingly two points,—

DOCTRINE I.—That the testimonies of God, when duly considered, and thoroughly understood, will indeed be found to be wonderful.

DOCTRINE II.—The wonderful excellency of the word should beget in our hearts a readiness and diligent care to keep it.

DOCTRINE I.—The testimonies of God are wonderful.

First, The word in itself is wonderful, as containing truths of a sublime nature.

Secondly, It is wonderful in its effects, as it produceth effects rare and strange.

First, In itself considered, it is sometimes called the mystery of faith, as it containeth principles of faith; and sometimes a mystery of godliness, as it

containeth rules of practice. As it is a mystery of faith, there are many strange doctrines in it, above the reach of man's capacity, which we could neither invent nor understand, unless we be enlightened by the Spirit of God: as that three to be one, and one to be three; God to be made man, &c. These are riddles to a carnal mind. And, as it is a rule of faith, still it offereth matter of wonder, the duty of man being represented with such exactness and comprehensiveness: "I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad" (Psalm cxix. 96).

Secondly, What rare effects it produceth: where it is entertained, it maketh a Christian become a wonder to himself and others.

1st, A wonder to himself: "Who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter ii. 9). There is no man converted by the word of God, but hath cause to wonder at his own estate, at the condescension of God in plucking him as a brand out of the burning, or that woful condition wherein he was before, when others are left to perish: "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?" (John xiv. 22.) And then, that we are brought into the possession of such excellent privileges, as we enjoy in our new estate, peace that passeth all understanding (Phil. iv. 7), "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter i. 8), privileges greater than can be imagined or expressed; so are their hearts ravished in the sense of their reconciliation with God and communion with him. So also in giving them such an undoubted right to an everlasting blessed estate in the heavens: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. ii. 9). He hath promised them a happiness which they can never think of, but every day they must fall a-wondering anew; and all this wrought by an exceeding great power working together with the word (Eph. i. 19). As Peter wondered at his deliverance when chains, and gates, and bars, did all give way to the power of the angel that brought him forth: "And he went out, and followed him, and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were passed the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city, which opened to them of his own accord; and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the Jews" (Acts xii. 9—11). So may every one that is converted to God, stand wondering, when he considereth how, from whence, and to what he is called by God; all this is wonderful indeed. There is more of God seen in inward experiences than in outward; in converting, comforting, quickening, and carrying on the work of grace in our own hearts, than in governing the courses of nature: therefore the Apostle appealeth to this internal power: "Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. iii. 20). He instanceth in that which God hath done for us in Christ, which is beyond our prayer, conceptions, and hopes; transcending the hopes and apprehensions of the most enlarged hearts. Thus is a Christian a wonder to himself.

2ndly, He is a wonder to the world, if he keep up the majesty and vigour of religion: "Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (1 Peter iv. 4). It

was strange to them that they should be altered so of a sudden, that of filthy puddles they should become as crystal waters; a sink turned into a pure fountain. That men should live above interests of nature, row against the stream of flesh and blood, this is all strange to the world; and this is the fruits of the word; for “the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalm xix. 7). Every grace is a mystery and wonder; especially faith, for a man to believe that which he understandeth not; to hope for that he seeth not; to have that which he wants; to be tossed with tempests, and yet to enjoy a sweet calm in our own hearts; to be destitute of all things, and yet be as little anxious as if we indeed had all things; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things; to be a rock in the midst of a storm; as dying, and yet we live: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. iv. 8, 9); “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor. vi. 10). Thus is a believer the world’s wonder, a very riddle to carnal sense. So in other graces, he can hate father and mother for Christ’s sake, can also love enemies at Christ’s command: he that doth even break his heart for the least sin, can bear up against the greatest trouble.

Thus I might exemplify the point; but I must go a little largely to work.

1. God’s testimonies are wonderful in their majesty and composure, which striketh reverence into the hearts of those that consider; it speaketh to us at a Godlike rate. Jesus Christ leaves a character of his Divine Spirit upon his words: “And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes” (Matt. vii. 28, 29). There was an impression of his authority upon his word; his hearers were convinced of a sovereign majesty proper to the dignity of his person. Those that went to take him, returned this account: “Never man spake like this man” (John vii. 46), for authority, power, and evidence. Now, the Scriptures being Christ’s doctrine, why should they not have the same power, authority, and Divine character in them? It is the same doctrine; the voice could add nothing to it, and the writing take nothing from it. Could not God discover his sovereign majesty in writing as well as speaking? Look into the Scriptures, are you not even compelled to say, this can be no other but the word of God? They speak not as conscious of any weakness, or as begging assent, but as commanding it: “Thus saith the Lord;” hear it, or ye are undone for ever. The wisdom, majesty, authority of the author, show themselves in every line almost of Scripture. Longinus (a Heathen) admired the majesty of that passage, *Γενίσθη δὲ ἐγένετο*. Indeed, everywhere there is great authority mixed with simplicity and plainness of speech, such as moveth reverence and awe in the consciences of men. It may be, it is not seen in every phrase and clause of a sentence, but it is clearly discovered in the whole frame: as the majesty of a man’s countenance is not so fully discovered in any one part of the face, as in the whole visage taken jointly together: *Scriptura sic* (saith Austin), *ut altitudine superbos irrideat, profunditate attentos terreat, veritate magnos pascit, affabilitate parvos nutriet*. Scripture so speaketh that it laughs proud and lofty men to scorn, with the height of it; with the depths of it, it terrifieth those who with attention look into

it : with truth, it feedeth men of greatest knowledge and understanding ; with affability and sweetness, it nourisheth babes and sucklings. Let a man have but anything of a prepared mind, and he cannot contain his wonder and reverence, but will tremble at the word of God : “ To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word ” (Isa. lxvi. 2).

2. It is wonderful for the matter and depth of mystery, which cannot be found elsewhere, concerning God, and Christ, the creation of the world, the souls of men, and their immortal and everlasting condition, the fall of man, &c. Here God is set forth to us in the clearest representation that we are capable of in this mortal state. God is in part seen in the creatures : “ For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead ” (Rom. i. 20). Everything that hath passed his hand, discovereth somewhat of the author and maker of it ; but, as imperfectly as God is discovered there, we cannot behold him without wonder and reverence. If we use never so little of an attentive mind, the strictures of God are seen in man’s body. Galen wondered when he saw a man’s hand, the sun, moon, and stars ; yea, a gnat : yea, a pile of grass ; but these discoveries are not to be compared with the Scriptures, revealing the glory of God in the face of Christ : “ For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ” (2 Cor. iv. 6). If we wonder at so much of God as we find in a gnat, shall we not wonder much more at so much of God as we find in his law, in his Gospel, in the whole economy and frame of his gracious dispensations ? Besides that, the Scriptures help us to interpret the book of the creatures : they show forth more of God, than all the creatures can do : the book of nature is an imperfect piece in regard of the book of Scripture. You cannot look upon the book of the creatures, but in every page and line of it you will find this truth presented to your eyes, that there is an infinite, eternal power that made all things : this is enough to leave the world without excuse ; but, in the book of the word, you may see more of God, and the way how to enjoy him. In the 19th Psalm, David doth first admire the glory of God by the beauty of the heavens, then by the light of the word. By reason, the Heathens found out, *πρώτον αἰτιον τῆ κόσμου ἐκ τῆς τάξεως πάσης*, a first mover and a first cause ; but, when and how the world was made, they were left in uncertainties, which was first, the egg or the hen, the oak or the acorn : “ Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God : so that things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear ” (Heb. xi. 3). A child is taught more than they could find out by their profound researches. So concerning the fall of man, conscience will inform us of a distinction between good and evil ; and Heathens, by the light of nature, could speak of virtue and vice, as moral perfection and a de-ordination ; but nothing of sin and righteousness, relating to a covenant ; and whence this mischief began, they knew not. They complained of nature as of a step-mother, observed an inclination to evil more than to good, that vices are learned without a teacher, that man is born into the world crying, beginneth his life with a punishment ; but the first spring and rise of evil was a secret to them, but clearly discovered to us : “ Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned ” (Rom.

v. 12). Man's restitution and redemption by Christ is wonderful indeed : "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. iii. 16). This could not be found by man; how could they know the free purposes of God's grace, unless God revealed them? This is the mystery of mysteries, which angels desire to pry into (1 Peter i. 12). So excellent and ravishing a mystery is this plot of salvation of lost sinners by Christ incarnate, that the very angels cannot enough exercise themselves in the contemplation of it. So union with Christ, and communion with him, a mystery that nature could never have thought of! God's keeping a familiar correspondence with his creatures, God's dwelling in us, our dwelling in God: "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1 John iv. 13): words we should not have dared to use, if God had not used them before us; it would have looked like blasphemy to speak so, if we had not the warrant of Scripture. So the resurrection of the body and life eternal, they are all wonders: "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, through the Gospel" (2 Tim. i. 10). Heathens might dream of a life after death, but could never understand it distinctly. It is brought to light. Their wise men saw it, like the blind man, who saw men walking like trees, or a spire at a distance; no clearness, no certainty; Lord, "thy testimonies are wonderful."

3. It is wonderful for purity and perfection. The Decalogue in ten words compriseth the whole duty of man, and reacheth to the very soul, and all the motions of the heart. All the precepts of morality are advanced to the highest perfection. Those fragments and sorry remainders of the light of nature, that have escaped out of the ruins of the fall, will show us the necessity of a good life; but the word of God calleth for a good heart, a regeneration as well as a reformation, not only abstaining from acts of sin, but lusts: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter ii. 11). Not only the outward work, but the spirit, that is weighed in the balance of the sanctuary: "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits" (Prov. xvi. 2). It mightily establisheth faith, fear, and love to God, as the essential graces. When we consider duty in the lump, we have no admiring thoughts; but, when we look abroad into all the parts and branches of obedience, whereunto the law diffuseth itself, then the holiness which the law requireth is admirable; then we see it no easy matter to serve this holy and jealous God, it is no easy matter to go to the bottom of this perfection.

4. It is wonderful for the harmony and consent of all the parts. All religion is of a piece, and one part doth not interfere with another, but conspireth to promote the great end, of subjection of the creature to God. The law hath a mighty subserviency to the Gospel, and the first covenant shutteth up the sinner immediately under the curse, that mercy may open the door to him. The Gospel is first darkly revealed, and still it groweth as the light doth, till noon-day. At first an obscure intimation, "The seed of the woman;" to Abraham, "In thy seed;" which after was repeated to Isaac to cut off Ishmael; then to Jacob, to cut off Esau; yet not what tribe: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from be-

tween his feet, until Shiloh come" (Gen. xlix. 10); yet not what family of Judah; to David, "I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (2 Sam. vii. 13): then, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and call his name Immanuel" (Isa. vii. 14): then John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29), points with a finger to Christ. This, while, in short, the Scriptures do set forth the mercy of God, as that the duty of the creature is not abolished, so offers grace as not to exclude our care and use of means: justification and sanctification promote one another, all is ordered with good advice: "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5). Thus the wonderful harmony, order, and consent of all the parts with respect to the great end, which was the glorifying of God and the subjection of the creature, demonstrate the wonderfulness of God's testimonies. The glorifying of God's grace and mercy in those that are saved, and his justice in those that are damned: with respect to this, God made man upright, furnished with abilities to do his will; but mutable, and, in case of a fall, to begin with a new covenant. He will have his mercy honoured without prejudice to his justice; the comfort of the creature established so as duty not abolished; not all of commands, nor all of promises, but these interwoven, that they may serve one another. A promise at the back of a command, to make it effectual; command beside a promise, to cause humbling; neither looseness nor rigour. If the covenant had been left to our ordering, it had been a confused business. Now it is wonderfully suited; God keepeth up his dominion and sovereignty, notwithstanding his grace and condescension; justice hath full satisfaction, yet grace glorified.

5. Wonderful for the power of it. There is a mighty power that goeth along with the word of God, and astonisheth the hearts of those that consider it and feel it: "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost" (1 Thes. i. 5). By this power, it doth not only fit the head with notions, but pierceth the heart, alarms the conscience, awakens the affections: "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. iv. 12). This power was seen in the wonderful success of that doctrine and religion which the Scriptures do establish. It hath diffused and spread itself like leaven in the mass and lump, throughout all parts of the known world, within the space of thirty or forty years, or thereabouts. *Hesterni sumus* (saith Tertullian), *et tamen omnia vestra implevimus, urbes, insulas, castella, municipia, conciliabula, castra, tribus, decurias, palatium, senatum, forum: sola vobis relinquimus templa*: We are but of yesterday, and yet how are we increased! Christians are found in all places, cities, villages, isles, castles, free towns, councils, armies, senate, markets, everywhere but in the idol-temples. Such a wonderful increase and success was there in a short time! The Apostle, "The word of the truth of the Gospel, which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you" (Col. i. 5, 6). The doctrine itself is contrary to nature; it doth not court the senses, nor woo the flesh; it offereth no splendour of life, nor pleasures, nor profits; but biddeth deny all these things, and expect persecution; "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. xvi.

24). It only telleth us of spiritual comforts, and the recompences of another world. Mahomet allured his followers with fair promises of security and carnal pleasure, their wind and tide went one way. Man is credulous of what he desireth; but Christ telleth us of denying ourselves, taking up the cross, cutting off right hand, and plucking out right eye, rowing against the stream of flesh and blood, bearing out sail against all the blasts and furious winds without. Here is nothing lovely to a carnal eye. This was the doctrine: it taught the proud world, humility; the uncharitable world, love of their enemies; the unchaste world, that a glance is adultery: "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. v. 28): the revengeful world, to turn the other cheek to the smiter; the covetous man, to be liberal, not to cark and take thought for worldly things, but to lay up treasures in Heaven; the dissolute world, to walk circumspectly, in all godliness and honesty. The persons and instruments that were to manage the doctrine, were in the world's eye contemptible; a few fishermen, destitute of all worldly props and aids; of no power, wealth, secular wisdom, authority, and other such advantages, as are apt to beget a repute in the world; yet they preached, and converted many nations, though they had no public interest, were not backed with the power of princes, as superstitions are wont to prevail by their countenance and example: "Many seek the ruler's favour" (Prov. xxix. 26). But the Gospel had gotten firm footing in the world long ere there was a prince to countenance it; there were many to persecute it, none to profess it. As the instruments were poor, so the persons that received their message: "Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" (James ii. 5); "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1 Cor. i. 26). When destitute of worldly succours and supports, it held up head. *Ne videretur autoritate traxisse aliquos, et veritatis ratione, non pompæ gratia, præcaleret*, saith Ambrose. It was much it should hold up head; yea, the powers of the world against it, bonds, and sufferings, and deaths did abide for them everywhere that professed this way. Horrible tortures; never did war, pestilence, and famine, sweep away so many, as the first persecutions. Poor Christians were murdered and butchered everywhere; yet still they multiplied, as the Israelites did in Egypt, under oppression; or as a tree lopped sends forth more sprouts. As without worldly interests, they had not such gifts of art, eloquence, and policy, as the world with whom they had to deal: all was carried on in a plain way, without pomp of words. Paul was learned; but he laid aside his ornaments, lest the cross of Christ should be of none effect: "And my speech, and my preaching, was not with enticing words of man's wisdom; but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. ii. 4, 5). They were to deal with men of excellent parts and learning, some of which received the Gospel. This plain doctrine was set afoot in that part of the world where arts and civil discipline most flourished at that time, and were in their ἀκμή. Thus, as Aaron's rod devoured the magicians' serpents, so was the Gospel too hard for the wisdom of the world: it prevailed not by force of arms, and the power of the long sword, as all dotages do, and superstitions are planted; but "overcame him by

the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. xii. 11). Christ's sword is in his mouth: "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger" (Psalm viii. 2). This way seemed to the world a novel way; they were leavened with prejudices, and bred up by long custom, which is a second nature, in the worship of idols: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers" (1 Peter i. 18). Men keep to the religion of their ancestors with much reverence. Christ did not seize upon the world as a waste is seized upon for the next owner. The ark was to be set up in the temple, that was already occupied and possessed by Dagon. Before Christ could be seated in the government of the nations, first Satan was to be dispossessed, and superstitions, received by a long tradition and prescription of time, were to be removed, the wolf hunted out. Thus the power great.

But this is past and gone. There is a wonderful power that goes along with the word.

(1.) A power to humble and terrify those that scoffed at the miracles: "When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts ii. 37.) The word can do that which a miracle cannot, make the stoutest hearts relent and yield. One instance more: "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled" (Acts xxiv. 25). Mark the disadvantage, the prisoner maketh the judge tremble, the man none of the tenderest, a Pagan, and to boot an obdurate sinner; but Paul, by his power, caused these. Terrors of conscience, which are raised by the word, all wicked men feel not, but soon may; they fear them that feel not: "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light; lest his deeds should be reproved" (John iii. 20). Conviction in one of these spiritual agonies exceeds all natural passions: fears of the wrath of God scorch more, and breed more restlessness and disquietness to the soul; their thoughts become a burthen to them: "He is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25). His sins revived, the poor creature lieth grovelling.

2. There is a converting and transforming power in the word of God: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. i. 16); "For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God" (1 Thes. i. 9); from a false to a true, a bad to a better. Men brought up in a false religion, there is much ado to take them off: "Hath a nation changed their gods?" (Jer. ii. 11.) Though their worship be never so vain and foolish, yet this power the word hath, even over those that have been rooted and habituated in superstitious customs. The gods they had prayed to in their adversities, praised in their prosperity, deprecated their anger when any judgment upon them, magnified their goodness when any good received, built them temples, offered them gifts; must they break those images, destroy those temples, deny those gods? How dear idols are, Rachael's stealing away her father's images clearly showeth (Gen. xxxi. 34). She was

one of them that built God's Israel; yet she hath a hankering after her father's idols. No humours so obstinate and stiff as those that are found in religious customs: they accused Stephen for changing the customs Moses delivered (Acts vi. 14), and Paul, that he taught customs which were not lawful for Romans to observe (Acts xvi. 21). Certainly, it is a very hard thing to bring men out of an old religion into a new one; the converting of man from a state of nature to a state of grace, so that they were as it were born again: "Of his own will begat he us, with the word of truth; that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures" (James i. 18). It is a hard matter to change natures, to turn a lion into a lamb: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall dwell with the kid, and the calf and the young lion, and the fating together; and a little child shall lead them" (Isa. xi. 6). Yet this will the Gospel do, make him that resembleth the Devil in his contempt of God, envy, revenge, to be like Christ; I say the Gospel doth it: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. iii. 18). To bring us to love what we naturally hate, and to hate what we naturally love; that the heart should be turned from all creatures, himself and all, to God; that they should be induced to turn from the creature to God, to seek out happiness in him; from self to Christ; from sin to holiness; that God's desires should be our desires; his will, our will; his delights, our delights; the natural heart is averse from this: "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. viii. 7). That the hearts, spirits, dispositions of men should be turned upside down: "Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (2 Cor. vi. 9—11): "Instead of the thorn, shall come up the fir-tree; and, instead of the brier, shall come up the myrtle-tree" (Isa. lv. 13). A mighty change wrought, to be changed not only in their lives, but natures.

(3.) In comforting poor distressed souls: their sore runneth upon them, and their soul refuseth comfort, when they have all things in the world; but yet, as there are no sorrows like wounds of conscience for degree, so no comforts. Groans unutterable, so joys unutterable; nothing left that will comfort, it is as the whole of their joy; the reviving of poor wounded spirits is one of the greatest wonders in the world. Creatures can do nothing, reason and human discourse can do nothing; it proceedeth from the apprehension of God's wrath provoked by sin: "If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom: his flesh shall be fresher than a child's, he shall return to the days of his youth" (Job xxxiii. 23—25). Nothing but the covenant of his peace will still such a soul; a Scripture wound will only be cured by Scripture plasters. He that puts the soul on the racks of conscience, can alone release us: "I create the fruit of the lips" (Isa. lvii. 9), to be peace; "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein; and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jer. vi. 16); "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy

laden; and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. xi. 28, 29).

(1.) The confirming and strengthening power of the word, that we may despise the world, encounter all difficulties and discouragements, and be cheerful as the martyrs were in the midst of flames, all the oppositions of Satan: "I have written unto you young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you; and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1 John ii. 14); "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts xx. 32). In the word of his grace, God hath assured us of the great privileges of Christianity, support and defence here, and glory hereafter; and that is a mighty strengthening to the soul, and maketh a Christian also glorious, and becoming all those hopes and promises that are given him.

SERMON CXLII.

VERSE 129.—*Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore doth my soul keep them.*

USE I.—Reproof to several sorts.

1. Of those proud carnalists that scorn the simplicity of the word. Many wit themselves into Hell by lifting up the pride of reason against the word of God; think all respect to the word to be fond credulity. To them the Gospel seemeth a base and a mean doctrine, whereas it is indeed wonderful. They never studied it, and therefore think nothing but plain points in it; have no spiritual eyes, and are looking on what is uppermost.

There is nothing vulgar, the angels prize what they contemn: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. iii. 10). They despise the word, as if it were too low a discipline for their wit and parts, scoff at that as mean which a gracious heart findeth to be mystery; they see none of this sublimity that we speak of; this pearl of price seemeth to them but as a common stone. This is pride not to be endured, for the foolishness of man to contemn the wisdom of God. The excellency of Scripture can never be sufficiently understood; they never pierced the depths of Scripture, else they would find it sublime and subtle enough; but they are ignorant of what they seem to understand so well: "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. viii. 2).

2. Others that give up themselves to the itch of curiosity, must have mysteries made more mystical; and therefore fly from the letter of the Scriptures to ungrounded subtleties and spiritualities, as if all the written word were an allegory: "But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan" (Rev. ii. 24). Men must have βάζη, but βάζη τῆ Σατανᾶ, are loth to be tethered to a few common truths. The bait to our first parents was the fruit of the tree, it is good for knowledge: "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to

be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat" (Gen. iii. 5, 6). If any be of such a rigid temper and constitution as not to be moved with the pleasures of the senses, Satan draweth them to nice and ungrounded speculations: they would be wise above the rate which God hath allowed, run into strange and uncouth notions; and so many, otherwise of a sober life, have an unsound judgment.

3. Those that would fathom these mysteries by the line and plummet of their own reason, believe God's word, and the things contained in it, no further than they can see natural reasons for it, these are not disciples of the doctrine of Christ, but judges, and set a prince at the subject's bar; the scantling of their own private senses and reason is made the standard for the highest mysteries to be measured by. They come to judge the word rather than to be judged by it. Mysteries are to be admired, not curiously searched and discussed by mere human reason. Every light must keep its place; sense, reason, faith, light of glory. If sense be made the judge of reason, there is wrong judgment. Some things we apprehend by reason, that cannot be known by sense, as that the sun is bigger than the earth. So faith corrects reason: shall we doubt of that to be true which droppeth from God's own mouth, because it exceedeth our weak understanding?

4. Those that prostitute their wonder to every paltry, carnal vanity. Oh! what trifles are these to the wonders of God's law! If we see a fair building, we cry out, Oh! wonderful! as the disciples: "Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" (Mark xiii. 1.) Oh! there are God's testimonies! a more noble nature, the person of Christ: "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. ii. 9). 'Oh! wonderful!' at a heap of money: what are these to the unsearchable riches of grace? rare plot, *μέγα μυστήριον*, all in and about Christ is rare; his name is "Wonderful." He that found out the causes of things by philosophy, could say, *Nil admirari*; but he that hath the most knowledge of religion, as to Divine things, may say, *Omnia admirari*; the transcendent goodness of God in the pardon of sins! riches of everlasting glory! purity of Divine commands! but, as to the world, *Nil admirari*: you know better things in God's testimonies.

5. Those that find more savour, and more matter to wonder at, in other books, in Plato, in Aristotle, or Heathen writers; they have a savour there, a wonder there; but are not affected with those mysteries and those notions which are in the Gospel. They like those books where they find flowers of rhetoric, or chemical experiments, philosophical notions, maxims of policy; but they slight the word.

6. Those that admire more what man puts into an ordinance than the word of God. The further off anything is from the majesty of the Scriptures, the more it taketh with unregenerate men, taken with toys and baubles of delight more than the substantial goodness of Christianity. We are apt to say of the labour of man, excellences of man, 'Admirable!' but we little regard the truths of God; as in a field of corn, prize the poppies and well-coloured weeds, but slight and overlook the more valuable corn.

USE II.—Instruction. To instruct us how to entertain the word of God. We never entertain it rightly, till we entertain it with wonder.

Considerations:—

1. We have not a true sight and sense of the word, if we admire it not. There is such transcendent love, admirable depths of wisdom, unsearchable treasures of happiness, raised strains of purity, an harmonious coinci-

dence of all parts. What would we admire, but that which is great and excellent? Why are not we, then, transported and ravished with those wonderful felicities, as the favour of and fellowship with God, everlasting enjoyment? Nothing is of such weight and importance as this is; all is nothing to this: "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. iii. 8). Would we admire what is rare and strange? As the object of wonder is *inaudibile et inspiratum*, it could not enter into the heart of man to conceive what God hath done for us in Christ! Unheard of, unlooked for: "And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come; and is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" (2 Sam. vii. 19.) If we wonder at what is wise and deep, the terms upon which salvation is dispensed and propagated are with excellent wisdom: "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" (1 Cor. ii. 7). These are mysteries that lie out of the road of vulgar understandings.

2. Upon every new looking, it argueth some distemper, unless we wonder. Either carelessness of soul-necessities, or stupidity, and unattentiveness, or else carnal savour prevailing too much.

3. It is a great help to practice. The more the word is admired, the more reverence it striketh into the conscience; the more it is submitted unto, the more should we frame our practice. In the text, "Therefore doth my soul keep them." The word must be kept; not only affected with it, but our esteem must last, and we must ever be tender of doing anything contrary to it. It must be kept by the soul, there is the directive and commanding power; it must be preserved or kept there, not confined there. If not kept there, it will not be kept elsewhere: there understanding is clear, conscience awful, heart ready. Human authority reacheth no further than to bind men to conform to order in the course of their practice; but Divine authority bringeth under the heart and thoughts to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. x. 4). It bindeth the conscience to approve of God's commanded will, to choose it with affection, to embrace it with the whole man, to follow on with strength and constant endeavours. Therefore wonderful, partly because a renewed esteem is the beginning of a pure and entire subjection to it. Why did any give up themselves to the discipline of it? Plato and Zeno's doctrine was admired. So to God, reverence is the mother of obedience. If we have not a slight esteem of the word, we shall look more after keeping of it. And partly, because wonderfulness of promises evidenceth them to be of God, it commendeth itself to the consciences of men.

Means:—

First, A spiritual gust, to relish knowledge and spiritual things. A brutish soul admires the sweetness of carnal things; the sober part of the world, that prize intellectual food, the perfections of the mind, they have a taste and relish for those things: "How sweet is thy word to my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm exix. 103.) A sensual heart is not affected with these things.

Secondly, A diligent search: "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God" (Eph. iii. 9). The more diligently we search into these things, the more we admire them. A superficial view satisfieth and con-

tenteth sooner than a deep search. Herein they differ from other things; for the more they are searched into, the less they are admired; imperfections which formerly lay hid, then come in view.

Thirdly, A thorough insight, or spiritual illumination: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psalm cxix. 18); and, "Make me to understand the way of thy precepts; so shall I talk of thy wondrous works" (verse 27). The testimonies of God have more in recess than in open view.

Fourthly, Experience; if we have felt the wonderful power, majesty, and authority of the word: "Ye shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you free" (John viii. 32). Where there is no such effect, they have no experience.

Fifthly, Show forth the wonderfulness of God's testimonies, by the raisedness of your conversations. They disparage the word that live at a mean rate: "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power" (2 Tim. iii. 5); "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you. On their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified" (1 Peter iv. 14).

SERMON CXLIII.

VERSE 130.—*The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.*

In the former verse, David had commended the word from the wonderfulness and mysteriousness thereof, here from its clearness and perspicuity, "Thy testimonies are wonderful;" yet they give light. The entrance giveth light to the simple. The one property doth not hinder the other, upon a twofold account:—

First, Because the truths revealed in Scripture are of two sorts: some are plain doctrines, fit for the entertainment of novices, and may be called the porch and entrance; others are deep mysteries, to exercise the wits of the strongest. In the waters of the sanctuary, in some places the elephant may swim; in others, the lamb may wade. The penmen of the Scripture acknowledged themselves to be debtors to wise and foolish, learned and unlearned: "I am debtor both to the Greeks and Barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise" (Rom. i. 14); and accordingly were made use of to discover truths of all sorts. There are *ὑπερόψατα*, not all things, nor the most material, but "*some* things hard to be understood" (2 Peter iii. 16). God hath expressed his mind in some points so, that the sharpest-sighted will not at first glance easily take up the meaning of it. Other things are plain, and easy, and obvious, so that the very entrance, or first sight of them, giveth understanding.

Secondly, From the manner; because, though there are mysteries and things naturally unknown to us, yet they are not obscurely delivered, so as that we should despair to understand them; but in a plain and familiar style, depths of mystery in plainness of words. Therefore the simplest who desire to know so much as may comfort and save their souls, ought not to be hindered and discouraged in the study of the Scriptures. The sum is, some things are open and clear, other things dark and mysterious; but, though hard to be understood, yet not impossible to be understood;

most things plain, none impossible: "The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." In these words,—

1. What, or the benefit we have by the Scriptures, set forth by two words: the one metaphorical, "giveth light;" the other literal, "it giveth understanding." That is it, which is meant by light.

2. How or whence we have this light, from the entrance of the word.

3. To whom? "To the simple."

The first thing explained in the text, it giveth light; that is, it giveth understanding. Two questions then remain by way of explication.

First, What is meant by "the entrance of thy word." Some render it *ostium*, the door, as Jerome; the Septuagint, ἑλῳσις; the Vulgar, the declaration; we, the entrance. The word *petack* signifieth door, gate, or opening. The expression giveth us occasion,—

1. To distinguish of truth in Scripture. There is *ostium* and *penetrals*, the porch of knowledge and the secret chambers of it. The porch I should take for the first vital, essential, necessary truths, that concern faith and practice: those are obvious to every one that looks into the Scriptures. The inner chambers are those more abstruse points, that do not so absolutely concern the life of grace, but yet conduce *ad plenitudinem scientiæ*, serve for the increase of knowledge. Those that are in the porch, and have not as yet pierced into the depths of Scripture, may yet have so much light as to direct them into solid piety.

2ndly, Every door hath a key belonging to it; so hath this a key to open it, which Christ hath in his keeping: "He that hath the key of David; he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth" (Rev. iii. 7). The officers of the church are in part entrusted with it for the good of the church. Christ saith, "Ye [the lawyers] have taken away the key of knowledge: ye enter not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered" (Luke xi. 52). Such unfaithful ones hath every age almost afforded, that shut the door of knowledge against the people. Papists that lock up the Scriptures in an unknown tongue, are grossly guilty of it: others, that hinder plain and powerful preaching, cannot excuse themselves from being accessory to this guilt; yea, those that obscure the plain word of God by philosophy, traditions of men, or careless handling. Tertullian complained long ago of those *qui Platonium et Aristotelicum Christianismum producunt Christianis*.

3rdly, By this door opened there is entrance, and so cometh in our word. This entrance may be understood actively or passively; when the word entereth into us, or we enter into it.

1. Actively, when the word entereth upon a man's heart, and maketh a sanctified impression there; as the expression is, "When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul" (Prov. ii. 10). This entrance of the word bringeth light with it: the first creature God made was light, so in the new creature: therefore it concerns us to know what manner of entrance the word had upon us: "For they themselves show of us, what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God" (1 Thes. i. 9).

2. Passively, when men do first enter upon the study of the word. It may be read, the entrance unto thy word, as well as of thy word: when once acquainted with it, and the first rudiments of knowledge, we should soon discern the Lord's mind in the necessary truths that concern faith and practice.

Secondly, The other question is what is meant by “the simple?” The word is sometimes used in a good sense, sometimes in a bad.

1. In a good sense.

1st, For the sincere and plain-hearted: “The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me” (Psalm cxvi. 6); “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward” (2 Cor. i. 12).

2. For those that do not oppose the presumption of carnal wisdom to the pure light of the word: so we must be all simple, or fools, that we may be wise: “If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise” (1 Cor. iii. 18); that is, in simplicity of heart submitting to God’s conduct, and believing what he hath revealed. The Septuagint, in the text, *Φωτίζει δὲ συνετίζει νηπίους*, enlighteneth and giveth understanding to the babes; and so they often translate this word, babes or little ones: thence Christ’s saying: “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. xi. 25). Not to worldly wise, but babes in comparison; not to conceitedly wise, but those that are sensible of their own ignorance.

2ndly, In a bad sense for the ignorant.

1. In the general, every man is naturally dull and ignorant in Divine things: “Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt” (Job. xi. 12); for grossness, as well as untamedness. So every man is simple.

2. Those that are naturally weak of understanding, or of mean capacity: “To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion” (Prov. i. 4); “O ye simple, understand wisdom; and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart” (Prov. viii. 5). In all these senses, may the text be made good; I take the last chiefly intended.

Observations:—

1. Observe somewhat from that word “the entrance.”

DOCTRINE I.—That, in getting knowledge, there is a porch and entrance that we must pass through, before we can attain to deeper matters.

As in practice there is a gate and a way: “Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life” (Matt. vii. 14). An entrance, and a progress; an entrance by conversion to God, and a progress in a course of holy walking. So, in knowledge, there are *τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν λόγων τοῦ Θεοῦ*, “the first principles of the oracles of God;” or some elements, and afterwards deeper mysteries; milk for babes, as well as meat for stronger men: “For, when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk, is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. v. 12—14). There is an order in bringing men to knowledge.

First, There is something obvious and lies uppermost in all truths, that is soon understood; and this we put into catechisms. We must teach as able to bear: “And with many such parables spake he the word unto

them, as they were able to hear it" (Mark iv. 33). Indeed, afterwards we come to dig into the mines of knowledge, and to dive deeper, as choice metals do not lie on the surface, but in the bowels; therefore we should not content ourselves with a superficial search, but dig as for treasure in a mine: "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures" (Prov. ii. 4). So Paul, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ: I have fed you with milk, and not with strong meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able" (1 Cor. iii. 1, 2). By milk, he meaneth the plain handling of the doctrines of Christian religion, according to the capacity of those that are weak in knowledge; and, by meat, the more exact and curious handling of those points. Our weakness enforceth that we begin with the one; but we must go on to the other, for several reasons. Partly, because we are to grow in knowledge as well as other graces: "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge" (2 Peter i. 5). Besides that knowledge that maketh way for faith and virtue, there is a knowledge to be added to it, a great skill in Divine things. Partly, because those obvious truths will be better improved and retained when we look more into them: after-notions do explain and ground the former. First we receive the truth, and after we are rooted and grounded in it: "If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel" (Col. i. 23). A half light makes us very unsettled in our course; but, when we grow judicious, have a fuller and clearer apprehension of truths, we are the more confirmed against the error of the wicked; whereas, otherwise, light chaff is carried about with every wind. Partly, because the more we understand a truth, the more dominion it hath over our faith and practice; for God beginneth with the understanding, and grace is multiplied by knowledge: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you, through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Peter i. 2). A truth simply understood, hath not such operation and force, as when it is soundly and thoroughly understood. Love aboundeth with judgment: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil. i. 9).

Secondly, There are first principles and fundamental doctrines that must be first taught in a plain and easy way. I say, some things are initial and fundamental, others additional and perfective: we must regard both; the one in our entrance, the other in our growth: the one are called "the first principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. v. 12); partly, because they are first in order, and first to be taught and learned; partly, because they are chief and fundamental truths of the Gospel, upon which the rest depend, most conducing to salvation; the foundation laid well, the building will stand the stronger. They are reckoned up: "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" (Heb. vi. 1, 2). In the general, he calls them the principles of Christ. The doctrine of Christ is the sum of religion; he that hath learned it well, hath learned all. In particular, repentance from dead works is made the first, or that a sinful creature must turn to God by Christ before he can be happy. The next is faith towards God, believing the promises and privileges of the Gospel, and depending on

him till they be accomplished. Indeed, in these two is the sum of religion sometimes comprised: "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts xx. 21). So, "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts v. 31). Doctrine of baptism, it is the initiating ordinance, what it signifieth, to what it obligeth. Laying on of hands, the way of Christ's officers entering into the church. Resurrection and last judgment bindeth all. The prime truths are few and clear, ignorant and unlearned people may know them; they are milk, babes and ignorants may swallow them, as most easy of digestion; God's end in the Scripture being to guide his people to true happiness. Those truths that are necessary to this end are few and clear, and plainly set down, that he that runneth may read them. Though we reach no other points, yet, if we get but to this door, there is a great deal of profit.

Thirdly, They which do not first learn these, cannot profit much. Some confused knowledge they may acquire; but distinct, clear, and orderly understanding they never grow unto. When men run before they can go, they often get a knock. They that were never well grounded, are always mutable; therefore, before we are brought into the chambers of knowledge, we must stay in the porch, begin with most necessary things, which are most clear and plain, and thereby we are made capable of higher mysteries.

Though all Christians must come to this pitch, to know what is necessary to salvation, yet we must not stay here, nor always stay in the porch, nor always keep to our milk, nor be always infants in understanding: "Brethren, be not children in understanding" (1 Cor. xiv. 20). Other things must be regarded, or why hath God revealed them? No part of Scripture is expressed in vain or at random, but all by Divine direction; though the first points are most necessary, yet the rest are not superfluous, but have their use: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. iii. 16); one part of Scripture as well as another; and maketh much for the increase of spiritual knowledge, comfort, and godliness. One part is milk, another stronger meat; but all is food for the soul. The grown are more ready to every good work, more strong in the resistance of sin, more steadfast in the truth; therefore we should improve our knowledge. If a man layeth the foundation, and doth not carry on the building, he loseth his cost; therefore let us up to go on to perfection.

USE I.—Let us bless God for this door and porch, that the Scriptures are so plain and clear in all things necessary to salvation. Many complain of the difficulty and obscurity of religion, and the many controversies that are about it; and they know not what to choose, nor where to find the truth, till the world be more of a mind. It is true, in some things there is difficulty, but not in the most necessary things: *Pascimur apertis, exercemur obscuris; ibi fames pellitur, hic fastidium*. God has made his people's way clear and sure in necessities, for which we have cause to bless his name, for exercising our diligence and dependence. Something is difficult: if those that complain of this difficulty would enter into the porch that standeth open, other things would soon be understood. Whatever differences there are in Christendom, all agree that there is one God,

Jesus Christ his only Son, who died for the world, and accordingly must be owned by his people; that a man must be converted to God, and become a new creature, and walk holily, or else he shall never see God: all are agreed in this. Prepare thy heart for entertaining the light and power of these truths, and in due time God will show thee other things. In the mean time, bless God that whatever is necessary is plain to them that are docile, and heedful, and willing to do the will of God. As, in the world, the most necessary things are at hand, the less necessary are hidden in the bowels of the earth; so, in the Scripture, necessaries are facile and easy.

2. Let us use this method in learning and teaching of others. In learning ourselves, first, be sure to get a clear understanding of, and firm assent unto, the main plain truths of Scripture, that there is one God: "He that cometh to God, must believe that he is" (Heb. xi. 6); that Jesus Christ is the Son of God: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3). It is a corner truth, that enliveneth all religion: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. xvi. 16); then, "Upon this rock I will build my church; we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John vi. 69). This is the great enlivening truth, that hath influence both on faith and obedience. We must believe that he is able to bring us to God (John xiv. 6; Heb. vii. 25), and must be obeyed (Heb. v. 9), that every man needeth this Christ to bring him to God (Acts iv. 12). There is a necessity of his merit, that God may be propitious; of his Spirit, as the foundation of a new life, that we may be reconciled to God; that we should live holily, because there is a day of account when every one shall receive according to his works. We should bestow more cost upon the main truths, to get a clear, distinct knowledge of them; there must be a removing of rubbish, and digging, to lay the foundation of the knowledge of the principles of the doctrine of Christ, before there can be any safe building, or going on unto perfection (Heb. vi.), and firm assent to them. For he is the best Christian, that doth most clearly understand and firmly believe these things. Not the opinionist, the disputer, he that best promotes the interest of his party or side, which are the distempers now afoot in Christendom. Those truths, well accepted, would so purify the heart as we should sooner discern God's interest in other things, and be able to find out that. So for teaching our children, God reckons on it from his people: "For I know him [Abraham], that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment" (Gen. xviii. 19); "And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. vi. 6, 7). Train them up in wholesome truths, "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. vi. 4); how to carry themselves towards God in matters of religion; how towards men, in righteousness, civility, and good manners; chiefly that they may be instructed in the knowledge of Christ, and salvation by him.

3. Let the entertainment we have upon our first entrance into the study of religion, encourage us to follow on to know the Lord, that we may see more into his mind and counsel concerning us. When we are first serious, we have notable experience of light, and comfort, and power; this is a bribe to draw us on further; more light, for it is a growing thing: "The

path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18); more taste, "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious; to whom coming, as unto a living stone," &c. (1 Peter 2—4.) It should sharpen and put an edge upon our desires; more power, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures: wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James i. 18, 19). You saw the entrance, and your first acquaintance with the word succeeded well.

DOCTRINE II.—By the word of God we get light, or our understandings are enlightened: "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life" (Prov. vi. 23).

First, Light is a great benefit. This is the perfection of the rational nature, the benefit that we have above the beasts: "He teacheth us more than the beasts of the field:" they are guided by instinct, ruled by a rod of iron; we have reason, and in it more resemble God, who "is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John i. 5); we come nearest to our happiness in Heaven; it is called "the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. i. 12). Our knowledge is perfected, and the vision of God is our happiness: "For now we see through a glass, darkly: but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. xiii. 12).

Secondly, This light hath excellent properties.

1st, It is *lux manifestans*, it manifesteth itself and all things else. How do I see the sun, but by the sun, by its own light? how do I know the Scripture to be the word of God, but by the light that shineth in it, commending itself to my conscience? So it manifests all things else. By this light, a man may see everything in its own colours; it layeth open all the frauds and impostures of Satan, the vanity of worldly things, the deceits of the heart, the odiousness of sin: "All things that are reprov'd, are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make manifest is light" (Eph. v. 8—13). It sets out the odiousness of sin, as a breach of God's most holy law, enmity against the great God, the procurer of his eternal wrath. Nothing manifests things as this light doth.

2ndly, It is *lux dirigens*, a directing light, that we may see our way and work. As the sun lighteth man to his labour, so doth this direct us in all conditions: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm cxix. 105). It directs us how to manage ourselves in all conditions, in prosperity, adversity; in all affairs, paths, steps, in all the particular actions of our life; it filleth us with spiritual prudence: the wayfaring, the fool, a man of parts that is a stranger, the man of mean parts, all may meet with plain and clear directions hence to guide them in the way to Heaven.

3rdly, It is *lux vivificans*, a quickening light. *Lux est vehiculum influentiarum*, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John viii. 12); "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. v. 14). That light was the life of men: so is this spiritual life; it not only discovereth the object, but helpeth the faculty, filleth the soul with life and strength.

4thly, It is *lux exhilarans*, a comforting, refreshing, cheering light:

“Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun” (Ecl. xi. 7). It is so in two respects:—

1. It presents us with excellent grounds of comfort, not only against afflictions, but against distress of conscience, which is the greatest trouble that can befall the creature; such as the sense of God’s love in Christ: so it rejoiceth the soul: “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm xix. 8). It doth us good to the heart. Others tickle the senses, but are not affliction-proof, stead us not when God rebuketh us for sin. The light of God’s countenance is displayed in the word: “There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased” (Psalm iv. 6, 7).

2. Because it is a soul-satisfying light; as light easeth of trouble and restlessness of mind, which we always lie under, till we find a safe way of salvation; which we never do till we give up ourselves to the conduct of the word: “Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein; and ye shall find rest for your souls” (Jer. vi. 16). There we find enough to satisfy conscience, though, it may be, not to satisfy curiosity, which is *libido intellectus*: thirst of a sober man, and thirst of a drunkard; the one satisfied, the other mortified.

USE I.—Information.

1. That without the word men lie in darkness, whatever learning they have, if they want the Gospel. As the Ephesians, before it came to them, though given to curious arts, the Apostle telleth them they “were sometimes darkness” (Eph. v. 8). The wisest Heathens could only grope and feel about for happiness. If they neglect the light, though it be among them, it is not excusable: “And the light shineth in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not” (John i. 5). But, if they refuse the light, and this carelessness groweth obstinate, their condition is the worse: “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John iii. 19).

2. If we get not understanding of the mysteries of salvation, we may blame ourselves: “But, if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. iv. 3, 4). If thou miss the way to Heaven, accuse thine own blindness; thou canst not accuse the Gospel, plead its darkness. The true cause of their non-proficiency is unbelief, they believe not; the superadded cause is spiritual blindness.

USE II.—Is exhortation, to look after this light, without which we shall be in the dark as to comfort: “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?” (Isa. l. 10:) either under actual horrors, or doubtfulness and uncertainty. Every wicked man is troubled, as the leaves of the trees of the wood are shaken with the wind. Now, who would live in such a condition, to be at the mercy of the tempter? You are in the dark, as to duty: our own reason, the council and example of others, will mislead us; and we shall be unsteady, carried away with every deceit of sin, at least unsatisfied whether in God’s way or no: “He that hateth his brother is in

darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes" (1 John ii. 11). Oh! study the word! But who have this light?

1. He that heartily desireth knowledge: "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding" (Prov. ii. 3); he that diligently labours for it: "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm i. 2). That propoundeth a right end, to be Christ's disciple, to do God's will: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John vii. 17). That humbleth himself for his ignorance; John got open the book with weeping: "And one of the elders said unto me, Weep not; behold the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book" (Rev. v. 5). Those Bereans were *πρόζηυμοι*, "they received the word with all readiness of mind" (Acts xvii. 11); *ἑυπειθής*, "easy to be entreated" (James iii. 17). The opposite, on the one side, is slowness of heart: "O fools, and slow of heart, to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke xxiv. 25.) Or obstinacy on the other, a sluggish easiness, when light of belief, to believe anything without searching into the reason of it, or given up to a foolish credulity: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. iv. 14); like a reed shaken with every wind. But he that is indued with this light, is one that doth not depend on his own wit, but submits his reason to God: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. iii. 5, 6). Well then, this earnest desire in the next verse, "I opened my mouth, and panted; for I longed for thy commandments." This painful seeker will find out this treasure; this humble, trusting soul will have it.

DOCTRINE III.—That the Scriptures are written so that plain and private men may get this light and spiritual understanding by them: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm xix. 7).

1. From the author, God, who is the fountain of light; and surely he was able and willing conveniently to express his mind to his creatures. Cannot God speak plainly? *Deus et mentis, et lingua, et vocis artifex*, as Lactantius calleth him. He that is so wise, so loving of mankind, our supreme judge and king, would he hide this light under a bushel? would he conceal his mind, and leave thee in the dark? "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. vi. 8.)

2. For whom the Scriptures were written: not for ministers or professed students; God speaketh to all sorts of men in the Scripture, and therefore would have all understand them. He wrote the Scripture that it might be read of all, young and old: "This commandment which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in Heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to Heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it," &c. (Deut. xxx. 11, 12.) Rich and poor, the king was to read in it all the days of his life: "It shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, he shall write him a copy of this

law in a book out of that which is before the priests, the Levites; and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life" (Deut. xvii. 18, 19). Every good man is to meditate in it: "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm i. 2); "These words which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. vi. 6, 7). The apostles wrote epistles to the whole church, spake to old men, youth, little children: "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning; I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one; I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father" (1 John ii. 13). To kings, judges, men, women, husbands, wives, fathers, children, masters, servants, was it written, for their use, nor must it be taken out of their hands, nor is it above their reach.

3. The end why it was written. To be a sure and infallible direction, to guide us to eternal life, and make us wise unto salvation: "And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. iii. 15). Not only so, but it is our food and means of growth: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter ii. 2). Every life hath food convenient for it. It is our weapon in temptation: "And take that helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. vi. 17). To be read by all in this spiritual warfare they are all engaged in. It is God's testament, therefore to be read by them to whom it is sent. God's letter must not be intercepted, upon all these reasons. There is enough to make wise the simple in Scriptures.

But is there nothing difficult in Scriptures? Answer: Yes, to subdue the pride of man's wit, to quicken us to wait and depend upon God for knowledge, to prevent contempt, to exercise our industry and diligence, and to fasten truths on our minds. There is some difficulty, but not such difficulty as that the people neither can nor ought to read them with profit; which is the dispute between us and Papists. There is no difficulty, but what is conquerable by that grace that God ordinarily dispenseth; and the means of explaining or applying; not a whole loaf, but a *dimensum*, his share; for it distributes to every man his portion.

USE I.—For the confutation of them that forbid the simple the use of the word. The Papists say, God's word is dark, and hard to be understood; therefore they lock it up from the people in an unknown tongue, as if none could profit by it but the learned sort. Yea, many among us are ready to say, What should simple men do with Scripture? and think all the confusions and troubles of the world come from giving people this liberty. Answer: Though in the word there are mysteries to exercise the greatest wits, yet there are plain truths to edify the simple. This text is a notable proof against them. It is good to have a text against every error of theirs. They are injurious to God; as if he had revealed his mind so darkly, or his word, that it were so doubtful and harmful that there were danger in reading it: injurious to the Scriptures, while they tax them with obscurity; injurious to the people of God, while they despise those whom the Lord inviteth, with their Pharisaical pride: "But this people, who knoweth not the law, are cursed" (John vii. 19), hinder them of their com-

fort. The simple have souls to save, therefore have need to see with their own eyes, to consider God's charter. They pretend they do it in mercy to the people, lest by their mistakes they should ruin themselves and introduce confusion into the world. They might as well say, all must be starved; and deny meat and drink, because some surfeit. But certainly they do it for their own interest; they have false wares to vend; and, to keep the people from discovering the errors they impose upon them, they would conceal the Scriptures from them. Ignorance is a friend to the Devil's kingdom. The blind go as they are led. They are afraid of the Scriptures, as a thief of a candle or the light, which would discover his villany, and hinder his design (John iii. 20).

USE II.—Of encouragement to poor Christians that have a sense of weakness. Before Plato's school was written, 'Let none but the learned come in hither;' but Christ inviteth the simple; that none might be discouraged, he speaketh to all sorts; "Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men: O ye simple, understand wisdom; and, ye fools, be of an understanding heart" (Prov. viii. 4, 5). That which is spoken to all, is thought to be spoken for none. Christ speaketh to men under their several distinctions, noble or base, young or old, rich or poor. If any earthly profit be offered to any that will take it, who will exempt themselves? None are so modest. But, in spiritual things, persons are more stupid. Let none be discouraged by weakness of parts; all are invited to learn, and here they may be taught of any capacity. Oh! but how many will say, 'I am so weak of understanding, that I shall make no work of such deep mysteries as are contained in the Scriptures?'

ANSWER.—1. Many times this objection cometh from a sluggish heart, to ease themselves of the trouble of a duty, as meditation or prayer; they pretend weakness, they would have a rule that would make knowledge.

2. If it be serious, God is able to interpret his own book unto thee. He must indeed open the door, or we cannot get into the knowledge of truths there. If you had better parts, you would be but groping about the door. He that hath not the right key, is as far from entering the house as he that hath none. If the Spirit of God be thy master, thou shalt learn, though never so blockish.

3. Wisdom stands upon the threshold, or at the door of God's word, as ready to open the treasures of knowledge; "The entrance of thy word giveth light." No sooner is a soul entered into the Spirit's school, but he becometh a proficient; on first acquaintance with Scriptures, he seeth great light. Yea, she sendeth abroad to invite comers, "She hath sent forth her maidens; she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither; as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled" (Prov. ix. 3—5). Therefore go on with thy duty. He that sent an interpreter to the eunuch to guide him, when reading part of Isaiah's prophecy which he understood not, will direct and guide thee in the knowledge of all necessary truths (Psalm xxv. 8, 9; Prov. ii. 2—5).

4. It is a good advantage to be sensible of our blindness: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and stand in need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes

with eye-salve, that thou mayest see" (Rev. iii. 17, 18). The first thing a man seeth, is his own blindness, nakedness, and wretchedness: "And Jesus said, for judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind" (John ix. 39). Many times they which conceitedly think they see, are made blind. Those that are ignorant, and humbled under the sense thereof, Christ will open their eyes; but they that are conceited of their own parts and knowledge, their hearts are darkened more and more, and they are given up to follow their own fancies. The simple may see further than others, because they swell not with the presumption of their own wit. *Surgunt indocti, et rapiunt calum, cum nos doctrinâ nostrâ detrudimur in Gehennam.* Sometimes simple people are more forward and earnest than others; and men of weak parts and small breeding may have strong affections. A blunt iron, when heated, may enter deeper into a board than a sharp tool when cold. Great doctors and rabbies are proud and careless; and poor broken-hearted sinners are warm and serious. Your labour will not be in vain.

SERMON CXLIV.

VERSE 131.—*I opened my mouth, and panted; for I longed for thy commandments.*

Here is the use that the Psalmist maketh of the former commendation of the word, it is wonderful and mysterious, clear and perspicuous; now he declareth his great affection to it. These words were used by Nazianzen, when his father committed to him the care of the church of Nazianzum: he beginneth his speech with it, Orat. 8, as being a word of more than ordinary comfort, and grace, and direction. David was in a fainting condition, through the passionateness of his desire, "I longed;" and that longing caused a languor, as all strong desires do. His affection wrought upon his body, or else affected his soul, as bodily refreshments desired and wanted do the body, "I opened my mouth, and panted; for I longed for thy commandments." In the words there are,—

1. The vehemency of his passion, "I opened my mouth and panted."

2. The reason or cause of it, "For I longed for thy commandments."

1. "I opened my mouth and panted:" a metaphor taken from men scorched and sweltered with heat, or from those that have run themselves out of breath, in following after the thing which they would overtake. The former metaphor expressed the vehemency of his love; the other, the earnestness of his pursuit: he was like a man gasping for breath, and sucking in the cool air. Judea was a hot country, and therefore such expressions are frequent. The like expressions, that come somewhat near it, are those, "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged" (2 Cor. vi. 11); when he did vehemently desire their profit. And Job saith, "They waited for me, as for the rain; they opened their mouth wide, as for the latter rain" (Job xxix. 23). A vehement, passionate desire affects the mind as an insatiate thirst the body. Thus will they be affected that are sensible of the wonders of the law, and enlightened by it. The reason of this passion, "I longed," noteth a high degree of desire. What did he long for? God's commandments; that is, the saving know-

ledge of the doctrine of salvation, or to find the use, benefit, light, comfort, and power, of the word of God.

DOCTRINE.—That God's children have strong and vehement affections and desires after the comfort and benefit of the word of God.

Here is,—

1. Opening the mouth, and
2. Panting, as for fresh air, and
3. Longing for the commandments.

All three expressions imply an intensiveness of affection. Surely David prized holiness at a greater rate than we do, or else he would not use expressions so strange to us! See the like Psalm cxix. 20, "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times." Desire is the stretching forth of the soul to the thing desired. Now, his soul did so stretch towards these spiritual comforts, that it did even break and crack again in the stretching. So, "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psalm xliii. 1). Harts are thirsty creatures, especially when chased, or having eaten serpents.

Considerations:—

First, The soul never worketh better than in the strength of some eminent affection. In all things that we take in hand, we do but so so, act but chilly and weakly, while we have a listless and remiss will; but, when the force of affection is upon us, the soul is carried on strongly, either in abomination or prosecution; for affections are the forcible and vigorous motions of the will. Now, the soul never doth well, but under such an affection. Were it not for affections, our nature would be sluggish and idle, as Plutarch, *ὡς περ κυβερνήτης πνεύματος ἐκλίποντος*, like a pilot at sea without a wind; the ship moveth slowly when there are no winds stirring to fill the sails. Or like a chariot without wheels or horses, or a bird when her wings are clipped. They spur us on to what we affect. Men are heavy and lazy, because they have no affection: "And Moses called Bezaleel, and Aholiab, and every wise-hearted man, in whose heart the Lord had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it" (Exod. xxxvi. 2). Man findeth a force within himself, his heart maketh him willing; the stronger the affections, the better the man acteth, with greater strength and vivacity; for they are the vigorous motions of the will.

Secondly, Of all affections, desires are most earnest and vehement; for they are the vigorous bent of the heart to that which is good, the motion and endeavour of the soul after it. As to good, the will chooseth it, and the heart affects a union with it, or desires to obtain it. This affection of union, simply considered, is *love*, which is an inclination of the soul to good, it presseth the heart to it; but, as it is an absent good, it is *desire*, which exciteth to pursue it earnestly. Desire doth all that is done in the world; for it lifteth up the soul to action, that we may possess those things that we desire; I desire it, and therefore I labour for it. Therefore the main thing that God craveth is the desire: "My son, give me thine heart" (Prov. xxiii. 26), which is the soul of desires; and therefore the people of God plead their sincerity: "The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee; with my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Isa. xxvi. 8, 9). Get but a desire to good things, to God, to his word, and it

will be a great help to you in spiritual things : "The desire of the righteous is only good" (Prov. xi. 23). It is well when the soul is set right; this is a strong, active, commanding faculty.

Thirdly, Of all desires, those which carry us out to holy things should bear sway, and be the greatest; for affections are not rationally exercised, unless they bear proportion to the objects they are conversant about. Now, the word, and things contained therein, are the most noble objects, and so most suitable for our desires, if we would act rationally; that appears upon these accounts:—

1st, Spiritual things are more noble; partly, because they concern the soul, whereas carnal things concern only the outward man. Our liveliest affections should be exercised about the weightiest things. Can we desire riches, and honours, and pleasures, which only concern the body, and shall we not desire comforts and graces which are necessary for the soul? It is irrational; for by this means we grow brutish and sensual. If our appetite desire only food and good pastures, and propagation of our kind, these desires soon exceed, and grow tempestuous and hurtful to the soul: "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. xiii. 14). There is a lawful care for the body; but this desire should not be chief, because the body is not the chief part of a man: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 33). The ennobling of the soul with grace, the settling of our conscience, the assuring of our everlasting estate, these things deserve our chiefest care. Partly, because these things are only useful to us in our passage, and so for a time; they are not useful to us in our home, and so for ever: "When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel" (Deut. xxiii. 24). We have these things for our use when here; but we carry nothing with us when we go hence. They who did occasionally pass through their neighbour's vineyard, might take for their necessity, but they must carry none home; and therefore, as to these things, all our acts must be non-acts; rejoice as if we rejoiced not (1 Cor. vii. 30, 31), desire as if we desired not. Affections here need a great deal of guiding, and a great deal of curbing, lest we sin in these less noble things; but, in spiritual, heavenly things, we can never do enough.

2ndly, Common and ordinary affection will not become God, or anything that cometh from God, or concerneth our enjoyment of him, or our communion with him. Surely we are to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and with all our might, and with all our souls (Deut. vi. 5). And as we are to love God, so in proportion his word, which is the means to enjoy him; therefore here we should stretch our desire to the utmost.

3rdly, An earnest bent only will do us good, and make us hold out in the pursuit of heavenly wisdom. It doth us good for the present, as it fits us to improve the word, as an appetite to our food. To eat with a stomach maketh way for digestion: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter ii. 2). And it is zeal only will bear us out. Besides the difficulties and oppositions from without, our hearts are full of contrary qualities and desires: "The flesh lusteth against the spirit;" so that nothing but a strong affection is for our turn. The greatest vehemency is but enough to bear us up in the prosecution of what is good; a weak desire will be soon chilled. Herod had some good desires: so have many, but not strong desires. He that affects

grace, should affect nothing so much as grace. A carnal man may be affected with what is good; but there is something that he affects more, vanities, profit, pleasures. Well then, spiritual desires should be drawn out to the utmost, because the object is more noble. These desires cannot degenerate, nor this affection be corrupted; and a common and ordinary affection doth not become these things. Nothing else will serve the turn.

4thly, Wherever these desires bear sway, it will be sensibly discovered by the effects, both to ourselves and others. A man may have a little joy, or a little grief, or a little anger, and nobody see it; but none of these affections can be in any strength and vigour, but we shall feel it, and others will observe it; for strong affections cannot be hid. Can a man carry fire in his bosom, and hide it? So there will be some expression of what thy heart affects. Can a man be under terrors, and not show it in his face? A concealed affection is no affection. Men may hide their hatred, but cannot hide their love: "Open rebuke is better than secret love" (Prov. xxvii. 5). These things tie body and soul together, move the spirits. So desire will show itself; yea, spiritual desire. What desire doth in other things, it will do in this. If there be longing, there will be fainting, gaping, breathing; for strong desires are hasty and impatient of satisfaction. Ahab's eager desire of Naboth's vineyard cast him upon his bed. The spouse was sick of love: "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him that I am sick of love" (Cant. v. 8). What! desire, and nobody see it? What! desire, and you never feel such a strong, urging affection? Surely, there will be secret, deep, and frequent sighs; there will be striving with God in prayer, and constant attendance upon God. Such an active affection cannot be hid. Most men desire so little, it cannot be known whether it be desire or no.

5thly, God's children have these desires, because they see more in the word than others do, or can do. Spiritual discerning is a help to spiritual affections. They whose eyes are anointed with spiritual eye-salve, see wonders in the law, and so are wondrously affected with them. But why should God's children see more?

1. They look through the spectacles of faith; they believe the commands to be the commands of the great God, the promises to be the promises of God, and therefore as good as performance; and so what to others seem fancies and fine dreams, to them are the chiefest realities: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them" (Heb. xi. 13). Who would, having the promises, be so strangely transported, but they that are strongly persuaded? Faith, that looketh upon the things promised as sure and near, maketh them more active and lively. They that have not faith, or do not exercise faith, have but cold affections; but they who believe these wonderful felicities which the word of God speaketh of, long to enjoy what they are sure is true.

2. They look into it with an eye of love, and love sets a price on things; they see more of the loveliness of spiritual things than others do. Men's affections are according to the constitution of their souls, or the end they propound to themselves. They that are carnally disposed, know all things after the flesh, and value them by the interests of the flesh, as that is gratified; and they that are spiritually disposed, are affected accordingly as men's genius lieth. And that is the reason why eminent grace hath strong affections, which carnal men are not competent judges of. It seemeth impro-

bable to them, that a man should have such fervent desires of holiness, and be able to speak thus to God; "I opened my mouth, and panted; for I longed for thy commandments." The constitution of their souls is quite otherwise, and their hearts hang world-ward; they have not such a sense of their duty, and do not make it their business to please God; and so, having no deep sense and conscience of their duty, they do not see such a need of the word as their guide and help. They have no love to these things, therefore no passionate desire; for this is the order, the will chooseth, love desireth the union, desire presseth to endeavours after it; but now a godly man, that maketh it his business to please God, the principal desire and choice of his will is, to be what God would have him to be, and to do what God would have him to do.

3. Because they have experience. Two things quicken our affection to anything that is good; namely, the knowledge of the worth and use of things, and our want of them. And the children of God know both of these by experience, in the course of that life wherein they are engaged; and nothing is known so intimately and pressingly, as what is known by experience. By experience, they see the want of the word of God, and in comforts and helps; not only when God first touched their hearts with care of saving their souls, and they were humble, and parched with a sense of sin and wrath; all things were then unsavoury as the white of an egg; then they longed, they panted, for one comfortable word from God, one passage of Scripture to give them ease; and the word becometh as necessary as meat to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty, and cool air to the weary: "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28). But still they are sensible of their spiritual necessities, so as they cannot breathe without it, nor thrive without it, they find such a necessity of it. It is the food of their souls, the seed and principle of their being, the rule of their lives, the means of their growth, the charter of their hopes, their defence and strength in temptations and assaults; Christ himself guarded himself with the word when he was assaulted. Now, being practically convinced of this, they must needs have vehement longings after it, and after a more full understanding of it. They find by experience that the soul is apt to faint as well as the body: "Lest ye be wearied, and faint in your minds" (Heb. xii. 3); and that in all these things nothing relieveth them, but the comfort and direction God giveth them in his word.

6thly. The more godly any are, the more they feel these strong affections. All that have life, their pulses do not beat alike strongly: some are weak, others more robust. So it is in grace, some have larger souls than others; and so, as they are more in action for God, they must have more supplies, and a greater measure of spirit and grace; these long and pant. In others, there is a greater sluggishness and narrowness of mind, and they rest satisfied with what they have, their spiritual affections are not so raised; and therefore every one that is godly is not acquainted with this panting, and breathing, and longing; they have so much appetite as is necessary to maintain the new creature, but not these enlarged desires. I confess, you are to judge by your willingness, rather than the passionate stirrings of your affections. It is the heart which God requireth; and, if he hath the will, he hath the heart. But yet affectionate workings of the soul towards spiritual and heavenly things, are very sweet, and such as all Christians should strive for, but not the best marks by which to judge of

our estate. There may be a solid and sincere intention and choice, when there is little stirring perceived in the affections. If the will be fixedly set for God, the man is upright. Yet you are to endeavour to raise your affections to that height which is suitable to the excellency of the object; especially when it is movingly represented to us, our desires should be upon the wing. It is a duty; as far as we can reach it, we should. The more the soul is refined from the dregs of carnal longings and worldly lusts, the more are they enlarged towards God; and, as their passionate desires of earthly things are abated, so their spiritual desires are enlarged. David saith, "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness" (Psalm cxix. 36); and the Apostle, "Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth" (Col. iii. 2). The more the heart is given to the one, the more it is taken off from the other. Riches, honours, and pleasures, as these are loved, they hinder this noble working of the soul, this breaking, longing, panting for better things. Worldly things have a great advantage over our affections, because they are sensible and near us, and our knowledge of them is clear, and by the senses obtrude and thrust themselves upon the soul. Therefore use them with a guard and restraint.

7thly, Though this desire should always continue in some degree, yet there are some seasons when it is more vehement, and more notably stirred and raised. In some degree, it should always continue; for our necessities and work are ever the same; and, if it be only a qualm or fit, it is not right: "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times" (Psalm cxix. 20). Appetite followeth life; but at special times it is more notably raised, as when we are to meet with God in solemn duties; it is whetted when disappointed, and stirred up on some restraint or delay, when we meet not with what we expected, that light, and comfort, and strength, that we looked for, but are kept off from satisfaction. When some deep distress makes spiritual comforts more seasonable, or in some great affair or temptation we need more than ordinary strength, or in some doubt we need light and direction; in all these cases, spiritual desire is more stirring, and a strong affection is kindled in us. David panted as a hart: "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psalm xlii. 1). It was when he was in some distress. So, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Psalm lxiii. 1). Oh! the sighs and groans that are sent up at such a time! Troubles will sharpen our appetite, and rouse us out of security. We cannot always subsist under strong affections, they are very mutable; yet something of them should continue.

USE I.—For reproof.

1. Many are acquainted with the passionateness of sin, but know little of the passionateness of spiritual desire: *μη εν παθει επιθυμας*, "not in the lusts of concupiscence" (1 Thes. iv. 5). Some think it should rather be rendered thus, Not in the passion of lust. Many times lust groweth to violence, men neigh like fed horses after their neighbours' wives; they feel an ardeney and a burning heat in their evil passions and lusts, but none of this gasping and panting for spiritual refreshings and the comforts of the soul. They are acquainted with passionate wrath and fury, passionate envy and spitefulness, passionate lust and filthy desires, passionate covetousness, as Ahab after Naboth's vineyard; the boilings of sin they know,

but were never acquainted with these gaspings after grace, as Amnon lusted for Tamar: "Burned in their lust one toward another" (Rom. i. 27). When any sin groweth so headstrong, as to admit of no restraint, but men are wedded to their own inclination; that is the passionateness of sin.

2. Some that have affectionate desires for worldly things, and their souls are pained and grieved, and are sick within them if they have them not. These differ from the former, for there the object was sinful; but here the object is lawful, but the desire is irregular: they are sick of pleasures, their hearts run on them, and they cannot refrain: "The heart of fools is in the house of mirth" (Ecc. vii. 4). All their longings are for balls, and dancings, and plays, and merry meetings; these are suitable entertainments to the hearts of fools, vain and sottish epicures, that know no higher delights than the tickling of the senses, their love runneth that way, and their hearts are wholly estranged from God. So some sick for riches and wealth, they gape and gasp for them with an impatient longing: "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into divers foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition" (1 Tim. vi. 9). The more they have, the more they covet, as the laying on of more fuel increaseth the flame; they are impatient, making haste to be rich; run themselves, yea, their consciences, out of breath, to overtake the prey. The world is their element, out of which they cannot live, but spend their time, wit, strength of their souls, upon it. They are sick for honour, credit, esteem, as Mordecai's stiff knee cast Haman upon his bed: "And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not the knee, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath" (Esther iii. 5); "Mordecai came again to the king's gate; but Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered" (vi. 12). How do men tire their spirits, waste their strength, to compass honour and esteem in the world; and, if they find it not, how are they troubled! Ambition is a restless thing; how doth Absalom court the people, sick for rule and government!

3. It reproveth them that have only a cold approbation, but no earnest affection to the things of God. Oh! how this instance should shame us, that we have no more affection! David speaketh of longing and panting; we thirst not, we pant not: their fervency reproveth our lukewarmness; we are indifferent whether we have this light, comfort, and grace, yea or no. God's children thirst for it as dry ground for rain. We have some loose and straggling thoughts about holy things, or weak and ineffectual glances of desire, some lukewarm motions; but for these strong affections, admire them we may, feel them we do not. Wicked men may have slight apprehensions of spiritual things, which may produce some slight desires and wishes, which yet are so feeble and weak, that every carnal desire overcometh them.

USE II.—Information, why the people of God press through so many difficulties to enjoy his word. They are urged and pricked on by a strong desire; they would fain enjoy more of God, and therefore press after the means, where it is most clearly and powerfully revealed: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. xi. 12). Where the gates of Heaven stand open, they will break through hindrances to get in.

USE III.—It should quicken our dulness, and exhort us to get this affection. If the heart were as it should be, a little bidding would serve the turn,

1. These good desires discover a good frame; for a man is as his desires are. Such motions, when they are in their strength and liveliness, are signs of heroic grace, when your hearts are sick of love; yea, in a more temperate degree, where there are strong and prevailing desires, they show truth of grace, where there is such an affection as is industrious and unwearied, and keepeth us hard at work: "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come" (Acts xxvi. 7). Such an affection as is troubled when we are interrupted in our main design of bringing the heart into complete subjection to God, or being capable of the fruition of him: "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but, when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life" (Prov. xiii. 12). If you come for grace, and are troubled and grieved when you are interrupted, if you are refreshed when you have tasted anything of God's graciousness, any increase of light and grace is as welcome to you as bodily refreshment to a weary, panting traveller, or water to one that is in a great thirst. This is that the heart mindeth most, studieth most, remembereth most, that you never have enough of it, and are longing for more. If there be such an affection, it is a good sign; for sensitive stirring is not so great an evidence as a settled constitution of spirit.

3. These holy desires, as they have something of burthen, so something of pleasure in them. Though the absence of the thing desired be a trouble, yet the exercise of holy desire is a pleasure to us, because it is an act of love; the more our hearts are enlarged in them, the greater it is, even before satisfaction. While we are hungering and thirsting, we are blessed. It is a blessed thing to be a desirer: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled" (Matt. v. 6).

3. This is a desire which God will satisfy: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Psalm lxxxi. 10); "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground" (Isa. xlv. 3). This insatiate thirst of grace and comfort shall be satisfied: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John vii. 37, 38). The soul is prepared by it for fruition: "Ho every one that thirstest, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. lv. 1).

If we would get it,—

(1.) We must get a new heart, which is the soul of these desires, and is God's promised gift in the covenant: "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. xxxvi. 26).

2. Mortify and moderate your affections to the world and worldly things, and meddle sparingly with the comforts thereof; otherwise, your hearts will be apt immoderately to leak out after them, to the interruption of the spiritual life.

SERMON CXLV.

VERSE 132.—*Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me: as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.*

The Prophet having praised the word, and expressed his affection to it, presents his petition to God for a favourable look from him, upon the account of his grace and mercy, according to the manner and law of his dispensations towards others of his people. They that love the word, may with the like confidence expect the grace of God. Observe in the words,—

I. The petition, or favour asked, “Look thou upon me.”

II. The ground of asking, or the cause of that favour, “And be merciful unto me.”

III. The terms according to which it is dispensed, “As thou usest to do,” *secundum iudicium*, according to the law, or according to thy custom towards those that love thy name.

IV. The description of God’s people, “Them that love thy name.”

These are the especial objects of grace and favour. I shall explain the words as I go over the several branches.

I. I begin with the petition, “Look thou upon me.” The Septuagint reads it, *ἐπιβλεψε ἐπὶ ἐμέ*. Other translations, *aspice me*, or *respice me*. Ainsworth, Turn thy face unto me: “Turn thou unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted” (Psalm xxv. 16). God seemeth now and then to turn away from his people in their distresses, to turn the back upon them, and not the face; as it is Jer. xviii. 17, “I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.” They had dealt so first with God: “Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God when he led thee by the way?” (Jer. ii. 17.) So David, God might have seemed to have turned the back upon him. Our translation cometh to the same effect, “Look thou upon me.” God’s looking implieth two things; namely, his favour and his providence.

First, His favour; as Isa. lxvi. 2, “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit;” that is, I will be gracious unto him, smile upon him, give him evidences of my love.

Secondly, His providence. The providence of God is usually set forth by his eye: “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. xv. 3). Now, God hath a double eye, an avenging eye, and a gracious eye. The avenging eye: “I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good” (Amos ix. 4); the other: “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him” (2 Chron. xvi. 9). Accordingly, this act of looking is either,—

1st, With a revengeful eye. So upon their enemies: “The God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it” (1 Chron. xii. 17); “The Lord look upon it, and requite it” (2 Chron. xxiv. 22); said Zachary the son of Jehoiadah the priest. This is the look of anger. But,—

2dly, There is the look of love and benign aspect, as astrologers speak. So, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters; for I know their

sorrows" (Exod. iii. 7); and, "Till the Lord look down, and behold from Heaven" (Lam. iii. 50). So doth he beg here, that God would look upon him with a gracious eye. In this gracious aspect, two things are notable; namely, his observation and his compassion.

1. His observation. He taketh notice of their condition and oppressed innocency: "Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night" (Neh. i. 6). What have eyes to do with hearing? To behold their pitiful and desolate condition. So, "And may be that the Lord will look upon mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day" (2 Sam. xvi. 12).

2. His compassion. God doth take to heart the distresses of his people, and hath a tender pity and compassion over them: "Look upon mine affliction, and my pain" (Psalm xxv. 18). He doth not only take notice of, but take to heart, their sorrows, as appeareth by some gracious effect and deliverance wrought for them. So looking implieth both his affection and actual providence for them.

DOCTRINE.—The children of God apprehend it as a great favour, if he will but look upon them.

So saith David, "Look thou upon me;" which request expresseth his modesty; one short glimpse of God's favour, a look of kindness, would be a great matter to him in this vale of tears. A look is welcome to a broken and contrite heart; they are thankfully affected with the least discoveries and manifestations of God's love to the soul. If they could have but the least glimpse of his love, it would be very reviving: "Show me a token for good" (Psalm lxxxvi. 17). The returning prodigal could go no higher than, "Make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke xv. 19); any place in the family, so he might be no more absent from his father. God's people would have a nail in his holy place. This shows,—

1. His necessity. God seemed to look from him, no sign of his favour appeared. Thus it is often with God's children here in the world; the sense of his love is gone and lost; we sometimes have not so much as a look from him: "Your sins have hid his face from you" (Isa. lix. 2). In Heaven, our communion is more full, and it is uninterrupted: "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face;" here God often hideth his face, and we walk in darkness, and see no light: "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust" (Psalm civ. 29).

2. His value and esteem of God's favour: "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Psalm iv. 6, 7). Esteem of spiritual privileges is a great means to continue them to us. We feel no more of God's love, because we are not thankful for the enjoyment of it. It must be a practical esteem, such as moveth us to seek it earnestly; as David professeth here, it would satisfy him, if God would look upon him. We count ourselves most miserable in the want of it; but, if we have it, it allayeth all worldly discontents, abateth our desires of worldly comforts.

3. His confidence. One look from God is enough, it is all he beggeth; as the saints in like cases, if their God would look upon them: "Look down from thy holy habitation, from Heaven, and bless thy people Israel"

(Deut. xxvi. 15). So, "Look down from Heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory" (Isa. lxiii. 15). Without any labour, only by this look, thou canst help all our evils; and will not God cast a look upon us, especially when we call him by his name?

Reasons:—

1. Because in our distresses the main thing we should look on, is not so much the removal of God's anger, and the removal of the evil, as the renewed sense of his love, to be reconciled to them: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sins, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. vii. 14). It is a part of the prescribed remedy, to seek the face of God, or a favourable look from him; that is put in among the conditions, otherwise we are not affected with our true misery, and the cause of all our trouble, though we may seriously enough desire to be rid of the trouble, or the effects and the strokes of God's anger. The brute creatures can feel pain as well as we, and howl when they find anything inconvenient to that nature which they have, as well as we cry to God: "And they have not cried unto me with their hearts, when they howled upon their beds" (Hos. vii. 14). God accounts it as howling, when we do not seek God's favour and grace, as well as the supply of our outward necessities. It is an easy matter to be sensible of the evil of trouble; nature will teach us that.

2. Because that bringeth other things along with it. If God look upon us, he will help us: his love and power are set awork for us; for his eye affecteth his heart. When his heart is affected, he will stir up his strength, and come and save us. So that, go to the fountain-head of all mercies: when you beg a favour, look for it from God; for God's favour is the fountain of all blessings, and, without it, all your other comforts will do you no good: "Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts: cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved" (Psalm lxxx. 19). When God once showeth the evidences of his favour and reconciliation to them, other mercies come of their own accord. Oh! then, be assured of the favour of God.

3. If we continue in our misery, a look from God will sweeten all: "We glory in tribulation also, &c., because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. v. 3, 5). To be in favour with God, is enough, and sweetens the bitterest of all our troubles. The comfort of the creature may be supplied with this greater comfort, that, if affliction be not removed, it is made light to us.

USE.—1. Beg earnestly for God's look. It is an ill sign to be careless and regardless of it. Surely, the heart is too much carried to earthly comforts, if you care not how God standeth affected to you. God deliver us from such a sottish spirit, that we should neither care for God's frowns nor smiles, nor be sensible of his coming and going. David said, "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord" (Psalm xxv. 15), to observe him and his postures: but most men, their eyes are ever towards temporal accidents, how the times smile or frown upon them: or, if they think of God, they judge of his respect to them by outward things, but have not any regard to his favour, whether God be reconciled to them or angry with them.

2. Improve it to hope: "Return, we beseech thee, O God of Hosts; look down from Heaven, and behold, and visit this vine" (Psalm lxxx. 14).

Will God love his people, and take notice of their sorrows, and not help them? God will manifest his respects and kindness to his people by some visible deliverance, when it shall be good for them.

3. Be such as God will regard, and have an eye unto. Such are,—

(1.) The broken-hearted, that have a tender conscience, affected deeply with what the word speaketh concerning their everlasting condition: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. lxvi. 2). The word of God passeth sentence upon men; most regard it not. Now, whilst they look not after God, they have no promise God will look after them. Indeed, by his preventing grace, he is found of them that look not for him; but then, before they have any smiles from God's countenance, they are first humbled and brought to trouble: "For thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth, and smote him; I hid me, and was wroth; he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him" (Isa. lvii. 15—18). When the spirit is softened by a deep and serious remorse for sin, and a tender sense of their condition, with these will God dwell, to comfort, relieve, restore them.

(2.) The believer: "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy" (Psalm xxxiii. 18). They that look for God, shall find him.

(3.) The sincere: "His countenance doth behold the upright" (Psalm xi. 7). He hath a singular care of them, to manifest his love to them, both inwardly and outwardly. A good conscience presents itself to God; none but such will say, "Look thou upon me." Adam hid himself upon his transgression. Hypocrites cannot trust him.

(4.) Such as love his name. It is the description and mark of God's people in the text, they love God, and all that by which God is especially made known. To these God will look, that he may bless them, and comfort them with his love: "Grace be with them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" (Eph. vi. 24). God's grace and free favour is to them: they love the name of God, that rejoice to see God honoured, known, and had in request in the world, to be owned to be such as he is by themselves and others: "The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee" (Isa. xxvi. 8). Their great desire is, that God may be exalted in their own hearts, and in the hearts of others. To these God will look, who take care to honour God, love Christ, and keep his commandments: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him" (John xiv. 21).

II. The ground and cause of that favour he expects, "Be merciful unto me." David begs what he begs upon terms of grace.

DOCTRINE.—God's mercy is the cause of all his favour to us, or gracious dealing with us.

All that we have, or would have, cometh only and wholly from his mercy and mere mercy. If God cast but a look upon us, or visit us with

one glimpse of kindness, we can ascribe it to no other cause. Only mercy, and never a word of merit, should be in the mouth of a believer.

First, Because there was nothing in us to move him to be thus gracious to us: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant" (Gen. xxxii. 10). Let us ask the reason, and debate the cause, with ourselves. Why doth or should God do this for me? What moveth him? Is he necessitated? Then he could do no otherwise, and should be kind to all. Would he be unjust if he did not? whereby have I obliged him? "Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?" (Rom. xi. 35.) Could you enter your action and plea against him? Before what bar and tribunal? And with what arguments will you manage your cause? How will the beam plead against the sun? the stream against the fountain? Is it a debt to your kind and rank of being? How many of the same flesh and blood are equal in nature, but unequal in condition? nay, in the same vicinity and neighbourhood, not only Americans, but of your own nation and country? What did God see more in you than in them of the same calling and profession? "Two women shall be grinding together; one shall be taken and the other left" (Luke xvii. 35). Of the same parentage; was not Jacob Esau's brother? Indeed, what did God see to move him to give you the first grace? "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom. ix. 16).

Secondly, There is much to the contrary, a manifest unworthiness and contrary desert to what God bestoweth on us.

1st, A general unworthiness in all the sons of Adam. Man was left as a condemned malefactor in the hands of the law, without all hope and possibility of recovery, under sin: "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. vii. 14). Under a curse: "Were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. ii. 3): and that God should regard such!

2ndly, A particular unworthiness, before conversion and after.

1. Before conversion: "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures," &c. (Titus iii. 3.) We deserve to be abhorred, and cast out of God's presence, and might justly expect his vengeance, rather than his bounty and goodness; his anger and frowns, rather than the light of his countenance.

2. Since conversion: "In many things we offend all" (James iii. 2); "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecl. vii. 20). There are mixtures of evil, imperfections of holy things. Well then,—

(1.) Let mercy be all your plea, when you have any favour to seek from God. We cannot claim any good upon any other right and title. Justice will except against you, and conscience will take its part. What have you to say but on that: "We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies" (Dan. ix. 18). We have no other motive that will become God, nor bear weight in our own consciences, but only God hath set up a court where grace taketh the throne, and giveth out pardons and blessings to sinners.

(2.) When you have once tasted one pledge of God's love vouchsafed to you, let this kindle coals in your bosoms, and warm your hearts with love to God. It is not only his condescension to take notice of you, but his mercy to show any favour and kindness to you: "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" (2 Sam. vii. 19.) Is this the manner of men, to requite good for evil? Who am I?

(3.) Be contented with your measures. Where nothing is deserved, anything should be kindly taken. Grace communicateth itself to whom, and in what measure, it will: "Is it not lawful for me do what I will with mine own?" (Matt. xx. 15.) If we are kept under, and in great extremities, he might have dealt worse with us: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lam. iii. 22). If we had a prize in our hands to procure better, we might complain. Now all is free and undeserved, we should admire and submit.

SERMON CXLVI.

VERSE 132.—*As thou usest to do to those that love thy name.*

Here you have,—

III. The terms of the dispensation, "As thou usest to do to those that love thy name." The word is,—

1. According to the law and right.

2. According to the use and custom, according to the mercy promised, and usually bestowed upon those that love thee. Both senses not improper.

I. The first sense, according to the law and right. *Prout est jus diligentium nomen tuum*, so some. The Vulgar, *Secundum iudicium*. Amyraldus glosseth thus, *Pro illa misericordia quam inter te et timentes nomen tuum constituisti*. Others, *Secundum jus, et factus illud*. Take it thus; and it beareth a good sense; for there is the obligation of justice, and the obligation of grace; a judgment of righteousness, and a judgment of mercy. This merciful judgment the saints appeal unto. I cannot exclude this; for otherwise this verse would not have one of those ten words which express the word or law of God.

DOCTRINE.—That there is a gracious way of right established between God and his people, according to which they may expect mercies.

This will be best understood by comparing the two covenants, their agreement and disagreement, not in all things, but such as are pertinent.

First, Let us see how the two covenants agree.

Ist, They agree in their author. God appointed both, and man is only to accept or take hold of what is offered. Man was not thinking of any such thing, when God instituted the first: "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest of it, thou shalt surely die" (Gen. ii. 17), or revealed the second: "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. iii. 15). For God to enter into a covenant with the creature, either of works or grace, was an act of condescension; and who is he that could bid the Almighty humble himself, and prescribe conditions and laws of commerce between God and us, but only God alone? Man did not give the conditions, or treat with God about the making of them, what they should be; but only was bound to submit to what God was pleased to prescribe. In the covenant of works, God gave forth the conditions of life, and a law and a penalty; and, in the covenant of grace, man is bound to submit to the conditions without disputing. They are not left free and indifferent for us to debate upon, and to modify, and bring them down to our own liking and humour; but to yield to them, and take hold upon them, not to appoint them: "Thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs, that keep my Sabbaths,

and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant" (Isa. lvi. 4); "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. x. 3).

2ndly, They agree in the moving cause, which in both was the grace of God. The first covenant, it was grace for God to make it. It was the grace of God to accept of man's perfect obedience, so as to make him sure of eternal life on the performance of it. Though the last covenant hath the honour by way of eminency to be styled the covenant of grace, yet the first was so, though the condition of it was perfect obedience, and the reward had respect to personal righteousness. It was of grace also, that God would at all covenant and enter into bonds with man, who was not his equal, and give his word to any of the works of his hands. It was grace that endowed man with original righteousness, and fitted him, and enabled him, to keep that covenant. His absolute sovereign owed him no more than the rest of the creatures which he had made. Grace engaged the reward, there was no more merit in Adam's obedience than in ours: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke xvii. 10). Nor did his work bear proportion to the eternal reward.

3rdly, They agree in the parties, God and man in both covenants, not any other creatures superior or inferior to man, rational or irrational: the principal contracting parties were public persons, Adam, Jesus: "Therefore, as, by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. v. 18); "The first man is of the earth earthly; the second man is the Lord from Heaven" (1 Cor. xv. 47). The first and second Adam, for them and all their heirs.

4thly, That God giveth sufficiency of strength in both these covenants to the parties with whom he made them, to fulfil the conditions thereof. To Adam: "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions" (Ecc. vii. 29). To Adam, natural, to us supernatural, strength: "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezek xxxvi. 27); "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb. viii. 10).

5thly, In both God kept up his sovereignty, and by his condescension did not part with anything of his dominion over man. In the covenant of works, he ruled by a law written on men's hearts: "Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. ii. 15). So by grace the believer is not freed from the law of nature, which being almost obliterated and blotted out of the heart of man, and become very unlegible, it pleased God to set it forth in a new edition, and to write it over again in the heart of a renewed man: "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb. viii. 10); "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. iv. 24). Though God admitted us to new conditions of favour, yet he still requireth subjection on our part, and that we own him as lord and sovereign requiring obedience and service at our hands, or else he taketh a liberty to

visit our transgressions with rods: “If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes” (Psalm lxxxix. 31, 32).

6thly, In both covenants, there is a mutual obligation on both parties; this ariseth from the very nature of a covenant. *Contractus est consensus ad constituendam obligationem, quâ alter alteri sit obnoxius.* In every covenant, there is a tie on both sides, and some reason of right. There is no obligation of debt between God and us, but an obligation of grace: *Deus non est debitor* (saith Aquinas), *quia non est ad alia ordinatus; reddit debita, nulla debet.* His covenant doth infer a debt of favour, not of justice. We may challenge him upon his promise: “Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope” (Psalm cxix. 49). But God doth it not with respect to our work, but his own promise. In covenants of justice between man and man, there is a proportion and correspondence between the conditions on the one part and the other. In the covenant between God and us is a deed of favour, containing large grants of privileges, and noble conditions, upon terms and restipulations which had no proportion to the favours granted. As if some prince or person of honour should, out of pure love to a poor, mean virgin that hath no portion, covenant to give her a rich dowry and jointure, suitable to his own degree; so doth God with us in the covenant of grace: “Now, when I passed by thee and looked upon thee, behold thy time was a time of love, and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness; yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine” (Ezek. xvi. 8); “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. xxxi. 3). Indeed, in the covenant of works, justice hath a greater predominant influence than grace; though, in exact justice, God is not bound to remunerate us there neither.

7thly, The conditions in both covenants were suitable to the ends and scope appointed. In the first covenant, God would show forth justice in rewarding man’s works and his own obedience. Now, what more suitable condition than works, without the least indulgence in case of failing? “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them” (Gal. iii. 10). And what more suitable to show forth grace, than the condition of faith required by the covenant of grace? “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all” (Rom. iv. 16). So he would make it full of comfort to the creature and honour to his justice.

Secondly, the differences between these two covenants.

1st, They differ in the ends, both as to man and God.

1. As to man. The end of the first covenant was to preserve and continue man in that happiness wherein it found him, and in which he was created; but the covenant of grace was for the reparation and restitution of mankind to that happiness which he had lost, and from which he had fallen. The law saith to man in his best, his pure and perfect estate, Continue in it; it speaketh to the innocent, that they may continue in their original happiness. The Gospel saith, Be ye reconciled and renewed: “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, Be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor. v. 20): for it speak-

eth to the fallen and miserable: it is a restitution of what was lost, and redeeming us from misery and sin. The one was made with man *in statu instituto*, as he came out of God's hand, in his primitive integrity, when he was a lively resemblance of God, and his abilities for obedience not yet broken. The other covenant was made with him *in statu destituto*, when at the worst, sinful, and wretched, in his fallen estate, disabled for obedience to God: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. viii. 3). In the one, there was perfect amity between the confederates, God and Adam, and this covenant was made for the continuance and standing thereof; but there was enmity and distance between the parties, when the new covenant was set afoot; and this was to be taken away, and the breach made up: and therefore it is called a covenant of peace: "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. liv. 10).

2. As to God. In the one, God is considered as a gracious and merciful Redeemer, who, being displeased with them for the breach of the first covenant, did enter into a covenant to show the riches of his grace and mercy: "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. i. 6). Man fallen was not a suitable object of God's love, as man in innocency; he was then lovely, and an alluring object, because of the beauty God had put upon him; but now he was loathsome, like an infant in his blood and filthiness: "When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live. I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxed great; and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thy hair is grown, whereas thou wert naked and bare. Now, when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness; yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord, and thou becamest mine" (Ezek. xvi. 6—8). Therefore God had a different end as to himself. The glory of his creating bounty was the end in the old covenant; the glory of his redeeming grace and pardoning mercy was the end in the new covenant, showed in the recovery of lost sinners. In the one, he intended the advancement of those attributes that were known to man by the law and light of nature, as wisdom, power, goodness, bounty, and justice: "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Psalm viii. 9.) The end of the covenant of grace was to set forth redeeming mercy: "That, as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. v. 21). If the creature had never been in misery, mercy had never been known, and grace had not been so glorious, as in giving Christ. All the natural attributes of God receive a new lustre in Christ.

2ndly, They differ in their nature. The covenant of works stood more by commands, and less by promises; but the covenant of grace standeth more by promises, and less by commands: therefore called the promise: "For, if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Gal. iii. 18). The commands and pro-

mises were not commensurate. There was not a promise in that covenant for every command of the law of nature; but, in the Gospel, God promiseth what he requireth. In the covenant of works, justice is the rule of God's dealing; for, though he entered into that covenant, and promised a reward out of grace, yet, being entered into it, justice holdeth the balance, and weigheth the works of men, and giveth to every man according to his works, what is due to him: "Who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but, unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath," &c. (Rom. ii. 6—8.) But the rule of God's dealing in the new covenant, is grace. The covenant of works was more independent on God and grace, without man; and more dependent on man and grace, within himself. In it man was left to stand by his own strength, to be justified upon his own righteousness, God having furnished him with a stock at first, or a sufficiency of power to keep that covenant; but the covenant of grace findeth us without strength; therefore we are kept in dependence upon another: "I have laid help upon one that is mighty" (Psalm lxxxix. 19); and, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13). Man was to keep the first covenant; but here, in effect, the covenant keepeth us: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter i. 5); "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me" (Jer. xxxii. 40).

3rdly, In the terms. Unsinning obedience is the condition of the covenant of works. The covenant of works is wholly made void, and the promise thereof of none effect, by any one sin, without any hope of cure or remedy. Once a sinner, and for ever miserable; as the angels, for one sin, were thrown down from Heaven, and "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). It admitteth of no such thing as repentance, neither doth it offer any provision for such: it speaketh much to the whole, nothing to the sick; it maketh a promise to the righteous, but none to sinners. But the covenant of grace is otherwise: "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Matt. ix. 13); "Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts v. 31). Every failing doth not make void the covenant; no, not every grosser fault: "Nevertheless, my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail: my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips" (Psalm lxxxix. 33, 34). The first covenant is an uncomfortable covenant to a sinner, and can be only comfortable to a perfectly righteous person; for, in case of the least failing, it speaketh nothing but wrath and the curse. But the covenant of grace is comfortable to sinners, it offereth pardon to them. As to the first covenant, it is impossible to be fulfilled by man in the state of corruption: "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh" (Rom. viii. 3). Since the day that Adam fell, never did, nor could, any man fulfil this covenant. Well then, the demands of this covenant cannot be satisfied without a continuation in all things written therein, in height of exactness and perfection. But the Gospel admits of a sincere, uniform obedience as

perfect: "For, if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor. viii. 12). There is a merciful lenity as to acceptance, though the rule is as strict: "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son, that serveth him" (Mal. iii. 17).

USE I.—Then enter into this covenant. You have no benefit by it, till you personally enter into the bond of it. The covenant of works was made with man generally, universally considered; with Adam, as a public person, representing all his prosperity; but the covenant of grace is made with man particularly, and personally considered, and his consent is expressly required, or else it can convey no benefit to us. That was a law, and so did bind whether man did consent or no. This is a privilege; Christ draweth to consent to him, doth not force us against our will: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John i. 12). Will you own him as the Son of God and Redeemer of the world? Every man must consent for himself. The effects of the first covenant are uncomfortable for the present, the spirit of bondage: "And deliver them, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. ii. 15). But dreadful hereafter: "He shall have judgment without mercy" (James ii. 13). When none to mediate for them, they have to do with justice, strict justice. The least sin is enough to ruin you; it will pass by no transgression, remit no part of your punishment; it will have satisfaction to the utmost farthing, admits of no pardon, no advocate, regardeth no tears. What justice can give you, that you may look for. If justice speak no good, promise no good, you are to look for none; for justice doth all in the covenant under which you stand: "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psalm cxxx. 3.) What you may claim as a due debt, that you may look for; that covenant gives no gift. Oh! then give the hand to the Lord: "Now, be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever, and serve the Lord your God" (2 Chron. xxx. 8). Receive God's condition: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts ix. 6.) You have not leave to choose and refuse.

USE II.—Let us bless God, and admire his grace in bringing about this new covenant.

1. Man irreparably had broken the first covenant, fallen from his state of life; so that all the world is lost under guilt and a curse: "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. iii. 19).

2. Upon this fundamental breach, the Lord was acquitted and absolved from the promise of life, in this way of works; for man could never stand in that court: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh," &c. (Rom. viii. 3.) Then,—

3. God, taking occasion by this miserable estate, opened a door of hope by Christ, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. v. 19). God hath set up a new court of righteousness and life, where sinners may appear, where grace taketh the throne, and the judge is Christ, and the Gospel the rule, and faith and sincere obedience accepted.

4. The Lord giveth notice to fallen man, and sendeth him word, that,

if he will come to this court, and put himself under the laws thereof, he shall be delivered from the curse: "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins; through the tender mercies of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us; to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke i. 77—79).

5. Because men are backward, he hunteth and pursueth them by the curse of the law, and the sense men have of it, to take sanctuary at his grace: "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb. vi. 18).

6. When a poor creature cometh, he receiveth him graciously: "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord; and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God" (Jer. iii. 12, 13); "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 9). If he had not set up another court of righteousness, no tears, no repentance could have helped us; there had been no help that way. Now he is willing to receive you, he standeth with his arms open. From first to last, he dealeth with us upon terms of grace.

II. Judgment is put for manner and custom, or course: "Thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner," כמשפט (Gen. xl. 13). So, "Compassed the city after the same manner" (Josh. vi. 15). The same word again 1 Sam. ii. 13, "The priest's custom with the people was," &c. דמלך משפט, "This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you" (1 Sam. viii. 11): "So did David, and so will be his manner" (1 Sam. xxvii. 11). So in other places.

DOCTRINE I.—That it is God's constant method to encourage all those that serve him, by showing to them all manner of expressions of favour and mercy.

The proposition is often expressed in Scripture: "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies" (Psalm xxv. 10); "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psalm lxxxiv. 11); "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord, shall not want any good thing" (Psalm xxxiv. 10). David presumeth it: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Psalm xxiii. 6); and many other places.

But it seemeth to be contradicted by sense. They that love God most, are most calamitous, and have many afflictions.

ANSWER.—These belong to God's covenant, and are expressions of his good will and faithfulness: "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psalm cxix. 75). God were not faithful nor merciful, if he did not now and then take the rod in hand; our need, our good, requireth it: "For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. xii. 10). Discipline is as necessary for a child as food, winter as necessary as summer, rainy days as fair

days, to curb the wantonness of the flesh, and to withdraw the fuel of our lusts.

2. He useth to show mercy to people in their afflictions, to cause light to rise to them in darkness: "For, as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ" (2 Cor. i. 5). We are not capable of taking in spiritual comforts, till we are separated from the dregs of worldly affections.

3. God will sanctify afflictions: "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. viii. 28). And he will finally deliver, when the season calleth for it: "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13).

But he dealeth more hardly with them than others; he doth not punish the gross iniquities of his adversaries, when the lesser failings of his people are severely chastised.

ANSWER.—1. It is meet: "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter iv. 17). That it may be known God doth not favour any in their sins: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos iii. 2). Their sins, though small, have more aggravations, being committed against clearest light, dearest love: "And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, &c., should we again break thy commandments?" (Ezra ix. 13, 14.) "Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness" (Isa. xxvi. 10). God is jealous over his people, and careful to have them reclaimed from every evil course: "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. xi. 32). In the bitterness of the rod, God discovereth the vileness of their sin; for he will reclaim *them*, when he suffereth others to walk in their own way.

2. His enemies shall in time taste the dregs of that cup, whereof his own people taste a little: "For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out and drink them" (Psalm lxxv. 8); "For lo, I begin to bring evil on this city, which is called by my name, and shall ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished; for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the Lord of hosts" (Jer. xxv. 29). They shall have the bottom.

3. In the meantime, God's people have his love; their sins are pardoned, they are admitted into communion with him; and God's mercy and favour to his people must not be judged by temporal accidents: "From men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world; which have their portion in this life; whose bellies thou fillest with thy hid treasure; they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm xvii. 14, 15). Christ gave his purse to Judas, but his Spirit to the other disciples.

But God deserteth them, his people complain of it: "But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me" (Isa. xlix. 14). Yea, Christ himself: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. xxvii. 46.)

ANSWER.—1. There is a distinct consideration of Christ; for he was to bear our sorrows: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (Isa. liii. 4); to be forsaken for a while, that we might be received for ever.

2. God's people are mistaken; the saints complain without a cause. Sense maketh lies of God: "For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless, thou heardest the voice of my supplication when I cried unto thee" (Psalm xxxi. 22); "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? And I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High" (Psalm lxxvii. 9). The disciples had Christ near them when they knew it not: "Their eyes were holden, that they should not know him" (Luke xxiv. 16).

3. Though they are forsaken for a while, yet not for ever: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercy will I gather thee. In a little wrath, I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer" (Isa. liv. 7, 8).

USE.—Do not say God is a hard master. When the compute is rightly made, and you trace his providence through all the passages of your lives, there is more good than evil. Jacob giveth an account of his life: "God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads" (Gen. xlviii. 15, 16). So may others say.

DOCTRINE II.—God's accustomed goodness, and gracious dispensations to his people throughout all ages, should encourage us in waiting upon him and praying to him.

This emboldeneth me, that all thy servants in all ages have found thee gracious and merciful unto them.

1. From God's unchangeableness. He will not leave his old wont, he is where he was at first: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that he cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear" (Isa. lix. 1); "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. iii. 6). He is the same that ever he was.

2. All his people stand upon the same terms; therefore what he will do for one, he will do for another. God's love is the same; he is alike affected to all his children; his saints now are as dear to him as ever: "For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people; he will beautify the meek with salvation" (Psalm cxlix. 4). They have the same covenant; it is a common charter: "For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts ii. 39). The same Redeemer: "To them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (2 Cor. i. 2); "Even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference" (Rom. iii. 22). One hath not a more worthy Christ than another. Faith is as acceptable as ever: "To them that have obtained like precious faith" (2 Peter i. 1). They are interested in the same privileges, promises, gifts, and rewards.

USE.—1. Examples and instances of God's mercy should confirm us. It is not agreeable to God's nature and practice to forsake his people, or to be deaf to their prayers: "Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and

thou didst deliver them; they cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded" (Psalm xxii. 4, 5). None of his people ever sought him in vain. From the beginning of the world to this day, God hath been gracious: "And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee" (Psalm ix. 10). No age can give an instance to the contrary; therefore mark the usual dealings of God with his children: what was said to them, was for the establishment of our comfort and hope: "Now, it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but for us also to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom. iv. 23, 24); compared with Gen. xv. 6, "And he believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness." God's word is a book of precedents, as a painter's master-piece is hung out to invite custom.

2. Let us be sure we be of this number. If there be conformity to them in affection, there will be in consolation; if in grace, then in privileges: "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The Lord preserveth all them that love him" (Psalm cxlv. 18—20).

DOCTRINE III.—We should beg the favour of God's people.

Common things should not satisfy a child of God. He must have what is peculiar to the saints: "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people. Oh! visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance" (Psalm cxvi. 4, 5). Nothing will satisfy the people of God, but his special love; they have a new nature that must be pleased; a great, noble, and Divine end to be promoted, which is to enjoy God; the creatures serve not for that. Common men are put off with common mercies; these they may have and perish.

USE.—Let us be of this temper. Men commonly think that God looketh upon those whom he blesseth with a large increase of temporal things, that he is merciful to those that never see evil, nor feel pain or want. David was not of this mind; he would have God deal with him as with his friends and favourites; he leaveth it to God how to express his mercy, who only knoweth what is best for us; only he beggeth the fruits of his special love. The heart is earthly and worldly, when spiritual things are not valued above all the glory and plenty of the world. Our condition is under a curse without these; in these Christ showed his love: "Unto you first, God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts iii. 26). He died not to make us rich, honourable, great, but for remission of sin. This is a solid ground of rejoicing; this abideth for ever.

DOCTRINE IV.—We must not affect singularity of dispensations, but be content to be dealt with as others of God's children have been dealt with before us.

We must not expect to go to Heaven without difficulties: "Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (1 Peter v. 9). We are not alone, our lot is no harder than others of God's holy ones. All have gone to Heaven this way. God will so manifest himself to us, that still there may be room for faith and patience.

SERMON CXLVII.

VERSE 133.—*Order my steps in thy word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*

In the former verse, the Prophet had begged for a comfortable look from God, and some renewed taste of his mercy. He now amplifies his request; and, as he there prayed for pardoning mercy, so now for sanctifying grace. Many that seek mercy to deliver them from the guilt of sin, do not desire grace to deliver them from the power of it; and yet the one is as necessary as the other, that we may not offend God, as well as that sin may not hurt us. To pray only for pardoning mercy, would seem to be a praying only for our own interest, and not for God's. God's interest lies in our subjection; our interest lies in impunity and freedom from the curse of the law and the flames of Hell; and let me tell you, that our interest is not sufficiently provided for, till the heart be sanctified as well as sin pardoned; for an unholy creature can never be happy, that is clear against the course of all the Lord's wise proceedings. He hath settled everything, and put it into its proper place; and a sinful creature can never enjoy impunity; therefore as we need to pray, Lord, be merciful to us: so, Lord, "order my steps in thy word," &c.

In this prayer there are two branches:—

I. A petition for grace for the regulation of his life, "Order my steps in thy word."

II. A deprecation of the contrary evil, "And let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

The first part of his prayer is by way of prevention, the second is by way of reserve; and the connection of both doth in effect speak thus, 'Lord, if thou dost not order my goings, surely iniquity will have dominion over me.' Therefore he first prays that God will not permit him to err; or, if the Lord should, by his righteous providence, permit him to fall, that he might return again to his duty, that sin may not wholly and clearly carry it in his heart, and have a full power over him: Lord, "order my steps in thy word;" but, if I should fail, "let not any iniquity have dominion over me." The same method is used Psalm xix. 13, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;" He doth desire absolutely to be kept from presumptuous sins; but then, he adds by way of supposition and reserve, that, if he could not by reason of his naughty heart be kept from them, yet that they might not have full power and dominion over him. Rabbi David Kimchi, indeed, refers the former branch to the affirmative precept, "Order my steps in thy word;" and the latter branch to the negative precept: and so he makes the meaning to be this, 'Let me neither break thy laws by omitting any duty, or committing any sin.' You may take that division of the words, if you will.

In the former branch observe, the act of grace, "Order;" the subject, "My steps;" the rule, "Thy word."

In the latter branch observe, the evil deprecated, the dominion of sin, the universality or degree of the deprecation, "Let not any iniquity," neither great nor small sins, take the throne by turns.

To explain these circumstances: the act of grace, "Order." The Septuagint, *κατεύθυνον*, direct or set straight my steps. Junius hath it, *institute*, frame or appoint. And Ainsworth hath it, firmly direct; for,

indeed, the word signifies to instruct, order, and establish. We are ignorant, and apt to err; therefore God must order us in a way of obedience, and reduce us into a settled course and method, that all may be done in a subordination to our great end; for order respects that. And we are soon discouraged; therefore God must support and establish us; so firmly direct, that thou mayest establish our steps according to thy word.

The subject is, "My steps." Because the affections are the feet of the soul, by which it walks out after the object represented, the understanding represents and the will chooseth; therefore some would limit these steps to the affections. I think it compriseth all the actions of the reasonable creature, that no thoughts, no deeds, no counsels, no enterprises of his, might transgress the limits of God's word.

For the rule, "In thy word." The Septuagint, *κατὰ τὸ λόγιόν σου*, according to thy oracle. However, the phrase is to be noted, "In thy word;" not only according to this rule, but in this path. The sum is this, 'Lord, thou hast invited me to walk in thy word; now direct me, strengthen me to walk in it; and let all my motions and my actions keep within the compass of it.'

For the other part, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." Because the Septuagint read, *Μὴ κατακυριεύσω με πᾶσα ἀνομία*, and out of them the Vulgar, Let not all iniquity tyrannize over me, some have conceived the sense to be, Let me not be trampled upon, nor oppressed by all kind of wrong and all kind of injustice; as if he pleaded here to be kept from the tyranny of his enemies. But this is not probable, and other Scriptures that are parallel to this, where the like expression is used, will not permit such a sense; and therefore he saith, "Let not any [or every] iniquity have dominion over me." Why? Because sins take the throne by turns; sometimes a man finds this sin, and sometimes that sin, in the throne; and sometimes strange sins that we think little of, may get a great power over the heart; even those that we fear least, many times may steal into the throne.

From the first branch observe,—

DOCTRINE I.—That there is a constant, daily necessity of grace, to direct and order our motions and actions according to the word of God.

Now, that there is a daily and hourly necessity of grace, is a point that frequently offereth itself in this psalm. I shall briefly dispatch it therefore in these propositions:—

1. It appears from the strictness of Christianity. He that would please God, had need of a tender conscience, that he may wholly frame himself to do the will of God; and not only take care to be right for the main of his course, but that every particular action should be orderly and regular; for the man of God does not beg grace here to choose a right path, but that his steps may be ordered. This is the strictness of Christianity, that a man should make conscience of every step, that every action should be under the power of grace, and fall within the rules of the word. It needs to be so; why? Because the word of God is not only a general rule to show us our path, but a particular direction to order our steps: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm cxix. 105); to my feet as well as my path. Every action or step of ours is, morally considered, in its own tendency, either a step to Heaven or Hell; if good, a step to Heaven; if evil, a step to Hell: therefore we had need make conscience of our steps. Besides, if we do not make conscience of our

steps, we shall not make conscience of our way ; for he that is not faithful in a little, will not be faithful in much. Every wry step is so far out of the way, and the more we persist in it the more we wander. Therefore see what is required of Christians: “Be ye holy,” *εν πάση ἀναστροφῇ*, in every creak and turning of your lives, “in all manner of conversation” (1 Peter i. 15). A man that would approve himself to God, must be good in all conditions, in all his businesses, affairs, all the ages of his life, young or old, in actions civil, sacred. If his condition be prosperous or adverse, when in adversity or prosperity, he must carry himself as a Christian ; he ought still to approve himself to be a hater of sin, and a lover of what God loves. In all his affairs, not only in his religious actions, but in his civil and common actions. Godliness is not a holiday-suit, but an apparel that is of constant wearing ; and therefore a Christian is to show himself a Christian in all things, though especially in those things which are solemn and most weighty ; a Christian in his prayers, a Christian in his business, in his recreation, in his meals ; a Christian in the disposal of himself and condition, a Christian in all his converses. I lay this for a foundation. Certainly, here are steps spoken of. The holy man would have them ordered, and that by the strictness of Christianity ; so that no one particular action must allowedly be sinful. You see what need there is of direction. Careless and slight spirits, that only look upon Christianity in the lump, they think that truths are few and easy, and that the art of holy living is soon learned ; and they do not see a need of this ordering our ways, and to be willing to please God in all things. But those that count the least sin to be a very heavy burthen, a greater evil than the greatest temporal loss, that make it their business to approve themselves to God in all things they put their hands unto, will be earnest and importunate with him for his grace.

2. The necessity of the word of God. Whoever will please God in all things, and will purge his own soul and his life from sin, must take the word of God for his rule and direction. Our lives are not to be framed according to our own fancies, but God’s word, where the genuine holiness is recommended to us, and which is the only proper means to work the heart to it. I shall prove that the word of God is the great rule both to warn us of our dangers, and to instruct us in our duties ; and so it is the great means to sanctify the heart. I say it is the great rule to warn us of our dangers : “Moreover, by them is thy servant warned” (Psalm xix. 11). This discovers temptations, inconveniences, snares, which otherwise we should never discern. There are many dangers that wait for us on every side. So, “Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer” (Psalm xvii. 4) ; it is the only proper means to keep us from the paths of the destroyer. Alas ! otherwise, if we do not strictly consult with his statute and rule, we shall cry up a confederacy with those that cry up a confederacy against God ; we shall embrace the temptation which opportunity offers, if we follow the guidance of our deceived and deceiving heart. And the word of God only doth discover our duties to us : “For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the ways of life” (Prov. vi. 23). Mark, whatever condition we are in, whether in the night or whether in the day, whether in this or that condition, here we have a lamp and light ; here is that which will show us what God requires of us in every state and condition. Now, as this is the only rule, so it is the only appointed means with which God will associate the operation of his grace, for the

converting and curing of the souls of men; for, when God had stated a rule for the creature, it is fit the knowledge of that might be a means of sanctification. So the word is commended to us: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John xvii. 17). If the Holy Ghost will sanctify, if he will beget not an apocryphal and bastardly holiness (that may be by the institutions of men and rules men prescribe), but a genuine, true holiness, which is acceptable to God; put them into a capacity to serve, love, and enjoy God: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Psalm cxix. 9). A young man, that is in the heat of his lusts and in the ruff of his sin, is impetuously carried away: how shall he do to break this boisterous violence, and bring his heart into some competent way of obedience to God? Why, the word of God is the only means; the Lord interposeth by his word, and blesseth his word. Let a man read Seneca, Plato, Plutarch, all the philosophers, he will have but cold and faint respects to holiness and to better things, until he come to be exercised in the word of God. Man is not a vessel that comes newly out of the potter's shop; but he hath a smatch of the old infusion of sin; and he cannot have this taste and tang put out, but by the word of God sanctifying his heart and breaking the power of his lusts: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm xix. 7). We are out of joint, unfit to please and serve God. Now, how shall a man do to get his soul set in joint again, that he may be in a capacity to serve and enjoy God? Why, this restores the soul to a capacity, the Lord blesseth this institution and this means; for it is not bare truth, but instituted truth, with which God will associate the operation of his Spirit. By this word of his, that was indited by the Spirit, and penned by holy men, that were moved by the Holy Ghost, he doth join his virtue, and power, and efficacy of his Spirit, to sanctify the souls of men.

3. They that make it their scope and business to please God in all things, and take his word for their rule, their souls will soon see a need for Divine direction and the establishment of his grace. This reason is taken from the temper of the persons that are to walk in this strict way, according to his strict rule; they are such as are naturally blind, and naturally opposite to God. Now, certainly, such need to go to God for direction. I gather that from these words, "Order my steps." Every man is a poor, blind creature, and hath a heart opposite to the ways of God; he need beg this grace of God, 'Lord, incline my heart.' Every man is a blind creature; partly, because our own spirits are blind, crooked, and unstable, that we shall neither consult our rule, nor understand our duty, nor like it when it is represented to us, until the Lord doth enlighten us. A man's heart is naturally blind: "And cannot see afar off" (2 Peter i. 9); he hath no skill in spiritual things (1 Cor. ii. 14). The heart is naturally full of darkness, and then this darkness grows upon us. Partly, by prejudice or custom, and many evil habits: "The God of this world hath blinded [men's] minds" (2 Cor. iv. 4). There are many inordinate affections that increase upon us. So it is, then, that a man is blind by nature, more blind by custom and inordinate affection, is exceedingly blinded; which have a great influence upon our judgments in all practical cases. Though we should know general rules, yet to bring them down to every particular action is very grievous, and hard to bring the heart to. But you will say, When we have received the Spirit, God hath put his law into our minds,

this blindness is cured; therefore why should such as David pray, Lord, "order my steps," &c. Yes, we are cured; but in part, *non totaliter*. Grace doth heal us but in part: much of the matter that clouded the mind before, is yet upon us; and, when lusts are awakened by temptations, we strangely forget ourselves, our own reason, our senses, and examples of others; we are misled, so that we know not what to do, unless the Lord order our steps. Well, as we are blind, so we are opposite too. When we know our way, what we should do, yet we are apt to stumble at every stone. Naturally, the wisdom of the flesh is opposite: "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. viii. 7). And so much as the wisdom of the flesh still remains, we are apt to be discouraged from walking with God, according to his strict rule, and in the way that he hath given us, and we are extremely slack, that, unless we be quickened by the lively and strengthening light of the Spirit, alas! how soon shall we miscarry! Therefore this ordering is a strengthening against the reluctancies of the flesh: "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not" (Psalm xvii. 5). Alas! when a man finds a good way, he is either apt to lie down out of laziness, or to stumble and fall; and we cannot keep our footing against temptations. Every man of experience seeth the need of this. Therefore, Lord, direct me, "Order my steps." The—

4th, Reason is taken from the value of the blessing here asked. It is one of the chiefest blessings of his grace and favour, to have his illuminating. After he had said, "Lord, be merciful unto me;" presently follows, Lord, "order my steps." To prove this, must needs be a great blessing and favour. It will appear out of the words of the text; partly from the word "order;" it makes our lives orderly and regular. Alas! what a confused, disproportionable thing is a man that is half in and half out with the ways of God! His conversation is not all of a piece, sometimes right and sometimes wrong; there is not that beauty, that harmony, that holiness, to be found in them. Solomon tells us, "The legs of the lame are not equal; so is a parable in the mouth of fools" (Prov. xxvi. 7). Baines, on the place, saith thus: The man hath knowledge to speak well, but he lives ill; so his conversation is halting, like the legs of the lame. Sometimes his speculative light will incline him to do easy things; but his practical endeavours will carry him another way; there is no even and uniform strain of godliness. Then is a man's conversation ordered, when all is carried on with a fair respect to his last end; for it is the last end that fixeth a man's mind, and cuts off impertinencies and inconsistencies, and makes a man's conversation beautiful: otherwise, the man is tossed up and down in a various, uncertain motion, distracted by a multiplicity of ends and objects, that his will is in no composed and settled frame. I remember David prays, "Unite my heart to fear thy name" (Psalm lxxxvi. 11). It is a blessed thing when a man is united, when his conversation is all of a piece. And, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James i. 8). A divided mind will beget an uncertain life. I say, the last end of our lives doth unite all the parts of it, and there is a regularity and harmony between them. But others, their life is a mere lottery; the fancies by which they are governed, they are jumbled together by chance, and they live at peradventure and hap-hazard; and there is not a comely, entire, uniform order to a blessed end. Again, partly, too, from the reason here, "Order my steps in thy word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me." This will prevent the dominion of sin: perverse affections are apt

to sway us ; but, when the Lord supplies fresh directions, the tyranny and dominion of sin is prevented and crushed in the egg. Sin usually steals into the throne by insensible degrees ; temptations and occasions reduce us to some evil practice. Well, and that produceth another ; then do multiplied acts get strength, then they ensnare us ; and, when once the soul is ensnared, then this bondage daily increaseth, and is hard to be broken ; for by multiplied acts custom creeps upon us, and that is another nature ; and that which was but indifferent at first, grows more difficult. As diseases looked to at first are easily cured, otherwise they grow desperate ; so sins, when they come to a slavish tyranny and custom, they cannot help it. All this is prevented by the reasonable warnings of the Holy Spirit. Partly, too, because this is only vouchsafed to God's special people. God, as he loves any, so he manifests himself to them : this appears out of the text ; for, in the verse before the text, the words run thus, "Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me ; as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name ;" and what then ? "Order my steps in thy word." Oh ! this is to do good to us, as he useth to do good to them that fear his name. Mark, some have only providence and natural conscience ; there are others that have the word, and have an enlightened conscience, that plead God's interest in them ; but there are others are honoured so far that they are his people, that have not only his word, but his Spirit, to enforce his word upon their hearts. How did Christ declare his love to his people ? "I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you" (John xv. 15). There is God's love declared, when he shows us his whole will, when he doth guide us in all his ways ; this is the favour of his people : "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him ; and he will show them his covenant" (Psalm xxv. 14). There is the great privilege that God vouchsafes to his peculiar people, they know the mind of God more than others do ; and, in all doubtful debates and uncertain controversies, they are not left in the dark : "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God" (Mark iv. 11). David surely found such direction to be a very special blessing. Again, another argument from the text that this must needs be a very great blessing ; partly, because it helpeth us in our way to true happiness. I gather that from the word "steps ;" for all motion hath a term to which it tends, and every journey hath its period. Now, whither doth the path of the word lead us, but to God, and to the everlasting enjoyment of him ? Oh ! here they have an infallible direction that they cannot miscarry in so great an affair as this is, as the getting home to God ! Surely, that is a great blessing. I remember David saith, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm lxxiii. 24). They that wait upon God's direction, are sure to be received into his heavenly glory ; their steps are directed for the present, and they may be confident that at length they shall get home to God ; for God will accept of what he hath ordered. You are sure God will take pleasure in you when you walk according to his direction. So you see the need, from the value, of this blessing.

5. That the children of God are sensible of their need of it, that they cannot choose but pray for it. I take this form of the words, Lord, "order my steps." It is a prayer from the man of God. They seek it humbly and earnestly ; therefore they shall find it. They that make their bosom their oracle, and wit their councillor, God is disengaged from being

their guide : they need him not ; but the snares they run into will soon show how much they need him. But the children of God need him, therefore they shall find it : “ In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths ” (Prov. iii. 6). You should ever go to God for the direction of your way ; then God will not disappoint you, nor defeat your expectations : “ Righteousness shall go before him, and shall set us in the way of his steps ” (Psalm lxxxv. 13). Sometimes we wander, turn aside, and walk out of the right way ; at other times, we fall and stumble in the right way ; but the Lord will set us in the paths of his steps.

USE.—To press us to seek this great privilege of God, beg of the Lord continually to order your steps according to his word. Alas ! evil may surprise you before you are aware. Little did David think danger was so near him, when he walked upon his terrace : he gave leave to his eye to wander, and his eye fired his heart. Every morning be with God about this business : “ O Lord, in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up ” (Psalm v. 3). You need not only protection against dangers, but direction against evils and snares. As we seek for protection in the night, so in the morning ; prayer is for the direction of the day. Nay, we need not go to God in the morning only, but all the day long : “ On thee do I wait all the day ” (Psalm xxv. 5). Beg of him that you may not miscarry, but carry yourselves humbly and prudently, and may do nothing that is contrary to the will of God and his grace, but that the Lord would support and guide you continually. There is one argument that may mightily encourage you in praying : consider, your covenant interest in God doth establish this blessing, as the saints always plead the relation : “ Lead me in thy truth, and teach me ; for thou art the God of my salvation ” (Psalm xxv. 5) ; “ Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God ” (Psalm cxliii. 10) ; “ For this God is our God for ever and ever ; he will be our guide even unto death ” (Psalm xlvi. 14). To be a God to any, is to be a guide ; for, to a people in covenant, God makes over his whole self. Now, in God, there are considerable these three great attributes, his wisdom, power, and goodness. Look, as God, by virtue of his power, is all-sufficient against all dangers, and, by virtue of his goodness, is a fountain of everlasting happiness, so also, by his wisdom, is he a fountain of all goodness to guide and direct us. Now, as God hath engaged all his goodness to make us as happy as heart can wish, and his power to defend and maintain us, so all his wisdom to guide and direct us.

SERMON CXLVIII.

VERSE 133.—*And let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*

For the second branch of the prayer I observe,—

DOCTRINE II.—That the dominion of sin is a great evil, and ought earnestly to be deprecated, even by the children of God.

1. What is the dominion of sin.
2. That it is a great evil.
3. Why the saints should deprecate this evil.

I. What is the dominion of sin? It may be known by some distinctions.

First, There is a dominion of sin that is gross and sensible, and a dominion of sin that is more secret and close.

1st, More gross and sensible. For, though sin do reign in every one by nature, yet this dominion more sensibly appears in some than in others, who are given up to be visibly under the dominion of sin, as the just fruit of their voluntary living under that yoke; and usually these are set forth as a warning to the rest of the world; God hangs them up in chains of darkness in the sight of men, as an instance of this woful slavery, that every man that seeth them, and is acquainted with their course of life, may say, without breach of charity, 'There goes one that declares himself to be a servant of sin.' This is either to sin in general, or to some particular sin.

1. To sin in general. He, whosoever he be, that, instead of trembling at God's word, scoffeth at it, and maketh more account of this world than of the will of God; of the fashions of men, than of God's word; and thinketh the scorn of a base worm that would deride him for godliness, a greater terror than the wrath of God; and the love of his carnal company, a greater happiness than communion with Christ; and, instead of working out his salvation with fear and trembling, runneth into all excess of riot; and carelessly neglecteth his precious soul, while he pampereth his frail body, and doth voluntarily and ordinarily leave the boat to the stream, give up himself to serve his corruption without resistance or crying to Christ for help—this man is, without dispute, and in the eye of the world, a slave to sin: "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. vi. 16.) It is an apparent case, a man that giveth up himself to go on in the ways of his own heart, restraining himself in nothing which it affects, he is one of sin's slaves. So saith our Lord Christ: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John viii. 34). He needeth no further doubt nor debate about the matter. He that goeth on in a trade of sin, and maketh that his work and business in the world, without serious looking after the saving of his soul, is one in whom sin reigneth.

2. So some particular sins. As we have instances of carnal wretches in general, so of some poor captive souls that remain under the full power and tyranny of this or that lust, and are so remarkable for their slavery and bondage under it, that the world will point at them, and say, 'There goeth a glutton, a drunkard, an adulterer, or covetous worldling, a proud, envious person.' Their sin is broken out into some filthy sore or scab that is visible to every eye; either their covetousness, or gluttony, or ambitious affectation of worldly greatness; one whose god is his belly, who is a slave to appetite: "For of whom a man is overcome, of the same he is brought in bondage" (2 Peter ii. 19). They grow proverbial for giving up themselves wholly to such a conquering and prevailing lust. As in the natural man several men have their distinct excellences, some are famous for a strong sight, some for a quick ear, some for a nimble tongue, some for agility of body, so these for notable excesses in some corruption. Or as the saints of God are eminent for some special graces, as Abraham for faith, Moses for meekness, Job for patience, and Joseph for chastity, and Paul for zeal, Timothy for temperance, so these have their notorious and contrary blemishes.

2ndly, There is a more secret and close dominion of sin, that is varnished over with a fair appearance. Men have many good qualities, and no notorious blemishes; but yet some sensitive good and created thing sitteth

nearest the heart, and occupieth the room and place of God; that is loved, respected, served, instead of God, or more than God. That which is our chiefest good and last end, is our god, or occupieth the room of God. So our Lord telleth us, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other: ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. vi. 24); and, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John v. 44.) And, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother," &c. (Luke xiv. 26.) We must be dead, not only to carnal pleasure, but to credit, estate; yea, life and all. It must not sit nearest the heart, nor bring it under its command and power: "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Cor. vi. 12). We are besotted and bewitched with some created thing, that we cannot part with it, or leave it for God's sake, or notwithstanding all the mischief it is to the interest of our soul. Though a man serveth it cunningly, closely, and by a cleanly conveyance, yet all his religion is but either to hide or feed his lust.

Secondly, There is a predominancy of one sin over another, and a predominancy of sin over grace. In the first sense, renewed men may be said to have some reigning corruption, or predominant sin; namely, in comparison of other sins. That such predominant sins they have, appeareth by the great sway and power they bear in commanding other evils, to be either committed or forborne, accordingly as they contribute to their advancement. As a wen or a strain draweth all the noxious humours to itself, so it appeareth by the violent and frequent relapses of the saints into them, or their unwillingness to admit of admonition and reproof for them, or their falling into them out of an inward propensity, when outward temptations are none, or weak, or very few; some sins that are less mortified than others, or unto which they are carried by a natural inclination, constitution, or education. Thus David had his "iniquity" (Psalm xviii. 23), whether it were hastiness, or distrust of the promise, or an inclination to revenge himself. Some sins that men favour most, and are most urgent and importunate upon them, and steal away their hearts most from God. The great pond into which other rivulets or streams of iniquity do empty themselves. That sin that outgroweth all the rest, as the tall tree taketh away the nourishment from the under shrubs. That which is loved and delighted in above other sins; and, when other sins will not prevail, the Devil sets this awork, as the disciples looked upon the disciple whom Jesus loved; when Christ told them that one of them should betray him, Simon Peter beckoned to him that he should ask who it was of whom he spake (John xiii. 23, 24). Well then, in regard of other sins, one may reign and sit in the throne of the heart, be beloved more than another, but not in regard of predominancy over grace; for that is contrary to the new nature, that sin should have the upper hand constantly and universally in the soul: for any one thing, though never so lawful in itself, habitually loved more than God, will not stand with sincerity (Luke xiv. 26). If not our natural comforts, certainly not our carnal lusts. To love anything apart from Christ, or against Christ, or above Christ, is a dispossessing Christ, or casting him out of the throne.

Thirdly, There is a twofold prevalency and dominion of sin, actual or habitual; actual is only for the time, habitual for a constancy. Though a

regenerate man be not one that lets sin reign over him habitually, yet too often doth sin reign over him actually, as to some particular act of sin.

1st, The habitual reign of sin may be known by the general frame and state of the heart and life, where it is constantly yielded unto or not opposed, but breaketh out without controul, and beareth sway with delight. Men give the bridle to sin, and let it lead them whither it will. That is *peccatum regnans, cui homo nec vult nec potest resistere*, so Coppen. The sinner neither can nor will resist, *non potest*; because, usually, after many lapses, God giveth up men unto penal or judicial hardness of heart. But he is willingly taking these bonds and chains upon himself. Such are said to walk after their own lusts (2 Peter iii. 3); to live in sin (Rom. vi. 2); to be "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. ii. 1); to serve divers lusts and pleasures (Titus iii. 3); to draw on iniquity with cart-ropes (Isa. v. 18); such as addict and give over themselves to a trade of sin with delight and full consent.

2ndly, Actually, when we do that which is evil against our consciences, or yield *pro hic et nunc* to obey sin in the lusts thereof; when it gaineth our consent for the time, but the general frame and state of the heart is against it. In short, when sin is perfected into some evil action, or (in the Apostle's speech) when lust hath conceived and brought forth sin (James i. 15); that is, some heinous and enormous offence. At that time, no question, it hath the upper hand, and carrieth it from grace; and the flesh doth show itself in them more than the spirit. A man may please a lesser friend before a greater in an act or two. Every presumptuous act doth for that time put the sceptre into sin's hand. Note, that both predominant spoken of in the former distinction, and the actual reign of sin in this, do much prejudice a Christian, waste his conscience, hinder his joy of faith; and, if not guarded, and we do not take up in time, or if often, cannot be excused from habitual reign. They are rare by the violence of a great temptation, unlikely acts, as for a hen to bring forth the egg of a crow.

Fourthly, The next distinction is of sins reigning with a full and plenary consent, and with reluctancy and contradiction; as Herod reigned over the Jews for many years by mere force, they opposing him and contradicting him, but afterwards willingly consented to his government: so sin reigneth in some, who readily, willingly obey the lusts thereof, and take its bonds and chains upon them. And on the godly it doth sometimes prevail, yet not quietly and without blows: "What I hate, that do I" (Rom. vii. 15). They are in combat and conflict with it. The virgin that cried out, was innocent; it was a ravishment, not a consent: *Peccatum patitur, non facit*, as Bernard. The seed of God is disliking and opposing (1 John iii. 9). They are sometimes foiled; but they keep up their resistance. Sin gets the mastery in some acts, but as a tyrant, not a lawful possessor. They groan under that oppression, ever strive for liberty and freedom, and in time recover it. Chrysostom hath an expression on that of Rom. vi. 12, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies," &c.: *Ὅνκ εἶπε μὴ τυραννείτω, ἀλλὰ μὴ βασιλεύετω*. Sin will play the tyrant in the best heart, but let it not have a quiet reign. It will take advantage of present distempers and difficulties; it may encroach upon us, but it hath not our hearts: whereas, otherwise, if a man be not in arms against it, but liveth in peace and good contentment under the vigour and life of his

lusts, there is no opposition, unless it be some checks of a natural conscience, or a few thoughts of fear and shame, or some temporal mischief and inconvenience; no opposition of a renewed heart, no hatred of it and opposition, as it is an offence to God. Then your condition is evil.

II. That it is a great evil, &c. It must needs be so,—

First, Because it is a renouncing of the government of Christ. We transfer the kingdom from him to Satan, and take the sceptre out of his hands, when we give way to the reign of sin. What though we do not formally intend this, yet virtually we do so, and so God will account it. It is *finis operis*, though not *operantis*. Look, as the setting up of a usurper is the rejection of the lawful king, so the setting up of sin is the setting up of Satan (John viii. 44), and, by consequence, a laying aside of Christ; for every degree of service done to him, includeth a like degree or portion of treason and infidelity to Christ. For a man cannot serve two masters (Matt. vi. 24), cannot have two chief goods at the same time; therefore he that cleaveth to the one, refuseth the other. If you cleave to sin, you renounce Christ; and, though we profess Christ to be our Lord, that will not help the matter (Matt. vi. 21); we are, for all that, as true bondsmen to Satan, as the Heathen that offered sacrifice to him. A drunken or wanton Christian giveth the Devil as much interest in him as those that sacrificed to Bacchus, or Priapus, or Venus; for he doth as absolutely dispose and command your affections, as he did theirs. You are his by possession and occupation. The bond of your servitude to Satan, is altogether as firm and strong as their rites of worship. Now, we that know Christ's right both by purchase and covenant, cannot but know what a great sin this is. By purchase we are his: "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). The buyer hath a power over what he hath bought. We were lost and sold, we sold ourselves against all right and justice; and Christ was pleased to redeem us, and that with no slight thing, but with his own blood (1 Peter i. 18, 19). How can you look your Redeemer in the face at the last day? If you have any sense and belief of Christian mysteries, you should be afraid to rob Christ of his purchase: "Shall I take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot? God forbid" (1 Cor. vi. 15). He hath bought you to this very end, that you may be no longer under the slavery of sin, but under his blessed government, and the sceptre of his Spirit: "That he might redeem us from all iniquity" (Titus ii. 14). This was his end, to set us at liberty, and to free us from our sins; therefore for us to despise the benefit, and to count our bondage a delight; yea, to build up that which he came to destroy, this is as great an affront to Christ as can be. But we are not only his by purchase, but his by covenant: "Entered into a covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine" (Ezek. xvi. 8). This was ratified in baptism, where we dedicated ourselves to the Lord's use and service; and shall we rescind our baptismal vows, and give the sovereignty to another, after we have resigned ourselves to Christ, and the hands of consecration have passed upon us? When Ananias had dedicated that which was in his power, and kept back part for private use, God struck him dead in the place (Acts iii. 5); and, if we alienate ourselves, who were Christ's before the consecration, of how much sorer vengeance shall we be guilty? God's complaint was just, "Thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured" (Ezek. xvi. 20).

And, if Satan hath a full interest in you by doing his lusts, as he had in them by that rite of worship, is not the wrong done to God the same ?

Secondly, It is a sure note of a carnal heart ; for it is not only incongruous, that a renewed man should let sin reign, but impossible. *De jure*, it ought not ; *de facto*, it shall not be. The exhortation and promise, Rom. vi. 12, with 14 : " Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies " (verse 12). There is the exhortation : while you have these mortal bodies, sin will dwell in you ; but let it not reign over you. God suffereth it to dwell in us, for our exercise, not our ruin. Then the promise : " Sin shall not have dominion over you ; for ye are not under the law, but under grace " (verse 14) ; " Let not," " Shall not : " it is true, sin remaineth in the godly, but it reigneth not there. It is *dejectum quodammodo, non ejectum tamen* ; cast down in regard of regency, not cast out in regard of inherency. Like the beasts in Daniel, " They had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season " (Dan. vii. 12) ; some degree of life, but their reign broken. The Israelites could not wholly expel the Canaanites, yet they kept them under. There will be pride, earthliness, unbelief, and sensuality, dwelling, moving, working in them ; but it hath not its wonted power over them. Christ will not reckon men slaves to sin by their having sin in them, nor yet by their daily failings and infirmities, or by their falling now and then into foul faults by the violence of a temptation, unless they make a constant trade of sin, and be under the dominion of it without control, and set up no course of mortification against it.

Thirdly, The reign of sin is so mischievous. Sin, when it once gets the throne, groweth outrageous, and involveth us in many inconveniences, ere we can get out again. Therefore they that know the service of sin, as we all do by sad experience, should use all caution that it never bring them into bondage again. The work and wages of sin are very different from God's work and wages. The Apostle compareth them, when he dissuadeth them from the reign of sin : " For, when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed ? for the end of those things is death. But now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life " (Rom. vi. 20—22). You have had full experience of the fruits of sin, of Satan's work : what fruit then, before you had tasted better things, before you had a contrary principle set up in your hearts ? You are ashamed now to think of that course, now you know better things. But what fruit then ? Satan's work is drudgery, and his reward is death. The Devil hath one bad property, which no other master, how cruel soever, hath, to plague and torment them most which have done him most continual and faithful service. Those that have sinned most, have most horror ; and every degree of service hath a proportionable degree of shame and punishment. He is an unreasonable tyrant in exacting service without rest and intermission. The most cruel oppressors, Turks and infidels, give some rest to their captives ; but sin is unsatisfiable. Men spend all their means, and all their time, and all their strength, in the pursuit of it ; yet all is little enough. And what is the reward of all, but death and destruction ? Now, judge you, to whom should we yield obedience, and who hath most right to be sovereign ? he who hath made us and redeemed us, and preserveth us every day (none but he can claim title to us), he to whom we are debtors

by so many vows, so many obligations; or else Satan, our worst enemy, who is posting us on to our destruction.

Fourthly, It is so uncomely, and misbecoming the new estate, wherein we have so many helps and encouragements to resist sin.

1st, For helps, you have an opposite principle to give cheek to it, the seed of God, or new nature. Since Christ hath put grace into your hearts to resist sin, it is your duty not to suffer it to be idle and unfruitful: "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Rom. vi. 11, 12). You want no ability to encourage, you have an observing witness to give cheek to it, the Spirit of God, who will help you in this work (Rom. viii. 13). He will be your second; neither we without the Spirit, nor the Spirit without us. There is a life and power goeth along with every Gospel-truth: laziness pretendeth want of power; but what is too hard for this Spirit? Then,—

2ndly, For encouragement. In every war are two notable encouragements, goodness of the quarrel and hopes of victory; as David (1 Sam. xvii. 36). We have these in our conflict and combat with sin.

1. Our quarrel and our cause is good; it is the quarrel of the Lord of hosts which you fight. We stand with Christ our Redeemer, who came, *ἵνα λύσῃ*, that he might destroy the works of the Devil. He hath begun the battle; we do but labour to keep under that enemy which Christ hath begun to slay and destroy. Sin is not only an enemy to us, but to him. It is against him, and hindereth his glory in the world, and the subjection of his creatures and servants. Were it not for sin, what a glorious potentate would Christ be, even in the judgment of the world?

2. Hope of the victory. Our strife will end, and it will end well. Those that are really, earnestly striving against sin, are sure to conquer: "Let not sin therefore reign," &c. (Rom. vi. 12.) And it shall not: if there be but a likelihood of victory, we are encouraged to fight; here a Christian may triumph before the victory. *Non equè gloriatur accinctus, ac discinctus*; "Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as he that putteth it off" (1 Kings xx. 11). There will come a good and happy issue in the end, even a conquest of sin. For the present, we overcome it in part; it shall not finally and totally overcome us in this world, and shortly all strife will be over: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. xvi. 20). It is but a little while, and we shall receive the crown, and triumph over all our enemies.

III. Why the saints should deprecate this evil.

1. Because there is sin still in us all. It is a bosom enemy, that is born and bred with us; and therefore it will soon get the advantage of grace, if it be not watched and resisted; as nettles and weeds that are kindly to the soil, will soon choke flowers and better herbs that are planted by care, and grow not of their own accord, when they are neglected, and not continually rooted out. We cannot get rid of this cursed inmate, till this outer tabernacle be dissolved, and this house of clay crumbled into dust. Our old nature is so inclinable to this slavery, that, if God subtract his grace, what shall we do?

2. It is not only in us, but always working and striving for the mastery. It is not as other things, which, as they grow in age, are more quiet and tame; but, "Sin, &c., wrought in me all manner of concupiscence" (Rom.

vii. 8); "The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy." It is not a sleepy, but a working, stirring principle. If it were a dull and inactive habit, the danger were not so great; but it is always exercising and putting forth itself, and seeking to gain an interest in our affections, and a command over all our actions; and therefore, unless we do our part to keep it under, we shall soon revert to our old slavery. Sin must be kept under as a slave, or else it will be above as a tyrant, and domineer.

Once more, the more it acts, the more strength it gets; as all habits are increased by action; for, when we have once yielded, we are ready to yield again. Therefore any one sin let alone, yea, that which we least suspect, may bring us into subjection and captivity to the law of sin (Rom. vii. 23). It doth not only make us flexible and yielding to temptations; but it doth urge and impel us thereunto.

Again, this bondage is daily increasing, and more hard to be broken; for by multiplied acts, a custom creepeth upon us, which is another nature; and that which might be remedied at first, groweth more difficult. Diseases looked to at first are more easy to be cured, whereas, otherwise, they grow desperate; so sins, before hardened into a custom, before they bring us under the power of any creature or comfort which we affect (2 Cor. vi. 12). For then, afterwards, it cometh to a complete dominion and slavery; so that, if a man would, he cannot help it. It behoveth, then, every child of God to do his part, that sin may not reign; for, where care is not taken, it certainly will reign.

USE.—To reprove the security and carelessness of many. David suspected himself, else he would never have made this prayer to God, Lord, keep me: "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." And we should all do so that would be safe: "Happy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart, shall fall into mischief" (Prov. xxviii. 14). A constant watchfulness and holy jealousy and self-suspicion will be no burden to you, but a blessing. Sin deceiveth us into hardness of heart, for want of taking heed. Many that are secure do not consider their danger; and therefore they are not so careful to watch over themselves, nor so humble as to implore the Divine assistance, because they do not consider how soon they may be transported by a naughty heart, and brought under the power and reign of sin. Surely, were we as sensible of the danger of the inward man as we are of the outward, we should resist the first motions, and not nourish and foster a temptation as we do. The saints do not tarry till the dead blow cometh, but resist the first strokes of sin; they do not tarry till it pines to death, but resist the first inclinations. An evil inclination, if it be cherished and gratified, gets ground: the longer we let it alone, the harder will our conflict be; for sin secureth its interest by degrees.

It showeth the fearful estate of them that lie under the dominion of sin. But who will own it?

1. It is certain that all men in their natural estate are in this condition. Sin doth reign where there is no principle of grace set up against it. The throne is always filled, man's heart cannot lie empty and void. If grace doth not reign, sin reigneth. Natural men are under the power of darkness, living in a peaceable subjection to sin; till Christ come to trouble it, all is quiet: wind and tide go together.

2. It appeareth by your course. Many will say, "There is not a just man on earth that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecc. vii. 20): you are

sinners as well as we. Answer: There is a difference; though there be not a good man upon earth, that sinneth not, yet there is a difference. Some have not the spot of God's children (Deut. xxxii. 5). There is a difference between sins; God gave the priest under the law direction how to put a difference between leprous persons. So still there is a great deal of difference between numbness and death, and between dimness of sight and blindness, want of sense and want of life; between stumbling into a ditch, and throwing ourselves headlong into an ocean. And so there is a difference between infirmities and iniquities; a failing out of ignorance and weakness, or some powerful temptation, and a running headlong into all ungodliness. God's children have their failings, but a burning desire to be freed from them, though others wallow in their sin without any care of a remedy. In the one, there is a failing in point of duty; in the other, a rebellion. Take Judas and Peter, both sinned against their Master, the one denied, the other betrayed him; the one denied him out of fear, the other betrayed him out of covetousness and greediness of gain; the one plotted his death, the other was surprised on a sudden. There is a great deal of difference between purpose and a surprise; the one wept bitterly, the other is given up to a raging despair. David did not make a trade of adultery, and bathe himself in filthy lusts. Noah was drunk, but not knowing the power of the juice of the grape. They dare not lie in this estate, but seek to get out by repentance.

3. Some things may beget caution, and move you to suspect yourselves; that is, when your souls readily comply with the temptation, you are at sin's beck. If it saith, Go, you go; if it saith, Come, you come. It is of great concernment to know what goes to the determining a man's condition, to know at whose beck he is, whether he is at the flesh's or the Spirit's beck. The godly are described, that they hearken unto the voice of his word; so the wicked are those that hearken to the voice of sin. If sin but make a motion, it is a match presently. If ambition bid Absalom rise up against his father, then he will trouble all the kingdom, it will hurry him to run his father down; if envy bid Cain kill his brother Abel, he will not stick at it; if covetousness bid Achan take a bribe of that which was devoted to the flames, and must be offered as a burnt-offering to God, yet Achan obeys his covetousness; if adultery bids Joseph's mistress tempt her servant, presently she yields. So, when a sinner yields, and is led away like a fool to the correction of the stocks. Meadow-ground may, in a great flood, be drowned; but marsh-ground is overflowed by every return of the tide: so they cannot cease to sin, every temptation carries them away. When men are impatient of reproof, when they have a privy sore they cannot endure should be touched, if a man speak to them anything to help them on to their condition. Herod must not have his Herodias touched, though he heard John the Baptist gladly in many things. Or when men set up a toleration and court of faculties in their hearts, and they will have a dispensation; if God will be contented with obedience in some things, they will dispense with other things; pardon for some sins, but not break them off; have an indulgence that they may continue in them, or in vain practices. This shows the reign of sin.

SERMON CXLIX.

VERSE 131.—*Deliver me from the oppression of man ; so will I keep thy precepts.*

In the former verse, the man of God had begged grace with respect to internal enemies, to the bosom enemy the flesh, that no sin might have dominion over him ; now he beggeth deliverance from external enemies. The saints are not only exercised with their own corruptions, but the malice of wicked men. We have to do both with sin and sinners, with temptations and persecutions ; and therefore he desireth first to be kept from sin, and after that from danger and trouble ; first from the dominion of sin, and then from the oppression of sinners : both are a trouble to us, they were a trouble to David, and God can and will in time give us deliverance from both, “ Deliver me from the oppression of man,” &c.

In the text we have,—

1. A prayer for mercy.

2. A resolution, vow, and promise of duty. The one is inferred out of the other, “ So will I keep thy precepts.”

1. A prayer for mercy, “ Deliver me from the oppression of man.” In the Hebrew it is, From the oppression of Adam, the name of the first father for the posterity. This term is put either by way of distinction, aggravation, or diminution.

(1.) Man by way of distinction. There is the oppression and tyranny of the Devil and sin ; but the Psalmist doth not mean that now : *Hominum non demonum*, saith Hugo.

(2.) Man by way of aggravation. *Homo homini lupus* ; no creatures so ravenous and destructive to one another as man. It is a shame that one man should oppress another. Beasts do not usually devour those of the same kind ; but, usually, a man’s enemies are those of his own household (Matt. x. 36). The nearer we are in bonds of alliance, the greater the hatred. We are of the same stock, and reason should tell every one of us, that we should do as we would be done to. Nay, we are of the same religion. *Eodem sanguine Christi glutinati*. We are cemented together by the blood of Christ, which obliges to more brotherly kindness ; and, if we differ in a few things, to be sure we have cords of alliance and relations enough to love one another more than we do. But, for all this, there is the oppression of man.

(3.) Man by way of diminution. And to lessen the fear of this evil, this term Adam is given them, to show their weakness in comparison of God. Thou art God ; but they that are so ready and forward to oppress and injure us, are but men ; thou canst easily overrule their power and break the yoke. I think this consideration chiefest, because of other places : “ To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress ” (Psalm x. 18). The oppressors are but men of the earth, a piece of red clay ; earth in his composition, earth in his dissolution ; frail men, that must, within a while, be laid in the dust. But it is more emphatically expressed : “ Who art thou that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass ; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, which hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth ; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy ?

And where is the fury of the oppressor?" (Isa. li. 12, 13.) When thou hast the immortal and Almighty God to be thy protector and Saviour, shouldest thou be afraid of a weak, mortal man, that is but Adam, a little enlivened dust? Within a little while he and all his fury is over and gone.

2. The promise of duty, "I will keep thy precepts;" which is a constant observation of all God's commandments, if God would interpose for his rescue. But did David do well to suspend his obedience upon so uncertain a condition? I answer, no; we must not understand it so, as if he did indent with God upon those terms, and no otherwise; or as if, before, he had not kept them, and would then begin. No; he would keep them however, and had kept them; only this would be a new engagement to press him to keep them more constantly, more accurately. Look throughout this psalm, and you shall find David still at his duty, whatever his condition may be: "The proud have had me greatly in derision, yet have I not declined from thy law" (verse 51). There he is scorned, but not discouraged. "The bands of the wicked have robbed me, but I have not forgotten thy law" (verse 61). There plundered, wasted, stripped of all; yet not discouraged. "The proud have forged a lie against me; but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart" (verse 69). There falsely accused, but not discouraged. "I am become like a bottle in the smoke, yet do I not forget thy statutes" (verse 83). There dried up and shrunk into nothing, yet not discouraged. "They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts" (verse 87); "I am small and despised, yet do not I forget thy precepts" (verse 141). So that his meaning was not, that he would serve God no longer, unless he would deliver him; but the meaning is, he would have a new obligation and encouragement; this will engage me afresh; he doth beforehand interpose a promise, that he would walk with God more closely. From the words thus opened, we have three points:—

1. Deliverance from oppression is a blessing to be sought from the hands of God in prayer.

2. When God delivereth us from the oppression of man, we should be quickened and encouraged in his service.

3. When we are praying for deliverance, we may interpose a promise of obedience.

I. For the first point, that deliverance from oppression is a blessing to be sought from the hands of God in prayer. I shall show it first, by answering the question, why; and then show you how.

First, Why. The point may be strengthened by these reasons:—

1st, We have liberty to ask temporal things. Many think it too carnal to pray for health, food and raiment, long life, temporal deliverance. What God hath promised, we may lawfully pray for; for a prayer is but a promise put in suit. Now, these blessings are adopted into the covenant, as being useful to us in our passage; and therefore we may ask them. What Christ hath taught us to pray for, that we may pray for; for he said, "After this manner therefore pray ye" (Matt. vi. 9); and one request is, "Give us this day our daily bread." Protection and maintenance we may ask, as well as pardon and grace. It conduceth to the honour of God, that we should ask these things of him, that we may testify our dependence, and acknowledge his inspection and government over the affairs of the world: "He hath prepared his throne for judgment" (Psalm ix. 7). Courts of

justice among men are not always open to hear the plaintiff; but the Lord holdeth court continually; we may come to the Lord every day. No man's petition and complaint is delayed for an hour. He hath prepared his throne for this end and purpose, to hear the complaints of his people when they are oppressed; therefore we may pray for temporal things.

2ndly, Our spiritual welfare is concerned in such temporal deliverances, that we may serve God without impediment and without distraction. The oppression of man is an impediment; it taketh us off from many opportunities of service and bringing honour to God; and, though God will dispense with us at such a time, yet it is uncomfortable, as God dispensed with David when he was hunted up and down the wilderness (Psalms lxxiii., lxxxiv., xlii.). As Christ biddeth them pray: "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath-day" (Matt. xxiv. 20). Though it was lawful, it was grievous; as grievous to the body, to have their flight in winter; and grievous to the soul, to have it on a Sabbath-day. That might call to mind their pleasant opportunities of conversing with God by prayer. When God denieth liberty and opportunity of enjoying and performing the exercises of religion, we are excused from positive duties; but yet it is a great mercy to have our liberty restored, to serve God in peace without distraction, to have a little breathing time: "Then had the churches rest" (Acts ix. 31). The oppressions and persecutions of men are among the temptations, and may weaken obedience to God; and, if not altogether drive us from his service, yet clog our spirits, and hinder our cheerfulness and readiness in it: "Oppression maketh a wise man mad" (Ecc. vii. 7). It will strangely shake and discompose our spirits, especially as it may be circumstantiated; that is, when we have base indignities put upon us, as when exposed to all manner of insolency and contempt: "Have mercy upon us, for we are filled with contempt" (Psalm cxxiii. 3); our friends afraid to pity us (Ecc. iv. 1). Take it at best, it is no small discouragement and trial to a godly man. Therefore it being so, that oppression is ever reckoned among the temptations, we may pray not to enter into temptation; as Theophylact observeth well on the place, the rather because one way by which God helpeth his people is, by taking away temptation, as well as ministering a supply of grace: "The rod of the wicked shall not always rest upon the lot of the righteous" (Psalm cxxv. 3); "But with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13).

3rdly, The glory of God is concerned. His people will honour him more if one, especially an eminent one, be delivered from the oppression of man: "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name. The righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me" (Psalm cxlii. 7). They will be flocking about him, and inquiring what experiences of God and his goodness he hath found: "Helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us, by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf" (2 Cor. i. 11). Much more when the whole church is delivered: "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion; build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness," &c. (Psalm li. 18, 19.) Every heart will be thinking of honour and praise to God. And, besides the honour done to God by his people, God will more discover himself to the world, his justice will be more evidenced: "The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth" (Psalm ix. 16). The world is led by

sense; he will not be taken to be a friend to persecutors and oppressors. In short, it is not for the honour of God that his people should be left under oppression, as if he sought not, and cared not, for their welfare. You shall see the afflicted condition of the church is called “the reproach of the Heathen” (Ezek. xxxvi. 30); and, “Neither bear the shame of the Heathen any more” (Ezek. xxxiv. 29). The Heathen would cast this in their teeth, as if their God had no respect to them, or were not able to help them.

4thly, Prayer engageth us to constancy. God’s deliverance will be better for us than our own; that is, than those sinful shifts and ways of escape that we can find out. What we ask of God, must be had in God’s way. It bindeth us to seek no other way of escape than we can commend to God’s blessing in prayer. It is said of the saints, that they “were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection” (Heb. xi. 35). Would any refuse deliverance, when it is tendered to them? Yes, upon such spiteful conditions: they were commanded to do something contrary to the laws of God; therefore they would have God’s deliverance, not their own. Every one of them was offered release in the midst of their torments and tortures, if they would yield to the eating of swine’s flesh, or that which was forbidden by God.

5thly, Seeking deliverance at the hands of God, doth ease the heart of a great deal of trouble, and deliver it from those inordinate affections, and afflicting and tormenting passions, which otherwise the oppression of man might raise in us; as fear, grief, sorrow, anger, envy, and despair; fear and dread to suffer more, grief and sorrow for what we suffer already, anger and envy against those oppressors by whom we suffer, and despair and impatience because of the continuance of our molestations and sufferings. All these are mischiefs to the soul, and all these are cured by prayer.

1. Fear, because of the mightiness of them that oppress or threaten to oppress. The fear of man, we are told, is a snare: “The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord, shall be safe” (Prov. xxix. 25). We are full of distracting and perplexing thoughts; and, if we cherish them, they will weaken our trust in God, and dependence upon his promises; for fear of man and trust in God are there opposed. Nay, the mischief will not stop there; for they that trust not God, can never be true to him; it will destroy our trust in God, and then we shall run to carnal shifts, and so fear men more than God; do things displeasing to God, for fear of being oppressed by men: so that you may be soon sensible of the mischief of carnal fear. But how shall we ease our hearts of this burthen by prayer? Partly, because then we use our fear aright, when it only driveth us to seek his protection; that is the commendable use of fear: “Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord” (2 Chron. xx. 3). When Jacob feared Esau, he set himself to wrestle with God (Gen. xxxii.). And partly, because prayer discovereth a higher object of fear: “He that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they” (Eccl. v. 8). And so the fear of God driveth out the fear of man, as a great nail driveth out the less. In God’s strength we may defy enemies: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm xxvii. 1.) We can set God against the creature, and this will quell our fears of them. When we set ourselves against them, our

interest against theirs, we may see cause to fear; but set God against them and engage him, and you have no cause to fear. Then,—

2. For grief and sorrow. It cloggeth the heart, and stayeth the wheels, so that we drive on heavily in the spiritual life. Worldly sorrow worketh death (2 Cor. vii. 10). It brings on deadness and hardness of heart, and quencheth all our vigour: “By sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken” (Prov. xv. 13). A dead and heavy heart doth little to the purpose for God. Now, how shall we get rid of this? The cure is by prayer; for vent giveth ease to all our passions: “Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. iv. 6). As when wind is gotten into the caverns of the earth, it causeth terrible convulsions and earthquakes, till it get a vent; so the mind is eased, when we can pour out our care into the bosom of God, and wait till deliverance cometh from above. Prayer showeth there is some life in our affairs, that our right for the present is not dead, but sleeps; there is a God in Heaven, that heareth our groans, and is sensible of our sorrows, and then we may say, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him,” &c. (Psalm xlii. 5.) Prayer is the old refuge of the saints, and the blessed means to pluck up their spirits. Whilst there is a God in Heaven, we are not at an utter loss. So, “I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” (verse 9.) David first reasoned with himself, yet the distemper continued; but, when he comes to reason the case with God in prayer, then he gets ease.

3. The violent passions of anger, envy, and revenge against oppressors, these are all nought, and do a world of mischief. Anger discomposeth us, and transports the soul into uncomely motions against God and men, makes us fret and malecontent; it tempts us to atheism (Psalm lxxiii.), maketh us weary of well-doing (Psalm xxxvii.), tempts us to imitation of their wicked course. The Devil worketh much upon spleen, and stomach, and discontent; and we are apt to run into these disorders. Now, how shall we do to get rid of these distempers? By prayer, in which we get a sight and prospect of the other world, and then these things will seem nothing to us; acquaint ourselves with God, and the process of his providence, and so we shall see an end of things (Psalm lxxiii. 17); then all is quiet. And as for revenge too, that is an effect of the former; when we plead before God, we see the justice of what is unjust, and hard dealing from men to be justly inflicted by God; and so the heart is calmed. The Lord bid him curse (2 Sam. xvi. 11). There is reason enough for this dispensation in the upper tribunal, whereunto when we appeal we should render no man evil for evil (Rom. xii. 17). We ought not, we need not; it is God’s work: “To me belongeth vengeance and recompence” (Deut. xxxii. 35). Nay, our very praying is a committing ourselves to him that judgeth righteously (1 Peter ii. 23). In prayer, we vent our zeal; and that hindereth us from venting our carnal passions. It is a resignation of our person and cause to him under unjust sufferings; not out of malice, desiring judgment and vengeance on persecutors; that is to make God the executioner of our lusts, to establish that which we would prevent in prayer. But saints, in prayer, labour only to show their faith and meekness, and to leave things to the righteous judge, to do what is for his own glory and their good.

4. For the other evil, impatience and despair, it is a very great evil, and contrary to faith, and hope, and dependence, which the Christian religion doth mainly establish; and maketh way for the worst evils, either total apostasy from God, or atheism, or self-destruction. Now, this is very incident to us, when oppressions lie long upon us: "This evil is of the Lord: what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" (2 Kings vi. 33.) So, "But thou saidst, There is no hope" (Jer. ii. 25). Desperately! No; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go; I will take my own course; there is no hope; it is in vain to wait upon the Lord any longer. And, if things do not grow to that height, yet the children of God grow weary and faint in their minds (Heb. xii. 3). Now, we keep afoot some hope, while we have a heart to call upon God. The suit is still depending in the court of Heaven, when it seems to be over on earth; and we see there is cause to wait for God's answer. He that shall come, will come. God may tarry long, but will never come too late. Thus why.

Secondly, But how is this to be asked?

1st, This is not to be asked, in the first place, as our main blessing: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matt. vi. 33). If we seek our ease and temporal felicity only, that prayer is like a brutish cry: they howled upon their beds for corn and wine (Hos. vii. 14). A dog will howl, when he feels anything inconvenient. You will never be freed from murmuring and quarrelling at God's dispensations, and questioning his love, if this be the first thing that you seek; and so your prayers will become your snare. Besides the great dishonour to God, it argues the great disorder of your affections, that you can be content to have anything apart from God: "Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face evermore" (Psalm cv. 4). In all conditions, that must be our great request, that we may have the favour of God.

Secondly, It must be asked with submission. It is not absolutely promised, nor intrinsically and indispensably necessary to our happiness; but if the Lord see it fit for his own glory and our good. We cannot take it ill if a friend deny us to lend a sum of money, which he knoweth we will lay out to our loss and detriment. God seeth it fit sometimes for his own glory and our good, to continue us under oppression, rather than to take us out of it. There are two acts of providence, relieving and comforting the oppressed, and punishing the oppressors. Sometimes God doth the one without the other, sometimes both together. Sometimes God will only comfort the oppressed; we cry to him in our afflictions, and God will not break the yoke, but give us a supply of strength to bear it: "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul" (Psalm cxxxviii. 3). He giveth you strength to bear the burthen, if you continue in your integrity. Sometimes God doth punish the oppressor; yet that is no relief and reparation to you: you must bear it; for you are to stand to God's will, and to wait his leisure to free you from it.

Thirdly, Your end must be, that God may be glorified, and that you may serve him more cheerfully. So it is in the text: "Deliver me from the oppression of man; so will I keep thy precepts;" "Have mercy upon me, O Lord; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death: that I may show forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Sion: I will rejoice in thy sal-

vation" (Psalm ix. 13, 14). So David beggeth salvation in order to praise. Temporal mercy should not be loved for itself, nor sought for itself; but as we may glorify God by it; that is to be our end: 'Lord, I seek not my own interest, but thine.' If you have a carnal end, you miss: "Because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James iv. 3); that we may please the flesh as sweetly and quietly as we did before: live in the height of pomp and splendour, gratify our lusts without disturbance, or see our revenge; or, if a mere natural end, the mere convenience of the outward man, we bespeak our own denial.

Fourthly, We must pray in faith, that God can, and is ready to, deliver from the oppression of man, and will do so in due time, when it is good for us.

1. God can deliver us. Though our oppressors be never so mighty and strong, God can break their power, or change their hearts, or determine their interests; because the omniscience of God is a great deep, it is a great relief to the soul to consider the several ways that God hath to right us. Either by changing the hearts of the persecutors and oppressors: "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (Acts ix. 31). They had nothing to do but to build up one another. When was that? When Paul was converted: he was an active instrument against the church, and God turned his heart; then had the churches rest. Or else the Lord may do it by determining their interests, that they shall show favour to his people, though their hearts be not changed: when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. xvi. 7). Enemies, while enemies, may be at peace with us. Please men, and you cannot say God is your friend; but please God, and he maketh your enemies at peace with you. There is much in the secret chain of providence: "Now, God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs" (Dan. i. 9). What was that favour? To wink at him for doing that which was contrary to the law of their religion. Or else he can break the yoke by some apparent ruining judgments, by which he will defeat all their advantages, either by power or law, reseuing his people out of their hands: "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children" (Isa. xlix. 24, 25). Whether they plead might or right, when God goeth that way to work, nothing shall let; no power shall be able to detain what God will have delivered and restored. Or it may be by some secret ways, God will bring on some judgment: "A fire not blown shall consume him" (Job xx. 26); that is, the oppressor, a curse not invented by those he hath wronged, or any man else; but sent immediately by God. It shall come, nobody knoweth how. Therefore we should not be discouraged with unlikelihoods when we go to God, who hath many ways which poor short-sighted creatures cannot foresee.

2ndly, He is ready. The love which the Lord hath for his afflicted people, will not suffer his justice to be long at quiet. That God is ready to help and deliver, three things will evidence.

1. It is his nature to pity and show mercy to the oppressed, and to revenge the oppressor. He pitieth the afflictions of them that suffer most justly,

and far beneath their desert, from his own hand: "And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord; and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel" (Judg. x. 16). And, "For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel" (2 Kings xiv. 26). How much more will he pity them that are unworthily oppressed: "In all their affliction he was afflicted" (Isa. lxiii. 9); "I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning," &c. (Acts vii. 34.) And the Lord's pitiful nature doth incline him to deliver his people. And when the oppressed cry, "I will hear, for I am gracious" (Exod. xxii. 21—27).

2. It is his usual practice and custom: "The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed" (Psalm ciii. 6). If for all, surely for his people: he sits in Heaven on purpose to rectify the disorders of men. So, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all" (Psalm xxxiv. 19). God hath a plaster for ever wound: God's people plunge themselves into trouble, and his mercy delivereth them out of it.

3. It is his office as judge of the world: "Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth; render a reward to the proud" (Psalm xciv. 2); "Shall not the judge of the earth do right?" Look upon him only in that notion, according to our natural conceptions, as the supreme cause and judge of all things. Again, his office, as protector of his people: he is in covenant with them, he is their sun and shield, he is the refuge of the oppressed. his people's refuge in time of trouble (Psalm ix. 9). When they have none else to fly to, he will be their refuge.

3rdly, He will do it when it is good and necessary; for God hath made promises, and repeated promises, of deliverance; and surely these are not in vain. If God had spoken but once, we had had no reason to doubt; but he telleth us over and over again we should cast our care upon him, and refer all things to him without despondency and distraction of mind: "For the needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever" (Psalm ix. 18).

USE.—Is instruction, to teach us what to do when we are oppressed.

1. Patience. It is the lot of God's children to be often troubled by the world, and hardly used. Satan is the ruler of the darkness of this world, the blind, carnal, malicious, superstitious part of the world; and they cannot away with those that would overturn Satan's kingdom. The good are fewest, and therefore we must look to be oppressed; if there be any breathing time, it is a mercy: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. iii. 12). But as then he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now" (Gal. iv. 29), and will be so; we should want our way-mark without it.

2. Let us be prepared to commend our cause to God: "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear; to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress" (Psalm x. 17, 18). God prepares the hearts of the humble; how so? The trouble continueth, till we are sensible of the misery of the sin, of the cause: "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction, they will seek me early" (Hos. v. 15). It is a long time before men can be sensible of the hand of God upon them: slight

spirits are not grieved, but lull themselves asleep (Jer. v. 3). If they have a natural sense of the judgment, they have no sense of sin as the cause; then they fly to human help to be eased of the trouble: "Wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved; how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?" (Jer. iv. 14.) When past human help, then seek the favour of God to take up the controversy (2 Chron. vii. 14). When driven to an earnest attendance upon God, and all probabilities spent; we have no help, but what Heaven and a promise can afford, and upon these terms continue our importunity (Luke xviii. 7, 8). It is a long time ere men will lay it to heart, to see his hand and seek to him for relief.

3. When you have prayed, then wait. It is a good sign when we are enlarged in prayer, and encouraged to wait. Enlarged to pray; for, when God hath a mind to the work, he sets the spirit of prayer awork. God will not pour out his Spirit in vain: the Spirit knoweth the deep things of God: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee" (Psalm l. 15). So, when we are encouraged to wait: how can our prayers be heard when we regard them not ourselves, nor expect an issue? How should God hear when we pray out of course, and do not think our prayers worth the regarding? "I will hear what God the Lord will speak," &c. (Psalm lxxxv. 8); "I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined unto me, and heard my cry" (Psalm xl. 1); "And will watch to see what he will say" (Hab. ii. 1). Look for an answer. God doth not usually disappoint a waiting people.

II. When God delivereth us from the oppression of man, we should be quickened and encouraged in his service.

1. Because every mercy inferreth an answerable duty: "But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him" (2 Chron. xxxii. 25). There must be rendering according to receiving.

2. This is the fittest return; partly, because it is real, not verbal. The Lord cares not for words, he knows the secret spring of the heart; and see Psalm l. 23. It is good to be speaking good of God's name. This is one way of glorifying; but ordering the conversation aright is that which is most pleasing to him. And partly, too, because our clogs of fear and sorrow, and other impediments, are taken away: "I will run the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart" (Psalm cxix. 32). This was God's end, to deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, that we might serve him without fear (Luke i. 74, 75). Those wretches that said, "We are delivered to do all these abominations" (Jer. vii. 10); to return to the practices of their vile courses afresh, did prevent God's end in their deliverance. What use shall we make of such a point, in our deep sorrows?

ANSWER.—1st, We are not altogether without this benefit: "I have heard thy prayer" (2 Chron. vii. 12). Many times God maketh his love conspicuous to his people in a low condition; they are oppressed sore, but not ground to powder; it is a blessing we are not quite destroyed. The Israelites, the more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied; and the Egyptians were grieved for the children of Israel (Exod. i. 12), that they were not extinguished. God dealeth with us as then he did with them (2 Sam. xii. 7): 'But I will grant them some deliverance.'

2ndly, We are now under the sad effects of our former unthankfulness; and, by remembering our duty, we may see our sin. Ingratitude and

walking unanswerably to received mercy, is the great and crying sin of God's people; therefore we should humble ourselves, that we did so little good in former times of liberty, that God had so little glory and service from us. Now, God by his present providence showeth us the difference: "Because thou servest not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies," &c. (Deut. xxviii. 47, 48); "Nevertheless, they shall be his servants, that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries" (2 Chron. xii. 8). First we must be humbled for the abuse of former mercies, before we seek new.

3rdly, That we may know what to have in our eye, when we are asking for mercies. The end is first in intention, though last in execution. Do not pray to serve thy lusts more freely, nor think how to execute revenge, be quits with those that hate us, nor how we shall be provided for; but what glory and service we may bring to God: "When I shall receive the congregation, I will judge uprightly" (Psalm lxxv. 2). These mercies must not be abused to licentiousness, or to nourish ourselves in sin or stupid security, but in duty and service.

4thly, It teacheth us how to make our promises, and oblige ourselves to God. When you come to promise duty and obedience to God, be sure to be sincere and holy; make due provision that it may be so, by mortifying the roots of such distempers as will betray us. When a people in a low condition have a real inclination to praise and glorify God by their mercies as soon as they shall receive them, it is an argument God will hear and grant.

III. But when we are praying for deliverance, we should interpose promises of obedience, as David doth here, "Deliver me from the oppression of man, so will I keep thy precepts."

1. To show there is the *ratio dati et accepti*, to show the law of giving and receiving is natural to us, it is an engrafted principle in men's minds. When we think of God's giving, we should think of returning something. An intercourse between God and us is maintained by mercies and duties; not that God needeth, or that we can oblige him; but this qualifyeth us. Intercourse is lost, when we would receive all and return nothing.

2. A solemn promise is necessary to excite and quicken our dulness, or a bond upon us, or a bridle to our inconstancy. We cannot unbind ourselves again from our strict obligation to obedience.

USE.—Well then, let us make good the vows of our distress; they must be paid, or else God is mocked: "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed" (Eccl. v. 4); "Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee; and thou shalt pay thy vows" (Job xxii. 27).

SERMON CL.

VERSE 135.—*Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.*

This verse is wholly precatory. Most of the verses of this psalm have a prayer with an argument; but here both the branches are petitory. Observe, in the words,—

1. The blessings prayed for.

2. The order of these petitions.
3. The connexion that is between them.

1. The blessings he prayeth for are two:—First, for God's favour, and, secondly, for his direction in God's ways; spiritual consolation, and increase of sanctification. David could not live out of God's favour, nor without his direction; therefore he prays heartily for both.

2. The order of these petitions. First, "Make thy face to shine;" and then, "Teach me thy statutes." God's favour is the fountain of all goodness to his children and servants; and, until we have that, we can have nothing: there we must begin. They that have not the favour of God, are left to their own sway, and their own hearts and counsels; but those whom he loves know his secrets, and are guided by his Spirit.

3. The connexion. He prays not for one, but for both; for God giveth both together, consolation and direction, and we must seek both together: for we cannot expect God should favour us while we walk in a wrong way, and contrary to his will.

First, Let me speak of the first petition. Where I might observe,—

1. The matter of the petition, "Make thy face to shine."

2. The person, Upon me.

3. The character by which he describeth himself, "Thy servant."

Ist, As to the matter, "Make thy face to shine." It is a metaphor taken from the sun. When the sun shines, and sheds abroad his light and heat and influence, then the creatures are cheered and revived; but, when that is obscured, they droop and languish. What the sun is to the outward world, that is God to the saints. Or else here is a metaphor taken from men, that look pleasantly upon those in whom they delight. And so the Lord gives a smile of his gracious countenance upon his people: indeed, it alludeth to both. For the allusion to the light and influence of the sun is clear in the word "shine;" and the allusion to the pleasant countenance of a man upon his child, is included in the word "face." The phrase may be understood by what is said Prov. xvi. 15: "In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain." That place will illustrate this we have in hand. Look, what the smiling and pleasing aspect of the king is to those that value and stand in need of his favour, that is the favour of God to the saints. The same form of speech is used in other places; as in the form of the priest's blessing: "The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee" (Num. vi. 25); and, in that prayer, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us. Selah" (Psalm lxxvii. 1). Well then, the thing begged is a sense of God's love.

2ndly, For whom doth David beg this? For himself, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant;" David, a man after God's own heart. But did he need to put up such a request to God? (1.) Possibly God might seem to neglect him, or to look upon him with an angry countenance, because of sin; and therefore he begs some demonstration of his favour and goodwill. David had his times of darkness and discomfort as well as others, therefore earnestly beggeth for one smile of God's face. (2.) If you look not upon him as under desertion at this time, the words then must be thus interpreted, he begs the continuance and increase of his comfort and sense of God's love. God's manifestations of himself to his people in this world are given out in different degrees, and with great diversity. Our assurance or sense of his love consists not *in puncto*, an indivisible

point ; it hath a latitude, it may be more and it may be less ; and God's children think they can never have enough of it ; therefore David saith, Lord, cause thy face to shine. If it did shine already, the petition intimates the continuance and increase of it.

3rdly, He characterizeth himself by the notion of God's servant ; as, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant ; save me for thy mercy's sake" (Psalm xxxi. 16). We must study to approve ourselves to be the Lord's servants by our obedience. If we would have his face shine upon us, we must be careful to yield obedience unto him.

The points are four :—

1. The sense of God's favour may be withdrawn for a time from his choicest servants.

2. The children of God that are sensible of this, cannot be satisfied with this estate ; but they will be praying for some beams of love to be darted out upon their souls.

3. They that are sensible of the want or loss of God's favour, have liberty with hope and encouragement to sue out this blessing as David did, Lord, "make thy face to shine upon thy servant."

4. God's children, when they beg comfort, they also beg grace to serve him acceptably.

I. The sense of God's favour may be withdrawn for a time from his choicest servants. David puts up this petition in point of comfort. There is a twofold desertion, in appearance and in reality.

First, In appearance only, through the misgivings of our own hearts. We may think God is gone, and hides his face, when there is no such matter, as through inadvertency we may seek what we have in our hands. Thus a child of God thinks he is cast out of the presence of God, when all the while he hath a full right and place in his heart. Thus David (Psalm xxxi. 22). We think God hath forgotten us, neglects us, casts us off, hath no respect for us, when, in the mean time, the Lord is framing an answer of grace for us. One chief cause is misinterpreting God's providence and our manifold afflictions. The Lord sometimes frowns upon his children, as Joseph upon his brethren, when his affections were very strong ; so the Lord covers himself with frowns and anger, the visible appearance of it speaks no otherwise.

Secondly, It may be really, when he is angry for sin : "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him ; I hid me and was wroth" (Isa. lvii. 17). As the fathers of our flesh show their anger by whipping and scourging the bodies of their children ; so the Father of our spirits, by lashing the soul and spirits, by causing them to feel the effects of his angry indignation. Or else withdrawing the Spirit of comfort, suspending all the acts and fruits of his love ; so that they have not that joyful sense of communion with God which they were wont to have. Now, the reasons why God's people may want the light of his countenance, are these :—

1. God out of sovereignty will exercise us with changes here in the world. Even in the inward man, there we have our ebbs and flows, that we may know earth is not Heaven. He hath an eternity wherein to reveal his love, and to communicate himself to his people ; therefore he will take a liberty as to temporal dispensations : "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee, for a moment ; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer" (Isa. liv. 8). He hath an everlasting love and kindness for us ; therefore here in the world he will exer.

cise us with some uncertainties; as David concealed his love towards his son Absalom, when yet his bowels yearned towards him. Here he takes liberty to do it, because he will make it up in Heaven. All your changes shall then be recompensed by an uninterrupted comfort.

2ndly, To conform us to Jesus Christ. We should not know the bitter agonies our Redeemer sustained for us, unless we had some experience of it ourselves. He tasted of this cup (Matt. xxvii. 46); and, though it be a bitter cup, yet it must go round; we must all pledge him in it. Conceit will not inform us so much as experience.

3rdly, His justice requires it, when we surfeit of our comforts, and play the wantons with them, that he should withdraw them. We ourselves breed the mist and clouds which hide from us the shining of God's favour. We raise up those mountains of transgressions that are as a wall of separation between us and God; whence that expression, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God; and your sins have hid his face from you" (Isa. lix. 2). As the sun dissolves and dispels mists and clouds by his bright beams, so God of his free grace dissolveth these clouds: "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins" (Isa. xlv. 22). Now, there are two sins especially which cause God to hide himself: first, too free a liberty in carnal pleasures and delights; and, secondly, spiritual laziness.

1. Too free a liberty in carnal pleasures and delights. When we live according to the flesh, we smart for it, these mar our taste; and, when our affections run out to other comforts, we forfeit those which are better (Psalm xxx. 6, 7). When we begin to sleep upon a carnal pillow, to compose ourselves to rest, and lie down and dream golden dreams of earthly felicity. Carnal confidence and carnal complacency make God a stranger to us. This carnal complacency hinders a sense of God's love two ways, *meritorie et effective*. Not only meritoriously, as it provokes God to withdraw when we set up an idol in our hearts; but also effectively, as carnal delights bring on a brawn and deadness upon the heart, so that we cannot have a sense of God's love; for that requires a pure, delicate spirit. Our taste must be purged, refined, sensible of spiritual good and evil. Now, this will never be, except the soul be purged from carnal complacency; for, while there is so strong a relish of the fleshpots of Egypt, we are not fit to taste of the hidden manna; but always, the more dead the heart is to worldly things, the more lively to spiritual sense ever: "Sensual, having not the Spirit" (Jude 19); that is, spiritual joys, feelings, operations. When Solomon withheld not his heart from any joy, God left him; when he was trying the pleasures of the creature, and went a whoring from God, God left him.

2. Spiritual laziness is another cause why God hides his face from his people. The spouse neglected to open to Christ upon light and frivolous pretences; and then her beloved had withdrawn himself (Cant. v. 6, compared with verses 2, 3). If we lie down on the bed of security, and grow lazy and negligent, then Christ withdraws.

4thly, It is necessary and useful for us sometimes that God should hide his face. Cloudy and rainy days conduce to the fruitfulness of the earth, as well as those that are fair and shining; and the winter hath its use as well as the summer. We are apt to have cheap thoughts of spiritual comforts (Job. xv. 11); apt to run riot, and to grow neglectful of God and be proud (2 Cor. xii. 7). Paul had his buffetings to keep down his pride.

We have changes even in our inward man to keep us in the better frame, the more watchful, diligent, and waiting upon God.

USE.—Well, if it be so, all the use I shall make is, to put this question, Is this your case, yea or no? There is nothing that conduceth to the safety and comfort of the spiritual life so much as observing God's comings and goings, that we may suit our carriage accordingly. Our Lord saith, "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?" (Matt. ix. 15.) Is God present, or is he gone? When God is gone, not to lay it to heart argues great stupidity. You are worse than that idolator (Judg. xviii. 24). He thought he had reason enough for his laments and moans, when they had taken away his images, his gods. So, if God be gone, shall we digest and put up with such a loss, and never mind to lay it to heart? Job complains of this, that the candle of the Lord did not shine upon his head, as it did of old (xxix. 3). Surely they that have any respect to God, any tenderness left in their hearts, will be sensible of God's going. On the other side, if we get anything of God, his grace and favour, to our hearts, it should be matter of joy and consolation to us: "We also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom. v. 11). Jesus Christ made the atonement; but we have received the atonement, when we get anything of the blood of Christ upon our own consciences, when we have any sense of reconciliation. A little sunshine enliveneth the poor creatures, the birds fall a-singing that were melancholy and sad before in cloudy weather; they are cheered and comforted when the sun shines. How should we observe the least glimpse of God's favour, if he but show himself through the lattice! (Cant. ii.) There is nothing keeps grace lively, and freeth us from a dead and stupid formality, so much as this. But when men are careless, and do not observe God's accesses and recesses, hardness of heart increaseth upon us presently, and God loseth that worship, and reverence, and invocation, and praise, that are due from us to him. Therefore our eye should still wait upon the Lord; and, as the eyes of servants are on their mistresses (Psalm cxxiii. 2), so should our eye be still upon God's hands, and observe what he gives out in every duty, or what of God we observe in this or that ordinance.

II. The children of God that are sensible of this, cannot be satisfied with this estate; but will be praying and always seeking the evidences of his favour and reconciliation. Psalm lxxx. 3, 7, 19, three times it is repeated, "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts; cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved." Their great happiness is to be in favour with God. They can dispense with other comforts, and can want them with a quiet mind, let God do his pleasure there; but they cannot dispense with this, with the want of his favour and manifested goodwill to them. This is the life of their lives, the fountain of their comforts; this is the Heaven they have upon earth, without which they cannot joy in themselves, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." What are the reasons of this?

First, Because of the value of this privilege; the favour of God is the greatest blessing. It may appear in sundry respects: take but that consideration, "Thy lovingkindness is better than life" (Psalm lxiii. 3). The favour of God is the life of our souls, and his displeasure is our death. A child of God values his happiness by God's friendship, not by his worldly prosperity; and is miserable by God's absence, and by the causes thereof,

his sin and offence done to God. Nay, his lovingkindness is not only life, but better than life. A man may be weary of life itself, but never of the love of God. Many have complained of life as a burthen, and wished for the day of death; but none have complained of the love of God as a burthen. All the world without this cannot make a man happy. What will it profit us, if the whole world smile upon us, and God frown and be angry with us? All the candles in the world cannot make it day; nay, all the stars shining together cannot dispel the darkness of the night nor make it day, unless the sun shines: so, whatever comforts we have of a higher or lower nature, they cannot make it day with a gracious heart, unless God's face shine upon us; for he can blast all in an instant. A prisoner is never the more secure, though his fellows and companions applaud him, and tell him his cause is good, and that he shall escape, when he that is judge condemns him. Though we have the good word of all the world, yet, if the Lord speak not peace to our souls, and shine not upon our consciences, what will the good word of the world do? He is approved "whom the Lord commendeth" (2 Cor. x. 18). A sense of God's love in Christ is the sweetest thing that ever we felt, and is able to sweeten the bitterest cup that ever believer drank of: "We glory in tribulation" (Rom. v. 3). It will be a blessed thing when we can not only bear tribulations, but rejoice in them; but how come we to rejoice in them? Why, because "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us;" so he goes on. If we would know the value of things, the best way is to know what is our greatest comfort and our greatest trouble in distress; for, when we are drunk with worldly prosperity and happiness, we are incompetent judges of the worth of things; but, when God rebukes a man for sin, what is our greatest trouble then? That we may take heed of providing sorrow to ourselves another time: then we find sin and transgression the greatest burthen when any notable affliction is upon us (Job xxxvi. 9); and what will be your greatest comfort then? for then your comforts are put to the proof. One evidence of an interest in Christ, a little sense of the love of God, how precious is it! "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" (Psalm xciv. 19). His thoughts were entangled and interwoven one with another, as branches of a crooked tree; for so the word signifies there: when his thoughts were thus intricate and perplexed, then, "Thy comforts delight my soul." Oh! then, what should we labour for, but to be most clear in this, that God loves us! This will be our greatest comfort and rejoicing in all conditions. It is good for us in prosperity, then our comforts are sweet; and in adversity and deep affliction, to see God is not angry with us. Though we feel some smart of his afflicting hand, yet his heart is with us.

Secondly, They deal with God as worldly men do with sensible things; for, as others live by sense, so they by faith. Now, worldly men are cheered with the goodwill of men, and troubled with the displeasure of men, upon whom they depend. The down look of Ahasuerus confounded Haman, and put him to great trouble: he was afraid. Absalom professes it were better for him to be banished, than to live in Jerusalem, and not see the king's face (2 Sam. xiv. 32). Surely it is death to God's children to want his face and favour upon whom they depend. Their business lies mainly with God, and their dependence, and hope, and comfort, are in God; they live by faith. Poor worldlings walk by sense; therefore their souls run out upon other comforts; in the smiling face of some great

potentate, or some friend of the world, this is their life, peace, and joy. But they that live by faith see him that is invisible, and value their happiness by his favour, and misery by his displeasure.

Thirdly, The children of God have tasted the sweetness of it; therefore they know it by experience. The best demonstration of anything is from sense. Description cannot give me such a demonstration as when I taste and feel it myself: "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter ii. 3). They have an experimental feeling of that which others know only by guess and hearsay. Carnal men know no other good but that of the creature. The spouse did so languish after her beloved, being sick of love; when her desires were disappointed, it made her faint (Cant. v. 6). They that have not seen and known him, know not what to make of those spiritual and lively affections that carry us out after the favour of God with such earnestness and importunity; but they that have tasted and know what their beloved is, their hearts are more excited and stirred up towards him: "If thou knewest the gift of God," &c. (John iv. 10.) You would more admire the favour of God, if you knew it, especially by experience; you would find it is a better good than ever you have yet tasted.

USE.—Is this our temper and frame of our hearts? Can we live contentedly and satisfiedly with the light of his countenance? A child of God may be without the light of his countenance, but cannot live contentedly without it. Are we troubled about it? ever seeking after it? Surely, this is the disposition of the children of God; they are ever seeking after the favour of God. I shall press to this by this argument.

1. God bespeaks it from you: "Thou saidst, Seek ye my face" (Psalm xxvii. 8). There is a dialogue between God and a gracious heart. The Lord saith, "Seek;" he saith in his word, and speaks by the injection of holy thoughts, by the inspiration of his grace; and the renewed heart, like a quick echo, takes hold of this, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." You should ever be seeking after God in his ordinances, seek his favour and face.

2. The new nature inclines and carries the soul to God; it came from God, and carries the soul to God again. The spirit of the world doth wholly incline us to the world. They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and the Spirit of God doth incline us to God; and therefore the people of God will value his favour above all things else. David speaks in his own name, and in the name of all that were like-minded with himself; he speaks of all the children of God in opposition to the many, the brutish ones, that were for sensual satisfaction: "Many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us" (Psalm iv. 6). He doth not say upon me; but, "upon us;" as the common language of all the saints. The favour of God is so dear and precious to the saints, that they can compare with the affections of carnal men, take them at the greatest advantage. He doth not consider their worldly things in their decrease, but he considers them when they are increased; and he considers them in the very time when they are increased, in the vintage and harvest time. The shouting of vintage and joy of harvest are proverbial; and the comforts of this life, when new and fresh, most invite delight. They that place their happiness in these things, cannot have so much joy as they that have a sense of their

interest in God. Now, shall we be wholly strangers to this temper and disposition of soul!

3. If we be backward to seek after the favour of God, the Lord whips his people to it by his providence; for sometimes their spiritual disposition may be marred: "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face. In their affliction, they will seek me early" (Hos. v. 15). The Lord withdraws his gracious presence for this reason, not that we may seek ease or freedom from trouble, but that we may seek his face, and the applying of his grace to our consciences.

4. God is not wholly gone, neither is the desertion total, when there is such a disposition in the heart. He hath left something behind him which draws you after him. The estimation of God's favour keeps his place warm, till he come again: it keeps room in the soul: "Unto thee have I cried; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee: Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?" (Psalm lxxxviii. 13, 14.) But, when they can digest such a loss with patience, it is an indifferent thing whether they have any sense of God's love, yea or no.

5. We find it to be a sad thing to lose any worldly comfort, and shall we lose the favour of God too, and never lay it to heart, and live contentedly without it? It is a sign we despise that which the saints value, and which is the principal blessing; you will not have cheap thoughts of the consolation of God (Job xv. 11).

6. Unless we seek God's favour, all our labour is lost in other duties: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from Heaven," &c. (2 Chron. vii. 14.) This is put in among other conditions; and, without this, the promise is not made good to us. Many seek to the Lord in their distresses, but it is only for redress of temporal evils, or obtaining necessary temporal supplies; but do not seek his face: then their prayers are but like howlings, but like the moans of beasts (Hos. vii. 14). They do not seek reconciliation and communion with God, but only ease and riddance of present trouble. Those are not holy prayers.

7. It is the distinguishing point that will separate the precious from the vile, to have a tender sense of God's favour: "This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob" (Psalm xxiv. 6). There are many thoughts of interpreters about that place. I find, though they differ in it, yet they all agree in this sense, that they are the true Israelites, the true Jacob's posterity, that cannot brook God's absence, that seek his face, that will not let him go; but strive with him till they get the blessing. These are not Israel in the letter, but Israel in the spirit. Jacob said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. xxxii. 26). Such diligent seekers of God should we be, never to give over till we find him. Or, as Moses said, "Lord, if thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence;" we will not stir a foot without thy favour and presence.

III. They that are sensible of the want or loss of the favour of God, have liberty to sue for it, with hope and encouragement to find it. For so doth David, "Make thy face to shine." Whence comes this liberty?

First, Because of God's promise, because of the mercy of God pawned to us in his promises. He hath told us, none shall seek his face in vain. One that seriously and diligently is seeking after God, before he hath done

his search, he shall have some opportunity to bless and praise the Lord; some experience of grace shall be given to him, if he conscientiously, diligently, and seriously seek it.

Secondly, Because of the mediation of Jesus Christ; you may come in his name, and seek the favour of God: "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings" (Psalm xxxvi. 7). Interpreters upon that place conceive the shadow of God's wings does not allude to an ordinary similitude of a hen, that, when vultures and kites are abroad, covers her little ones, gathers her chickens under her wings. No; but they think the allusion to be to the outstretched wings of the cherubims; and this is the ground of our trust and dependence upon God. Let the sons of men put their trust under the shadow of his wings, there to find God reconciled in Christ; for the throne of grace was a figure of that propitiation. He is called the propitiation; God propitiated and reconciled in Christ, is the throne of grace interpreted. However that be, it is clear: "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth" (Psalm lxxx. 1). When they would have God hear, they give him the title of one that sits upon the mercy-seat, reconciled by Christ. Though the cloud of sin doth hide God's favour from thee, he can make it shine again; and here is our ground, the merciful invitation of God's promise, and then God propitiated in Christ.

USE.—Oh! then, let us turn unto the Lord in prayer, and in the use of all other means, humbling ourselves, and seeking his favour.

1. Waiting for it with all heedfulness: "My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning;" and he repeats it again, "I say, more than they that watch for the morning" (Psalm cxxx. 6). Look, as the weary sentinel that is wet and stiff with cold and the dews of the night; or as the porters that watched in the temple, the Levites, were waiting for the daylight; so more than they that wait for the morning, was he waiting for some glimpse of God's favour. Though he do not presently ease us of our smart, or gratify our desires, yet we are to wait upon God. In time, we shall have a good answer. God's delays are not denials. Day will come at length, though the weary sentinel or watchman counts it long first; so God will come at length, he will not be at our beck. We have deserved nothing, but must wait for him in the diligent use of the means; as Benhadad's servants watched for the word brother, or anything of kindness, to drop from the king of Israel.

2. Work for it; for I press you not to a devout sloth. All good things are hard to come by; it is worth all the labour we lay out upon it. There is no having peace with God, any sense of his love, without diligent attendance in the use of all appointed means: "Be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Peter iii. 14); and, "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter i. 10). That comfort is to be suspected, that costs nothing; but, like Jonah's gourd, grows up in a night, that comes upon us we know not how.

IV. God's children, when they beg comfort, also beg grace to serve him acceptably. For by teaching God's statutes, is not meant barely a giving us a speculative knowledge of God's will; for so David here, "Make thy face to shine;" and, "Teach me thy statutes." And why do they so?

First, Out of gratitude. They are ingenuous, and would return all

duty and thankfulness to God, as well as receive mercy from him; therefore they are always mingling resolutions of duty with expectations of mercy; and, when they carry away comforts from him, are thinking of suitable returns. And, while they take Christ for righteousness, they devote and give up themselves to his use and service. The nature of man is so disposed, that, when we ask anything, we promise, especially if a superior: "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips" (Hos. xiv. 2). The children of God resolve upon duty and service when they ask favour: so, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord; consider my trouble, &c.; that I may show forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion" (Psalm ix. 13, 14). We are thinking of honouring, praising God, at that time when we seek his favour.

Secondly, The children of God do know that this is the cause of God's aversion from them, that his statutes are not observed; and therefore, when they beg a greater experience of God's special favour, they also beg direction to keep his statutes. They cannot maintain and keep up a sense of the love of God, unless they be punctual in their duty. He knows nothing of religion that knows not that the comfort of a Christian depends upon sanctification as well as justification; and the greater sense of obedience, the fuller sense of the love of God; and the degrees of manifesting his favour are according to the degrees of our profiting in obedience; for these go along still. Jesus Christ is king of righteousness and king of peace. He is Melchizedek, king of Salem; he pours out the oil of grace, that he may pour out the oil of gladness (Heb. vii. 2). But especially see one place: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John xiv. 21). Christ was then most sweetly comforting his people; but it was not his mind that they should be emboldened thereby to cast off duty. No; he says the only way to assure them that they were not delusions, and to clear their right to these comforts, was this: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." That is the way to get confirmation and evidence of the love of God.

Thirdly, This is a notable effect and evidence of God's favour, to guide you in his ways; therefore it is a branch of the former; for whom the Lord loveth, he teacheth and guides: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 14). Others are left to their own hearts' counsels. And, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant" (Psalm xxv. 14). The communication of secrets is a note of friendship. Now, the secret of the Lord, the knowledge of his covenant, and what belongs thereto, it is to those that fear God. There is the qualification.

Fourthly, He showeth that he does not desire a greater proof of God's love. He would chiefly experience the goodwill of God to him in being taught the mind of God. The most slight that which David prizeth; but, if our hearts were as they should be, we would prefer this before all other good things, sanctification, to be taught of God. For,—

1st, It is a better evidence of God's favour than worldly comforts. Pardon freeth us from punishment, sanctification from sin and pollution; sin is worse than misery, and holiness is to be preferred before impunity.

Christ, in the work of redemption, considered the Father's interest and honour as well as your salvation. The taking away of worldly comforts doth not infringe our blessedness; yea, when it is accompanied with this benefit, it maketh way for the increase of it: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law" (Psalm xciv. 12). All the comforts of the world are not worth one drachm of grace. The loss of them may be supplied with grace, and man be happy, comfortable, and blessed, for all that; but the loss of grace cannot be supplied with temporal things. We cannot say, Blessed is the man that hath lost grace for the world's sake. Again, all the riches and honours heaped upon a man cannot make him better, they may easily make him worse; but grace can never make us worse, but always better; more amiable in the eyes of God, and fitter for communion with him. Those may be given to those whom God hateth; but this is the favour of his people. Grace is never given, but to those whom he entirely loveth. Those may be given in wrath, but sanctifying grace never in wrath. The more we have of those things, the more wanton and vain (Deut. xxxii. 15). They are often used as "an occasion to the flesh" (Gal. v. 13); prove fuel to our lusts, increase our snares, temptations, difficulties in Heaven's way (Luke xviii. 25). Our table becometh a snare (Psalm lxi. 22). But the saving graces of the Spirit make all easy, and help us towards our own happiness.

2ndly, Profiting in obedience or sanctification is a greater effect of God's favour. Sanctification is a greater privilege than justification. Perfect and complete holiness and conformity to God is the great thing which God designed; as the glory of God is holiness (Exod. xv. 11). Moral perfections exceed natural; and, of all moral perfections, holiness is the greatest. It is better to be wise than strong, to be holy than wise. Beasts have strength, man hath reason; but holy angels, a holy God. Sanctification is a real perfection; but justification is but a relative. It rendereth us amiable in the eyes of God. God hateth sin more than misery. Sin is against God's very nature. God can inflict punishment; but he cannot infuse sin. God's interest and honour is to be preferred before our comfort and personal benefit. In sanctification, besides our personal benefit, which is the perfection of our natures, God's honour and interest is concerned in our subjection to him. Justification is a pledge, but sanctification is not only a pledge, but a beginning; it is *removens prohibens*. We love him for pardoning, but he delighteth in holiness: he delighteth in us rather as sanctified, than pardoned. We love much, because much is forgiven (Luke vii. 47). But God delighteth in the pure and upright: "Such as are upright in their way are his delight" (Prov. xi. 20).

USE I.—For reproof of three sorts.

First, Of those that would have ease and comfort, but care not for duty; would have the love of God to pacify their consciences, but never mind this, to have their hearts directed in God's ways: "Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn" (Hos. x. 11), but not to break the clods. It yielded food (Deut. xxv. 4). They would be feasted with privileges, yet abhor service, when they prize comfort. To these we may argue, not only *ab incongruo*, how disingenuous it is to separate duty and comfort; to be so ready to expect all from God, and so unwilling to do anything for him. It is contrary to the disposition of God's children (Titus ii. 11, 12, and Rom. xii. 1); but *ab impossibili*. Will God ever delight in you till you be conformed to his image? Christ

came not to make a change in God, but in us; not to make God less holy, but us more holy. It is not agreeable to the reasonable nature to conceive that God should be indifferent to good and bad, or a friend to those that break his laws. Would you think well of that magistrate, that should let men rob and steal, and beat their fellow-subjects; and not only connive at them, but receive them into his bosom? You that have but a drop of the Divine nature, cannot delight in the company of sinners (2 Peter ii. 8).

Secondly, Those that would have the favour of God, but expect it should be showed to them in temporal things. Alas! these things are promiscuously dispensed to all, can be no evidence of his special love. God is behind-hand with none of his creatures; sometimes evil things to good men, and good things to evil men (Eccl. ix. 1, 2). Josiah died in wars as well as Ahab. Is Abraham rich? so is Nabal; is Joseph honoured by Pharaoh? so is Doeg by Saul; hath Demetrius "a good report of all men?" (3 John 12;) so have false teachers (Luke vi. 26). Hath Caleb health and strength? (Josh. xiv. 11;) so have wicked ones: "No bands in their death; but their strength is firm" (Psalm lxxiii. 4). Was Moses beautiful? (Acts vii. 20;) so was Absalom (2 Sam. xiv. 25). Did God give learning and wisdom to Moses and Daniel, &c. (Dan. i. 17); so to the Egyptians (Acts vii. 22). Long life to Ishmael (Gen. xxv. 17), as well as to Isaac (Gen. xxxv. 29).

Thirdly, The children of God that murmur and repine at their sufferings, when others, ignorant of the mind of God and the strictness of his ways, fare better (Psalm xvii. 14). It is often seen, that "he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow" (Eccl. i. 18). Drones and sots have their ampler revenues; but we should not be thereby discouraged. It is their portion: "Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is an abomination unto the Lord; but his secret is with the righteous" (Prov. iii. 31, 32). They are hateful to God while they flourish. It is a greater evidence of God's favour and friendship to understand his counsel in the word, and to be acquainted with the mysteries of godliness, than to enjoy all the power and greatness in the world; the knowledge of a despised, hated truth, than to flourish in opposition against the ways of God, through ignorance, obstinacy, and prejudice.

USE II.—Is direction to us.

1. For strict walking. If we would have a comfortable sense of God's love, we must resolve upon a strict course of holy walking: "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. vi. 16); and Psalm lxxxv. 8.

2. If we would walk strictly, we must go to God for continual direction: "Teach me thy way, O Lord: I will walk in thy truth, unite my heart to fear thy name" (Psalm lxxxvi. 11); "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God; thy Spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness" (Psalm cxliii. 10); especially when blinded with interest, or apt to be carried away with temptations.

3. God's teaching is not only directive, but persuasive; it prevents sin (Psalm cxix. 133); quickens to duty (Psalm cxix. 33—35). Teach and keep, and make me to go; for that is the difference between literal instruction, which we have from man, and spiritual instruction, which we have from God. God's teaching is drawing (John vi. 44, 45).

SERMON CLI.

VERSE 136.—*Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.*

Most of the sentences of this psalm are independent, and do not easily fall under the rules of method; so that we need not take pains in clearing up the context, the verse needs it not, the time permits it not: only you may observe this, that often in this psalm David had expressed his great joy, and now he maketh mention of his exceeding grief. There is a time to rejoice, and a time to mourn; as times vary, so do duties: we have affections for every condition. Indeed, in this valley of tears, mourning is seldom out of season; either with respect to sin or misery, for ourselves or others. David, that did sometimes mourn for his own sins, and watered his couch with tears (Psalm vi. 6), he took also his time to mourn and bewail other men's sins, "Rivers of tears run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law."

In the words, observe David's grief is set out by,—

1. Constancy and greatness of it, "Rivers of tears run down mine eyes."
2. The goodness of the cause or reason of it, "Because they keep not thy law."

"Rivers of tears." He compares his tears to a stream and river always running. The same expression is used: "Let tears run down like a river day and night, &c.; let not the apple of thine eye cease" (Lam. ii. 18). When affections are vehemently exercised, the Scripture is wont to use such kind of expressions. The will of a godly man is above his performance; it is wont to do much more than the body can furnish him with abilities to express. He had such a large affection, that he could weep rivers. "Because they:" some refer it to eyes, the immediate antecedent; they are usually the inlets of sin; we are first taken by the eye, and then by the heart: she saw the fruit that it was good, and then ate it. But I rather suppose it is to be referred to men. The Hebrews many times do not express a general antecedent. More particularly, his enemies, Saul and his courtiers; for so he saith verse 139, "My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy word." And again, (verse 158,) David saith, "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word." I have brought these places, because parallel with the text; and principally that you may not think David was troubled because of any injuries done to himself, but because of offences done to God. "Keep not thy law:" keeping of the law, is to observe it diligently, not only to maintain it, but to retain it in our eye and practice. It might be matter of grief to David, that they of whom he specially speaketh, being persons of power and place, did not maintain the law, and keep it from encroachment and violation, but suffered abuses to pass unpunished; but he speaketh here of retaining the law in their hearts and practice. For it is an expression equivalent with that which is used verse 139, "Because [they] have forgotten thy words." The point which I shall observe is this:—

DOCTRINE.—That it is the duty and property of a godly man to mourn bitterly, even for other men's sins.

Here we have David's instance; and it may be suited with the practice of all the saints. Jeremiah: "But, if he will not bear it, my soul shall

weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears" (Jer. xiii. 17). There you have described the right temper of a good prophet, first to entreat earnestly for them, and in case of refusal to weep bitterly for their obstinacy. Mark, it was not an ordinary sorrow he speaks of there, but a bitter weeping: "mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears." Not a slight, vanishing sigh, not a counterfeited sorrow, soul and eyes were both engaged; and this in secret places, where the privacy contributeth much to the measure and sincerity of it. Now, this is a fit instance of a minister of the Gospel. We cannot always prevail when we plead with you, and shall not be responsible for it. God never required it at the hands of any minister to work grace and to save souls, but to do their endeavours. But, alas! we do not learn of Jeremiah to go and mourn over the ignorance, carelessness, and obstinacy of those committed to our charge. The next example that I shall produce is that of Lot in Sodom, who was vexed from day to day, in seeing and hearing their unlawful deeds (2 Peter ii. 7, 8). Not with Sodom's injuries, but with Sodom's sins. It was matter of constant grief to his soul; the commonness did not take away the odiousness. My next instance shall be our Lord himself; we read very much of his compassion: I shall produce but two instances of it. One is in Mark iii. 5: Christ looked upon them with anger, and was "grieved for the hardness of their hearts." They gave him cause of offence; but it doth not only exercise his anger, but grief. In our Saviour's anger, there was more of compassion than passion. He was grieved to see men harden themselves to their own destruction. So, when he came near to Jerusalem, a city not very friendly to him, yet it is said, "When he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke xix. 41). Our Lord Jesus was made up of compassion, he weepeth not only for his friends, but his enemies. As a righteous God, he inflicted the judgment; but, as man, he wept for the offences. First he shed his tears, and then his blood. Oh! foolish, careless city, that will not regard terms and offers of peace in this her day! He bewailed them that knew not why they should be bewailed; they rejoiced, and he mourned; Christ's eyes are the wetter, because theirs were so dry. And now he is in Heaven, how doth his free grace go a-mourning after sinners, in the entreaties of the Gospel! But that I may vindicate this point more fully, I shall give—

1. Some observations concerning mourning for the sins of others.

2. Give you the reasons of it.

I. The observations are these five:—

1. I observe, that it is an absolute duty to preach this doctrine, not only some high and raised effect of grace. When we produce these instances and examples of the word, David, Lot, Jeremiah, and Christ, many think these are rare and extraordinary instances, elevated beyond the ordinary line and pitch of Christian practice and perfection. No; it is a matter of duty lying upon all Christians. When God goes to mark out his people for preservation, who are those that are marked? The mourners: "Go through the midst of the city, &c., 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" (Ezek. ix. 4). None are marked out for mercy, but the mourners. The great difference between men and men in the word is, the mourners in Zion and the sinners in Zion; so that it lieth upon all, if

we would have God's mark upon us. And the Apostle reproveth the Corinthians for the want of this mourning: "Ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned" (1 Cor. v. 2). Possibly many of the converted Corinthians disliked the foulness of the fact, but they did not mourn and solemnly lay it to heart; therefore the Apostle layeth a charge upon them. In all the examples that have been produced, that of Jesus Christ only is extraordinary; and yet we are bound to have the same mind in us that was in Jesus. We must have the same mind, though we cannot have the same measure of affection. Christ had the Spirit without measure; but we must have our proportion. If David can speak of floods, certainly we should at least be able to speak of drops; somewhat of David's and Christ's spirit. Nay, the example of Christ in this very thing is propounded by the Apostle: "For even Christ pleased not himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me'" (Rom. xv. 3). The Apostle speaketh there of bearing one another's burdens, Christ would bear the burden of all the world. He was moved with a zeal for the dishonour done to God, and compassion to men; and so undertook the burden upon him, not to please himself, or seek the ease and safety of the natural life. Well then, it is not some raised effect of grace, but a necessary duty which concerns all, a frame of heart which all the children of God have. If you love God and love your neighbour, if you believe Heaven and Hell, and have any sense of the truth of the promises or threatenings; you will be thus affected in some measure, to mourn and grieve for the sins of others.

2. This duty doth chiefly concern public persons, though it lies upon all Christians, magistrates, and ministers, and officers of the church, because of their public and universal influence. Public persons must have public affections, as well as public relations. You shall see in that type the church of the Jews is represented in their officers (Zech. iii. 1). When the people were corrupted, and in a calamitous condition, Joshua the high priest is brought in, standing before the Lord in filthy garments; the priest is accused by Satan. Certainly, public persons are more responsible to God than others, and more concerned than others in the sins committed in the land, or other places where they have a charge. Among private persons, a householder is more responsible than a private member of the family, if one under his charge fall into a notorious sin. You are responsible for your children and servants, and so are we for our souls. Under the law, God said, "If a man did deliver unto his neighbour an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it did die, or was hurt, or was driven away, no man seeing it," or it did miscarry through his negligence; he was to make it good, because it was delivered into his hand (Exod. xxii. 10). So I may say here in quoting this law, hath God a care of oxen? God hath committed souls to us; he hath put them into the hands of magistrates and ministers to keep them. Now, because we do not discharge our duty, he will require their blood at our hands (Ezek. xxxiii. 7, 8). Because of our trust and charge, we are bound to have more public affections: "Let the priests, and the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar" (Joel ii. 17). Ministers should be exemplary for spiritual feeling and tenderness and humiliation. Under the law, the measures of the sanctuary were double to other measures. I apply it to this very thing; our portion must be greater, because of the burden that lies upon us. Paul speaketh as one sensible of the weightiness of his charge, in the 2 Cor. xi. 29: "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended,

and I burn not?" Paul trembled to see a weak Christian in the hands of Satan; and, when they had taken offence and begun to stumble, this was his trouble and grief. Mourning and burning is put for the violence of any affection. So Jeremiah the Prophet, "My soul shall weep in secret places for your pride."

3. That tears are not absolutely necessary for the expression of this grief and tenderness. David saith, "Rivers of tears." Why? For grief doth not always keep the road and highway; and many times when water goes out, wind comes in. Many are puffed up with sensitive trouble, and put more upon tears than they do upon the frame of the heart, which should engage us to this. All constitutions are not alike moist; a tender heart may be matched with a dry brain. When men are careful to get things reformed, and are affected with the calamity of the church more than their own private loss, this is that which God requires. However, let me tell you, if we find tears for other things, we should find tears for these duties, when we come to remember our own sins and the sins of others. God did not make the affections in vain. A man that hath a thoroughly sanctified soul, will have affections exercised in some measure proportionable; and therefore, if we can shed tears abundantly upon other occasions, we should remember this water should be reserved for sanctuary uses. David, when he is spoken of, is represented as one having a moist eye upon all occasions; yet Lot had a tender heart, being offended with public disorders. It is said his righteous soul was vexed (2 Peter ii. 8). Great devotionists are usually very tender. Good men are much given to tears; and these sensitive stirrings of affection are a great help to religion, and therefore should not wholly be neglected. But, if there be a serious discrepancy against sin, a deep laying to heart God's dishonour, though they cannot command tears, the duty is discharged. Humiliation lieth more in heart-grief and trouble, than the sensitive and passionate expressions of it. And yet, upon religious occasions, we shall express ourselves with a few cold words and dull thoughts; but our liveliest affections should be exercised about the weightiest things: "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness" (James iv. 9). When we are deprecating the wrath of God, humbling ourselves under the offences done to his infinite majesty by ourselves or others, there should be more tenderness, and we should do it in the most lively, affectionate manner that possibly we can.

4. I observe, the greatest sinners, when they are once converted to God, have the greatest compassion afterwards towards other sinners. Why? They know the heart of a sinning man; they have had most experience of the power and prejudice of corruption, and also sensibly tasted of the love of God, and his goodness in Christ Jesus; and so their hearts are entended thereby to pity others, and they more earnestly desire others should partake with them of the same grace. As Israel were pressed to pity strangers, because they themselves were once strangers in Egypt, they knew what it was to be neglected and despised in a strange land; so they that are acquainted with the temptations of Satan, with the bitter fruits of sin, with the prejudices that men lie under before they come to take to the ways of God, they have greater compassion towards the souls of others than others have. This is observed to be fulfilled in the Apostle Paul, whose zeal lay otherwise more in the active than contemplative way; for, in his writings, we find him mostly doctrinal and rational; yet, when he

speaketh of sinners, he doth it always with grief and bowels: "And now I tell you even weeping" (Phil. iii. 18). And still he presseth Christians to a greater tenderness, to be more in grief for, than censure of, their brothers' faults: "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. vi. 1); and, when he presseth to gentleness to all men, "For we ourselves (saith he) were sometimes foolish and disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another; but, after that the love and kindness of God appeared," &c. (Titus iii. 4.) This melted his heart, to consider what he was, and what God had made him by grace: whereas, sullen men, of a severe temper, of a constant, rigid innocency, are wont to be more harsh and carried out with greater indignation than sorrow. Sin and they have not been so much acquainted. Others, that know how cunning this strumpet is to insinuate and entice the soul, pity those that are deceived with its enticing blandishments. Certainly, men that profess religion, and do not observe their own hearts, or else have lived in a more equitable course of honesty, without any sensible change, are not touched with such tenderness. But they that once come to remember how obstinate they were in prejudices against the ways of God, how securely they walked in a way of sin, without any sense of God's displeasure, or serious thoughts of the bitter fruit of it; now God hath plucked them as brands out of the burning, they would fain save others also that are heirs of the same promise. The high priests under the law were "taken from among men" (Heb. v. 1), that they might have more compassion; so the Lord multiplies these instances of grace, that they might have more compassion towards others. They that have felt the terrors of the Lord, and know the wounds and bruises of a troubled conscience, are more affective in persuading, more compassionate in mourning for others.

5. There must be not only a constant disposition to mourn over the sins of others, but upon some more than ordinary occasions, it must with much seriousness be exercised and set a work. It is said of Lot, he vexed his righteous soul in seeing their filthiness with his eyes and hearing their blasphemies with his ears (2 Peter ii. 8); these were continual torments to him, he could go nowhere but he heard or saw something that was matter of grief to him. That is a sad prognostic of an approaching judgment, when a country is so bad, that it is made, as it were, a prison to a godly man. Daily a Christian hath his occasions of sorrow. How can we walk the streets with dry eyes, when we here shall see a reeling drunkard, there hear a profane swearer rending and tearing the sacred name of God in pieces; a filthy speaker, theatres, and the Devil's temples crowded with such a multitude of people, that men may learn more how to please the flesh, and hate godliness, and feast their ears with filthy talk; to see people so mad against God, and ready to cast off the yoke of Christ everywhere, this occasions matter of grief and mourning before the Lord. But, besides this, there must be solemn exercises, when our eyes must gush out with tears, and we must open the flood-gates. We must wish as Jer. ix. 1, "Oh! that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" There are certain times when this is necessary, as times of great sin and of judgment felt or feared.

(1.) Of great sin; for then the things begin to draw to a judgment. As for instance,—

(i.) When outward, gross sins are frequently committed; such as are against the light of nature: “The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood” (Hos. iv. 1, 2). God’s severity is last mentioned, wherein men bewray their high presumption, in profaning the name of God and violating his commands, without any the least appearance of profit and advantage. Lying and falsehood, a sin inconsistent with human society. God, who is the God of truth and the patron of it, cannot endure it. So the lives, goods, chastity of men to be abused, this God cannot bear with: “Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” God doth not contend usually for lesser faults, or ordinary infirmities, but gross sins, by way of omission or commission.

(ii.) These sins are more odious, and do provoke God when universal: “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint; from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it,” &c. (Isa. i. 5, 6.) Though there be a few secret mourners, yet, when the contagion becometh general and riseth to a head, the Lord will take no notice of them, as to the keeping off a common judgment: “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 them through the city, and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity” (Ezek. ix. 4, 5); and, “Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God” (Ezek. xiv. 14); and, “Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth” (Jer. xv. 1). Yet the sentence against Sodom was revocable, if but ten righteous persons could be found in it (Gen. xviii. 32). Nay, a larger offer concerning Jerusalem, larger than that which God made to Sodom, if but a man: “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, and seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it” (Jer. v. 1); though Jerusalem were a city larger and more populous than Sodom and other cities. When the whole body of a people grows monstrous in sin, if a ruling party be found, though the body be corrupt and vicious, that iniquity be not established by a law, or countenanced by them; or if the ruling party be corrupt and vicious, yet if the body of the people, or a considerable number, be serious and holy, and mourn in secret for the sins of the times, God may spare a land. But, when all flesh have corrupted their ways, then the flood comes.

(iii.) When resolute and incorrigible. Resolute, We have, and We will: “As for the word that thou has spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee; but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of Heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we and

our fathers" (Jer. xlv. 16, 17); and incorrigible, "They have refused to receive correction, they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return" (Jer. v. 3).

(iv.) When bold in sinning: "The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not" (Isa. iii. 9). When men commit sin without shame or fear, break over all banks of love, moderation, or civility.

(2.) In respect of judgments felt or feared. When the day of the Lord is near, or already begun; when the smoke foreshoweth the fire is a-coming, and the decree ready to break forth; these are mourning times.

II. The reasons why this is the duty and property of God's children: they do it out of obedience, it is their duty; and they do it of an innate disposition, it is their property.

First, It is their duty, because God hath commanded it. Now, all God's commands are equal, and full of reason; and there is a great deal of reason why God should lay this kind of duty upon the creature.

Ist, That it may be an allay to zeal. That is an excellent and well-tempered zeal, when grief is mixed with anger; as it is said of Christ, he looked about with anger, and was grieved at the hardness of their hearts; when we are angry at the sin, and mourn for the person, and mourn over him. Zeal against the sin, that shows our love to God; and our commiseration of the person, that shows our love to man. Samuel spared not Saul in his sin, yet mourned for him; and all the prophets of God, you shall find, when they were threatening the people for their sins, were grieved lest their threatenings should be accomplished. False zeal hath malice and mischief; it mourns not for the person, because it coveteth his shame and destruction. Now, it is the great wisdom of God, he would have this temper mixed. There must be anger for the offence done to God, and a grief that our brother hath offended. The world is apt to cry out upon the children of God, as persons peevish and rancorous; but this is a rare vindication, when they see you as apt to mourn as to chide, that all your expostulations with them come rather from conscience than interest; it is an excellent allay and praise to public zeal.

2ndly, God would have us mourn for the sins of others, to engage us to seek redress and reformation. We should soon neglect the duty that we owe to the age and place where and when we live, were it not for this, that the want of it would be burdensome to us, and the abounding of iniquity will cost us bitter tears upon God's command, and upon zealous endeavours to get a public reformation. Ezra first mourns bitterly, then reforms zealously: "I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head, &c., and said, O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our head; and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens" (Ezra ix. 3—6). Zealous actions! which few practise in their own case; yet sins of others, you see, work an afflictive grief and shame in those that fear God. These were the actions of Ezra, when he was bewailing the sins of others; and this made him so resolute and active in the reformation that is described in the next chapter. Their love begets sorrow, and their sorrow care. Who would not seek to redress the evil which is burdensome to him? Many times the world is angry, because we are so clamorous for reformation and repentance. You have liberty enough, say they, and may serve God in your own way, and go to Heaven quietly; why should you trouble yourself

about others? But can a man that grieveth for the abominations of the times, be silent till they be redressed? A Christian is troubled about the salvation of others, to see so many thousands of souls carried to Hell by droves, and hurried to their own destruction. Can pity and remorse behold this, without care and endeavours with God and man to get it remedied? Certainly, the children of God are not impertinently active and pragmatistical. Public reformation is not only a relief to their souls, but to their bowels. They are troubled, therefore thirst and long to see it redressed: Godly sorrow (saith he), "what carefulness it wrought in you!" (2 Cor. vii. 11.) He speaketh of their public, church sorrow. Till they mourned, they neglected the discipline of the church, and let incest go without censure. O my brethren! until we mourn for public disorders, we shall not mourn over one another. We think it is enough to keep ourselves free, and to make a little conscience of our own ways. Always private sorrow will beget public care. If thou hast wept sore in secret places, thou wilt be earnest with God and man to remove the occasion of thy grief.

3rdly, The Lord requireth this, to keep our hearts the more tender and upright; it is an act God useth to make us more careful of our own souls, to be troubled at the sins of others, at sin in a third person. It keepeth us at a great distance from a temptation. This is like quenching of fire in a neighbour's house, before it comes near us; thou runnest with thy bucket. There is no way to keep us free from the infection, so much as mourning. The soul will never agree to do that which grieved itself to see another do. And, as it keepeth us upright, so also humble, fearful of Divine judgment, tender lest we ourselves offend, and draw down the wrath of God. He that shruggeth when he seeth a snake creeping upon another, will much more be afraid when he cometh near to himself. In our own sins, we have the advantage of conscience scourging the soul with remorse and shame. In bewailing the sins of others, we have only the reasons of duty and obedience. They that fight abroad out of love to valour and exploits, will certainly fight out of love to their own safety at home. So God would have us more abroad, more against the sins of others, that our hearts may be more set against those sins with which we ourselves are apt to be soiled.

Secondly, This is their disposition as well as their duty; it must be so, and it cannot be otherwise with the children of God, for several reasons.

1st, From their tenderness of God's glory, which is more dear to them than all their own interests. A Christian hath a great affection to the glory of God, is very tender of that, he cannot endure it should be violated; for his heart will even break within him. Can a man see an injury done to a person whom he loves, and not be troubled? Jesus wept for Lazarus, because he loved him; and they say, "Behold, how he loved him!" (John xi. 36.) They that love God, can they hear his great name rent with so many blasphemies? So many affronts put upon his grace, the laws of God trampled under foot, and not lay it to heart? God's glory is more dear to them than their own lives. They had neither had any standing in nature, nor grace, had it not been for the glory of God. God made all things for himself; therefore, when the name of God is violated, his authority despised, his laws broken and set at nought, and no more regarded or esteemed than a ballad or a song, they cannot but express their tenderness and great

affection to God, by mourning for this. Carnal men are hot in their own cause, cold in God's. God's children are quite otherwise; cold in their own cause, and hot in God's. Therefore they are deeply sensible when God's honour is weakened. Moses was the meekest man upon earth; yet he brake the tables: how doth this agree? The injuries that were done to himself he could look upon with a meek, quiet spirit, easily put up with them; but, when he saw the people bring dishonour to the name of God, then he hath a high and deep affection. They cry out, "And what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" (Josh. vii. 9.) So, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us; but unto thy name give glory" (Psalm cxv. 1). They go to God, not to advance our faction and interest, we are brought very low; yet the wrath of man shall praise thee. Thy name is dear and precious, they are sorry to see any profane it. God hath abundantly provided for their respect; he hath bid all men love them, when he bid us love one another. So that, in effect, all the respects of the world are devolved upon one person; and they would have all men love God, and honour God.

2ndly, It comes from their compassion, and pity, and love to men. Oh! it grieves them to see so many that do not grieve for themselves; and their eyes are wet, because yours are always dry. "I tell you even weeping," saith Paul (Phil. iii. 18). Compassion over the miserable estate of such teachers, and those that are led by them; they and the whole droves run after fancies that endanger their souls. False teachers and their proselytes should not only fall under our indignation, but our pity. They are monsters in nature, that want bowels; much more in grace. Religion doth not harden the heart, but mollify it. Jesus Christ was made up of compassion, and all Christians partake of Christ's spirit: "God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 8). Pray mark, Paul had got some of Christ's bowels; and let me tell you, they were tender ones. Compassion towards others, and weeping over their sins, is somewhat like the love of Jesus Christ. He would take our burden upon himself when he was not interested; so the Spirit of Christ worketh in all his members: he hath distributed his bowels among them; and therefore they cannot but long for the salvation of others; yea, their heart is broken and mollified with Christ's compassion to them; and therefore long for fellows in the same grace. Though they have received personal and private injuries, yet they pity their case, and mourn for them. It is matter of humiliation and lamentation: "When I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness, and fornication, and lasciviousness, which they have committed" (2 Cor. xii. 21). It is matter of grief to see so many thousands perish, or in a perishing condition.

3rdly, This disposition cometh from the antipathy and zealous displeasure that is in their hearts against sin. They know what sin is, the greatest enemy that God, and Christ, and their own souls, have in the world. It was sin that made angels become devils; it was sin that blew up the sparks of Hell fire; it was sin that opposed God, that crucified Christ; it is sin that grieves the Spirit of God; and therefore they mourn when sin gets proselytes. A man cannot endure to see a toad or viper near him; your hearts rise when you see them creep upon another, so do the hearts of the children of God rise, that their enemy and God's should find such

respect and entertainment in the world. It is said of the church of Ephesus, that she could not bear those which were wicked (Rev. ii. 2). And David saith, "I hate the work of them that turn aside" (Psalm ci. 3). They know this will grieve the Spirit of God, that this will press him as a cart is pressed with sheaves; and shall God be pressed and burdened, and they not troubled? It cannot be. They that love the Lord will hate evil (Psalm cxvii. 10), both in themselves and others.

4thly, This disposition comes out of a sagacity of faith and serious foresight of the effects of sin. They know what sin will come to, and what is the danger of it; therefore, when they see sin increasing, rivers of water run down their eyes. Wicked men tremble only at the judgment of God, but good men tremble at his word; and therefore they mourn when others fall into danger of the threatening. When Ezra plucked his beard, and was in such a zealous indignation against the sins of the people, bewailing them before the Lord, "Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel" (Ezra ix. 4). At last, others are slight and obdurate; they look on threatening as a little mock thunder, they are not sensible of the danger. I may set forth this by that allusion, 2 Kings viii. 11—13. The Prophet Elisha wept when he saw Hazael, that he looked wistfully on his face till he blushed: "The man of God wept, and Hazael said, Why weepeth my Lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil thou wilt do unto the children of Israel; their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child; and Hazael said, But what! is thy servant a dog," &c. So when the children of God look upon sin, they know by the complexion of it what will be the dreadful effects. This will be bitterness in the issue; in time, this will produce pestilences, famine, fire, sword, and all other mischiefs and judgments, and expressions of the angry indignation of the Lord. They foresee a storm, when the clouds are but a-gathering; therefore they tremble when they see them. This is the sagacity of faith. Now, carnal men, on the other side, look upon the threatenings of Scripture but as words of course, used as in way of policy; that God would only awe and scare them, but doth not propose to condemn them. But faith is sagacious. Look, as to the promises, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;" so, as to the threatenings, the same evidence of things not seen. The Apostle doth not only instance when he had given the general description of the objects of hope for the recompence of reward; but he instances in the threatenings: "Noah, being moved with fear, prepared an ark," &c. They know, however men slight the word of God, one day it will be found true; and therefore, when they see men add sin to sin, they are troubled. The word is as sure as execution, and works upon them accordingly. They have all things in a near view: the nearer the objects of our faith are in our view, the more they stir up our affections. Dangers and death, when in hand and in present expectation, work far otherwise than they do when they are considered at a distance. So, when the effects of sin are looked upon as near at hand, when faith makes them present, then they stir up these affections in the soul.

5thly, A fifth cause is from their public spirit, and tender respect to the common good. When they wisely foresee approaching dangers, they are moved with the love and care of their country; and this melteth them. They know sin is of a destroying nature, that "one sinner destroyeth much

good" (Ecl. ix. 18). One sinner may do his country a great deal of mischief, an open, bold-faced sinner; Achan troubled the whole camp (Josh. vii. 11, 12); much more when a multitude of sinners are increased; therefore they sigh and mourn. Godly men are the truest friends to their native soil, they are the chariots and horsemen of Israel. Those that plead with God, stand in the gap, keep off judgments, and have the most public spirit: therefore the least they can do is to sigh for it, and to plead with wicked men; as Tertullian, *Si non vis tibi parcere, parce Carthagini*; if thou wilt go on with thy soul-destroying course, and wilt not spare thyself, yet spare Carthage. This will be bitterness in the issue. The children of God are always of a public spirit. David fasted for his enemies (Psalm xxxv.); Abraham prayed to God for Sodom, a neighbouring country; the godly Israelites were good friends to Babylon in their captivity: "Seek the peace of the city, whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof ye shall have peace" (Jer. xxix. 11); if nothing but their interest and share in the common rest and quietness. Passengers are concerned in the welfare of the vessel wherein they are embarked. Babylon fared the better for the Jews' prayers. Now, more especially are their hearts carried out with a respect to their native soil and dearest comforts; therefore this melteth them, to see the land defiled with sins, and ready for judgments.

SERMON CLII.

VERSE 136.—*Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.*

USE I.—For reproof of two sorts of persons.

1. Those that do not lay to heart their own sins. Usually, men make their affections to prescribe to their judgment, and cavil at the fervorous exercises of religion, because unpleasant to flesh and blood. To humble ourselves before the Lord with a pressing sorrow, seriously and indeed to rend our hearts and not our garments. In this wanton and delicate age, men are apt to think I speak of a theme obsolete and out of date, as calculated for former times, when men were more tender-hearted: if we could awaken some of the old godly professors out of their graves, as the Prophet calleth up Rachel to weep in Ramah for her children (Jer. xxxi. 15), then we might hope to prevail. Alas! to plead now for mourning over the sins of others, when men think it a crime to mourn for their own, this is likely to be lost labour. Were this the humour only of ungodly wretches, it might be borne with silence and patience; but those that would be taken for Christians of the highest form, are altogether prejudiced against such doctrines as this. Men would be honeyed and oiled with grace, and distaste the wholesome discipline of repentance as too severe. They cry out we are legal. How may the poor ministers of the Gospel go to God, and say as Moses did, "The children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how, then, shall Pharaoh hear me?" (Exod. vi. 12.) The professors of religion will not brook such doctrine; and how shall we hope to prevail with the poor, blind, carnal world? To scoff at doctrines of repentance and humiliation, was once a badge of profaneness; many now adopt it into their religion. But be not deceived, the Gospel doth not take away the conscience of sin. It may take away the fear of Hell and damnation upon

right terms. The heart of flesh is a promise, and the spirit of grace is a promise, or mourning apart is a promise. You that say that justified persons must no more mourn for sin, you may as well say they shall no longer have a heart of flesh, or a spirit of grace and supplications, that they shall no longer have a tender conscience. Be not deceived; there must be some time to weep for your own sins, as Peter went out and wept bitterly. Sorrow must have its turn in the Christian life. I would press it upon you by this argument, you cannot be sorrowful for others' sins, unless you be first sorrowful for your own sins. Grief must begin at home; there where you have the advantage of conscience and inward remorse. It is hypocrisy to pitch upon other men's sins and neglect our own; as some will zealously declaim against public disorders, yet neglect their own hearts; as the crafty lapwing will go up and down fluttering and crying, to draw the fowler from her own nest. We have a nest of sin of our own; and we are loth it should be rifled and exposed to public view.

2. It reproveth them that, in times of public defection, never take care to mourn over God's dishonour. We complain and murmur under our judgments, but do not weep over our sins, every person and family apart. Whether it be out of negligence and carnal security, or out of distaste and displeasure against the conduct of present affairs, we seem to have lost our public affections, and can only wonder at the children of God in former times, since they were so broken and tender. To many that would now go for professors, this doctrine seemeth a riddle, a mere strain of wit and fancy, like a precept wire-drawn, or elevated beyond its pitch and tenour. But, in the fear of God, consider what hath been spoken. There are many abuses in our reflections upon the sins of others. Wicked men are quite otherwise disposed; they do not only do evil themselves, but take pleasure in those that do so (Rom. i. 32); would be glad that sin were more common, that it might be less odious, and then there would be none to put them to the blush: it is said they "rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked" (Prov. ii. 14). So the Prophet speaks of some corrupt men in the priesthood, "They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity" (Hos. iv. 8). God had appointed that those that served at the altar, should live of the altar, have a proportion of those offerings. Now, they flattered them in their sins, so that they might have meat, and get a portion of the sacrifices. Many that would be accounted ministers, care not for the sins of the people, but think the less serious men are in religion, the better they can work them to their private advantages, and have more respect among them. Then there are some that scoff at the mourners in Zion; they count it melancholy and mopishness to be so often and seriously humbling themselves before the Lord. The world deals perversely with the people of God; they provoke their sorrow, and then upbraid them with it. You should bear them company, mourn with them, pine in concert with those doves of the valleys. Better be a mourner than a mocker and scoffer. Others there are that yet can make a shift to hold out some profession of religion, yet can delight in the company of profane, carnal persons. Would a man willingly put himself upon occasions of grief? Are you like Lot, whose soul was vexed day by day? Do but consider how much your temper differs from theirs. David saith, "Depart from me, ye evil-doers" (Psalm cxix. 115). Others there are that by censures and bitter invectives seek to make the sinner, rather than the sin, more odious. This is to exercise malice and pride,

not Christian affection. We should not censure, but mourn. Tears flow from charity, censures from pride; and by this means you lose a duty for a sin, which is a sad exchange. Others, again, are apt to laugh at them, and to make sport with the sins of others, but do not mourn. This is a vile abuse; and yet we are many times guilty of it. Men laugh at drunkenness, and make the slips of others matter of boasting and vain talk. This should rather set our hearts a-bleeding and mourning. He were a monster, rather than a man, that could see a man take a fall, even to the breaking of his back or neck, and turn it into a jest; or a man wound himself, and he make a sport of it; and shall we be more kind to the bodies than to the souls of men? Oh! consider the danger of these practices! As much as in him lieth, he hath put himself into Hell, and wilt thou laugh at it?

USE II.—Is trial. Are we so tenderly affected? I know every one is not of a like tender constitution, and cannot weep rivers of tears; but tell me, or rather tell God, I cite thy conscience to make answer to God, when thou didst ever go aside into thy closet, or some secret place, to lay to heart the dishonour done to God, or the affronts put upon his grace? Do not tell me thou hast declaimed against the sin of the times, that thou hast not cried up a confederacy with them that cry up a confederacy against God. There may be somewhat of faction, and interest, and obstinacy in those things; but when hast thou mourned, and wept sore in secret places? Do not tell me that thou hast joined in public fasts: hasty and transient sighs do not wound the heart. Hast thou ever done it in secret? or hast thou often done it? It may be thou hast resented injuries, and spread them before God; and so there is a spirit of self-love and revenge that breathes into thy prayers. Men will be hot in their own cause, but what hast thou done in this duty? It is a plain question; and therefore I hope it will have the more force upon the conscience. True zeal for injuries done to God would ease itself by tears rather than anger. True penitents will not satisfy themselves only with public humiliation, to which law, custom, and example, may draw them, but will make conscience of this duty in their families; yea, in secret, where no eye seeth them but God's; mourn apart (Zech. xii. 12—14), and bring home public provocations to their own doors (Jer. xi. 17).

USE III.—Is to exhort you to get this practice, and to get this disposition of the saints.

I. There is a great deal of need to practise it now, whether we look upon the sins or dangers of the nation; the sins, such horrid blasphemies and reproaches cast upon God's servants, his ways, truths, doctrines according to godliness. I think, in the wisest judgment that a man can make, never was there such a dangerous *κρίσις* and temper of any nation, as of ours at this time. Never were sins boiled up to such a height and consistency as now, such snarling at reformation that was hopefully begun. Now sin walketh in the streets with a bold face: drunkenness, swearing, and profaneness seem to triumph; and with the more pretence, because the stricter sort have so much dishonoured God and religion. Church affairs are much out of order. And, for our dangers, we hear again of wars and rumours of wars; and God knoweth what may be the issue and effect of them: "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye will in nowise believe, though a man declare

it unto you" (Acts xiii. 41). The danger of a nation doth not lie in outward probabilities, so much as in the threatenings of the word. He alludeth to the horrible devastation of Judea by the Chaldeans, and applieth it to the despising of the Gospel. Would any believe that the temple and city should be destroyed, and the people of God carried captive, that not one should remain? yet this came. In the time of Noah, when they abounded in all things, who would have thought of a flood? Many would say as that nobleman, if the windows of Heaven were opened, how could this be? Who would have believed the horrible dissolution by the Romans? or, thirty years ago, that which is now fallen out in Germany? Never think that our armies and forces are so strong as to withstand the threatenings of the Gospel; for our horrible contempt, God may blow upon all these props in an instant. Therefore weep and mourn for the pride and rebellion of the daughter of your people. So for our private place: what sins are there among us! Some have withstood the ways of God; though they have had convictions, yet held out against them. Some are profane, many defects in all orders. Paul was mightily troubled because the church of Corinth was so much out of order; he bewailed it with many tears: "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you, with many tears" (2 Cor. ii. 4). So may I speak, and you think of these things; it is time to mourn. By way of motive, consider—

(1.) This is the best way to enter our protestation and dissent against the iniquity of the times. When we cannot help a thing, it is good to retract it, and commit it by tears to God; for then it shall not be laid to our charge. When the Corinthians mourned for incest committed among them, and sorrowed with a godly sorrow, "Ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter" (2 Cor. vii. 11). Many of them did not only not approve, but abhor that foul act, before; but they were not clear till they mourned, and purged the church from the imputation. So you are not clear till you have done this duty.

(2.) God may take occasion to punish you from their sins. We are all fuel fit for the burning. God's dispensation is not unrighteous as to you, but that may be the occasion: "Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats" (Zech. x. 3). So, "For the transgression of a land, many are the princes thereof" (Prov. xxviii. 2). The people's sins may make great changes and alterations of government.

(3.) You are one body with them. Nations are one political body, churches one political body. In God's plea about Sodom with Abraham, ten righteous persons have an influence to save or ruin it. The sins of one generation may be the cause of another. It is said God turned not from the fierceness of his anger that was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal: Manasseh was dead thirty or forty years before. Manasseh had repented, and Josiah was a great reformer, none like him. You see God may punish their sins many years after; nay, in the process of vengeance, the whole lump is involved, as being one body. So all Israel were troubled for one Achan. Do not tax God's dispensation with severity and rigour; for it is the condescension and art of Divine mercy by this means to prevent public ruin; and you are involved in their portion, that every man in his place may study the prevention of sin and ruin. So churches are one lesser body: one root of bitterness defileth many (Heb. xii. 15); not only by the conta-

gion of the sin, but also by imputation of guilt. So at Corinth, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. v. 6). So also in households and families, which are one lesser body.

(4.) Many of their sins may be thine. It is a good prayer, though it be a harsh expression, to desire God to be delivered from other men's sins: *Ab alieno libera me, Domine*. They have sinned the more, because thou hast been wanting as a magistrate, as a minister, as a neighbour, as a fellow-member, as a private Christian. As a magistrate; a negligent prince, all the sin is put upon him. Eli was a high priest, and was a judge in that case; and therefore, though he were innocent, God saith he would cut off his house for the iniquity of his sons: "Because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (1 Sam. iii. 13). When magistrates suffer all things to run at random in religion, instead of God's ministers, they prove the Devil's agents: though they be holy for their persons, yet there is a great guilt lieth upon them. So for ministers: we are to watch as those that must give an account (Heb. xiii. 17): "I will require him at thy hands," &c. He may be a good man, yet not a good minister, when he is not so diligent in inspection, so faithful to his trust, as he should be; so frequent in exhortation, prayer, mourning, care of the flock; much hurt cometh by our connivance. So for private Christians, they are bound to watch over one another. It may be you do not look after them; you suffer hardness to grow upon them, and would not warn them (Heb. iii. 13). Ye are witnesses from God to the people of Israel. You may be guilty of much evil example and unwary carriage: "By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Heb. xi. 7); and, "Thou hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done. Thou also which hast judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame, for the sins that thou hast committed, more abominable than they: they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters" (Ezek. xvi. 51, 52). You either justify or condemn the world. So that, in effect, they may be your sins; you are sensual, vain. We easily catch a disease from one another, but do not get health. Nature is more susceptible of evil than of grace.

(5.) By seeing their sins conscience may awaken, and thou mayest remember thy own; as Pharaoh's butler said, "I remember my faults this day." Their lives are but a glass of the deformity of our natures. There are many Judases, many Cains in thy nature. I was in times past as bad as any, as bold with sin, and as notorious a sinner. Every sin, therefore, should be a fresh-bleeding wound in our own souls. They are but the picture of thy natural face: "We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived" (Titus iii. 3). Thou seest them given up to vain pleasure; remember how it was with thee before conversion, and let this humble thee.

(6.) If all this do not work, consider the holy angels, that are no way interested, but as it conduceth to God's glory; that do not communicate with us in nature and blood, how they rejoice at the welfare of man. As when the world was made: "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job xxxviii. 7). So when Christ came, and assumed human nature, at his birth: "Suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and say-

ing, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Luke ii. 13, 14). And when the creature repenteth: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance" (Luke xv. 7). So should we mourn over them to God, who are our flesh, our neighbours, united in the bonds of duty and neighbourhood, it may be church-relation.

(7.) I might tell of the fruits of mourning. The greater party of mourners, the more hope of preservation. We have complained of drought, we have dry bottles: judgments are kept off; as long as there is a sighing party, you are preserved (Ezek. ix. 4), as Lot out of Sodom. But, if the righteous God see not this fit, and a godly man may be swept away, as two dry sticks burn a green one, yet you shall laugh when others mourn; in Heaven there will be joy enough. This is the valley of tears. Wicked men, though now they are dry wood, yet they are fit fuel for Hell. Consider of these things. It is a difficult work to soften the heart, and you have need of all the help that may be.

(i.) Consider the compassion of Christ to thee. If he had not mourned and sighed in the garden, and sweat drops of blood, where had thy soul been? Thou wast in thy blood, when free grace went a-sighing after thee in the ministry of the word: "I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live" (Ezek. xvi. 6). These are intending considerations: "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy;" ἡλεήθη (I Tim. i. 13). If I had not been all to be bowelled, and all to be mercied, I had been a brand fit for the burning.

(ii.) Take heed of sensuality: "My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them; for the spirit of whoredom hath caused them to err, and they have gone a-whoring from under their God" (Hos. iv. 12). It taketh away the heart, the tenderness and softness; no one thing doth more brawn the spirit. To be given to uncleanness, past feeling: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph iv. 18).

(iii.) Beg the assistance of God's Spirit; he can smite the rock, and make waters gush out. That thou mayest not be discouraged, look upon precedents in Scripture, the tender hearts of God's people there; the Spirit of God wrought them to this frame. Cry, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days" (Isa. li. 9). God hath promised it: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son," &c. (Zech. xii. 10.) And then it follows, "And the land shall mourn, every family apart," &c.

SERMON CLIII.

VERSE 137.—*Righteous art thou, O Lord; and upright are thy judgments.*

This psalm is spent in commendation of the word of God. The man of God sometimes commends it for its efficacy, sometimes for its sureness and certainty, and at other times for its sweetness. In this octonary or por-

tion, the word of God is commended for its righteousness. David was troubled with sore grief for the wickedness of his enemies; yea, tempted greatly to impatience and distrust, by looking upon their prosperous estate: for, if you consult with the context, you shall find this was spoken in a time of defection, when rivers of tears ran down his eyes, because men kept not the law of God. When carnal men pass their time in joy, and the godly in tears, it is good then to meditate of God's righteousness: so does David; when they were making void God's law, he was in deep sorrow and tears. It is good so to do, that we may humble ourselves under his mighty hand, and compose our soul to patience and a quiet submission, and with hope wait upon God in the midst of wrongs and injuries. Simo Caltu telleth us, that the emperor Mauritius used these words, when he saw all his children slain before his face, and himself ready to be slain after them by Procas. The historian tells us, *Ἐπὶ πάντων ἐπικαλεῖτο, δίκαιος εἶ κύριε καὶ ἐθέεις αἰ κρίσεις σε*, that he did, in the presence of all, meekly submit to this great and heavy calamity, crying out, "Righteous art thou, O Lord; and upright are thy judgments."

In the words, the man of God's reasons, *ab efficiente ad effectum, à legislatore ad leges*; from the property of God to the laws that he hath given us. God being essentially righteous and perfectly righteous, yea, righteousness itself, nothing contrary to justice can proceed from him; no iniquity from equity itself, nor injustice from justice itself. God's law, all his dispensations that proceed from him, are as himself is. Therefore in the text you have two things:—

1. What God is, "Righteous art thou, O Lord."

2. What his word and works are, "Upright are thy judgments."

The word *misphatim*, judgments, implies both; both the rule, and his providential dispensations according to that rule. In God's word, there is a judicial sentence concerning our thoughts, words, and works; therefore his law is called judgments. It is the judgment of the great God concerning the actions of men, and then the effect thereof when his sentence takes place.

The points are three:—

1. That God is a righteous God.

2. That this righteous and holy God hath given a rule of equity and justice to his creature.

3. That all the dispensations that proceed from him according to that rule, are all exactly righteous.

1. That God is a righteous God.

Here I shall show,—

1. What is the righteousness of God.

2. Prove that God is righteous.

First, What it is. Amongst men there is a general and particular justice. The general justice is that whereby we carry ourselves conformably to the rule of religion, called living unto righteousness (1 Peter ii. 24); and the particular justice is that whereby we give every man his due: so it is taken Titus ii. 12, that "we should live soberly, righteously, and godly." Godliness is that grace which inclines us to give God his portion, and sobriety is that grace which helps us to govern ourselves, and righteousness that grace whereby we give our neighbour his due.

1st, Justice is sometimes put for the whole rectitude and perfection of the Divine nature; when God act's becoming such a pure, holy, and infi-

nite being, and so God cannot do anything that is against the perfection of his nature: "He cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. ii. 13). He will not give his glory to another (Isa. xlii 8). He cannot be indifferent to good and evil; he will not damn and punish an innocent creature; there is a condescency in all his actions to the perfection of his nature.

2ndly, There is a particular justice, with respect to his dealings with the creature, especially man. And before I come to open that, I must tell you, that God must be considered under a twofold relation:—

1. As absolute Lord.

2. As governor and judge of the world.

1. As absolute Lord; and so his justice is nothing but the absolute and free motion of his own will, concerning the estate of all creatures. In this respect, God is wholly arbitrary, and hath no other rule but his own will; he doth not will things because they are just, but therefore they are just, because God wills them. For,—

(1.) He hath a right of making and framing anything as he willeth, in any manner as it pleaseth him; as a potter hath power over his clay, to form what vessel he pleaseth, either of honour or dishonour (Rom. ix. 21); and, "As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel" (Jer. xviii. 6). He hath not only might and power, but full right to dispose of the creature according to his own pleasure. As he sustaineth the person of a Lord, he doth what is agreeable to his free and sovereign will. As the good man of the house of Israel pleaded, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" (Matt. xx. 15;) so God, as absolute Lord and sovereign, may do as he pleaseth. Nothing before it had a being, had a right to dispose of itself. Neither did God make it what it was by the necessity of nature, nor by the command, counsel, or will, of any superior, or the direction of any coadjutor; neither is there any to whom he should render an account of his work, but merely produceth things by the act of his own will, as absolute and sovereign Lord of all his own actions: "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. i. 11); and, "Thou hast created all things; and for thy pleasure they are, and were created" (Rev. iv. 11). As his wisdom saw fit, so he hath placed creatures in several ranks of being; the fish cannot complain that it was made without feet or hands, nor the ass that it was made for burthen, that it is not fierce and mettlesome as the horse, which was made for battle. And we men, whatever was given us by creation, it was not a matter of right, but the mere effect of God's goodwill and pleasure. He might have made us stocks and stones, and not living creatures; and, among living creatures, plants only, with the life of vegetation and growth. Or, if he had given us a sensitive life, he might have placed us in the lowest rank; he might have made us toads or vipers, or horse and mule without understanding, and not men. And, among men, all the blessings and privileges to which we were born, might have been withheld without any injustice.

(2.) He hath a right of using and disposing of them so made, according to his own pleasure, to appoint them to be high or low, miserable and afflicted, or prosperous and happy, as it shall be for his glory: "Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory" (Rom. xi. 36). As God made the creatures for himself, so he governs them ultimately, terminatively, for himself. There is no cause of murmuring and repining, when he will use us as he pleaseth for his own glory. We cannot say,

Why dost thou thus? (Isa. xlv. 9, 10.) It is enough to silence all tempests in our souls, God did it: "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it" (Psalm xxxix. 9). Now, this is true in the dispensations of grace, as well as in the blessings of this life; to some God gives grace, to others not; some are elected to mercy, others left to perish in their own sins; one is taken, and another left (Matt. xxiv. 40, 41). There were two thieves upon the cross together with Christ; God saves the one, passeth by the other. He may do with his own as he pleaseth. He, being sovereign, is obliged by no debt of law, or the command of any superior power; and therefore hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth (Rom. ix. 18). Election is an act of sovereignty and dominion. God might have left all in misery, as he left the fallen angels, none of them that sinned are recovered out of their misery; and are we of a more noble consideration than the angels, than those spirits? One of them could have done God more service, than many men could do; therefore, as he left all those angels in their sinful condition, so it is a mercy, that, when he might have destroyed all mankind, he would save any. God could have given Judas a soft heart as well as Peter; but he does not: he will be master of his own gifts. Only this clears his justice, none are denied grace, but those that deserve it should be so; none by God are compelled to sin, none are punished without sin; but, in all his gifts, and in what he doth as supreme Lord, his will is his reason.

2. God may be considered as governor and judge, and so he gave a law to the creatures; and his governing justice consists in giving all their due, according to his law. This is to be distinguished from the former; for God, that is arbitrary in his gifts, is not arbitrary in his judgments. Observe that, he is arbitrary in his gifts, he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy; but, in his judgments, he proceedeth with men according to their works, according to a law or outward rule. Of this governing justice the Scripture often speaks: "All his ways are judgment" (Deut. xxxii. 4). So, "He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth" (Psalm xevi. 13). Now, this governing justice of God is twofold, either legislative or judicial.

(1.) God's legislative justice. This determines man's duty, and binds him to the performance thereof; and also decrees and sets down the rewards and punishments that shall be due upon man's obedience and disobedience. God made man rational, or a voluntary agent, capable of good and evil, with desires of the good and fears of the evil; and therefore God, as universal king, that he might rule him according to his nature, hath made for him a law that revealeth good and evil; with promises, to move him by desire and hope of the good; and with threatenings, to drive him by a necessary fear of the evil. So, "See, I have set before thee this day, life and good, and death and evil" (Deut. xxx. 15). It is true of the law of Moses, and it is true of the Gospel of Christ Jesus: he deals with us this way. That I may not make a distinction between the law and the Gospel, what is the law of the Gospel? "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned" (Mark xvi. 16). Now, this law is the rule of man's duty and God's dealings with all those that have received it.

(2.) There is his judicial justice, called also distributive; and this is that whereby he renders unto men according to their works, whether they

do good or evil, without any respect to persons: "Without respect of persons [he] judgeth according to every man's work" (1 Peter i. 17). The persons that may be respected in judgment is some external thing, that hath no affinity with the cause in hand. Now, when God comes to judge of the breach of his law, or the keeping of his law, he hath no respect of persons, high or low, rich or poor, professing or not professing Christianity; he deals with them as they have walked according to his law. His judicial or distributive justice is declared at large by the Apostle (Rom. ii. 5—9). There God's executing judgment according to his law is described, and you find it twofold, remunerative or vindictive.

(i.) His remunerative or rewarding justice. It is just with God to reward our obedience, and to give men what his promise hath made due to them. It is true, we cannot expect reward from God in strict righteousness, or by the exact laws of commutative justice and strict righteousness, in this fallen estate, as if there were an inward condignity of our works to that which God gives. Oh! no; that is disclaimed by the saints: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities" (Psalm ciii. 3); "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Psalm cxliii. 2). From any exuberancy of merit, we cannot expect a reward from God; but we may and ought to encourage ourselves from his righteousness, even that it is not an unrighteous thing with God to give us Heaven and happiness, when we have served him faithfully, and patiently continued in well-doing. You know the Apostle distinguisheth, that there is a reward according to debt, and a reward according to grace (Rom. iv. 4). Though it be righteous with God to give the reward, yet he gives it not out of debt, or for any condignity of worth; but he gives it out of grace. And so all the comforts we have from obedience are said to come from the righteousness of God. Even the pardon of sin, which is one of the freest acts of God, and wherein he discovers most of his mercy: "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John i. 9). It is not, faithful and gracious, but just. And so for the eternal reward; in 2 Thes. vi. 7, *ὁμοιωσιν*, "It is a [just or] righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." Ay, you think it is just with God to punish evil; but is it a righteous thing that he should reward our obedience? Read on, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from Heaven," &c. God in righteousness is bound by his own promise to give this reward: "God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love" (Heb. vi. 10). How is God's righteousness engaged? Partly by Christ; Christ having given satisfaction equivalent to the offence and wrong to his majesty, and having interposed an everlasting merit, it is just with God to forgive the sin, as it is just with the creditor to forgive the debt when he hath received satisfaction from the surety. And it is just, because God is bound by his own promise; he hath promised a crown of life to them at the end of their trial (James i. 12). And it is part of his justice to make good his word; by promise God hath made himself a debtor. So, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Tim. iv. 8). Bernard glosseth sweetly upon that place, *Paulus expectat coronam justitiæ, justitiæ Dei, non suæ; justum est ut reddat quod debet, debet autem quod pollicitus est*. It is just with God to pay what he oweth, and God oweth what he hath promised; and so it is a crown of righteousness which God, the righteous judge, will

give us at that day. Once more, it is just with God not to forget your labour of love, because it agrees with his general justice, or the rectitude of his nature; it falls in with his law. As God is a holy, perfect being, he cannot be indifferent to good and evil; it concerns him to see, *ut bonis bene sit, et malis, male*; that it be well with them that do well, and ill with them that do ill. But how upon terms it should go well with them, that must be interpreted according to either covenant; either according to the exactness of the law, and so no flesh can be justified in his sight; or according to the moderation of the Gospel, where the soul sincerely frames itself to do the will of God; and it is not an unrighteous thing with God to give you according to your labour of love and zeal for his glory.

(ii.) There is his vindictive justice on all sinners. God punisheth none but sinners, and only for sin, and that ever according to the measure of the sin; as it is more or less, so they have more or less punishment: "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile" (Rom. ii. 9). God will render vengeance to the Gentiles, that had the light of nature to teach them God, to show them the invisible things of his Godhead and power; but chiefly upon those that have been bred up in his ordinances, and mostly upon them that have rejected the terms of grace offered them in the Gospel; for so it is said: he will render vengeance upon all them that obey not the Gospel (2 Thes. i. 8); and, "He that believeth not, is condemned already." The law is passed upon him; but "this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John iii. 18, 19). Their sin is inexcusable, that will not lay hold upon the offers of grace. They have no cause to murmur, or impute their damnation to God's secret purpose; in their own consciences, they may read the justness of their condemnation. Well then, this is God's justice; it is that property by which God acts agreeably to his nature, as sovereign Lord; and agreeably to his covenant, as governor and judge of the world; either his covenant of works or grace.

Secondly, To prove that God is just. I shall prove it by four things:—

1st, From the perfection of the Divine nature. The perfection of the Divine will is such, that he necessarily loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity. As the perfection of God's understanding includes all intellectual virtues, so the perfection of his will all moral virtues. There can be no virtuous act of the will, either in men or angels, that doth not agree to God in a far more excellent manner and measure; and therefore, if there be such a quality as justice and righteousness in angels and men, if holy angels and just men made perfect, certainly there is a just God. This rectitude in men and angels is accidental, and separable from their being; angels may be angels, yet not just, as appears in the devils; but in God it is essential: as his essence is necessarily, so his integrity must needs be so. In short, God must be just and holy, because he necessarily loves himself, and hates everything that is contrary to himself: "The righteous God loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright" (Psalm xi. 7). If they be just, he loves their justice, because he loves himself; if unjust, he hates their injustice, because they are contrary to himself.

2ndly, He could not else govern the world, or judge men according to their offences. Next his nature, God's office shows him just; that infers his justice as he is governor and judge of the world; so we shall see:

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. xviii. 15.) It must needs be so, that the Judge of the earth will do right: “Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? God forbid; for then how shall God judge the world?” (Rom. iii. 5, 6.) It is impossible to imagine that he can be the supreme Judge, who is not just. Among men, appeals are allowed, because men are fallible and apt to pervert equity and judgment; and this is their relief, that they can appeal higher. But now, “If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice, &c., marvel not at the matter; for he that is higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they” (Ecc. v. 8). God is the great arbiter of all affairs in the world, where all appeals rest, can go no higher than the will of God; therefore he must needs be just.

3rdly, This was God’s great end in giving Jesus Christ, that he might be known to be a just God; therefore he stood so punctually upon satisfaction, that the sinner must die or the surety. No surety so fit to keep up the honour of his law, and honour of his justice in the consciences of men, as the Son of God. God had a mind to be gracious to the creature, but without any disparagement to his justice (Rom. iii. 24—26). Now, how should this be? All the wise men in the world, that had any sense of the nature and being of God, busied themselves in this inquiry, how God could be merciful to the creature, and yet just; but all their devices were vain and frivolous, until God himself found out a ransom and remedy for us, as it is Job xxxiii. 24. Here was the difficulty; God would preserve the notions which the creature had of his being and justice inviolable; he would be known as one that would stand to his law, which he had made for the government of the world. Now, there was no way to keep up the credit of it, but these two, strict execution or sufficient satisfaction. The execution would have destroyed all the inferior world, the reasonable creatures at least; and the love and wisdom and mercy of God would not permit that the world should be destroyed so soon as it was made, and man left remediless in everlasting misery. Well then, strict execution would not do it, therefore satisfaction must be the remedy; and such satisfaction as might be sufficient to procure the ends of the law, to keep up the honour of God’s justice in the consciences of men. Now, this was done by Jesus Christ, whom God had set forth to declare his righteousness, that he might exercise his mercy without prejudice to his justice. If this ransom had not been found, we should either have slighted God and not stood in awe of him, or else we had been for ever left under the curse, and under doubtfulness and scruple, wherewith we should have appeased him; but the Lord found out such a means to our hands, that he might declare he was a righteous God.

4thly, I prove it from the Divine nature infused into us. As many as are made partakers of God’s grace, are more just than others; they hate sin and sinners: so we read, that the new man was created after God in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. iv. 24); after God; that is, after the image and pattern of God. Now, if the new creature be made after such a pattern, then certainly God was righteous. We find by experience, the more Godlike and virtuous any are, the more just they are, more apt to give every one his due, to live without wrong to any; and the more their hearts are set against that which is base and unworthy. Therefore certainly God is righteous; for he hath put such a quality as the copy of his nature, into the hearts of men.

OBJECTION.—If God be so just, why, then, does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those that desire to be faithful with God so afflicted and calamitous? This is a wind that hath shaken the tallest cedars in Lebanon. The choicest saints of God have been exceedingly hurried and tossed to and fro in their thoughts by this objection against the righteousness of God: “Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments” (Jer. xii. 1). He holds fast this principle; but yet, Lord, saith he, I am not satisfied; “let me talk with thee of thy judgments,” that I may be better informed, “wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?” So David: “Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart” (Psalm lxxiii. 1); but yet the wicked thrive and prosper, and there are no bands in their death. So, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil,” &c. (Hab. i. 13.) Lord, saith he, I know that thou art a holy God; but why can thy providence then look upon them in the world that deal treacherously and perversely? The clearest-sighted saints may be so bemisted many times, that they are not able to reconcile God’s dispensations with his nature and attributes, and so quarrel with, and reproach, and impeach his providence. Yea, the Heathens, that knew little of sin and righteousness, were troubled at the afflictions of the good, and the flourishing of the wicked, and questioned the being of a God upon this account; and therefore there are two Heathens who have written two worthy treatises to vindicate the providence of God; Seneca hath written one treatise, *Cur malè bonis, et bene malis*, to show why the good may be afflicted, though there be a God; and Plutarch hath written another treatise, *De sera Numinis vindicta*, why the wicked may be spared, and suffered to flourish in the world, though there be a God to take notice of human affairs. These Heathens had a sense of this difficulty; for it is an obvious objection.

I answer, First, In general, God’s dispensations are just, though we see not the reason of them. The saints hold their principle; Lord, I confess thou art righteous (Jer. xii. 1; Hab. i. 13). The justice of God must be acknowledged in all his dealings with us and others, though it appear not to our reason, which indeed cannot discern well; and therefore is unmeet to judge of such high matters as these are: “Thy righteousness is like the great mountains, thy judgments are a great deep” (Psalm xxxvi. 6). The judgments of God are such a deep as we cannot easily fathom the bottom of; and therefore, though we do not see the justice of it, we must believe it, and prefer faith above sense. The Lord may deal otherwise in many things with us than we can express and see the reason of his doing; and yet he is always just and holy in his proceedings, and it is the duty of his people to believe it: “Clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne” (Psalm xcvi. 2). Augustine’s words are a good comment upon that passage, The judgments of God, saith he, are sometimes secret, but always just; *sæpe occulta, nunquam injusta*. We know not what to make of it, clouds and darkness are round about it. Ay; but, though they are unsearchable and secret, they are managed with great judgment and rectitude.

Secondly, But more particularly to come to speak to the things mentioned in the objection.

1st, As to the flourishing of the wicked; three things to that.

I. God’s word doth sufficiently declare his displeasure against them,

though his providence doth not. There is *sententia lata, sed dilata*: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. viii. 11). Mark, there is a sentence pronounced against evil men; but the Lord doth not put the sentence in execution. The sentence is passed against them; both *sententia legis*, the sentence of the law; and so it is said he is condemned already (John iii. 18). Nay, there is *sententia judicis*, the sentence which the judge passeth upon a sinner; for he ratifieth the sentence of the law; what is bound upon earth is bound in Heaven. Well, the warrant for execution is signed; yet the execution is suspended for just and wise reasons. Sin is not less odious to God, because wicked men do not presently feel the punishment of it. There are many righteous ends why execution should be delayed: partly, with respect to the Mediator, into whose hands the government of the world is put: "I will send an angel before thee, for I will not go up in the midst of thee, lest I consume thee in thee way" (Exod. xxxiii. 2, 3); compare with Exod. xxxiii. 20—23, "Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared: beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions, for my name is in him. But, if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to thy enemies, and an adversary to thy adversaries; for my angel shall go before thee." That was Christ, whom they tempted in the wilderness: "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted him, and were destroyed of serpents" (1 Cor. x. 9). Partly, that the elect might not be cut off in their unregenerate condition, that the wheat may not be plucked up with the tares, which they might be: if sentence should be speedily executed against every evil doer, there would be no room left for conversion. Therefore God is not slack, as men count slackness; but only waits, that all those that belong to the purpose of his grace might come to repentance (2 Peter iii. 9). He is long-suffering to usward, to those that were such as the Apostle was, that belonged to the purposes of God's grace. And it is delayed too, that his wrath may be glorified in the confusion of the reprobate: "Endureth with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. ix. 22); that he may show the glory of his power against them, they are hardened and strengthened in their wickedness by their prosperity. When all the favours of God have been abused, and the riches of his goodness set at nought, they have nothing to say for themselves. And sentence is delayed, that the little good they do in the world may not be hindered. God knows how to use all his creatures; even the wicked have a ministry and service under his providence. The Lord would not destroy their enemies all at once, lest the beasts of the field should increase upon them (Deut. vii. 22). They serve as a hedge of thorns to a garden of roses for his people. A dead, rotten post may support a living tree. It may be God will bring some that belong to his grace out of their loins. Jerome saith, many times an evil shrub may bear sweet fruit. And God hath righteous ends too, that his people may be humbled, and that their perverse humours may be broken; for so saith the Lord: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Sion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria" (Isa. x. 12). When he hath sufficiently humbled and purged his people, then he will do it. And whenever this temptation comes, when you see sentence delayed, go to the

sanctuary, as David did; then you will understand their end (Psalm lxxiii. 17). There you will see sentence is not speedily executed, but it is surely executed; as a chimney long foul will be fired at length: "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God," when they are high and prosperous; but "God shall hear and afflict them, even he that abideth of old" (Psalm lv. 19). He whose essence and providence hath been always the same, he will in due time execute his righteous judgment; and the longer he stays, the more heavy; the longer he is about drawing his bow, the deeper will his arrows pierce; they are but treasuring up wrath to themselves against the day of wrath (Rom. ii. 5). As in Jehoiadah's chest, the longer it was ere it was opened, the more treasure there was in the chest; so they are treasuring up wrath, &c. The fire that hath been long kindling, burns the more grievously at last.

2. There are other punishments besides outward afflictions. Invisible judgments are most fearful, blindness of mind, hardness of heart, terrors of conscience. Tertullian ad Marg., *Cogitemus ipsum magis mundum carcerem esse; exiisse eos de carcere, quam in carcerem introisse intelligemus. Majores tenebras habet mundus, quæ hominum corda excæcant: gravioribus catenas induit mundus, quæ animas hominum obstringunt* (2 Cor. iv. 4). *Nihil infelicius felicitate peccantium.* No such misery as to be condemned to this kind of happiness, no blindness like a blind understanding, no chains like an obstinate will, no torments like terrors of conscience, under which a man lives for his further punishment, that he may be his own tormentor. Cain had rather die a thousand deaths, than be let loose as a vagabond here upon earth, and be delivered over to the hell of his own conscience. Those that are under torments of conscience, will call upon the mountains and rocks to cover them.

3. The third consideration is this, Providence must not be viewed by halves, but in its whole frame and connexion. Do but wait a little, and you shall see God will show himself a righteous God. When we view the dealings of God by pieces, we are apt to break out into those complaints: "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches," &c. (Psalm lxxiii. 11, 12.) Ay, but stay a while, and you will see there "is a God that judgeth in the earth" (Psalm lviii. 11). I remember the poet Claudian, who had a little tincture of Christianity, though a Heathen, as appears by his words, when he saw drones and unworthy men greater than the worthy, and vex the pious, *latose diu florere nocentes vixarique pios*, doubted *num inesset rector*, &c., whether there were any governor of the world, any judge, that took notice of things here below; *et incerto florent mortalia casu*, and thought all things were delivered over to blind chance: but saith he at length, *Abstulit hunc tandem Ruffini pæna—absolvit Deos, tolluntur in altum, ut lapsu graviore ruant.* The gods were absolved; for they are lifted up on high, that their fall may be the greater. Men give another judgment of the work of God when it is brought to perfection, than what they do when they see the beginning of it. Alas! at first, when we see the beginnings of God, we are apt to say, There is no profit to serve the Lord. Ay, but at length, "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous." And therefore let us not be rash and hasty, until God hath put his last hand to his work. They are impatient spectators, that will not tarry till the last scene of the tragedy, till the

Lord brings forth his last work. Our hastiness and impatience will betray us into many foul thoughts of God and his providence.

4. That the solemn triumph of God's justice will be at the last day. If God should punish no sin here, no man would believe a God; if he should punish all here, no man would be afraid of a future judgment. Now is the day of his patience, and all taste the effects of his common goodness: "He hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world" (Acts xvii. 31); that is the great day of assizes for all the world, when the great Judge shall appear in his royalty. Now God only keeps a petty sessions; now and then he seizeth upon the hairy scalp of a sinner; but the general assizes is then. In the day of trial, it is not fit we should live by sense, but by faith; but hereafter in the day of recompences all shall be open and clear: "Treasure up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. ii. 5). There is a day that will reveal the justice and righteousness of God; a black day to the wicked it will be, and to God's people a day of redemption. Now his justice is manifested on a few here, then on all. Now God's children have their sentence of absolution from sin in private, *in foro conscientie*, their justification and assurance of eternal life; and wicked men have their woful doom in the stings and horrors of their own conscience, they are self-condemned (Titus iii. 11); but then sentence will pass publicly. The equity of God's dealings is not now so fully seen; but then the causes will be opened: when the secrets of all hearts shall be manifested, then we shall see how justly God accepted one to salvation, and rejected another to damnation. God's justice is seen by the present government of the world, but not so clearly: here justice is mixed with mercy to the godly in their afflictions, and mercy is mixed with justice to the wicked in their temporal blessings; but, when the Lord shall stir up all his wrath, then we shall see clearly God is a just God, and will keep punctually to the law he hath made for the government of the world.

SERMON CLIV.

VERSE 137.—*Righteous art thou, O Lord; and upright are thy judgments.*

For the other part of the objection, that those which desire to be most faithful with God, are calamitous and afflicted, as Lazarus lay in poverty and rags while the rich man surfeited in all manner of luxury; I answer,—

1. God, having an absolute right and dominion over us and our comforts, may give and take them away according to his own pleasure: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away" (Job i. 21): *abstulit, sed et dedit*; they are his own, he gave at first. If he hath lent us anything for his service and our comfort, he may command it again when he pleaseth, and none can commence a suit against his providence. Whatever straits and poverty we are reduced to, we were poorer than ever we can be made by Providence. We came into the world naked. If God should strip us of many comforts, we are not so poor as when we were born.

2. God, having intended to bestow eternal blessings upon us, will take a liberty in disposing of outward things. Jesus Christ, when he purchased

comforts for us, did not purchase only nor chiefly earthly comforts and blessings: "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ" (Eph. i. 3). He did not purchase worldly blessings as our chief happiness. The world is a common inn for sons and bastards, where God will show his bounty to all his creatures; our inheritance is elsewhere, in heavenly places; for, though all things come alike to all, we cannot murmur and say God is unjust; nay, though a child of God should be in a worse condition than the wicked are. A child, during his nonage, is kept under more severe discipline than a slave, which doth more live at large. We distinguish between the care of a father and the indulgence of a mother. The father loves his child; ay, but he breeds him up in a strict way. But mothers are fondly indulgent, and would have them pampered and cockered; so evil habits increase upon them. We that so quarrel for worldly things, would have God show the fondness and indulgence of a mother, and not the wisdom and care of a father.

3. It is fit, before we go to Heaven, that we should be tried; therefore God will so manifest his love to us, that there may be room to exercise faith and patience (Heb. vi. 12). Never any came to reap the comfort of God's promises, but there was a time to exercise their faith with difficulties, and their patience with delays; and therefore God will try our sincerity when we have no visible encouragements. God would have us live by faith, and not by sense or present appearance only; to see if we can look above the clouds and mists of the lower world, and encourage ourselves, and grow bold, upon the hopes and concernments of the world to come. Nature is purblind, but it is the property of faith to see afar off (2 Peter i. 9). There is the excellency of faith, if we have but an eagle's eye to see afar off. If we had the fruition of the whole blessing, alas! there were no room for faith. And then for patience, we are not only to be conformed to God, but to Christ; not only to God in purity and holiness, but to Christ in patience, and submission, and self-denial. There are some of our duties which imply perfection, as justice, holiness, purity, and mercy; of these, we have a pattern in God; and some of our duties imply subjection and obedience, and of these we have a pattern in Christ. Now, all the heirs of promise God hath conformed to the image of his Son (Rom. viii. 29). If we must have all graces, then we must have those graces that are conversant about misery. We should be ignorant of one part of human affairs, were it not for these suffering graces; therefore it is agreeable to God's justice that these suffering graces should have their exercise sometimes. Then the Lord will try our sincerity, whether we follow Christ for the loaves (John vi. 26); out of external encouragements or out of affection for internal reasons, upon pure obedience. God's holiness consists in loving himself, but man's holiness consists in loving God; therefore his holiness had need be tried, whether it be a sincere love to God: "All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant" (Psalm xlv. 17). There is a trial of love! A man of strength seeks a fit adversary to deal withal. It is no trial to a man of strength and courage, that he can bear down a child. If we would try our strength, fortitude, sincerity, and courage, we had need be exposed to difficulty sometimes; as the skill of a pilot is seen in a storm and tempest, and a valiant soldier's in a battle. *Verberat nos? lacerat nos*

Jehovah? patimur; non est sævitiâ, certamen est (Seneca). Doth the Lord scourge us? doth he break us, and tear us in all our concernments in pieces? bear it; it is not cruelty, it is a trial. Religion must cost us something, else it is worth nothing. It will give you no comfort till it be tried, and therefore there is a necessity that we should be tried.

4. Afflictions have their profit and use, and conduce to our good (Heb. xii. 11). It yields grace and comfort to us, it is the fruit of righteousness, and the peaceable fruit of righteousness; that is, that righteousness which brings peace. Outward troubles occasion an increase of inward blessings. Outward things are but shadows of better. If God deny the shadow, and give us the substance, have we cause to murmur? If God do deny the picture, but give the thing itself, hath that man cause to complain? If we have not abundance; yet, if we grow rich in faith, rich in grace (James ii. 5), we have no cause to repine against God. Though we flow not in ease and plenty, yet if we have a full tide of spiritual consolation; if we have no respect in the world, yet if we have the favour of God, we have no reason to complain. Levi had no portion among his brethren; but God was his portion. So it is here, good men have comfort and support at least in all their troubles; they may be accounted miserable, but they are not so, especially if we consider that a great part of their goodness lies in their mortification and contempt of the world. So that to a man that is as God would have him to be, that which is a misery to others is none to him; for his affections are weaned. Therefore, if we have an increase of grace and spiritual comfort, we have no reason to quarrel against God's providence.

5. Good men are but in part good; and it is fit their carnal part should be chastised; that, while there are remainders of sin, there should be some trouble; that God should burn and cut here, that he may spare hereafter; that we should be judged of God, and not condemned with the world (1 Cor. xi. 32). It is better that we should have our troubles, than all our consolations here, and nothing but Hell and misery in the world to come.

USE I.—Information. If God be righteous, then all that comes from him is righteous, his word and his works: *Modus operandi sequitur modum essendi*. "Righteous art thou, O Lord;" and then, "Upright are thy judgments." God acts according to his being. It is true, a man may be just, and yet all that proceeds from him may not always be just. Why? He is not essentially just; but, God being essentially just, all that he does or says is just also. A man's actions are one thing, and his rule another. A carpenter that hath a line without him, may sometimes chop beside his line; but a man whose hand is his own line, can never chop amiss. So a man's rule is without him; his righteousness is one thing, his nature another: he may swerve, and be just. But God's act is his rule, his righteousness is himself; therefore whatever he does is just and righteous. Men may be deceived; but God deceiveth none, and is deceived by none.

1. His word, and every part of his word, is just; it is in all things right, commanding those things which natural justice exacteth, and forbidding those things which have a natural sinfulness and turpitude in them. God is just, and all his judgments are just; the way he hath set down for the justifying of sinners and receiving them, is just and righteous (Rom. iii. 26); and the way he hath set down for the sanctifying of men, to guide

men in holiness, it is a just law: "The commandment [is] holy, and just, and good" (Rom. vii. 12), becoming such a pure nature to give, and having nothing of exorbitancy or irregularity.

2. The way God hath prescribed for saving such as follow this way of sanctification, is just. The righteous Judge will give a crown of righteousness in that day (2 Tim. iv. 8). And the way for punishing such eternally as do despise eternal mercies, is just; they have received a just recompence of reward, especially those that neglect so great salvation (Heb. ii. 3). God's law flows from his righteous nature, and it is a copy of his righteousness; therefore it becometh those that confess God to be righteous, to acknowledge his laws such, and to live according to them.

3. His works: God hath his judgments for those that do not accept the way of righteousness prescribed by him: "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psalm cxlv. 17). We are too busy in interpreting wrongs to others; but, when it lights upon us, we do not acknowledge it: "Thou art just in all that is brought upon us," &c. (Neh. ix. 33). Nay, if thy hand be never so smart upon us, Lord, thou art righteous in all. The only way to suppress murmuring and silence disputes, and rebuke the waves and winds of discontent that toss the soul to and fro, is to remember all God's ways are just and true. God taketh it ill when we question any of his works: "Is not my way equal?" (Ezek. xviii. 25.) When we thus acknowledge the dispensations of God to ourselves, we may with profit observe them to others, that we may applaud his proceedings: "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Rev. xv. 3). So, "For true and righteous are his judgments, for he hath judged the great whore which did corrupt the earth with her fornications" (Rev. xix. 2). There is no hurt done, and they are confirmed in his promises, and the rule set down in the Scripture; not afflicted but on just grounds. It is good to observe this in all his dispensations.

USE II.—If God be a righteous God, and all his judgments right, this is terror to wicked men, that securely wallow in the pleasures of sin, without remorse and trouble. Go on in the way of your own hearts, give satisfaction to your senses, please your eye, withhold not your heart from any comfort you delight in; but remember, for all these things God will bring thee to judgment. As cold water stays the working of the boiling pot, so these sober thoughts of God's justice and judgment may abate the fervours of youthful lusts. When you are pampering the flesh, letting loose the reins to all wanton desires, go on in them; there is a righteous God. Men harden themselves by two things, by God's patience for the present, and thoughts of his mercy for the future.

1. By God's patience for the present. When God doth not strike, but withholds his hand, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes" (Psalm l. 21). Christians! patience and forbearance is not absolute remission and forgiveness. God may give you a long day, and yet reckon with you at last: "He endureth with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction" (Rom. ix. 22). Mark, there is suffering, long-suffering, and much long-suffering; and yet vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. God suffered Cain to live as a man reprieved, so you may be reprieved. He deals with ungodly men, as David with Joab and Shimei; he would not acquit them, yet forbore them, and gave order to Solomon to put them

to death; your doom may yet be dreadful. Christians! bethink yourselves, there is a sentence in force, and there is but a slender thread of a frail life between you and execution, but a step between you and death; and will you add sin to sin, and heap up more wrath and condemnation to yourselves? Alas! you are but in the state of condemned malefactors, and will you roar and revel as some desperate wretches in the gaol, between condemnation and execution? There is but cold comfort in this, to be rescued, and to be afterwards executed; and therefore remember God may forbear those whom he will not pardon. Ay, and his anger is most sharp after patience is abused, and most speedy, when you begin to reckon the worst is over: "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee" (Luke xii. 20).

2. Men please themselves that they shall do well enough, because God is merciful; and so they fancy a God all of honey and sweetness. God is just as well as merciful. Ay, but his justice may be a friend; can you claim that justice? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John i. 9). When we with remorse and humble penitence go and confess them before the Lord, then justice is our friend. It is not your friend until you be in Christ: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 1). Why, but am not I in Christ? am not I baptized in his name? Then I say again, there are none in Christ but those that come in the new covenant way; for him hath God set forth through faith in his blood. If we hope we believe in Christ; if we do, then let me say one thing more, there are none come in the new covenant way, that do allow themselves in any known sin; and therefore the justice of God still remains upon you. Improve this latter thus: he that transgresses in one point, is guilty of all; therefore so speak, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty (James ii. 10—12). There are some that have judgment without mercy, and others that shall be judged by the law of liberty. He that allows himself to break with God in any one thing, shall not be judged by the law of liberty, but shall have judgment without mercy. Therefore take heed, you will have double condemnation, if you love darkness rather than light; that is, if you allow yourselves in sinful courses, and turn your back upon the grace and mercy God offers in Christ.

2. Here is for the comfort of the godly, God is just. But to you also he will be merciful, all his dispensations to you are justice and mercy mingled: "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful" (Psalm cxvi. 5). Not all mercy and no justice, nor all justice and no mercy; but so just that we may not offend, so merciful that we may yet hope in him: "Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will he teach sinners in his way" (Psalm xxv. 8). He is good, therefore will direct you; he is righteous, therefore we must take his direction. Nay, justice and mercy are both for you. You must not apprehend as if mercy were for you, and justice against you. No, no; the justice of God is made your friend; that attribute which is most terrible in God, is the pawn and pledge of thy salvation.

The grand inquiry of all the great rabbies and sophies of all the world was this, how justice should be made a friend. It cannot be put out of your mind, but that God is just, and an avenger of the sinner; but he is faithful and just (1 John i. 9); just, in justifying those that believe in Christ. You have a double claim and holdfast on God, you may come to

either court, before the throne of his grace and tribunal of his justice; for there Christ interposed, and satisfied the justice of God. Here the great scruple of nature is solved; that is, how the justice of God should be made your friend. Nay, when you are fainting and discouraged with the scorns and neglect of the world, the just God will reward "your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name" (IIeb. vi. 10). It may be vain in the world, but not vain in the Lord (I Cor. xv. 58). Therefore be cheerful in your service; men are not paymasters, but God. It is a noble spirit to look for it hereafter, a base spirit to look after it here: "They have their reward," saith Christ.

And then against wrongs and injuries we meet with here, the just God, as he will do us no wrong himself, so he will not suffer others to do us wrong without punishing them: "The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed" (Psalm ciii. 6). He pities the afflictions of them that suffer unjustly, and will execute judgment for them. Mark, first from his pity, then from his justice. First from his pity: "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel" (Judg. x. 16); and, "And the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter" (2 Kings xiv. 26). But how much more will he pity those that are unjustly oppressed by men's hands! "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people, &c., and I have heard their groaning" (Acts vii. 34). And, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them" (Isa. lxiii. 9). Therefore, if we look upon the compassions and pities of God, this may comfort us in all wrongs and injuries. Then out of hatred to oppression: "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold the upright" (Psalm xi. 7). So again, "Judgment shall return unto righteousness, and all the upright in heart shall follow it" (Psalm xciv. 15). Sometimes they are asunder. Earthly judges may refuse the justice of righteousness, a judge may suspend the act of his own judgment; but they shall not long be severed, God will bring forth his righteous judgment: "These are things that I hate, saith the Lord" (Zech. viii. 17). And then in regard of his providence, God will not be unmindful of his promise: "He hath prepared his throne for judgment, and he shall judge the world in righteousness; he shall minister judgment to his people in uprightness" (Psalm ix. 7, 8). Courts of justice among men are not always open, they have term-time; but God is always ready to hear plaintiffs. They make complaints among men, and they are delayed so much and so long that they are discouraged; but we have a friend that is always ready to hear: "Thy right hand is full of righteousness" (Psalm xlviii. 10); for defending his people and punishing his enemies.

USE III.—To press us to acknowledge this justice of God, that he governeth all things righteously, especially when you are under his mighty hand. The Lord takes it ill when you question any of his providences: "Is not my way equal?" (Ezek. xviii. 25.) He will be clear when he judgeth (Psalm li. 4). God will be justified in all that he hath done, or shall do, for the punishment of sin; and therefore, when the hand of God is upon you, take heed you do not reproach God. When his hand is smart and heavy upon you, remember affliction opens the eyes of the worst men. Nebuchadnezzar, that knew no God but himself, no happiness but in pleasing his own humour; yet, when he was whipped and scourged, hear him speak: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, and extol, and honour the King

of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Dan. iv. 37). Pharaoh, "The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked" (Exod. ix. 27). These acknowledgments and confessions come from wicked men, as water out of a still, forced by the fire. But, if affliction opens the eyes of wicked men, surely when we are under God's afflicting hand, we should give him the glory of his justice, and acknowledge that he is clear in all that he brings upon us. He takes it ill when we murmur and tax his judgment: "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me" (Mic. vii. 9); and, "The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment" (Lam. i. 18). And, when we submissively stoop and accept of the punishment of our sin after he hath been provoked, then God will plead for us (Lev. xxvi. 41). When we stoop humbly under God's correcting hand, and bear it patiently, and say God is just in all this, then it will succeed well. Observe the justice of God, especially his remarkable judgments upon others. The church is brought in acknowledging it: "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Rev. xv. 3). And, "True and righteous are thy judgments" (Rev. xvi. 7). Not that we should sit coroners upon other men's souls, and judge their spiritual condition, and misinterpret Providence; I look upon it as a great sin of a faction and perverse humours. But clearly, when men's sins are so great that the judgments of God have overtaken them, we ought to say, "Just and true art thou, O Lord, and just in all thy judgments."

I might show here is much to keep the children of God in awe. The Lord is a righteous God; though they have found mercy and taken sanctuary at his grace, the Lord is impartial in his justice. God that did not spare the angels when they sinned, nor his Son when he was a sinner by imputation, will not spare you, though you are the dearly beloved of his soul (Prov. xi. 31). The sinful courses of God's children occasion bitterness enough; they never venture upon sin, but with great loss. If Paul give way to a little pride, God will humble him. If any give way to sin, their pilgrimage will be made uncomfortable; God's hand may be smart and dismal. Eli for negligence and indulgence, there is the ark of God taken, his two sons slain in battle, his daughter-in-law dies, he himself breaks his neck. Oh! the wonderful tragedies that sin works in the houses of the children of God! And David, when he intermeddled with forbidden fruit, was driven from his palace, his concubines defiled, his own son slain; a great many calamities did light upon him. Therefore the children of God have cause to fear; for the Lord is a just God, and they will find it so. Here upon earth he hath reserved liberty to visit their iniquity with rods, and their transgression with scourges. I might press you to imitate God's righteousness: "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him" (1 John ii. 29). You have a righteous God; and here is the thing you should copy out.

SERMON CLV.

VERSE 138.—*Thy testimonies, that thou hast commanded, are righteous and very faithful.*

In the former verse, the Prophet had spoken of the righteousness of God. Now, God is essentially righteous; and therefore all that proceedeth from him is righteous. A carpenter, that hath a rule without him, and a line to measure his work by, may sometimes hit and sometimes miss; but, if you could suppose a carpenter the motion of whose hand were his rule, he could never chop amiss. So must we conceive of God; his act is his rule, holiness is his essence, not a superadded quality, his righteousness is himself; therefore from this righteous God there proceedeth nothing but righteousness, and from this faithful God nothing but faith. He discovereth his nature both in the acts of his providence and in the institutions of his word. We cannot reason so concerning men, that, because they are righteous, nothing cometh from them but what is righteous; because righteousness is not their nature, but an adventitious quality: therefore good men may make ill laws; for, though they be meant for good, they may be deceived. And sometimes wicked men may make good laws, to ingratiate themselves, and for the interest of their affairs; but, God being essentially, necessarily good, holy, and righteous, his laws are also good, holy, and true: “Thy testimonies, that thou hast commanded, are righteous and very faithful.”

In the words observe,—

1. That there is a revelation of God's will in his word, “Thy testimonies.”
2. The authority wherewith his revelation is backed, “That thou hast commanded.”
3. The intrinsic worth and excellency of these testimonies; it is double; they are, 1. “Righteous;” 2. “Very faithful.”

In the Hebrew, righteousness and faithfulness; that is, very right and very faithful: the one word is referred to the *agenda* in religion; the other, to the *credenda*; they are worthy to be obeyed, worthy to be believed. The sum is, God hath his testimonies extant, their authority is inviolable, and their justice and truth immutable.

Some read, *Præcepisti justitiam testimoniorum tuorum et fidem valde*; thou hast highly charged and earnestly commanded the righteousness and faithfulness of thy testimonies, as referring to our duty. But most translations agree with ours. Our duty, indeed, may be inferred; but I shall not make it the formal interpretation of the place. In the texture of the words in the Hebrew, these attributes are given to the word itself.

DOCTRINE.—They that would profit by the word or rule of faith and manners, which God hath commanded them to observe, should look upon it as righteous and very faithful.

So did David here and elsewhere: “The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether” (Psalm xix. 9). I shall make good the point by these considerations:—

PROPOSITION I.—That our faith and obedience must be well-grounded, or else they will have no firmness and stability. The want of a foundation is the cause of many a ruinous building. Men carry on a fair and lofty structure of profession; but, when the winds of boisterous tempta-

tions are let loose upon them, all is blown down, because they build upon the sand, and not upon the rock. They take up this profession without sound evidence and conviction in their consciences; and so they are not grounded or settled in the faith (Col. i. 23): "That ye, being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph. iii. 17). They take up religion slightly, not looking into the reasons of it, upon tradition or vulgar esteem; they are not undoubtedly persuaded that it is the very truth of God. The good seed withered that fell upon the stony ground, because there was no depth of earth (Matt. xiii. 5), no considerable strength of soil to feed faith.

PROPOSITION II.—Faith and obedience cannot be well-grounded, but on such a doctrine as is true and righteous; for who can depend on that which is not true, or who can obey that which is not righteous? Truth is the only sure foundation for faith to build upon, and righteousness for practice. Faith considereth truth: "In whom ye also trusted, after ye had heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation" (Eph. i. 13). And that righteousness is that which bindeth to practice, we may gather from Psalm cxix. 128, "Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way." The word commandeth nothing but what is just and righteous.

PROPOSITION III.—This true and righteous doctrine must be backed with a strong and powerful authority, not only recommended to us, but strictly and severely enjoined, for two reasons:—

First, Because otherwise it will not be observed and regarded, but be looked upon, not as a binding law, but as an arbitrary direction. There is a difference between a law and a rule. A bare rule may only serve to inform our understandings, or to give direction; but a law is a binding rule, a rule with a strong obligation. The word of God is not his counsel and advice to us only, but his law; that men may examine and regard it with more care and diligence, God hath interposed his authority: "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently" (Psalm cxix. 4); and in the text, "Thy testimonies, that thou hast commanded." God hath commanded us to believe all truths revealed, to obey all duties required; and, if God commandeth, there is good reason why he should be obeyed.

Secondly, Divine authority is one means to evidence the righteousness and truth of what is to be believed and obeyed. The righteousness; for, if God, who is my superior, and hath a full right to govern me according to his own pleasure, doth command me anything, it is best that I should obey it without reply and contradiction; yea, though I see not the reason of it: "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28). All creatures have their being, not only from him, but in him; and therefore sometimes God giveth no other account of his law, but this: "I am the Lord; speak unto Aaron and to his sons, that they separate themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel, and that they profane not my holy name in those things which they hallow unto me: I am the Lord. Say unto them, Whosoever he be of all your seed, among your generations, that goeth unto the holy things, which the children of Israel hallow unto the Lord, having his uncleanness upon him, that soul shall be cut off from my presence: I am the Lord" (Lev. xxii. 2—4). Therefore it gives rules of practice to be embraced with all the heart, as holy, just, and good. God's authority is founded upon the total dependence of all creatures upon him, and upon his infallible wisdom, truth, and goodness,

by which he hath a right to prescribe all points of faith to be believed and assented to upon his own testimony, without contradiction: "If we receive the witness of man, the witness of God is greater" (1 John v. 9). A man that would not deceive us, we believe him upon his word, though he may be deceived himself; but God doth not deceive, nor can he be deceived: by the holy God, nothing can be given, but what is holy and good; and thereupon I am to receive it.

PROPOSITION IV.—This Divine authority, truth, and righteousness, are only to be found in God's testimonies, which he hath commanded, or in God's word.

First, There is a Godlike authority speaking there, and commanding that which it becometh none but God to command, who is the universal King and Sovereign; for it speaketh to the whole world without respect of persons, to king and beggar, rich and poor, male and female, without reservation of honour or distinction of degrees. The word looketh on them as standing before God, on the same level: "That accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor; for they all are the work of his hands" (Job xxxiv. 19); and speaketh to them indifferently and equally: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exod. xx. 3); which is not the voice of any limited and bounded power, but of that which is supreme, transcendent, and absolute. And by these laws he bindeth the conscience and the immortal souls of men: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm xix. 7). Men may give laws to the words and actions, because they can take cognizance of them; but the word giveth laws to the thoughts: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts" (Isa. lv. 7); "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. v. 28). And the internal motions and affections of the heart, how we should love, and fear, and joy, and mourn: "They that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not" (1 Cor. viii. 30). Of these things, God only can take notice; the power of man reacheth not to the mind and spirit; they would be ridiculous, if they should take upon them to give laws to these. Philosophers might give directions about them, but potentates would not give laws; for it doth not besem them to interpose their authority in such cases, where it is impossible they shall know whether they are broken or kept. The Scriptures, upon their disobedience, make men liable not only to temporal, but spiritual and eternal, punishments; and accordingly are rewards proportioned in case of obedience. The magistrate's wrath lighteth on the body, but God's upon the soul. All that men can do concerns life, or limb, or liberty, or estate, the inward man is exempted from their power; but God threateneth hardness of heart: "He hardened Pharaoh's heart, for he hearkened not unto them" (Exod. vii. 13); a reprobate sense: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Rom. i. 28); a trembling heart: "The Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of the mind" (Deut. xxviii. 65). On the contrary, obedience hath the promises of a soft heart, and peace that passeth all understanding: "The peace of God, that passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ" (Phil. iv. 7). Of an increase of grace: "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more until the perfect day" (Prov.

iv. 18). God, that punisheth sin with sin, will reward grace with grace. So, for eternal rewards, God threateneth: "Where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched" (Mark ix. 44). On the other side, he promiseth rivers of pleasures that are at God's right hand for evermore (Psalm xvi. 11). He that will be believed and obeyed upon terms of salvation, is a God, one that hath the power of the world to come. Thus hath God scattered the strictures of his majesty, and given real evidence of interposing his authority, everywhere throughout the word. I shall only add, that the Scriptures, as God's law, may be considered as the rule of man's duty and God's judgment. In respect of the commands, they bind man to duty, and are the rule of it. In respect of the sanction, that is, promises and threatenings, they are the rule of God's judgment. In the one, God showeth his righteousness; in the other, his truth: in the precepts, righteousness; in the promises and threatenings, truth.

Secondly, All that God hath required of us is very righteous and just, becoming God to give and man to receive. There is a condecency in these precepts, both to God's nature and to ours. They are the copy of God's holiness, and so a fit means to bring us not only into a subjection to him, which is just, he being our Creator; but into a conformity to him, which is our happiness. To prove the righteousness which is in God's laws, I shall produce several arguments.

Ist, Surely there is a distinction between good and evil, and all acts are not in their own nature indifferent; that was a monstrous conceit of Carpendor and others, contrary to the common sense of man. If this were true, the chasteness of Lucretia should not be more to be prized than the lightness of Lais; nor the virtue of Cato, than the dissoluteness of Sardanapalus; and it would be as indifferent for a man to kill his father as his neighbour's dog; to rob in the woods, as to hunt a deer or hare; to lie with his father's wife, as to contract honest matrimony; to forswear and lie, as to be sincere in all our words and proceedings. Now, whose heart doth not rise within him at such an apprehension? If this be thought to be only custom and received opinion that begets this abhorrence, I would ask, whence cometh it that we all desire to be, if not really, yet seemingly honest? The most wicked are offended, when they are taken for such as they are; and endeavour, as much as they can, to clothe their actions with the appearance of probity and uprightness. If men were not sensible that vice were blame-worthy and virtue commendable, why should such a desire so universally possess the heart of man? were there not a natural sense of good and evil, and an essential difference between the one and the other, which we are sensible of; nature itself valuing and esteeming the one, and blasting the other with severe marks of her imprecation and hatred. And I do with the more confidence urge this argument, because there is difficulty in the exercise of virtue, because of the conflict of the sensual appetite; and, on the other side, many delights and pleasures accompanying vice, by which it gets an easy entrance into our souls and dominion over our desires. Why should a thing so much against the bent and hair be accounted worthy of praise, and the contrary, which hath such a compliance with our natural desires, be accounted worthy of blame? And were there only custom and tradition for it, would men so universally conspire to decree honours for that which is contrary to their corrupt nature, and to disapprove what is suitable to it? It cannot be. Would they desire the reputation of virtue, when their desires choose

vice, and impel them to it, and hold them under it, if they were not sensible that the one hath a comeliness, and the other a turpitude in it? Thus hypocrites do clearly attest the excellency of uprightness and honesty. Well then, the testimonies which God hath commanded are very righteous; for they forbid those things which have a natural turpitude and indispensable sinfulness in them, and command those things which are plainly and evidently lovely and praiseworthy: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. iv. 8).

2ndly, It is such a rule and direction as men would choose if they were at their own liberty, provided they were wise, and not brutified by their inordinate passions, evil customs, and discomposure of soul; for all such are incompetent judges. For there is nothing preserveth the rectitude of human nature, and maketh men to live as men, according to the dictates of reason, as the serious observance of this law. Break it a little, and so far a man turneth beast; so that it was well said of one, 'A saint or a brute.' For the law is so written upon man's heart, and so connatural to his reason, that you must extinguish the nature of man, before you can rase out all the sentiments of this law: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another" (Rom. ii. 14, 15). As long as we have these hearts that we have, we cannot wholly except against the justice and equity of these laws and rules of commerce between God and his creatures. It is true, all truths are not alike evident, but they that seriously mind the one will be led on to the other; at least, will find none contrary to such conclusions as may be drawn from principles naturally known, and will be encouraged to go on till God reveal more to them. This is so evident, that the wiser any among the Heathen are, the nearer they come to this rule, and have framed something like it for the regulation of men, though with great mixtures of their own folly. The perfect discovery of man's duty God reserved to himself and his own writings; else, where there is but *ficta rectitudo* and *picta justitia*, poor counterfeits in the laws of civil nations, and institutions of philosophy, *sapientia eorum abscondit vitia, non abscondit*, there was only a little hiding and disguising of sin, that it might not appear too odious. In short, the less knowledge any nation or society of men have had of this law, the more brutish and barbarous they have been, and so accounted to be by all that have known what civility and human converse mean. And, on the contrary, the more polite and civil, the nearer they came to it. Whom would you judge to be more civil, the Romans or the Scythians? the wise and good man, or the sot and fool? Even among us, the more punctually any keepeth to this law, the more he differeth from others, as much as an angel from a man, or a man from a beast: "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour" (Prov. xii. 26). It is as clear as the sun, whether men will or nill, they must acknowledge it, and do when they are serious; for they approve them while they hate them, wish their latter end like theirs, trust them more than others. Out of all I conclude, that the very frame and constitution of the reasonable and immortal soul and body of man, doth dictate the equity and

justice of this law, and it doth result from the image of God, wherein man was created.

3rdly, That law is just and righteous, the violation of which men judge to be justly punished. I use this argument, because under punishment men are serious; for it rubbeth up and reviveth the sense of a Divine power. Now, for the violation of this law, God hath judged persons, families, nations, and kingdoms; and conscience is sensible of the justice of God's judgments exercised upon them. God is clear when he judgeth (Psalm li. 4); his eminent judgments carry light and conviction with them; and wherefore have his judgments been executed? "For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. i. 18); "Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward" (Heb. ii. 2). There is a fear after some notorious breach, even in those that are not acquainted with God, a shyness of his presence; ever since Adam ran to the bushes, so it is. All which doth seal the righteousness and truth of this law, and how justly God may reckon with us about it.

4thly, There is an intrinsical righteousness in all the duties commanded in God's law. Besides the will of the Lawgiver, there is a justice in the things themselves. By what measure will we take justice? We usually understand it to be to give every one his due. So doth the law: it commandeth us to give God his due and man his due. Love is *πλήρωμα νόμου*, the fulfilling of the law. The law is comprised in one word, "love;" to love God, himself, and his neighbour, is there not justice in all this? The natural relation we have to God calleth for love to him; for he made us, and is the strength of our lives, and the length of our days: "That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him; for he is thy life, and the length of thy days" (Deut. xxx. 20). Self-love and self-preservation, if that be not a natural principle, nothing is. Our neighbours we are bound to love, because of consanguinity; they are our own flesh and blood, and God hath bidden us to do to them as we would to ourselves: "Therefore all things, whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. vii. 12). There is a universal consanguinity between all mankind, which hath its root in the communion of one and the same nature, and in the dependence and derivation from one common stock. The eminence of the Divine nature is the foundation of the honour which we tender to it; and the equality of our nature is the foundation of the justice which we use to one another. So that here are natural, immutable obligations and grounds of right. Go to particulars: how equal is it, that we should acknowledge but one God. They are drunk that see double, strangely depraved that see more. That we should not worship him before an idol, which is very apt to taint our minds with a gross opinion of God, as if he were some limited, finite being. It is a great lessening of reverence to see what we worship. Not to take God's name in vain by a false oath, that breedeth atheism and contempt. That there should be a day to remember the Creator of all things; every day's work is no day's work; but there must be a limited time. For reverence to parents, all nations call for it. For murder, adultery, stealing, false accusations, man's interest will teach him the necessity of those laws, that forbid these things. Contentation is a guard to all the rest; it is fit the God of the spirits of all flesh should give a law to the spirit: "Thou shalt

not covet." Yet this is the law of God, to which Scripture is subservient; and all the admonitions, reproofs, exhortations, dehortations, examples, directions; histories of the obedience and virtue of some, with their rewards; of the disobedience, apostasy, rebellion of others, with their punishments,—all is to enforce this law. The doctrine of Christ, and redemption and reconciliation by him, I bring not under this first head, because that is a favour and privilege; and the justice and equity of Gospel precepts will soon appear, when once we have consented to the law, that it is good. But of that in the next head.

Thirdly, For the truth and faithfulness of God's testimonies. This may be considered either in revealing or performing, making or making good his promises.

1st, For truth and faithfulness in making such offers and promises of pardon and eternal life in case of obedience, and threatening a curse and everlasting punishment in case of disobedience. Surely, there is no doubt in all this, because they are revealed by God, who is the supreme and original truth, and who neither is nor can be deceived; for God's understanding is the rule and measure of all other truths: nothing is true, but what is constant to his knowledge. And he cannot deceive us: that will not agree with the goodness of his nature and love to mankind; therefore he is called "God, that cannot lie" (Titus i. 2).

2ndly, In making good. God hath given us the most solemn assurance: "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that, by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation" (Heb. vi. 17, 18). He hath demitted himself to the terms of a covenant, given us a seal: "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith" (Rom. iv. 11). Pledge: "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. i. 22). He hath stood upon his truth above all things: "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name, for thy lovingkindness, and for thy truth; for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psalm cxxxviii. 2). One part of the word verifieth another: in one part, you have the promise; in another, the accomplishment, the great promise of sending Christ: "Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared for me: in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure; then said I, Lo, I come, &c., to do thy will, O God" (Heb. x. 5—7). He would not go back, being willing to keep the promise afoot. It was on our part a hand-writing against us, in justification of our guilt and need of expiation; but, on God's part, an obligation of debt to pay our ransom. Still he accomplisheth promises in the return of prayers; and, though the great payment be in the other world, yet here God remembereth us still, accomplishing the intervening promises, and giving proof of his truth. So that they that are acquainted with his name, will never distrust him: "They that know thy name, will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee" (Psalm ix. 10). They that have known his way, and the course of his dealings, will have a confidence in him.

PROPOSITION V.—They that would receive the word as the word of God, must be soundly convinced of, and seriously consider, this righteousness and faithfulness in the testimonies which he hath commanded; for,

till then, the word worketh not on them: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thes. ii. 13). And till then they are but customary Christians, and can never rightly believe nor obey: "Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John iv. 42). First their faith depends on the common tradition, or the testimony of the church; afterwards on the sure ground of the word itself; in which they find such clearness and efficacy, that they cannot but yield to God. The authority of man is nothing to it, when our faith is bottomed on a surer ground, the authority of God speaking in his word.

1. There must be sound conviction, or belief of this. This is called, "the acknowledging of the truth" (Titus i. 1), *ἐπίγνωσις τῆς ἀληθείας*. And, "All riches of the full assurance of understanding to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ" (Col. ii. 2); an assurance that God will keep touch with me, that he will not delude me in the terms propounded in the Gospel. This full persuasion of the truth of God's testimonies we must all aim at and seek after. The assurance of my interest and my salvation is another thing; and yet that I am not to neglect, but with this I am to begin.

2. There must be serious consideration; for that improveth all truths, and maketh them active and effectual. God's complaint of his people is, that they will not consider: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isa. i. 3). They do not lay truths in the view of conscience. Food, without mastication and chewing, nourisheth not. A thing not considered doth profit as little as if not believed, as forgetting God is a kind of denying him. Seriously, then, debate it with yourselves: you must consider the authority of God. Authority is that right which a superior hath to prescribe to such as are under him. Doth God usurp upon you when he giveth you a law? or hath he left you in the dark, that you do not know whether this be his law, yea or nay? Are there no strictures of his majesty in the very economy and frame of it? Can any but a God speak at such a rate? And, for his justice, hath he commanded anything to your hurt? No; it is all for thy good: "And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always" (Dent. vi. 24). And for his truth: men may deceive and be deceived; and, though they often speak truth, they do not always so; but God seeth by his own light, not by discourse, but vision. Truth is his nature; from which he can no more swerve than from himself, and why need he court a worm, and flatter us? Thus should we urge our hearts.

USE I.—Let us own and improve the word, as a righteous and faithful word, which God hath commanded for our good.

1. Own the authority of it. It is not an arbitrary thing; the truths revealed imply a command to believe them, the duties required imply a command to obey them: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. xvii. 5). God hath commanded us to hear Christ, to believe in his name, to love one another: "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment" (1 John iii. 23). As we value his

word, and would one day see his face with comfort, we should bind his precepts upon our hearts. Say to thy soul, As thou wilt answer it to God another day, take care of this.

2. Own and improve the righteousness of his testimonies. Man having a total and absolute dependence upon God, God might govern us in what manner it pleased him; for it is just that one may do with his own what he will (Matt. xx. 15). But what hath the Lord required of thee, but to love him and serve him? Not to pluck the stars from the sky, or to guide the chariot of the sun; not such sublimity of knowledge and learning, nor such a quantity and proportion of alms; nor to lance thyself, or offer thy firstborn; nor rivers of oil, nor thousands of rams for a burnt-offering: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (Mic. vi. 8). The Lord's commands are not rigid and severe and unreasonable, but sweet and desirable, that we should do wrong to none, do good to all, and maintain communion with him; and is this burdensome? Go try the drunkard's life, and the adulterer's life; you will see the temperate, the chaste, have much the sweeter life of it. Therefore let there not be one disallowing thought of what God hath required. Could we bring you to esteem the word, other things would come on more easily.

3. Own it and improve it as a faithful word, building upon the promises, fearing the threats, thereof. The word will not deceive them that are ruled by it. Consider your condition, and what will be the event of things. There is a curiosity in men to know their own destiny: we may easily know what shall become of us by the word of God; and, if men were not more curious to know their end than careful to amend their lives, they need not seek any other oracle: "For, if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but, if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. viii. 13). So for the end of any action; if the word of God say it will be bitter in the latter end, though it bring profit and pleasure for a while, believe it against all the wicked men in the world, and say, 'I do more believe this one text and place of Scripture than all that men can do and say.' Mind the great duties of the Gospel, and venture your souls in Christ's hands upon these terms: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. i. 15). I have nothing but God's word, yet I will venture my salvation, my all upon it, upon his bare word. Comfort yourselves in the midst of difficulties with the truth of God's word, when all sense and outward seeming is contrary to the promise. Before a promise be accomplished, there will be unlikelihooods; I will instance in Paul's prediction: "Lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee; wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit, we must be cast upon a certain island" (Acts xxvii. 24—26). Yet how many difficulties came to pass! First, no isle appeareth; they are tossed in the Adriatic Sea for fourteen days together; they knew not where they were, nor whither they did go. Thus doth God delay the accomplishment of the promise; they know not how nor which way it shall be made good. Another difficulty was, that meeting with some isle, it fell out in the night-time, they deemed they drew near to some country, but yet feared they should be split upon the rocks (verse 30). The shipmen were ready to flee out of the ship,

leave Paul and his fellows in danger, upon pretence of casting out anchors out of the fore-sterne, and so they were ready to miscarry in the haven. When this difficulty was over, and it was day, they were not able to row to land, because of their long fasting, having eaten little or nothing for fourteen days. Another difficulty was, when they would have thrust the ship ashore, it was broken all in pieces, what with high banks and two seas meeting. Another difficulty was, when they were to swim to land, they think of killing the prisoners; and the captain, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and so they escaped all to land. Therefore do not distrust the word; but especially bear up with the hope of eternal life, though remote, and in another world which we never saw: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises; but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them" (Heb. xi. 13); "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" (Rom. ii. 7). You will meet with bitter conflicts, heavy troubles, sad desertions; yet remember God's word is a faithful word, and let this cheer and revive you.

USE II.—Express these virtues of the word. We must be righteous and true, if the word of God be so; for the impression must answer the seal and stamp: "But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, which was delivered you" (Rom. vi. 17); "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart" (2 Cor. iii. 3); "Holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice, in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain" (Phil. iii. 16). A Christian is the Bible exemplified; such a conformity there must be there to the law of God, the same light that shineth forth in Scripture should shine forth in the lives of the godly; so it was in Hezekiah: "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight" (Isa. xxxviii. 3). And of David it is said, "Thy servant David, &c., walked before thee in truth and righteousness, and uprightness of heart" (1 Kings iii. 6).

I. For righteousness. A Christian's business is to give to every man his due, to do what he is bound to do to God and man, to "render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. xxii. 21). Whether by the law of nature: "If any provide not for his own, and especially for them of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. v. 8). Or by relation, as Boaz did the part of a kinsman to Ruth: "Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that, if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well, let him do the kinsman's part; but, if he will not do the part of a kinsman, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth" (Ruth iii. 13). Or by place or station: "And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in" (Neh. vi. 11). Or by paction or by agreement: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal" (Col. iv. 1). Or according to rules of prudence, equity, charity: "Let your moderation, τὸ ἐπιεικὲς, be known unto all men" (Phil. iv. 5). Whether it be fear or honour that be due: "Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom

custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour" (Rom. xiii. 7). Or goodwill: "Owe no man anything, but to love one another" (verse 8).

2. For truth. You are to adhere to the truth, not to be "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph. iv. 14, 15). To speak nothing but truth in your ordinary communication: "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour" (Eph. iv. 25). To perform what you promise, though to your loss: "He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not" (Psalm xv. 4). Thus should the whole course of our lives express the properties of the word.

USE III.—To show the reason why men are so backward in obedience, so prone to what is evil, so uncomfortable in trouble. We do not believe that the testimony of God is righteous and true, very true, every tittle of it; but we are slow of heart to believe: therefore is the faithfulness and truth of the word inculcated; Christ saith, "Believest thou this?" (John xi. 26.) Could we believe the word more, what advantage should we have in the spiritual life! what fear of God! what joy of faith! what readiness of obedience! But we cannot depend upon God's word, and therefore are easily shaken in mind. Our hearts are like a sea, one wave riseth up after another. We must be fed with sense, and God must do all immediately; or else we are apt to sink under our discouragements.

SERMON CLVI.

VERSE 139.—*My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.*

In these words, you may observe, 1. Two different persons. 2. A different carriage mentioned.

1st, Two different persons are spoken of, David and his enemies. By enemies is not to be understood, those only that were troublesome to himself, but those who were an opposite party to God, who opposed themselves against God and godliness; these, without any breach of the law of love, may be counted enemies: "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred, I count them mine enemies" (Psalm cxxxix. 21, 22). It is a comfort and satisfaction to the godly to have no enemies to themselves, but such as are enemies to God also, such as rise up against God.

2ndly, There is a different carriage mentioned and ascribed to these two parties; on the one side, oblivion and forgetfulness of God's law; on the other side, zeal.

1. On the enemies' part, oblivion and forgetfulness of God's word. The word of God is not effectual usually, but where it is hid in recent memory: they "have forgotten thy word;" a proper phrase to set forth them in the bosom of the visible church, who do not wholly deny and reject the word and rule of Scripture, but yet live as though they had forgotten it: they do not observe it, as if God had never spoken any such thing, or given them any such rule. They that reject and contemn such things as the word enforceeth, surely do not remember to do them.

2. On David's part here is mentioned zeal, or a flagrant affection, which is set forth, (1.) By the vehemency of it. (2.) By the cause of it.

(1.) By the vehemency of it, "My zeal hath consumed me." It was no small zeal that David had, but a consuming zeal: vehement affections exhaust and consume the vital spirits, and waste the body. The like expression is used Psalm lxxix. 9, "The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up." Strength of holy affections works many times upon the body, as well as the soul; especially zeal, which is a high degree of love, and vents itself by a mixture of grief and anger. What a man loves, he would have it respected, and is grieved when it is dishonoured and under dispute. Both have an influence upon this consuming, this wasting of the spirits, that is spoken of in the text, because they had lessened and obscured the glory of God and violated his law; and there was in him a holy care, ardour, and earnest endeavour to rectify this abuse, and awaken them out of their security, and reduce them to their duty.

(2.) Here was the cause of it. Why was David so much wasted, pined, consumed, and troubled? Because they "have forgotten thy word;" the contempt of God, and the offence of God, sate nearest his heart, as if he had said, 'I should more patiently bear the injury done to myself; but I cannot be coldly affected where thy glory, O Lord, is concerned; since I have had a taste of thy grace, and felt the benefit of thy word, I cannot endure it should be contemned, and it much moves me to see creatures so mad upon their own destruction, and to make so light of thy salvation.' Thus was David consumed, not at the sight of his own, but at other men's sins; and not at others in general, but them, his enemies, that they should make void the law of God. Such was his love to the word, that he could not endure the contempt and violation of it; and such was his compassion to the souls of men, that it grieved him exceedingly to see any of the workmanship of God to perish, to be captivated to the world, to be made factors for the Devil, and fuel for Hell-fire, and to be so violent for their own destruction.

DOCTRINE.—That great and pure zeal becomes those that have any affection for the word and for the ways of God.

Here is a great zeal; for David saith, "My zeal hath consumed me;" it preyed upon his spirit. And here is a pure zeal; for he mentions not personal injuries, but disrespect to God's word. When the same men are our enemies and God's enemies, we should be more zealous for God's cause than our own. Now, both the greatness and purity of his zeal did arise from his love to the word, as appears from the precedent and subsequent verses. In the precedent verses, he had told them, 'Just and upright are thy testimonies, and very faithful; therefore zeal hath consumed me, because this word should be slighted and contemned;' and it appears also from the following verse, "Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it." He was troubled to see such a holy and pure word trampled underfoot; and especially, that those seem to disown it (he doth not say they deny it), who had generally professed to live under this rule, that they made light of and disregarded the precepts, in which he found so much comfort and delight.

In the prosecution of this point, I shall—

1. Show what is true zeal.
2. Why all that love the word, they should have this great and pure zeal.

I. What is true zeal? There is a carnal zeal, and there is a spiritual zeal.

First, The carnal zeal (to begin with that) is threefold.

1st, That which comes from an ill cause, and produceth ill effects. An ill cause, as hatred of men's persons, or envy at their gifts and excellences, or their success and happiness in the world: "If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts" (James iii. 14); it is *πικρόν ζήλον*, if you have *bitter zeal* in your hearts. There is a kind of bitter zeal, and malignity at their excellency, whether gifts, graces, rank, dignity, in the world. And verse 16, he tells us, this bitter zeal produceth confusion and every evil work. To be consumed and eaten out with envy, is little commendable. This is not the zeal of the text. With this zeal were the chief priests filled, when they saw that the Gospel came into some reputation, and that the people, do what they could, did haunt and frequent it. We read, Acts v. 17, *ἐπλήσθησαν ἔνηλον*. We render it, "they were filled with indignation;" it is in the Greek and in the margin, they were filled with zeal, with this bitter zeal, malignity, envy, indignation; they would bestir themselves to suppress the growing Gospel by all the means that possibly they could.

2ndly, There is another sort of carnal zeal, which hath an ill object, though it may be a good cause from whence it proceeds; such as an ignorant zeal, which proceeds from some love to that which men call religion, but falsely; and so the Apostle saith, "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. x. 2); and such a zeal had Paul when he was a Pharisee; he gives us an account of it: "How that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, &c., being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. i. 13, 14). Paul was a man that never acted against his conscience, no not when he was a Pharisee; he still acted according to his light; but, when he was blinded with Pharisaical prejudices, he wasted the church of God, and was exceedingly zealous for a false religion. This is such a zeal as possibly might have a tolerable cause, but it had a bad object,—a zeal about the dictates of a deluded conscience; and this zeal *perniciosior est quo flagrantior*, is the more pernicious the more earnest it is: it hath often raised confusions in the church. When men are led with a blind zeal they think for God, if they be under, then they make divisions; if they get a-top, then they are persecuting and oppressing; this is the zeal of a deluded conscience. In short, zeal must have a right object; otherwise, it may be great, but cannot be good, pure, and holy.

3rdly, Another false zeal is when it hath no ill object, but it exceeds in the measure and degree, and is far beyond the weight of the thing that it is laid out upon. This is a superstitious, a trifling zeal, which runs out to externals, and is altogether employed about lesser things of religion, as the Pharisees that made a great business about a smaller matter, tithing mint, and anise, and cummin, but neglected weighty duties, faith, judgment, righteousness, and the great things of the kingdom of God (Matt. xxiii. 23). The Apostle tells us, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink" (Rom. xiv. 17), in being of this party and that. Many, all their care and strength of their souls runs out in matters of less importance, and keeping up a party and faction in religion. We should first make conscience of principal matters. Superstitious scrupulosity is always damageful, like those that come into a shop to buy a pennyworth of a commodity,

and steal a pound's-worth. Oh! they have a great zeal for lesser things, when it runs out mightily about outward things, either for that or against that; and, in the mean time, they cherish the world, pride, envy, carnal, evil affections that are destructive to, and the bane of, godliness.

Secondly, There is a spiritual, holy zeal, which we may describe, 1. By its cause. 2. By its object. 3. By its effects. 4. By its use, as to public reformation. 5. As to its use as to Christians' private exercises, to carry on the spiritual life with fervour, warmth, and vigour.

Ist, I am to speak of the cause of it. The true cause of holy zeal is love to God and what belongs to God. Zeal is *ferventis amoris gradus*, a higher degree of love; it is the fervour of Divine charity. We should mark still what spirit inflames the zeal that we have. Every man is eaten up with one kind of zeal or another. The zeal of the world eats up many (Psalm cxxvii. 2). They bereave their souls of good, and all for a little pelf; they work in the fires, they load themselves with thick clay. The zeal of the flesh inflames many; they are mad upon carnal delights, can let go all considerations so as they may fulfil their lusts; they are consumed with these kinds of zeal. Another spirit should be working in us, a zeal for God; and that comes from an entire love to God. When the soul doth heartily and earnestly love God above all, then there is a strong desire of promoting God's glory and interest; there should be that spirit which breathes in our zeal, and with this zeal should we be eaten up and spent. Now, they that love God will love all them which belong to God. Friends have all things common; so it is between us and God, the injuries done to him will be as grievous to us as if they were done to ourselves: "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee, are fallen upon me" (Psalm lxix. 9); and the glory that comes to them is as acceptable as if some great benefit had come to us: "Declaring the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy unto all the brethren" (Acts xv. 3). Oh! this is great joy to a glorious soul, when God's interest thrives in the world. Oh! this is that they would willingly hear spoken of; their hearts are upon it; when God's interest stands or falls, such an earnest desire of the glory of God, which is the highest degree and measure of love to God.

2ndly, Let us speak of the object of zeal. In three things, God's interest lies in the world; namely, his truth, his worship, and his servants. Now, it is not enough to have zeal, that we do not oppose any of these; but they must be tenderly regarded and looked after, and we must be affected with these things, as we would with our own concerns. When wrongs are offered to any of these, either to God's truth, his worship, or his servants, they must go more nearly to our hearts than any personal injuries done to ourselves. What we cannot remedy, we must mourn for. All these three concur in Elijah's speech: "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts," there is his zeal; why? "for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant," there is his truth perverted; "thrown down thine altars," there is his worship overturned; "and slain thy prophets with the sword" (I Kings xix. 10), there his servants are wronged. So that zeal mainly is concerned when God suffers loss in any of these things, if his truth be perverted, his worship overturned, his servants be despitefully used, vexed, and grieved; then zeal presently shows itself in opposing these things, or in grieving for them.

1. Zeal seeks to preserve the truth of God inviolate. Truth is a pre-

cious *depositum*, trust, and charge, which God hath committed to the keeping of his people; and, without zeal to defend, and propagate, and maintain it, though with the greatest hazard, it will never be kept, and you will never be faithful to God. We are a kind of feoffees for the present age, and trustees for the future; and the charge of God's truth is put into our hands, and we must see it be transmitted to the world, pure and undefiled; therefore, *ἐπαλωρίζεσθαι*, we must "earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). When others would violate the truth, we must contend with them: "They are not valiant for the truth" (Jer. ix. 3). A Christian needs not only the labour of an ox, that he may be diligent; but the valour of a lion, that he may appear for God in defence of his truth when it is invaded and encroached upon; and especially doth this concern the officers of the church: this zeal they should have for the word: *Ἀντεχόμενον*, "Holding fast the faithful word" (Titus i. 9). The word signifies to be good at holding and drawing; that is, when others would wrest it out of our hands, we should hold it fast: as a staff that another would take out of our hands, we hold it the faster and wrestle with him; so should we wrestle, contend, and hold fast the truth, when others would draw it from us. And, "Striving together for the faith of the Gospel" (Phil. i. 27). Oh! we should not let one dust of truth perish. This is to be zealous for the truth, standing to, and striving for, the defence thereof, in our way and place. If God had not raised up zealous instruments in every age to plead for his truth, what a sad case would the church have been in! Truth would have been buried under a great heap of prejudices, and Christ's kingdom have been crushed in the very egg, and religion strangled in the cradle. But there is a cloud of witnesses gone before us; in every age God sets up some of all sexes, ages, conditions, that have owned his despised and oppugned truth, and have not counted their lives dear, so as they might give their testimony to the truth of God (Rev. xii. 11), and have more greedily embraced martyrdom than others honours and dignities in the church; as Sulpitius Severus observes, they have with greater desire affected the glory of martyrdom and suffering for the truth, that they might be faithful to God and the souls of men in future ages, and to preserve God's truth inviolate; they have greedily sought this honour, to suffer for God. And Ignatius, he could say, Come, saith he, I desire the beasts that are prepared should be let loose for me; it is better to die for Christ than to command the ends of the earth. And Basil (when the Arian emperor threatened those that did oppose his religion should die the death), The wild beasts, let them be let out; would to God it were so, that I had the honour to die for the truth of Christ! This was notably for the increase of Christ's kingdom, and thus the Lord hath inspired his people with a holy love and zeal.

2. For his worship, that that may not be corrupted, but his institutions kept pure; zeal is conversant about that too: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God" (Exod. xx. 5). In the first commandment, God forbids a false god; in the second, he forbids the false means of worship, as before the false object. Now, because the means of worship are apt to be perverted, the Lord shows how jealous he was for his worship: "I am a jealous God;" if the institutions of God be perverted, then, "I will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." The children are considered in that commandment, be-

cause, usually, the interest of families is our great snare, when an idol is set up, or a false means of worship. The chiefest false worship is an idol, and the greatest sin is put for all the rest, before an idol, the imagination or invention of men, when that is set up. The Lord speaks of the interest of families, because men are apt to think they shall undo them and their families, if they contend in this matter. Now, be you zealous of my worship; for I will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. That the interest of families might not abate our zeal, the Lord takes the family into the curse for the violation, and likewise into the blessing for zeal for his institutions. And so Christ saith, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (John ii. 17). We should be zealous for God's worship; ministers they should preach zealously; and magistrates govern zealously, to purge God's house; and Christians pray zealously; every one of us, as far as the bounds of our calling will permit, should be zealous for God's worship. *Quis comeditur zelo domus Dei?* saith Austin; who is he that is eaten out with the zeal of God's house? He that desires that no human invention may be blended and mixed with God's worship, and would fain amend what is amiss. This zeal is the only right and acceptable principle of reformation, our great indignation against all false worship whatever. I remember the story of Valentinian (who was afterwards emperor), when, according to the duty of his place (being captain of the guard to Julian the Apostate and emperor), he was engaged to attend him into the Heathen temple of Fortune, and the priests were to sprinkle the lustrating and holy-water (for that ceremony was common to the Heathens with the Papists), and a drop of it lighted upon Valentinian, he struck the priest that did it, and said, 'Thou hast defiled me, thou hast not purged me' (he thought his garments to be contaminated, and not his body sanctified); and he tore off his belt, renounced his honour, rather than he would do anything that should be contrary to his religion; and for this Julian sent him into banishment; and, within a year and few months, the story tells us that he received the reward of his holy confession and owning of Christ, the Roman empire. For the soldiers, being weary of this Pagan emperor, as soon as he died, chose Jovinianus (that had been banished, and a fellow-sufferer with him), who recalled him and other Christians from their exile; and, after having reigned not full eight months, he died, and Valentinian was chosen emperor in his stead.

3. The third thing we should be zealous for is God's servants. When they are oppressed, we should own and cherish them, as good Obadiah did the prophets, who "hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water" (1 Kings xviii. 3). And Jonathan owned David, though his father was greatly displeased with him, and flung a javelin at him (1 Sam. xx. 32). And Esther pleads for the Jews, when they were doomed to destruction (Esther vii. 3). And Nicodemus pleads for Christ that he might not be condemned unheard: when the council was ready to condemn him, "Nicodemus saith unto them (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them), Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?" (John vii. 50, 51.) And then they went their way. That stopped the persecution for that time. Certainly, they have little zeal for God, that can see good men perish before their eyes, and have not a word to speak for them. This Nicodemus, that was before infirm and weak, that sneaked unto Christ, that came to him by night, gets courage in the time of need to speak for Christ.

3rdly, What are the acts of zeal with respect to these objects?

1. It quickens us to our duty, and makes us publicly active for God: "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing" (Gal. iv. 18). Oh! how remiss and sluggish would we be otherwise in matters of God's kingdom and glory, if we had not a strong degree of love to stir us up to appear for God, in the worst times, and in the way and places that are proper for us! Paul, "when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry," it is said, "his spirit was stirred in him" (Acts xvii. 16); he could not contain; and again, "Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews, that Jesus was Christ" (Acts xviii. 5). That heroic act of Phinehas, when he saw the laws of God broken, and nobody ready to vindicate the honour of God, he took a javelin in his hand and thrust the offenders through (Num. xxv. 7, 8). And the Lord saith afterwards, "Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy" (verse 11). He had an extraordinary call to do that, he was high-priest; but he went then upon *jus zonorum*. So Elijah: he took the prophets of Baal, and "brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there" (1 Kings xviii. 40). There was an extraordinary call; but we are all to be active in spreading and defending the truth, and promoting the purity of God's worship, and welfare of his people, as far as our calling and places permit.

2. It maketh us spare no cost; yea, it judgeth that best done for God, which costs us most, as David would not serve God with that which cost nothing. That is worth nothing that costs nothing, in religion. Jezebel, she was zealous for Baal, and maintained four hundred of his priests at her table. In the primitive times, they sold all things that they had, and had all things common. And the Israelites, they offered so plentifully to the tabernacle, that Moses was fain to forbid them, to put a stop, because there was enough given for the advancement of God's worship. And therefore certainly they are cold, and have little zeal for God, that love, as the Corinthians did, *ἀδάπορον ἐπαγγέλιον*, a Gospel without charges, would be at no cost for Christ. This was Paul's case; there the poor saints of Macedonia, which had but from hand to mouth, they ministered to him, and maintained him when he was at Corinth, a rich and opulent town. Paul would depart from his right rather than prejudice the Gospel. Therefore they that will be at no cost for Christ, maintaining his truth, upholding his worship, relieving his people, have no zeal.

3. It vents itself by holy grief and anger when any of these are violated.

(1.) With holy grief. We should be touched, and that to the quick, with other men's sins, when they neglect their duty, pervert all that is right and honest, and seem not to be concerned with the glory of God. It is said of Lot, his righteous soul was vexed at the wickedness of the Sodomites; and he vexed himself, not with Sodom's injuries, but with Sodom's impurities; he could not redress the evils, but he mourns for them. So the Prophet Jeremiah for the stubbornness of the people: "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine eye shall weep sore," &c. (Jer. xiii. 17.) Though they would not hearken, amend, nor any way regard these things, yet it grieved him exceedingly. So you shall see the like of Ezra: "He mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away"

(Ezra x. 6). The transgression of God's people was very grievous to him. Thus we read of Eli, "Eli sate, &c., by the wayside, watching; for his heart trembled for the ark of God" (1 Sam. iv. 13). The glory of God was dear to him; and, when religion is in danger, God dishonoured, it leaves a mighty impression upon the hearts of those that have a zeal and strong love to God.

(2.) It vents itself by indignation and holy anger; as Christ whipped the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and showed his Divine power therein (John ii. 15). And, "Remember them, O God, because they have defiled the priesthood" (Neh. xiii. 29). And meek Moses; yet his anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands (Exod. xxxii. 19). And, "When I heard this thing, I rent my garment, and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head, and of my beard, and sate down astonished" (Ezra ix. 3). Thus deeply are God's children affected with God's public dishonour, though not occasioned by themselves, but occasioned by others; and this is to have a zeal for God.

4thly, The qualifications and concomitants of this holy zeal. I will name three.

1. It must be accompanied with knowledge and discretion; that is to say, there must be a distinct knowledge of the cause that we take up; else we may be factors for the Devil's kingdom, when we think we are acting for God; and be persecuting the saints, when we think we are destroying his enemies. It must be out of the knowledge of the cause of the evil to be renounced and the good to be established. There is a blind zeal: "Whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service" (John xvi. 2). The pseudo-Christians, the literal Christians, have a blind zeal against the serious Christians; and, if they can excommunicate them, and throw them out of the church and kill them, they think this is acceptable service to God. All this is blind zeal. The Apostle saith, "they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. x. 2): therefore there must be light as well as heat in this fire, else it is not the fire of the altar, but of a common hearth; nay, we must not only know the truth, but also the worth, of the cause. The truth of the cause, that must be guided still by wisdom, and we must observe all the seasonable circumstances in discovering ourselves for God; else it will produce strange, evil, and malignant effects, which tends much to the dishonour of God and prejudice of the Gospel. Look, as a blind horse that is full of mettle, but is always stumbling, so they never act commendably and seasonably. The church of God hath had bitter experience in all ages of the sad effects of misguided zeal, when it hath not been seasoned with knowledge and discretion, to time things; it hath tended much to the hindrance of Christ's kingdom, and the promotion of Satan's interest in the world. Christ in one place bids us to be "wise as serpents" (Matt. x. 16); and in another place, not to give that which is holy to dogs, nor cast pearls before swine (Matt. vii. 6). Otherwise, we unprofitably sacrifice ourselves, and hinder the good we would promote. It was a grievous thing to Paul, and pressed upon his spirit, to see all Ephesus given to idolatry, and mightily affected with Diana's worship; yet we read he was two years at Ephesus before he spake against Diana (Acts xix. 10); he observed his season, before he took the liberty, and thought himself bound to speak against that false worship. The historian tells us of Andes, a Persian bishop, that was under Varrans, that, having an unguided zeal, got some Christians together to destroy the

temple of fire, which the Persians worshipped; saith Theodoret, not as he ought to do; and what was the issue? Varrans the emperor, that was formerly favourable to the Christians, when he saw they affected power, and would destroy the worship of the country; what then? He was filled with cruel persecution; he skinned the backs of some of the Christians and the faces of others, drew splinters through their flesh, used horrible torments, which the historian takes notice of; and it conduced to the total suppression of the Christian religion. Therefore this wild-fire, when it runs abroad without discretion, and not being seasoned with prudence, it doth a world of harm to the church of God. We must observe the time, circumstances, and when it is most behoveful to the glory of God, the good of the church, and cause we would promote. See Videlius, lib. 1, cap. 1.

2. This zeal also must be mingled with compassion, that, as we mind the glory of God, so we may pity deluded souls. When we are zealous against the sin, we must have commiseration of the sinner, as knowing the weaknesses and prejudices of education that are incident to human nature. This is, to be sure, most agreeable to Christ's pattern: he wept over Jerusalem, that stood in a state of enmity to him (Luke xix. 41). And, when he was angry with the unbelief of his countrymen, at the same time he was grieved at the hardness of their hearts (Mark iii. 5). In Christ's anger, there was more of compassion than of passion. And Samuel, he mourned for Saul, when he saw him no more (1 Sam. xv. 35). And the Apostle, when he had zealously declaimed against the false teachers, he falls a-weeping (Phil. iii. 18). When we show love to God, there should not be a hatred and ill will to the persons of men; but we should bewail their obstinacy and blindness. Those that are all for destruction, and ready to call for fire from Heaven, they know not what spirit they are of; they have a fiery, zealous spirit, but that which doth not become the temper of the Gospel.

3. Zeal must be constant (Gal. iv. 18). The fire on the altar must never go out; we cannot be without it for a moment. There are some that have a zeal for a fit, but soon grow weary of it; they are zealous in prosperity, then they are forward and active for God; but, when it comes to trouble, they give up all to oppositions. On the contrary, others in their affliction and low estate, they have a warm sense of religion; but, when they are well at ease, they are lost in the delights of the flesh, and drowned in the cares of the world, and their zeal for God is checked. And we see that some in their youth have a good savour and towardness, and seem to have a very tender conscience; but, after their first heats are spent, they are very careless, and grow inordinate, and all their zeal for God is gone: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth?" (Gal. v. 7.) David was as zealous when the crown was upon his head, as when God humbled him and kept him low. Many think zeal a cumber as they increase in worldly wisdom, and so cast it off. Nay, in gross hypocrites you shall find this, they will be zealous in good company, as vain and loose in bad. Let any grave servants of God be there, they seem to kindle a great fire; but, as soon as they are gone, they put it out again. Ay, but true zeal should always continue, and be of a lasting and of an increasing flame.

5thly. To speak of the private and personal use of zeal, what need we have to keep up a warm frame of heart towards God and heavenly things.

Hitherto we have considered it as it respects God's public interest: it is also of private use, both in resisting of sin and perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

I. In resisting of sin. A man never doth anything to purpose in purging out sin until he hath a zeal for God: "Be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. iii. 19). Repentance is set on and quickened by zeal. Doth zeal, think you, serve only to rectify the disorders of other men, and not our own? No, certainly; we should begin at home, we should take care that God be exalted in our own hearts, as well as his interest be not infringed in the world. First our Saviour adviseth us to pluck out the beam out of our own eyes (Matt. vii. 5). Unless we be blameless ourselves, we can have no confidence or hope to do much good to others. The first stone should be cast at ourselves; we should repent of our own sin, our own lusts, the plague of our own heart; if in anything we are apt to allow what is contrary to God, this should be a great grief to us. Unless we cleanse our own unclean sinks at home, how can we hope for reformation abroad? Men cry out against public vices, as the lapwing will croak abroad to draw off the person from her own nest; it is all but the deceit of the heart; and, usually, we find it to be so in the world. Most men are better acquainted with other men's duties than their own; with the magistrate's duties more than their own; and so other men's sins more than their own; but it is not so where zeal is unfeigned: and there it begins at home, they will allow nothing in their own hearts, that may be contrary to God's interest, and to the sovereignty of his Spirit.

2. Also in perfecting holiness. The whole business of the spiritual life must be carried on in warmth and vigour: "Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. xii. 11). It is *ζέοντες πνεύματι*, seething hot in spirit. Nothing done for God should be done negligently, but affectionately. To be lukewarm and keycold, that makes no work in religion. But, when a man hath a great zeal for God, oh! then he profits, and gets ground; then sin decays, grace is strengthened, love is more rooted in his heart every day, and he doth more for God. Paul profited in the Jewish religion (Gal. i. 14). Why? Because he was more zealous than others. This is the man that will be the honour of God's ordinances, that man that will show forth the virtue and power of religion, when his heart grows warm for God, and zealous for God.

II. Why we ought to look after a great and pure zeal, if we have any love to God, and the law of God, and his ways.

First, Why a great zeal?

1st, Because it is not zeal else, if it be not in some good degree; for zeal is a great fire, and a vehement flame; not only love, but vehement love. It must needs be great: "For love is as strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave;" zeal is cruel as the grave, read it so; "many waters cannot quench love," &c. (Cant. viii. 6, 7.) Mark, our love to the ways of God should be of such a nature, such a warm and zealous working of heart towards God, that many floods cannot quench it, that nothing can bribe it. Surely the best things deserve the best affections; therefore whatever we do in religion and for God, we should do it with all our might (Eccl. ix. 10).

2ndly, Otherwise it will not do the work. Such as increaseth with opposition: as fire, when you put on more fuel, it grows more vehement; so, unless it be a zeal that grows earnest with discouragement, alas! it will

soon be quenched. We shall meet with many discouragements from within and without; but when we can resolve with David, the more they scoffed and opposed him, he would yet be more vile (2 Sam. vi. 22), so the more trouble they meet with in the ways of God, the more they will cleave to him, and will please God though with the displeasure of men. True zeal is inflamed with difficulties; as lime, the more water they pour on, the more it burns; as Nehemiah's courage, it sparkled the more, the more it was opposed: "Should such a man as I flee?" should I betray the cause of God? This is the true zeal, when it sparkles by opposition. As Paul, the more they persuaded him, the more he seemed to be bound in spirit to go to Jerusalem (Acts xxi. 13). Though they did even break his heart, they could not break his purpose. Such a zeal as is quenched with every drop of water, and goes out with every flout and scorn, will never do it; therefore we had need have a great zeal, that we may harden ourselves against all oppositions we meet with in the way.

Secondly, It needs to be pure too. Such a fervent affection had need be right; for, since it makes men so active and resolute, certainly it should go upon sure grounds. I showed before nothing hath done more mischief in the world than wild zeal: it is like fire out of its place, that sets all the house in a flame; it doth not comfort and refresh those that have it, but it destroys and consumes all. But why must we have pure zeal?

1st, Because there is a false zeal and a self-seeking zeal, which men have, while they pretend much love to God and good of souls, but are really hunting after their own interest: "They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them" (Gal. iv. 17); that is, they sought to rend their affections from Paul, and from their faithful pastors, that they might affect them; so he tells us, "Some, indeed, preach Christ even of envy and strife" (Phil. i. 15). There may be a zeal that comes merely out of envy and strife; Jehu could say, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings x. 16).

2ndly, This false zeal doth a great deal of mischief. It is a dishonour to God to pretend to him, and to put the varnish of our cause upon God; God himself is involved in the deceit. It is a strange expression to be used to God, "Ah! Lord God; surely thou hast greatly deceived this people" (Jer. iv. 10): the false prophets did it in his name. And it divides the church, as well as dishonours God: "They would exclude you, that ye might affect them" (Gal. iv. 17): the meaning is, they would rend you from the body of the Christian church, and alienate the minds of God's people, so as to devote them to a faction: "The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds" (Phil. i. 16). And it hardens the persons themselves, as Jehu boasted of zeal, and it was only self-seeking; and the Lord counts it murder (Hosca i. 1).

USE.—Have we this pure zeal, such a zeal as David speaks of? There are many notes by which it may be discerned, as,—

1. When injuries done to God and religion affect us more than injuries done personally to ourselves; when we carry ourselves in an indifferency in our own cause, but not in God's. Compare Num. xii. 13, with Exod. xxxii. 19: Moses could with a meek spirit bear all the injuries done to himself, but could not contain himself, when he saw injury done to God, but breaks the tables.

2. When the same enemies are God's enemies and ours. David was sensible, not of the inhumanity of his enemies, but that which most

troubled him was, because they were God's enemies, and forsook his words. David was not so much troubled at Absalom's rebellion, as dying in his sins.

3. When there is a compassion mingled with our zeal. Fleshly anger is all for destruction: holy anger is for conversion, when they grieve, and seek to redress the matter.

4. True zeal is universal; it is most against their own sins, and the sins of those that are nearest, and runs out upon weighty things. But those that tithe mint, and cummin, and neglect weighty things, they have not true zeal. There are many instances of this false, disproportionate zeal of a conscience taken up for a turn, when there is a partial conscience; in some things, men are mighty scrupulous, and strain at a gnat and swallow a camel; it discovers the hypocrisy that lights upon the professors of religion, full of heinous outcries upon small things, yet dash upon things that are against the fundamentals of the covenant.

SERMON CLVII.

VERSE 140.—*Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.*

There are three things in this verse.

1. The excellency of the word, "Thy word is very pure."

2. David's respect to it, "Thy servant loveth it."

3. The connexion between both, in the illative particle, "Therefore."

1. The excellency of the word, "Thy word is very pure." That which we render very pure, signifieth tried in the fire, and refined; the Septuagint reads it, *πεπερωμένον λόγων σε σφόδρα*, Thy word is set on fire; and so you may see it explained, "The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Psalm xii. 6). The expression may import two things: first, the infallible certainty of the word; and, secondly, the exact purity.

First, the infallible certainty of the word, as gold endureth in the fire when the dross is consumed. Vain conceits comfort us not in a time of trouble; but the word of God, the more it is tried, the more you will find the excellency of it: the promise is tried, as well as we are tried, in deep afflictions; but, when it is so, it will be found to be most sure. In the old translation, it is, Thy word is proved most pure: "The word of the Lord is tried, he is a buckler to all those that trust in him" (Psalm xviii. 30). So, "Every word of God is pure, he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him" (Prov. xxx. 5); as pure gold suffers no loss by the fire, so the promises suffer no loss, when they are tried, but stand to us in our greatest troubles.

Secondly, It notes the exact perfection of the word: there is no dross in silver and gold that hath been often refined; so there is no defect in the word of God.

2. Here is David's respect to the word; speaking of himself in the third person, he saith, "Thy servant loveth it." The children of God love the word, and the duty and obedience it prescribeth, so as effectually to follow it: that is love, and none but that.

3. Here is his reason for it, "Therefore I love it, because it is pure: wicked men hate it, and slight it, for this very reason: the word of God is so pure, that it ransacks their consciences, and therefore they cannot

endure it. "It [the carnal mind] is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. viii. 7). But the saints do the rather embrace it; wicked men could wish it were less strict, that it might be calculated to their turns; but the children of God love it for this reason.

DOCTRINE.—That God's children see such purity in his word, that therefore they value it and love it exceedingly.

The point will be made good by four considerations:—

1. That the word of God is pure.
2. That this pure word must be loved and esteemed by us.
3. That we must not only love God's word, but see why we love it.
4. Among all the grounds and reasons of our love to the word of God, this is the most noble and excellent, to love it for its purity.

I. For the first of these, That the word of God is pure; yea, as it is superlatively expressed in the text, it is very pure; that will appear in two respects, it is pure in itself, and it maketh us pure.

First, It is pure in itself, because it is a holy rule, fit for God to give and us to receive, exactly comprising the whole duty of man. We need not seek elsewhere for direction in order to true happiness: "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm xix. 8). As metal refined from all dross, so here is not the least mixture of error, folly, or falsehood; not the least corruption or flaw to be found in it, as in all other books of human composure. All other writings come as short of the Scripture, as a coal doth of the sun. The whole art and design of this holy book is to advance the spiritual and heavenly life; and not to fashion our outward carriage a little for converse with men, but to bring us into fellowship and communion with God, and to direct us to do all things from holy principles, in a holy manner, to holy ends. There is no dead fly in this box of ointment, no blemish of weakness and imperfection: it hath the manifest impress of the author left upon it, and is the copy of that exact holiness which is in God himself.

The word is very pure, as it maketh us pure if we diligently attend unto it: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereunto according to thy word" (Psalm cxix. 9). It is not said, by what means may a young man guide his way, as if he were yet to choose, or were as white paper, indifferent to any impression; but, by what means shall a young man cleanse his way? Man's heart, naturally, is a sink of sin, and he delighteth to wallow in this puddle, as swine do in the mire; he hath gotten a tang and smatch of the old Adam. Now, is there no way to make his heart and his way clean? Yes, if he will take God's counsel, and direct his life according to the word, a young man that is in the heat and strength of his lusts, he may be cured and cleansed. Christ prayeth, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John xvii. 17). The work is God's; but he doth it by the truth, or his will revealed in the word. He hath reserved the power of his Spirit, for this dispensation and way of institution of mankind. A moral lecture may make a man change his life; but it is the word of God that changeth his heart: his Spirit goeth along with his word. So, "Now ye are clean, through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John xv. 3). The word is the instrument of purifying sinners, and to get rid of their sins. But how doth the word make us pure? As it is an appointed instrument of the Spirit, and as it is an accommodate instrument to such an end and purpose.

1st, It is an appointed instrument by which the Spirit will work: "Ye

have purified your souls, in obeying the truth, through the Spirit" (1 Peter i. 22). It is the Spirit of Christ that powerfully worketh it, but yet in and by the truth; he worketh by his own means, he will not join his assistance with other things. The sum of what I would say is this: it was meet that God should give a rule to his creatures, or else how should they know his will; and then it was meet he should honour his rule, by owning it above all other doctrines, by the concomitant operation of his Spirit, that this might be a constant, authentic proof of its Divine authority. The efficacy of the word is a pledge of the truth of it.

2ndly, It is a commodious instrument for this end and purpose; for there is a wisdom in all God's institutions. He that looketh upon an axe, will say, This is an instrument made to cut: so he that looketh upon the Scriptures must needs say, This is a means to purify. The word is more morally accommodated to work upon the heart of man, than any other instrument, means, or doctrine in the world. Now, the word doth so commodiously serve for this purpose, because there are, 1. Such pure precepts. 2. Such pure examples. 3. Such great helps to purity. 4. Great encouragements to purity. 5. Such great terrors, to dissuade men from sin.

1. There are pure precepts, setting forth the nature of that purity that is pleasing to God; and so, on the one hand, they serve to humble us, for our natural filthiness; for *verum est index sui et obliqui*, truth showeth itself, and discovereth error also. It is such a pure doctrine that it showeth a man his natural face, and discovers foul spots. And, on the other side, by these precepts and doctrines, we are urged and enjoined to seek after true purity, and holiness of the right constitution: "Now, the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. i. 5). The word telleth us God will be served, and that he will be served with a pure heart; the right end and scope of the whole law, as it is a Gospel rule, is love to God and man, flowing from a sincere and renewed heart, and a good conscience, rightly informed of God's will; and faith unfeigned, apprehending the grace of God towards us in Christ our Redeemer. So that, you see, there is required of us not only good actions, but good principles and ends.

The Apostle telleth us *ἔργον νόμου*, the work of the law, was written upon man's heart (Rom. ii. 14). Natural conscience will take notice of some gross acts, urge to some external conformity and show of duty. But the word of God taketh notice not only of acts, but of the frame of the heart; not only of sins, but also of lusts. If ever there were an instrument fitted to do a thing, the word is fitted to make men pure and holy. Briefly, then, the word requireth purity of heart and life; that we should be pure in heart, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. v. 8); and pure in life, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way" (Psalm cxix. 1): you have both in one place, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded" (James iv. 8); both must be cleansed, both heart and hands. But we must first begin with the heart. The heart is that polluted fountain, from whence floweth all the pollution of life: "Out of the heart, proceed all evil thoughts, murders, adulteries," &c. (Matt. xv. 19.) It is vain to cleanse the outside, unless the heart be cleansed; and therefore the Scripture presseth us to wash our hearts from wickedness (Jer. iv. 14). There is the difficulty. It is more easy to heal an outward wound, than to stanch an inward bleeding; and the cause is within. The purity of the outside is loathsome to God, unless the heart

be cleansed; it is more easy to prevent disorders in our conversations, than to cleanse our hearts; and therefore the Scripture mainly calleth upon you to purge out sin out of the heart (Matt xxiii. 26, 27). Therefore the great design of the word of God, with which it travaileth, is to get the heart clean: as Elisha, when he would cure the brackishness of the waters, cast salt into the fountain; so doth the word of God seek to cleanse the hearts of men; and all its wooings, and pleadings, and entreaties, tend to this.

2. There are pure examples and patterns. We miscarry by low examples, and grow loose and careless seeing others to be so: therefore the word is still to keep us humble under our defects, unsatisfied with our present measure, always contending, and striving towards the mark: it propoundeth all manner of examples to us. It propoundeth the example of God: "Be ye holy, as he that hath called you is holy, in all manner of conversation" (1 Peter i. 15). God is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works; and so should we be. And the Scripture presseth us to be holy as Christ is holy: "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John iii. 3). It is impossible there should be an exact equality, yet some answerable conformity there should be. God is essentially, immutably, infinitely holy: he loveth himself as much as he can be loved. His essence and his being is the same with his holiness; our holiness is a superadded quality. God's holiness is like a vessel of pure gold, where the substance is the same with the lustre; but our holiness is like a vessel of earth gilded with gold, the substance is one thing, the varnish another. But yet this God and Christ must ever be before our eyes: we must be holy as he is holy; we must always be increasing in holiness. We must come into an abiding state of holiness. There must be some kind of conformity between God and us, and Christ and us; and head and members must be all of a piece. He will shoot farther that aimeth at a star, than he that aimeth at a shrub: so he will be more holy, that doth as God doth, than he that doth as sinful creatures do, like himself. Nay, the Scripture propoundeth the example of the saints (Heb. vi. 12). We need all kinds of examples. As we need high and glorious examples, that we may not rest in any low degrees and beginnings of purity; so lower examples, that we may not be discouraged, and think it impossible. And therefore the saints of God are propounded to us, men and women of like affections with us, the same natural interests, and we the same grace with them; the way to Heaven is a trodden path all along, you may see the footsteps of the saints before you.

3. The Scripture offereth great helps to purity: Christ died to purchase it for us: he gave himself for us "that he might sanctify and cleanse [us] with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. v. 26). And God hath promised to give this clean heart to them that seek after it, and undertaketh to give what he requireth: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27). God hath promised this to somebody, and why not to you? You are as fair for this promise as any; and, if God hath not excluded you, why will you shut out yourselves from the grace offered?

4. There are in the Scripture excellent encouragements and motives from the reward promised to the pure. Lactantius saith of the Heathen, *Virtutis vim non sentiunt quia ejus præmium ignorant*; that they were ignorant of the force of virtue, because they were not acquainted with the reward of it. There is a great force in Scripture arguments in this kind. See how the Scripture speaks of these promises; they are so great, so pure, and so expressly binding in their condition and qualification annexed. They are so great, that, having such great and precious promises, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. vii. 1). And then so pure, "And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure" (1 John iii. 3). It is not barely said, he that hath hope in him, but he that hath *this* hope. It is not a Turkish paradise, but a sinless estate; not an estate wherein we shall be engulfed in all sensualities, but satisfied with the vision of God, and made like him. Heaven is not only to be looked upon as a place of happiness, but a state of likeness to God. Once more, so many and so expressly binding to purity, in their condition and qualification annexed. See what the word of God speaks to purity, if we would enjoy the favour of God, and have him good to us: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart" (Psalm lxxiii. 1). Who are they that God will be good to? To Israel. All are not Israel, that are of Israel; but those whose consciences are cleansed by the blood of Christ, and study to be clean, and holy in heart and life; those are God's Israel. However things fall out here, how blustering and boisterous soever the times are, yet God will be good to them that are his Israel. If we would have his favour actually exhibited, if we would have God to shine upon us, we must look after purity: "With the pure, thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward, thou wilt show thyself froward" (Psalm xviii. 26). God will be to man as man is to God. No degree of purity shall go unrewarded; the holy use of the creatures is their privilege: "To the pure all things are pure" (Titus i. 15). To the wicked, all things are defiled, and they have a curse with their blessings; but, to the pure, these blessings are lawfully enjoyed, and are sanctified to them, and they receive every temporal mercy as a blessing of the covenant. Would we be accepted in our service? "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord; but the words of the pure are pleasant words" (Prov xv. 26). The thoughts and words of wicked men are an abomination to the Lord; but the thoughts and words of the saints are his delight. God hath respect to the person, and then to their services: so that we must be pure in heart, if we would have our services accepted of the Lord. Once more, the pure are those that shall be employed with honour for God: "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. ii. 21). Again, the purified and cleansed are meet to receive and retain the word: "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Tim. iii. 9). None receive the word with such profit, and retain it with such warmth, as the pure in heart. Precious liquor is not put into musty, filthy vessels; if it be, it is corrupted and spoiled presently. Let a man be addicted to any worldly lust, and he will soon lose all the sense of good he hath received. Once more, none pray aright but the pure: "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name

of the Lord" (Zeph. iii. 9); and, "Lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Tim. ii. 8); and, "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb. x. 22). Then we draw near to God with comfort, being sure of audience. Once more, if we would be happy for evermore, who are they that shall see God? "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God" (Matt. v. 8). You shall see the question propounded in Psalm xxiv. 3, 4; "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?" And the question is answered in the fourth verse, "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." It standeth us upon to examine how it is with us since the visible church are not saved; the pure and holy are they that shall see and enjoy God. Filthy dogs, and impure and unclean swine, are not suffered to enter into the New Jerusalem.

5. Here are terrible threatenings. The word is impatient of being denied: it would have holiness and purity upon any terms; there is something propounded to our fear, as well as to our hope. Sometimes the word of God threatens with the loss of happiness: "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. xii. 14). If there were no more but this, this were enough to terrify us (to be shut out from the presence of the Lord), if it were rightly considered. But, oh! how miserable will the poor creature be, that the word threatens with the loss of the vision of God, supposing the soul subsists! This is enough to overwhelm us, that we shall never enter into the place where God is: "There shall in nowise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination" (Rev. xxi. 27). But we hear of a worm that shall never die, a pit without a bottom, a fire that shall never be quenched, and torments that are without end and without ease. God shall say, I would have purged you, but you would not be purged. Whose heart doth not tremble at the mention of these things? Oh! then, you see the word is very pure.

II. The second consideration, that this pure word must be valued and esteemed, and loved by us. Here I shall show you what it is to love the word; and then why?

First, What it is to love the word.

1st, Negatively.

1. It is not an outward receiving, or a loose owning of the Scripture as the word of God. Many carnal men may so receive it, or rather not contradict it: they receive the word of God, not upon any Divine testimony and evidence of the Spirit of God, but upon the authority and credit of men; the practice and profession of the nation where they live, and the injunctions of the civil state; or the tradition of the church: this is the just account of most men's faith and love to the word, and therefore they never feel the power of it. It cometh with power when it is the evidence of the Spirit (1 Cor. ii. 4); human credulity breedeth no true love to the word of God.

2. This love is not a bare approbation of purity and holiness; many approve that which they never choose and follow. None, in the face of the church, can be such a wretch as not to think that it is a good thing to be holy, that strictness is commendable: Herod revered John (Mark vi. 26); there is an excellency in holiness, and it winneth esteem, even there where it is not embraced. Purity is a stricture of God's majesty, and so it is feared. Where it is not loved, it breedeth an awful respect in wicked

men. Natural conscience so far doth homage to the image of God, and doth incline men to think well of holiness, and to show some respect to it.

3. It is not a pang or passionate delight, as some, when the word falls upon them, they may be stirred a little; it is not a love that is controulable, or easily overcome by other loves: "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?" (John v. 44.) As Herod rejoiced in John's light for a season, and he loved John's preaching (Mark vi. 20); but he loved his Herodias better; and therefore off goes John's head. The love that he had was controulable by a higher love. Unless we be so addicted to the word that it prevaileth over all contrary inclinations, we do not love the word. Whether it be sensuality, or pride, or covetousness, it will be casting off the dominion of the word: "My word hath no place in you" (John viii. 37); it doth not sink down into their hearts, that it may bring forth fruit in their lives.

2ndly, Positively: what is it then?

1. It is such a love as causeth us to wait at wisdom's gates, to consult with the word upon all occasions, to read it, hear it, meditate on it, as the great instrument of sanctification. You will take it for your counsel (Psalm cxix. 5). That we love, we will be thinking on often, and exercising our minds in it: "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm i. 2). Oh! how few love the word thus! Few read and delight in the Scriptures, because of the purity and holiness that is in them. They read them for dispute's sake, or to know the mystery, or to be able to hold up an argument; but, as they serve to make us pure and heavenly, who loves them so? as they forewarn us of sin, and quicken to grace and love to God? "Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb;" because "by them is thy servant warned" (Psalm xix. 10, 11); then we love the word, when we love it for this reason.

2. We love the word when we are chary of transgressing it, or doing anything contrary to the tenour of it. We are bidden to keep the commandment as the apple of the eye (Prov. vii. 2). The eye is a tender thing, offended with the least dust. Oh! take heed of offending the word of God. Fear of offending is a sure note and effect of love. So he that loves God, he fears the commandment: "Whoso despiseth the word, shall be destroyed; but he that feareth the commandment, shall be rewarded" (Prov. xiii. 13). A wicked man maketh no bones of a commandment, regardeth not what the word saith, but doth according to the bent of his own will: those that will turn their back upon a commandment, for the least temptation, they have no true love to the word of God. But now, a godly man is one that feareth a commandment; he is afraid to do anything against the express will of God. If a commandment stands in his way, it is as much as if an angel with a drawn sword stood in his way, as the angel stood with a drawn sword in Balaam's way; they had rather have all the world against them, than the word against them. This awful regard of the word of God is a good evidence of our love to it.

3. Then we are said to love the word, when we cheerfully and readily delight to do what it requireth in order to the glory of God and our own salvation: that is love. For true love is not only notional, but practical: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John ii. 4). Our love to God is known by our obedience to him; so our love to the word is known by our obedience

to it. And therefore we love the word in good earnest, when we observe it readily and diligently, whatever it costs us: "Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. vi. 17). Look, as there is a cold love to a man's brother, when we say, Be clothed, be warmed; so there is a pretended love to the word, that endeth in talk, and not in action; which is as if a man should hope to pay his debts by the noise of money, and, instead of opening his purse, to shut it; as ridiculous it is to think to put off our duty with good words.

4. It is a rooted affection. A carnal man may have his affections moved, and be a little stirred, with this pure doctrine; but he is soon put out of humour, he is not changed by it, he hath not a constant affection to God and holy things: "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing" (Gal. iv. 18); to hold out to the end, and still to keep up a warm respect to the word of God. This is to love it, to have the word engrafted into the stock of corrupt nature (James i. 21). It is not something tied on, but ingrafted into the soul; it hath place in the heart.

Secondly, Let me show you why?

1st, The necessity of this love to the word appears, because without this love we cannot be accepted of God; unwilling and constrained service is of little acceptance with him: "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. xiii. 3). If a man hath never so many excellences, if he spend his goods, and life, and all for God, without this sincere love to God and his ways, all is nothing. God doth not value men by the pomp of their services, but by the affection of their hearts in them; he needeth not the service, and he seeth the heart. A man is pleased so his work be done, willingly or unwillingly; for he needeth the labour of the slave; but he seeth not into his heart. But God hath no need of us, and he seeth whether we give him the heart or no. So that, if we have not charity, all that we do is nothing.

2ndly, Without this love, your work will be very difficult, grievous, and irksome to you. It is love maketh all things pleasant and easy, and to go on roundly: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John v. 3). A love to the commands of God will make us do them with cheerfulness. When a man loves God, it will be no grievous thing to serve him. It is said, Neh. iv. 6, that the building went on, "for the people had a mind to work." The building of the temple was a difficult task, to remove the rubbish, and carry on such a vast piece of work; but they had a mind to the work, and then it went on. Love to anything makes it go on sweetly and cheerfully, as we use to say; so in God's service, if we love the work, we cannot count it difficult.

3rdly, You will never be constant with God without this love. An unwilling servant is ever running from his work; and he that hath not a heart fixed and set, will find discouragement enough in Heaven's way. They fell off that received not the truth in the love of it (2 Thes. ii. 10). Fear hath compulsion in it, but it will not hold when the fear is worn off; but love is a lasting affection, when your hearts love holiness, and you love the work for the work's sake.

III. Third consideration: it is not enough to love the word; but we must look after the grounds and reasons of this love.

First, Because a true love to the word is not blind, but rational, and

may be justified: "Wisdom is justified of her children" (Matt. xi. 19). All that love God and his truth, are able to plead for it. If you are not able to show your grounds and reasons for your love to the word, your love is but customary: "I pray that your love may yet abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil. i. 9). Such a love and zeal is commendable, as hath a proportionable measure of knowledge going along with it. When the spouse had spoken so much of her beloved, the question is propounded, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?" (Cant. v. 9.) Christians should be able to say what is their Christ, and what is the religion they do profess, that there is more in their religion than in all religions in the world.

Secondly, Because many love it upon wrong reasons. There may be a natural and carnal love to spiritual things. Look, as a religious man in outward things rejoiceth spiritually, so a carnal man in spiritual things rejoiceth carnally. So Herod rejoiced in John's preaching with a human passion (Mark vi. 20), as he was a plausible preacher, and a rare and pregnant interpreter of the law. This was but a carnal affection; that is, thus: they may be pleased with notions and elevated strains of wisdom. I remember a moralist gives this similitude. A gallant, going into a garden, prizeth flowers altogether for the beauty of them, but a physician he looks after their use, and virtue in medicine; but they both go to look after flowers: so a godly man delights in the word of God, it is that he may be brought under the power of it, and made more holy and heavenly-minded; but others go to hear an argument rationally traversed, or to hear cadences of speech and pleasant language. It is not enough to take a liking to things, but we must know why. Nay, let me tell you that mere foreign and external reasons may sway us to delight in the word; when religion is in request, and groweth in fashion, and becometh matter of reputation, it is no great matter to be an honourer and admirer of it. Simon Magus would be a disciple and turn Christian too, when the whole city of Samaria listened to the apostles, and embraced their doctrine (Acts viii.), when there was so great an outward affluence.

Thirdly, The more we view the grounds and reasons, the more our love is increased. It is clear the will and affections are moved by the understanding, and that ignorance is the cause of the contempt of the Lord's grace: "If thou knewest the gift" (John iv. 10). We love, and fear, and hate, and joy, according to the apprehensions that we have of things; and therefore the more knowledge we have, the more love: "I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in all knowledge" (Phil. i. 9): if thou dost not increase in knowledge, thou wilt never increase in affection: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you, through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Peter i. 2). Now, the more these grounds and reasons are drawn forth, in the view of conscience, the more thy love is stirred; as the more we beat the steel upon the flint, the more the sparks fly out.

IV. Fourth consideration: of all the grounds and reasons of our love to the word of God, the most noble and excellent is to love the word for its purity.

First, Because this showeth indeed that we are made partakers of the Divine nature (2 Peter i. 4). For I pray you mark, when we hate evil as evil, and love good as good, we have the same love and hatred that God hath. It showeth that the soul is changed into the likeness of God, when

we love a thing for its purity. God hath no interest to be advanced by the creature; he loves them more or less as they are near or further off from his glorious being. When once we come to love things because they are pure, it is a sign that we have the same love that God hath.

Secondly, This argueth a suitableness of heart to what God requireth; for things affect us as they suit with us: "They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh" (Rom. viii. 5). The pure will only delight in pure things; but swine delight in puddles: they that have the spirit of the world, they must have worldly pleasure and honour; but the pure will delight in the word of God: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. ii. 14), and because they are not suitable to him. First, we love things as suitable to our necessity, and then we love them upon interest, and afterwards as suitable to our disposition. Now, it argueth a good frame of heart, and a deep sense of God's interest, when we love the word because it is so pure. A man first loves the word customarily, because he is born there where that religion is in fashion; and then, when he beginneth to have a conscience, he loveth it for pardon and peace, as it offers a Saviour. His own happiness, self-love, puts him upon seeking after God; then afterwards his heart is suited to God's will; and there is something of kin in his heart to the will of God revealed without, and he loveth it for its suitableness of nature unto the will of God.

Thirdly, To be sure, this love is no way questionable, but is an undoubted evidence of right and sound love to the word of God: many pretend to have a high estimation and respect to the doctrine of God, when they cannot digest the directions of it, because it is contrary to their desires and carnal affections: they reserve something in their hearts, that makes their love questionable. They that have not a real love to the word of God, are but lightly tintured with religion, not deeply dyed. The stony ground received the word with joy. Men may have strong affections and strange stirrings in their souls, and yet not be right with God. But here is an undoubted evidence, to love the word for its purity. A man's love may be questionable, because he may love the word upon foreign motives: either because of novelty, or fineness of expression, or public countenance and credit, or external advantage (John vi. 26). *Vix diligitur Jesus propter Jesum.* Or they may love it for internal reasons; as it is a good word, as they that tasted of the power of the world to come; they may look upon it for pleasure and profit, but not as good and holy: many look upon the Gospel as good and profitable, as offering peace, and pardon, and comfort, and eternal life. Nature that hath naturally a sense of religion, hath also a hunger after immortality and blessedness; and therefore the promises of the Gospel may be greedily caught after, as offering everlasting life and blessedness; but now, a love to that which is pure and holy, leaveth a more durable impression upon the soul. And further, many have a liking to the purity of the word, and a general approbation of it, as it is a fit rule for creatures to live by; yet, unless there be a strong prevailing affection, all comes to nothing; and therefore nothing but this love to the word because of its purity, is unquestionable.

Fourthly, Unless we love the word as pure, we shall fail in many other parts of religion. We shall not love God as we ought; for God is lovely, not only as the fountain of blessedness, but as he is the most pure and perfect being: he was *diligibilis natura*, before any emanation of goodness

passed from him. We are to love him in desertions, when we feel no good from him, and he seemeth to write bitter things against us (Isa. xxvi. 8). So that we cannot discharge this duty, to love God as he is a pure and perfect being, if we do not love the word because it is pure. And we shall not love the saints as we ought, without this (Psalm xvi. 3). We are to love them for the image of God in them. "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye?" (Matt. v. 46.) We are to love the saints as saints, and for that reason. Once more, we are to hate sin, as filthy, as it is a gross absurdity, and deordination of the human nature: "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil" (Psalm xcvi. 10). Now, till we have this frame of heart, to love the law as it is pure, we can do none of these things; for there is the same reason for the one as for the other; and therefore it is not a nicety, but a necessary frame of heart.

USE I.—Is to inform us that they can never love God and his ways, that hate purity, till their hearts be changed. There are a sort of men in the world, whose hearts rise against purity; for, if they see any make conscience of sin, they brand them with the name of Puritans; so those that seek to keep themselves from sin, and the more holy they are, they are an eyesore to them. Now, can they say, I love thy law because it is pure, and cannot endure to see it copied out in others? Oh! what a vile disposition is this in you, to be despisers of that which is good! (2 Tim. iii. 3). None live up to the purity of their profession, but you scorn them; and let me tell you, you scorn that which is most glorious in God himself. Would a father take it well, that a slave should mock his child, because it is like him? So will God take it well, that you should scorn those that are good, because they are like their heavenly Father? These are of the seed of the serpent, who are full of enmity; they have the old antipathy (Gen. iii. 15; Prov. xxix. 27). It is a vile scorn of the God of Heaven, to hate a man for his holiness. And they can never love the law, whatever they pretend, that do not love the law for its purity; a carnal, distempered appetite hath no taste for the word of God, as it is a direction to holiness (1 Cor. ii. 14).

USE II.—Is information to inform us in what rank to place principles. There are several sorts of principles: there are some that are false and rotten, and some more tolerable, and some good and sound, and some rare and excellent.

1. There are some false and rotten principles, as carnal example and custom. Men will do as they have done, or as others do; they will own the religion that their fathers have done, be it what it will. By the same reason, you may serve Mahomet as well as Christ. A man that standeth upon the vantage ground, is not taller than another: such are of no better constitution than the Turks, only they stand upon the vantage ground. Another rotten principle is vain-glory, to be seen of men; Matt. vi. 1, they pray and give alms to be seen of men. "Come, see my zeal for the Lord of hosts," saith Jchu. Vain-glory many times filleth the sails, and carries us on in the service of God. So secular and worldly interests and ends; as the Pharisees made long prayers, that they might devour widows' houses (Matt. xxiii. 14); that is, they made long prayers and show of devotion, to be trusted with the management of widows' estates, to make a prey of them. All that I shall say to this principle, is this, that it is better for the world that men should serve God any how, that Christ should be served out of vain-glory, than not served at all; as the Apostle saith, Some preach Christ out of envy, and others out of goodwill, but I

am glad so Christ be preached (Phil. i. 18); though they themselves be rotten-hearted hypocrites, yet the world fares the better for it.

2. There are some more tolerable principles, the hope of temporal mercies. When we come and pray, and do not seek the favour of God, but seek temporal mercies: "They howled upon their beds, &c., for corn and wine" (Hos. vii. 14). Or the fear of temporal judgments (Isa. lviii. 5), when all that they do is to remove some temporal judgment: "In their afflictions they will seek me early." And I think I may add one thing more here, the fear of eternal death, when it is alone (otherwise it is a grace), they shall be damned else; and so it is a sleepy sop to appease an accusing conscience, and so it is but a sin-offering. Though it requireth some faith to fear what is to come, yet fear of punishment alone showeth you are slaves, and only love yourselves. The devils fear and tremble, but do not love. You may fear a thing, though you hate it. So far as the heart is affected with the fear of Hell, it is good.

3. There are very good and sound principles, yet do not always argue grace; as, when duties are done out of the urgings of an enlightened conscience, this may be without the bent of a renewed heart, but yet the principle is sound; for the first thing that influenceth a man, is to consider himself a creature, and so look upon himself as bound to obey his Creator. I shall illustrate it by the Apostle's words in another case. I must preach the Gospel, and "wo is unto me if I preach not the Gospel;" whether I do it willingly or unwillingly, yet "a dispensation is committed unto me" (1 Cor. ix. 16, 17). So saith the soul, Whether I be fitted to do God service or no, God must be obeyed; but, because God's precept is invested with a sanction of threatenings and rewards, here come in the fear of Hell and the hopes of Heaven. The Lord hath commanded me to fly from Hell, this is a good principle: so the hope of Heaven (Heb. xi. 26), it is a sound principle; a man may be gracious, or he may not. Many have a liking to Heaven and eternal life, as it is a state of happiness, not of likeness to God. Where it is not alone, it is a very sound principle; but, as it is, it may sometimes be the sign of a renewed man, and sometimes not.

4. There are rare and excellent principles. When we act out of thankfulness to God; when we consider the Lord's goodness, that might have required duty out of mere sovereignty, he hath laid the foundation of it in the blood of his own Son; when we love him out of the sense of his love to us in Christ (1 John iv. 19); and when the grace of God that hath appeared teacheth us to deny ungodliness (Titus ii. 11, 12); when the mercies of God melt us (Rom. xii. 1); when there are no entreaties so powerful as that of love. Again, another principle that is rare and excellent is, when the glory of God doth season us in our whole course, that it may be to the praise of his glorious grace (1 Cor. x. 31). Another is complacency in the work for the work's sake. When we love the law because it is pure; when I see it will ennoble me and make me like God; when I love God and his ways; when nothing but so noble employment doth engage me to his service, and service to God is the sweetest life in the world.

SERMON CLVIII.

VERSE 141.—*I am small and despised, yet do not I forget thy precepts.*

Here David proveth the truth of his former assertion, seeing the word of God was so pure, he loved it for its own sake; and that he did not court religion for the portion that he should have with it, but for itself. Some are mere mercenaries; no longer than they are bribed by some worldly profit, have they any respect for God and his ways. The man of God was of another temper: if God would bestow anything on him, well; if not, he would love his word still; yea, when it brought him apparent loss, meanness, and contempt, yet this could not make any divorce between his heart and the word. "I am small and despised," &c.

In the words we have, 1. David's condition. 2. David's carriage under that condition. His condition might have been a snare to him, yet still he keepeth up his affection.

1. His condition is set forth by two notions, the one of which implieth the other. God's providence, "I am small;" God had reduced him to straits; the other, man's treatment of him, "and despised;" the one showeth what he was really in himself, the other what he was in the opinion of others; mean in himself, and contemptible in the eye of others. The Septuagint, *Νεώτερος ἐγὼ εἶμι ἔξ ἐξιδενομήνους*, I am the younger and set at nought. Therefore the Greek interpreters suppose it relateth to the story, when God bids Samuel to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king, and the elder children were brought forth, who were taller and more likely too; and they said of them, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him;" and, when Samuel inquired for another, they told him, "There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold he keepeth the sheep" (1 Sam. xvi. 11); then, when he was but a youth and a despised stripling, his heart was with God, and God favoured him. Or else, they refer it to the time when Eliab, his eldest brother, despised him (1 Sam. xvii. 28). Others think this was verified when the elders of Israel forsook him, and clave to Absalom; rather, I think it applies generally to any afflicted condition, when he was little in estate and reputation rather than in years; elsewhere so is this word "small" taken: "By whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small" (Amos vii. 2—5); when his condition was helpless and hopeless, and interest inconsiderable in the world. So here, "I am small and despised;" I am looked upon as a man of no value and interest.

2. David's carriage under this condition, "Yet do not I forget thy precepts." First, here is a *μείωσις*; less is said, more is intended: 'I do remember them.' Again, a man may be said to remember or forget two ways, notionally or affectively. Notionally, a man forgets when the notions of things formerly known, are quite vanished out of his mind; affectively, when, though he retaineth the notions, yet he is not answerably affected, he doth not act suitably. So it is taken here, and implieth as much as, 'I am steadfast in the profession of this truth;' as they say in a like case, "We have not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant" (Psalm xlv. 17); not parted with any point of truth, or neglected and dispensed with any part of duty. "Precepts" is put for the whole word of God: 'I do not forget thy word,' the comforts and duties of it. None do so far forget God and his precepts, as those that make defection from him. The sum of all is, 'My mean and despicable condi-

tion doth not make a breach upon my constancy; but still I keep the credit of being a faithful servant to thee.' His temptation was double; his faithfulness had made him small (God seemeth to forget us in our low estate, yet we should not forget him), and had made him despised. Though we lose esteem with men by sticking to the word of God, yet the word of God should lose no esteem with us.

DOCTRINE I.—They that love God may be reduced to a mean, low, and afflicted condition ("I am small," saith David): the Lord seeth it meet for divers reasons.

1. That they may know their happiness is not in this world, and so the more long for Heaven, and delight in heavenly things: "From men of the world, which have their portion in this life, &c. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm xvii. 14, 15). Christ gave his Spirit to the rest of the disciples, and the purse to Judas; he had the keeping of the bag that was the worst. God's dearest children usually have the least in this world, that they may look higher; as Levi had no portion among his brethren, because God would be his portion. Others have more plentiful accommodations for back and belly, they are better clad, their tables more plentifully furnished and supplied, larger portions for their children. They that look to save anything or get anything by religion, but the saving of their souls, are foully mistaken. If we have more than others, religion calleth for more disbursements; charity and liberal distributions expose to troubles; religion moderateth our desires, and forbids all unjust ways of acquiring wealth, calleth upon us to forsake all for a good conscience. Therefore they that follow Christ, out of a design to be rich in this world, lose their aim: not but that hypocrites sometimes make a market of religion, but then God is angry; and they, and the church too, pay for it at last. Not but that religion bringeth in temporal supplies: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 33); *ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται*, food and raiment it bringeth in. God may give some a more plentiful allowance, especially if they be faithful stewards; then they are entrusted with more; but generally they are mean and small; or, if they have more of this world's goods, they have their afflictions in other kinds.

2. It is necessary, to cut off the provisions of the flesh and the fuel of their lusts. A rank soil breedeth weeds; and, when we sail with a full stream, we are apt to be carried away with it. We either glut ourselves with the pleasures of the flesh, or grow proud, and hanker, and linger, after the pomp and vanities of the world, and neglect God. And therefore God is fain to diet us, and to keep us bare and low; as he is said to "cut Israel short" (2 Kings x. 32), when he straitened their coasts and borders. So, for our cure, we need not only internal grace, to abate the lust; but external providence, to catch away the prey and bait, by which it is fed. The wise man saith, not only, Give me grace, but, "Give me neither poverty nor riches" (Prov. xxx. 8); and, "By whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. vi. 14): both parts are necessary. Riches are a great temptation; we would root here, and grow sensual, worldly, and proud, if God did not snatch our comforts from us, when we are apt to surfeit of them: a plentiful portion of temporal things is spiritually dangerous.

3. That they may be more sensible of his displeasure against their sins

and scandalous carriage by which they have dishonoured him and provoked the pure eyes of his glory. Never have scandals fallen out, but some great wo hath followed: "Wo unto the world, because of offences" (Matt. xviii. 7). Therefore God hath brought his people low, that he may vindicate his name, which, through their means, is blasphemed (Rom. ii. 24), and make his people sensible of their sin. The world shall know that he doth allow sin no more in them than in others; and therefore, though they were as the signet upon his finger, he will pluck them off, and make them feel the smart of their wanderings: "You only have I known, of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos iii. 2). They that have been so near and dear to him, the world might think he did approve their sins, if he did not manifest his displeasure at them. Usually, their sins go nearest his heart, and meet with the sorest vengeance: "When the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons and of his daughters" (Deut. xxxii. 19). Their relation to God, their privileges, and the consequences of their actions, aggravate their sins; and therefore God is most quick and severe in punishing their sins. We complain we were brought low, but were not our provocations first very high? The most religious cannot wipe their mouths, and excuse themselves as faultless. Oh! what a sad part hath been lately acted upon the public stage! What a trade have many driven for themselves under a mask of religion! What breaches in the body of Christ, uncharitable divisions, making a profession of the name of Christ for carnal ends!

4. That we may learn to live upon the promises, and learn to exercise suffering graces; especially dependence upon God, who can support us without a temporal visible interest. Compare Rev. xii. 11: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death;" Rev. xiii. 7: "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them; and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations." You shall see how the enemies overcome, and the saints overcome; the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent. The beast raiseth the world against the saints, and prevaileth over their bodies; he overcomes them by spoiling them of liberty, lives, and temporal estate; but they overcome by adhering to truth, and resisting his temptations and their own corruptions, even in the lowest estate by suffering. So for other graces, patience, meekness, self-denial, spiritual comforts; as the stars in their order fought against Sisera, so all graces are exercised in their turn: "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints!" (Rev. xiii. 10;) that is, a time to act these graces. A full third of the Scriptures would be lost which containeth comfort for afflicted ones, if God did not exercise them with temporal afflictions.

5. That God may convince the enemies that there is a people that do sincerely serve him, and not for carnal, selfish ends (Job i.). The carnal world suspect private, selfish, worldly aims and designs, in all that we do, and attribute all our duties to interest: being themselves led by interest, they cannot think others are led by conscience. Men are apt to suspect and malign what they will not imitate. There is sometimes too much advantage given: many are mercenaries, only esteem the ways of God when beneficial to them: "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled" (John vi. 26). Therefore

it is needful to heighten the price of religion, when it is too cheap a thing to be a Christian. This God doth by bringing his people low, that the world may see some will cleave to him in all conditions; not only when his ways are befriended, but when frowned upon. God will glorify himself and his truth by their constancy.

6. That his glory may be more seen in their deliverance; and therefore, before God doth appear for his children, he bringeth them very low. Thus Paul, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. i. 9); and, "Who remembered us in our low estate; for his mercy endureth for ever" (Psalm cxxxvi. 23). His mercy and power are the more glorious in our rescue.

USE.—All that I shall say by way of use on this point, is this.—

1. That, when we are a small people, and persons of no interest, we have a liberty to use it to God; you may make use of your weak and low condition as an argument of pity. So doth the Prophet Amos, "He [Jacob] is small;" so doth David here and elsewhere: "For I am poor and needy; and my heart is wounded within me" (Psalm cix. 22); and, "But I am poor and sorrowful; let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high" (Psalm lxxix. 29). It is some ease to acquaint a friend with our griefs, that can only pity us; much more when we have liberty to go to God, who can and will help us, and will allow us to complain to him, though not of him.

2. When God's ends are accomplished, there is hope: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion" (Isa. x. 12); when he hath chastised his people, and brought them to his purpose, then he will reckon with his enemies; when Heaven is minded more, and earth less. We naturally mind earthly things, and please ourselves with dreaming of a happy estate in the world. The appetite of temporal dominion, and wealth, and honour, and peace, is natural to us, and very hardly subdued; and therefore we would fain flourish here, and do not comfort ourselves in our crosses, with the meditation of the glory of the world to come, but are always feeding ourselves with desires and hopes of earthly happiness, and turning the tide and current of affairs, that things may again smile upon us; and, when frustrated and disappointed of this hope, our soul fainteth. Your worldly happiness will be a snare to you while you are thus affected. Prepare for Heaven, and God will give you so much happiness by the way, as will be needful and fit for you (Matt. vi. 33). Again, when we are mortified and the cross hath purged out sin (Isa. xxvii. 9), the cross hath done its work. So when we are humble: "If then their uncircumcised hearts he humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity" (Lev. xxvi. 41): to be meek in spirit, and to trust in the Lord, is a forerunner of mercy: "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord" (Zeph. iii. 12). When you bring honour to God by your sufferings: "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James i. 4). When it is most for God's glory to do it: "For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left" (Deut. xxxii. 36).

DOCTRINE II.—God's people, when they are brought low, are usually a very despised people, the most despised people under Heaven.

Here I shall show,—

1. That this is the usual lot of an afflicted people.
2. But especially of the people of God.
3. The trial is very grievous to them.

1. An afflicted people are usually a despised people: "Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud" (Psalm cxxiii. 4). They that are proud, and have all things flow in upon them according to their own will, contemn and slight others, and take no notice of their burdens, unless it be to increase them: they pour vinegar on the wound. The Heathens had a reverence for places stricken with thunder, because the hand of God had touched them; but here it is not so: "He that is ready to slip with his feet, is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease" (Job xii. 5). While we are burning lamps, shining in riches and greatness, we shall have enough to look after us; but a poor, broken, dying lamp, a snuff, that is ready to go out, every body holdeth their nose at it. Whilst the enemies are honourable, great, tumble in wealth and the excess of carnal delights, they despise those that are mean and low, and fallen under God's hand.

2. The people of God, much more common sufferers, may meet with some pity in their calamity; but the godly are subject to reproaches and mockings in their troubles, and this many times proveth the heaviest part of the cross, and maketh it most grievous to be borne. It is so, partly, because fallen from their great hopes, carried on in a way of religion. Where is their God? their fasting, prayer? As if all were now delusions and fantastical impressions. And partly, because the presence of God is sensibly gone from them. The presence of God among his people, maketh them wise, courageous, prosperous. How should one chase a hundred, and a hundred put a thousand to flight? But, when God leaveth them, they grow despicable and ridiculous above all others: "Return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity" (Hosea xiv. 2); "All that honoured her, despise her, because they have seen her nakedness" (Lam. i. 8); a dispirited, judgment-blasted people shall be contemned. And partly, because the cause for which they suffer, may be strangely disguised and ill-represented to the world. Satan was first a liar, and then a murderer (John viii. 44). Elijah was thought the troubler of Israel. They may not only persecute, but say all manner of evil against us falsely for Christ's sake. Christ is called a glutton, a wine-bibber (Matt. xi. 19); and Stephen a blasphemer. And partly, by Satan's instigation. By this means, he maketh the despisers increase their sin, and hasten their judgment; and so he dissuades and discourages many weak Christians from owning the despised ways of Christ; yea, it taketh off much of the cheerfulness and courage of the strong, in the possession of godliness.

3. It is very grievous. Contempt maketh other trials more sharp. Every man thinketh himself worthy of some respect, and would be somebody in the world; and therefore, when we are laid aside as if dead and useless, the temptation is the greater. Saul could better bear death than contempt: "Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me" (1 Sam. xxxi. 4). Zedekiah was afraid of mocking, "Lest they deliver me into [the hands of the Chaldeans], and they mock me" (Jer. xxxviii. 19). But not only as we are men it is grievous to us, but also as Christians; because this contempt reflecteth upon our hopes and the worship of God; it

hindereth our service. While we were esteemed, we did more good and had greater advantages. It may revive the sense of guilt. God saith, "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. ii. 30). We have made God's name to be reproached, and religion to be lightly esteemed; we may own the justice of God in all this.

USE.—Oh! then, let us be forearmed against this temptation; that, when we loose esteem with wicked men, because we will not comply with their lusts, we may bear it patiently. Surely, we stand too much upon honour and respect, and have too tender a sense and feeling of contempt, when it discourageth us in the ways of God. A Christian should seek the honour that cometh from God only, and be content with his approbation. I know it is a blessing to have respect with men: it is said of our Lord Christ, that he grew in favour with God and with men (Luke ii. 52). The same also is spoken of Samuel: "And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men" (1 Sam. ii. 26). It is a blessing where it may be had without any violation of duty; when God blameth us not, and men have no just complaint against us. Our care must be to provide things honest in the sight of God and men (Rom. xii. 17), to take away all cause of offence both from Jew and Gentile, and from the church of God (1 Cor. x. 32); but, if men will not be pleased but with the offence of God, we should count it a privilege to be worthy of the world's hatred: *Gratias ago Deo meo, quod dignus sum quem mundus oderit*, saith Jerome. Be not discouraged, if they slight you that slight God, and Christ, and their own salvation. Our self-love is too great when too tender to suffer a little disgrace and contempt for Christ, who hath suffered so many and so great indignities for us. Therefore, though we be small and despised, let our affection be as great to the word as ever; say, "I will be yet more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight" (2 Sam. vi. 22). Alas! many cannot bear contempt: *Coguntur esse mali ne viles habeantur*, as Salvian complains in his days. As we should not forsake the despised ways of God, so not be dejected and troubled at it; better we be despised, than God dishonoured; therefore let us purchase the glory of God with our disgrace. To animate you,—

1. Consider it is the usual lot and portion of God's children. When God meaneth thoroughly to humble his children, he suffereth them to be odious in the eyes of the people where they live. We need so sharp a means to do us good; therefore the church complaineth of contempt: "Thou hast made us as the offscouring and refuse, in the midst of the people" (Lam. iii. 45). You will say this was a sinning nation. Nay, the Apostle saith the same thing of himself and other apostles: "We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things" (1 Cor. iv. 13); cast out, as the sweeping of the city. Yea, Christ himself complaineth: "I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (Psalm xxii. 6); as if he were but as a worm to be trod upon, in respect of the world. Thou canst not be more despised than Christ was. So, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isa. iii. 3). Well, if this be a common lot and portion of God's people, it is more usual to persecute with contempt than with violence; men are kept off by the restraint of laws.

2. Shall we not suffer a little for Christ, who suffered so much for us? He hath endured greater reproaches for our sakes; and what are we to him? If he endured shame, was made a curse for us, what a softness and tenderness have we for our interests! "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord," &c. (Matt. x. 24—26.)

3. We must be dead to esteem, credit, and reputation, as well as other things; or else we are incapable of the kingdom of Heaven: "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John v. 44;) "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. Nevertheless, among the chief rulers also, many believed on him; but, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (John xii. 41, 42). It is not enough, to deny brutish pleasures, to escape sordid covetousness, but all prizing of our own credit; content to be nothing, that Christ may be all in all; or else there is some affection not yet subdued to Christ's interest: any interest of ours that cometh into competition with Christ, must be denied.

4. This is the true fortitude. We all affect to be counted men of spirit and courage; there is not a greater evidence of it, than when we can endure contempt for Christ. Military valour depends upon bodily spirits, it is a more brutish thing; Peter, that ventured upon a band of men, was overcome by the weak blast of a damsel's question. He that can, in a generous contempt, count man's day nothing: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment," &c. (1 Cor. iv. 3.)

5. The more despised in the world for righteousness' sake, the more honourable with God. If they could hinder your esteem with him, it was something. He is approved whom the Lord commendeth (2 Cor. x. 18): they will ever be of great account in Heaven that have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb, and kept themselves unspotted from the world, and are clothed with the sun, and have the moon under their feet (Rev. xii. 1). The true and afflicted, despised church is, in the eyes of God, fair as the sun, pure as the moon (Cant. vi. 10). You are an elect seed, a royal priesthood (1 Peter ii. 9).

6. If we cannot endure a little disgrace for God, what shall we do when called to resist unto blood? "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, how canst thou contend with horses?" (Jer. xii. 5.) *Scommata nostra ferre non potes, &c.*

7. God hath his times of bringing you into request again: "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day" (Psalm xxxvii. 6); "Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee, and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame" (Zeph. iii. 19). All God's children were despised in their time, and yet afterwards were honoured. There is a resurrection of names as well as persons. Abraham gave Isaac his son to God in sacrifice, and received him again: so we receive our names from reproach and contempt. He that draweth light out of darkness, is able to revive our credit and esteem; if not in this world, yet, in the world to come, we shall be glorious, though our condition be never so contemptible here. Our reward is not in this life. When we die, the beggar is carried into Abraham's bosom. Would you be in Dives's condition, or that of Lazarus? To wal-

low in ease and plenty, and go to Hell, and be cast out with the Devil and damned spirits; or to be poor and despised here, to be carried by angels into the presence of God hereafter? So at the day of judgment: "Who-soever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father, which is in Heaven" (Matt. x. 32); we shall be publicly owned.

8. Great contempt shall be poured upon those that now contemn you. When Hanon offered injury to David's servants, he took severe revenge of it; God will require an account of all the wrongs and affronts which are put upon his servants. The wicked shall be made the scorn of good men and angels: "The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him. Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness; but I am like a green olive tree," &c. (Psalm lii. 6—8.)

DOCTRINE III.—That, though our condition be small and despicable, yet we should be still faithful in our respects to God and his word.

1. The temptation will not excuse us: *Esse bonum facile est, ubi quod retat esse remotum est.* Our trial is expressly mentioned in the promise, as necessary for our crowning: "When he is tried" (James i. 12); when the temptation is over, the trial is past: it is no praise for a woman to be chaste that hath no suitors. Adam was tempted by Eve, and Eve by Satan; yet both bore their burden. *Si taceret Deus et loqueretur Satan,* &c., why should we hearken to Satan's suggestions rather than God's admonitions?

2. God observeth what we do in our trouble: "If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god, shall not God search this out; for he knoweth the secrets of the heart?" (Psalm xlv. 20, 21.) If we slacken our service to God, or fall off to any degree of apostasy, the Judge of hearts knoweth all: God knoweth whether we have or would deprave and corrupt doctrine, worship, or ordinances; or whether we will faithfully adhere to him, to his word, and worship, and ordinances, whatever it cost us.

3. God and his law are the same; and therefore, though our condition be altered, our affections should not. If we love the word of God upon intrinsic reasons, there is the same reason why we should adhere to it with love still, so as to embrace it out of love: "Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth" (verse 142). Among men, that may be just to-day which is not so to-morrow, because they and their laws alter; but God's law is the eternal rule of righteousness, that never alters.

4. In our poor and despicable condition, we see more cause to love the word than we did before; because we experience supports and comforts which we have thereby: "Knowing that tribulation worketh patience," &c. (Rom. v. 3); "For, as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ" (2 Cor. i. 5). God hath special consolations for his afflicted and despised people, and makes their consolation by Christ to run parallel with, and keep pace with, their sufferings for Christ.

USE I.—Carry your duty still in remembrance. The first step of defection, is to forget what God hath commanded. There is an oblivion and a darkness, for the present, on the mind; so that a man knoweth not what he knoweth; as Hagar saw not the well that was before her, till God

opened her eyes: therefore revive the grounds of your adherence, if you would constantly adhere to God. The temptation cometh afresh upon you every day, with all the enticing blandishments; so should the reasons of your duty. It helpeth our perseverance, to consider how strong and cogent they are, and what wrong we should do to God and religion to consent. At first, a man beholds temptations with horror; but, being familiarized, our thoughts are more reconciled to them: therefore recollect yourselves, and remember the reasons you first had to put you upon your duty; and, if you duly consider them, they will be strong and cogent to repel the temptation that would take you off from it.

USE II.—It showeth who are lovers of the word, and who not. On the one hand, some love the precepts of God, when they are in honour and esteem, have many to join with them, and they see peace and plenty follow the profession of it; but, rather than they will endure trouble and contempt, forsake it. The Samaritans would be Jews when the Jews were favoured; but, in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, when the Jews were in trouble, they would be called Sidonians; ἐκέθ' ὠμολόγουν τὸν ἐν Γαριζὶν ναὸν τῆ μεγίστη Θεῶ, dedicating their temple, not to Jehovah, but Jupiter (Josephus). These never received the love of the truth. On the other side, when a man loveth it alike in all times and in all conditions, when rich, when poor, in liberty and in bonds: when the ways of God are countenanced, or when despised, it is all one to him; they love it, not for outward respects, but internal reasons.

SERMON CLIX.

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

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

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

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

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

The reasons:—

1. Because it is the copy of that righteousness which is in God. God's natural perfections are represented in the creatures; his majesty and omnipresence in the sun, but his moral perfections in the word. The heavens declare his excellent majesty and glory; but his law, his purity, righteousness, and holiness. Psalm xix., the sun and the law are compared together: as the creatures, in their kind, set forth God, so doth the word in its kind. Well may it be called righteousness, because it is the fairest draft and representation of God in his moral perfections; the chief of which are called righteousness and holiness. The knowledge we get by the creatures tendeth to exalt God; the knowledge we get by the law, to humble and abase man, because of our impurity; and therefore the Prophet, when he saw God, cried out, "Wo is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Psalm vi. 5); and David, when he contemplated the holiness of the law, cried out presently, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Psalm xix. 12).

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

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

2. For the way of sanctification, or how a man that is justified should approve himself to God and men. The Scripture crieth up another righteousness, that becometh justified persons; that is, the way to be righteous is to do righteousness: "Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness, is righteous" (1 John iii. 7). So it is said of Zacharias and Elisabeth, that "they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke i. 6). So, "And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments, before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us" (Deut. vi. 25). This wisdom we learn from the word, where

nothing but righteousness is recommended ; for it cometh from the righteous God, who is essentially good and holy, and cannot be contrary to himself in commanding unjust things ; and therefore his commandments are in all points right. There is no way right to prove principles, but by arguing *ab absurdis*, and so prove the goodness of them. What a miserable case would the world be in, if there were not such a law and rule ! A place of villanies and wickedness ! And therefore here is righteousness, and all righteousness. We need not seek further for direction : surely, God can tell what will best please him ; and our sense and experience inform us, what things are good and honest in the sight of men.

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

II. Now I come from the notion to the predication. This righteousness, it is “an everlasting righteousness.” It is so in two respects, in the constitution among men, and in the effects of it.

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

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

2. As to the effects of it, in case of obedience or disobedience.

(1.) In case of disobedience, eternal wrath lighteth on them that reject this covenant, that walk contrary to it; they shall be eternally miserable: "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thes. i. 9); not a temporal, but an everlasting destruction; and, "Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark ix. 41): an eternity of torments, because they despised everlasting mercy, and rejected the authority of an everlasting God. Having offended an infinite God, their punishment abideth on them for ever. If they will stand out their day, it is fit their recovery should be hopeless.

(2.) The benefits are eternal in case of obedience. There is everlasting grace, everlasting comfort, and everlasting life: "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever" (1 John ii. 17). The Spirit is given as a comforter, that shall abide for ever (John xiv. 16); and, "God, &c., which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace" (2 Thes. ii. 16). And it is fit it should be so, because it is built upon God's unchangeable love and Christ's eternal merit and intercession: God's love is "an everlasting love" (Jer. xxxi. 3). The efficacy of Christ's merit never ceaseth (Heb. xiii. 8); his continual intercession ever lasteth (Heb. vii. 25); and nothing "shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. viii. 39). He liveth for ever, by which we continue for ever in the favour of God, and the covenant standeth firm between him and us: the fountain of comfort is never dried up.

USE.—Is to inform us of the difference between the laws of God and the laws of men. There are many differences, some of which I shall touch by-and-by; this expression offereth two: it is righteousness, and everlasting righteousness.

First, It is righteousness: men have, and do often, decree wickedness by a law; not only in the first table, where man is most blind, but also in the second; not only in their barbarous worship, their sacrificing of men, but also in their human constitutions. The Lacedæmonians held it lawful to steal, if he were not taken ἐπ' αὐτῷ φέρειν, in the very act. In Cyprus, they held it lawful for their virgins, if they were poor, to prostitute themselves to get a dowry or portion. By the law of the twelve tables, a man might kill his wife, if she smelt of wine, or counterfeited his keys. And, among the Romans, if a slave had killed his master, all his fellow-slaves were put to death with him, though ever so innocent. By the same laws, a father might thrice sell his child; they might tear their debtors in pieces, if they were not solvent. Thus blind were men in their own concerns, and what made for human commerce: much more in the way of pleasing God, and the interest of the world to come. Bless God for this righteous law. Again,—

Secondly, It is everlasting righteousness; not only righteous at the first

giving out, but righteous in all ages and times; and should we slight this rule that will hold for ever? In the world, new lords, new laws; men vary and change their designs and purposes; privileges granted to-day, may be repealed to-morrow: but this word will hold true for ever. Our justification by Christ is irrevocable; that part of righteousness is everlasting. Be sure you are justified now, upon terms of the Gospel, and you shall be justified for ever: your forgiveness is an everlasting forgiveness, and your peace is an everlasting peace: "I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. xxxi. 34). So the other righteousness of sanctification, it is for ever: approve yourselves to God now, and you will approve yourselves at the day of judgment.

USE II.—Is exhortation.

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

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

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

In a time of desertion, we seem to be dead and cast off; yet remember, God loves to be bound for ever: "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5). Though we are not so punctual, exact, and faithful, but are subject

to many errors and failings, yet God will mind his eternal covenant: "Nevertheless, my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips" (Psalm lxxxix. 33, 34). Death doth not dissolve it, nor desertions break it off.

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

DOCTRINE.—That the word of God hath the nature and force of a law.

It is often so called in Scripture: not only the Decalogue, which is the abridgement of all moral duties, but the whole Scripture, is God's law: "A law shall proceed from me" (Isa. li. 4); and, "His delight is in the law of the Lord" (Psalm i. 2); and the Gospel is called "the law of faith" (Rom. iii. 27). Here I shall show you how necessary it was that God should give man a law, both as we are considered apart, and with respect to community; and then show that the word hath the force of a law.

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

Secondly, But much more if you consider man in his community, as he is a part of that spiritual community called a church. All societies of men, from the beginning of the world, have found the establishing of laws the only means to preserve themselves from ruin. There is no other way against confusion; and would God leave that society which is of his own institution, that of which he is the head, and in which his honour is con-

earned, without a law? "The Lord's portion is his people" (Deut. xxxii. 9), which was set apart to serve him, and to be to him for a name and a praise. Surely, a people that have God so near them, and are in special relation to him, have their laws by which they may be governed and preserved as to their eternal good; unless we should say God took less care for his own people than for others. This necessity is the greater because this society is spiritual; though made up of visible men, yet combined for spiritual ends, commerce and communion with God; and that mostly in their spirits, which maketh this society the hardest to be governed, and this the most scattered and dispersed of all societies, throughout all parts of the earth, and therefore should be knit together with the strongest bonds. Surely, then, there needeth a common law, whereby they may be united in their conjunction with Christ the head, and one another, that it may not be broken in pieces. And this to be given by God, that he may preserve his own authority and interest among them.

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

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

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

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

2. That there is not only direction given to us, but an obligation laid upon us. There is this difference between a law and a rule; a bare rule is for information, a law for obligation. So herein the word of God agrees with a law: it is not only the result of God's wisdom, but the effect of his legislative will. He would not only help and instruct the creature in his duty, but oblige him by his authority. *Decretum necessitatem facit, exhortatio liberam voluntatem excitat*, saith the canonist. Exhortation and advice properly serveth to quicken one that is free; but a decree and a law imposeth a force, a necessity, upon him. So Jerome, lib. 2, contra Jovin.: *Ubi consilium datur, operantis arbitrium est; ubi preceptum, necessitas servitutis*. A counsel and a precept differ: a precept respects subjects; a counsel, friends. The Scriptures are not only God's counsel, but his pre-

cept. There is a coactive power in his laws: God hath not left the creature at liberty to comply with his directions if he please, but hath left a strict charge upon him.

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

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

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

1. Man, in his laws, doth not debate matters with his subjects, but barely enjoineth, and interposeth authority; but God condescendeth to the infirmities of man, and cometh down from the throne of his sovereignty, and reasoneth, and persuadeth, and prayeth men, that they will not forsake their own mercies, but yield obedience to his laws, which he convinceth them are for their good: "Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors" (Isa. xli. 8): "Let us reason together, saith the Lord" (Isa. i. 18). God is pleased to stoop to sorry creatures, to argue with them, and make them judges in their own cause: he will plead with Israel, "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me" (Mic. vi. 2, 3): He will plead with Israel about the equity of his laws, whether they are not for their good. It is a lessening of authority for princes to court their subjects, they command them; but God will beseech, and expostulate, and argue, with his people (2 Cor. v. 20). He draws with the cords of a man, sweetly alluring their hearts to him.

2. The laws of God bind the conscience and the immortal souls of men; the laws of men only bind the behaviour of the outward man, they cannot order the heart. God takes notice of a wanton glance, of an unclean thought, a carnal motion (Matt. v. 28). Men's words and actions are liable to the laws of men, they cannot know the thoughts; but the law of

God falls upon the counsels of the heart: "For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal" (Rom. vii. 14); "A discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. iv. 12).

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

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

USE.—Let us humble ourselves, that we bear so little respect to God's word, that we so boldly break it, and are so little affected with our breaches of it. Do we, indeed, consider that this is God's law? The greatest part of mankind fear the prince more than God, and the gallows more than Hell. If every vain thought or carnal motion in our hearts were as the cutting of a finger or burning in the hand, men would seem more afraid of that than they are of Hell. Nay, I will tell you, men can dispense with God's law to comply with man's: "Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment" (Hos. v. 11). A little danger will draw men into the snare, when Hell will not keep them from it. Oh! let us rouse up ourselves! Is not man God's subject? Is not he a more powerful sovereign than all the potentates in the world? Doth he not in his word give judgment on the everlasting estate of men, and will his judgment be in vain? Hath not God appointed a day when all matters shall be taken into consideration? If you can deny these truths, go on in sin and spare not; but, if conscience be sensible of God's authority, oh! break off your sins by repentance, and walk more cautiously for the time to come! Every sin is *áropia* (1 John iii. 4), a breach of God's eternal law; and will God always wink at your disloyalty to him?

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

DOCTRINE.—God's law is truth.

1. I shall show in what sense it is said to be truth.
2. The reasons why it is truth.
3. The end of this truth.

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

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

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

3rdly, It is the pure truth. In it there is nothing but the truth, without the mixture of falsehood; every part is true as truth itself. It is true in the promises, true in the threatenings, true in the doctrines, true in the histories, true in the precepts, true in the prohibitions; God will make it good to a title: true in moralities, true in the mysteries of faith; not only true in duties that concern man and man, but in the sublimer truths, that concern commerce with God, where nature is more blind: "The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether" (Psalm xix. 9). It is true where a carnal man would not have it true, in the curses and threatenings. If God's word be true, wo to them that remain in a sinful way! They shall find it true shortly, and feel what they will not believe. It is true where a godly man feareth it will not be true; no promises contradicted by sense, but will prove true in their performance. Whatsoever, in the hour of temptation, carnal reason may judge to the contrary, within a while you will see your unbelieving fears confuted.

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

Reasons:—

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

2. The matter itself. It commends itself to our consciences by the manifestation of the truth (2 Cor. iv. 2): "Approving yourselves, &c., by the word of truth" (2 Cor. vi. 4, 7). If the heart be not strangely perverted, and become an incompetent judge by obstinate atheism and corrupt affections, it cannot but own these truths to be of God: "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost (2 Cor. iv. 3).

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

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

USE I.—Is to commend the word of God to us. We cannot have true doctrine, nor true piety, nor true consolation, without the Scriptures. Not true doctrine: "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. viii. 20). It is to be condemned of falsehood, if not according to the word: you cannot have true holiness; for holiness is but Scripture digested and put in practice. The foundation of the spiritual life is laid in the word (James i. 18); Scripture faith and Scripture repentance are still fed by the word. It teacheth us how to believe, and how to repent, and how to pray, and how to live, especially the heavenly life; and there can be no true comfort and peace without the word: "That we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope" (Rom. xv. 4).

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

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

3. When difficulties arise that oppose the promise or expectation of relief according to the promise, you should urge the truth of the word in the very face of difficulty, "Thy law is truth." Take Paul's instance, Acts xxvii. God by promise gave all that sailed with Paul in the ship their lives, yet how many difficulties came to pass! At first, when they were in the Adriatic Sea for so many days and nights, and had neither seen sun nor stars, they knew not where they were, nor whither they should go:

here was little appearance of God's making good his word to Paul. Another difficulty fell out: they feared they were near some country; they sounded, and found they were near some land, but what land they could not conjecture, and were afraid of being split in pieces against the rocks. But the shipmen, that knew the danger of these seas, they must go out of the ship, they would make use of their long-boat; and so they were ready to miscarry in the sight of the land; but Paul prevented them. And, after it was day, the men were spent because of long fasting and conflicting with the waves, they could not ply the oar. Another difficulty: they were where two seas met, they ran the ship aground, and resolved to kill Paul and the rest of the prisoners, lest they should swim to land; but the captain, willing to save Paul, prevented that purpose. And so, at length, they came all to shore, though followed with difficulty upon difficulty. God made good his promise to a tittle (verse 44). Pray, observe how Paul urged God's promise against the greatest difficulties, as sufficient ground of encouragement to expect relief: "For I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (verse 25).

SERMON CLX.

VERSE 143.—*Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me; yet thy commandments are my delights.*

In the words we have—

1. David's temptation, "Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me."
 2. David's exercise under that temptation, "Thy commandments are my delights."

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

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

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

(1.) The object, "Thy commandments." The commandment is put

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

First, Consider the people of God in their collective body and community, which is called the church. It is the church's name, "Oh! thou afflicted, tossed with tempest!" (Isa. liv. 11.) Names are taken *à notioribus*; things are known and distinguished by their name; it is one of the way-marks to Heaven: "Through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts xiv. 22); as the way to Canaan lay through a howling wilderness. If we were told before that we should meet with such and such marks in our journey to such a place, if we found them not, we should have cause to suspect we were out of our way. From the beginning of the world, the church hath always been bred up under troubles, and inured to the discipline of the cross: "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say" (Psalm cxxix. 1). The spirit of enmity wrought betimes. The first family that ever was in the world, yielded Abel, the proto-martyr, and Cain, the patriarch of unbelievers. While the church kept in families, the outward estate of God's people was worse than their neighbours'. Abraham was a sojourner, though owned and blessed by God, when the Canaanites were possessors and dwelt in walled towns. Jacob's family grew up by degrees into a nation; but Esau's presently multiplied into many dukes and princes. And, as they grew up, they grew up in affliction. Egypt was a place of retreat for them for a

while ; but, before they got out of it, it proved a house of bondage. Their deliverance brought them into a wilderness, where want made them murmur, but oftener wantonness. But then, God sent fiery serpents, and broke them, and afflicted them with other judgments. After forty years' wandering in the wilderness, they are brought into Canaan, a land of rest ; but it afforded them little rest ; for they forfeited it almost as soon as they conquered it : it flowed with milk and honey, but mixed with gall and wormwood. Their story, as it is delivered in the book of God, acquaints you with several varieties and intermixtures of providence, till wrath came upon them to the utmost ; till God saw fit to enlarge the pale and lines of communication, by treating with other nations. Now, if the Old Testament church were thus afflicted, much more the New. God discovered his approbation and improbation then, more by temporal mercies and temporal judgments. The promises run to us in another strain ; and, since life and immortality was brought to light in the Gospel, we must not expect to be so delicately brought up as never to see an evil day. He hath told us we must be conformed to our head (Rom. viii. 29), and expect to pledge Christ in his bitter cup ; and our condition must inform us, that our hopes are not in this world (1 Cor. xv. 19). In the Gospel-dispensation, God would deal forth temporal blessings more sparingly, and spiritual with a fuller hand : the experience of all ages verifieth this. When religion began first to fly abroad into all lands, the Pagans first persecuted it, and then the pseudo-Christians : the holiest and best people were malign'd, and bound, and butchered, and racked, and stoned ; but still they multiplied. It were easy to tire you with various instances in every age. Those that went home to God, were those that came out of tribulations, and had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. vii. 15). There is always something set afoot to try God's servants ; and, in the latter times, the roaring lion is not grown more gentle and tame, rather more fierce and severe : " For the Devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time " (Rev. xii. 12). Dying beasts struggle most. As his kingdom beginneth to shake, so he will be most fierce and cruel for the supporting of it.

Secondly, As to particular persons. " The whole creation groaneth " (Rom. viii. 22) ; and God's children bear a part in the concert : they have their share in the world's miseries ; and domestical crosses are common to them with other men in the world : yea, their condition is worse than others'. Chaff and corn are threshed in the same floor ; but the corn is grinded in the mill, and baked in the oven. Jeremiah was in the dungeon, when the city was besieged. The world hateth them more than others, and God loveth them more than others. The world hateth them because they are so good, and God correcteth them because they are no better. There is more care exercised about a vine than a bramble. God will not let them perish with the world. Great receipts call for great expenses, first or last. God seeth it fitting sometimes at first setting forth. As the old Germans were wont to dip their children in the Rhine to harden them, so to season them for their whole course, they must bear the yoke from their youth or first acquaintance with God. Sometimes God lets them alone while they are young and raw, and of little experience, as we are tender of trees newly planted ; as Jacob drove as the little ones were able to bear : " Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able "

(1 Cor. x. 13). They are let alone till middle age, till they are of some standing in religion: "Moses, when he was come to years," μέγας γενόμενος (Heb. xi. 24). Sometimes let alone till their latter time, and their season of fighting cometh not till they are ready to go out of the world, that they may die fighting, and be crowned in the field; but, first or last, the cross cometh, and there is a time to exercise our faith and patience before we inherit the promises. I will not enlarge in the common place of afflictions, and tell you how necessary the cross is to subdue sin, which God will do in an accommodate way to weaken pride, to reclaim us from our wanderings, to increase grace, to make us mindful of heavenly things: these are discussed in other verses, to make us retreat to our great privileges, to stir us up to prayer, &c. *Tribulatio tam nobis necessaria, quam ipsa vita; immo magis necessaria, multoque utilior quam totius mundi opes et dignitates*, saith Luther. We think wealth is necessary for us, dignity and esteem is necessary for us; no, affliction is necessary for us: "If need be, ye are in heaviness," &c. (1 Peter i. 6.)

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

USE II.—If you are under afflictions, μη ξενίζεσθε (1 Peter iv. 12), do not strange at it, no more than at night and day, showers and sunshine. As these things fall out in the course of nature, so do troubles and afflictions in the course of God's providence. It were a wonder if otherwise. We do not wonder to see a shower of rain fall, or a cloudy day succeed a fair: "The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (1 Peter v. 9). All the rest of God's people are fellow-soldiers in this conflict.

USE III.—When we are out of affliction, let us bless God that we are out of it. The greatness of the trouble, danger, misery, straits, whereinto

God doth cast his own, doth lay a greater obligation of thankfulness upon those that are free from those evils. If thou beest not thankful for thy health, go to the lazar-houses, look upon the afflicted state of God's people; and that may quicken you to thankfulness for being freed from affliction.

USE IV.—Is advice. Do not draw sufferings upon yourselves by your own rashness and folly: "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations" (James i. 2). We must not seek nor desire trouble, but bear it when God layeth it on us. Christ hath taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." It is a folly for us to cast ourselves upon it. If we draw hatred upon ourselves, and run headlong into dangers without necessity, we must make ourselves amends by repentance; otherwise, God will not. If a man set his house on fire, he is liable to the law; if it be fired by others, or by an ill accident, he is pitied and relieved. We are to take our own cross, when made to our hands by God's providence, not make it for ourselves; not to fill our own cup, but drink it off if God put it into our hands. We must come honestly by our crosses as well as by our comforts, and must have a call for what we suffer, as well as for what we do, if we would have comfort in our sufferings.

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

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

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

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

4. Sorrow and trouble may revive inward trouble. Affliction, in itself,

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

USE.—Let us take notice how affliction worketh. There is a double extreme, slighting the hand of God, or fainting under it; we must beware of both (Heb. xii. 5). There must be a sense, but it must be kept within bounds; without a sense, there can be no improvement; to despise them is to think them fortuitous. They come from God; their end is repentance, their cause is sin. Men cannot endure to have two things despised, their love nor their anger. When David's love was slighted, he vowed to cut off all that pertained to Nabal. And Nebuchadnezzar, when his anger was despised, commanded the furnace to be heated seven times hotter. Nor fainting; for that excludeth God's comforts; God hath the whole guiding and ordering the affliction, and, while the rod is in his hand, there is no danger. He is a wise God, and cannot be overseen,—a God of judgment, by whom all things are weighed (1 Sam. ii. 3), every dram and scruple of the cross. A just God, and will punish no more than is deserved: "He will not lay upon man more than right" (Job xxxiv. 23). As well no more than is meet, as no more than is right. He is a good God, does only what our need and profit requireth: "For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men" (Lam. iii. 33).

DOCTRINE III.—That is the property of a gracious soul, to delight in God's commandments.

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

We shall consider the nature of delight.

1. In the causes.

2. In the effects of it.

First, The causes are,—

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

2ndly, A second cause is possession of it, and communion with it. *Oritur* (saith Aquinas) *ex presentia connaturalis boni*. Now, one may be said to possess the law, or enjoy the law, in regard of the knowledge of it, or obedience to it: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them,

he it is that loveth me" (John xiv. 21). The knowledge of the law, so it be not superficial and fleshly, but full, and thorough, and savoury, is very comfortable, and goeth toward a good note; but obedience to the law is the cause of delight therein. God's servants rejoice when they can bring on their hearts with any life and power in the way of God's testimonies: "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches" (Psalm cxix. 14). Thence come their comfort and obedience.

3rdly, A third cause of delight is a precedent love of the object. Love is a complacency in, and propension towards, that which is good, absolutely considered, both in the presence and absence of it. Desire noteth the absence of a good; delight the presence and fruition of it. Therefore a love of the object delighted in, is essentially presupposed to delight. So that it is impossible for anything to be delighted in, but it is first loved. We have experience that many things are delightful in themselves, and known to be such, which yet do not actually delight if they be hated. A man may taste of the sweetness of honey; yet, if he have an antipathy against it, he may loath it. David, in this psalm, presupposeth love as antecedent to delight: "I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved" (Psalm cxix. 47). Carnal men cannot say so: "For every one that doeth evil, hateth the light" (John iii. 20). The renewed only love the commandments. Yea, it doth not only presuppose a love of simple complacency, but also a love of desire; for all things are first desired before delighted in. None can truly delight in obedience, but such as desire it. Such as can say with David, "Behold, I have longed after thy precepts" (verse 40); and, "I opened my mouth, and panted; for I longed for thy commandments" (verse 131). Now, all such are blessed (Matt. v.).

Secondly, Let us consider the effects.

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

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

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

2. Spiritual delights may be said to cause a desire, as desire importeth a denial or exclusion of loathing; for the objects of spiritual delight, and the acts whereby they are enjoyed, can never exceed the degree and measure required in them, unless by accident, by reason of some bodily

act, concurrent therewith, and subservient unto the spiritual operation. The desire can never be too great; the expression of it may be burdensome. We may easily exceed the bounds of moderation in carnal things, but not in spiritual. They can never be too high and intense. Therefore fresh desires and earnest longings are still kindled and quickened in us: it never dulls the appetite; but draweth out the soul further and further, and cannot be too eager and zealous after holiness.

3rdly, Another effect of delight is *perfect operationem*, it makes the operation to its object more perfect than otherwise it would be. As a motive or means, it exciteth to a greater care and diligence in promoting the end which we pursue. The delight in the law helpeth to perfect our meditation therein and observation thereof; by its sweetness, it quickeneth, provoketh, and allureth to a greater zeal in both. Delight maketh all things easy (1 John v. 4): "Her ways are ways of pleasantness" (Prov. iii. 17); "The Sabbath [is] a delight" (Isa. lviii. 13). It facilitates duties, and removes difficulties in working.

Now, this delight must be sincere; otherwise, they are but like the carnal Jews who did delight to know his ways (Isa. lviii. 2). It must not be on foreign reasons.

And then it must be universal; otherwise, it is but like Herod, who heard John gladly, and did many things (Mark vi. 20). It must be deeply rooted; otherwise, it is but like the seed which fell on the stony ground, which received the word with joy, but dured for a while (Matt. xiii. 20, 21).

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

USE II.—Have we this delight? The sincerity may be discerned,—

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

2. It will be discerned by the effects of it. You will often consult with it: "Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors" (Psalm cxix. 24).

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

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

USE III.—Let us be exhorted to do what we can for the begetting, increasing, and cherishing this delight in our hearts. If you love God, you

cannot but love his word, which is so perfect a representation of him. If you love holiness, you must needs delight in the word; this is the rule of it. If you love life and happiness, you must needs delight in the word; this is the way that leadeth us to so blessed and glorious an estate. If you love Christ, you will love the word, which offereth him to you. If you love the new nature, you will delight in the word, which is the seed of it. If you would speed in prayer, "Let thy tender mercies come unto me, &c.; for thy law is my delight" (verse 77). If you would be supported in affliction, "Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction" (verse 92).

DOCTRINE IV.—In the days of our trouble and anguish, God's word will be a great delight and comfort to us.

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

Here I shall show,—

1. What comfort the word holds out to us.
2. Why afflictions do not diminish it.

First, What comforts it holds forth.

1st, The privileges of the afflicted: "We glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience" (Rom. v. 3). Such may rejoice in tribulations; miseries are unstinged, his rods are not signs of his anger. They are in the favour of God; and his heart is with them, however his hand be smart upon them. The habitude and nature of afflictions is altered in themselves; they are the punishments of sin, and so their natural tendency is to despair and bondage. God seemeth to put the old covenant in suit against unbelieving sinners; but now, they are trials, preventions, medicines to believers, that proceed from love, and are designed for their good.

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

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

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

5thly, It giveth us many promises of God's being with us, and strengthening and delivering us, and giving us a gracious issue out of all our troubles: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape,

that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13). Now, it is a great ease to the soul to fly to these promises which are made to his afflicted servants.

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

Secondly, Why afflictions do rather increase than diminish this.

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

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

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

SERMON CLXI.

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

In these words,—

First, The excellency of the word is again acknowledged, "The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting."

Secondly, A prayer is thereupon grounded, "Give me understanding."

Thirdly, The fruit and benefit of being heard in that prayer, "And I shall live."

Because the righteousness of the word is everlasting, therefore we

should beg understanding; and this sound understanding maketh way for life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ANSWER.—In two things; in the tenour of them, and in the effects.

Ist, In the tenour. Those terms on which God dealeth with us, are never repealed, but stand in force to all eternity. It is an everlasting truth, that he that believeth in Christ shall be saved, and that without holiness no man shall see God. The moral part of the word is unchangeable, and shall never be altered; the same duties and the same privileges do always continue. Our Lord telleth us, "Till Heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. v. 18). The truth of the doctrine of the law and prophets, is more firm and stable than the frame of Heaven and earth. Heaven and earth may be dissolved and made void; but his law shall never be made void. Both in that part wherein he comforts us by his promises, and that part wherein he sets down our duty, we are eternally obliged to obedience, and God hath eternally obliged himself to reward and bless. There is an everlasting and unchangeable ordinance, by which we are bound to God, and he hath bound himself to us. We should not change, and God will not, having passed his word to us. The everlasting obligation on us, dependeth on God's authority; the everlasting obligation on God's part, dependeth on his own truth and veracity. And, though we are poor, changeable creatures, God hath interposed his authority: "I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. iii. 6); "In whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James i. 7). God would change, if his truth were changed; but that is everlasting. It is not in the power of men to annihilate and change the law. They may break the law; but they cannot annihilate and change the law. Though it be not fulfilled by them, yet it shall be fulfilled in them and upon them. And God will not annihilate the law; for God cannot change or deny himself: in those things wherein he hath engaged his truth to the creature, he is immutable and infallible. Another expression is, "If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant" (Jer. xxxiii. 20, 21): the one shall not fail any more than the other. God compareth the firmness of his covenant with those things that are most unalterable, the standing of Heaven and earth, the constant course of night

and day. The ceremonial law was not abrogated, till fulfilled in Christ. This is God's last will; the terms of life and salvation are still the same, other conditions are not to be expected.

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

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

1st, When it is strongly believed, or else it worketh not; for all things work according to the faith we exercise about them: "The word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thes. ii. 13). Did we believe that our eternal condition did depend upon the observance or non-observance of this rule, we should regard it more: "Teach me good judgment and knowledge; for I have believed thy commandments" (Psalm cxix. 66). Lord, I believe I must stand or fall by this rule; and therefore let me know all my duty: so, "Were persuaded of them, and embraced them" (Heb. xi. 13). We have not a thorough persuasion about these things; our persuasions about eternal things are very weak, when God's expressions about them are very clear and strong. Most men guess at a world to come, but are not thoroughly persuaded. They have a loose or general opinion that the Scripture is the word of God, the rule by which they shall be tried; but do not soundly assent to it, and receive it as the word by which they shall be judged at the last day (John xii. 48). Christ pronounceth as the word pronounceth. There is a non-contradiction, but not an active and lively faith: this, and nothing but this, bindeth the will and conscience to obedience.

2ndly, Often considered. David still insists upon this, the everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies. It is as if he had said, I have said it already, and I will repeat it again and again. It is constant thoughts are operative, and musing maketh the fire burn. Green wood is kindled, not by a flash or spark, but by constant blowing. Deep, frequent, and ponderous thoughts leave some impression upon the heart: the greatest mat-

ters in the world will not work much upon him that will not think upon them. All the efficacy is lost for want of these ponderous thoughts. Why are all the offers and invitations of God's grace of so little effect? Matt. xxii. 5, 'Οι εἰ ἀμελήσαντες, they made light of it; they would not take it into their care and thoughts. Why do all the injunctions and precepts of God work no more? Men will not consider in their hearts (Deut. iv. 39, 40) all the comminations of God; and therefore he calls upon them, "Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver" (Psalm l. 22). It is for want of this that all the promises of God, of Heaven and happiness, work so little upon us: "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things" (2 Tim. ii. 7). The truth lieth by, neglected, unimproved, till consideration take it up, and lay it in the view of conscience; and then it worketh. Till we take it into our thoughts, we have no use of any truth; therefore set your hearts seriously to consider of these things.

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

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

2ndly, Because it bindeth and helpeth to obedience; partly, as it showeth the absolute necessity of obedience: because the terms of salvation are indispensably fixed, and will everlastingly stand in force, therefore I must yield to God or perish. The soul cometh off most kindly to the ways of God, when it is shut up unavoidably without all hope of escape and evasion, but by yielding to God's terms. The Lord will have the world know that there is no hope of a dispensation: "He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark xvi. 16). The terms are peremptorily fixed; there is no relaxation in the Gospel-covenant. Now, this doth bind the heart exceedingly to consider: "Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old thou hast founded them for ever" (verse 152). And partly, as it urgeth to speediness of obedience. You will not get better terms; for the righteousness of God's terms is everlasting; as good yield at first as at last. The laws of Christianity are always the same, and your heart is not likely to be better by delay. Your standing out were more justifiable in the account of reason, if you could get better terms. Partly, as it engageth to serious-

ness, whilst it carrieth the mind off from the vanities of the world into the midst of the world to come. I am not to mind what will content me for the present, but what will profit me for ever: holiness will abide, when other things fade. My ways are to be scanned by an eternal rule: some distinctions will not outlive time, as rich and poor, high and low; but the distinction of holy or unholy, sanctified or unsanctified, these abide: "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever" (1 Peter i. 24). Nothing stirreth us up more to provide for a better life, than to consider the uncertainty of the world's glory, and the everlastingness of God's approbation according to the rule of his word. When all things are dissolved, we are to be tried by a rule that will never fail. Our pomp, and honour, and credit, and all things that we hunt after in the world, are soon blasted; but the Gospel tells us of things that are everlasting, everlasting torments and everlasting bliss; and therefore our thoughts should be more about them: "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" (Isa. lv. 2.) And, "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John vi. 27). And partly, as it engageth to constancy in obedience; for it must last as long as our rule lasteth. You are eternally bound to love God, and fear him and obey him. We must not only begin well, or serve him now and then in a good mood; but so love God as to love him for ever, so cleave to him as never to depart from him. For his law is an eternal obligation; you must never cease your work till you receive your wages; and that is when you enter into eternity. Yea, much of our work is wages: loving, praising God, all duties that do not imply weakness, are a part of our happiness. Thus it hath a greater influence upon our obedience than we were at first aware of.

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

1. In all the changes of men's affections towards us. Sometimes they smile, and sometimes they frown; but the promises ever remain the same. There is yea and nay with men, but not with the promises; they are all yea and amen in Christ (2 Cor. i. 20). Times alter and change; but the tenour of the covenant is always the same.

2. It comforts us in the changes of God's dispensations to us. God may change his dispensations; yet his purposes of grace stand firm, and are carried on unalterably, by various and contrary means. We must interpret Providence by the covenant, not the covenant by Providence. We know the meaning of his works best by going into his sanctuary. The world misconstrueth his work and dealing to his children many times; if it be rightly interpreted, you will find God's righteousness is an everlasting righteousness. Sometimes God's providence is dark, but always just: "Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne" (Psalm xevii. 2); "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God?" (Hab. i. 12.) That was the Prophet's support in those sad times, when a treacherous people were exalted, when he was embroiled and lost about God's dispensations; this was his comfort and support, God's eternal immutability in the covenant. He is always

the same, loveth his people as much as ever, as faithful and mindful of his covenant as ever; only a veil of sense covereth our eyes that we cannot see it.

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

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

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

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

2. Such as by their constant progress towards an everlasting estate, are going from strength to strength, serving God, and cleaving to him in a uniform, constant course of holiness; not by fits and starts, but unchangeably: "To have always a conscience void of offence" (Acts xxiv. 16). Again, when you are in such an estate wherein you can bear the trial of those everlasting rules: "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. vi. 8); "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but, if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. viii. 13). In short, if you have everlasting ends: "While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. iv. 18). Not making things temporal our scope and aim, that will not satisfy us; when we are deeply possessed with the thoughts of the other world: "We have received not the spirit of the world" (1 Cor. ii. 12); and look upon all other things by-the-by, and use the world as if we used it not (1 Cor. vii. 29, 30).

II. I come now to the prayer; "Give me understanding, and I shall live."

1. Here is the benefit asked, "Understanding."
2. The person asking, David, "Give me."
3. The person from whom it is asked, from God.

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

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

The reasons why this should be our great request to God:—

Ist, The necessity of understanding; that will appear,—

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

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

2ndly, The second reason is, because of the excellency of understanding: therefore we should make it our request to God. Here are four considerations:—

1. Knowledge, in the general, is man's excellency. It is our privilege above the beasts. Many of them excel us in beauty of colour, in strength, and nimbleness, and vivacity, and long life, and acuteness of sense; but we excel them in knowledge. And so God hath taught us more than the beasts of the field. Man is a rational creature, his life standeth in light: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John i. 4). Other creatures have life, but not such a life as is light, are not endowed with a reasonable soul and a faculty of understanding. The more of knowledge there is increased in us, the more of man there is in us.

2. Divine knowledge is better than all other knowledge; to know God's nature and will, to know how God will be pleased, and how we may come to enjoy him. All other knowledge doth but please the fancy; this doth us good to the heart: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me" (Jer. ix. 23, 24); as not in strength, so not in natural

wisdom. Here I may take the argument of the text; men do not properly live, if they want the light of heavenly wisdom; without Divine knowledge, a man is little better than a beast. The endowment of reason was not given us merely to shift for ourselves, or provide for the animal life; other creatures do that better by instinct and natural sagacity, and are contented with less. No; man's life was given him for some other end, to know and serve his Maker.

3. Of all the knowledge of God, practical knowledge is better than speculative; not so much subtlety to be able to discourse of his nature, as to obey his will: "He judged the cause of the poor and needy, &c.; was not this to know me, saith the Lord?" (Jer. xxii. 16.) The knowledge of God is not measured by sharpness of wit, but by serious, ready practice; not strength of parts, but a good and honest heart; so to understand as to keep them: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments" (Psalm iii. 10). They understand best, not who can discourse most subtly, but who live most holily. When our faith is more strong, our reverence of God increased, our obedience more ready, then is our knowledge sound. When we follow those courses which we know God delighteth in (Jer. ix. 24), and study to please him in all things: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John ii. 4). He that doth not make conscience of his duty, he knoweth no such sovereign being as God is, that hath power to command, to save, and to destroy. They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him (Titus i. 16). So, "Whosoever sinneth, hath not seen him, neither known him" (1 John iii. 6). Well then, in giving his word, God's end was not to make trial of their wits, who could most sharply conceive; nor of their memories, who could most firmly retain; nor of their eloquence, who could most neatly discourse; but of their hearts, who will most obediently submit to him: that is knowledge indeed, which tendeth to use and practice. *Scire malum, non est malum*; look, to know evil, is not evil (for God knoweth evil, yet his knowledge is not evil). So *scire bonum, non est bonum*; to know that which is good, doth not make a man good. This is the distinction between understanding and will; the understanding draweth the object to itself, but the will is drawn by the object to it. If I understand anything, I am not, in a moral sense, that which I understand; but, if I will anything, or love anything, I am what I will and love. This is the difference between the two faculties.

4. Transforming, regenerating, saving knowledge, is the best part of practical knowledge: I add this, because general knowledge may produce good life, or some outward conformity in the unregenerate: "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter ii. 20). Those that are destitute of the saving knowledge of Christ, they may cleanse their external conversation, by that rational conviction, though not spiritual illumination, though strangers to inward mortification, and unrenewed in heart; yea, avoid gross sins, perform external duties. Oh! but the lively, saving light, such as subdueth the heart to God, such as maketh a thorough change in us, that is the best: "But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. iii. 18). When we so know Christ as to be like him, this is like Heaven's knowledge: "When he shall

appear, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John iii. 2). Common truths have another efficacy, when they understand them by the lively light of the Spirit ; when men know the torments of Hell, so as to flee from them : " Flee from the wrath to come" (Matt. iii. 7) ; as a man would out of a ship that is sinking, or a house falling ; so when we see Heaven so as it maketh us seek after it (Heb. iv. 1) ; so to know Christ as to be made like him, this will do us good ; and this is one of God's best gifts.

USE.—Oh ! then, beg this gift of God. ' Lord, give me understanding eyes !' Do not beg riches and honours, and great things in the world ; but beg for understanding : it is pleasing to God (2 Chron. i. 12). This will bring other things with it ; be importunate, take no nay. Cry for knowledge, lift up thy voice for understanding (Prov. ii. 3). It will not come at the first call ; follow God as the blind man : " Lord, that I might receive my sight" (Mark x. 51). So be earnest with God that the eyes of your understandings may be opened, that you may have such a sight of Heaven as that your affections may be set upon things above ; such a sight of Hell, as that ye may flee for refuge, as if the avenger of blood were at your heels. Without this, there can be no true piety. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God (Psalm xiv. 3). Nay, there can be no salvation without this : " It is a people of no understanding ; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them," &c. (Isa. xxvii. 11.) Ignorant people have a saying, he that made them will save them ; but it is said, they have no understanding, therefore he that made them will not save them : and therefore beg of God that he would break in upon your minds with the lively light of his Spirit.

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

DOCTRINE.—None know so much of God and his ways, but they still need to know more : petitions for understanding do not only become beginners, but grown Christians.

Three reasons of this point :—

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

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

3. That we may be prepared for our everlasting estate by degrees.

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

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

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

DOCTRINE.—If we would have the knowledge of Divine things, we must seek to God.

I will give you some grounds of this. Partly, because he is the fountain of knowledge, the first mind or intellect, called in Scripture "the Father of lights" (James i. 17). He is the sun, that must not only shine on us, to make us see things; but shine through us, to make us be enlightened ourselves. Ours is but a participation. Now, to show whence we receive all, God will be asked. And partly, too, because God gave the rule, and therefore he must interpret it: *Ejus est interpretari cujus est condere*. He can best show his own meaning; and therefore, in all doubtful cases, repair to him, especially since he hath undertaken in necessary cases: "For they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest" (Jer. xxxi. 34); and loveth to be employed by his people for that end and purpose. Once more, without his Spirit the clearest light we have hath no efficacy. He will have it sought.

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

DOCTRINE.—The saving knowledge of God's testimonies, is the only way to live.

There is a threefold life.

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

In all these considerations, may the point be made good.

First, Life is taken for the life of nature, or the life of the body, or life temporal, called "this life" in Scripture (1 Cor. xv. 19; 1 Tim. iv. 8). Among outward things, nothing is more precious than life; it maketh us capable of enjoying what the world can afford to us; we give all that we have to preserve it. Indeed, in competition with worldly things, we do well to value it; but not in competition with our duty and love to Christ, so

we must not count our life dear to us: "Neither count I my life dear unto myself" (Acts xx. 24); and, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, &c., and his own life" (Luke xiv. 26). Out of the conscience of our duty to Christ, we must be willing to expose it; for he can give us a better life (John xi. 25); but otherwise, so far as we can preserve it with our duty, it must be precious to us, and we must seek the interests of it. Well then, in this sense, it is no unbecoming thing for a Christian to say, "Give me understanding, that I may live." My life present, which mine enemies seek to take from me, this life is from God, both originally, and in a way of constant preservation. God gave it at first: "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. ii. 7); and still this life is at God's disposing, and he will sooner continue it to us in a way of obedience than in a way of sin: "Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit" (Job x. 12); "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28). The same power that giveth us being, maintaineth it as long as he pleaseth: all is at the daily dispose of God.

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

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

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

2. The life of sanctification: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. ii. 1). And men live not properly, till they live the life of grace; they live a false, counterfeit life, not a blessed, happy, certain, and true life. Now, this life is begun and carried on by saving knowledge: "The new man which is renewed in knowledge" (Col iii. 10). Again, men are said to be "alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them" (Eph. iv. 18). They that are ignorant, are dead in sin: life spiritual cometh by knowledge. Hence

beginneth the change of the inward man, and thenceforth we live. Give me understanding, *ut vere in te vivam*, that the true life begun in me may grow and increase daily, but never be quenched by sin.

Thirdly, Life everlasting, or our blessed estate in Heaven. So it is said of the saints departed, they all live to God (Luke xx. 38). And this is called the water of life, the tree of life, the crown of life; properly this is life. What is the present life in comparison of everlasting life? The present life, it is *mors vivalis*, a living death; or *worldly vita*, a dying life, a kind of death: it is always *in fluxu*, like a stream: it runneth from us as fast as it cometh to us: "He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not" (Job xiv. 2). We die as fast as we live: it differeth but as the point from the line where it terminateth. It is not one and the same, no permanent thing; it is like the shadow of a star in a flowing stream. Its contentments are base and low, called "the life of thine hand" (Isa. l.iii. 10). It is patched up of several creatures, fain to ransack the storehouses of nature to support a ruinous fabric. And compare it with the life of grace here, it doth not exempt us from sin, nor miseries. Our capacities are narrow. We are full of fears, and doubts, and dangers; but, in the life of glory, we shall neither sin nor sorrow any more. This is meant here, "The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding, and I shall live;" it is chiefly meant of the life of glory. This is the fruit of saving knowledge, when we so know God and Christ as to come to God by him.

USE.—Let us seek this saving knowledge of God, that we may live; first spiritually here, and gloriously here. But few mind it: all desire sharpness of wit, and to be as knowing as others. No man would be a fool, but would own a wickedness in morals, rather than a weakness in intellectuals; but who thinketh of being wiser for Heaven, of being seasoned with the fear of God? Most men choke all the motions and inclinations they have in that kind, with worldly delights and worldly businesses; being alive to the world, and dead to God; thronging their hearts with carnal vanities, but leaving no room for higher and serious thoughts.

But at length be persuaded. What do men desire but life? If you know God and Christ with a saving knowledge, you shall have it.

1. We were made for this end, to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved (1 Tim. ii. 4). We do not live merely to live, but to make provision for a better life; not to satisfy our bodies out of God's storehouse, but to furnish our souls with grace, and to exercise ourselves in his law day and night, that we may know his will concerning us, and provide for a better life, and live according to the directions of his word.

2. No creature is so bad as man, when he degenerateth from his end for which he was created. It is not so much for the sea to break its bounds, or to have a defect in the course of nature, as the degeneration of man.

3. You live not properly when destitute of the life of God and heavenly wisdom: he doth not live the life of a man, nor preserve the rectitude of his nature.

SERMON CLXII.

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

In these words are,—

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

First, In the allegation we have a description of prayer, by the two adjuncts of it.

1. Intension and fervency, “I cried.”
2. The sincerity and integrity of it, “With my whole heart.”

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

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

I. I begin with the allegation, or description of David’s carriage in prayer. David devoured not his grief, nor nourished his unbelief, but opened his heart unto God, and that in an affectionate manner; he did not call, but cry. Crying noteth vehemency and earnestness, and is opposite to careless formality and deadness. The note from thence is,—

DOCTRINE.—That there is a holy vehemency and fervour required in prayer.

Here I shall show,—

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

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

Secondly, We must cry. For,—

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

be accompanied with brokenness of speech; for God knoweth what a groan meaneth, and will not refuse the work of his Spirit.

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

3. These cries are heard and answered; as in all the former places, so Psalm xxii. 5, "They cried unto thee, and were delivered;" "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth" (Psalm xxxiv. 17); *βοηθῆσω*, the word to help, is *εἰς βοήην θεῶν*, to run to the cry. An arrow drawn with full strength will pierce deep.

4. Other prayers are not comely. It doth not become God to whom we pray: dead prayers doth not become the living God: "Cursed be the deceiver which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the Heathen" (Mal. i. 14). Slight dealing in God's service, argueth mean thoughts of God. It doth not become the Spirit by whom we pray; as in the first reason. Nor doth it become the blessings for which we pray: God will not give mercy till it be valued; if we be indifferent and pray for things of course, without any esteem of them, we bespeak our own denial. Then we undervalue the grace we seek, if we seek it so as if we cared not whether we obtained our request or no; for form's sake, we must say something. When things are prized, we are earnest, and God will have us earnest, to ask, seek, and knock (Matt. vii. 7). If you have good things, you must do so, and will do so, before you have them. Nor doth it become the state of want wherein you pray; where there is real indigence and felt necessity, it will sharpen your affections, and put an accent upon your prayers. You will not tell a tale, or a cold story, of your own wants, but cry aloud for help: "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord" (Jonah ii. 2). And the saints cry day and night. A true sense of want will sharpen our sluggish desires; the hunger-bitten beggar will not easily be put off.

Thirdly, Wherein this crying consisteth.

1. In the earnestness of the affection, not in the loudness of the voice: "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6). It is a cry, not of the mouth, but of the heart: it lieth not in the lifting up of the external voice, or the agitation of the bodily spirits; but the serious bent and frame of the spirit; *πειναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις*, inward groans, and holy meltings, and breathings of soul after God (Rom. viii. 26). Moses cried after God (Exod. xiv. 15); but we hear of no words which Moses spake. We hear of Israel's crying, and have an account of their words, hot and full of impatience (verse 10); but not a word that Moses said; yet he cried unto the Lord. Israel was in straits, the Red Sea before, the Egyptians behind. *Clamabat populus, et non audiebatur; tacebat Moses, et audiebatur*, saith Ambrose. Moses's silence was sooner heard than their cry: our groans and tears have a language which God understands. It is said, that "Hannah spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard" (1 Sam. i. 13). That is the better crying, in sighs and groans, rather than words; as the child that cannot speak, will cry and make moan for the breast. God hath

heard the cry of the heart without that of the tongue, but never the cry of the tongue without that of the heart. *Quibus arteriis opus est, si pro sonitu audiamur?* What lungs and sides must we have, if the loudness of the voice did it? A dumb beggar gets an alms at Christ's gate, if he can but make signs, when his tongue cannot plead for him.

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

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

USE I.—To reprove most men for their deadness and carelessness in prayer. Prayer is a part of natural worship. All that will acknowledge God and a providence, will acknowledge a necessity of praying to God, especially in their straits. The Pagan mariners cried, every man to his god, in a tempest (Jonah i. 6). But, though all will pray in one sort or other, yet few pray in good earnest. Some say a prayer; but they do not pray in prayer. Elijah prayed earnestly (James v. 17). Their prayers are conceived in a cold and customary track of devotion. Others flow in words, without spirit and life; their tongue is as the pen of a ready writer, but the heart is dead and carelessly affected: for they are indifferent whether they be heard or not. Prayer is, indeed, the work of their invention, but not the expression of their spiritual desire. The mind conceiveth a rational prayer, but the heart is not poured out before God: and so it is discoursing, rather than crying. Words are the outside of prayer; sighs and groans lie nearer the heart, and do better discover the temper of it, and are more regarded by God than all the charms of speech: "The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping" (Psalm vi. 8). Tears have a language which our Father understandeth; a want of affection is more than a defect of words: broken words, with a spiritual affection, do more than a well-set speech with unbrokenness of heart. Others have a natural fervency, but not renewed affections; pray from their own interest, or pray passionately for carnal things; "They fell a-lusting, and wept, saying, Who will give us flesh?" (Num. ii. 4.) They may be importunate for their own ease and welfare: "Give me children, or else I die," saith

passionate Rachel. Natural desires are very passionate; yea, for spiritual things on their own terms; would not a man desire pardon and Heaven, whose heart doth not engage to look after them? Some that are renewed, yet are too cold in prayer, do not cry. It is not enough to have the qualification of the person, but the prayer must be qualified also. James v. 16, *δέησις ἐπιγρησμένη*, it must be a well-wrought prayer, otherwise it availeth not; yea, our earnestness must increase according to the weight and moment of what we pray for. When Peter was in prison, the church made instant and earnest prayer; *δέησις ἐκτενής* (Acts xii. 5), as in the margin it is; and Christ had his *ἐκτενέστερον* (Luke xxii. 44). But now the children of God are conscious to themselves of much deadness and drowsiness, and are so low sometimes that they are not heard, scarce breathe in prayer, so far from crying. But—

What is the reason of this carelessness?

1. Want of sense. They have no feeling of their wants, and therefore pray perfunctorily. The poor in spirit, the mourner, and meek, are put before the desirer (Matt. v.). Men must be affected with their wants, before they be earnest after a supply. Jesus Christ was sensible of his burden, and therefore he offered up supplications with strong crying and tears (Heb. v. 7); and, if man were once sensible of his sins by which his Saviour suffered, he would be fervent in his prayers, and most earnestly deprecate the wrath of God, as his Saviour did. A smart sense of want quickens prayers. If we were always alike affected, as we are in a deep distress, or fears of death, or some notable danger, we should not need many directions to teach us to pray fervently; but, because such a sense is soon worn off, our prayers grow cold and careless.

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

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

4. Want of reverence to God; and therefore they babble over words without sense and feeling: they do not see him that is invisible: "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in Heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Ecc. v. 1, 2). Keep thy heart and affections when thou goest into God's presence; a little outward lip-service is but the sacrifice of fools, an affront to the power and majesty of God: "Offer

it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person, saith the Lord of hosts?" (Mal. i. 8.)

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

USE II.—Is to press you to this crying, or holy vehemency in prayer. The Apostle biddeth us to "continue instant in prayer;" *προσκαρτερῶντες*, continue with all your might in prayer: *ἀγωνιζόμενος*, "Labouring fervently for you in prayer" (Col. iv. 12). The word signifieth to be striving in a battle, and in an agony for them: it hath life in it. But what is it?

1. When the heart worketh in prayer as before.

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

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

“Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.”

4. Holy fervency and vehemency will be argumentative, and plead with God as Abraham, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. xviii. 25.) So Jacob (Gen. xxxii. 9). Jacob pleadeth God’s promise, “Return unto thy country, and unto thy kindred; and I will deal well with thee;” ‘Lord, I undertook not this journey but upon this encouragement.’ The little honour God hath by the church’s calamities (Psalm xlv. 12; Isa. lii. 4, 5). The praise God will have from his people. Psalm cxlii. 6, do it as David in the text, “I will keep thy statutes.” The chief arguments are, God’s covenant: “Arise, O God; plead thine own cause; remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily” (Psalm lxxiv. 22); “Have respect unto the covenant” (verse 20). The merits of Christ: ‘Lord, hear for the Lord’s sake.’ Desire is witty to find out arguments and reasoning to enforce the things we sue for.

But how shall we get it?

1. Have a sincere desire to the things asked; we shall cry for what we value and earnestly desire: “If thou criest for knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God” (Prov. ii. 3—5).

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

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

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

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

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

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

DOCTRINE.—Our prayers to God must be sincere as well as fervent.

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

1. Seriousness; that we heed what we say, otherwise we do not pour out our hearts before God. It is so far from being a spiritual act, that it is not a rational act, but like the parrots speaking by rote, or as children say their prayers; and we must not be always children. Surely, we do not speak to God as God, as an all-seeing Spirit, if we do not mind what we say (John iv. 24); and, "Burning lips and a wicked heart, are like a potsherd covered with silver dross" (Prov. xxiv. 23).

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

3. The prevalency of these affections. That God and his interest be uppermost in the soul, and the heart be effectually bent towards him: for prayer is not a work barely of our natural faculties, but of grace guiding, ordering, and inclining those faculties: not only a work of understanding and will, but of faith, love, zeal, hatred of sin, temperance, patience, and other virtues, which do bend the heart towards God, and draw it off from other things; and, without them, the understanding will not be clear, and have any deep sense of the worth of spiritual things without these. The will is remiss, and they never pursue them in good earnest: we may wish for them, but shall not will them: as Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous;" but he "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Peter ii. 15), and so spoke words which his heart allowed not. The affections will be diverted to other things; and we cannot have those longings and strong desires after grace (Psalm cxix. 26, and Col. iii. 2), or at best but a little passionate earnestness for the present.

4. A universal care to please God in all things, without harbouring any known sin in our hearts (Psalm lxxvi. 16). And, "Thou hast proved mine heart, thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing" (Psalm xvii. 2). Nothing contrary to the new covenant, no guile; nothing in his heart contrary to what was in his mouth: so no insincerity found: "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands towards him: if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles" (Job xi. 13, 14). If you mean to call upon God with any confidence, all that is dis-pleasing to him must be cast out of the heart. This is the best preparation: all filth must be swept out when you come to the holy God; for he will not do us good till we are fit to receive good. Therefore, if you mean to stretch out your hand in prayer, thus you must do; then may you lift up your face without spot, have boldness and confidence in prayer; but when the heart is

wedded to any vanity, God will not hear: "Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it" (Job xxxv. 13).

USE.—Is to persuade us to pray with our whole hearts. For—

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

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

3. Where there is a moral integrity, you do not dissemble; God can find the defect of supernatural integrity: "I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee; they have well said all that they have spoken. Oh that there were such a heart in them," &c. (Deut. v. 28, 29.) Therefore be sure your lips do not feign (Psalm xvii. 1), and pretend more grace than you have; so that, for the main, your hearts be upright, seriously, readily bent to please him in all things. To this end,—

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

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

3. You must pray earnestly in secret as well as in company: "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men, &c. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and, when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret," &c. (Matt. vi. 5, 6.) We have more enlargement there, because we represent our own ease to God. Mourn apart: "My soul shall weep in secret places" (Jer. xiii. 17). We are flat, cold, loose, careless in private; strive to speak with the same power, life, holiness in private, as you would in public.

4. What you would be *in* prayer, you must be *out of* prayer: "The legs of the lame are not equal; so is a parable in the mouth of fools" (Prov. xxvi. 7). As the legs of the lame, one doth not answer another, they are devout, all of a fire in their prayers, but neglectful of God in their conversations: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance" (Eph. vi. 18); "He

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

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

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

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

SERMON CLXIII.

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

II. Here is the petition, "Hear me;" or, as it is in the Hebrew, "Answer me;" not in words, but deeds.

DOCTRINE I.—God's children, when they pray, are earnest for an answer.

To give you some instances: "I will hear what God the Lord will

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

Reasons:—

First, Because they dare not take God's name in vain, as all do that pray cursorily and never regard what cometh of it: like foolish boys that knock at a door in wantonness, but have no business, and therefore will not stay till somebody cometh to open the door. It is a great sin to take God's name in vain in any act of worship, much more in prayer. Now, all do so, that go about this duty as a task, not as a means to do their souls good, or to obtain blessings from God; when I hear merely that I may hear, or receive the Lord's Supper, and rest in the act of receiving. Every ordinance must be gone about in faith and obedience, expecting the ends of the duty as well as being employed in the acts of it. If you do it in good earnest, and with respect to God's institution, you must do so. All the ordinances come under a fourfold notion; as duties, as privileges, as means, as talents. As duties enjoined, and a part of our homage and obedience to God: this will breed an awe upon our conscience, to keep us to a due and constant observance of them; it is not a matter arbitrary, but our necessary duty. As privileges: this keepeth us from weariness, that we may not consider them as a burdensome task. As means of our growth and improvement: that notion is necessary, that we may not rest in the work wrought, but look after the grace dispensed thereby. As talents for which we must give an account; which will quicken us to more earnest diligence in the improvement. Some do not look upon them as duties, and so neglect them; others, not as privileges, and so do not prize them, are not joyful in the house of prayer; others, not as means, and so rest in the bare performance, without looking after the fruits to be had thereby; others, not as talents, and so are more indifferent whether they get good by them, yea or no; but, when all these are regarded, we act best in any service or ordinance. Now, as this is true of ordinances in general, so especially of prayer, which is a sweet means of communion with God; not to be done as a task: herein we make an immediate address to God, and come to set him awork, and to take proof of his power and goodness, to see what he will do for his people. We put it, I say, to the trial; as, in that extraordinary case, Elijah puts his contest with Baal's priests upon this issue, that God that should answer by fire, he should be God (1 Kings xviii. 24); so, ordinarily, we put in prayer to trial whether God hath any respect to his people, and that with God's own leave and encouragement;

for he hath said that none shall seek his face in vain (Isa. xlv. 19). We put it to proof whether he will keep touch with his people, and be able and willing to perform what he hath promised. Therefore we use this duty in vain, and in a cursory way, if we be not earnest for an answer, which the saints dare not do.

Secondly, Not looking for an answer proceedeth from an ill cause.

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

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

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

4. It argues some disesteem of God's favour and acceptance. They care not whether he hath any respect for them, yea or no; for they do not so much as inquire of it. Oh! how contrary is this to the temper of God's people! If God hide his face, they are troubled (Psalm xxx. 7); he is the life of their lives: "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us" (Psalm iv. 6). The seasoning of their comforts is God's accepting their works (Ecl. ix. 7). How passionately do they beg for a glimpse, for a token for good (Psalm lxxxvi. 17). Nothing goeth so near their hearts as when the Lord hideth himself from their prayers: "I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent" (Psalm xxii. 2); "I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me; I stand up, and thou regardest me not" (Job xxx. 20). A dumb oracle is a great trouble. They make a business of prayer; therefore it is very grievous to have no answer, not to see their signs, to have no token for good. The church taketh it bitterly to heart: "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through" (Lam. iii. 44); that cloud is his wrath, by reason of sin. Now, to have no affection this way, argueth a stupid, sottish spirit. These are two reasons of the point.

Thirdly, If we do not look after God's answer, our loss is exceeding

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

2. You lose encouragement to love and thank him. Nothing so much increaseth our love to God, as when we see that he is mindful of us, upon all occasions, especially in our deepest need: "I will be the Lord, because he hath heard my voice, and my supplications." Psalm cxvi. 1. Every experience in this kind, is not without reason to increase the fire.

3. We lose encouraging hints to pray again: "Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call by a kinship tongue." Psalm cxvi. 2. The throne of grace had not been polluted and unapproached by me; I see there is mercy to be had, help to be had. One adventure succeeding, encourages thee, when "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee." Psalm cxliii. 9; because David had such ready audience and dispatch.

4. You lose the benefit of sensible communion with God. Taking communion for familiarity, it hath in derivatives and desires, prayers and blessings; and there is a commerce betwixt the heavens and the earth, by vapours and showers. Prayers go up, and blessings come down; as it was told Cornelius, "Thy prayers and thine alms come up for a memorial before God" [Acts x. 4]; and down come the blessings upon us.

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

USE I.—Is to reprove them that throw away their prayers, and never look after them; that play with such a duty as this, as children that shoot away their arrows, and never look where they light. Surely this argueth great contempt and low thoughts of God, formality in prayer, and stupidity of heart. It bespeaks low thoughts of God and of his providence; for, if they did believe such a particular providence reacheth to all persons and things, they would study to produce some of these experiences, to be able to say, 'I was in such a strait, and God delivered me.' "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him" (Psalm xxxiv. 6). Great formality in prayer; for, if we pray not out of course, but in good earnest, we cannot but hearken after the speeding of our requests. Great stupidity of

spirit : hearts that have any sense of life in them, are observing God's dealings, and suit their carriage accordingly : lively Christians are putting cases.

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

1. Be persuaded that God will hear you and answer you, when you pray according to his will : "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John v. 14). This is absolutely necessary for all that will pray aright and mind what they do ; for none can come to God aright, but those that are persuaded they shall be the better for coming to him : "Ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James i. 6). There must be a relying upon God, if indeed we pray to him. He that expects little in prayer, will neither be much in it, nor serious about the answer of it.

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

3. Sometimes God giveth an answer presently : sometimes it may be after some competent space of time.

(1.) Sometimes presently ; as Cornelius, in the time of prayer, and while the duty is a-doing, God giveth in some tokens of acceptance ; as an angel was sent to Cornelius, at the ninth hour, which was the hour of prayer, to assure him his prayers were heard and duties accepted (Acts x. 3) : "Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour" (Acts iii. 1). So Daniel, "While I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin, &c., yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, &c., being caused to fly swiftly." The Lord is ready to answer the prayers of his servants in the very instant of their praying. So, while they prayed, "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts iv. 3). The cases brought are singular and extraordinary, as to the token and manner of assistance ; but, as to the substance of the blessing, it is the common practice of God's free grace : "Before they call, I will answer ; and, while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isa. lxxv. 24). A company was met together in prayer, when Peter in prison heard of the time of his deliverance (Acts xii. 12—18).

(2.) Sometimes a good while after. The prayers are in God's book (Mal. iii. 16). Now, these must be waited for : "My God will hear me" (Mic. vii. 7). We cannot say as soon as the prayer is made ; for he saith,

“I will wait for the God of my salvation.” Paul prayed thrice for the removal of the messenger of Satan; then God said, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. xii. 9). We must knock again and again; God heareth as soon as the prayer is made; but he taketh his own time to dispatch an answer. Abraham prayeth for a child; but many years pass over till he hath him in his arms.

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

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

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

(2.) Ordinary; and this several ways.

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

(ii.) By giving in spiritual manifestations to the soul, though he doth not give the particular mercy prayed for; as when, upon the prayer, he reviveth the soul of him that prayeth: “He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him; and he shall see his face with joy” (Job xxxiii. 26). The Lord giveth them the light of his countenance, and special discoveries of his love, or support till the mercy come: “In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul” (Psalm cxxxviii. 3). Support is an answer, such an answer had Paul: “My grace is sufficient for thee.” Or when the heart is quieted, though we do not know what God will do with our requests, yet satisfied in the discharge of our duty, and that we have commended the matter to God. So it is said of Hannah, when she had prayed, “Her countenance was no more sad” (1 Sam. i. 18). And, “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. iv. 6, 7). Sometimes by a secret impression of confidence, or a strong inclination to hope well of the thing prayed for: “The Lord hath heard the voice of my praying” (Psalm vi. 8). Or experiences, as they

that travelled to Jerusalem, passing through the valley Baca, they met with a well by the way (Psalm lxxxiv. 6); a sweet refreshing thought, or some help in the spiritual life, by serious dealing with God; some consideration to set you awork, or some new engagement of the soul to God, as a recompence of the duty; some principles of faith drawn forth in the view of conscience, not showed before. Some truth or other presented with fresh life and vigour upon the heart.

(iii.) Sometimes by way of commutation and exchange; and so God doth answer the prayer, though he doth not give the mercy prayed for. When he giveth another thing that is as good, or better, for the party that prayeth; though not in kind the same, yet in worth and value as good. This commutation may be three ways. First, in regard of the person praying. David fasts, and humbleth, and melteth his soul for his persecutors; and it returned into his own bosom (Psalm xxxv. 13), was converted to his own benefit: his fasting had no effect upon them; but his charity did not lose its reward. David prayeth for his first child by Bathsheba, but that child dieth, and God giveth Solomon instead thereof (2 Sam. xii. 15). Noah, Daniel, Job, shall save their own souls (Ezek. xiv. 14). Your peace shall return to you again (Luke x. 5, 6), the comfort of discharging their duty. Secondly, in regard of the manner. Carnal things are begged, and spiritual things are given. The apostles asked him, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?" (Acts i. 6.) They did not receive the kingdom to Israel, but received the promise of the Spirit. Moses would fain enter into Canaan with the people; and God said, "Let it suffice thee, speak no more unto me of this matter" (Deut. iii. 23—26); but God gave him a Pisgah sight, and ease of the trouble of wars. We would have speedy riddance of trouble, but God thinketh not fit; as showers that come by drops, soak into the earth better than those that come in a tempest and hurricane. We ask for ease in troubles, and God will give courage under troubles: "I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice; hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not" (Lam. iii. 55—57). His gracious and powerful presence in trouble was enough. Christ "was heard in that he feared" (Heb. v. 7); not saved from that hour, but supported and strengthened in it. Job sacrificed, prayed for his children when they were feasting (Job i. 5); and, though they were all destroyed, God gave him patience; for, in all that befel him, he "sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (verse 22). Thirdly, in regard of means. We pray such means may not miscarry, God will use other; as Abraham would fain have Ishmael the child of the promise, but God intended Isaac: "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee!" (Gen. xvii. 18.) Thus doth God often blast instruments we most expect good from, and maketh use of others to be instruments for our good which we did least expect it from. God may give us our will in anger, when the mercy turneth to our hurt. Therefore the kind of God's answer must be referred to his own will; in all things for which we are not to pray absolutely, and when we have discharged our duty, endeavoured to approve our hearts to God, take what answer he will give.

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

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

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

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

USE.—This exhorteth us to look more after the manner of praying. An earnest and sincere prayer cannot miscarry; judge by this, and you cannot want success. You cannot judge of your prayers by the wit, by the length, by the kind of words; but by the faith, the sincerity, the obedience, the holy desires expressed in them. Cry with your whole hearts, and God will hear you.

1. Look to the fervency of the prayer, set yourselves in good earnest to seek God, and good will come of it: "I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications" (Dan. ix. 3); I seriously minded the work: "Therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee" (2 Sam. vii. 27); he found his heart disposed to call upon God; there is many a prayer we force upon ourselves, we do not find it there. What encouragements from the word, what motions from the Spirit! Resolve to seek after it, till you have found it: "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek" (Psalm xxvii. 8). Wrestle with God: "He had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him" (Hos. xii. 4). Such as wrestle with God, and have their hearts broken and melted before the Lord, will prevail.

2. Look to the sincerity of your prayers; see that you do not feign and pretend to pray for a thing you desire not: is your confidence wholly in the Lord? When your heart is divided, and you hanker after carnal lusts, you cannot pray aright.

3. Look that you ask more for his glory than for your own ease: "Ye ask, and receive not; because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James iv. 3). The less by-ends in prayer, the more hope of success.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON CLXIV.

VERSE 146.—*I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.*

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

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

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

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

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

In the words observe,—

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

2. The matter of his prayer, "Save me," or deliver me, out of trouble.

3. The end and scope of his prayer; not for the satisfaction of his

natural desire, but that he might have a heart and opportunity to serve God, and obey his word: 'That I may, or then "I shall keep thy testimonies."

Observations from the text :—

DOCTRINE I.—We should not lightly give over our suits to God.

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

Now, the reasons are,—

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

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

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

2. It is more thankfully improved. This follows upon the former, and may be further made good, because, when we know the difficulty of getting a blessing, we will not easily part with it; as they that get an estate are

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

3rdly, Things often and earnestly asked of God, come with the greater fullness of blessing when they come; and so (as one saith) God payeth them use for forbearance: the mercy is the more ample; and so every prayer hath its reward. Christ denieth the woman of Canaan long, but at length yieldeth up himself to her importunity: "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matt. xv. 28): she lost nothing by the delay. Hannah was long without a child; but at length the child proved the more eminent; she gets both a child and a Prophet too. Let God alone, and do you continue praying; and he will recompense you abundantly for all his delay. Peter was in prison, and the church made prayers "without ceasing" (Acts xii. 5); and God doth not only bring him out, but bring him out with a miracle, so that "they were astonished" (verse 16). God delayed for a while, and seemed to refuse their prayers; but, when Herod was just about to bring him forth to execution, God brought him forth to deliverance. Every prayer is upon the file, and contributeth to make the mercy the more complete; it remaineth day and night before the Lord: "And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God, day and night" (1 Kings viii. 59); "Thy prayers and thy alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts x. 4).

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

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

2. There is weakness of faith to yield to the temptation, and to go off upon every repulse; yea, sometimes too, too plain unbelief and atheism, as if there were no mercy to be expected from God, or no good to be obtained by spiritual means. Faith is to believe what we see not. The woman of Canaan cometh to Christ; at first she gets a word from him, and afterwards his speech is more discouraging than his silence; she is put out of the compass of his commission: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" but still she is importunate; afterwards a rough answer: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs:" she turneth his rebuke into an encouragement; then, "O woman, great is thy faith" (Matt. xv. 22—28). Many times we pray for blessings, and the oracle is dumb and silent; though God love the suppliant, yet he will not seem to take notice of his desires; yea, the more they pray, the more they may go away with a sense of their unworthiness and revived guilt: yet the work of faith is to make an answer out of God's silence, a gracious answer out of his rebukes, and to increase our importunity the more.

3. Want of love to God, or coldness of love. It is the property of love to adhere to God, though we be not feasted with felt comforts and present benefits; yea, though he appear an enemy; for so will God try the affection and deportment of his children: "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name" (Isa. xxvi. 8); "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job xiii. 15). Not only when our affections are bribed: a child of God should love God for his judgments, as well as fear him for his mercies; as lime, the more water you sprinkle upon it, the more it burneth. It was a high expression of Bernard's affection to those that he took to be the people of God, *Alharebo vobis etiamsi velitis, etiamsi nolitis*; so should we adhere to God now. When you can only wait on him in the way of his mercies, not in the way of his judgments, your waiting and praying is discouraged upon every difficulty and disappointment, you have little love to him.

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

USE.—Reproof to two sorts.

1. To those that cease praying or crying to God, if they have not a present answer, especially if they meet with a contrary rebuke in the course of his providence. You must cry, and cry again, not imagine that God will be at your beck; but foolish men suddenly conclude, "It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" (Mal. iii. 14.) Oh! no; consider something is due to the sovereignty of God, that we should wait his leisure; for he is supreme, and will govern the world

according to his own will, not ours. And therefore we must stay his time for the mercies we expect: "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert" (Psalm cvi. 13, 14). And something is due to the stated course of his providence; we cannot expect that God should turn all things upsidedown for our sakes, and invert the beautiful order of his dispensations: "Shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of his place?" (Job xviii. 4.) Shall God alter the course of nature, or change the order of governing the world, for us, or to please our humour? Something is due for the present estate of mankind, who are not to live by sense, but by faith: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, and it will not tarry. Behold, his soul, which is lifted up, is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith" (Hab. ii. 3, 4). And that appointed time is for our trial, to see if we, out of duty and principles of faith, can keep up our respects unto God, though his providence doth not presently gratify our desires or satisfy our necessities. Besides, it concerneth us to suspect ourselves, rather than to blemish God's dispensations: those always complain most of God's not hearing prayer, who least deserve to be heard: "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness. Ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?" (Isa. lviii. 3—5.)

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

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

(2.) A seeming repulse or denial should make us more vehement: as blind Bartimeus, the more they rebuked him, he cried so much the more (Mark x. 48). God suffereth the faith of his servants to be tried with great discouragements; but the more it is opposed, the more should it grow, and the more powerfully and effectually should it work in our hearts; as the palm-tree shooteth up the faster, the more weight is hung upon it; or as fire, the more it is pent up, the more it striveth to break out: there-

fore we should not only have fresh affections at first, but in every new prayer we should act over our faith again, and put forth spiritual desires anew.

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

4. We must not only continue praying, when Christ seemeth to neglect us, or to give no answer, but when he giveth a contrary answer; when he (to appearance) rejecteth our persons and prayers, and seemeth to forbid us to pray. Sometimes he seemeth to neglect us, and pass us by, as if he took no notice; but yet he heareth when he doth not answer; yea, his not answering is an answer; pray, or continue your prayer. It is said, "He saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them; and, about the fourth watch of the night, he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them" (Mark vi. 48); but yet he came with an intent to appease the storm and help them. Christ taketh notice of the distresses of his people; but they shall not know so much, but he delayeth to help till all their patience be spent, and yet then seemeth to pass by, for their thorough trial and exercise, and to move them more earnestly to pray. Sometimes he giveth them a seeming contrary answer and rebuke; instead of an expression of favour, he seemeth to pursue us in anger. God is the main party against us; we have to do with an offended God: but yet we should not quit him, but follow him when he seemeth to forsake us, and fly to him when he is pursuing us in hot displeasure. Such is the admirable power of faith that it dares call on an angry God, and follow him when he goeth away from us, and lay hold on him when he smiteth, and cast itself into his arms in the midst of his rebukes and frowns: "Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I look again toward thy holy temple" (Jonah ii. 4). God seemeth to cast us off, as those he will not favour or care for, which is a great trouble to a child of God, who liveth by his favour, and valueth that above all things else. Now, for such a one to be rejected by God in his own sense and feeling, it goeth near his heart; yet, in such a case, we should not cast away our confidence, nor give over all addresses to God, but yet look to him and wait upon him.

5. Whether God answereth or no, it is the duty of faith to answer itself. The answer of his providence is not so sure as the answer of his word, and that faith hath to do with. See Psalm vi. 4, "Return, O Lord, deliver my soul; oh! save me, for thy mercies' sake." Compare verses 8, 9: "The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping; the Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer." When trembling for fear of wrath, yet in prayer his heart groweth confident as if it had received news of an answer from Heaven: "Attend unto me, and hear me" (Psalm lv. 2); compared with verse 19, "God shall hear, and afflict them." He is confident of it, that the prayer should not miscarry: so, "Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God; defend me from them that rise up against me; deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody

men" (Psalm lix. 1, 2); "The God of my mercy shall prevent me; God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies" (verse 10). Faith sees its own deliverance in the promise and all-sufficiency of God: when we have prayed according to God's will, we should take our prayer for granted, and leave it lying at God's feet: "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John v. 14). God's delay is not always an argument of his hatred, but some more glorious purpose, which is to be helped on by prayer: "When he had heard, therefore, that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was" (John xi. 6).

I observe again that he not only repeateth his prayer, but reneweth the promise of obedience; to show that it was no vanishing notion, but a settled conclusion. As Christ maketh Peter profess his love thrice to engage him the more (John xxi), so David, "I will keep thy statutes;" and again, "I shall keep thy testimonies;" as if he had said, 'Indeed, Lord, I will; it is the settled purpose of my heart to return to thee in the sincere obedience of my whole life.' The note is,—

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

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

2ndly, Because the nature of the work calleth for advertency and seriousness; because it is a work of the greatest moment, and so must be done with the greatest deliberation. This devoting ourselves to God both entitleth us to all the comforts of Christianity, and engageth us to all the

duties of it. It entitles us to all the comforts; you enter yourselves heirs to the covenant of grace, when you enter into the bond of the holy oath, or give your hand to the Lord to be his people: "All things are yours," because "ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 22, 23). If you have owned Christ as your dearest Saviour and sovereign Lord, with love, thankfulness, and subjection, and given him the supreme command of your souls, then you are Christ's, and God is yours, and all things yours: glory and salvation shall be yours in the world to come; grace, help, maintenance, ordinances, and providences, shall be yours in the present world; and death, as the connection between the two worlds, as the passage out of the one into the other, shall be yours also. It is also the beginning and foundation of all obedience; and, if this were once seriously and heartily done, other things would succeed the more easily. He that is indeed God's, will use himself for God's glory and service; and God shall have a share in all that he hath and doth: "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. xiv. 7, 8). They came off so freely: "And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God" (2 Cor. viii. 5). This enliveneth our whole work; it is no hard matter to persuade them that have given up themselves to God, to part with anything for God's use.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. The vehemency, “I cried.”

2. The object or person to whom, “To thee.”

“I cried;” David keepeth up his fervour. What crying in prayer is, I have shown in the former verse; I shall observe now,—

DOCTRINE III.—That great trouble and sense of danger puts an edge upon prayer, and kindleth our affection in it.

When Israel was under sore bondage, God saith, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry” (Exod. iii. 7). Afflictions make us cry in prayer, not only speak. An ordinary affection is *vox orationis*, it speaketh to God in prayer; but a vehement affection is *clamor orationis*, the cry of prayer. Ordinary prayers speak to God; but earnest prayers cry to God: and, though remiss and cold wishes vanish in the air, yet strong cries pierce the heavens. They have a shrill accent, and cannot be kept out from God: “The children of Israel cried unto the Lord; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron” (Judg. iv. 3). So Judg. vi. 7, they cried to the Lord because of the Midianites, who came up as grasshoppers. David, “In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears” (Psalm xviii. 6). He prayed not seldom, but often and frequently; not slackly, but with fervency and earnestness.

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

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

USE I.—Be content to be cast into such an estate, that you may learn to pray: for, alas! we are but cursory at other times; but then, our necessities whip us to the throne of grace, that was set up for a time of need. Then is a time to put promises in suit, to make use of our interest in God. We misexpound the voice of God’s providence; we expound troubles to be his casting off, putting us from him; they are his voice calling, his hand pulling us to him: it is a time of drawing nigh, we are allowed: “Call upon me in the day of trouble” (Psalm l. 15). The day of trouble is the

fruit of sin, a part of the old curse; when we think him, feel him an enemy, he is drawing us nearer to him. Blessed season to bring God and you together! When our troubles chase us to the throne of grace, God is not wholly gone; he hath left somewhat behind him to draw us to himself.

USE II.—It reproveth them that neglect God in their troubles: “All this evil is come upon us; yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God” (Dan. ix. 13). You defer the dispensation: now you should make up your former negligence; unprofitableness under the rod is an ill presage, when God sends a tempest after us. Oh! how frequent and earnest should we be in the practice of this duty!

1. This is a time proper for it. Prayer is a duty never out of season, though some seasons are proper and solemn to it. God is always to be prayed unto (Job xxvii. 10). When freed from trouble and inconvenience, we are not freed from prayer; still we must profess dependence, subjection, and maintain our communion; but this is a special season: “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray” (James v. 13).

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

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

From that, “Unto thee,”—

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

1. Because he is the author of our trouble. In mercies and afflictions, our business lieth not with men, but God; by humble dealing with him, we stop wrath at the fountain-head: he that bindeth us, must loose us; he is at the upper end of causes, and, whoever be the instruments of our trouble, and how malicious soever, God is the party with whom we are to make our peace; for he hath the absolute disposal of all creatures, and will have us to acknowledge the dominion of his providence and our dependence upon him. In treaties of peace between two warring parties, the address is not made to private soldiers, but to their chief: “The Lord hath taken away,” saith Job; “When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?” (xxxiv. 27.)

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

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

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

(2.) For his goodwill and readiness to hear: "O thou that hearest prayer! unto thee shall all flesh come" (Psalm lxxv. 2). The readiness of God to hear prayer, doth open a door of access to all people who are sensible of their burdens and necessities. He hath ever showed himself ready to hear the cries and groans of his people; and wo be to them against whom they cried! "They cried unto thee, and were delivered" (Psalm xxii. 5). Their cries and groans are not hid from him, and cannot be shut out: "Nevertheless, he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry" (Psalm cvi. 44).

USE I.—To reprove divers sorts.

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

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

USE II.—To inform us of the privilege and duty of the godly.

1. Their privilege; they have a God to go to. The worldly man sigheth and crieth, he knoweth not to whom; but the godly man presenteth himself in his lamentations to God: "My friends scorn me; but mine eye poureth out tears unto God" (Job xvi. 20). He hath a Father in secret, a friend in a corner. They need not go to men, nor to saints and angels; they have God himself, and can challenge him by his office, as the Judge of the world, to help poor creatures: "Lift up thyself, thou Judge of the earth; render a reward to the proud" (Psalm xciv. 2). Yea, by

his peculiar relation to them: "Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my king and my God; for unto thee will I pray" (Psalm v. 2). They do not cry unto him as a stranger, but one in covenant relation with them.

2. Their duty to make God their guardian and saviour in all their distress, when in their own sense they are near perishing: "Lord, save us; we perish" (Matt. viii. 25); "Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand; that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only" (2 Kings xix. 19). When they have a good cause and a good conscience, this they may do, and this they ought to do, and they will have comfort in it.

The last thing which I shall observe is,—

DOCTRINE V.—That prayer for deliverance should be accompanied with serious purposes of obedience. Then, saith David, "I shall keep thy testimonies."

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

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

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

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

self; for, whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. xiv. 7, 8). In every state, they would be unto God what they are when they seek to be delivered: it is that they may be in the better condition and capacity to serve God, and have more opportunities to glorify his name.

USE.—To persuade us to seek deliverance with these aims.

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

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

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

SERMON CLXV.

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

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

First, his vigilancy and diligence, "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried."

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

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

DOCTRINE.—Those that make a business of prayer, will use great vigilancy and diligence therein.

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

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

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

2. That it was an early morning prayer; "I prevented the dawning of the morning."

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

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

1. It was a personal or secret prayer, "I cried;" I alone, and without company. Our Saviour, that doth in Matt. xviii. 19, 20, encourage us to public prayer, by the blessed effect of such petitions, where two or three do agree to ask anything of God, in the name of Christ,—he doth suppose that his disciples will make conscience of personal and solitary prayer, and therefore giveth directions and encouragement about it: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which seeth in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matt. vi. 6). He taketh it for granted that every one of his disciples is sufficiently convinced of being often with God in private, and pouring out his heart to God alone. It is not *if*, but *when*, as supposing they will be careful of this; it is not plurally and collectively, when *ye* pray, but *ὅταν προσεύχῃ*, "when thou prayest." Elsewhere the context speaketh of public prayer, or the assemblies of saints, and of family worship; but here he speaketh of personal prayer. Church prayer hath a special blessing, when with a combined force we besiege Heaven, as the petition of a shire and county is more than a private man's supplication; but yet this is not without its blessing. God is with you in private; pray to thy Father in secret, and he that seeth in

secret, observeth the carriage and posture and frame of thy spirit; all thy fervour and uprightness of heart is known to him. That which is the hypocrite's fear, that God seeth in secret, is the saint's comfort, that God seeth in secret: it bindeth condemnation upon the thoughts of wicked men (1 John iii. 20), but is their support (John xxi. 17): "He that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 27). He knoweth the brokenness or unbrokenness of the heart, he can pick out the very language of thy sighs and groans; know where thou art, and how thou art employed: "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus; for behold he prayeth" (Acts ix. 11). In such a street, in such a house, in such a chamber of the house, there is one a-praying; a notable place to express God's seeing in secret, where we are, what we do, and how affected. And then his reward is another encouragement, he will reward thee openly; grant thee what thou prayest for, or bless thee for the conscionable performance of this duty. Openly, either by a sensible answer of thy prayers, as Dan. ix. 20—22, or with an evident blessing, as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the eyes of the world. God highly favoured them; a secret prayer hath an open blessing. Or in convincing the consciences of men: Pharaoh sendeth for Moses and Aaron when in distress; the consciences of wicked men are convinced that God's praying children have special audience with him; no magicians sent for them, but Moses and Aaron. Thus God may reward them openly: "Them that honour me, I will honour" (1 Sam. ii. 30); but chiefly at the day of judgment: "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (Luke xiv. 14). Then is the great reward of Christians, and most public: "Then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor. iv. 5). Thus you see how our Lord encourageth us to closet prayer; but let us see other arguments to engage us to this duty:—

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

2. The example of Christ, which beareth the force of a law in things moral. We read often of Christ's praying: "He went out, and departed into a solitary place; and there prayed" (Mark i. 35); and Matt. xiv. 23, and Luke vi. 12, we read, he prayed a whole night to God. Now, let us improve this instance. Christ had no such need of prayer as we have, the Godhead dwelt in him bodily; nor such need of retirement, his affections were always in frame; yet he went out from the company of his disciples to pray alone to God. This pattern is very engaging; for, if we have the Spirit of Christ, we shall do as Christ did; and very encouraging; for, by submitting to this duty, he sanctified it for all; his steps dropped fatness, and left a blessing and virtue behind him. And it assureth us of his sympathizing with us; he is acquainted with the heart of an earnest suppli-

cant; and it is some comfort against our imperfections, when we are with God and our hearts are as heavy as a log, it is a comfort to think of this particular part of his righteousness, by which our defects are covered.

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

4. I might urge you, too, from the practice of the saints, who are called God's supplicants (Zeph. iii. 9), the generation that seek him (Psalm xxiv. 6). They delight in God's company, and cannot be content to stay away long from him. Daniel had his three times a-day (Dan. vi. 10). So David, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice" (Psalm lv. 17); and, "Seven times a-day do I praise thee" (Psalm cxix. 164). And Cornelius prayed to God always (Acts x. 2); not only with his family, but sometimes alone, *for* his family. They that have a habit of prayer, will be thus affected. Now, to be altogether unlike the people of God, giveth just cause of suspicion.

5. Shall I add our own private necessities, which cannot be so feelingly spoken to by others, do challenge such a duty at our hands; or, it may be, are not so fit to be divulged and communicated to them: "There is the plague of our own hearts" (1 Kings viii. 38). Paul had his thorn in the flesh: "I besought the Lord thrice" (2 Cor. xii. 7). No nurse like the mother; none so fit feelingly to lay forth our case to God as ourselves: private prayer, it is a help to enlargement of heart; for the more earnest men are, the more they desire to be alone: "My soul shall weep in secret places" (Jer. xiii. 17). Christ went from his disciples in his agony, when he would pray more earnestly (Luke xxii. 41, 42). Strong affections are loth to be disturbed, and seek retirement: Jacob sent away his company when he wrestled with God (Gen. xxiii. 24). Oh, then, let all this be considered by you: if you neglect closet addresses to God, you wrong God and yourselves. You wrong God, because it is a necessary part of the creatures' homage to God; and you wrong yourselves, because such duties bring in a great deal of comfort and peace to the soul, and many sweet and gracious experiences, which are not vouchsafed elsewhere. Bernard saith, the church's spouse is bashful, and Christ will not communicate his loves in company. We are to use acquaintance with God, and so good shall come to us (Job xxii. 21). It argueth little friendship to God, when we seldom come at him, and maintain no personal commerce with him. When we pray with others, we cannot so well tell who is heard, as when we pray alone, and see what God will do for our souls: "I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplications" (Psalm cxvi. 1). You sought earnestly for such a thing, and the Lord heard you. To conclude all, a man will not pray with any savour and delight in public, that doth not pray in secret. I observe, in Ezekiel's vision, the Lord removed from the temple by degrees; first, from the holy place to the altar of burnt-offerings, then to the threshold of the house, then to the mountain on the

east side of the city, there it stood hovering as loth to be gone : so first God is cast out of the closet, private intercourses are neglected ; then out of the family, and then out of the congregation ; and then public ordinances are laid aside as useless ; then are men given up to a strange, giddy, and vertiginous spirit, and all manner of profaneness. As a tree dies by degrees, first bears not fruit, then no leaves, then no bark ; so carnal Christians die by degrees.

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

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

2. Because, whenever we have strong affections to anything, we make it our morning work, be it good or bad. Good : so Mary and Mary Magdalene came early to the sepulchre of Christ (Matt. xxviii.) ; the disciples, when they came to wait for the promise of the Spirit, they met betimes ; for the Holy Ghost fell upon them in the morning : “ For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day ” (Acts ii. 15) ; which was about nine of the clock ; and some good time had been spent before, as appears by this speech that was uttered. So Hosca v. 16, “ In their afflictions, they will seek me early.” This is their first and chiefest work ; that which urgeth the heart most, we shall think of in the morning. The objects that have made deepest impression upon our spirits, will present themselves before any images be received from abroad : “ Bind [my law] continually upon thy heart, &c. When thou goest, it shall lead thee,” &c. (Prov. vi. 21, 22.) Abraham, when he went about the work of offering his son Isaac, rose early in the morning (Gen. xxii.). So for bad things : if a man be worldly, his worldly desires and affections compel him to rise early for their satisfaction ; the drunkard is thinking early of his morning draught, to be filled with wine : “ Wo to them that

rise up early to follow strong drink" (Isa. v. 11). The people, when they were mad upon the calf, rose up early in the morning and offered burnt-offerings to it (Exod. xxxii. 6). Whatsoever hath secured its interest in the soul, will first urge us; so, if prayer be our chief pleasure, it will urge us to be up betimes with God: our delights and affections solicit us in the morning.

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

4. It is profitable to begin the day with God, and to season the heart with some gracious exercise; as David, "When I awake, I am still with thee" (Psalm cxxxix. 18). It sanctifieth all our other business, as the offering the first-fruits did sanctify the whole lump; and to whom should the first-fruits of our reason and sense restored, be consecrated, but to him that gave us all, and is the author and preserver of them? When the world gets the start of religion, it can hardly overtake it all the day: the first thoughts leave a powerful impression upon it: "Wo to them that despise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it" (Mic. ii. 1). With carnal men, sin beginneth in the morning, stayeth in the heart all day, playeth in the fancy all night; but, if you begin with God in the morning, you take God along with you all the day to your business and employment.

5. This will be some recompence for the time lost in sleeping. Half our lives are consumed in it, our time is parted between work and sleep. It is the misery and necessity we are subject unto, whilst we are in the body, that so much of our time should be spent without doing anything for God, or showing any act of love and thankfulness to him. None of the other creatures ever stand still, but are always executing and accomplishing the end for which they were made. And in Heaven the blessed spirits are always beholding the face of God, and lauding and blessing his name, and need not those intermissions which we bodily creatures do. Now, though this be our necessity, and so no sin, to need the refreshings of sleep, yet, because so much of our time is lost, by way of recompence the least that we should do, is to take the next season, and, if health and bodily constitution will permit, to prevent the dawning of the morning, and to be as early with God as we can. All the time we can well spare should

be given to God. Do but consider, since thou wentest to bed, the sun hath travelled many thousand miles to give thee light this morning; and therefore what a shame it is, that the sun, being continually in so swift motion, should return and find thee turning and tossing in thy bed, like a door upon the hinges (Prov. xx. 14), after nature is satisfied with sleep; and that thou shouldst not rise, and own God's mercy in the rest of the night, and sanctify the labours of the day, by some serious address to him. This meditation is enforced by Augustine, *Indecus est Christiano, si radius solis eum inveniat in lecto; posset enim dicere sol, si potestatem loquendi haberet, Amplius laboravi heri quam tu, et tamen, cum jam surrexerim, tu adhuc dormis.* So Ambrose on this text, *Grave est si te otiosum radius solis orientis in verecundo pudore conveniat, et lux clara inveniat oculos somnolento adhuc corpore depressos.*

III. It was a vehement and earnest prayer; for saith David, "I cried:" observe,—

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

1. Earnest, though private. In our addresses to God, we must be serious; whether men see or hear or no, God seeth and heareth. A hypocrite hath a great flash of gifts in company, but is strait when alone; but God's children are most earnest in private, when they do more particularly open their hearts to God, without taking in the necessities of others. Christ when he was withdrawn from his disciples, then he prayed *ἐκτενέστερον*, more earnestly (Luke xxii. 44). Jacob sent away his company, to deal with God in good earnest, and then wrestled with him. *Ille dolet vere qui sine teste dolet*: Peter went out and wept bitterly; so a Christian trieth it out between God and him, when he hath a mind to plead for his own soul, or for the church; therefore hath no outward reason to move him but conscience and spiritual affection. The Pharisees would pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets; but Christ saith, Go into thy closet, and shut the door, and pray to thy Father in secret (Matt. vi. 6). This is the love and confidence we express to our Father in secret. A man may put forth himself with great warmth and vigour before others, that is slight and careless in secret addresses to God. In these secret intercourses, we most taste our spirits, and discern the pure workings of affection towards God. A woman that only bemoaneth the loss of her husband in company, but banisheth all thoughts of him when alone, might justly be suspected to act a tragical part, and to pretend sorrow rather than feel it. Some will pray in secret, but customarily utter a few cold words; but David saith, "I cried." Remember there is one seeth in secret; as Christ saith, "I am not alone" (John xvi. 32). And he is a God of great majesty (Mal. i. 14); he will not be put off with anything, with a short good-morrow or a hasty sigh. Consider, if you pray in good earnest, the prayer will not be lost; there is a register kept in Heaven: "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts x. 4). Surely a man that believeth and consulteth these things, dareth not be slight, though there be none present but God and his own soul.

2. It was earnest, though the answer was delayed: "I cried;" "I cried:" "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried." The Lord cannot away with cold asking, and a ceasing upon every repulse; you must continue to pray, when God continueth to deny; otherwise, you do not pray in faith; for, when the word warrants you to pray, either by way

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

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

1. That David had his times of converse with God.

2. That, rather than fail of them, he would take them from his sleep.

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

In the general, it is good to dedicate a certain part and portion of our time to the Lord of time. Idle servants must be tasked, and required to bring in their tale of bricks. A prudent allotment, such as is consistent

with your occasions and course of life, would be no burden to you; I am sure it will make your duties more seasonable and orderly. It is an expression of love to give him somewhat that is your own, in the general. We are not tied to the seasons of eating and drinking, yet, for convenience, we have our stated hours; the most necessary work should have a turn, and not be taken up by chance, and not left to a mere haphazard. It will make you more careful and watchful, how you spend your other hours, that you may not be unfit for duty when your time of worship cometh (1 Pet. iii. 7).

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

2. Rather than fail, he would take it from his sleep. Other business must give way to the great work and interest; especially the most inconsiderable interests of recreation. We are bidden to redeem time (Eph. v. 16), rescue it from meat, sleep, company, and recreation. Surely this is an equitable proposal, let God have as much time every day as thou spendest unprofitably: do but observe the spending of thy time, and be ashamed that God should have such a little share.

USE.—Now, you see David's instance, let this persuade you to this assiduity and diligence, to be ardent and instant in prayer, taking hold of all opportunities to pursue after God, without whom you cannot live; "Your heart shall live that seek God" (Psalm lxxix. 32). We cannot preserve any vitality without this. To press this,—

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

Let me lay this before you. You should be betimes with God, that you may not encroach upon your other occasions; yea, that you may sanctify your other occasions, and be the fitter for it all the day after. Let not the soft enemy of sleep steal away your golden hours, and the flower and choicest part of time. A Christian that makes conscience of his time, should not inure himself to a sluggish course, and turn in his bed, like a door upon the hinges; if your constitution will bear it; otherwise, we lay no blame upon you. The Scriptures have many dissuasives from immoderate sleep (Prov. v. 9; xiii. 4; xxvi. 14; vi. 6). To be sure, a Christian is to make conscience of time, and how he spendeth it; and we may sin and surfeit in sleeping, as well as in eating and drinking; and there-

fore we must watch against the encroachments of ease and sloth, lest a sluggish humour grow natural to us, and a morbid custom that cannot be shaken off.

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

4. Be sure that God hath his share. If business take up more time than prayer, because of the urgency of bodily necessities, yet, ordinarily, a man should not spend more time in any pastime and recreations than in religious exercises. It is most equal we should first seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof (Matt. vi. 33). The most needful duty should have most time bestowed upon it: it is an ill character to be lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God (2 Tim. iii. 4). It is reasonable to give an equal time to God and religion as to sports and delights. Most men have no other thing to do than to eat, drink, and sleep; if they should compare their religion and their recreations, they would soon see what a large share of time one hath above the other.

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

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

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

1st, From the word of God; which serveth for two uses, invitation and assurance.

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

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

2ndly, From the nature of hope, which implieth two things, both which

have an influence upon prayer; earnest expectation, and patient tarrying the Lord's leisure.

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

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

Use.—You see how we pray: the occasion of prayer is necessity; our necessities lead us to the promise; that inviteth us, and giveth us assurance, and yields matter for faith and hope; that puts us upon looking and waiting, these two make us pray. When we can join *patientiam spei cum ardore desiderii*; the earnestness of expectation, that keepeth us from sloth or negligence in the use of the means, or excites us to call upon God; and patience, that keeps us from fainting or discouragement: hence cometh that earnest diligence, and constant, unceasing importunity, so as to give God no rest. The belief of God's promises does not make us neglect means, but to be more diligent in the use of them.

SERMON CLXVI.

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

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

In the words we have—

First, an account of his vigilancy and diligence, "Mine eyes prevent the night watches."

Secondly, the duty wherein he was exercised, "That I might meditate in thy word."

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

1. What is meant by "night watches?" Drusius telleth us, that the night among the Hebrews was divided into three watches; the first watch was called the head or beginning of the watches: "Arise, cry out in the night; in the beginning of the watches, pour out thine heart like water before the Lord" (Lamentations ii. 19). The second was called the middle watch. Gideon "came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch" (Judges vii. 19). The third and last was called the morning watch: "In the morning watch, the Lord, &c., troubled the host of the Egyptians" (Exod. xiv. 24). This was the first division of the night among the Hebrews into three watches; but it seemeth afterwards, when they were acquainted with the Romans, they had four watches; as, "In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went unto them, walking on the

sea" (Matt. xiv. 25). For every three hours they had a new watch; and, according to this latter division, they were called, the evening, and the midnight, and the cock-crowing, and the dawning (Mark xiii. 35). Now, whether we reckon by the first or second division, it cannot be imagined that David should be wholly without sleep. Rabbi David Kimchi thinketh he gave the first watch to sleep, and the other two to the meditation of the word, and that he did this often when the nights were long. I think it is meant of the third and last watch; and so it agreeth with the dawning of the morning, mentioned in the former verse; and this watch, which is called the morning watch, did David prevent, getting up early to entertain himself with delightful meditations on the word of God. The Septuagint reads it, early in the morning.

2. What is meant by preventing the night watches? Either that he was more careful to awake at several times of the night to meditate on God's word, than they to keep their watches who were appointed thereunto; or that he did not need to be called upon by them; for the watchmen were wont to tell them the seasons and watches of the night. But he needed not that help, his own desires and delights awakened him; so that, in effect, he saith, when others are so fast asleep that either they do not wake in the night, or, if they do, it is because they are interrupted in their sleep by the noises of the watch or guard; but I need no such excitation; "for mine eyes prevent the night watches;" sleep flyeth from them of its own accord, that my mind may be delighted with the meditation of God's word. The points are,—

First, from the duty wherein David was exercised.

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

Secondly, from the season; his eyes prevented the night watches.

DOCTRINE.—A gracious heart will take all occasions to set itself awork on holy things, and sometimes in the night.

Thirdly, from the condition wherein he was; in some distress: for he saith, Save me; and his prayers not yet heard, I cried, I cried, I cried.

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

The first will give us occasion to speak of the duty of meditation, and the necessity and profit of it.

1st, What the duty of meditation is, see Sermon upon the 15th verse of this psalm.

2ndly, It is a necessary duty because it is recommended to us by God, among other things enjoined in his word. He complaineth of the neglect of it: "Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isa i. 3); they will not think upon God, nor consider what great things he hath done for them. It is recommended to us in the practice of the saints, they sometimes meditate upon God: "I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches" (Psalm lxxiii. 6). When David could not sleep, and had his night's rest broken, his thoughts ran upon God presently. Sometimes upon the works of God: "I meditate on all thy works, I muse on the work of thine hands" (Psalm cxliii. 5); on his creation and providence. Sometimes on the word of God, either that part which sets forth their duty: "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm i. 2). To make the Christian's life more orderly and comely, the Apostle commands us to "think on these

things" (Phil. iv. 8). Sometimes on the promises and grounds of faith, for the support of their souls in a fainting time, as in the text; especially that part of the word which is brought unto them by the providence of God; and so we meditate upon what we read and hear: "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke ii. 19). We ponder things, when we consider the weight and moment of them, that our hearts may be affected with them. So Moses, "And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day" (Deut. xxxii. 46). Let these sayings sink down into your ears" (Luke ix. 41); be seriously considered and thought of by you, not be lost or vanish into the air, or stay in the brain.

3rdly, It is a profitable duty; it is a help,—

1. To our natural faculties.
2. To our graces.
3. To our duties.

1. To our natural faculties, to our memories. We complain of weak memories; but we do not take a right course to cure them. Good things slip from us, as water doth through a sieve; and why? Because we do not weigh them, and meditate upon them by deep and serious thought. Truths would stay with us longer, if we did oftener think on them. So many a conviction is lost: "For, if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was" (James i. 23, 24). Many a comfort is lost by neglect: "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children" (Heb. xii. 5). A weak impression is soon defaced. Many a pressing motion is lost for want of a little diligence to fasten it upon the heart: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Heb. ii. 1). Meditation and serious consideration fastens a truth upon the mind and memory. Deliberate thoughts stick by us, as a lesson well conned is not easily forgotten. Civet long kept in a box, the scent remaineth when the civet is taken out; sermons meditated upon, are remembered long after they are delivered. So for understanding; we have weak understandings, slow to conceive of anything that is spiritual and heavenly. Why? Because we are so little exercised in the study and contemplation of these things: whereas our judgments would ripen, and we should grow more skilful in the word of righteousness, if we did often meditate on it: "I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation" (Psalm cxix. 99). We see things *in transitu*, and know them only by hearsay, without meditation. To move the will, we had need deal seriously with our own hearts, ere we can gain them to a consent. Thoughts are the spokesmen that make up the match between the soul and the temptation: they were given for the like office in good things, they are the first acts of the soul to set awork all the rest. Things lie by, till we take them into our thoughts and consideration at leisure, that we may know what is their tendency, and how they concern us. You cannot imagine the Gospel should work as a charm, and convert us we know not how, before consent and choice. There is a proponning and debating of terms; the greatest matters will not work on him that doth not think of them: God, and Christ, and Heaven, and salvation, are looked upon in a cold and remiss manner, without this serious consideration. And to excite, and

quicken, and stir our affections, meditation is useful. We complain of deadness, and we ourselves are the cause, because we do not rouse up ourselves, excite and compel ourselves, expostulate with ourselves: "And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee" (Isa. lxiv. 7). Man hath a power to whet truths upon his own heart; and, if we will not make use of it, and reason for God with ourselves, we are justly left under the power of deadness and stupidity of spirit.

2. It is a great help to our graces. (1.) Faith takes root by meditation. Matt. xiii. 5, the seed forthwith sprang up, because it had no deepness of earth. A careless, slight heart is no fit soil for faith to grow in. (2.) Hope is made lively by consideration of the thing hoped for. (3.) Charity is inflamed by the sight and frequent view of Divine objects in their beauty and amiableness.

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

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

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

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

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

4. What a likely means meditation is to do you good! I know it is the Lord inclineth the heart, and our thoughts work no further than God is in them; yea, he giveth us to think (2 Cor. iii. 5). But, as it is our duty, so it is a very proper means to improve our graces and our comfort; for a constant, steady, continued view of truth, surely will work more than a

glance. A transient view cannot leave such an impression upon us as a steady view. We taste things better when they are chewed than when they are swallowed whole. Meditation goeth over things again and again, and pryeth into every part. And as it is a constant light, so it is an argumentative consideration of things. When one scale is not heavy enough, we put in weight after weight till we gain our point, bring off the heart from such a vanity, engage it to such a pursuit by our own arguings with ourselves: "A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth" (Prov. xii. 14); "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts xvii. 11, 12). Therefore many believed, because they had searched with all readiness of mind.

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

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

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

First, I shall prove this argueth a gracious frame of spirit.

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

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

1. Plenty of Divine knowledge; the heart is well stocked, and can entertain itself without help from abroad: "I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel, my reins also instruct me in the night seasons" (Psalm xvi. 7). He had laid up a great deal of truth in his reins or inward parts; and, when sleep fled from his eyes, out it came. So, "Bind them continually

upon thy heart, and tie them about thy neck" (Prov. vi. 21); to be always ready and present with us. It is an excellent thing to have a good treasure in our hearts: "A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things" (Matt. xii. 35). Many a man's heart is stuffed with vanity; and then he is vain in his thoughts, and vain in his discourses, and vain in his actions; yea, the word of God doth not dwell in him richly (Col. iii. 16). Then your thoughts are very scant and barren, as he that hath more brass farthings in his pocket than gold or silver, will more easily pull them out at every turn. Our leanness of soul and difficulty to meditate cometh from the want of a stock of knowledge.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. If we wake in the night and our rest is broken off, then to exercise ourselves in holy thoughts. Many times it falleth out that we cannot

sleep; now, we should spend the time in meditation and prayer, not in vain thoughts, or entertaining ourselves with carnal musings, or perplexing and anxious thoughts about the troubles that we are under.

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

DOCTRINE III.—That meditation on the promises is very seasonable when the answer of our prayers is denied.

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

SERMON CLXVII.

VERSE 149.—*Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness; O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment.*

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

1st, His prayer is double: 1. General for audience, "Hear my voice." 2. Particular for quickening, "Quicken me."

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

DOCTRINE I.—One blessing which the children of God do see a need often and earnestly to ask of God, is quickening. David ever and anon reneweth his request, and he is loth to be denied; and therefore, before he saith, "Quicken me," he saith, "Hear my voice."

DOCTRINE II.—The main argument which God's children have to plead in prayer, is his own favour and lovingkindness. That is David's argument in the text, "Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness."

DOCTRINE III.—The mercy and lovingkindness of God manifested and impledged in the promises of the Gospel, doth notably encourage us to ask help from him. For David doth not only say "according unto thy lovingkindness," but "according to thy judgment."

For the first point, one blessing which the children of God do see a need often and earnestly to ask of God, is quickening. Here I shall inquire, 1. What is quickening? 2. Give you some reasons why the children of God do see a need so often and earnestly to ask it of God.

First, What is quickening?

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Expect his grace in and through Jesus Christ, who came down from Heaven for this end: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John x. 10). That was his end in coming into the world, to procure life for his people; and not only bare life, but liveliness and comfort; yea, glory hereafter. He died to purchase it for us: "This is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world" (John vi. 51). His incarnation and taking on him our nature, is the channel and conduit through which the quickening virtue that is in the Godhead is conveyed to us. And his offering up himself in that nature by his eternal

Spirit, doth purchase and merit the application and annunciation of this his quickening virtue to our souls, and prepareth him to be fit meat for souls. That same flesh and human nature of Christ that is offered up a ransom to justice, is also the bread of life for souls to feed upon. Souls are fed with meditations upon his death and sufferings; the bread which he giveth by way of application is his flesh, which he gave by way of ransom; every renewed act of faith draweth an increase of life from him.

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

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

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

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

(2.) Appetite after Christ, his graces and comforts (1 Peter ii. 2). The more life any have, the more craving of food to maintain it in being; they

are always hungering and thirsting after God (Matt. v. 6). Our appetite will be after the things that conduce to the maintaining and preserving that being which we have. If a man lose his appetite, the body pineth and languisheth, and strength decayeth; desire prepareth the soul to take in its supplies. Your life is in good plight when that is desired, τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα: and it will be a means of spiritual growth, a kindly appetite after this milk. They are under a great decay who have lost their appetite after the Gospel.

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

Secondly, The reasons why, &c.

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

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

(1.) Because of the instability and changeable frame of man's heart. It hardly stayeth long in the same state; now it is up, and anon it is down, as the constant experience of the saints witnesseth. Sometimes they have a forwardness and strong propension of heart to that which is good; at other times, a lothness and dulness or unfitness to perform any spiritual service, when their will is more remiss and their affections unbent. It is not indeed the constant frame of their hearts, yet it is a disease incident to the saints; even good men may feel a slowness of heart to comply with the will of God and some hanging off from duty. *Spontaneæ lassitudines sunt signa imminentis morbi*; so is this laziness and backwardness of spirit a sign of some great spiritual distemper. Sometimes they are carried with great largeness of heart, and full sail of affections; at other times, they are in bonds and straits, that they cannot pour out their hearts before God:

"I am so troubled that I cannot speak" (Psalm lxxvii. 4). Sometimes they have great life and vigour; at other times, no such lively stirrings, but are flat, and cold, and dead. When, with Samson, they think to go forth and shake themselves as at other times (Judges xvi. 20), by sad experience they find that their locks are gone, that their understandings are lean, sapless, and their affections cold, and their delight and vigour lost. Man is a sinful, weak, inconstant creature; his heart is unstable as water; and much of this levity and instability remaineth with us after grace, as is seen in the various postures of spirit that we are under.

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

(3.) Because our outward condition doth work a great change in us. A Christian should, and in some measure doth, carry an equal mind in all conditions, and keep the same pace whether he goeth up-hill or down-hill, and have his heart fixed in God whatever falleth out: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord" (Psalm cxii. 7). But, alas! we are much discomposed oftentimes, especially at the first onset, by our outward estate; when under great afflictions, it puts a damp upon our spirits, and we cannot serve God so cheerfully: "And Aaron said unto Moses, Behold, this day have they offered their sin-offering and their burnt-offering before the Lord; and such things have befallen me; and, if I had eaten the sin-offering to-day, should it have been accepted in the sight of the Lord?" (Lev. x. 19.) So Hezekiah, it is said of him, 2 Chron. xxxii. 24, 25, "In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the Lord, and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign; but Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up." We are too apt to be dejected and cast down with worldly troubles, or exalted and puffed up with worldly comforts; and both bring on deadness upon the heart, both worldly sorrow and carnal complacency. It is not requisite that a child of God should be without all sense of his condition; and it cannot be supposed that this sense should always be kept within bounds, and under the coercion and government of grace, considering our weakness; and therefore a Christian receiveth some taint from the changes he passes through, as the water doth from the soil through which it runneth. He is sometimes in credit, sometimes in disgrace; sometimes rich, sometimes poor; sometimes sick and in pain, at other times in health and firm constitution of body. Now, though it argueth small strength to faint in ordinary afflictions (Prov. xxiv. 10), and a light spirit, to be puffed up like a bubble with every slight blast;

yet, when troubles are heavy and pressing, God's best servants have been ready to die and faint; and, in a full estate, it is hard to keep down carnal rejoicing. By both, the freedom of following God's service cheerfully may often be interrupted.

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

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

DOCTRINE II.—The main argument which God's children have to plead in prayer, is his own favour and lovingkindness. I shall show,—

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

2. This is a comfortable and encouraging argument.

First, It is a modest argument; and it were good if we could learn this modesty of David. He was one much in prayer, diligent in keeping God's statutes, abundant in all acts of devotion, spent nights in meditation; and yet, after all this, placeth all his hopes in the mercy and lovingkindness of God, and desireth only to be heard according to mercy. But in us there is a secret carnal notion of God as if he were our debtor; if we act for him, or suffer anything for him, we carry it as if God were obliged to us: "Wherefore have we fasted," &c. (Isa. lviii. 3.) We cannot be at a fast, give a little alms, or make a prayer, but we think we have merited much at God's hands. Oh! this is against all reason. Alas! what profit can we be to God? (Job xxxv. 6—8.) God is above the injuries and benefits of the creature. What miss had he of angels and men, in those innumerable ages of duration that went before any created being? And as it is against reason, so it is against all the declarations God hath made of himself to us: "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, &c.; be ashamed and confounded for your own ways" (Ezek. xxxvi. 32). So, "But after that

the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus iii. 4—6). In short, no worth in us, or righteousness of ours, is that merit and righteousness by virtue of which we are accepted with God. Our works and righteousness are not that condition by which we receive and apply this merit; that is faith. No works or merit are a motive, or the first inducing cause to move God to give us that faith; but all is from his lovingkindness and readiness to do good to the creatures. Again, it is contrary to the practice of the saints and children of God, who, though never so holy and never so good, yet still they plead mercy, and this by direction from him who knoweth what plea is fittest for creatures to use to God (Luke xvii. 10). As it is not the merit of one part of the earth that it lieth nearer the sun than another, only the Creator would have it so; so still the Scripture crieth down works and merits in the creature, in all these gracious influences. They all come from God's bowels of compassion to his creatures labouring under difficulties. He loveth to act as a free agent in giving, continuing, and actuating the life of his creatures, whether natural or spiritual. Yea, lastly, any other principle would be against our profit, as well as God's glory. Our profit, both as to duty and success; we should never carry it dutifully to God, if we did not acknowledge that all came from grace. Whence come impatience, murmurings, contempt of things afforded, but from a secret opinion of our merit and deserving? They that prescribe to God, ascribe too much to themselves; that prescribe to God for time, measure, and kind, are hasty and murmur under delays and suspensions of grace. And as to success, without this modest and humble claim, God rejecteth the request; for he "resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. v. 5). Spiritual pride is the worst of all pride. The humble supplicant may expect increase of grace, which is denied to others: "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy" (Psalm cxlvii. 11). Such as fear God, and serve him diligently, and yet put all their confidence in his mercy, these are those whom the Lord delights in, to keep communion with them, and pour out his blessings upon them. This is enough to show you it is a humble, modest plea.

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

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

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

2ndly, The kinds of it. God's lovingkindness is twofold, general and special.

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

2. Over and above this common kindness, there is a more entire special love and kindness towards believers in Christ. This may be admired rather than expressed: "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God!" (Psalm xxxvi. 7.) This is unto admiration, his common kindness, his preservation of man and beast. This is the fruit of his eternal love: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. xxxi. 3); and this is expressed in blessing them with special and saving benefits in Christ. The effects of his special kindness do all relate to life and godliness, and are conveyed to us through the conduit of Christ's merit and intercession, in and by whom he doth fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness (2 Thes. i. 11, 12). Now, this special kindness must needs be a mighty encouragement to the saints to come to him (since he loveth them with such a free and special love) for all that mercy they stand in need of. The former speaketh the goodness of God to all his creatures, this to themselves in particular; both together a notable support. Yea, though we have not yet any experience of the goodness of God, yet, since there is such a thing as self-inclination in God to do good to his people, and, besides this, a readiness to express his love to all his creatures, more especially to every one, without respect of persons, that cometh to him: "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee" (Psalm lxxxvi. 5): take the cause, and you do not know what you may find; it may be your portion and lot.

3rdly, The proofs and demonstrations of this lovingkindness.

1. He hath given evident proof and infallible demonstration of it in Christ: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (1 John iv. 9). The cause or first motive was love: his means was the sending of Christ to be a propitiation; his end, life spiritual and eternal. This is such a glorious instance and manifestation of the love of God, that poor creatures are encouraged to draw nigh to God for such mercy as

they stand in need of. It is a hidden love; here is a convincing proof and real demonstration, by so glorious an effect and fruit of it! It was not a well-wishing love only; nor a love concealed, but manifested, and that by a signal proof.

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

3. His former love to ourselves. At first, he took us with all our faults, and betrothed us unto himself, in lovingkindness and tender mercy (Hos. ii. 19); and therefore he will still do us good, freely and bountifully: and so we may answer all objections from God's wonted goodness towards us. When he hath entered into covenant with us out of his love and bounty, we may well expect that upon the same terms he should keep covenant. The continuance is more easily believed and asked than the beginning and first grant: "Oh! continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee, and thy righteousness to the upright in heart" (Psalm xxxvi. 10). When by experience we have found what it can do for unworthy creatures, we may the better expect it should help us upon all occasions.

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

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

1. Let us meditate often on the lovingkindness of God; on his pitying, and pardoning, and lovingly entreating, poor sinful and broken-hearted

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

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

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

4. Let us improve this lovingkindness, and readiness of God's mercy to help penitent supplicants.

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

kindness is good; turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies" (Psalm lxi. 16).

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

There is one word yet undiscussed; "According to thy judgment." Some by judgment, understand wisdom and prudence; the word will sometimes bear that sense: "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment," &c. (Mic. iii. 8.) As we say a man of judgment, for an understanding person. In this sense, "according to thy judgment," will be, as thou thinkest fit; but surely judgment here, is to be understood in the notion of his covenant, or the rule according to which he judgeth of men; for it is one of the terms by which the word is expressed. Judgment is sometimes put for the covenant of works, or his strict remunerative justice. David declineth it under this notion: "Enter not into judgment with thy servant" (Psalm cxliii. 2). And this is called by the Apostle, "Judgment without mercy" (James ii. 13). Sometimes for the covenant of grace and free promises of God, or that merciful right which he hath established between him and his people, wherein God acteth as an absolving and pardoning judge. Of this, see verse 132. And of this the Prophet speaketh: "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment" (Isa. i. 27); that is, by his mercy promised according to his judgment. David desireth to be "quicken'd." From thence observe,—

DOCTRINE III.—That God's mercy and lovingkindness manifested and impledged in the promises of the Gospel, doth notably encourage us to ask help from him.

You have heard what encouragement we have by the lovingkindness of God; now what we have over and above that, by his judgment.

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

1. In general, from the general undertaking of the covenant. The covenant of grace differeth from all other covenants in the world, because every thing that is required therein, is also promised; and therefore it is called "the promise" (Gal. iii. 17), because God hath promised both the reward and the condition; faith and perseverance therein, as well as righteousness, pardon, and life. The new heart, to bring us into the covenant; and the continual assistance of grace, to keep us in that covenant. And so it differs from the usual covenants that pass between man and man. Among men, each party undertaketh for, and looketh after, his own part of the covenant, but leaveth the other to look to his duty and his part of the engagement; but here the duties required of us, are undertaken for, by him that requireth them. No man filleth his neighbour's hand with anything to pay his rent to him, or enableth him to do what he hath covenanted to do; but God filleth our hand with a stock, yea, more than a stock, of habitual grace, with actual influences, to draw forth habits into act; and doth with strength so far enable us to perform every commanded duty, that, in the performance thereof, we may be accepted. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27, God owneth there not only the principles of acting, but also the excitement of

these principles; yea, the very act itself. He hath undertaken to infuse the principle, and stir up the acts and exercise of it: I will "cause you to walk in my statutes." So, "And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them and of their children after them; and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me" (Jer. xxxii. 39, 40). Besides converting grace, superadded influences. It differeth from the covenant of works, that had more of a law, and less of a promise: there was a promise of reward to the obeyer, but no promise of giving obedience. God, indeed, gave Adam a stock of habitual grace, but no promise of assisting grace. There, man was to keep the covenant; here, in effect, the covenant keepeth us (Jer. xxxii. 40). And, indeed, therein lieth the exceeding graciousness of the covenant of grace, that God undertaketh for both parties, and worketh in his people all that is required for entering into and keeping this covenant with him.

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

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

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

First, Consider the tenour of this judgment, or the terms thereof. The mildness of the court in which you plead; it is not a covenant of justice,

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

Secondly, Consider the blessing offered in this covenant: "Mercy and grace to help" (Heb. iv. 16). It offereth mercy for pardon of sins, a blessing which the law knew not; and grace to help, that is for our purpose. It is a covenant which alloweth you expenses to run the way of God's commandments; gives you straw to make your brick; filleth your hand to pay the master's rent. It is not a hard master, to reap where it soweth not, but will cause you to walk and run whither it sends you.

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

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

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

SERMON CLXVIII.

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

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

In the words we have,—

First, An intimation of approaching danger; "They draw nigh that follow after mischief."

Secondly, A description of those from whom the danger was feared; "They are far from thy law."

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

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

Reasons:—

1st, From the implacable malice of their enemies.

1. They seek the destruction of the people of God, nothing less will content them; this is implied in the word "mischief" in the text: *τὸ μὴ εἶναι*: "Come, let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance" (Psalm lxxxiii. 4). That is their aim, that not one of that denomination be left: "Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof" (Psalm cxxxvii. 7). Nothing will satisfy them but utter ruin and extirpation; they that expect milder terms from the seed of the serpent, flatter themselves with a vain hope.

2. They follow this end with all industry and diligence; this is implied in the phrase "that follow after mischief." They watch all occasions, pursue every advantage, to bring their purpose to pass. Some in Scripture are said to follow after righteousness (Isa. li. 1): it noteth their constant trade and study; it may be rendered pursuers of righteousness, as in the text pursuers of mischief. They that follow after righteousness, are such as continue constant in the serious and sedulous practice of holiness; and they that follow after mischief, are such as are unwearied in the prosecution of their malicious designs. It implieth a metaphor taken from the vehemency of huntsmen in pursuit of their foe or prey: "He that followeth after righteousness and mercy, findeth life" (Prov. xxi. 21); and *διώκετε τὴν εἰρήνην*, follow peace, &c., and holiness (Heb. xii. 14). As Asahel pursued Abner, and "turned not to the right hand, nor to the left, from following after Abner" (2 Sam. ii. 19). The Septuagint render here *καταδιώκοντές με ἀνομία*, they earnestly seek to undo me.

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

1. That this is the usual course of God's providence, to suffer his people to be reduced to great dangers and extremities, that there is not a hair's-breadth between them and ruin. Paul was in the very mouth of the lion (2 Tim. iv. 17), before God delivered him. By the lion, he meaneth Nero, a bitter enemy to the Christians, and the lamb was brought bound to him: the prey was in the lion's mouth, before God delivered him (2 Cor. i. 10, compared with 1 Cor. xv. 32, and both with Acts xiv. 19). I gave myself for dead; it was a thousand to one he had not been sacrificed to the fury of the multitude. So was David often near taking dangers, which he did or could hardly escape; Psalm liv., the title, when the Ziphims discovered him to Saul. So Psalm lvii., the title, "When he fled from Saul in the cave;" the army of Saul at the mouth of the cave, and Saul cometh into it; and yet God blinded him, so that he escaped. So the church: "If it had not been the Lord that had been on our side, now may Israel say; if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us" (Psalm cxxiv. 1—3). They were in the midst of their fears.

2. Why is this his usual course?

(1.) To exercise their trust and dependence. Graces are seldom exercised to the life, till we are near the point of death. Now, rather than God will suffer his people to live by sense, without manifesting grace, and bringing honour to their profession and the truth of his promises, he will cast them into great dangers. The skill of a pilot is seen in a storm, so is faith put to it in great conflicts; as it is in cares, so in fears. Many are reduced to great straits in the family, no meal in the barrel, no oil in the craise: "When Jesus lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come

unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do" (John vi. 5, 6). A poor believer is put to it: children increase, trading seems dead; what shall we do? When danger is danger indeed, then is a believer tried and exercised: "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. i. 9). We are much given to self-confidence; while our mountain standeth strong, and we are entrenched within the security of worldly advantages and props, we scarce know what faith and dependence upon God meaneth. Now, saith God, I will make you trust in me ere I have done, and to live alone upon my all-sufficiency. You may think your reputation will bear you out; but I will load you with censures that you may trust in me. You think friends shall help you; but friend and lover shall be afar off. You think to shelter yourselves under common refuges; but they shall all fail and cease, that I may see whether you trust in me: or that the common justice and equity of your cause shall bear you out; but I will send against you those that are maliciously resolved (contrary to all justice and gratitude), that shall approach and endeavour to mischief you. Who would think that Paul should be in danger of self-confidence, a man so exercised as he was, so tossed to and fro, so often whipped, scourged, exposed to danger? Alas! we can hardly see with other eyes than nature hath, or depend upon invisible help; we look at present things, and laugh at danger upon the confidence of outward probabilities. If we can get a carnal pillow and bolster under our heads, we sleep and dream many a golden dream of ease and safety. Now, God, that is jealous of our trust, will not let us alone, and therefore will put us upon sharp trials. It is not faith, but sense, we live upon before; that is faith, if we can depend upon God when they draw near that follow after mischief: "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about" (Psalm iii. 6). A danger at a distance is but imagined, it worketh otherwise when it is at hand: Christ himself had other thoughts of approaching danger, than danger at a distance: "Now is my soul troubled" (John xii. 27). This vessel of pure water was shaken, though he discovered no dregs.

(2.) To quicken to prayer. Jonah, that slept in the ship, falls a-praying in the whale's belly. A drowsy soul is awakened in case of extreme danger: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee" (Psalm cxxx. 1). Now, an ordinary prayer will not serve the turn; not to speak a prayer, but to cry a prayer. We do but act devotion before, and personate the part of the supplicant; then we exercise it. Now, rather than God's children shall neglect prayer, he exposeth them to great hazards: "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark iv. 38.) What careless, dead, and drowsy prayers did we perform, when all things went on fairly and we were well at ease! Moses cried when Israel was at a loss (Exod. xiv. 15); the sea before, the Egyptians behind, ready to tread upon their heels; mountains on each side.

3. That the deliverance of his people may be more glorious; partly, because there is more of his power and care discovered when our straits are great; Israel may now say, we had been swallowed up quick (Psalm cxxiv). Rescues in extremity of dangers are more glorious: "Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall; but the Lord helped me" (Psalm cxviii. 13). So, "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me

to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell" (Psalm xxxvii. 2); in great danger of being overtaken by his enemies. God doth some way suffer his people to be brought near destruction; but he doth always prove their friend and helper. David's strength and courage were seen, in that he plucked a lamb out of the lion's mouth (1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35). And partly, because these great straits and troubles are a means to open our eyes, and waken our stupid senses. Deliverance is all one to God, whether from great exigencies or in ordinary cases; but is more endeared by extremity of danger. It is easy to save a hundred or a thousand, but it maketh a fuller sound: we are more sensible of our weakness to help ourselves, to be sure, without his assistance.

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

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

USE III.—The greater the danger, the more thankfully should we acknowledge the deliverance. The woman of Sarepta, when her son was restored to life, said, "By this I know thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth" (1 Kings xvii. 24). So Israel may now say, If the Lord had not been on our side, men had swallowed us up quick.

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

1. To amplify or aggravate the danger. As if he had said, Lord, having oppressed them, they contemn thy law, and all restraints of conscience and duty. The further the enemies of the godly are from God's law, the nearer to do mischief. So, "Oppressors seek after my soul; they have not set God before them" (Psalm liv. 3); so, "Violent men have sought after my soul, and have not set thee before them" (Psalm lxxxvi. 14). They are likely to be cruel, because profane. When the fear of God is laid aside, and all respect to his word, there is nothing to be

expected but the worst of evils. They mind not thy law, therefore care not what mischief they do me.

2. To increase his confidence of help; for God will not favour a corrupt party: "Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God" (Psalm cxxxix. 19); "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee?" (Psalm xciv. 10.)

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

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

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

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

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

(1.) Because God and we are engaged in a common cause; for our adversaries are against God, as well as against us. Now, it is better to be afflicted by them, than to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, or to cry up a confederacy with them that cry up a confederacy against God (Psalm cxxxix. 22).

(2.) It is a great satisfaction to us to be opposed by evil men, or common enemies of the power of godliness. Certainly, it would be more grievous to us to be oppressed by them that have a show of godliness, than the openly profane (Psalm lv. 12, 13): the worst that a professed enemy can do, is more tolerable than the injury of a friend. It importeth a dis-

honour, to be opposed by the good, as having an ill cause in hand, or unworthy to be assisted; but it helpeth to make the cause more clear, when we see what kind of persons we have to do withal, such as we cannot but count wicked, because they have no regard to God's law. Our cause would not be so clear, if it were with them that fear God.

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

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

SERMON CLXIX.

VERSE 151.—*Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth.*

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

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

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

1. Something spoken of God. And,

2. Something of his law.

1. That which is spoken of God is, that he is near; a present help to those that persist in the obedience of his will; for nearness doth not only import his favour, or inclination to help them; but that he will not delay his help too long, his help is at hand, therefore called “a very present help in trouble” (Psalm xlvi. 1); and, “He [the Lord] is at my right hand” (Psalm xvi. 8); ready, as our second, in all conflicts to stand by us, support, and comfort us in our troubles, yea, to deliver us; that is the notion of nearness in the text; near as the enemies are near, only he is near to defend as they are near to destroy; when to appearance danger is nearest, at the same time help and salvation is nearest also; and this doth allay all our cares and fears: “The Lord is at hand;” therefore “be careful for nothing” (Phil. iv. 5, 6). Still present by his providence, or hastening his second coming: “I come quickly” (Rev. xxii. 20). I rather quote that place, for the Septuagint have it here *ἐγγύς εἶ, κύριε*, there *ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς*. Therefore he bids us be careful for nothing; certainly the belief of God's nearness should encourage us.

That which is said of his word and law is, “Thy commandments are

truth:" one would think it had been more proper to say, are just and righteous, than to say "are truth." His commandments are just as the rule of our duty, they are just as the rule of God's process; but the word commandment is not taken strictly for the mandatory part of the word, but it is put for the whole covenant; his precepts invested with promises and threatenings: the commandments, thus considered, with the promises and threatenings annexed, are true; yea, mark the emphasis of the phrase, truth itself. The happiness promised to them that make conscience of their duty, will be made good; and so the punishments on them that offend God, will be inflicted. Now, the joining of these two clauses seemeth to speak thus much; I know that thou art near me, because thy word is truth. God, in his providence, seemeth to be absent sometimes from his people; but, upon the assurance of his word, we must believe him near. I say, God seemeth to be far off from his people; for who would think that the God of peace and all comfort should dwell with them that are broken in spirit? "For thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. lvii. 15). Or that the author of all felicity should be present with them that are harassed and exercised with such sharp afflictions, and hunted up and down in the world, but because God hath promised it: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. xliii. 2). We should be satisfied with it; his word is truth: whatever sense and reason saith to the contrary, neither distance of place, nor afflictedness of condition, doth hinder his nearness to us.

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

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

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

1. What is this nearness?

2. How is it brought about?

First, What is this nearness?

Ist, God is not said to be nearer to them than others in regard of his essence; for so he is everywhere present; *nullibi inclusis, nullibi exclusus*. So a Heathen described God to be a great circle, whose centre is nowhere and circumference everywhere: and in the Prophet he telleth us, "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? can any hide him in secret places that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? do not I fill Heaven and earth?" (Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.) He filleth all things with his essential presence, he is in earth, in Heaven, and under the earth: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in Hell, behold, thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Psalm cxxxix. 7—10). God is here, and there, and everywhere: the heavens do not confine and inclose his being, nor the tumults of the earth exclude it. In this sense, God is alike near to all things; they that cannot endure the presence and thought of God, whither

will they go from him? They may run away from God as a friend, but they cannot escape him as an enemy: *Te non amittit, nisi qui dimittit, et qui te dimittit, quo fugit, nisi a te placato ad te iratum?* Men may shut God out of their hearts; and yet he is there, do what they can, and will be found there one day, in the dreadful effects of his anger.

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

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

4thly, This nearness may be understood of his visible presence in his ordinances, or of that spiritual inwardness and saving union and communion that is between God and his converted people, or those that are brought home to him by Christ, and are the members of his mystical body. In some sense, it is the privilege of the visible church to have God near them, because they have the signs of his presence among them; as in the former place (Deut. iv. 7), What nation hath God so nigh unto them? It was the common privilege of the nation in comparison of the Pagans about them, who were a people afar off, and strangers to the covenants of promise. So, “Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not” (Jer. xiv. 9). Thus God is said to be nigh, because he dwelleth in the churches, and walketh in the midst of them; but those that are converted indeed, are in a straiter union with God; all those that are members of the visible church, and are united to Christ by a visible and political union, they have great privileges; for they are a society under God’s special care and government, and enjoy the means of grace, and the offers of salvation, and great helps by the gifts bestowed upon the body, and so have God nearer to them than to others, though they have not the saving fruits of union with Christ and communion with God. Once

more, a people that are nigh unto God visibly and politically, may be cast off; as, "For as a girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord, that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory; but they would not hear (Jer. xiii. 11); yet I will cast them away as a rotten girdle that is good for nothing" (ver. 10). These words are the application of a charge given to Jeremiah, to get him a girdle, and hide it till it was rotten, and then to bring it forth, and tell the people the meaning of the ceremony: he was to get a girdle, not leathern, nor woollen, such as were commonly worn by the ordinary sort; but a linen girdle, such as the better sort of persons were wont to wear: he was not to wet it, or put it in water, to imply that neither God, nor aught from him, had been the cause of the general corruption and destruction of this people, but to hide it in a dry place near Euphrates, till it was corrupted. Thus God would lay visibly before their eyes their own state; they were as near about him, girded as close to him, as a girdle about a man's loins; yet then good for nothing. But, for those to whom God is near by saving benefits, they cannot be lost; for where the nearness is really begun, it will continue, and never be broken off. You may as well separate the leaven and the dough; *Impossibile est massam a pasta separare, &c.*

5thly, In those that are living members of Christ's mystical body, we must distinguish between a state of nearness and acts of nearness. By converting grace we are brought into a state of nearness unto God, and in worship we actually draw nigh unto him, and he to us. The state of nearness is the state of favour and reconciliation with God, into which we are admitted, who were before strangers and enemies: "And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled" (Col. i. 21). And also our participation of the Divine nature: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature; having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter i. 4); or life of God, from which we were formerly alienated by sin: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. iv. 18). For these three do always go together, the favour of God, the image of God, and fellowship with God. When Adam lost one, he lost all; when he lost the image of God, he also lost the favour of God, or fellowship with God, or nearness to him. So, then, our state of nearness lieth in the recovery of the favour of God and the image or life of God: when we stand right in his grace, and live his life, they are both great mercies, and both the ground of our fellowship with God, or nearness to him. O Christians! think with yourselves, is it not a great privilege for poor sinful creatures, that could not think of God without horror, or hear him named without trembling, or pray to him without great dejection of heart, to look upon God as reconciled, and willing to receive us and bless us! So for the life of God, to have a life begun in us by the Spirit of God, and maintained by the continual influences of his grace, till all be perfected in glory, what a privilege is this! None but they that live this life can have communion with God. Things cannot converse that do not live the same life, as Adam had no companion or meet help, but was alone; though all the creatures came and subjected themselves to him, trees,

beasts, men, &c. : “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him” (Gen. ii. 18). But, besides this state of nearness, there are special acts of nearness, both on God’s part and ours: he is nearer to us sometimes than at others, when we have more evidences of his favour inward or outward; inward evidences, when he quickens, comforts, supports the soul, filleth the heart with joy and peace in believing; at such a time, God is near, we feel him sensibly exciting and stirring up his own work in us. The soul always dwelleth in the body, but it doth not always act alike; it is ever equal in point of habitation, but not in point of operation. So Christ doth always dwell in the heart by his Spirit; but he doth not always act alike, but *κατ’ ἐὺδοκίαν*, “of his good pleasure” (Phil. ii. 13). God is not alike always present with his people, but never withdraweth that influence that is necessary to the being of grace: “Nevertheless, I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand” (Psalm lxxiii. 23). So outwardly, sometimes God hideth himself, sometimes seemeth not to mind the affairs of his people; at other times, all the world shall know that they are near and dear to him: he that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye; those that will not see, shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at his people (Isa. xxvi. 11). So, on our part, there is a standing relation between us and God; but our hearts are more or less towards him in worship; we especially then draw near unto him, though there be a communion in walking with God in our whole course. These things must be distinguished; for actual intercourse may be interrupted or suspended, when our state of nearness to God ceaseth not.

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

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

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

give up ourselves to God to serve him, we enter ourselves heirs to all the privileges of the Gospel, and may lay claim to them.

2. By union with Christ. Such as are under the covenant of grace are made members of the mystical body of Christ; the union the Scripture sets forth by the similitude of head and members: "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. xii. 5). Vine and branches: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman: every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John xv. 1, 2); stock and graff (Rom. vi. 5); body and garment: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 27). The converting of meat and drink into our substance: "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John vi. 56). House and indweller: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. iii. 17). As the members receive sense and motion from the head, the branches sap from the root, and the graff liveth in the stock; so we receive all life and being from Christ: Christ first giveth himself to us, and with himself all things; we must have himself first, for it is he in us becometh the fountain of life: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. ii. 20). The hope of glory: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. i. 27). Now, this endeareth us to God, and makes us near to him: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us" (John xvii. 2). Christ is God-man in one person, and we are united to him mystically, though not hypostatically; and so God and we are brought near together; for we are in him as he is in the Father, not with an exact equality, but some answerable likeness; we are immediately united to Christ, and by Christ to God.

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

4. The mutual love between God and them: God loveth them, and they love God; and so they are near and dear to one another: "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam. xviii. 1). Such love is here between Christ and believers, and between them and God; God beginneth, he loveth first, and best, and most; no father or mother loveth their children so tenderly as God doth them: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee" (Isa. xlix. 15). No husband loves his spouse as Christ doth his church: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. v. 25); not

only gave himself to the church, but for it. Alas! when we are at our best, we love God too little. There is a strong love which the saints have to God and Christ; they cannot live without him, are always crying, Abba, Father: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6). They cannot brook his absence, are dejected if they cannot hear from him at every turn.

7thly, There being such a ground laid for our nearness, all familiar intercourses do pass freely between God and us, through Christ, by whom and through whom are all things, and we by him (1 Cor. viii. 6). Our commerce with God is in donatives and duties.

1. On God's part, it is seen in his readiness to hear our prayers: "Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am" (Isa. lviii. 9). God is at hand when we knock at Heaven's gates: he answereth presently, saying, And what would you have? If God should make an offer to us as Jonathan did to David, "Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee" (1 Sam. xx. 4); we should think then we should never want more. What would the world give for such a promise from an earthly potentate? You have it from God, if you like the condition: "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psalm xxxvii. 4). Thou canst not desire anything regularly, and consisting with the condition of the covenant, with thy delight in God, but thou shalt have it. In a holy sense, you have God at command, to do for you what you would have, as if you had his sovereignty at command: "Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee; and thou shalt pay thy vows. Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee; and the light shall shine upon thy ways" (Job xxii. 27, 28). Decree, and it shall be established: speak the word, and it shall come to pass. Is it for us to enact decrees, to appoint what shall be? Their prayer is a duplicate or counterpart of God's decrees. God guideth their hearts to ask such things as are pleasing to him; God is ready to help us, to give supplies in all our necessities: he is remembering us for good upon all occasions, especially in our low estate: when we have none to help, he will help: "And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness it sustained him" (Isa. lix. 16). It was when he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey, he cannot be safe, unless he be wicked; and none will bestir himself in the behalf of truth and right, or own the good cause, by speaking a word for it: therefore God himself would take the business in hand: "He suffered no man to do them wrong" (Psalm cv. 14). They that are God's confederates, he hath a watchful eye over them: they are under his defence and protection: an afflicted people are more sensible of God's presence, help, and assistance, than others are; for straits and troubles are means to open men's eyes, and waken their senses: now, you will ever find God with you, when he seemeth most to forget you. But especially in duties of worship, the visits of love there, and the entertainment at God's table: "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causet to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple" (Psalm lxxv. 4). They have many sweet experiences of God, which they find not elsewhere: there he doth comfort, quicken, and revive them:

"They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures" (Psalm xxxvi. 8). God biddeth them welcome to this table, and will not send them away empty: indeed, there they come to feel joys unspeakable and glorious. Not that we should build always on sensible experiences, or tie God to our time, or make an essay of curiosity; but, if they humbly, resolutely wait upon God according to the encouragements of his promise, first or last they shall have a full meal, and God will own them, and fill their hearts with goodness. Thus in answering their prayers, helping them in straits, visiting in duties.

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

(1.) In holy duties: "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee: they poured out a prayer, when thy chastening was upon them" (Isa. xxvi. 16); "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee" (Job xxii. 21). We have no reason to be strange to God; for, if we were acquainted with ourselves, we should find daily and hourly some errand to the throne of grace. To forget him days without number, showeth we have little knowledge of God or of ourselves. Be sure to look after a desire to enjoy God in the duty: "My soul longeth; yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God" (Psalm lxxxiv. 2, 3). To rest in an empty ordinance, showeth we do what we do rather to pacify conscience than satisfy spiritual desires. God is to be our end and object, whom we are to seek and serve: *Abs te, sine te, non recedam*.

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

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

ANSWER.—In this hopeless and helpless estate, the Lord Jesus had pity on us; the great end of the Mediator is to bring us to God: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter iii. 18). And therefore he is said to be the way to the Father: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John xiv. 6). He hath taken our case in his

own hands, and doth, partly by his merit, and partly by his Spirit, bring about this nearness and fellowship between God and us.

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

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

USE I.—To persuade us to enter into this state of nearness, by taking hold of God's covenant. It is an excellent thing in the general; all will grant it, that it is good to draw near to God; but it is not only good, but good for you, all things considered: "It is good for me to draw near to God" (Psalm lxxiii. 28); it is our only blessedness; the practical judgment must be possessed with this truth, and then determine it so, that it may have the authority of a principle; and then the heart must be engaged to draw nigh to God, by a hearty resolution to come to God. Till the heart be engaged, we are too easily enticed away from God: now, the engaging the heart is by covenant: "Yield yourselves unto the Lord" (2 Chron. xxx. 8). All God's servants, they are his by covenant: "I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant" (Ezek. xx. 37); as sheep, to pass one by one out of the fold: God doth not covenant with us in the lump and body; but every man, for

himself, must engage himself to live according to the will of God. It is not enough that Christ engaged for us as our surety: "Jesus [was] made a surety of a better testament" (Heb. vii. 22); something is to be done personally, if we would have benefit by it. It is not enough that the church engage for us, as a visible political body professing faith in Christ; but every man must engage his own heart. It is not enough our parents did engage for us, in behalf of little ones avouch God to be their God: "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel; your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day" (Deut. xxix. 10—12). We must ratify their dedication and covenant in our own persons, by a "professed subjection unto the Gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. ix. 13). This covenant and oath of allegiance, you eat at God's table, to show that God and you are agreed, and entered into a strict union and fellowship one with another.

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

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

(2.) In point of dependence, did we believe more firmly that God were

so near and so ready at hand, to comfort, support, deliver, and bless us, this would stay our hearts in all our troubles. Is God near us? what should we be afraid of? "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want: he maketh me lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters" (Psalm xxiii. 1, 2). God admitteth you to his table, to assure you of his bounty and liberality: he gives you this Supper, as a sign of reconciliation with you, that God and you are friends. Now, *τὰ τῶν φίλων πάντα κοινὰ*. Especially let it check our fears, when trouble is near, God is also near, to counterwork our enemies and support his people: "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" (Zech. iii. 1, 2.) Where there is Satan to resist, there is an angel to rebuke: as extremities draw nigh, God draweth nigh. When Laban with great fury followed after Jacob, God followed after Laban, and stepped between them, and commanded Laban not to hurt him. When Paul was like to be torn in pieces in an uproar, God runneth speedily to his help: "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us" (2 Cor. i. 9, 10). When danger cometh to be danger indeed, you will find him a present help.

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

1. To whom we draw near; to God, as reconciled in Christ. If God were inaccessible, it were another matter; but, Divine justice being satisfied in Christ, we come to a throne of grace: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. iv. 16). God's throne is a throne of justice, grace, glory. To the throne of strict justice, no sinful man can approach; to the throne of grace, every penitent sinner may have access; to the throne of glory, no mortal man can come, in his whole person; his heart may be there; so it is said, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. x. 19), as petitioners are admitted to the prince in the presence-chamber: the way to the throne of glory lieth by the throne of grace; we pass by one unto the other. In short, Christ stood before the throne of justice, when he suffered for our sins: penitent sinners stand before the throne of grace, when they worship him in faith: after the resurrection, we shall ever stand before the throne of glory, and ever abide in his presence. Our business now is with the throne of grace, to give answer, and dispatch our suits. There is a three-fold throne of grace; the typical, which was the mercy-seat: "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth" (Psalm lxxx. 1): the real, which is Christ: "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;" the commemorative, which is the Lord's Supper, where is a representation of wisdom and oblation of the grace of Christ in the New Testament. This throne of grace is set up everywhere in the church; it standeth in the midst of God's people, as

the tabernacle did in the midst of Israel; for God is always, in all places, nigh unto such as call upon him in truth: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John iv. 23). Access to God may be had everywhere; therefore let us come.

2. By whom we come; by Jesus Christ: "In whom we have boldness, and access with confidence, by the faith of him" (Eph. iii. 12); upon the account of his merit and intercession. We should come without fear or doubt to him, *de facto*, as if his blood were running afresh.

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

SERMON CLXX.

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

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

First, The constant and eternal verity of God's testimonies, "Thou hast founded them for ever."

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

1st, What the Scriptures are in themselves.

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

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

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

2ndly, David's attestation or persuasion of this; "I have known of old."

I here observe,—

1. His persuasion.

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

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

(1.) The knowledge of faith: "I know that my Redeemer liveth;" that is, I believe it; what we read concerning thy testimonies. Other translations read, by thy testimonies, 'I have known by thy testimonies:' the

Septuagint *ἐγγνω ἐκ τῶν μαρτυρίων σου*, have been persuaded of this by thy Spirit out of the word itself.

(2.) The knowledge of sense and experience; I myself have known by sundry experiences heretofore, which I shall never forget.

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

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

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

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

The points are three:—

DOCTRINE I.—There is an everlasting stability, and a constant unchangeable truth, in God’s testimonies.

DOCTRINE II.—This must be known by us, or apprehended by us.

DOCTRINE III.—Experiences of former times, should give us encouragement to trust God for what is future.

DOCTRINE I.—There is an everlasting stability, and a constant unchangeable truth, in God’s testimonies.

PROOF.—“All his commandments are sure; they stand fast for ever and ever” (Psalm cxi. 7, 8). The word of God is of perpetual use and comfort, not in one condition, but all in every age of the world, you have the effects of it: it shall be made good to us in the world to come: “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen” (2 Cor. i. 20); of one invariable tenour, and of a sure and certain accomplishment: they do not say yea and nay, but yea and amen; yea to our hopes, and amen to our desires.

REASONS.—It must needs be so, if we consider—

1. Their author.
2. Their foundation.
3. Their use.

1st, Their author is God, who is the self-same God, and needs not say and unsay; for he has wisdom enough to foresee all events, power enough to answer all difficulties that may stand in the way of his promises, authority supreme, and so is above all controlment. Sometimes men command,

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

2ndly, They are founded. The testimonies of God, if taken for the promises of the Gospel, as they ought to be, are built on two foundations.

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

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

3rdly, Their use.

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

2. To be props and pillars of our confidence; so the Scriptures as they are founded themselves, so they are a foundation for us to build upon: "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone" (Eph. ii. 20). They support the weight of the building. Now, foundation-stones must not be moveable, or laid loosely and carelessly; for then all the building will be weak and tottering; therefore there is a sure word and sure promises for poor creatures to build upon. The Apostle calls it *βεβαίωτερον λόγον*, "a more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter i. 19), comparing it to the voice from Heaven, whereof he spoke immediately before. We are upon more certain terms now God guideth us by Scripture, than if he guided us by oracle: *quoad nos*, it is so, though every declaration of God be alike evident and certain in itself; a transient voice is more easily mistaken and forgotten, than a standing authentic record. Consider it as subject to jealousies, forgetful-

ness, mistakes, it is so. The general voice of the Gospel gives more encouragement to self-undoing sinners, than a voice from Heaven calling us by name.

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

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

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

3. In our opinions and professions, how do we say and unsay, and build again the things we have destroyed, and destroy the things we have builded; so that we know not where to have them, and are like children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Eph. iv. 14); where are two metaphors, they are compared to children for inconstancy in their choice, and to ships destitute of skilful masters, tossed this way and that way with contrary winds and tides; so they with divers doctrines and opinions; sometimes taken with one opinion, sometimes with another; *περιφερόμενοι*, circled about by all the winds in the card. Is this becoming the constant, unerring certainty of the Scriptures? It will be necessary for us to quit this childish temper; God will not always bear with it in us, whatever he may do in babes: therefore let us not receive

the truth of God lightly and uncertainly, but fix ourselves in the knowledge, the love, and practice of the truths that are commended to us: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel" (Gal. i. 6). This lightness is a disease incident to our natures, soon off, soon on, that other gospeling, or pretence of a purer way.

USE II.—Is comfort to the people of God.

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

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

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

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

USE III.—To persuade us to behave ourselves to the word of God as an unchangeable, unerring rule.

1. To the directions and precepts of it. There are no other terms to be expected but what God hath set down in the word: therefore frame yourselves to observe them, and be constant in this practice; then will you have the everlasting comfort of it. Bind them upon your hearts; you must take up Christ's yoke one time or other, do not think that he will alter the ordinances of his wisdom and justice for your sakes: "Teach me good judgment and knowledge; for I have believed thy commandments" (Psalm cxix. 66).

2. To the promises of it. They are founded for ever, whatever carnal reason suggests to the contrary in the hour of temptation. To this end consider what promises are; they are declarations of the purposes of God: both confirm you; as they are purposes of God, they imply immutability: "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath" (Heb. vi. 17). God's counsel is immutable; for God, being an intelligent agent, of most perfect knowledge and profound wisdom, can will and determine

nothing but according to the best and most exact understanding. There can be no cause of revocation, either for want of wisdom or justice; for he is absolutely both wise and just: nor from inconstancy of will; for the strength of Israel is not as man, that he should repent: nor can his will be frustrated for want of power; for he is almighty. But now, when this purpose is declared, that draweth on a further obligation: "Not alter the thing that is gone out of my lips" (Psalm lxxxix. 34). There is a debt ariseth, and a right established of the creatures. To change counsel, would imply weakness; to alter a promise, wickedness and unfaithfulness, which were the highest blasphemy to imagine in God, especially when this declaration is made with such emphatic averment, confirmed by an oath: "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation" (Heb. vi. 18); which is such a sacred assurance; yea, by seals and signs. Yet again, your very believing bindeth it the faster: "Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou has caused me to hope" (Psalm cxix. 49). Would God invite a trust, and then decline it? The more you believe, the sooner you see the effects of the promise. This is the difference between promises and threatenings: Christ saith, "Be it unto thee according to thy faith;" God's threatenings are fulfilled whether man will or no, let him believe or not believe, God will throw the ungodly into Hell; but, in promises, it is otherwise; then they do good to us, when by faith we embrace them: believe, and thou shalt be established. Besides God's two immutable things, faith is an anchor sure and steadfast (Heb. vi. 19); therefore let us not entertain the promises of the Gospel with a loose heart: you may know it by your slightness and carelessness about them, if you do not esteem them as great. To you are given "exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Peter i. 4); they contain spiritual and eternal riches, and deserve to be greatly esteemed. By your addictedness to sense and present things, you seem to declare that you think a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush, happiness to come but conjectural and uncertain. It is a fancy to live by faith, if it doth not support us in difficulties and afflictions: "This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me" (Psalm cxix. 50); when you look on all the promises as a dry stick, or as words and wind, if they do not engage us to the earnest pursuit of heavenly happiness, and the blessedness which they contain and offer: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. xi. 13).

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

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

1. It is needful we should understand the unchangeable and everlasting verity of the Scriptures; for how shall we believe what we do not know, and venture our souls upon what we are ignorant of? "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim. i. 12;) "Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?"

(John ix. 35, 36.) True faith is not content to go on implicit grounds, but seeks for clear knowledge of the ground it goeth upon: nor can there be solid faith without knowledge of that which we do believe. Who will venture his soul on the bottom of the Scriptures, till he knoweth they are of God, and unchangeably fixed as the rule of life and charter of his happiness? Especially since they require us to crucify our lusts, and sacrifice our interests, and perform those duties which are displeasing to nature, upon the hopes which they offer, and bid us with confidence and joyfulness to wait upon God for his salvation, in the midst of all pressures and afflictions. If we build hand-over-head, we build on the sand, not on the rock.

2. To know, signifieth to consider. This also is necessary, because all knowledge is improved by consideration, without which it is but as ignorance, or oblivion at the best, till consideration doth awaken it. Certainly it can have no efficacy upon us, breed no delight and hope in us. A transient view doth not acquaint us with things as serious meditation. The truth lieth by unimproved; as a man that passeth us by occasionally, knoweth us not so much as he that doth intimately converse with us. Therefore, if we would improve our knowledge, excite the soul to its act of faith and choice, there must be consideration. We are bid to consider the Lord Jesus (Heb. iii. 1), to give heed to the Gospel (Heb. ii. 1), to consider its worth and certainty. The schoolmen have a distinction, *Certitudo cognitionis seu speculationis*, and *certitudo adhesionis*; the former lieth only in a clearness of the mind, the latter in its power upon the affections and the will. The object rightly propounded, produceth the former from the understanding, not expecting the consent of the will; the latter followeth *imperium et consensum voluntatis*, the command and consent of the will; the former ariseth from the evidence of the thing, the latter from the worth, weight, and greatness of the thing, the Gospel truth. Of this latter sort we read, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. i. 15); and therefore must not only be apprehended, but seriously considered by us, that we may adhere to it with all our hearts. Though illumination is helped by contemplation, yet much more the latter, where firm adherence is expected. Men may apprehend the truth of things, when corrupt affections and a perverse will keep them off from closing with them; but, when a man so knows a thing as to consider it is both his duty and interest to close with the goodness and truth of it, then doth he rightly know it.

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

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

1. Partly from the self-evidencing light of the Scriptures themselves; they have passed God's hand, and have his signature upon them, as all his works make out their author. There are characters of his wisdom, power, goodness, and holiness, impressed upon them: "By manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But, if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. iv. 2—4). The Gospel being the result of God's wisdom, and suited to the heart of man (for whose use it was calculated), it hath something in itself to commend it to our consciences. It cannot be imagined that the hand of God should pass upon anything, and there should be nothing of his character left on it, to show it came from God. Look upon any fly or gnat, any flower of the field, or pile of grass; and you may see some impressions to discover the Author of them. So, certainly, if God shall set himself to write a book, or set forth a frame of doctrine to do man good, surely he hath discovered his wisdom, and holiness, and grace therein, and that in plain and legible characters, that, if man were not prepossessed and leavened with prejudice and corrupt affections, he could not choose but see it. That there is such an objective evidence or aptitude, in the doctrine itself, to beget faith in those that consider it, is plain from that of the Apostle, "By manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. iv. 2); without miracle, or other confirmation, if they had a clear eye: it is light which discovereth itself, and all things else. The reason why it is not seen, is not in the object, because of any defect there; but the faculty, the visive faculty, their eyes are blinded with worldly lust. Well then, when things are spoken so becoming the nature of God, and so agreeable to the necessities of man, and with such an evidence of reason, not to the law only, but also to the Gospel, as to establishing of a way of commerce between God and us, and exempting us from the grand scruples that haunt us, though these things could not be found out by human wit, yet now they are revealed, they carry a great suitableness thereunto.

2. And partly, by the testimony of the Spirit. This is one way of confirming the truth of the Gospel: "We are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts v. 32); where the apostles are mentioned as one sort of witnesses, and the Holy Ghost as another. The great office of the Spirit is to testify of Jesus Christ: "Even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth

from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John xv. 26). The doctrine of the Gospel concerning Christ's coming and power, is so great a mystery, that it is not believed and received in the world without the Spirit. Upon the beginning of Christ's ministry, in his baptism, the Spirit appeared in the form of a dove: now, the Holy Ghost doth two ways bear witness of Christ, *ἐντεχνῶς, ἀτεχνῶς*, artificially and inartificially; artificially, *per modum argumenti*; and inartificially, *per modum testis*: partly, as he doth afford sufficient matter of confirmation and conviction in those miraculous operations in the primitive times; and also, as he doth persuade the heart, and convince us of the truth of the Gospel.

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

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

ANSWER.—Both in order to our comfort and duty.

1. Comfort. If the certainty of the Scriptures were more understood, believed, and thought of, we should be more fortified against fears, and sorrows, and cares, and discouragements, whencesoever they do arise: for, as fire, well kindled, doth easily break forth into a flame, so assent, freely laid, doth fortify the heart against trouble. It is very notable, when the apostles would raise the joy of faith, they plead the certainty of the doctrine they delivered; for it was comfortable in itself, suitable to the necessities of man; all that needed was to assure others of the truth of it. See 1 John i. 1—4: that their joy might be complete and full, upon this certainty of evidence and complete demonstration; we could not be so comfortless and dejected, if we were persuaded of the reality of these things. So, "Believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter i. 2). We should love Christ, and rejoice in the believing, confident expectation of enjoying him; and, where this is firmly believed, afflictions cannot damp or hinder this joy. A firm trust in the promises of the word, will fill a man with comfort, and strengthen him against all difficulties (Psalm lvi. 4. 10).

2. Our obedience would be better promoted; it would be a remedy against boldness in sinning, and coldness in duty: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. iii. 12). You cannot drive a dull ass into the fire: "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird" (Prov. i. 17). Men do not believe the everlasting verity of the Scriptures, and therefore are so bold and venturesome: they think they shall do well enough, after all God's threatenings: "And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and will punish the men that are settled upon their lees; that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil" (Zeph. i. 12). Secondly, coldness in duty. How do the Scriptures reason against neglect: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip; for, if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb. ii. 1—3.) The

word spoken by angels was λόγος βέβαιος. Was only worth questioned? No; but the truth also, because so little believed, therefore so little thought of, less desired, least of all pursued and sought after: "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter i. 16).

USE.—Oh! study to be informed more and more of this great truth. Let us think of, and often consider, the unerring certainty of the Scriptures. It is a truth not to be supposed and taken for granted, but known, that you may build sure. Man is apt to suspect evangelical truths, as being cross to his lusts and interests. You will find it of use, not only in great temptations, when we are apt to question all (Psalm lxxiii. 13), but in ordinary practice, in every prayer: "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith" (Heb. x. 22). It is not an assurance of our particular estate, or our title to eternal life, but a full assurance of the word and promise of God, that is necessarily required in every one that will draw nigh to God: "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James i. 6).

2. Do not content yourselves with a light credulity, but grow up to a full persuasion: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (2 Tim. iii. 14); and, "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding" (Col. ii. 2); not a fluctuating, doubting knowledge, but a full persuasion of the truth of the Gospel: "That thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke i. 4); "If thou continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel" (Col. i. 23); a rooted persuasion that it is the undoubted truth of God. The firmness of faith should answer the firmness of God's word. There are several degrees of assent, conjecture, opinion, weak faith, and receiving the word in much assurance (1 Thes. i. 6). There is belief, confidence, assurance, and full assurance. Belief is grounded on God's word in general, and all the truths and propositions therein contained; confidence, on the promise; the one goeth before the other, fidelity is before dependence and belief; for the promise is first a truth, and so to be considered, before it can be conceived under the formal notion of a promise. Full assurance is grounded on the fidelity and immutability of God; no man believeth so far, but he may believe more.

DOCTRINE III.—That experiences of former times should give us encouragement to trust God for what is future. "Thy testimonies I have known of old," saith David.

So the children of God make use of them. See David's instance: "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, &c. David said moreover, The Lord hath delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear; and he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. xvii. 36, 37). Thus he argueth from former experience to future deliverance: I trust in the same God, who is able to give the same strength; and why should I not look for the same success? So Jacob: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau" (Gen. xxxii. 10, 11). So, "Thou preparest a table

for me in the presence of mine enemies, &c. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Psalm xxiii. 5, 6). He hath been good to me, and, if it be for his glory, he will be still good to me; he hath been my God, and will be my God, and shall be my God for ever: "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us" (2 Cor. i. 10). In all respects of time, we stand in need of deliverance; when one is past, another cometh; there have been dangers, there are dangers, and there will be dangers; but God hath, doth, and will deliver. It is a trade God hath used, an art he is versed in, and never at a loss about. Our God is a God of salvation, and is excellent in working of it.

Reasons of the point:—

Ist, God's constancy and unchangeableness. God is the same, always like himself, for mercy, power, and truth; he is never at a loss; what he hath done, he can do, and will do. "I Am" is God's name; not I have been, or shall be: his providence is new and fresh every morning (Lam. iii. 23); God is but one God (Gal. iii. 20); always like himself; as he hath delivered, so he doth, and will: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear" (Isa. lix. 1); no decay in him. When we give to another, we give from ourselves, we waste by giving; the creatures are at a stint, and soon spend their allowance; but God cannot be exhausted, there is no decrease of love and power, no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity.

2ndly, Experience begets confidence: "And patience, experience; and experience, hope" (Rom. v. 4). The heart is much confirmed when it hath faith and experience on its side. If we were as we should be, the promise would be beyond all experiences; for it is the word of him that cannot lie. Experience addeth nothing to the certainty of the promise, nor any authority to it; only in regard of our weakness, it is a help and sensible confirmation against our distrustful cares and fears. Sense and experience is not the ground of faith, we must believe God upon his bare word; yet it is an encouragement: "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed" (John xx. 29); then more encouraged, when felt Christ. We have a double proof and experience.

1. What God is able to do for us.

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

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

2. We see and know what God is willing to do for poor sinners. He is not sparing of necessary supplies and comforts; he hath been a present

help. We have no cause to believe the contrary; it is only distrust saith he will not; it is a suspicion and jealousy without cause. It may be, for it hath been: "The Lord hath delivered me," &c. (1 Sam xvii. 36.) Particular and special confidence is not so usual now; but we have no reason to be discouraged in the ways of God; though we cannot be absolutely confident, yet we should not baulk duty out of distrust and jealousy: in such faintings, take the cordial of experience: "And I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High?" (Psalm lxxvii. 10).

3rdly, Former mercies are pledges of future; by giving, God becometh our debtor: "Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (Matt. vi. 25.) If he gives life, he will give food; if he gives a body, he will give raiment: one mercy is an earnest of another. If he gives us Christ, he will give us all things (Rom. viii. 32); if he give grace, he will give glory; if we have the first fruits (Rom. viii. 23), we shall have the harvest; if we have the beginning (Phil. i. 6), we shall have the ending. There are some dispensations that are but as a tendency to other mercies, given out in such a way as to invite hope.

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

USE I.—To reprove the people of God for their diffidence and distrust, when, after many experiences of God, they can no more quiet their hearts concerning future events; upon every new trouble as much tormented and perplexed, as if they had never known or heard anything of God before. David, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1 Sam. xxvii. 1). When God hath abundantly done enough to evidence his power and love unto us: "They said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness," &c. (Psalm lxxviii. 19—21.) When we are to credit God in another work, as the disciples after the miracle of the loaves, when new temptations assault us, we should not be disheartened. What were God's motives before to help? Because you were in misery. The same you may expect again.

USE II.—To press you,—

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

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

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

SERMON CLXXI.

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

In this verse observe,—

First, David's petition, "Consider mine affliction, and deliver me."

Secondly, His argument, "For I do not forget thy law."

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

1. That God would consider his case.

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

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

1. His diligence, he did carefully observe.

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

I shall give you some brief notes.

DOCTRINE I.—That God's choicest servants in this world have their afflictions.

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

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

2. As Christians. A man is no sooner brought home to God, but he must expect to be hated by the world: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but, because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John xv. 19). Assaulted by Satan: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke xxii. 31). Chastened by the Lord himself for their trial and humiliation: "But, if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Heb. xii. 8). Our own corrupt hearts will be vexing us, thwarting all the motions of the new nature: "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. v. 17). The lusts of the flesh are as pricks and thorns in our sides. In short,

wicked men will hate us because we are so good: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. iii. 12). God will afflict us, because we are no better: "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin" (Isa. xxvii. 9). A Christian is too strict and pure for the world, and is not strict and pure enough for God; and therefore must look for afflictions to mortify sin, from God's hands, and great enmity from the world, if he meaneth to keep up the majesty of his profession.

USE.—It presseth us,—

1. To look for crosses.
2. To prepare for them.
3. When they come, bear them with more patience.

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

2. Be prepared for them; otherwise, our looking for them is in vain; and to this end would Christ have us reckon upon the cross, that we may be forewarned. He that buildeth a house, doth not take care that the rain should not descend upon it, or the storm should not beat upon it, or the wind blow upon it; there is no fencing against these things, they cannot be prevented by any care of ours; but that the house may be able to en-

dure all this without prejudice. And he that buildeth a ship, doth not make this his work, that it should never meet with waves and billows, that is impossible; but that it may be tight and staunch, and able to endure all weathers. A man that taketh care for his body, doth not cark for this, that he meet with no change of weather, hot and cold, but how his body may bear all this. Thus should Christians do; not so much take care how to shift and avoid afflictions, but how to bear them with an even and quiet mind. See Chrysostom, Hom. 35, in 1 Cor. As we cannot hinder the rain from falling upon the house, nor the waves from beating upon the ship, nor change of weather or seasons from affecting the body, so it is not in our power to hinder the falling out of afflictions and tribulations; all that lieth upon us, is to make provision for such an hour, that we be not overwhelmed by it. We need get a stock of spiritual comforts, that all may be peace within, when trouble without; and as afflictions abound, so may comforts: we had need get a sound back, be much mortified, and weaned from the vanities of the world: "And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed" (Heb. xii. 13). If we have any weak part in our souls, there the assault will be most strong and fierce. A garrison that looketh to be besieged, taketh care to fortify the weak places; so should a Christian mortify every corrupt inclination, those that are most pleasing. We need much resolution; a Christian had need be a resolved man, well "shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace" (Eph. vi. 15); or else in hard way he will soon founder and halt. That *ἑτοιμασία*, that preparation, is a resolved mind, to go through thick and thin, and to follow Christ in all conditions: *ἑτοιμὸς ἔχω*, "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts xxi. 13); a well-shielded, established mind in the comfort and hope of the Gospel. Unless we be thus prepared and armed with a mortified heart, and a thorough persuasion of the truth and worth of Gospel privileges, and thereupon a resolution to encounter all difficulties and hardships, we shall not long be faithful to Christ; but, after we have launched out into the deep with him, we shall be ready to run ashore again. Now, most Christians are not mortified, and so they trip up their own heels; most Christians are not resolved, and so take to religion as a walk for recreation, not a journey, so as to be prepared for all weathers.

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

subjection, is the very curse of crosses: the sacrifice that went struggling to the altar, among the Heathen, was counted unlucky. Two things feed this impatience.

(1.) Men think none suffer as they do: "See if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow?" (Lam. i. 12.) Every one hath the greatest sense of his own burden; therefore they think none hath so heavy and grievous a one as they have: it were well if they did this in feeling of sin. Paul felt his burden greatest in that respect: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. i. 15). But, alas! in afflictions, all God's children have their trials; many fare more grievously. When you lament the feared loss of an only child, what think you of the Virgin Mary? "A sword shall pierce through thy own soul" (Luke ii. 35). Generally, "The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren, that are in the world" (1 Peter v. 9). Every Christian hath his measure of hardship and sufferings; you are not singular and alone; your lot is no harder than the rest of the saints of God through the world. Others are poor, and carry it well, and are cheerful: such a one under a painful disease, very patient in an acute fever; racked with stone, &c. If they, why not thou?

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

DOCTRINE II.—That, in our afflictions, we should run to God by prayer. So doth David here, so should we.

1. We may do so.
2. We must do so.

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

2. We must come; it is a duty God hath required at our hands: "Call upon me in the day of trouble" (Psalm l. 15); and, "Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee; and thou shalt pay thy vows"

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

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

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

USE II.—To encourage us to come to God in our afflictions. Now is a time to put the promises in suit; to begin an interest, if we have none; to make use of it, if we have any: then our weakness and nothingness is discovered, that we may more apply ourselves to God, and a time of need will be a time of help: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm xli. 1); that is, when trouble is trouble indeed, then therefore we should call for it most earnestly; a necessitous creature is a fit object for mercy. You expound providences amiss, if you think afflictions are a casting off. No; they are God's voice calling you; nay, his hand pulling you to him. Blessed seasons, to bring God and us together; then God's aim is accomplished: "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction, they will seek me early" (Hos. v. 15); "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them" (Isa.

xxvi. 16). Afflictions do not work thus simply, for then they would work upon all, but as accompanied with some drawings of the Spirit: every condition is blessed, when it bringeth you nearer unto God: though crosses be great trials to any, yet, if they chase us to the throne of grace, God is not wholly gone, but hath left somewhat behind him to draw us to him. It is desertion in point of felicity, but not in point of grace.

DOCTRINE III.—One great request of the children of God in prayer, is, that he would consider their affliction.

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

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

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

2. The sight of misery is a real argument. It is clear that we are to use arguments in prayer; for God dealeth with us as rational creatures, and, as such, we too are to deal with him. Now, among arguments, our afflictions and miseries are real ones; they have a voice to work upon his pity, and to move him to have mercy upon us. He being inclined to compassion, his eye doth affect his heart: as a beggar, to move pity, will not only plead with his tongue, but uncover his sores; so do the saints lay open their misery, and unfold their estate before the Lord; for God so loveth his people that the very show of their miseries moveth him to help them. Thus God saith, that he would show mercy to his people: "For now have I seen with mine eyes" (Zech. ix. 8). God seeth our case, and every degree of our trouble is marked by him, which bringeth it the nearer to his heart; yea, God's people themselves are comforted under their sad-

dest sufferings, by the Lord's seeing and marking thereof: "Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand" (Psalm x. 14); it is enough to them, thou hast seen it. So, "I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy; for Thou hast considered my trouble, thou hast known my soul in adversities" (Psalm xxxi. 7). It is a mighty comfort, that God hath an eye upon them in particular, and hath friendly affections towards them.

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

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

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

(1.) The eye of his pity, which is more than bare omniscieny: it imports his knowledge, accompanied with a tender love. This is often spoken of in Scripture: "God looked upon the children of Israel, and had respect unto them" (Exod. ii. 25). So Exod. iii. 7; "And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters, for I know their sorrows;" Ἰδὼν εἶδον, "I have seen, I have seen, the affliction of my people" (Acts vii. 34); or seeing I have seen. The very sight of God is a comfort and support to a sinking soul: it is some comfort to us, to have our crosses known to such as we are assured do love us; if they condole with us, though they be not able to help us: so the Lord looketh upon us with a merciful, pitiful eye.

(2.) As God will cast the eye of his pity on us, so he will put forth the arm of his power; as he hath a merciful eye, so he hath a powerful hand, ready to help, though sometimes we see nothing of this: "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. xvi. 9): there is his care and effective providence.

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

“And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.”

DOCTRINE IV.—We may ask deliverance from temporal troubles: not only support, but deliverance. So doth David.

1. God hath promised: “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm l. 15).

2. Much of God is discovered in it. His wisdom: “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Peter ii. 9). We are at a loss many times; but God is never at a loss. His power: “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, &c.; and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king” (Dan. iii. 17); when the wrath of the king was great, and the fiery furnace burning before them. His goodness: God is sufficiently inclined to it, by his own grace, and delights to do it: “The Lord taketh pleasure in his people; he will beautify the meek with salvation” (Psalm cxlix. 4); he loveth the persons of believers, and loveth their prosperity and happiness, and delighteth to see them do well in the world, he “hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants” (Psalm xxxv. 27), which is a good encouragement to pray for it: “Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king’s heart was toward Absalom (2 Sam. xiv. 1). Yea, not only his love, but the constancy and unweariedness of his love: “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us” (2 Cor. i. 10): there are all respects of time. Solomon saith, “Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour’s house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee” (Prov. xxv. 17). Men waste by giving; but “I AM” is God’s name; we still need, and he is still giving: “Thou hast fully known, &c., my persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, &c.; but out of them all the Lord delivered me” (2 Tim. iii. 10, 11). So many troubles, so many gracious experiences of God: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all” (Psalm xxxiv. 19); “He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee” (Job v. 19). Seven is the number of perfection: God can and doth deliver us, as often as we need deliverance. When clouds return after the rain, or one evil treadeth on the heels of another, he hath a succession of mercies for our succession of sorrows. We are dismayed when we see one trouble is over, and another cometh: we have the same God still, the same certainty of his mercy, in delivering. Many times God so delivereth, that the troublers of his people shall come in their room: “The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead” (Prov. xi. 8); as the leprosy of Naaman went to Gehazi. His faithfulness, which he hath laid at pledge with us, that he will make a way to escape: “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. x. 13). His dominion and sovereignty: “Thou art my king, O God; command deliverances for Jacob” (Psalm xlv. 4); he hath all things at his command, all second causes, the hearts of his enemies.

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

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

DOCTRINE V.—Those that would have God deliver them out of their afflictions, should be sure they do not forsake their duty.

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

Reasons:—

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

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

USE.—If we would boldly come to God in our straits, let us not forget or forsake our duty, nor throw off the profession of godliness, whatever we suffer from men: “All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant” (Psalm xlv. 17). Yea, from God, though he seem to cast us off, taketh no care of us: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job xiii. 15). Diogenes Laertius telleth us of a cynic that went to Athens to Antisthenes to be taught by him, when often met with a repulse, yet still insisted on his request.

SERMON CLXXII.

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

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

The three requests are,—

1. That God would own his cause.
2. Deliver him out of his troubles.
3. And in the meantime, before the deliverance came, quicken him.

In the first, he intimateth the right of his cause, and that he was unjustly

vexed by wicked men: therefore, as burdened with their calumnies, he desireth God to undertake his defence; “Plead my cause.”

In the second, he representeth the misery and helplessness of his condition; therefore, as oppressed by violence, he saith, “Deliver me:” or, as the words will bear, Redeem me.

In the third, his own weakness, and readiness to faint under this burden; therefore, “Quicken me.”

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

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

I begin with the first request, “Plead my cause.”

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

There is a threefold cause that cometh usually into debate.

1. *Inter hominem et hominem*, between man and man; as between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. iii. 15). Those that are born after the flesh and those that are born after the Spirit: “He that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit” (Gal. iv. 29). The children of God and men of this world: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but, because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John xv. 19). As between wolf and lamb, raven and dove: this is an old controversy that will never be reconciled: it is often set afoot in kingdoms, in cities, in towns, ships, and villages, and families, and will continue till the world’s end. For, while there are two seeds, there will be strifes and enmities. Now, in this quarrel and strife, sometimes success is cast on this side, sometimes on that; as God seeth fit either to favour, or to try and correct, his servants. Usually, the world prevaieth, being more numerous; only let me tell you, this controversy doth not always appear to the world unveiled or bare-faced. Enmity to godliness is such an odious thing in itself, and hath so often miscarried, that it is not for its interest to appear openly and in its own colours, but under the mask and disguise of other pretences, which are the more plausibly taken on, when

the holy seed have scandalized their profession, and made the way of truth to be evil spoken of; and yet it is the old enmity and antipathy still, as appeareth by the parties contesting, their aims and designs, and the means and ways they use to compass them, with scorning of faith and piety.

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

3. *Inter hominem et Deum*. God hath a controversy with us about the breach of his law and our undutiful carriage to him. Now, you can never reason it out with God: it was Job's presumption to think that he could order his cause before him: "Oh! that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments: I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me" (Job xxiii. 3—5). No: there is no trusting to the equity of our cause, or hope to clear ourselves before God's judgment-seat: we have no way left, but submitting and humbling ourselves, and suing out our pardon in a broken-hearted manner; no way but yielding to the justice of the first covenant, and putting in the plea of favour and grace according to the second: "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand! but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psalm cxxx. 3, 4). If you deny or excuse sin, you stick to the first covenant, and plead innocence; and then God will deal with you according to the tenour of strict justice; but, if you humbly confess sin, and acknowledge your guiltiness and shame, then you may plead mercy. Justice dealeth with the innocent, mercy with the guilty.

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

In this point,—

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

2. The necessity of it.

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

1st, The nature of this pleading should first be explained; and here,—

1. In what quality God pleadeth for us. In all judicial proceedings, there are the principal contending persons, and those are called *actor et reus*, the plaintiff and defendant; and the manner of proceeding in judgment is, that the plaintiff bringeth forth his bill, and the defendant his answer; but, besides these principal contending persons, there are the witnesses, the advocate, the judge. Now, in some sense, God might be all these, *testis, advocatus, et iudex*, without any wrong and injustice. Our witness to attest for us, as he knoweth all things, and knoweth our hearts; for, as to such do the saints often appeal to him: our Advocate, to plead for us; for he is tender of the credit of his people, and hath undertaken to preserve them from the strife of tongues: "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man; thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues" (Psalm xxxi. 20): as a judge, to give sentence in our behalf, or such a decree whereby the adversary may be convinced of our righteous cause, and our innocency cleared; and all this may be called God's pleading, either as *testis, advocatus, or iudex*. But I rather confine it to the last: God's pleading is rather as a judge; not as *advocatus*, but as *patronus*, that is a more proper and honourable name. Zonaras tells us, that the Romans called their patrons *τῆς κειρημονικῆς*; and it was enacted in the law of the twelve tables, *Si patronus clienti fraudem fecerit, sacer esto*; if any man had deceived his client, he was accused, devoted to slaughter, and any man might kill him. *Cientes quasi colentes, patroni quasi patres*, saith Servius. So that to deceive a client, was as to deceive a son. This was begun by Romulus, who commended the common people and worser sort to the nobles, leaving every man his liberty to choose whom he would for his patron; and that defence of them was called patronage, and the *jus patronatus* during this constitution consisted in these duties and offices: they were to defend the poor in judgment, to answer for them in all points of law; they were to take care of them that none might wrong them, present or absent; they were *omnem accusatoris impetum sustinere*; and this *jus patronatus* was of such authority among the ancients, that Marcus Cato telleth us, that first the name of father was most sacred; next, that of patron. It were long to say all that might be said of them: this is enough, that their principal work was to be present at all causes wherein the poor client was concerned, and to appear for him and defend him, as they would their own cause. Advocates were taken in afterward when laws were multiplied, to suggest what was law; they were men skilful in the law. See Hall's *Lexicon*. Now, thus it is; God pleads the cause of his people as their patron, who hath taken them into his tutelage and clientship; not as interceder, but defender. They have betaken themselves to his tuition, and desire to honour and serve him: God will therefore take part with them against their enemies. He doth not only hear pleas and debates on either side, but interposeth as the patron and chief party concerned in the strife, and, having withal the power of a judge, will pass sentence on their behalf, and see it executed.

2. The manner of God's pleading. It is not a verbal or voeal, but a real and active plea. God pleadeth not by words, but by deeds, by his

judgments and powerful providence, righting the wrongs done to them. For, since, as I said, there concur in God, the relations of *judex* and *patronus*, he maketh the one serviceable to the other: as their *patronus*, he owneth the cause, taketh it upon himself, as the answerable party, and then useth his judicial power in defence of his people. Now, the property of a judge is to pronounce sentence, and then to put his sentence in execution. God hath pronounced sentence in his word, and he puts the sentence in execution in his providence; and that is God's pleading. Many times there is *sententia lata*, but *dilata*: long ago was sentence passed; but it is not speedily executed. Because sentence is not speedily executed upon an evil-doer, therefore do they vaunt and insult over his people (Ecc. viii. 11); as if God had forsaken and disclaimed them, and would never more own their cause and quarrel: but, when God seeth fit to appear, and to show himself in this mixed relation of judge and patron, the world will have other thoughts of their cause; and therefore, "The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people" (Isa. iii. 13). He will bring matters under a review, and will powerfully show himself against their oppressors. To this pleading Job alludeth, when he saith, "Will he plead against me with his great power?" (Job xxiii. 6); if he should use his almighty and invincible power against me, he would easily ruin me. So, "I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood" (Ezek. xxxviii. 22): against Gog and Magog; that is, the Scythians, Turks, and Tartars. So that you see that God's pleading is not by speaking, or by word of mouth, but by the vengeance of his providence against those that wrong his people. So against Babylon: "Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee" (Jer. li. 36). But that this is a mixed act of patron and judge, see Mic. vii. 9: "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me; he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness." When God's people provoke him to anger by their sins, he casteth them into troubles; and then their adversaries are chief, and their cause is much darkened and obscured: all this while God is pleading against them; but it is not the enemy's quarrel, but his own vindication of abused mercy and goodness. But, when once the controversy is taken up between God and them, by their submission, and clearing his justice, and imploring his mercy, then God will plead their cause, and take their part against the instruments of his vengeance (and clear their righteous cause), who only sought their own ends in afflicting them. When God hath exercised their humility and patience, he will thus do; and how, I pray, will he plead for them? The text saith there, by executing judgment for them; that is, by putting his sentence in execution; and then will he restore to them their wonted privileges, and own them in the public view of all, and make manifest that they are his: he will bring them forth to the light, and they shall see his righteousness.

3. The effect of God's pleading, which is the clearing of God's people, and the convincing of their adversaries; which God doth partly by the eminency and notableness of the providences whereby he delivereth his people, and the marks of his favour put upon them: "And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the Heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God" (Neh.

vi. 16). Their own judgments were convinced of their folly in opposing the Jews: the extraordinary success showed the hand of God was in it; by such incredible and remarkable occurrences doth God bring about their deliverance. So, when God shall plead her cause, "Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets" (Mic. vii. 10): those who mocked her faith, should be confounded at the sight of her deliverance. Thus God delights to make the happiness of his people conspicuous. So, "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I loved thee" (Rev. iii. 9). He will make their enemies to know that he hath loved them, and ask them forgiveness for the wrongs and outrages done to them: partly, by the convictions of his Spirit, undeceiving the world, and reproving them for the hatred and malice against his people: the Comforter, "when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John xvi. 8). The word is *ἐλέγξει*, not comfort, but convince or reprove, put them to silence, so as they shall not in reason gainsay; the object, the world, the unconverted, if not the reprobate; the things whereof convinced, of sin, and righteousness, and judgment; of the truth of Christ's person and doctrine. This was spoken for the comfort of the disciples, who were to go abroad and beat the Devil out of his territories, by the doctrine of the cross; that were weak men, destitute of all worldly sufficiencies, and props, and aids. Their Master suffered as a seducer; their doctrine, cross to men's carnal interests: for them in this manner to venture upon the raging world, was a heavy, discouraging thing. Now, the Spirit should come and convince the opposing world, so far that some who were terrified before, should be brought to evangelical repentance: "Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart" (Acts ii. 37); soon desire to share in their great privilege: "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the Apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost" (Acts viii. 18, 19); but he was yet in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. Some almost persuaded: "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts xxvi. 28). Some forced to magnify them, who did not join with them: "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them; but the people magnified them" (Acts v. 13). Some would have worshipped them, being yet Pagans: "And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying, in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people" (Acts xiv. 11, 13). Others bridled, that were afraid to meddle with them: "Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the Apostles forth a little space; and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves, what ye intend to do as touching these men" (Acts v. 34, 35). That Christ, that Messias, that righteous person, one able to vanquish the Devil; thus, without any visible force, and with mere spiritual weapons, by this conviction of the Spirit, did the Lord

subdue the world to the owning and receiving Christ's kingdom; at least, not go on in a high hand to oppose it; God cleared Christ as righteous, and Lord.

2ndly, The necessity of this pleading.

1. Because the people of God are often in such a condition, that none will plead their cause unless the Lord plead it; and therefore we are driven to him as our judge and patron. God's design is not to gain the world by pomp and force, but by spiritual evidence and power; and therefore, as to externals, it is often worse with his people than with others; for the world is upon their trial; and therefore, though God will give sufficient means of conviction, yet not always such evident marks of his favour to the best cause in temporal things, as that mere sense shall lead them to embrace it. No; he will only set a good cause afoot, and then suffer it to be exposed to the hatred of the world, and sometimes to be overborne as to any temporal interest it can get, that the mere evidence and love of truth may gain men, and not any secular motives. All the countenance and owning God will give to it, is, by infusing courage and constancy into his servants to suffer for it; and so they overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and not loving their lives to the death (Rev. xii. 11). He speaketh of such a time, when the church seemeth weakest, like a poor woman travailing; and her enemies seem strongest, like a great red dragon, ready to devour the child as soon as born. Now, though, at such a time, the church is overcoming, and the Devil and his instruments are but pulling down their own throne and establishing Christ's, while they are shedding the blood of his saints; yet none of this appeareth, and is visibly to be seen. Though suffering be a sealing and ratifying of the truth, yet, to the world's eye, it seemeth a suppressing and overbearing of it. Therefore few will own such a despised, hated, persecuted way; and the difficulty is the greater, when there is much of God's truth owned by the persecuting side; and the contest is not about the main of Christianity, but some lesser truths, and so the opposition is more disguised: then certainly it may be said, "None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth" (Isa. lix. 4): all half-friends are discouraged, therefore nothing is left the people of God, but their prayers, "Lord, plead my cause." David, in the text, appealeth to God's judgment, when he was deserted by men, burdened by prejudices, oppressed by man's wrong judgment. So often God's people are not able to defend themselves, and few in the world will own them, or be advocates for them; then God will take their cause in hand. In the civil law, if a man could not get an advocate, *metu adversarii*, the judge was to appoint him one to plead for him: so God taketh notice of his people's condition: "There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up" (Jer. xxx. 13). Often, among men, none can or dareth undertake the defence and patronage of oppressed right.

2. Though we have a good cause and hopeful instruments, yet we cannot plead it with any effect, till God show himself from Heaven. Nay, though the cause be never so right and just, and instruments and means hopeful, yet it requireth God's power to keep it afoot. For the justice of the cause must not be relied on, nor probable means rested in; but God must have the trust of the cause, and the glory of maintaining it: otherwise, by our own ill managing, or by some secret and unseen opposition, it will miscarry: "Thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right" (Psalm ix. 4). This is a work wherein God will be

seen: while it is in agitation, or under decision, God will have the trust; and, when it is over, he will have all the glory.

3rdly, What hopes or grounds there are to expect that God will plead the cause of his people.

1. He can.

2. He will. Infinite power and infinite justice can do it.

1. He can. The Lord is able; he that pleadeth our cause, hath infinite power: "Their Redeemer is mighty, he shall plead their cause with thee" (Prov. xxiii. 11). It is easy to bear down a few afflicted creatures, that have no strength or heart to oppose, being in bonds, and under oppression; but there is a mighty God, who, when he pleadeth any one's cause, he will do it to the purpose, really and effectually delivering them from whom he pleadeth: "Their Redeemer is strong; and the Lord of hosts is his name; he shall thoroughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 1. 34).

2. He will; considering.—

(1.) Their relation to God.

(2.) God's relation to them, and to the whole world.

(1.) Because of their relation to him. The *Dominus*, the Lord whom they had chosen, was to be their *patronus*: they that have put themselves under God's protection, and are faithful to him, keeping close to his word, he will plead their cause, and manage it as his own: "Thus saith thy Lord the Lord, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again" (Isa. li. 22). He, being their sovereign Lord, had undertaken to protect his servants; he counteth the wrongs done to them, done to himself: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts ix. 4:) especially since molested for his truth.

(2.) Because of his relation to them. He is the supreme potentate and the righteous judge of the world, and so bound by his office to defend the weak and innocent when oppressed: "Which executeth judgment for the oppressed" (Psalm cxlvi. 7). Those that should maintain right upon earth, and punish wrongs, are often prevaricators; but the Judge of all the earth will do right: he is an impartial judge, and will maintain the cause of his people: "Rob not the poor, because he is poor; neither oppress the afflicted in the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them" (Prov. xxii. 22, 23). Though no relation to him, yet, if poor, if afflicted, if destitute of human help, the Lord taketh himself to be the patron of all such, much more of his people.

USE I.—To rebuke our fears and misgiving of heart. When we see the best men go to the wall, and to be made objects of scorn and spite, we are apt to say as the church doth, in the Prophet Isaiah, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God" (xl. 27): that is in effect, that God doth wholly neglect them, and will not plead their cause. Oh! no; he knoweth what strife there is between us and our adversaries, and how good our cause is, and how much he is concerned in it; only we must wait his leisure, and bear his indignation until he plead. True submission to God ought to prescribe no day to him, but refer all to his will.

USE II.—Let us commit our cause to the Lord, as the expression is Job v. 8, "I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my

cause," who is the friend and advocate of the afflicted, and hath promised to be so, and to keep us from the hand of the wicked and the mouth of the wicked. From their hand and violence, so far as it shall be for his glory: "I will contend with him that contendeth with thee; and I will save thy children" (Isa. xlix. 25). And from the mouth of the wicked: "He saveth the poor from the sword, from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty" (Job v. 15); from slanders that may endanger their life and credit. So, "Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue" (verse 21), from their bitter reproaches. Therefore commit your cause to God. But then,—

1. Be sure that your cause be good: for God will not be the patron of sin. Unless he hath passed sentence for us in his word, it is boldness to appeal to him; as Balaam, that would hire God by sacrifices to curse his people. Hasty appeals to God in our passion and revengeful humours, are a great dishonour to him. Sarah appealed: "The Lord judge between me and thee" (Gen. xvi. 5); and David appealed: "The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand" (1 Sam. xxiv. 15). But there was more of justice in David's appeal in the case between him and Saul, than in Sarah's appeal in the case between her and Abraham: it would have been ill for her, if God had taken her at her word. It showeth that even God's children are too apt to entitle him to their private passions.

2. Let us be sure that there be no controversy between God and our persons, when yet our cause is good. The Israelites had a good cause (Judg. xx.); but there was once and again a great slaughter made of them, before they had reconciled themselves to God. There must be a good conscience, as well as a good cause; otherwise, God will plead his controversy against us, before he will plead our controversy against our enemies: "Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger will turn from me: behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned" (Jer. ii. 35). Because we have a good cause, we think God hath no cause to be angry with us: therefore he will first plead in judgment against us. So, "The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him" (Hos. xii. 2). Though God may approve what is right in worship and profession, yet he will punish our shameful disorders, and unanswerable walking in his people.

3. Let us pray in a right manner; with confidence, with earnestness.

(1.) Confidence, that God will plead our cause, when he seeth it good, and for his own glory; whether there be any likelihood of it, yea or no; for he hath promised to support the weak and humble, and protect the innocent against their oppressors: "I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted and the right of the poor" (Psalm cxl. 12). God is party with you, not against you; and leave him to his own ways and means. Faith should support us, when sense yieldeth little comfort and hope. He knoweth how to justify your cause, and deliver your persons; and you should know that he will do it, and can do it, though the way be not evident to you, and God seem to sit still for a while.

(2.) Earnestly. Oh! be not cold in the church's suit! If you be Zion's friends, and are willing to take share and lot with God's people, awaken him by your incessant cries. Nay, it is God's cause: "Arise, O God; plead thine own cause; remember how the foolish man reproacheth

thee daily" (Psalm lxxiv. 22). The godly are not maligned for their sins, but their righteousness. So, "Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, even unto my cause, my God and my Lord" (Psalm xxxv. 23). There is a long suit depending between the church of God and her enemies: desire that God would determine it, and declare what is right, and what is wrong.

Secondly, He beggeth God in the text to redeem or deliver him; the word in the text, רִדְּמֵנִי the usual word for Goel, Redeemer, the Septuagint render *λύτρωσαί με*, ransom me. Here he craveth, that, as his cause might be in safety, so his person.

DOCTRINE.—We may beg a deliverance or a release from our troubles, provided we do not beg it out of an impatience of the flesh, but a desire of God's glory.

God delights to be employed in this work. What hath he been doing all along in all ages of the world, but delivering his people from those that oppressed them? He delivered Jacob from the fury of Esau; Joseph from the malice of his brethren: "And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him" (Gen. xxxvii. 21). Daniel from the lion's den: "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt" (Dan. vi. 22). Peter from prison: "And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews" (Acts xii. 11). And will not he do the like for his suffering servants? How came his hand to be out? He delivered Israel out of Egypt, out of Babylon; he can do it again, it doth not cost him much labour: "As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God" (Psalm lxxviii. 2). Therefore refer your deliverance to God, and, when you are in a way of duty, be not thoughtful about it: there is a price paid for it, Christ redeemed us from temporal adversity, so far as it may be a snare to us. God hath his times; we may see it, unless he hath a mind to sweep away the unthankful and froward generation that provoked him to so much anger: "Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles which I did in Egypt, and in the wilderness, have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me, see it" (Num. xiv. 22, 23); "Thus saith the Lord concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite, Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie; therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his seed; he shall not have a man to dwell among this people, neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the Lord; because he hath taught rebellion against the Lord" (Jer. xxix. 31, 32). It may be, we may be more broken and afflicted first: "For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left" (Deut. xxxii. 36). Oh! let us desire to see the good of his chosen: "That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance" (Psalm cvi. 5). It is a favour: "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me;

and to him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God" (Psalm l. 23).

Thirdly, For quickening, "Quicken me;" in which he prayeth either to be kept alive till the promises be fulfilled, or rather to be comforted and encouraged in waiting.

DOCTRINE.—We need continual influence from God, and lively encouragement, especially in our troubles.

1. We are apt to faint before God showeth himself: "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made" (Isa. lvii. 16). The Devil's design is to tire and weary us out. Some are of a poor spirit, that they will tire before their strength faileth them: "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small" (Prov. xxiv. 10). Yea, there is a readiness to faint in the best, through many troubles, delayed hopes; those that have upheld others by their good counsel, are apt to sink themselves.

2. At least, we are clogged, cannot so cheerfully wait upon God, and walk with him: "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees" (Heb. xii. 12). We grow weak, slothful, remiss in God's service: fear and sorrow weaken the hands, indispose us for duty.

USE.—Let us encourage ourselves, rouse up our heavy hearts, and wait for God's quickening; let us not give God cause, by our negligence, to deny support to us.

SERMON CLXXIII.

VERSE 155.—*Salvation is far from the wicked; for they seek not thy statutes.*

David had begged his own deliverance as one of God's servants or clients, in the former verse: now he illustrateth his petition, by showing the opposite state of the wicked; they could not with such confidence go to God, or put in such a plea for deliverance: "Salvation is far from the wicked." Some read it prayer-wise, Let salvation be far from the wicked; for, in the original, the verb is understood, and there it is only, Salvation far from the wicked; but most translations read it better proposition-wise; for, as the man of God comforts himself in his own interest and hopes, so also in this, that God would not take part with the wicked enemies against him, who had no interest at all in his salvation and protecting providence, and therefore would keep him from their rage.

In the words,—

1. An assertion.

2. The reason of it.

1st, In the assertion, we have the miserable condition of wicked men, Salvation is far from them.

2ndly, In the reason, we have the evil disposition of wicked men, "They seek not thy statutes;" which will give us the true notion and description of those who are wicked men: such as seek not God's statutes, busy not themselves about religion, study not to please God.

In the words two propositions:—

DOCTRINE I.—That salvation is far from the wicked.

DOCTRINE II.—They are wicked who keep not God's statutes.

DOCTRINE I.—That salvation is far from the wicked. Salvation is of

two sorts, temporal and eternal; the proposition is true in both senses: they are far from salvation, and salvation is far from them. To be far from salvation is to be in a dangerous case, as to be far from light is to be in extreme darkness: to be far from God's law (verse 150), is to be extremely wicked; to be far from oppression (Psalm liv. 14), is to be in a most safe condition. So that the point is,—

That the wicked are in a very dangerous case, both as to their temporal and eternal estate.

First, Temporal salvation is far from them, and they are in a dangerous condition as to their outward happiness. This seemeth to be the harder part, and to have most of paradox in it; but this will appear to you, if you consider,—

1st, That all these outward things are at God's disposal, to give and take according to his own pleasure: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away" (Job i. 21); not the Sabeans and the Chaldeans: "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up" (1 Sam. ii. 7). He that cast the world into hills and valleys, disposeth of the several conditions of men, that some shall be high, and some low; some exalted, some dejected: all things that fall out in the world, are not left to the dominion of fortune, or blind chance, but governed by the wise providence of God: "Their good is not in their own hand" (Job xxi. 16).

2ndly, That it belongeth to God, as the judge of the world, to see *ut malis male sit, et bonis bene*: "That be far from thee, to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25.) "But, if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid; for then how shall God judge the world?" (Rom. iii. 5.) "Shall even he that hateth right govern? and wilt thou condemn him that it is most just?" (Job xxxiv. 17.) "For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways" (Job xxxiv. 11). He is not indifferent to good and evil, and alike affected to the godly and the wicked, but hateth the one, and loveth the other: he hateth the wicked: "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Psalm v. 5); and, on the other part, he loveth the good and the holy: "Which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants" (Psalm xxxv. 27); it is his delight to see them happy and flourishing. This different respect is often spoken of in Scripture: "The Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer" (Psalm xxxi. 23); that he will uphold and maintain those that are faithful to him, and avenge himself upon the pride and oppression of the wicked. Though all the world be against the godly, God will preserve them; and ruin the wicked, though all the world should let them alone. So, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Peter iii. 12). There is a watchful eye of God over the righteous, to supply their wants, to direct them in their ways, to uphold them against dangers, to comfort them in their griefs, to deliver them out of all their troubles. God hath an eye to take notice of their condition, and an ear to hear their prayers; but his face is set to pursue the wicked to their ruin: so that this is enough to assure us that holiness is the way to live blessedly, even in this life, where misery most aboundeth, because this is a part of the care that belongeth to the judge of the world.

3rdly, Besides his general justice as the ruler and judge of the world, and the condescency that is in such a dispensation to the rectitude of God's nature, there is his covenant declared in his word, wherein he promiseth temporal happiness to the godly, and threateneth misery and punishment to the wicked; and God ever stood upon the truth of his word, to make it good in the eyes of the world: therefore it will be with men as their condition is set forth in the word of God. A promise there is as good as accomplishment, and a threatening as sure as performance; and therefore accordingly as the word saith of them, so is salvation far from or near them. Now, search all the word of God, and see if it speak anything of hope and comfort to the wicked, or them who make a trade of provoking God. Nay, they are well enough aware of that, and therefore will not come to the light, care not to busy themselves in the Scriptures; for they say of them, as Ahab of Micaiah, He prophesieth nothing but evil to me; and justly enough, for they can see nothing there but their own doom: if they are evil, it can speak nothing but evil: "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Wo unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (Isa. iii. 10, 11). This is the tenour of the whole word of God; so, "Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged; yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him; but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he feareth not before God" (Eccl. viii. 12, 13). It is a certain truth, it is a certain evident truth; for it is *judicium certi axiomatis*. I do know and confidently affirm, that it shall be well with them that fear God; but it shall not be well with the wicked; that is, it shall be very ill with them.

But here cometh in the great objection of sense, How can these things be so? We see the contrary, that all things come alike to all: "The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath" (Eccl. ix. 1, 2). That those outward things are given indifferently to good and bad, and the wicked are as free from temporal punishment as others, and enjoy all prosperity in this world, even sometimes to the envy and offence of God's children, and the hardening of their own hearts; and, which is more, that often it happeneth to the just according to the work of the wicked, and to the wicked according to work of the righteous (Eccl. viii. 14); that is, evil to good men, and good to evil men. As to outward things, the advantage is usually on the side of the worst.

ANSWER I.—By concession, we must grant what is to be granted, that, temporal things not being absolutely good or evil, the Lord taketh a liberty in the dispensation of them. The eternal promises and threatenings, being of things absolutely good and ill, are therefore absolute and peremptory; none that live godly can fail of the eternal promises, none that goeth on still in his trespasses can escape the eternal threatenings; but the temporal promises and threatenings, being of things not simply good and evil, are not so absolutely fixed; but God will take a liberty sometimes to cross his hands, out of his general indulgence to give prosperity to the wicked, and

out of his fatherly wisdom to chasten the godly; and so all things come alike to all. Is Abraham rich? So is Nabal. Yea, so the godly may be afflicted, when the wicked triumph; as Lazarus pined with want, when Dives fared deliciously every day; and Jerusalem was in a heap of ashes, when Babylon flourished.

2. By correction. The wicked have no right by promise or covenant, and so salvation is far from them; for this promise or covenant-right inferreth two things:—(1.) A sanctified enjoyment. (2.) A more sure tenure.

(1.) A sanctified enjoyment. They that have salvation by promise, they have it as an effect of God's special love; and so have it as a mercy, not as a judgment; but, without this, they have it only by God's general indulgence, and so it may be a snare: "Let their table become a snare before them; and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap" (Psalm lxxix. 22); and promote their ruin, not only eternal, but temporal. If they be not by these common mercies brought to repentance, the greater shall their condemnation be, and their downfall the more speedy; for, while they let loose the reins, and run headlong into all sin, God is the more provoked against them, and his anger, that was a little delayed and put off, is the more severely executed. It is a blessed thing to have salvation by covenant: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. viii. 28). When we are sanctified to God (saith Baxter), all things are sanctified to us, to serve us for God, and to help us to him.

(2.) Our tenure is more sure, and we can with more confidence wait upon God for it. In this sense, salvation is far from the wicked, because they cannot lay claim to God's favourable providence, or look for the continuance of it with any confidence; because they have no right, no promise to build upon; the word of God speaketh no good to them, whatever God may do out of his general indulgence: "Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord" (James i. 7). Now, the misery of this appeareth by considering wicked men, either as in prosperity or adversity.

(i.) If they be still at ease for the present, yet they are not upon sure terms, because they know not how soon God may break in upon them and theirs: "I have seen the foolish taking root; but suddenly I cursed his habitation. His children are far from safety (the notion of the text), and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them" (Job v. 3, 4). In the eye of the godly, they are far from salvation: I judged him unhappy for all his wealth, foretold his sudden destruction, which God would speedily bring on him and his; I read his doom. So, "Can the rush grow without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish" (Job viii. 11—13.) A wicked man cannot lift up his head above others for want of God's favour to uphold him, as the rush or flag cannot grow without mire or water: the prosperity of wicked men, when it is most green and flourishing, yet wants its sustenance, which is God's blessing. This is the condition of wicked men in the opinion of the good. But what is it in his own opinion? Take him in his serious and sober moods, he always liveth miserably and expecting a change, as knowing that God oweth him an ill turn: "A dreadful sound is in his ears: in prosperity, the destroyer shall come upon him" (Job xv. 21). He trembleth secretly, as

if danger were always near; therefore cruel and mischievous against whom they fear, that shut the door against their own danger; for everything that is fearful, will be cruel.

(ii.) If he fall into adversity. In their troubles, they have not a God to go unto, nor promises to build upon; therefore it is said, "The Lord is far from the wicked; but he heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Prov. xv. 29). God's children have ready access to a sure friend, and are assured of welcome and audience when they come; but they are at their wits' end, know not which way to turn: "He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness; and he is waited for of the sword" (Job xv. 22); that is, full of terrors of conscience, and distracting, disturbing fears; hath no hope to be delivered, but lives as if he had a sword hanging over his head.

USE I.—To show us the reason why the people of God, when they grow wicked, are often disappointed in that salvation which they expect: "We look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us" (Isa. lix. 11). Why? because they had exceedingly sinned against God, and scandalized their profession. There was a horrible depravation of the people of God in those times; and therefore all their prayers, and fasts, and seekings of God, could not prevail for a deliverance.

USE II.—Comfort in a good cause, wherein the godly are opposed by the wicked. There is a double comfort:—

1. Because the prosperity, power, and pride of the wicked are not to be regarded; for, though they flourish for a while, and all things flow in upon them according to heart's desire, yet salvation is far from them. God is engaged both for the rectitude of his nature, the quality of his office, as judge of the world, and the tenour of his covenant, to employ his power and terror for their ruin; and, though he may for a while spare them, and they take occasion from this indulgence to do more and more wickedly, yet you should not be dismayed, if you see them engaged in ways or courses that are naught and wicked. You may say, I know they cannot prosper in them. When they are lifted up in the prosperity of their affairs, you should lift up your hearts by faith, see a worm at the root of their happiness: *ἐνδον τὸ κακόν, &c.*

2. Because, by the rule of contraries, if salvation be far from the wicked that seek not God's statutes, then deliverance is near to the godly that fear God and desire to be faithful with him, how hard soever their condition seemeth to be for the present: "Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him" (Psalm lxxxv. 9). You should be confident of it, they that please God cannot be always miserable; it is nearer than we think of, or can see for the present. There is a "surely," or a note of averment, put upon it. It is better to be with the godly in adversity, than with the wicked in prosperity. When they are men appointed as sheep for the slaughter, yet there is a way of ransom and escape; but the wicked at their best are in the appointment of God, as the stalled ox, or as swine fattened for destruction; when fattest, then nearest to destruction and slaughter.

Secondly, As to eternal salvation, so they are in a dangerous case.

1st, The phrase here used by the Psalmist, seemeth to be used to obviate their vain conceit. They think they shall do well enough, and have as much to show for Heaven as the best; it is near in their conceit, but far indeed: "Be not deceived: know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1 Cor. vi. 9.) Thoughts of impunity are natural to us; those that are in the ready way to Hell, are apt to think they

shall get Heaven at last; as if God would turn day into night; but, alas! it is an eternal truth, "Salvation is far from the wicked."

2ndly, There is somewhat of a *meiosis* in the expression, less being said than is intended: the man of God saith that salvation is far; but he implieth that damnation is near: certainly the one doth imply the other. The ground that beareth briars and thorns, is ἐγγὺς κατάρας, nigh unto cursing (Heb. vi. 8). They are upon the borders of Hell, and ready to drop into those eternal flames which shall consume God's adversaries.

3rdly, Once again, the longer they continued wicked, the further off is their salvation every day; farther off from Heaven, and nearer to Hell. A godly man, the more progress he maketh in virtue, the nearer he is to his salvation: "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Rom. xiii. 11); not only nearer in point of time, but nearer in the preparation of their hearts; not because older, but because better: and so, by consequence, wicked men go farther and farther off, and therefore they are said to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath (Rom. ii. 5). Every sin they commit, puts them a degree further off from salvation, as every degree of grace is a step nearer Heaven.

Reasons:—

1. The inseparable connection that is between privileges and duties. The Gospel offereth salvation conditionally. If we forsake the condition, we fall short of the privilege; and therefore, if we be wicked, salvation is far from us. When God took Abraham into covenant with him, he doth not tell him only what privilege he should enjoy, but also bindeth him to walk suitably: "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. xvii. 1). God will take care of our safety, if we will take care of our duty. The covenant is called a bond: "I will bring you into the bond of the covenant" (Ezek. xx. 37); because it hath a tie upon us, as well as upon God. We are not at our own liberty, to walk as we list: there are bonds upon us; not *vincula carceris*, the bonds of a prison, gins and fetters; but *vincula nuptiarum*, the bonds of wedlock. Now, they that cast away these bonds from them, as the wicked do, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Psalm ii. 3); and will be their own men, and walk by their own will, have no title to the privileges that accrue by the marriage: such licentious spirits are at liberty, but to their own wo; they have a liberty to go to Hell, and undo their own souls. It was the wisdom of God to bind us to displeasing duties, by the proposal of comfortable privileges. Every man would desire to be saved, and to be happy for evermore; but corrupt nature is against holiness: now, without holiness, there is no happiness. The conditional promise doth more bind and draw the heart to it, when we lay hold of it, by yielding to perform the condition required; then may we groundedly expect the privilege promised. We would have salvation; but we cannot, unless we submit to God's terms; for Christ came not to gratify our selfish desires, but to subdue us to God. We would have sin pardoned, we would be freed from the curse of the law and the flames of Hell; but this can never be while we walk in our own ways, and are averse to holiness of heart and life; for God would ever sweeten duties by felicities.

2. Because of the perfect contrariety between the temper of wicked men and this salvation; so that they are wholly incapable of it.

(1.) They care not for God, who is the author of this salvation: he is not in all their thoughts, words, and ways: "The wicked, through the pride

of his countenance, will not seek after God : God is not in all his thoughts" (Psalm x. 4). They are far from him, though he be not far from every one of them. He is within them, and round about them, in the effects of his power and goodness; but they never think of him, nor take care to serve and please him; that is the reason in the text, "They seek not thy statutes." If they seem to draw nigh to him at any time, in some cold and customary duties, they do but draw nigh to him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him: "This people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me; and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men" (Isa. xxix. 13). Or, as it is in another Prophet, "Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins" (Jer. xii. 2). They profess to honour God with a little outward and bodily service, but have no love and affection at all to him.

(2.) They slight Christ, who is the procurer of this salvation; however they could like him as their Saviour, they like him not as their guide and governor. So he complaineth: "My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me" (Psalm lxxxii. 11); and, *ὁ θεὸς ἔλομεν τῶτον βασιλεύσαι ἐφ' ἡμᾶς*, "His citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke xix. 14). Men cannot endure his bonds and yokes: "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Psalm ii. 3); that they should deny themselves their own wisdom and will, and wholly give up themselves to the conduct and will of Christ. It is his spiritual kingdom that is most contrary to our carnal affections; for, if there were no king in Israel, then every man might do what is best in his own eyes. They would not be crossed in their licentiousness of life; and therefore, when Christ bringeth his bonds and cords with him, they set him at nought.

(3.) They despise the word, in which we have the offer of this salvation, and counsel and direction given us how to obtain it. There God calleth upon us to be saved: "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. ii. 4); but most slight his voice, and thereby put all hope far away from themselves. See Acts xiii. 26, compared with the 48th verse: in the 26th verse, "To you is the word of this salvation sent." Mark first, he calleth the Gospel the word of salvation, because there we have the way and means set forth how it was procured for us; there we have counsel given us, what we must do on our parts that we may be interested in it; there also we have the promise and assurance on God's part, that, so doing, we shall obtain it. Mark again, he saith this word of salvation was sent to them: he doth not say brought, but sent. The preaching of the Gospel is governed by God's special providence. When salvation is offered according to his mind and in his name, we must look upon it as a message from Heaven, directed to us for our good; not by the charity or good will of men, but the grace of God. Now, if you despise this, what will be the issue? See verse 46, "Seeing ye put [the word of God] from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life" (that is, by this obstinacy and perverseness), you become incapable of receiving benefit by it. That phrase, "judge yourselves," is very notable. There is a judging ourselves unworthy, that maketh way for the applying of the Gospel unto us, rather than taking it from us; as the publican judged himself, and went home justified; but a humble self-

judging is not meant here, but an obstinate, contemptuous refusal of eternal life. All unconverted men are unworthy of eternal life; but they that refuse grace offered, judge themselves unworthy of eternal life; put it out of all question, clear God if he thus judge them by their fact, declare their condemnation just.

(4.) They refuse the beginnings of this salvation and foregoing pledges, which God vouchsafeth in this world by way of taste and earnest. Grace is the beginning and pledge of glory; to be turned from sin, is a great part of our salvation: "He shall save his people from their sins" (Mark i. 21). It is not only salvation when freed from misery, but salvation when freed from sin; not only from evil after sin, Hell, and punishment, but from the evil of sin; from a proud, lazy, self-loving heart: he hath saved us by the washing of water (Titus iii. 5). When the power of sin is broken, and the life of grace is begun in the soul, then do we begin to be saved: the Spirit of holiness is the earnest of our inheritance, and an earnest is part of the sum: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation; in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph. i. 13, 14). Therefore holiness is a part of eternal salvation. Now, without this, we cannot have the other part: they that slight holiness, shall never see God.

(5.) They despise the salvation itself, rightly understood; partly, because they only value it under a fleshly notion, as a state of happiness and ease, not as a state of immaculate and sinless purity; for so it is wholly unsuitable to them. What should a carnal, sensual heart do with Heaven? or how should they desire it, that hate the company of God, the communion of saints, the image of God? God maketh meet: "Give thanks unto the Father which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. i. 12). There is *jus hæreditarium et jus aptitudinale*; though they do not desire to be saved for it, they would love holiness more. Partly, because of those conceits that they have of the adjuncts of salvation, and that happiness and personal contentment which results to them, they do not practically esteem it so as to value it above the delights of the flesh and the vanities of the world; and they do not think it worthy the pursuit, but, for the interests of the bodily life, cast off all care of it: "As Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright" (Heb. xii. 16); "They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise" (Matt. xxii. 5).

USE I.—It informeth us of two things:—

1. That wicked men are the authors of their own ruin. Salvation doth not fly from them, but they fly from it; they are far from the law, and therefore is salvation far from them. They will not take the course to be saved; for they care not for God and his statutes. It is but just, *ut qui male vivit, male pereat*; that they which despise salvation, should never see it.

2. That the wicked buy the pleasures of sin at a dear rate, since they defraud their own souls of salvation thereby. Their loss you have in the text, "Salvation is far from them;" and their gain is nothing but a little temporal satisfaction; and are these things worthy to be compared? What is it maketh you wicked, but the ease and sloth of the flesh, and the love

of some carnal delight? And are you contented to perish for this whoredom from God?

USE II.—Let it exhort us to believe and improve this truth; for, if men did surely believe it, there would not be so many wicked men as there are; neither would they dare to lie in sin as long as they do. Oh! consider; if the wicked have no part nor portion in the salvation offered, nor any jot of God's favour belonging to them, the wicked should not flatter themselves with presumptuous hopes, but break off their sins by repentance.

1. God's mercy will not help you; though he be a God of salvation, yet he will not save the impenitent and such as go on still in their trespasses: "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah. He that is our God, is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses" (Psalm lxxviii. 19—21). You must not fancy a God all honey and sweetness, and that his mercy should be exercised to the wrong of his justice: the Lord will not spare the abusers of grace, whoever he spareth: "And it shall come to pass when he heareth the words of this curse, that, if he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst; the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under Heaven" (Deut. xxix. 19, 20).

2. No doctrine preached in the church, will bear you out; not law, for that discovereth both sin and the curse; convinceth of sin, "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. iii. 20); what is sin, and who is the sinner. That bindeth you over to the curse: "For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. iii. 10). The Gospel, that showeth a remedy against sin, but upon God's terms; that first with broken hearts we sue out our pardon: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 9). Sin must be condemned, confessed, before pardoned; and then, that, in the way of holiness, we should seek salvation and eternal life. The way and end must not be separated: we must have our fruit unto holiness, if we would have our end to be eternal life (Rom. vi. 22). The pure and undefiled only have part in this salvation; but it is far from the wicked: Christ disclaims the unholy and unsanctified: "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. vii. 23). You may as well expect the way of the west should bring you eastward, as to walk in the ways of sin, and hope to come to Heaven at last. To think God will save us, and suffer us to walk in our own ways, or that this undefiled inheritance shall be bestowed on dirty sinners, was had been pleasing to the flesh and blood; but it is the Devil's covenant, not God's; that article, You shall be saved, and yet live in your sins, is foisted in by Satan, that false deceiver, to flatter men with vain conceits.

3. Do you hope for repentance hereafter? But, in the mean time, ye run a desperate hazard to leave the soul at pawn in Satan's hands; it is not easy work to get it out again. Who would poison himself, upon a presumption that, before it cometh to his heart, he shall meet with an anti-

dote? Judicial hardness is laid on them that withstand seasons of grace: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa. lv. 6); "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh" (Prov. i. 24—26); "None of those men which were bidden, shall taste of my supper" (Luke xiv. 24).

4. The heart is more hardened, the longer you continue in this course: "But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. iii. 13). Inveterate diseases are seldom cured; a tree that hath long stood, and begun to wither, is unfit to be transplanted: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer. xiii. 23).

5. There is a stint and measure as to nations: "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. xv. 16). Persons, vessels of mercy, vessels of dishonour: "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" (Rom. ix. 22.) Meet for Heaven, ripe for Hell. Saints, like a shock of corn, in season; so when sinned enough, then away to Hell.

But this exhortation is likely to be lost, because nobody will apply it. Let us see, then, the character of wicked men.

Secondly, They seek not thy statutes.

DOCTRINE.—They are wicked men who seek not God's statutes.

Here I must inquire,—

1. What it is to seek God's statutes.

2. Show why they are wicked that do not seek them.

1st, What it is to seek God's statutes? There,—

1. The object, or thing sought, is God's statutes; those rules and counsels which he hath given us, to guide us in our service of himself and pursuit of true happiness. These are all enforced by his authority, and enacted as laws and statutes, which we cannot transgress without violation and contempt of his authority. Now, he saith statutes indefinitely, because they must all be regarded without exception; for they all stand upon the same authority. It is said of Ezra, that good scribe, that he "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it" (Ezra vii. 10); that is, to be thoroughly informed of, and to practise, whatsoever was enjoined in the law of God. So must we prepare our hearts to do all; and, because our Christian law is broader, and compriseth Gospel too, which is the law of faith, we must take care of all which God hath given us in charge, and all that is adopted into our rule of faith and repentance, as well as moral duties; and, because there are *minutula legis*, and *βαρύτερα νόμῳ*, therefore our chief care must be about the weighty things, and those of greater moment must be sought most earnestly: therefore it is said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt. vi. 33): these concern the change of our estate.

2. The act of seeking. The word implieth earnest and constant endeavour. I seek for that which I mind and pursue with all my heart, and use all means that I may obtain it, till I do obtain or find it: thus we are bidden to seek that which is good: "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may

live" (Amos v. 14); and, "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgments: seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger" (Zeph. ii. 3). So Christ, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John v. 30). And here the Psalmist speaketh of seeking God's statutes.

(1.) It implieth earnest endeavour (for a man's heart is upon what he seeketh); that it be the business of our lives, not a thing done by-the-by; but our *εργον*, our work, is to please God, and to this all other things must give way. Many think it is a foolish thing for them to trouble their heads with matters of religion, and to lay bands of strictness upon themselves; but it must not only have its turn and respect among other affairs, but be indeed as the great affair of our lives. There is no business of such weight and necessity, because the saving of our souls lieth on it; and therefore it must be followed in good earnest, as a man, when he is seeking a thing, quitteth all other cares, and mindeth that only.

(2.) Constant endeavour, seeking till we find; as the woman for her lost groat: "What woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?" (Luke xv. 8.) So we must not content ourselves with our first and cold essay, as many, if they find not success upon some fair attempt, give over all care of religion, as if it were a tedious thing, not to be endured; now, seeking implies a resolute diligence, and persevering endeavours till we find.

3. The end of seeking after God's statutes, it is to have them, and keep them; as Christ saith, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John xiv. 21). First hath, then keepeth. To have the commandments, is to know them; to understand our duty and prove what is the revealed, holy, and acceptable will of God concerning us (Rom. xii. 2), that it may have the authority of a principle in our consciences. To keep them, is to endeavour actual obedience thereunto, and to regulate our practice thereby; for both these ends do we seek, and in both these respects do men show their wickedness.

(1.) We must make it our business to know the tenour and compass of our duty; and we are said to seek after this, because it will cost us pains ere we can obtain it. All knowledge will cost us industry, especially Divine and practical knowledge; as he that applieth his heart to the understanding of his duty, will soon find: "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures" (Prov. ii. 4). Now, this the wicked cannot endure: they indulge the laziness of the flesh, they know they that increase knowledge, increase sorrow. If they did know more of their duty, they would be troubled for not observing it; for knowledge will be urging duty upon the conscience. It bringeth a great obligation along with it; and, as an obligation, so an irritation or provocation: it will call upon them to do that which they have no mind to do; yea, and further, a self-condemnation and accusation, or sting for not doing it, or breaking any of God's statutes. Therefore, to prevent their own trouble, they are so far from seeking light, that they would shut it out, and quench those convictions that break in upon them: therefore the language of wicked men is, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job xxi. 14); the language of their hearts and lives, if not of their tongues. They do not only err in their minds, but err in their hearts; they have no

will to know, would not trouble themselves about religion, or acquainting themselves with God, neglect the means of grace.

(2.) We must make it our business to observe them, or our serious study to keep at a distance both in heart and practice from every known sin; eschewing what the Lord forbiddeth, and endeavouring every good duty which the Lord commandeth. This will cost us pains indeed, and requireth much seeking to get such a frame of heart; and, whoever trieth it, will find it long ere he can attain to it: "To will, is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not" (Rom. vii. 18). He sought, for his words imply that; but he could not do as he would; there was not a total omission, but a coming short of his aims: we must seriously give up ourselves to the observation of God's will, and attend upon this work. Thus wicked men do not seek, it is the least of their cares: "Lo, they that are far from thee, shall perish" (Psalm lxxiii. 27). The whole stream and course of their affections, lives, and actions, doth run from God to the creature; they care not whether they please God, yea or no: "He that keepeth the commandments, keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways, shall die" (Prov. xix. 16). He slights his way, that goeth on as his own heart leadeth him: as a traveller that regardeth not to choose his way, but goeth through thick and thin; he despiseth his way; so he that careth not whether his way be pure or filthy. Well then, the sum is, wicked men care not to know and obey God's word.

2ndly, Reasons why they are wicked that do not seek God's statutes.

1. Because omissions, where they are of duties absolutely necessary, and total and universal, and do necessarily draw sins of commission along with them, do argue a state of wickedness. But such is the case here; to live in a known sin, whether of omission or commission, is damnable: "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James iv. 17); but especially when total, &c. The wicked are thus described, them that forget God: "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm ix. 17); "So are the paths of all that forget God" (Job viii. 13); "Now, consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver" (Psalm l. 22). This layeth a man open to all sin, and maketh way for his destruction. So, "Those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him" (Zeph. i. 6): that is enough to damn them, if they do not break out into excess.

2. Because they are guilty of great wrong to God, and to their own souls.

(1.) To God. It is a contempt of his authority, when men will not study to know and do his declared will; that is, make it their business to do so; for it is a great slighting of him, looking upon his direction as of little importance: "I have written to him the great things of my law; but they were counted as a strange thing" (Hos. viii. 12); and therefore were strangers to it, as if there were no danger in walking contrary to it.

(2.) To themselves. God's statutes concern our salvation, as well as his own glory: "The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves" (Luke vii. 30). Thus a wicked man is *felo de se*: "Whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord; but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me, love death" (Prov. viii. 35, 36).

USE I.—You see now who are far from salvation, they that do not study the word of God, to conform themselves thereunto.

USE II.—Let us be sure to be far from the disposition of the wicked;

let us with all our hearts seek to comply with the precepts of God, and be more diligent and earnest in bringing our hearts to a true scriptural holiness, that we may not be in this danger.

Motives:—

1. From the excellency of these statutes. To be employed in the service of God, is the greatest honour, and the most blessed life, upon earth. If it be irksome, it is a sign of a disease, and some great distemper, or inclination to some base, dreggy delights of the flesh. If the soul were rightly constituted, it would be our greatest pleasure, honour, and content. Other work spendeth our strength; this increaseth it: “The way of the Lord is strength to the upright.”

2. From salvation. It is great, sure, near. Great, both as to body and soul; sure, God’s word passed is unalterable; near, should we faint in the sight of our country, and be sluggish and negligent when Heaven is at hand?

3. There is present content in the sight of our qualification and clear distinction from the wicked.

SERMON CLXXIV.

VERSE 156.—*Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord; quicken me according to thy judgments.*

In the former verse, we presented you with the judgment of God against the wicked; we shall now present you with a more comfortable argument, his mercies to his people. Whenever we think or speak of the damnable condition of the wicked, we should remember the grace of God, that hath made the difference between us and them. We were no better by nature than they; only mercy interposed for our rescue, and snatched us as brands out of the burning; so here David fleeth to God’s mercy, as the original cause of all that he had, or hoped for, from him: “Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord,” &c.

In the words there is,—

1. A eulogy, or an aspiration of praise to God; “Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord.”

2. A prayer, “Quicken me according to thy judgments.”

The one maketh way for the other; for, because God’s mercies are so great, therefore he is encouraged to come unto him for help. In the eulogy, we have the thing praised, God’s mercy. It is set forth by a double adjunct; one taken from the quality, the other from the quantity. From the quality, it is tender and bowel mercy; from the quantity, it is great. Or the word may be rendered many; the mercies of God (as one saith) are many and motherlike. Having laid this foundation for his hope, the man of God proceedeth to his prayer; which is our second branch, where you have the request, “Quicken me;” the argument, “according to thy judgments;” that is, thy promises in the new covenant; as we before explained the word. Those promises are called judgments, because they are rules of proceeding in the new courts which God hath set up.

Many things might be observed from these words.

1. That the primary cause of all that we have, and expect from God, is his mercy. The man of God beginneth here, when he expected different usage from the wicked, or that God should deal with him in another manner than with them.

2. That this mercy is so great and large, that it is every way sufficient for our help.

3. The terms and rules according to which we are to expect this mercy, are set forth in the new covenant; where God hath bound himself to show mercy to his people upon such conditions as are there specified. So that this covenant doth inform us, and assure us, both of God's mercy and God's quickening.

4. One special new-covenant blessing, is the preservation of the life of grace in our souls. There is a great necessity of it, because in the spiritual life we are subject to fainting; and the children of God have a great value and esteem for it; for they are more sensible of soul distempers than other men; and, when they see others stark dead in trespasses and sin, they are the more displeas'd with their own remaining deadness; and therefore would have the distinction between them and wicked men made more clear and sensible, by the activity and vigour of grace, and their diligence and care of salvation (which the wicked neglect) awakened by new influences from God; and therefore do they so often pray for quickening. Accordingly, God in the new covenant, as the God of their life and salvation, hath undertaken to keep them fresh and lively; and therefore, whenever we are under deadness, we should not be satisfied with it, or think it a light evil, but present our condition to God, looking to the promise of the new covenant, wherein God hath promised to put his Spirit into our hearts, to cause us to walk in his ways.

But, because all these points have been often discussed, I shall only handle this one point:—

DOCTRINE.—That in the Lord Jehovah there are great and tender mercies.

1. I shall open the mercy of God.

2. The adjuncts; the greatness and tenderness of them.

First, I shall open the mercy of God. That mercy is one of God's attributes, the Scripture is plain and clear: "Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy" (Psalm lxii. 12): he said before, "God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God." This is an evident and certain truth, that God is almighty, and hath all power to avenge his enemies and reward his friends; but, because this is not a sufficient foundation for our trust, there wanteth more to invite the creature to depend upon God, than his bare power and ability to help us; there must be also an assurance of his readiness to do what he is able: and that we have in this other attribute, which is as proper, and as much belonging to God, as power, and that is mercy: yea, it is an attribute in the exercise of which God delights most of all: "Because he delights in mercy" (Mic. vii. 18). God delighteth himself in all his attributes; yea, in the manifestation of them to the world; but chiefly in acts of mercy: these come readily from him, and unextorted. Though God willeth the punishment of a sinner for the manifestation of his justice, yet these acts of his vengeance are not so pleasing to God as the acts of his mercy; for he never doth them of his own accord, but is provoked. Acts of mercy flow from him like life-honey, but acts of vengeance are his strange work (Isa. xxviii. 21). Bees give honey naturally, sting when provoked; therefore God is nowhere called *pater ultionum*, whereas he is called *pater miserationum*, "the Father of mercies" (2 Cor. i. 3). It is the original and fountain cause of all our comfort: get an interest in his mercy, and all his

other attributes shall be for our good. Mercy will set awork his wisdom to contrive, his power to accomplish, what is for our comfort and salvation; his justice and wrath to avenge our quarrel: all other attributes are serviceable to mercy. Among the things that are ascribed to God, there is this order, that one is given as a reason of the other; as, in the business of our salvation, why doth God discover himself with so much wisdom and power? Because of his mercy: "According to his mercy he saved us" (Tit. iii. 5); of his mercy quickened us (Eph. ii. 4, 5); of his mercy begotten us to a lively hope (1 Peter i. 3). But what moved him to show mercy to us? You can go no higher, unless you assign a cause like itself; "God, who is rich in mercy, out of his great love wherewith he loved us:" indeed, so he showed mercy, because he would.

1st, The goodness of the Divine nature, as it doth discover itself to the creature, is called benignity, or bounty; sometimes grace, and sometimes mercy. The first issue or effect of the Divine goodness, is his benignity or bounty; by which, God, by giving something to the creatures, showeth himself liberal or bountiful. This is his goodness to the creature, as a creature. Thus he hath given being to all things, bare life to some, sense to others; and to man and angels, reason and grace. The next term by which the goodness of God is expressed, is grace; by which he freely giveth to the creatures all that good which they have, beyond all possibility of requital. The third term is mercy; which implieth the ready inclination that is in God to relieve our misery, notwithstanding sin. These three terms agree in this, that they all express the goodness of God, or his communication of himself to the creature. God knoweth himself, loveth himself; but he cannot be said to be bountiful, or gracious, or merciful, to himself: these things respect us. And again, that none of these can be reciprocated, or turned back from the creature to God. We may love God, who hath loved us first (1 John iv. 19); but mercy or grace never results from the creature to God: we know God, and love him, but cannot be said to be merciful to him. He giveth out mercy and grace, but receiveth none. Thus they agree; but they differ, in that bounty or goodness respects the creature, as a creature; grace respects the creature, as being able to make no recompence to God, or to merit anything at his hands; but mercy addeth these two things to the former, as supposing us in misery (the object of it is *persona miserabilis*), or as finding us under demerit or ill deserving, and appoints a remedy for us. God doth good to the angels, that never sinned, out of grace; but to man fallen, out of mercy: so that his mercy is nothing else but his proneness to help a man in misery, notwithstanding sin.

2ndly, We must distinguish between mercy, as it is an attribute in God; and the acts and effects of it, as they are terminated upon the creature. As it is an attribute in God, "The Lord is merciful and gracious" (Psalm ciii. 8), so it is infinite, as his nature is; but, in the effects as to us, there is a great difference. Mercy is one in the fountain, many in the streams; because there are divers effects, divers ways of showing mercy. Mercy, in the effect, may cease, as when the angels turned devils, and when God threateneth to take away his mercies from us; but God doth not cease to be merciful in himself: the effects of God's mercy are more or less; but the attribute in God is not so. Mercy, as an attribute, doth not oppose justice; but the effects of God's mercy may be, and are, contrary to the effects of his justice, as punishment is contrary to blessing.

3rdly, God's mercy is either general, or special, or peculiar. First, God's general mercy hath for the object of it, not only men, even them that are strangers to the faith, but also all the creatures; for it is said, "His tender mercies are over all his works" (Psalm cxlv. 9). God helpeth the poor brute creatures in their needs, and doth supply them with provision convenient for them: then there is his special mercy to man, helping and succouring him in his misery, notwithstanding sin; and so the giving of Christ to be the saviour of the world: "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared" (Tit. iii. 4). His mankindness, this was pity to us above the angels; no remedy was plotted for them. And then, his peculiar mercy is to his elect in Christ; so the Lord saith, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Rom. ix. 15). This is again seen, either in the first grace, or bestowing that upon us; or in all the subsequent grace that we stand in need of.

1. The first grace is pardoning all our past sin, or receiving us into a state of favour upon our repentance. So it is made the motive: "Turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful" (Joel ii. 13): penitent sinners will find him so to be. The Apostle saith, "But I obtained mercy" (1 Tim. i. 13); *ἡλεήθη*, I was overwhelmed in mercy. So, also, in giving us a heart to repent and turn unto him. We were unworthy and miserable sinners, could not help ourselves; and then his eye pitied us, and his hand saved us: by his preventing grace, he brought us home to himself.

2. In all the subsequent grace that we stand in need of. So the objects of his mercy must have a qualification; such as fear God (Psalm ciii. 11); such as love him, and keep his commandments (Exod. xx. 6); that walk according to the rule of his word exactly (Gal. vi. 16); to the merciful (Matt. v. 7); for to the unmerciful God will not show himself merciful (James ii. 13); but to those that are thus qualified, he reneweth his pardoning mercy, in taking away the guilt of our daily failings (Psalm xxv. 7); his sanctifying mercy, by freeing them more and more from the dominion of sin (Rom. vi. 14); his preserving mercy, by delivering them from afflictions, so far as it is convenient: "Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word" (Psalm cxix. 41); "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lam. iii. 22). His rewarding mercy: "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21). So, "Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest to every man according to his work" (Psalm lxii. 12). He will graciously accept, reward, and crown every sincere and faithful servant of his, when they have done their work. Sincerity and faithfulness shall be accepted and rewarded, when infirmities and weaknesses shall be pardoned and covered.

Secondly, Let me now open the two adjuncts of his mercy.

1st, It is tender mercy: "Through the tender mercy of our God" (Luke i. 78). The word signifieth bowels; as, when you see a poor miserable creature, your bowels work within you; especially if you be related to him: *Misericordia complectitur affectum et effectum*. Let us take the nearest relation. If you be a father, we need not much entreat a father to pity a poor helpless child; his own bowels will persuade him to it: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Psalm ciii. 13). Or, if you think passions in females more vehement, take the relation of a mother; as Hagar was affected to Ishmael, when the water was spent in the bottle, she sat over against the child, and

lifted up her voice and wept (Gen. xxi. 16). God will take the affections of a mother; as, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee" (Isa. xlix. 15). It is passionately set out by the Prophet: if all the compassions of all fathers and mothers were joined together, it were nothing to God; he is the Father of mercies, he is pitiful and merciful (James v. 11). It is true, there is in God no sickness, or trouble of mind, no commotion; but there is pity and tender love, though no perturbation, which will not stand with the perfection of his nature: that is, he layeth to heart, and taketh notice of our misery. The tenderness of God may be known by the compassion which Christ had in the days of his flesh; for he was the express image of his Father's person. Now, we read, "When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. ix. 36). Their teachers did not do their duty to them in any profitable way; this wrought upon Christ's heart, when he saw the multitude. So when he saw many sick and under noisome diseases, when they followed him he pitied them, and helped them (Matt. xiv. 14). So, "Jesus had compassion on the multitude, when they continued with him three days, and had nothing to eat" (Matt. xv. 32). The care of man's welfare lieth near unto Christ's heart. Before the disciples took notice of it, he taketh notice of the people's necessities, and is affected with it; he would not send them away fasting. The two blind men, when they feelingly laid out their miseries, "Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes" (Matt. xx. 34). So the widow of Nain lamented her only son, "The Lord saw her, and had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not" (Luke vii. 13). This for a taste what a tender heart Christ had; and, in Heaven, he is still a merciful high-priest. He came down on purpose to acquaint himself with our griefs and sorrows: surely he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and God's pity, though it hath no trouble with it, is real, operative, and efficacious.

1. His tender mercy is seen in his readiness to hear, and help, and come in to the cry of his people, if they be but anything humble and profitable in their afflictions: "And, if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day" (Isa. lviii. 10); "And he arose and came to his father. But, when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke xv. 20). When the son was coming, the father ran to meet him: "Before they call, I will answer" (Isa. lxv. 24): as if God could not tarry to hear the prayer made: "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm xxxii. 5); "Surely, after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord" (Jer. xxxi. 19, 20). The first relentings of the creature work upon the bowels of God's mercy; when we do but conceive a purpose, the Lord is easy to be entreated.

2. By the motives that do induce God to show mercy. The bare sight of our misery; and therefore the saints do so often represent their condi-

tion: "I am poor and sorrowful; let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high" (Psalm lxxix. 29). You see he bringeth no other argument but his grief and misery. Justice seeketh a fit object, mercy a fit occasion: "For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left" (Deut. xxxii. 36).

2ndly, The next adjunct is great. The mercies of God are seldom spoken of in Scripture, but there is some additional word, to show their plenty and excellency: as, "For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption" (Psalm cxxx. 7); "Which according to his abundant mercy" (1 Peter i. 3); and, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us" (Eph. ii. 4). So, "The exceeding riches of his grace" (Eph. ii. 7), *ὑπερβάλλοντα πλεον.* Paul thinketh he can never word it enough. When he speaketh of mercy, he saith it over over-abounded; all to show the multitude and greatness of God's mercies. So Psalm li. 1, we read of the multitude of his tender mercies. It must needs be so, if we consider,—

1. How many there are to whom God hath done good; even as many as there have been, are, and shall be creatures in the world. None that ever had a being, but tasted of God's goodness; nay, for his special mercies, the many persons that are pardoned, all the elect from the beginning of time till the day of judgment. What hath God been doing these thousands of years that the world hath continued, but multiplying pardons, and passing acts of grace, in favour of his people? Time would be no more, but only that there are some more whom God meaneth to pardon: "Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter iii. 9). When we come to Heaven, how many monuments of grace shall we see there! A man would think that the unthankful world had given discouragement, and God should wait no longer; but yet there are some vacant places to be filled: "In my Father's house there are many mansions" (John xiv. 2). We waste by giving, give from ourselves what we give to another; but this fountain is never dry: "The free gift is of many offences" (Rom. v. 16).

2. How many benefits he bestoweth on every one, many repeated acts of grace of the same kind, divers kinds of benefits, bodily mercies, soul mercies! "Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to usward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered" (Psalm xl. 5.) Private mercies, and public mercies; mercies in hand, and mercies in hope: "Oh! how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men!" (Psalm xxxi. 19.) We have not one sin, but many sins; not one misery, but many miseries: therefore we have many mercies: the creatures are always in some necessity, and so are always an object of mercy. How many supports this life continually needeth! all which the providence of God supplieth to us.

3. The greatness of these effects, the sending of his Son: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John iv. 9, 10). The gift of the Spirit

himself to be everlastingly with us (John xiv. 16); and by present troubles, to prepare us for future glory (2 Cor. iv. 17, and Rom. viii. 18). Surely, nothing but mercy, and great mercy, could do all this for us.

USE I.—To exhort us to consider of this, and to meditate much upon this attribute. To this end, I shall lay down a few considerations.

1. All that come to God, should consider of his mercy; it is the great motive to repentance, and beginning our acquaintance with God: "And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (Joel ii. 13). Our distrustful and unbelieving thoughts draw an ill picture of God in our minds; we think him a hard and austere one, that is more ready to condemn us than to receive us to mercy. Thus we look upon him in the glass of our guilty fears. Oh! no; he is merciful, if we will but stoop to him. Besides, it is a great check to our pursuit of carnal vanities: "They that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercy" (Jonah ii. 8). Thus to the secure and careless, when they consider all this grace and tender mercy, it is the great means to overcome them with kindness. A serious consideration of what God hath done, and is ready to do for us: "I beseech you, &c., by the mercies of God" (Rom. xii. 1). Saul wept when David had spared him (1 Sam. xxiv. 16). If we had not lost all ingenuousness, we should say, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant" (Gen. xxxii. 10). Then when we come to a reckoning and audit with God, how great is the sum of them! There are more effects of his mercies, and of more diverse kinds: "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!" (Psalm cxxxix. 17.)

2. It is not enough to know that God is merciful, but we must also consider how great and tender his mercy is; for God's children are wont to have great and large thoughts of it: we must think of it, as becometh the infiniteness of his nature whose mercy it is: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. lv. 8, 9); "For I am God, and not man" (Hos. xi. 9). We must not straiten God to our scantling; our drop is soon spent. Peter, a good man: What! forgive seven times a-day? How tender it is! It is so natural to God. Acts of punitive justice are exercised with some reluctancy; but he rejoiceth over them to do them good: he is strongly inclined to let out his goodness to unworthy and miserable sinners, who deserve the contrary from him. The sea doth not more naturally flow, nor the sun more naturally shine, nor fire more naturally burn, than God doth naturally show mercy. These thoughts will answer all the doubts and fears of a penitent; thou canst never have too large thoughts of God.

3. We shall never have such great and large thoughts of God's tender mercy, as when they arise from our own experience and particular observation. To know God by hearsay, will not work upon you, as when we have seen him ourselves; as they said unto the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John iv. 42). We do not speak or think of God with any sense and life, affection and admiration, till we have studied his nature, and observed his ways: other-

wise, we speak by rote, when we praise him for his mercies, and it is but an empty compliment: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases," &c. (Psalm ciii. 1—3.)

4. Then will our own experience inform us of the greatness and tenderness of mercy, when we are sensible of our sins and miseries. When a man seeth his sins great, his dangers great, then he will see God's mercies towards him great also: "For great is thy mercy toward me; and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest Hell" (Psalm lxxxvi. 13). We do not know the greatness of the pardon, but by the greatness of the debt; nor the greatness of our protection and deliverance, but by the greatness of the danger. God continueth trouble upon his people, that they may be sensible of the sweetness of the mercy, and his help in their deliverance: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8).

5. When our sense of sins and miseries hath most recommended mercy to us, we should magnify it, both with respect to supplication and gratulation.

(1.) With respect to supplication. When we are under fears and discouragements, we should oppose and set these great and tender mercies in the balance against our doubts and fears. Our sins are many, our troubles great; yet let us not be discouraged from praying, and making our supplication to God; for God will pardon a penitent people, and help a sensible supplicant. The more sensible of our misery, the fitter objects for mercy. What is it that troubleth us? Fear of not speeding with God in prayer? You hear how soon he relenteth, when you relent and lie at his feet; for to what use doth pardoning mercy serve, but to encourage broken-hearted sinners? "We have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful kings." Benhadad having lost the day, and in great fear of losing his life with his kingdom, his friends comforted him with the fame they had heard of Israel's kings (1 Kings xx. 31). We know most certainly, it is hard to raise up truly poor, down-lost sinners, how presumptuous soever they have been before. God would have these by all means to be encouraged. So that, though you have many objections from your unworthiness, the multitude and greatness of your sins; or is it the power of men, and difficulty of our deliverance? God's mercy is beyond the proportion of their cruelty. The more violent and ungodly our oppressors are, the more hope of God's pity towards us: "O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul, and have not set thee before them; but thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Psalm lxxxvi. 14, 15).

(2.) Let us magnify it as to gratulation: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies," &c. (Gen. xxxii. 10;) less than the least of all thy mercies. Let us consider our unworthiness, that God may have all the glory.

USE II.—Is to press us to be merciful. We should be like God; let us put on bowels of mercy: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering" (Col. iii. 12); "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke vi. 36).

SERMON CLXXV.

VERSE 161.—*Princes have persecuted me without a cause; but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.*

In this verse we have,—

First, David's temptation.

Secondly, The godly frame of his spirit.

First, In David's temptation, take notice of,—

1. The nature of it, it was a persecution.
2. The instruments of it, Saul, and the chief men about him, princes.
3. The malice and groundlessness of it, "without a cause."

Secondly, The godly frame of his heart, "But my heart," &c. And there we have,—

1. The seat of his affection, "my heart."
2. The kind of the affection, "standeth in awe."
3. The object of it, the word of God.

First, With David's temptation, I will not meddle any further than an introduction, or the necessity of an exposition, enforceth me a little to reflect upon. And,—

1st, From the nature of it. Persecution is one of the ordinary trials of God's children. As God chasteneth them, because they are no better (Isa. xxvii. 9), so the world persecuteth them, because they are so good (John xv. 19). This ever hath been, and ever will be, the lot of God's children, while there are two seeds in the world: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed" (Gen. iii. 15). And the Apostle saith, "But, as then he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now" (Gal. iv. 29). The first place speaketh of the antipathy between the church and its open opposites; the second was in Abraham's family, and it is brought to comfort the true members of the Christian church, against those persecutions which they sustained from the false apostles and such as adhered to the Jewish synagogue. Isaac was begotten by the power of God's Spirit, according to the tenour of the promise: Ishmael, by the ordinary strength of nature, a figure of the regenerate and unregenerate (John i. 12). Persecution is a thing common to the church in all ages, then and now; therefore, as they grow worse, let us grow better; and let us be content to take the ordinary way, by the cross to come to the crown.

2ndly, The instruments of his trouble were Saul and his chief men about him. The man of God had said, "Many are my persecutors" (verse 157); now he showeth, they were not mean ones, and of the inferior sort; but such as by their power were able to crush him, such as by their place should be a refuge to him. I observe, the trial is the sorer when our trouble cometh, not only from the basest of the people, but from the rulers themselves. No doubt, a great part of the people followed Saul in his persecuting of David; yet the nobles most troubled him. In the primitive times, *lapidibus nos irradit inimicum vulgus*, the base riff-raff were most ready to stone the Christians; but this was mere brutish rage: a multitude, though they have power, yet they have no authority. But when the rulers were set against them, and persecuted them with edicts and punishments, then the greatest havoc was made of them. To see

God's ordinance abused, maketh the trial the more grievous. The godly should be defended by their governors; for therefore they are called the shields of the earth (Psalm xlvi. 9). But now, when they persecute them for righteousness' sake, it is a sore, but no strange, temptation. They may do so partly out of ignorance: "Which none of the princes of this world knew; for, had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. ii. 8); and partly out of prejudice and blind zeal; so the corner-stone is refused by the builders (Psalm cxviii. 22), applied to Christ's persecutors: "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner" (Acts iv. 11); and partly by the instigation of evil men. Wicked men labour to engage those who are in power against the people of God, and make them odious to them: "The blood-thirsty hate the upright" (Prov. xxix. 10). Flattery giveth the first onset to the work of impiety (Acts xxiv. 1—3). And partly because riches and power efferate men, swell them with pride, fill them with enmity against the ways of God: "Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud" (Psalm cxliii. 4). Well then, let us not be dismayed, though great men be prejudiced against us, and we have powerful enemies in church and state: "But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles" (Matt. x. 17, 18). Though we were persecuted with censures, civil and ecclesiastical, and both judicatures thunder against us: "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service" (John xvi. 1, 2). It is a stumblingblock to see power, which is of God, bent against God and his interest: the beast in the Revelations pushed with the horns of the lamb; but Christ hath told us of these things beforehand, that we should be fore-armed against them. Christ's followers must not only look for injuries from wicked men, in a tumultuous way, but ordinarily carried by fixed judicatures; thrown out of the church by excommunication, and out of the world by death.

Let us bless God that our rulers deal more Christianly by us; and let us not irritate them, but show all love, and meekness, and obedience; and let the mild government of our gracious Sovereign move us to pray to God for the continuance of his life, and the prosperity of his affairs: it is but a necessary gratitude that we should pay him, for the rest and peace we enjoy under him.

3rdly, The malice and groundlessness of this persecution, "without cause." David did not suffer for his deserts, as an evil-doer; he had done nothing disobediently against Saul's authority: when he had spared him in the cave, he giveth him an ample testimony: "Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil" (1 Sam. xxiv. 17). Again, he had another testimony, when he surprised his camp sleeping: "Return, my son David; for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly" (1 Sam. xxvi. 21). Theodoret expoundeth this of the next verse, with application to these passages. When David found Saul asleep, he would not kill him; and this was more comfort to him than if he had slain, and obtained all their

spoils. Observe, we may the better represent our case to God, when we suffer without a cause; then our sufferings are clean sufferings; more comfortable to us, and honourable to God. It was Daniel's glory, that they could find no occasion or fault against him, but only in the matter of his God (Dan. vi. 4, 5). Blameless carriage disappoints the malice of wicked men, or shameth them. Caius Seius, *vir bonus, nisi quod Christianus*. Now, a pretended crime doth not take away the glory from us: Saul pretended that David was an enemy to his life and crown; but David declared the contrary by word and deed; he might have slain him twice: "Put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter ii. 15). There may be in man's court a cause, which before God is no just cause; as when we are punished for the breach of law, which is contrary to our duty to God: "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?" (Psalm xciv. 20.)

Well then, whatever we suffer, let it be without a cause. There is cause enough on God's part, to afflict and strike us for our sins; but, on man's part, let us not procure sufferings to ourselves by our provocations. We shall hereby have more peace in sufferings, and bring more honour to religion: "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing" (1 Peter iii. 17); "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, &c.: yet, if any man suffer, as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter iv. 15, 16). Surely Christ's cross is more comfortable than the cross of Barabbas.

Secondly, Let us come to his gracious frame of heart, to stand in awe of the word; "But my heart standeth in awe of thy word."

DOCTRINE.—It is a gracious frame of heart, to stand in awe of the word of God.

God's people are often described by it: "Whoso despiseth the word, shall be destroyed; but he that feareth the commandment, shall be rewarded" (Prov. xiii. 13). There are many fear a judgment, when to visible appearance it is likely to tread upon the heels of sin; yea, and some fear a threatening, at least when it is likely to be accomplished; but who fears a commandment, but a gracious heart? This is reason enough to draw back, if a commandment stand in the way; it is more than if there was a lion in the way, or a band of armed enemies, or an angel with a drawn sword, such as stood in the way to stop Balaam: they have a deep reverence of God's authority, and dare not break through, when God by his law hath fenced up their way. So, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. lxvi. 2). A man that is affected according to his doom and sentence passed in the word, if the word speaketh bitter things or the word speaketh peace, accordingly the man is affected; this is the man that God will look at: "Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel" (Ezra ix. 4). None so careful to redress disorders, to use all the means they can to prevent judgment, as those that tremble at God's word; and therefore they above others did assemble to Ezra. A man hath gained a great point, when he doth not value his condition by external probabilities, but by the sentence of the word. It is hopeful, if the word speaketh good unto it; sad, when the word speaketh bitter things: this man will be otherwise affected than the most are, and more careful to please God. Once more, "Those that tremble at the commandment of our

God" (Ezra x. 3): Shechaniah referreth the reformation to them. These are persons exactly conscientious: they make God's commandments their rule, and tremble at the apprehension of having anything done against God's will: none so fit as they to judge of cases of conscience and to regulate affairs. Men that enlarge themselves, and do not stand so nicely on the will of God, will be more lax, and complying with their own lusts and the humours of men.

1st, I shall show you what it is to stand in awe of the word.

2dly, Then give you the reasons why they that are godly will do so.

1st, What it is to stand in awe of the word. We will determine it, by opening the circumstances of the text. And,—

1. Let us take notice of the seat of this affection, the heart; "My heart standeth in awe of thy word." A true reverence of the word of God must be planted in the heart, or else all outward profession of respect is but hypocrisy: "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth; seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee?" (Psalm l. 16, 17.) Many may solemnly pretend to piety, and talk of it, and perhaps preach of it to others, but do not exactly reform their carnal practices: they do but abuse themselves, and deceive others. So strangely are many bewitched with their own deceitfulness of heart, and power of Satan, that they can, without remorse of conscience, profess the true religion, pretend to a covenant with God, yet affront that religion, by being loose and scandalous, and can break the covenant without any scruple: such are contemners of God's word, however they seem reverencers of it. That Psalm speaketh of the collection of the Gospel church, "Gather my saints together, who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice;" not that of bulls and goats, but by Christ Jesus. But many profane this covenant, and are carried away by every temptation; some as greedy thieves and extortioners, some as filthy adulterers, some as haters of godliness, some as injurious slanderers and whisperers and backbiters. In the Christian world, this prediction is too plainly verified. The carnal Christian and the serious Christian profess to respect the same Bible, to believe the same creed, to enter by the same baptism, to claim privilege by the same covenant, yet hate one another, and are as contrary one to another, as infidels and Pagans. On the one side, there is mouth-respect to the word; on the other, heart-respect; the one in outward covenant with God, the other brought into the inner court. God beareth long with the former sort, but will not bear always: so, "Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins" (Jer. xii. 2). They profess thee in word, but deny thee in heart and in deed; draw near thee in show and pretence, as a people in league with thee, but their hearts, love, and affection, are wholly estranged from thee; and would take it ill to have their religion disproved or questioned, yet are not brought under the power of it. So, "This people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me; but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men" (Isa. xxix. 13). Because of tradition, teaching by authority, maintaining or enjoining the worship of God: a worship and respect to God they will have, but such as doth not proceed from an impression upon their hearts, but only in compliance with their customs.

2. The kind of the affection, "standeth in awe." There is a twofold awe of the word:—

(1.) One that driveth us from it.

(2.) Another that draweth us to it.

(1.) Fear and awe of the word which driveth us from it, is spoken of John iii. 20, 21: "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God:" carnal men, who live contrary to the light of nature and Scripture, cannot endure anything which should put them into a serious remembrance of God. This is an effect of legalism and slavish fear, which, as it bewrayeth itself in its carriage towards God himself, so also in its carriage towards his saints and word. Towards God himself: a slavish fear of God is always accompanied with an aversation, or a turning away, from him; as guilty Adam was afraid of God, and hid himself in the bushes (Gen. iii. 10); and still an unsound conscience is shy of God, and hangeth off from him. So towards the saints, who have God's image printed upon them; they fear the saints and hate them; as Herod feared John, and put him to death (Mark vi. 20). Still men malign what they will not imitate; natural conscience in them doth homage to the image of God, shining forth in the lives of his people. They see an excellency in them which they have not; and because all those who keep up the majesty of their profession, are objects reviving guilt, they hate them; and, if their hatred be more than their fear, they destroy them when it is in their power. So for the word: they are afraid of the word, so as to stand at a distance from it, and cannot endure it, any more than sore eyes can the light of the sun: they have a mind to cherish their lusts and carnal practices, and therefore hate the light which disproveth them; as they that would sleep, draw the curtain to keep out the light. Whereas, on the contrary, the godly delight to have their ways tried and made manifest by this light. It is a refreshing light to them; but a reprovng and discovering light to others, it convinceth them to be what they are: now, they shun all means of searching and knowing themselves, by wishing such things were not sin, or not desiring to know them so, and that there were not a God to punish them. But a sincere man is otherwise affected; he is jealous and suspicious of himself; he bringeth his work to God's balance, and cannot quiet his conscience without God's acceptance.

(2.) There is an awe of the word, not that maketh us shy of it, but tender of violating it, or doing anything contrary to it. This is not the fruit of slavish fear, but holy love; it is not afraid of the word, but delighteth in it, as it discovereth the mind of God to us; as in the next verse, 162. This is called by a proper name, reverence, or godly fear; when we consider whose word it is, God's; who is our God, and hath a right to command what he pleaseth; to whose will and word we have already yielded obedience, and devoted ourselves to walk worthy of him in all well-pleasing; who can find us out in all our failings, as knowing our very thoughts afar off (Psalm cxxxix. 2), and having all our ways before him, and being one who will not forgive our wilful transgressions: "He is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins" (Josh. xxiv. 19), that would impenitently continue in them; and so we receive the word with that trembling of heart which God so much respects.

3. The object "thy word;" that is, the whole word of God, the precept with its double sanction, the threatening and the promise. The precept is the rule of our duty; the sanction, of God's proceeding: we are

to stand in awe, not only of the threatening, but the precept itself; for love to God hath a great influence in producing this awe of the word. It is in angels and heavenly creatures, whose happiness is absolutely secured to them (Jude 4). The great ground of it is God's authority; and that is seen in the precept as much as in the sanction. God's will is the reason of our duty, and his will declared in his word is the rule of it; and the saints obey *intuitui voluntatis*, a bare sight of his will, though no inconvenience should follow of it: "For this is the will of God" (1 Thes. iv. 3); "For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thes. v. 18); "For so is the will of God," &c. (1 Peter ii. 15.) But yet I would not exclude the sanction; no, not the sad part of it; neither the threatening, nor the promise; because I dare not contradict any of the Holy Ghost's methods, nor exclude his argument from having an influence upon our obedience, as he telleth us of Moses, who "had an eye to the recompence of reward" (Heb. xi. 26). So of Job, who was tender of doing anything contrary to the will of God, because destruction from God was a terror to him (Job xxxi. 23). To be afraid of God's judgments in a holy manner, is not a sin, but a grace; a great point of our duty; yet a matter of faith, to apprehend that destruction which God in his word threateneth to sinners. Unbelief of the threatening had a great predominancy in the first sin: "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. iii. 4); and still it is a main ingredient; men embolden themselves to rebellion, because they look upon God's wrath as a vain scare-crow, and that he doth only frighten us with a deceitful terror and a flash of false fire. But yet reflection upon the threatening must not be alone, that breedeth legalism; nor yet upon the promises alone; but a deep awe and reverence of God's authority must be the main thing that swayeth the conscience. A Christian should have no more to move or stop him, than to know what God will have him to do or not do. That terror that doth arise from a mere slavish fear of God as a judge and avenger, is not right; but such an awe as doth arise from looking upon God at once as a wise lawgiver, a gracious father, and a righteous judge. A son, a child, if he take liberty to break the bonds of duty, shall smart for it; though a believer obeyeth and keepeth off from sin upon higher and nobler terms than wrath, yet he maketh a good improvement of these terrors also; for godly fear is influenced by God's being a consuming fire; "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 28, 29).

2ndly, We come to the reasons, why we should stand in awe of the word of God.

1. From the author of it. It is God's word; not the word of a weak man, but of the great and mighty God. His authority is supreme, his power infinite, his knowledge exact, his truth unquestionable, his holiness immaculate, his justice impartial. The same reasons which move us to fear God, do move us also to reverence his word; and add this above all the rest, that therein his truth is impawned to us, and by it he obligeth himself to make good both his threatenings and his promises. Three things I shall take notice of, which show God's stamp and impress upon the word.

(1.) Its authority in searching the heart: "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. iv. 12); that is,

as a sharp sword doth pierce asunder between joints and marrow, so doth the word divide soul and spirit; and is a discerner; that is, of the convictions of the mind, and the disposition and inclination of the soul, or sensual appetite. The soul cleaveth to the sin, when the mind or spirit disliketh it; or plotteth pretences to hide it from himself or others, even in those sins which lie as hidden in the mind as the marrow in the bones; secret purposes fall under its judging power, as well as practices accomplished. And what use must we make of this, but that we stand in awe of the word; avoiding what it forbiddeth, and following what it commandeth? Now, to evidence this property of the word, he urgeth the omniscience of God, whose word it is: "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; for all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (verse 13). As the sinner's secret thoughts are under the sight of the all-seeing God, so they are under the piercing power of his word; for God joineth with his word, and giveth it that discovering and piercing virtue. So the Apostle of the word preached or explained it: "He is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25). The word is the rule, God is the judge; and, the word being assisted by God, God is there where the word is; and so doth ransack the conscience, and discover men to themselves in order to judgment.

(2.) It hath a mighty power and force, because of the Spirit that goeth along with it: "It is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. i. 16). The Gospel is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 24). It is powerful to convince, even there where it converts not; as Felix trembled (Acts xxiv). It is powerful to convert from one religion to another, from one state to another.

(i.) From one religion to another: "Have any of the nations changed their gods?" (Jer. ii. 11.) There needs much ado to bring men from a false religion, wherein they have been brought up, how vain and foolish soever it be; yet this power the word hath. Though the doctrine of a crucified Christ were so distasteful; partly, as now drawing men from their old temples, and altars, and ceremonies, wherein they were educated; especially as incredible, offering life by one that died: and partly, as contrary to the carnal gust, as requiring duties distasteful to flesh and blood, and engaging in troubles and persecutions; yet it prevailed.

(ii.) Converting men from a state of nature to a state of grace; so that they are as it were born. To bring men to hate what they naturally love, and love what they naturally hate; it is hard to alter the nature of things (Isa. xi. 6); to quicken the dead, to purify the unclean, confirm the weak, to meeken the proud and passionate. Oh! who would not reverence such a word, such a law and doctrine, as can do all this? Yet this and much more hath the word done.

(3.) Its authority: "Where the word of a king is, there is power" (Eccl. viii. 4), or authority to back it; how is it where God's is? We reckon not of the words of a private person, though never so wise: "The poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard" (Eccl. ix. 16). Where the command of a king cometh, it cometh with authority; for he hath power to back it, and to avenge himself on whosoever shall contradict it; but wise counsel, where there is no authority to enforce it, is little regarded: but now, with God is sovereign majesty, and in his word; where-

in sentence is pronounced concerning every person and action, according to which judgment doth proceed and will be executed.

2. The second reason is taken from the matter of the word; it is direction about our everlasting concernments: "Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, &c.; for it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life" (Deut. xxxii. 46, 47). In a matter of life and death, a man cannot be too exact and nice: yea, in the obedience or disobedience of the word, life or death eternal is concerned; yea, in every action, morally considered, the word telleth you what is the merit of it, and what will be the event, or an evil or a good estate. Man would fain know his destiny, whether happy or miserable; here you may know whether you shall live for ever with God. Man, in his laws, doth not threaten or promise beyond his power; his power reacheth to men's outward estate, and no further, and is limited to the bounds of the present life: therefore the sanctions of their laws are never extended beyond the promises or threats of present and outward good, to give or take away men's liberty, wealth, estate, life at most. But God threateneth "everlasting fire" (Matt. xxv. 41), promiseth an inheritance immortal (1 Peter i. 4). As God commandeth inward holiness, righteousness, love, so eternal rewards and eternal penalties; things that concern us more nearly than estates, liberties, peace; yea, our lives themselves.

3. Because of the profit of standing in awe of the word.

(1.) It fortifieth us, and preserveth us in such temptations as arise from the fear of man; where there is a reverence and awfulness of God's word, the greater awe overcometh the less. In such a temptation, a man may miscarry two ways; by distrust of God, and disobedience to him: the one is the cause of the other. Now, that we may not distrust him, it is good to set fear against fear, God against the creature: "Be not afraid of their faces; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord" (Jer. i. 8). His powerful protection should encourage us against their wrathful disposition: "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?" (Isa. li. 12, 13.) The immortal and almighty God is able to bear us out; a due sense of the power of the Almighty checketh the fear of men. Or by disobedience we dishonour him: certainly a gracious heart feareth more to offend God than to fall into any temporal inconvenience: "Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (Isa. viii. 12, 13); "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts" (1 Peter iii. 14, 15). But let him be your fear and your dread: be afraid to offend so holy a majesty. The countenance of princes is very awful unto men; but the fear of God's wrath should overcome the fear of man's displeasure, even of the greatest: "Not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27).

(2.) It maketh a man sincere. When a man standeth in awe of the word, he obeyeth in presence and absence (Phil. ii. 12), and avoideth secret as well as open sins (Gen. xxxix. 9); sins of thought as well as deed; heart sins, which the laws of men cannot take hold of, but the fear of God is in stead of all laws. Conscience is to them, more than shame of men (2 Cor. i. 12). Something without, keepeth back wicked men; but something within, the godly. Abner's question was not good, "How then

should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?" (2 Sam. ii. 22 :) he should have said, How shall I hold up my face to the Lord thy God? Though an upright man might do wickedly, uncontrolled of man, and nobody seeth him, or punisheth him, yet reverence of God and his word restraineth him.

(3.) It maketh a man punctual and exact, when afraid to do anything contrary to God's revealed will. It is universal, and it is powerful. It is universal; the soul that maketh conscience of the word, is more thorough in obedience. There will be failings; but, for the main, his heart is sound with God; and lesser failings are retracted by repentance. And powerful: "Stand in awe, and sin not" (Psalm iv. 4). This will cause us to stop in an evil course, on the remembrance of our duty; as David's heart smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment. Some think the text then verified, "My heart standeth in awe of thy word;" a commandment was in his way.

USE I.—Is to show us what frame of spirit they are under who despise the word.

1. All do so, who deliberately and voluntarily prefer their own will before the will of God: "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord?" (2 Sam. xii. 9.) They obeyed their own inclination, whatever the word saith to the contrary. Despising the commandment is the root of all sin, as formality of wilful sin. Oh! that men did regard this as they ought! considering that to despise commandments, is to despise the Lord himself; and what it is for poor worms to despise the God of Heaven and earth! Nay, that God that is our judge! He hath power to cast both body and soul into Hell fire! the God whom we are bound by so many ties to obey!

2. When swayed by delight and profit against the course of our duty. Esau sold his birthright to keep him alive, yet despised it (Gen. xxix. 31, and Heb. xii. 16).

3. The case is more aggravated when we cast a precept behind our backs, for a light pleasure or small profit. The greater is our contempt, to break with God for a little trifle; sell the righteous for a pair of shoes.

USE II.—Is to press us to get this blessed frame of heart, to stand in awe of the word.

1. It is a great curb in actual temptations: "How, then, can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. xxxix. 9.)

2. It is a great help in reading and hearing: "Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (Acts x. 33).

3. A great help in humiliation, and suing out our pardon: "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psalm cxxx. 3, 4).

For means to get this awful frame of heart:—

1. Faith is necessary. Sundry articles of religion have influence upon it; God's power: "Fear not them which kill the body, &c.; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell" (Matt. x. 28). God's providence; that he observeth human affairs, and accordingly doth reward and punish: "And they consider not in their hearts, that I remember all their wickedness; now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face" (Hos. vii. 2); and, "Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward" (Heb. ii.

2). A day of judgment: "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. ii. 5). Eternal recompences of Heaven and Hell, or the state of the world to come. Those who believe not these things are bold and venturous, and, out of a daring confidence, will put it to the trial whose word shall stand, God's or theirs: "And all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose words shall stand, mine or theirs" (Jer. xlv. 28); which shall be fulfilled or made good: "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Heb. xi. 7).

2. Love is necessary; for reverence ariseth from love. David was afraid to displease so good a God, to whom he was bound by so many ties. Surely love breedeth a greater tenderness than a bare sense of danger: "Fear the Lord and his goodness" (Hos. iii. 5). That which maketh a wicked man presumptuous, maketh a child of God awful; he hath to do with a good God, and therefore would not offend him, nor cross his will.

3. An humble, penitent spirit is necessary for this frame of heart: Josiah, when he heard the words of the law, rent his clothes: "Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, &c., I also have heard thee, saith the Lord" ((2 Kings xxii. 19); and, "Because thine heart was tender," &c. (2 Chron. xxxiv. 27); troubled at God's anger: to some, nothing is of less consideration with them.

4. A good stock of knowledge, or frame of Divine truths: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm cxix. 11); "Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee" (Prov. vi. 21, 22); a treasure of knowledge, not only got by heart, but impressed on us by his Spirit. The great new-covenant blessing is God's law written upon the heart (Heb. viii. 10), by the finger of the Spirit, as before on tables of stone; on the directive and imperative powers, the heart and mind; and this maketh us conformable to it in heart and life. God's law is said to be in the heart of the godly; that maketh them willing to obey: "Thy law is within my heart" (Psalm xl. 8). Tender to offend: "The law of God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide" (Psalm xxxvii. 31). He loveth what is commanded, and hateth what is forbidden; he hath a sense of it, to keep him from usual guilt.

5. Advised consideration and watchfulness: "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee; ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established" (Prov. iv. 25). When you are about to do anything, examine and consider it, whether God alloweth it, yea or no: will it please or displease, honour or dishonour, God? If he disallow, forbear, how safe, profitable, or comfortable soever it be; if he allow it, then engage. This holy fear must never be laid aside: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. ii. 12); "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter i. 17).

SERMON CLXXVI.

VERSE 162.—*I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.*

In the text,—

1. An assertion, or declaration, of his delight in the word; “I rejoice at thy word.”

2. An illustration of it by a similitude, taken from those who have gotten some notable prey and booty; “as one that findeth great spoil.”

First, The similitude is very expressive, taken from the joy which a conqueror in battle doth find in the spoil of his defeated enemies. The same similitude is used Isa. ix. 3, “They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.” He speaketh there of the highest joy. In a time of peace, joy of the harvest is the greatest joy; in a time of war, victory obtained after a hazardous fight, and rich spoil and booty gotten. To heighten that joy, several circumstances concur:—

1. Deliverance after a doubtful conflict. No man goeth to war but carrieth his life in his hands, and the event is very uncertain. Now, when it is unexpectedly determined on our side, there is great rejoicing.

2. The joy of victory, especially to be victorious in a battle.

3. There is booty and spoil, whereby men are enriched; and so profit as well as pleasure.

4. The joy of honour and triumph over fallen enemies.

5. Peace and ease from toil. All these make the joy of victorious men in a battle to be a great joy.

Secondly, It was a fit similitude for David to use, who was a great warrior; and so a man not unacquainted with the joy of victory. A gracious heart spiritualizeth every occasion that falleth out in ordinary callings: here is great joy; but this is nothing to the knowledge of God’s will.

Thirdly, Every Christian is a warrior against Satan, the world, and the flesh: so it is a fit similitude for them. Victory over sin and Satan is above all the conquests in the world. This is a part of the good news the word bringeth to us (Col. ii. 14, 15; John xvi. 33).

Now, observe: in the former verse, David had expressed his reverence to the word; now, his delight.

First, Our trembling at the word doth not hinder our delight in it; none more cheery than the awful soul: “Walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost” (Acts ix. 31); and, “Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments” (Psalm cxii. 1). Those who are most observant of God’s will, and careful to follow it, have the greatest contentment in their souls.

Secondly, Joy should be mingled with reverence, lest it degenerate into slavery and a scrupulous fear.

DOCTRINE.—That God’s people do greatly rejoice in his word.

1st, It is not an ordinary delight which is here set forth, but such as is high and intense; such joy as the richest and most gainful victory can raise in any worldly man. It is incredible, and cannot be expressed, how much joy and comfort the word of God yieldeth to good men; therefore so many similitudes used: “As much as in all riches” (Psalm cxix. 14); “Sweeter than honey” (verse 103); “I love thy commandments above

gold; yea, above fine gold" (verse 127); a joy greater than the joy of worldly men.

2ndly, It is not a light flash, or a fantastical impression; but a solid consolation, such as is affliction-proof and death-proof, when the strength of this joy cometh to be tried and assaulted by deep afflictions. Therefore the heirs of promise are said to have strong consolation (Heb. vi. 18). So verse 50 of this psalm, "This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me."

3rdly, This joy, which is the mark of a sound believer, is delighting to know, believe, and obey God's word; for it is in the way of his testimonies (Psalm cxix. 14). It is in his commandments they delight greatly. Study and contemplation breedeth a pleasure, but nothing like practice. The pleasures and delights of the mind do certainly exceed those of the body; for the more noble the faculty is, the more capable of delight. A man in study hath a truer pleasure than the greatest epicure in the most exquisite enjoyments of sense. Now, moral delights exceed those which are the mere result of contemplation, as they give us a more intimate feeling of the worth of things. Again, those delights which are supernatural, and come from the Spirit, as the pleasures of faith and obedience do exceed those of the natural mind as much as those do bodily pleasures; as being exercised about nobler objects, which are the sense of the favour of God, and reconciliation with him, and the hopes of eternal life; and as coming from a higher cause, the Spirit of God. Therefore, upon the whole, there is no true delight and contentment but that which proceedeth from a careful performance of God's commands; strictly abstaining from what may displease him, and cheerfully practising all that he requireth of us. Truly the present gratefulness of such an employment, and the succeeding comforts of such practices, are a continual feast; all other pleasures to this, are nothing worth. The obedience of faith, to a believer, is more than any worldly advantage. It is a sweet thing to be exercised in the word of God, in reading and hearing it with serious meditation; but much more to be brought under the power and practice of it.

Reasons:—

1. The godly find glad tidings in the word, suitable to their soul's necessities, and therefore rejoice in it; for the object of delight is *bonum conveniens et sufficiens*. Here is enough to content them, and it is very suitable. There is pardon of sins; and that is ground of joy: "Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. ix. 2). There we hear of a Saviour: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. i. 15). When the Gospel was preached at Samaria. "There was great joy in that city" (Acts viii. 8). Zaccheus received Christ joyfully; for he brought salvation to his house (Luke xix. 6). There is the true way of mortifying sin and sanctifying the heart: "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the soul; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm xix. 8). There we are told of the joys of the world to come: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. ii. 9). We should exult for joy to hear of those things. Thus, you see, the word of God affordeth such comforts, such matter of rejoicing, as cannot be paralleled. A poor man, when he findeth a treasure, receiveth it

with a joyful heart. Oh! what inestimable treasure do we find in the word of God! The way of eternal salvation is there made manifest.

2. The saints have felt benefit by it. They have been renewed and sanctified by it; therefore they prize it: "Of his own will begat he us, with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, &c., be swift to hear" (James i. 18, 19). There they have found powerful heavenly truths, by which their souls are made new: they have tasted God's love in the doctrines and promises thereof, and against a taste there is no disputing (1 Peter ii. 2, 3). Experimented sweetness is beyond all arguments; they have been revived and comforted by it in their troubles, as at the 93rd verse of this psalm more largely, "I will never forget thy precepts; for with them thou hast quickened me." God hath done their souls good by it. It is the charter of their hopes (verse 111). Whatever calamities they meet with in the world, there they see ground of peace and composedness in their soul.

3. They love God, and they hear more of him in the word than they can elsewhere. The soul that loveth God, heareth and seeth his blessed name in every leaf. They find the effects of his goodness in creation, some fruits and pledges of his love in daily providence; but there they find his great, eternal, and wonderful love in Christ; there they know God's will, and it is their desire to be subject to it; and therefore value it, not only as the charter of their hopes, but as the rule of their duty.

USE I.—To condemn them,—

1st, That find no sweetness in the word of God. They do not mind the business of salvation; and then no wonder if they have a slight and mean esteem of the word.

Two reasons of this contempt:—

1. Their scope is not fixed. All means are regarded with respect to the end. Now, if they do not make the everlasting enjoyment of God their end, the Scriptures are of little use to them, a trouble rather than a comfort, because they disturb them in pursuing their lusts; but a man that would enjoy God, get to his holy hill, is apprehensive of the benefit.

2. They are not affected with their wants, and therefore esteem not the word; for the great benefit of the word is to teach us a remedy for sin and misery. Now, they that mind not the misery and danger in which they stand, go on carelessly and despise the word of God: "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished" (Prov. xxii. 3). They little think of the evil which is near them, and so slight the counsel of God.

2ndly, Those that will not believe them that find sweetness in it, as if all were fantastical and imaginary. Are the wisest and most serious part of mankind deceived? And hath the carnal fool only, the wit to discern the mistake? Surely in all reason it should be otherwise. These tell us of those delights and transports of soul in meditating on the promises, in purifying their hearts by the precepts; and, though a stranger intermeddeth not with their joys, yet surely these find them. All that is spiritual and supernatural is suspected by those who are drowned in matters of sense. A voice from Heaven is thunder (John xii. 29); the motions of the Spirit, fumes of wine (Acts ii. 13); joy in the Holy Ghost, but a fancy, &c.

3rdly, Them that count it alphabetary knowledge, fit for beginners.

David was no novice; yet he rejoiced in the word as one that found great spoil; the more conversant he was in these holy writings, the more he delighted in them. No; it is not only children's meat; there is not only milk there, but strong meat also (Heb. v. 14). It is our rule to walk by, till our blessedness be perfected; the continual storehouse of our comforts (Rom. xv. 4). It is the continual means of growing into communion with God in Christ.

USE II.—To exhort us to delight in the word of God. It is the work and mark of a blessed man: "But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm i. 2). As far as the necessities of the present life will bear it, they are still getting more knowledge of true blessedness, and the way that leadeth to the enjoyment of it. This is their business and pleasing study. His work is to form his heart to a sincere, uniform, impartial obedience; and, as he doth increase in godliness by the help of the word, his soul is more satisfied; all the joys of the world, to this, are nothing to him. Are your hearts thus set to know the Lord and his revealed will, and the way of life?

SERMON CLXXVII.

VERSE 163.—*I hate and abhor lying; but thy law do I love.*

In this verse, the man of God showeth his affection to the word, by the hatred of those things which are contrary to the word. Observe here,—

1. Affection set against affection.

2. Object against object.

1st, Affection against affection, hatred against love. Love and hatred are natural affections which are good or evil according to the objects to which they are applied. Place love on the world, sin, vanity, and nothing worse; place hatred on God, religion, holiness, and it soon proveth a hellish thing. But now, set them upon their proper objects, and they express a gracious constitution of soul: let us hate the evil and love the good (Amos v. 15), and all is well. Man needeth affections of aversion as well as choice and pursuit. Hatred hath its use as well as love. Love was made for God, and things that belong to God; and hatred for sin: it was put into us, that, at the first appearance, sense, or imagination of evil, we might retire ourselves, and fly from it. And is anything so evil as sin, so contrary to God, so baneful to the soul? The office of love is to adhere and cleave to God, and whatever will bring us to the enjoyment of him; and the office of hatred is, that we may truly and sincerely turn from all evil with detestation, according to the nature and degree of evil that is in it. The emphasis of the text is notable, "I hate and abhor:" it must be a thorough hatred which David calleth a "perfect hatred" (Psalm cxxxix. 22).

2ndly, Here is object set against object. As love is opposed to hatred, so the law to lying; for the word of God is truth, and requireth truth of all that submit to it; pure sincerity and simplicity. Some render the word more generally; the Septuagint, *'Αδικίαν ἐμίσησα ἢ ἐβέλευξάμην*, I hate, and abominate iniquity: other translations render it not so; they expound it so, that one kind is put for all the rest; and fitly; for every sin is a falsehood, and often called in this psalm a false way, and a lie; and will fail and beguile all those who are delighted with it: and the purport

and drift is, that we should admit, omit, commit nothing, which is contrary to the word of God, which is the great object of a holy man's love.

The points are three :—

DOCTRINE I.—They that love the word of God, must hate sin.

DOCTRINE II.—That a slight hatred of a sinful course is not enough ; but we must hate and abhor it.

DOCTRINE III.—That, among other sins, we must hate falsehood and lying, and all kinds of fraud and deceit.

For the first point,—

DOCTRINE I.—They that love the word of God, must hate sin.

This implieth four things :—

1. That our love must be demonstrated by such effects ; otherwise, it is but pretended : if we do not avoid what it forbiddeth ; for our love to God and his word is mostly seen in obedience and dutiful subjection to him and it ; for God's love is a love of bounty, our love is a love of duty. He is said to love us when he blesseth us, and bestoweth on us the effects of his special grace and favour ; we are said to love him, when we obey him. These propositions are clear in Scripture, that our love to God is tried by our love to the word ; and our love to the word, by our hatred of sin : “ He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me ” (John xiv. 21) ; and, “ If a man love me, he will keep my words ” (verse 23). On the contrary, our enmity to God and his word is determined by our love to sin. Enmity to God : “ Enemies in your mind by wicked works ” (Col. i. 21) ; to his word : “ The carnal mind is enmity against God ; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be ” (Rom. viii. 7). Habitual sin argueth a malice, or hatred of God and his holy law ; and actual sin, an actual hatred. It is *finis operis*, if not *operantis*. Whether a man thinketh so or no, it is the intent of the action ; a rebellion, or an act of disloyalty against God. Yea, there is not only a virtual hatred in sin, but a formal hatred ; not only implied, but expressed. They wish there were not a God to punish them and call them to an account ; such a law to forbid such practices as they affect, or that such things were not sin. Well then, it is not some kind of pleasure in the study of the word will show our love to the word ; but an impartial, entire, and uniform obedience ; strictly abstaining from such things as it forbiddeth, and carefully practising what it requireth at our hands.

2. That our hatred of sin must flow from such a principle. A man may hate sin upon foreign and accidental reasons ; so that abstaining from sin is not a true hatred, but a casual dislike ; as when we forbear some sins, but retain others that suit better with our condition, callings, employment, temper ; or because of some difficulty in compassing, shame in practising, or repugnancy to our natural temper. No ; it must be out of a principle of love to God : “ Ye that love the Lord, hate evil ” (Psalm xcvi. 10). So, “ I hate vain thoughts ; but thy law do I love ” (Psalm cxix. 113). A hatred of sin arising from love to God and his word, is the only true hatred ; that is hatred of sin as sin, as it is *ἀνομία*, a “ transgression of the law ” (1 John iii. 4) ; as it is ingratitude to God, contrary to our obligations to him, not only as destructive to ourselves ; not principally *timore panna*, but *amore virtutis*. The word of God furnisheth us with divers reasons and arguments to move us to hate sin : they all have their place ; but some are more noble and excellent than others ; as when a man hateth sin because God hath forbidden it. True hatred cometh from a love of the

contrary: therefore he that hath a vehement love to the law, hateth all things which are contrary to it: "He will hate the one, and love the other" (Matt. vi. 24). There is no serving two masters: love to the one enforceth hatred of the other. To love the good and hate the evil, are inseparable.

3. The more we hate sin, the more prepared we are to love the law. A carnal heart hateth the law: "Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light" (John iii. 20); and, "The carnal mind, &c., is not subject to the law" (Rom. viii. 7). He that doth not hate sin, hateth the word of God. We cannot delight in it, till our affections be purified and sanctified. Men's evil practices and dispositions cause them to hate the light; it is a reproving light. Can sore eyes delight to look upon the sun, or an unsound heart delight in that which will so ransack and search the conscience?

4. According to the degree of love, so will the degree of our hatred be. They that have the highest love of the law, will have most hatred of sin; they hate every lesser contrariety, a vain thought (Psalm cxix. 113). They do not only hate open and scandalous sins, but sins carried on in a more close and cleanly manner; yea, they groan under the relics of corruption, and feel it a heavy burden: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members." And then, "Oh! wretched man that I am" (Rom. vii. 22—24). Next to the object of our affection, the principle or spring of it must be regarded; and, next to the spring and rise of it, the degree must be looked after, that we love the good and hate the evil proportionably; that is to say, that our hatred must be proportionable to the evil of the thing hated, and our love to the good of the thing loved. And indeed, where the one is, the other will be; where a great love, a great hatred; where a little love, a little hatred: "I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way" (Psalm cxix. 127, 128).

USE.—Well then, if we would show our love to the word, we must truly, sincerely, and constantly turn from all known sin with detestation and abhorrence; for hatred of sin is an infallible evidence of love to the word. Now, hatred of sin, if it be right,—

1. It is universal, *εις τὰ γένη*, to the whole kind; as Haman thought scorn to lay hands upon Mordecai alone, but sought to destroy the whole race of the Jews (Esther iii. 6). One sin is as inconsistent with the love of God as another; there may be as much contempt of God's authority in a sin of thought as in a sin of practice; in a small sin, as in a greater. There may be much crookedness in a small line, and in some cases the dye is more than the stuff: "I hate every false way;" it is twice repeated in this psalm, in the 104th verse, and in verse 128. To hate what God hateth: "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Prov. viii. 13).

2. It is implacable: it aimeth at the utter extirpation and expulsion of sin. They seek to remove the guilt, to weaken the inclination; they groan sorely under the very being of sin, that anything of sin is left: "Oh! wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 24.)

3. It is still growing. At first, it is a dubious case: men that are convinced, have some mind to let sin go, or a wish that Christ would save

them from it; but it is with such reserves, that they have rather a mind to keep it than let it go; as Pharaoh had no mind to dismiss Israel, and therefore stood hucking with God; or as David, when he sent out forces against Absalom, yet, 'Be tender of the young man.' Pleasing lusts, we have but a remiss will against them: our love to it is greater than our dislike of it; therefore so unstable (James i. 8). But, when the soul is converted, the soul is armed with a resolution (1 Peter iv. 1). Then the love of sin is weakened in their hearts, and the strength and vigour of it abated; the soul is armed with a serious purpose to give it up, and shake off this servitude, in the confidence of that grace which is purchased for them by Christ's death; there is a godly inclination and bent of soul to live unto God. Again, as our communion with God and sense of his love is increased in us, so our hatred of sin groweth more keen and fierce. When God had told what he would do for Ephraim, "What have I to do any more with idols?" (Hos. xiv. 8.) I have had too much to do already: what! any more? In what proportion there is a sense of God's love, in the same proportion a hatred of evil. Moses, when he had talked with God in the mount, at his return he is full of indignation, and broke the tables. So those that have had sweet communion with God, have a more severe displacency against their corruptions; and there is a more lively principle at work in their hearts for the expulsion of them. Every act of kindness on God's part, layeth a new obligation, and their hatred is awakened by the holy use of the ordinances.

4. The constant discoveries of hatred against sin: they are watching and striving against it; they are ever careful that they may not offend God: "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward men" (Acts xxiv. 16); and keep striving, and making a serious resistance, even when they are foiled: "What I hate, that do I" (Rom. vii. 15). A Christian always hateth sin, though he doth not always prevail against it. In sins of daily infirmity, striving is conquering; but, in other sins, they prevail against them by degrees: sin doth not carry it freely, nor reign in them: "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. vi. 14).

DOCTRINE II.—That a slight hatred of a sinful course is not enough; but we must hate it and abhor it: "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Rom. xii. 9). Hate it as Hell, as the word signifieth. We do too coldly speak against evil, too slackly follow after that which is good. If our pursuit after God were more earnest, and our hatred of evil more serious and severe, we should be other manner of Christians than we are. There is a twofold hatred: 1. The hatred of offence and abomination; and, 2. The hatred of enmity and opposition. By the one, our hearts are turned from sin; by the other, turned against it. Now, both these are necessary for a Christian that would be safe. Hating and abhorring implieth not only a naked abstinence, or a simple refusal, but an enmity; not a forbearing the act, but a mortifying the affection. We must not only leave off evil, but abhor it; and not only abhor it, but pursue it with a hostile hatred, purposing, watching, striving, praying against it; thwarting the flesh, and contradicting the motions thereof.

Reasons:—

1. It is not else a hatred becoming sin, which is so great and evil; so opposite to God's law, and derogatory to God's glory, so mischievous to

us. There is a great deal of evil sin, a great deal of after sin, that we can never hate it enough. It is the evil of evils, that brought other evils into the world; it is the violation of a righteous law (1 John iii. 4); a contempt of God's authority: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" (Exod. v. 2); "Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?" (Psalm xii. 1.) It is a defacing of his image, and a casting off the glory and honour of our creation: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Psalm xlv. 12); "Nevertheless, man being in honour abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish" (Prov. iii. 23). A despising of his power by a silly worm, as if we could make good our party against him: "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" (1 Cor. x. 22.) It separateth from communion with God: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isa. lix. 2). It preferreth base satisfactions before the enjoyment of him: "Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. iii. 4); as if the base and brutish pleasures of the flesh were to be preferred before the love of God. This and much more may be said of sin; and is any hatred too great for it? "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside, it shall not cleave to me" (Psalm ci. 3).

2. No other hatred will serve the purposes of grace: a love that is cold, will soon fail; so also will a hatred. Where our zeal is not set against sin, we soon fall into a liking of it; therefore the soul is not sufficiently guarded by a slight hatred: if sin be not detestable, it will soon seem tolerable. There is a brabble between many and their lusts, and in all haste sin must be gone; but the quarrel is soon taken up, and sin stayeth for all that: where the enmity is not great, a man's agreement with sin may be soon made. Therefore not only an offence, but a hostile hatred, is required, such hating and abhorring as will not admit of reconciliation. Like the hatred of Amnon to Tamar: "The hatred wherewith he hated her, was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her" (2 Sam. xiii. 15): he hated her with hatred greatly. Did we more strongly-dissent from sin, it would not so easily prevail over us. Sin dieth, when it dieth in our affections, when our hearts are set against it: "Get thee hence" (Isa. xxx. 22); get you gone, be there from henceforth an utter divorce between me and you. This is to hate and abhor.

USE.—1. Is to show us the reason why so many are entangled again in the sins they seemed to renounce and forsake. They have frequently resolved to forsake their sins; but these resolutions have come to nothing: they have striven against them; but, as a great stone that hath been rolled uphill, it hath returned upon them with the more violence. Or as in rowing against the stream, when the tide hath been strong against them, and they have been driven the more back, and therefore are discouraged. Yea, they have prayed, and found little success, and therefore think it is vain to make any further trial. What shall we say, then, to these? If the premises were clear, yet the inference and conclusion is wrong and false; for we are not to measure our duty by the success, but God's injunction. God may do what he pleaseth; but we must do what he hath commanded. Abraham obeyed God, "not knowing whither he went" (Heb. xi. 8). Peter said unto Christ, "We have toiled all night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net." Though the first attempt succeed not, yet afterwards sin may be subdued and broken. In natural things, we do not sit down with one trial, or one

endeavour; but, after many disappointments, pursue our designs till we complete them. A merchant will not leave off for one bad voyage, nor an ambitious man because his first essays were fruitless; and shall we give over our conflicts with worldly and fleshly lusts? That showeth our will is not fixedly bent against them, because we cannot presently subdue them. "They that will be rich," &c. (1 Tim. vi. 10.) If you had such a will to be holy and heavenly.

2. There is a fault in these purposes, in these strivings and prayers; they do not come from a heart thoroughly set against sin.

(1.) These purposes are not hearty and real, and then no wonder they do not prevail: there may be a slight purpose, and there is a full purpose (Acts xi. 23). If thy purposes were more full and strong, and thoroughly bent against sin, they would sooner succeed. Is it the fixed decree and determination of thy will? When you are firmly resolved, your affections will be sincere and steadfast, you will pursue this work close; not be off and on, hot and cold; unstable in all your ways. Your full purpose, or the habitual bent of your hearts, is known by your drift and scope. Or it may be this purpose may be extorted; not the effect of thy judgment and will, but only thy conscience awakened by some present fear. Many are by some pangs and qualms of conscience, frightened into some religiousness; but this humour lasts not long: "And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant" (Psalm lxxvii. 35—37). In their dangers, they remembered God; but their hearts were not right with him. Ahab, in his fears, had some relentings. So had Pharaoh. The Israelites turned to the Lord in their distress; but they turned as fast from him afterwards; resolves not of love, but fear. So are these resolutions wrested from you by some present terrors; which, when they cease, no wonder that they are where they were before. Violent things never hold long; they will hold only as long as the principle of their violence lasteth. Or, it may be, you rest in the strength of your own resolutions. Now, God will be owned as the author of all grace, who reneweth and quickeneth every affection in us; we must ever have a sense of our own insufficiency, and resolve more in the strength and power of God; and rely upon the grace of Jesus Christ; by his Spirit mortifying the deeds of the body, as knowing that without him you can do nothing; neither continue, nor perform our resolutions. Men fall again as often as they think to stand by their own power: there is much guile and falsehood in our own hearts, we cannot trust them: the saints still resolve, God assisting: "I will keep thy statutes; oh! forsake me not utterly" (Psalm cxix. 8); "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart" (verse 32). They beg God to keep up their inclination and bent against sin: "Incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not to covetousness" (verse 36).

(2.) As to striving. Let us examine that a little; if it be so serious, so diligent, so circumspect, as it should be. Certainly that is no effectual striving, when you are disheartened with every difficulty; for difficulties do but inflame a resolved spirit, as stirring doth the fire. No question but it will be hard to enter in at the strait gate, or walk in the narrow way: God hath made the way to Heaven so narrow and strait, that we may the more strive to enter in thereat (Luke xiii. 24). Now, shall we sit down

and complain, when we succeed not upon every faint attempt? Who, then, can be saved? This is to cry out with the sluggard, "There is a lion in the way." Should a mariner, as soon as the waves arise, and strong gusts of wind blow, give over all guiding of the ship? No; he is resolved upon his voyage. To give out upon every difficulty, is against all the experience and wont of mankind. Again, this striving and opposing is but slight, not accompanied with that watchfulness and resolution which are necessary. Many pretend to watch against sin, yet abstain not from all occasions of sin: if we play about the cockatrice' hole, no wonder we are bitten. Never think to turn from thy sins, if thou dost not turn from the occasion of them: "Go not in the way of evil men; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (Prov. iv. 15). This is a practice becoming the hatred of sin. Evil company is a snare: if thou hast not strength to avoid the occasion, which is less, how canst thou avoid the sin, which is greater? He that resolveth not to be burnt in the fire, must not come near the flames. Job made a covenant with his eyes (Job xxxi. 1). Our Saviour taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation;" he doth not say, into sin; temptation openeth the gate to it: certainly it argueth a hankering of mind, when we dally with temptations. As the raven, when he is driven from the carrion, loveth to abide within the scent of it; so they have an inclination to sin, when they forbear the practice of it.

(3.) For praying. We oftener pray from our memories, than from our consciences; and from our consciences enlightened, than hearts renewed by grace. Prayer, as it is the fruit of memory and invention, is but a few slight and formal words said of course; a body without a soul: as dictated by conscience, it may be retracted by the will, *at noli modo*. Austin, when he prayed against his youthful lusts, *Timebam ne me excluderet Deus*, was afraid lest he should be heard too soon: at best but half desires, faint wishes; like Balaam's wish, to die the death of the righteous. The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; God never made promise, that lazy wishes should be satisfied. If you pray against sin with your whole heart, he will hear you. The great fault is the want of this thorough hatred of sin.

USE.—Take heed of two things:—

1. A secret love to your sins.

2. A remiss hatred against them.

1. A secret love to sin. Job speaketh of some that hid sin as a sweet morsel under their tongues (Job xx. 12), loth to let a lust go; and David, of regarding iniquity in our heart (Psalm lxxvi. 18). First, there is a secret liking of sin, which in time will prove baneful to the soul; some lust is spared and continueth unmortified: it doth not remain so much as it is reserved, and there keepeth possession for Satan. This will, in time, eat out all our other virtues, and bring a stain upon those good properties wherewith God hath endowed us. Sin was never heartily cast out; therefore they are in time ensnared again, and drawn away by some sensitive lure.

2. A remiss hatred of sin. No; there must be a total and full aversion. Hatred and indignation is the soul's expulsive faculty; it cannot be kept in good plight without it. It is the lively and active principle which sets the soul awork, in avoiding what is hurtful to the spiritual life; it concerneth us to keep it up in strength and vigour. The reason why

even believers do so often sin through weakness is, because the will doth not so strongly dissent as it should. Though we do not deliberately give our assent, it should more potently awaken our displeasure; but certainly, the reason of wilful sin is want of a strong hatred; though convinced of evil, yet we go on like "a fool to the correction of the stocks" (Prov. vii. 22).

DOCTRINE III.—That, among other sins, we must hate falsehood and lying, and all kinds of fraud and deceit.

1. I shall open the particular notion of lying in the text.

2. Show you the reasons against it.

1st, To open the particular notion of lying.

1. In the vulgar acceptation and sense of it, we take it to be speaking an untruth, or that which is false, with an intention to deceive. Now, this is a sin contrary to the new nature: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. iii. 9). It is not only contrary to that natural order which God hath appointed between the mind and the tongue, but to that sincerity and true holiness which is our great qualification, and the fruit of regeneration. Therefore God saith, "Surely they are my people, children that will not lie" (Isa. lxiii. 8). God presumeth that his people will not deal falsely, but speak as they think, and think of what they speak, as it really is; and that Christians will not deceive and circumvent others, since they are members of the same mystical body, and should seek one another's welfare as much as they do their own: "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members one of another" (Eph. iv. 25). No; it is more unseemly in a Christian, more inconsistent with grace. In short, no sin maketh a man more like the Devil: "Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John viii. 44).

2. Concealing the truth, which should be confessed. God would not have his people hide themselves in necessary truths: he would have them believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth (Rom. x. 9, 10); and Christianity is called a profession (Heb. iii. 1); and all Christians are saved either as martyrs or as confessors.

But how far we are to confess lesser truth, is a great case of conscience. Certainly we must do nothing against a truth, not appear in the garb of a contrary party; nor must we lie hid, when God in his providence crieth out, Who is on my side, who? We read of some who believed in Christ, yet "they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John xii. 42, 43). Faith is in a very weak condition, when confession is not joined with it; when men will not own Christ in troublous times, and appear in their own shape. Men that have much to lose, have many worldly considerations; they think these lose more than they gain, and lose by the praise of God rather than the praise of men. Now, the sincere Christian saith in these cases, "I hate and abhor lying."

3. It is contrary to that obedience to God which we do profess. There is a practical lie, as well as a virtual lie, when our practices do not correspond with our profession; there is a lie acted, as well as a lie told: so Ephraim is said to compass God about with lies (Hos. xi. 12). To say

we have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness, is a lie (1 John i. 6); a lie that tendeth to the disgrace of religion, *in opprobium Christi*: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John ii. 4); so he that speaketh much of the Spirit, and walketh after the flesh.

Reasons:—

1. God is a God of truth: God cannot, and will not lie; and his people must be like him.

2. His word is the word of truth: his law requireth truth; and all falsehoods and deceits are contrary to that justice and charity which it establisheth. His Gospel is a gospel of truth: "After that ye heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation" (Eph. i. 13).

3. He requireth and worketh truth in the reins and inward parts: "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Psalm li. 6).

USE.—Oh! then, hate and abhor lying! you cannot be accepted of God else: "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth?" (Jer. v. 3.) You cannot have grace in your own hearts: "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Cor. i. 12); nor long continue undiscovered before men: "His wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation" (Prov. xxvi. 26). Let us not lie to God, in our promises we make to him: "When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned and inquired early after God; and they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues" (Psalm lxxviii. 31—36). In your worship, do not compass him about with lies, complain of burdens which you feel not, express desires which you have not. In your profession, do not make it a veil and cover for your lusts. A wicked or carnal design is inconsistent with uprightness of heart: as to men, abhor all false and deceitful practices and speeches. When the Apostle biddeth us abhor that which is evil, he first saith, "Let love be without dissimulation" (Rom. xii. 9). You are not to live by interest, but by conscience. Therefore abhor all hypocrisy, falsehood, treachery, which are unworthy an ingenuous man, much more a Christian.

SERMON CLXXVIII.

VERSE 164.—*Seven times a-day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.*

In these words, the man of God giveth further proof of his love and delight in the word, by praising God for that benefit.

His praise is illustrated,—

1. By the frequent repetition of that duty, "Seven times a-day do I praise thee."

2. The subject matter, "because of thy righteous judgments;" that is, God's dispensations agreeing with his word.

First, The frequency of the duty, "seven times a-day;" that is, very often: *numerus definitus pro indefinito*, a number certain put for an uncertain: seven is often used for many; as, "I will punish you seven times more for your sins" (Levit. xxvi. 18); that is, not exactly seven, but many

and divers times: "A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again" (Prov. xxiv. 16); "There are seven abominations in his heart" (Prov. xxvi. 25); "The barren hath borne seven; and she that hath many children, is waxed feeble" (1 Sam. ii. 5). So here, I give thanks to thee as often as I meditate of them. Some of the Jewish rabbins stick in the very literal number seven; twice in the morning, before the reading of the law, and once after it, and at noon, and so in the evening as in the morning; so Rabbi Solomon: indeed, elsewhere, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray" (Psalm lv. 17); but whether with such scrupulous observation of hours, is not certain.

Secondly, The subject-matter, "thy righteous judgments;" whereby is meant,—

1. God's most righteous laws and precepts, called the ordinances of judgment and justice. We cannot sufficiently bless God for the benefit of his word.

2. The dispensations of his providence suiting therewith, whether they concern us or others. The word is fulfilled in the punishment of the wicked, and in giving the promised reward to the righteous. All God's dealings are righteous judgments; and matter of praise is still offered to us, from the comforts and blessings of his providence. There is no question of that: the smallest of his mercies should not be overlooked, though notable mercies should be continually remembered. Not only daily benefits (Psalm lxxviii. 19), but great deliverances, are a standing ground of thanksgiving: "Sing forth the honour of his name; make his praise glorious" (Psalm lxxvi. 2). Especially, now the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the great salvation, is more clearly revealed, we should never think of it, nor read it, nor hear of it, without some considerable act of joy and thankfulness. So for the dispensations of God to others, in protecting his people, in punishing his enemies. It is a great confirmation of faith, to see promises and threatenings fulfilled on others; how punctually God maketh good his word to all that trust in him (Psalm xviii. 30); on all those that reject it, and despise it: "As we have heard, so have we seen" (Psalm xlvi. 8). They that believe the word of God, and do mark what is foretold in the word, shall find the event and work of Providence suitable to the prediction.

3. God's righteous judgments afflicting us, do also yield matter of praise, as they work together for good to such as love him (Rom. viii. 28); and the saddest corrections afford necessary and profitable instructions: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law" (Psalm xciv. 12): "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Psalm cxix. 71); though not barely for the afflictions themselves, yet for their fruit and issue, that our souls are bettered and humbled by them, and as we see the faithfulness of God in them.

DOCTRINE.—That the people of God should never cease lauding and magnifying the name of God, because of his righteous judgments.

David was never weary of praising God; every day he praised God, and often every day: love sweetened it to him. We shall praise him evermore in the world to come; there it will be our sole employment; but, even in this world, we should not count it a burden, but praise him yet more: "I will yet praise thee more and more" (Psalm lxxi. 14); still magnifying his greatness.

Here I shall speak,—

1. Of the duty, that we should praise God.
2. Of the continuance, that we should not cease praising God.
3. The grounds of it in the text, because of thy righteous judgments.

First, The duty.

Secondly, The motives to it.

First, The duty, and there we have, 1. The nature of it. 2. The grounds of it. 3. The formality. 4. The fruit of it.

1. The nature of it. There are three words used in this matter, blessing, praising, giving thanks : sometimes they are used promiscuously ; at other times, there is a distinctness of notion to be observed. Blessing is used : “ Bless the Lord, O my soul ” (Psalm ciii. 1). Blessing relateth to his benefits ; it respects the works of God as beneficial to us ; his mercy, love, and kindness to us. We bless him who hath blessed us. Praise relateth to his excellences, as we may praise a stranger for his excellent endowments, though we are not benefited by them : “ Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein ” (Psalm cxi. 1, 2). It is a great part of our work to praise the Lord ; not that he at all needeth it, for he is infinitely perfect ; but he deserveth it, and by this means we testify our love and reverence of him, and strengthen our own dependence on him, and gain others to him ; when we speak good of his name. The other word is thanksgiving : “ Oh ! give thanks unto the Lord ; for he is good ” (Psalm cvii. 1). This differeth from the two former, because praise may be expressed in words, gratitude and thankfulness in deed : also it hath respect to benefits as well as blessings ; but we show our gratitude by obedience, but these are often co-incident. Indeed, there is a mixture of all in the true praising of God ; excellences and benefits are to be acknowledged with heart, mouth, and life.

2. The grounds of it. Faith and love must be at the bottom of our praise, if we would not have it slight and formal ; for the more lively apprehensions we have of God’s perfections, which is the work of faith, and the more sensible of his goodness and mercy, which is the work of love, the better is this service performed. Therefore, unless these praises flow from a believing, loving soul, they are but an empty prattle and a vain sound. (1.) Faith is necessary ; that is the eye of the soul to see the invisible one (Heb. xi. 27). It giveth us an apprehension of the Lord’s excellences, in order to love and trust : so also, in order to praise, faith sets us before the throne, and doth withdraw the veil, and showeth us the eternal God, who liveth and reigneth for ever ; dispensing all things powerfully, according to his own will. That is all the sight we have of God in this life : a nearer vision is referred to our future glory ; here we see him by faith.

(2.) Love, or a deep sense of the goodness of God, which enlargeth the heart towards him, and forceth open our lips, that our mouths may show forth his praise (Psalm li. 15). There he meaneth God’s giving a sweet and renewed sense of pardoning mercy : “ Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee ” (Psalm lxiii. 3) ; an intimate sense of the Lord’s love sets the tongue awork to speak of it. Praise, then, is the result of faith and love. None else do it seriously, delightfully, but where these graces reign and prevail in the heart.

3. The formality of it is an acknowledgment of the Divine virtues, benefits, and perfections manifested to us in his words, or works, or both; these must be acknowledged by some outward expressions. Words, whereby we express our inward thoughts and apprehensions: our tongues are called our glory: "Awake up, my glory" (Psalm lvii. 8); "My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth" (Psalm xvi. 9). When that Scripture is quoted, Acts ii. 26, it is said, "My tongue was glad," *ἡ γαλλιάσατο ἡ γλωσσά μου*. So the Septuagint. So called, not only as speech is our excellency above the beasts, but because God is thereby glorified and praised; given us to this end and purpose, to bless God (James iii. 9). As our understanding was given us to know God and think on him, so our speech to speak of God, to declare his excellent perfections, and to stir up others to praise him with us.

4. Holiness, the fruit of it; for, as Job said the sides of the poor blessed him (Job xxxi. 20), so must our lives praise God (1 Peter ii. 9); show forth his virtues, not in word only, but in works. Our lives must be a constant hymn to God, though we should be silent. We remember the Lord's excellences, that we may imitate them, and express them to the life: the children of God serve only for this use, to represent God to the world, as the image in the glass representeth the person that looketh in it. So, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise" (Isa. xliii. 21). The impression of all the Divine attributes and perfections must be left upon us, and copied out by us, plainly represented in our wisdom, purity, faithfulness, and godliness.

Secondly, The motives. Because there is no part of God's worship to which we are more indisposed. Self-love will put us upon prayers and supplications, but love of God upon praises: we are inclined to the one by our own necessities; but need to be stirred up to the other by pressing arguments. I will only mention those which are heaped up together in one place: "Praise ye the Lord; for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely" (Psalm cxlvii. 1).

1. It is good and profitable, a piece of service acceptable in God's sight: "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me" (Psalm l. 23). It is a part of that spiritual worship required under the Gospel, beyond all the sacrifices of the law: in other duties, we expect something from God; but, in this, we bestow something on him.

All God's praises are a believer's advantage; every attribute is his store-house: "This is my beloved, and this is my friend" (Cant. v. 16); and, "For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods" (Psalm cxxxv. 5). Yea, it is profitable as it is acceptable: "Let all the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him" (Psalm lxxvii. 5—7). Pliny telleth us of a fountain that would rise, and swell, and overflow, at their playing of a pipe or flute, and, when they ceased, would stop again: the fountain of mercy riseth, and swelleth, and overfloweth with new supplies of mercy, when we praise, and acknowledge the old.

2. It is pleasant and delightful, full of sweet refreshment. He that knoweth not this work is pleasant, is unacquainted with it; for this ravishing, transporting joy is matter of experience. When is the gracious heart more delighted, than when it feasts with God? All acts of obedience have a pleasure accompanying them, especially acts of worship, being the nobler

part of the spiritual life; and, among them, praise: "Sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant" (Psalm cxxxv. 3). It is our duty in Heaven to praise God, when we are in our highest felicity; therefore this is a work wherein we should rejoice to be employed. It is our reward rather than our work, the heaven that we have upon earth; and nothing so fit to cheer up the spirit, as to remember what a God we have in Christ; the very nature of it hath allurements enough to a gracious heart: "For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work" (Psalm xcii. 4); when God blesseth our meditations on his works with gladness.

3. It is comely and honourable. To be about the employment of angels, to be heralds to proclaim the Lord's glory; nothing so comely for us, as creatures, who have our whole being from him. As new creatures, we are set apart to be to the praise of his glorious grace in Christ (Eph. i. 12). It behoveth all men as a debt, which they owe to God, though the wicked have no power to perform it.

Indeed, the new song doth ill become the old heart; but, when there is an obligation and a capacity, then it is comely indeed. It becometh them to pay, and God to receive it from them: "Praise is comely for the upright" (Psalm xxxiii. 1). All are bound to praise God; yet none will do it cheerfully and acceptably, save the godly: they have obligations above all people in the world; they have a capacity and a heart to do it; and from them God most expecteth it.

In the second place, the continuance; that we should never cease praising God. David saith here, "seven times a-day," which is the number of perfection; and elsewhere you shall find equivalent expressions: "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be continually in my mouth" (Psalm xxxiv. 1). So, "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, &c., giving thanks unto his name" (Heb. xiii. 15). So, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God" (Eph. v. 20). What is the meaning of these extensive particles, continually, always, and at all times? I answer, it is not to be understood as if we were without intermission to be employed in the actual exercise of formal and distinct thanksgiving. No; there are other necessary duties, which sometimes must divert us from it; but the meaning is,—

1. That there is continual occasion of praising God. God is continually beneficial to us, blessing and delivering his people every day, and by new mercies giveth new matter of praise and thanksgiving; and there are some standing mercies, which should never be forgotten, but be remembered before God every day; as, redemption by Christ, with all the abundant benefits: and therefore the Gospel-church is represented by four beasts, or four living weights, together with four-and-twenty elders, who "rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty" (Rev. iv. 8). This is spoken to show that matter doth still continue of lauding and blessing God; and David saith, "Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day" (Psalm lxxvi. 8). There is no moment of time wherein we are not obliged to praise and glorify God.

2. This must be understood of the preparation of the heart without intermission. We must cherish that disposition of heart which is necessary for it; a habit of thankfulness, a heart deeply affected with the Lord's excellences and mercies, should ever be found in us, and never laid aside: the instrument must be kept in tune, though it be not always played upon. David saith, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and

give praise" (Psalm lvii. 7). There must be a prepared heart, or a fixed purpose to praise the Lord. A renewed sense of God's favour, and fresh experience of his goodness to us, to draw forth this preparation into act; yet the preparation must still remain with us, and we are to watch against dulness and indisposedness for his holy work. This preparation is more or less at times; for special mercies do raise, enliven, and inspirit the heart; but some measure of a thankful disposition, or bent and inclination to praise God, must never be wanting. As the vestal fire among the Romans was ever kept in, on special occasions it was blown up; so there should be an habitual frame of heart to praise God at all times; but, upon some special occasions, it must more especially be excited and stirred up to it.

3. We must keep a constant course and certain order of worshipping and praising God, both in public and private. In Scripture, they are said to do a thing always, who do it upon stated occasions; as Mephibosheth did eat continually at David's table (2 Sam. ix. 13); not as if always eating, but at the eating times: and the disciples are said to be continually in the temple, praising and blessing God (Luke xxiv. 53); that is, at the appointed times of worship. So we are to set forth certain times to bless and praise the Lord, who is continually good to us, especially on the Sabbath. See Psalm cxii., the title, with the first verse: "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most high!" We are not to omit any occasion of formal and direct thanksgiving; acknowledge mercy and faithfulness, the two pillars of our confidence. As it is to be done constantly, which the former head called for, so frequently; that is, we must take every just occasion to perform it; let no special opportunity pass; the Lord's mercies are new every moment (Lam. iii. 23), and he loadeth us with his benefits daily (Psalm lxxviii. 19). Therefore, as God's hand is ever open to bless, so should our mouths be ever open to praise; and we should never go from this exercise, *nisi cum animo revertendi*, but with a purpose to return to it again. We have poor temporary affections towards God, and are very rare and unfrequent in these duties; though we are daily receiving more and more benefits, yet we are slow and backward to this work. Every hour, every minute, every moment, God is obliging us to it anew; therefore we should say, "I will yet praise him more and more."

Thirdly, The ground of praising mentioned in the text, "Because of thy righteous judgments." Here observe,—

1. The term is one of the notions by which the word of God is expressed. Surely all kind of mercies are matter of praise, especially spiritual mercies; and, among these, his word; for this is a great favour in itself: the church can as ill be without it as the world without the sun. Psalm xix., he compareth the sun and the law together. This is a peculiar favour: "He showeth his word unto Jacob, &c.; he hath not dealt so with any nation, &c.; praise ye the Lord" (Psalm cxlvii. 19, 20). The benefit of the Scriptures is a precious gift of God to the church, and so it should be valued and esteemed: not counted a burden, as it is by them who are wholly earthly and mind not heavenly things. Alas! what should we do without this help, to ease our burdened minds, to understand God's providences, and learn the way to happiness, without these pure precepts and heavenly promises? What is it that raiseth in us the joy of faith, the patience of hope, that directeth us to a straight and certain way to glory, but the word of God? This is the book of books; the food and comfort

of our souls: "In God will I praise his word; in the Lord will I praise his word" (Psalm lvi. 10). The best hold that faith can have of God, is by his word; let us own his word; and then whatever his dispensations be, we have cause to praise him. Here is a sure hope to fix upon, and a sure rule to walk by; it cannot be told in a breath, what benefit we have by it. Here is matter of glorying and firm confidence; we need not fear men or devils, as long as we have such a firm bulwark to secure us. Here we have God's will made known to give us notice of a blessed estate, and God's promise to give us an interest in it.

2. It noteth the dispensation of his providence, fulfilling his promises unto the faithful, and executing his threatenings on the wicked. He is the same in his works that he is in his word: his judgments are declared in his holy word, and executed in his righteous providence; and therefore it is said of them that have not his word, "As for his judgments, they have not known them: praise ye the Lord" (Psalm cxlvii. 20). Where they have not his word, the Lord's dealing with men in justice and mercy, and the course which he observeth in ruling the world, is not understood; it lieth much in the dark, so that his providence is complicated with his word, and as it is the sentence of his word executed, is matter of praise. Well then, we must praise God for his righteous government of the world, according to his word; whether it concern the church in general, or us in particular: "True and righteous are thy judgments" (Rev. xvi. 7). But, because particular providences come nearest home, and do most affect us, I shall instance in them.

(1.) Let me show you how we should praise God for his favours, and fulfilling of promises to us, and hearing our prayers, and remembering us for good in our low estate. Joshua leaveth this note when dying: "I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you: all are come to pass with you, and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Josh. xxiii. 14). Trust God, and try him; and you will return the same account with this, which was the result of all his experience. And Solomon taketh notice of God's fulfilling promises: "And the Lord hath performed his word that he spake." "Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand" (1 Kings viii. 20 and 24). There is none of any acquaintance with God, but find much of this. Now, they should therefore praise the Lord, and love him; so David, "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplication" (Psalm cxvi. 1). When we have put promises in suit, and challenged God upon his word, he hath stood to it, justified our confidence; every fresh experience in this kind should excite new love and praise.

(2.) In time of affliction, when Divine dispensations go cross to our affections, and it may be to our prayers, yet, even then, should we praise the Lord. Job, when the Lord had taken away, blesseth the name of the Lord (Job. i. 21). The Lord is worthy of praise and honour, when he giveth, and when he taketh away; when he emptieth, and when he filleth us with blessings: a child of God is of a strange temper; he can fear him for his mercies (Hos. iii. 5), and praise him for his judgments, as in the text; it argueth a great measure of grace, to give thanks to God at all times, and for all things: "Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing: in

everything give thanks" (1 Thes. v. 16—18). Simply, we cannot give thanks for afflictions, as afflictions; as we cannot pray for them, nor joy in them, but as they are a means of good to us. A thankful frame of heart, bringeth meat out of the eater, encouragement out of the saddest providences, and taketh occasion to lift up itself in the praises of God, even from those things which are matter of greatest discouragement and heartless dejection to others: it seeth the hand of God working for good to him. And then, on the other side, an unthankful, repining, murmuring spirit soureth all our comforts, is ever querulous, whether crossed or pleased; it entertaineth crosses with anger, and blessings with disdain. It is hard to be in any condition on this side Hell, wherein we have not cause to praise God; even in great calamities, either for their fruit and issue, as our souls are bettered and humbled by them: "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word" (Psalm cxix. 65). Wherein? In giving him faith and sensible and seasonable correction (verse 67); and presently, "Thou art good, and doest good" (verse 68). Or else for their mitigation, as to deem them not insupportable (1 Cor. x. 13): "That we are not consumed" (Lam. iii. 22); that not to the full merit of our sins: "Thou, our God, hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve" (Ezra ix. 13); that comforts come along with them, that our afflictions do not exceed the measure of our comforts (2 Cor. i. 5); that we have a God still, who knoweth how to turn all to our advantage. Let us be persuaded he is well affected to us in Christ; and we shall take anything kindly at his hand. All this is spoken, that poor murmuring souls may not set out from so blessed a work; yea, when other arguments fail, we may see the wisdom, justice, and faithfulness of God, in his sharpest corrections: "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psalm cxix. 75). It is a great honour to God, to speak good of his name when his hand is smart upon us.

USE.—Let me press you now to three things:—

1. To the work.

2. Frequency and constancy herein.

3. To suit often God's word and works together.

First, To the work of praising God. Many are often complaining or begging, but seldom praising or giving thanks. Oh! surely this should be more regarded; not always taken up with complaints against ourselves, and supplications for mercies; but should sometimes give thanks, and praise the Lord; it is the noblest part of our work, it is nearest the work of Heaven. As love is the grace of Heaven, so praise is the duty then in season. It is good to be preparing, setting our hearts in order, for our eternal estate; it is the work of angels; when we praise God, we do the work of angels. The angels, according to the opinion of the ancient Hebrews, do every day sing praises to God, and that in the morning; which they gather, because the angel said to Jacob, "Let me go; for the day breaketh" (Gen. xxxii. 26); which place the Targum of Jerusalem thus explaineth, Let me go; for the pillar of the morning ascendeth; and behold, the hour approacheth that the angels are to sing. However that opinion be, sure we are that the angels ever bless God and laud his holy name: "One cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. vi. 1—3). They were blessing God for creation. Then the morning stars sang for joy (Job xxxviii. 4—7); for the nativity of Christ (Luke ii. 13, 14). They appre-

hend more of God's excellency and perfection, in himself and in his works, than we do, and are more sensible of his benefits than we are. Now, if this be the work of angels, the highest and greatest of them, surely this work should be more prized by us: it is nobler than other duties. We serve God in our callings; but this work is a part of our misery: this burden was laid upon Adam after his fall, that in the sweat of his brows he should eat his bread (Gen. iii. 19). Though honest labour be a part of our obedience, yet it is also a part of our trouble and exercise. There are works of righteousness; as, to give every man his due, these are good works; but they concern the benefit of man, the good of human society: whereas, praise is more immediately directed to the honour of God. There are works of merey, to relieve the poor, to help the distressed, to support the weak, to comfort the afflicted; these are good works indeed, and a very noble part of our service, to be reckoned to our thank-offerings as praise: "By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually; that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. xiii. 15, 16). It is Godlike to do good; and a more blessed thing to give than to receive (Acts xx. 35); as God giveth to all, and receiveth of none, but still this redoundeth to men. There are *opera cultus*, the fourth sort of works, works of worship: internal, as humbling our soul, repenting of our sins, and asking pardon; these are good works indeed, but such as imply our misery and imperfection: external, as prayer, hearing, and reading, and other acts of communion with God: but, when we give thanks, this is more noble. In other duties, God is bestowing something on us; but here, in our way, we bestow something upon God. In prayer, as beggars; in hearing, as scholars and disciples, we come to expect something from him: here we come to put honour upon God: in our way, it is a kind of recompence, or paying our debts to him, by word or deed.

Now, the reasons why men are so backward to this work, are,—

1. Because we have so little of the love of God. Self-love puts us upon supplication; but the love of God, upon praise and thanksgiving. It is a token of great love, to praise God without ceasing. We are eager to have blessings, and then forget to return and give God the glory.

2. And partly, neglect of observation. We do not gather up matter of thanksgiving: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. iv. 2). We should continually observe God's answers, and visits of love, manifestations of himself to the world. The reason, then, why we have no more pleasure in praising God is, because we observe not so heedfully as we should his mercy and truth fulfilled.

Secondly, to frequency and constancy therein. Frequency in this duty doth not beget a satiety and loathing, but rather a greater delight to continue in it. But here arise two questions:—

QUESTION I.—What time must be necessarily spent in acts of worship, and adoration, prayer, praise, and immediate converse with God?

ANSWER.—1. It is a truth, that our whole time must be given to God; for a Christian is a dedicated thing, "a living sacrifice" (Rom. xii. 1). Now, the beast offered in sacrifice, with all the appurtenances, was God's. A Christian, by the consent of his own vows, is not master of anything: after a vow of all, we must not keep back part, as did Ananias and Sapphira. A Christian hath given his whole self, time, and strength to God.

2. Though our whole time be given to God, yet for several uses and purposes: God's service is not of one sort, and he is served in our callings as well as in our worship. Man in paradise was to dress the garden (Gen. ii. 15), as well as to contemplate God: common actions may become sacred, by their end and use: "And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord" (Isa. xxiii. 18).

3. These several duties must not interfere and clash one with another; for God's commands are not contrary, but subordinate. We must not so attend upon religion as to neglect the service of our generation, as instruments of God's providence; nor suffer the lean kine to devour the fat, the world to encroach upon religion.

4. The particular seasons for each duty are not determined and set down in Scripture.

(1.) Partly, because God trusteth love, and will see whether we have a mind to cavil and wrangle, and dispute away duties, rather than practise them.

(2.) And partly, because he would leave something to the conduct of his Spirit, and the choice of spiritual wisdom: "A good man will guide his affairs with discretion" (Psalm cxii. 5).

(3.) And partly, because men's occasions and conditions are different, and he would not have his law to be a snare.

(4.) And partly, because there are so many occasions to praise God, that, if we do not want a heart, we shall be much and frequent in this duty.

5. Though there be not express rules, there is enough to prevent carelessness and looseness. God calleth to us in very large and comprehensive terms, "always," "continually," and "in every thing." The example of the saints, who night and day were praising God: Paul and Silas, at midnight, sang praises to God (Acts xvi. 25). So, "At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments" (Psalm cxix. 62); and in the text, "Seven times a-day. Besides, there are daily solemn services, personal and domestic, to be performed (Matt. vi. 11): "Watching daily at my gates" (Prov. viii. 34). Morning and evening they were to offer a lamb (Num. xxviii. 4).

6. There are general hints and limits enough to become love: "But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more" (Psalm lxxi. 14). Enough to keep the heart in good plight, and maintain faith and hope in God, and keep up a spiritual intercourse of communion with God by daily offering up prayers and praises to him.

QUESTION II.—Whether it be convenient to state and fix a time?

David had his set times; so had Daniel; and surely, all occasions, opportunities, and abilities considered, it may be a help to us, and make the spiritual life more orderly, to have set, stated, fixed times for the performance of this duty.

Thirdly, To suit God's word and works together, laws and judgments: God hath revealed his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness (Rom. i. 18); "Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward" (Heb. ii. 2). Deliverances and promises fetch all out of the covenant: "The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion" (Psalm cxxviii. 5); that relateth to the covenant made to the church. This checketh atheism, sweeteneth our duties, allayeth our fears, and resolveth our doubts, and helpeth us in the delightful exercise of praising God.

SERMON CLXXIX.

VERSE 165.—*Great peace have they which love thy law ; and nothing shall offend them.*

All that live in this world, find this life a warfare (Job vii. 1) ; much more must the godly expect difficulties and conflicts : “ Many are the troubles of the righteous ” (Psalm xxxiv. 19). To the eye of flesh, no condition seemeth worse, and more obnoxious to misery, than the condition of those that serve God ; yet, in reality, none are in a better estate : whatever happeneth, they are at peace, built on the corner-stone which God hath laid in Zion ; and therefore, in all the commotions and troubles of the world, they are safe. This is that which David here observeth.

In the former verse, he had told us, that it was his custom to praise God seven times a-day, for his righteous judgments ; and now he showeth the reason ; namely, from the ordinary course and tenour of these judgments, or dispensation of his providence, which was to give peace to them that keep his law, “ Great peace,” &c.

In these words you have,—

1. A privilege, “ Great peace have they.”
2. The qualification, “ which love thy law.”
3. The effect, “ nothing shall offend them.”

Let me open these branches.

1. The privilege is peace ; and that is threefold :—

First, external.

Secondly, internal.

Thirdly, eternal.

First, external, in the house, the city, or country, and societies where we live : in this sense it is taken Psalm cxxii. 6, 7, “ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem ; they shall prosper that love thee ; peace be within thy walls.” Now, this is not all that is meant here ; for this is a common benefit, though often vouchsafed for the sake of them that love God : as music cannot be heard alone ; though intended but to one person, yet others share with him in the benefit of it. Or, if you understand it of his own personal peace, or being at amity with men, they do not always enjoy that ; God’s best children are often forced to be men of contention ; that is, passively, they are contended with, and troubled in the world (Jer. xv. 10). And therefore the Apostle saith, “ If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men ” (Rom. xii. 18). It is not always to be had ; but we should endeavour to live in peace with all men.

Secondly, There is internal peace, arising either from justification (Rom. v. 1), or sanctification : “ The work of righteousness shall be peace ” (Isa. xxxii. 17) ; or from contentment with our condition (Phil. iv. 7). By justification, we have peace, when God is reconciled and made a friend : by sanctification, we have peace, when we walk evenly with God ; and, by contentment, we have peace, when our affections are calmed, and rightly ordered, or set upon more worthy and noble objects ; so that we are not troubled at the loss of outward things. These are the ingredients necessary to internal peace, which is (I suppose) principally intended here, inward comfort and contentment of mind.

Thirdly, There is eternal peace, that happy and quiet estate which we shall enjoy in Heaven, when we are above all desertions, temptations, and

the trouble of hostile incursions ; when we shall never have frown more from God's face, when our sun shall always shine without cloud or night ; when our strife is over, and our enemies that do infest us now, are all overcome. There is no Satan to tempt us, no serpent in the upper paradise, no world to trouble or divert us ; for all the wicked are bound hand and foot, and cast into unquenchable fire. There is no flesh to clog us ; for all is perfect. This glorious estate is called peace in Scripture ; as, Rom. ii. 10, God will give "glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile ;" and, "To be carnally minded, is death ; but to be spiritually minded, is life and peace" (Rom. viii. 6). By death, is meant the torments of Hell ; and by life and peace, the joys of Heaven. And, speaking of the blessedness of those that die in the Lord, he saith, "They shall enter into peace" (Isa. lvii. 2). Now, this cannot principally be intended here ; for the man of God speaketh of what we have, not of what we hope for ; and he speaks of God's righteous dispensations here in the world, for which he praised him ; and therefore it is meant of our peace here ; but yet it is the sense of peace and happiness we shall have in Heaven, that hath an influence upon the tranquillity of our hearts and minds here.

II. Let me a little explain the qualification, "Which love thy law." The word law is sometimes taken in a limited sense, for the decalogue, or moral law ; or else more generally, for the whole doctrine of the covenant, the whole tenour of religion, law and Gospel. So here and elsewhere ; as, "The isles shall wait for his law" (Isa. xlii. 4) ; that is, shall readily receive and embrace his doctrine. So, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God" (Dan. vi. 5) ; that is, in his religion. So, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord" (Psalm i. 2). By the law of the Lord, is meant the whole word of God. Well now, it is said they love his law ; not only keep it, but love it. A child of God is sometimes described by his faith, sometimes by his hope, or by his fear, but more often by his love ; that commanding and swaying affection, that sets the whole soul awork. They love thy law : there is emphasis in that.

III. Here is the consequent, "Nothing shall offend them." The Septuagint renders it *ἐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῖς σκανδαλον*, They have not scandals ; they have their troubles, but no stumblingblocks : "There is none occasion of stumbling in him" (1 John ii. 10). There is the same word used there, which the Septuagint useth here ; scandal is either active or passive, given or taken : that which is taken out of weakness, as young professors, or out of pride and malice ; they interpreted many things in a worse sense, when they knew it might be interpreted in a better. Now, nothing shall scandalize them : peace with God prevents the scandals of weakness ; and love to the law prevents scandals out of pride and malice : nothing shall scandalize them. Many things are apt to scandalize men ; as God's judgments, for which David did so often every day, and so solemnly, praise God. But they that love his law, and have thereby obtained great peace, they will not stumble at God's dispensations, let them be never so cross to their desires and expectations. Because they have a sure covenant, that is, a sure rule and sure promises, they are not scandalized by the miscarriages of men ; they can distinguish between the art and the artificer ; if the artist fail, the art is not to be blamed. The reproaches that are cast upon the ways of God, do not offend them ; for they have found God in

that way others speak evil of. Gold is gold, though cast into the dirt; dogs will bark at the moon when it shineth brightest. Would any man be troubled if a cripple mock him for going uprightly? Shall we leave the ways of God wherein we have found comfort and peace, because others speak against them? He is not offended at this. But that which is meant here is, such an offence as turneth them from God; otherwise, a good man may fall and stumble, but not into final apostasy, and he is usually kept from lesser offences; a child of God may be offended in lesser cases, but not so offended as to fall and break his neck.

But why is it called "great peace?" It noteth the excellency of this kind of peace; it is not only peace, but great peace, such as is rich and glorious, a peace that passeth all understanding (Phil. iv. 7). Or it may note the degree and quantity of it, "abundance of peace," as it is Psalm xxxvii. 11, and Psalm lxxii. 7: "Peace to him that is afar off" (Isa. lvii. 19); or peace like a river (Isa. xlvi. 18), or pure peace.

Three points I shall handle:—

DOCTRINE I.—That it is the property of God's children to love his law.

DOCTRINE II.—Those that love the law, shall have great peace.

DOCTRINE III.—This blessed peace maketh a man hold on in the way of obedience, whatever impediments, stumblingblocks, or discouragements, he meets withal.

DOCTRINE I.—That it is the property of God's children, not only to keep his law, but to love his law.

This is often spoken of in this psalm. Now, I prove it thus:—

Reasons:—

1st, They love God, and therefore they love his law. How doth that follow? The love that passeth between God and us, is not an arbitrary love of equals, but the necessary dutiful respect that inferiors owe to their superiors, such as children owe to their father, servants to their master, subjects to their prince and governor. Therefore it is not a fellowlike familiarity, but a dutiful submission and subjection to God's authority; and therefore, if we love God, we shall love his law. It is God's condescension that he will use us like friends, in regard of communion and converse with us, as Abraham was called God's friend (James ii. 23). Yet we are but servants, though we are used like friends, and there is a debt and bond of duty lying upon us; and so, if we bear any respect to God, it must be determined by our respect to his laws, and demonstrated by our obedience to them, not by acts of ordinary courtesy and kindness. This is often spoken of: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John xiv. 15); and, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (verse 21); "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John xv. 14). Though none condescendeth to such acts of kindness and friendship as God in Christ hath done, yet still he standeth upon his sovereignty. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." God's love to us is indeed a love of bounty; but our love is a love of duty and service. I have not yet done with this reason: it necessarily follows from the love of God, though you abstract him from the notion of a sovereign and lawgiver, and should love him only because of the excellency of his nature. Now, thus I argue: the same reasons that carry us to love God, do carry us also to love his law; for he that loveth God, will love anything of God, wherever he finds it: he will love his word, he will love his saints, but chiefly his word; for that is most to be loved, because that hath most

of God in it. The law is a copy of his holiness; the trace of God is in the creatures, there is his *vestigium*. His image is in his saints, they resemble his Divine qualities; but his most lively print and character is upon his word.

The image of God in his saints, is obscured by their infirmities; but the law of God is perfect, there is no blemish there: this is the fairest copy and draft of his holiness. Nay, once more; in this argument, abstract the consideration of his authority and the perfection of his being, yet our obligations to God as our benefactor will enforce this love to his word, and make it sweet to us; because it is the letter of our friend and benefactor, and the signification of his will, to whom we owe life, and breath, and all things; and therefore, though the law did not deserve to be loved for its own sake, yet it should be sweet for his sake from whom it cometh: he hath evidenced much love to us, as we are creatures; but much more love in Christ, as we are sinners; and it should be acceptable to us upon his account. Love and gratitude will constrain us to do his will, and regard his commands (2 Cor. v. 14). If we have any sense of our great obligations to him, it must needs be so.

2ndly, God's children find such an excellency in his law, that they must needs love it. As it is,—

1. A plain, clear word, that doth fully discover the will of God, and not leave duty to our own uncertain guesses; it puts duty into a plain stated course, how we may come to be blessed for evermore: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm cxix. 105): light is pleasant; but darkness is uncomfortable. When Aristotle was asked why all men do love the light, his answer was, that was the question of a blind man. Sense discovereth sufficiently why we should love the light: certainly, if you ask why men do not love the word of God, it is because the god of this world hath blinded their eyes (2 Cor. iv. 4).

2. It is a good word, because it is suited to our necessities; so we read Heb. vi. 5, "And have tasted the good word." Is food good when a man is hungry? Is drink good when a man is thirsty? Then the word of God is good; for it suiteth with the necessities of our souls, as these things do with our bodies: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. i. 15). The Gospel is a doctrine fitted for hungry consciences. If our inward senses were not benumbed, and we were not so Christ-gluttled and Gospel-gluttled as we are, oh! how precious would these tenders of grace be to our souls!

3. It is a pure word. So David gives the reason in the 140th verse of this psalm, "Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it." Hypocrites will now and then relish the comforts of the Gospel, be affected with the word, because it speaketh such good things to poor sinners; but God's children love the word for its purity and holiness. It meeteth with every sin, and directeth them to every duty necessary for the enjoyment of the blessed God. It is not comfort only must draw our love, but holiness. This argueth the life and power of grace, when we would not have the law of God less strict and holy than it is, but love it for this very reason, because it is pure, strict, and holy. You would not think a beggar loves you, because he liketh your alms, but he is loth to stay with you for your service, and live under the orderly government of your family. Most men's love to the word is such, they delight in the comfort of it as an alms, but

they hate the duty of it as a task: they had rather let the duties of it alone, if it could be without danger, and forbear them, if they durst. Oh! but, when your hearts consent to the purity of the law, and you would choose that life which it points out unto you, rather than any life in the world, or the most absolute freedom that the heart of man can imagine, so that you love your master the more because he hath appointed you such work; this is true affection to God and his word. You had rather live in holiness than sin, if you had your freest choice; it is a sign you love holiness for holiness' sake, and admire that in the word which is most worthy its strictness.

4. It is a sublime word: "Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore doth my soul keep them" (verse 129). Here are excellent truths, glorious mysteries, fit to exercise the sharpest wits in the world, a study fitter for angels than men (1 Peter i. 12). I do not speak this to stir up curiosity, which is a moral itch, a lust of the mind, and nothing more opposite to true love than lust; but to raise men to a due esteem of the Scriptures, which they are wont to contemn for their simplicity and plainness: it is full of high mysteries, though it may be read with profit by simple people, or any who desire knowledge. Sensual men, that are drowned in worldly delights, only look to the comfort of the animal life, and value all things as that is gratified; but those that look to the spiritual life and the ennobling of their souls, they will find the only sublime wisdom in the word of God: "Keep [these statutes] and do them: for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deut. iv. 6). What pitiful notions had the philosophers, and the wisest of the Heathen, concerning God, and angels, and providence, and the creation of the world, and the souls of men, and the happiness of the other world, and the way to attain it. When the Heathen came to be first acquainted with the Jews, they wondered at their wisdom and skill. These things would beget admiration in us, if we did meditate on them, and contented not ourselves with a slight and customary rehearsal of them. Here are deep mysteries to exercise the greatest wits; and therefore consider them more.

5. It is a sure word: "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm xix. 7). These directions may be safely relied on, and will not disappoint us; for they are not the guesses of deceived men, nor the collections only of the most observing and wisest men: or the result of their fallible experiences, but inspiration of the infallible God; and therefore a sensible heart, that knoweth what it is to live in a troublesome world, and hath been exercised with doubts, knoweth the comfort of a sure rule and sure promises. Oh! what a comfort is this in the midst of the uncertainties of the present life.

3rdly, There is no keeping the law without loving the law. There is a keeping the commandments by way of defence, and by way of obedience; a keeping of them by way of preservation, when we will not suffer them to be violated or wrested from us by others; and a keeping of them by way of observation, when we are mindful of them, are careful to observe them ourselves. This latter is the meaning of the Scripture notion of keeping the law. Now, this cannot be without love; nothing can hold the heart to it but love. What bonds will you cast upon yourselves! But, if a temptation come, you will break them all, as Samson did the cords wherewith he was bound. It is not your promises, vows, covenants, resolutions;

not your former experiences of comfort, when put to no trial. All is nothing to love. To evidence this to you, three things are needful; labour, valour, and self-denial.

1. To keep the commandments is a laborious thing, and requireth great diligence. Now, love is that disposition that maketh us laborious and diligent. If anything will keep a man to his work, it is love: labour and love are often put together: "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love" (Heb. vi. 10); "Your work of faith, and labour of love" (1 Thes. i. 3). It is not a slothful and idle affection, but will make a man take any pains, and endure any toil. *Nescit amor molimina*; love never findeth difficulties: the reason why they object difficulties is, because they love not. The church of Ephesus, when she lost her first love, she left her first works (Rev. ii. 4). Our Lord Jesus, when he had work for Peter to do, gageth his heart upon this point: "Simon Peter, lovest thou me?" "Feed my sheep;" "feed my lambs" (John xxi.). No man can endure the toil of the ministry, and the many troubles and difficulties he meeteth with in the discharge of it, without love to Christ: it is love sets all the wheels in the soul a-going.

2. To keep the commandments, requireth spirit and courage; not only the labour of an ox, but the animosity and courage of a lion; for we are not only to work, but fight and contend for our duty against the enemies of our salvation. Now, the most valorous and courageous affection, is love; a cowardly lover is a monster, one that hath all liver, and no heart. The poets, in their fictions, ascribe the valour of the persons whom they would represent as noble and heroic, to the strength of their love: certainly, the heroic acts of the martyrs came all from love. Others will not be at the charge of keeping the commandments of God, that lie cross to their profits and pleasures; but love will cause us to do the will of God, whatever it cost us. Yea, it is loth to serve God with that which cost nothing: "Love is strong as death; many waters cannot quench love" (Cant. viii. 6, 7). Death conquereth the stoutest, but cannot conquer love; "They loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. xii. 11). The waters of affliction cannot quench it; no threatenings, no promises can quench it. Love will not be bribed from Christ, nor frightened from Christ: you will be assaulted on both sides, with hopes and fears; but nothing shall fright or allure the soul from Christ.

3. To keep the commandments, there needeth much self-denial and submission, that he may have a heart to stoop to the least intimation of the will of God, though it be against your own will, and against your own carnal sense and inclination and interest. A man can never keep the commandments, till he thus deny himself; therefore the world wondereth what is the reason that men do so submit against their humour and interest, and say, If this be to be vile, I will be more vile, as Holy David said: nothing can do this, but love. When a man loveth you, you have the keys of his heart; you can open and shut it when you please. Samson, like a child, submitted to Dalilah, because of his love to her. So, Gen. xxxiv., Hamor and Sechem submitted to any terms, to be circumcised, because of the delight the young man had in Dinah: the father loved the son, and the son loved Dinah; and therefore both submitted to that hateful, painful ceremony. Jacob's service for Rachael seemed but a few years, because of his love to her (Gen. xxix. 20). So, if we love the law of God, we shall submit to the duties of it, against the hair and bent of our hearts.

USE I.—Is examination.

1. Do we receive the truth of God in the love thereof? Do we embrace the offers of Jesus Christ heartily? Acts ii. 41, they received the word gladly. Do you keep up your relish of the Gospel? Delight to hear of Christ, to read of Christ, to meditate of Christ, and the doctrine of salvation? not one part, but all? “His delight is in the law of God” (Psalm i. 2); the whole law. Ungodly men will catch at promises, seem to show a love to these; but grudge at the mandatory part of the word. Do you delight when it is pressed upon you, when you are warned of your danger? know most of your duty, and the way how to attain your blessedness? Do you love it most, when you feel the tragical effects of it; as the Apostle saith, “The commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”

2. Do you heartily take Christ’s yoke upon you, and frame yourselves to practise what he hath required of you? They that love the law, cannot rest in mere speculations, and be careless in the duties required of them: love cannot be hidden; but it will break forth into action; if it be in your hearts, it will break out in your lives: “Thy law is within my heart” (Psalm xl. 8): you will make conscience of duty (1 John ii. 4). Love is found to be solid and real, when we are tender of Christ’s laws; in vain, else, do we talk of the new birth, of the work of grace, or having an interest in Christ, and the like, unless we keep his law.

3. Do you practise it willingly, and without grudging? “His commandments are not grievous” (1 John v. 3): they that love the law, will not count the work tedious. God doth not look to the work; praying, hearing, strict observing his ordinances, or Lord’s day; but minds the will for the deed, not the deed for the will; whether willingly or unwillingly. God dealeth with us as rational creatures. If your ox draw your plough, and your ass carry his burden, you care not much whether it be done willingly or unwillingly; but God dealeth with us as obliged, and looketh that love should constrain us and influence our actions; and God dealeth with us as renewed creatures, that have a suitableness to their work (Heb. viii. 10; Psalm xl. 2). When rather from him, than with him, he delights greatly in God’s commandments (Psalm cxii. 1); delights to know, believe, and obey God’s word; and God expects it from us, because of the pleasures that do accompany well-doing (Prov. iii. 17). The speculation of a worthy truth affects the mind; but practice doth more, as more intimately acquainted with it.

USE II.—It shows,—

1. How far they are from the temper of God’s people, that dispute away duties rather than practise them; cavil at their work, rather than readily accept it.

2. They do not love the law, that are always full of excuses, and pretend occasions to neglect the service of God. Excuses are always a sign of a naughty heart; the sinner’s *non vacat*, is indeed *non placet*: “They all with one consent began to make excuse” (Luke xiv. 18). If we did not want a heart, we should not want an occasion, to manifest our respects to God.

3. It shows how far they are from the temper of God’s people, that are easily discouraged with difficulties; love will make us break through all (2 Cor. v. 14). Love hath a constraining force, counts nothing too dear to be parted with for God’s sake; they that are weary of well-doing, they are out of their element: as they in Malachi inquired, When will the Sabbath

be over? They that brought but a sorry lamb, cried out, Oh! what a weariness! Again, they that love the law are not troubled about the strictness of the law, but the unsuitableness of their own hearts. God's children are grieved for that weariness and uncomfortableness they find in God's service, glad of any enlargement of heart: lust is grievous, but not the commandment: "Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me (not from the law, but) from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 24.) But others, when the truth shineth round about them, they receive it not in the love thereof.

DOCTRINE II.—Those that love the law shall have great peace. Let me prove this.

First, They shall have peace.

Secondly, Great peace.

First, They shall have peace.

1st, Because the God of peace is their God; they are assured of his love and favourable acceptance: *Tranquillus Deus tranquillat omnia*; if God be with us, who can be against us? If he smileth on us, it is enough, though all the world should be against us; for it is God's wrath that maketh us miserable, and God's love that maketh us happy.

2ndly, Jesus Christ, who is the prince of peace, is their Saviour (Isa. ix. 6). He hath made articles of peace between God the Father and us; and drawn them into a covenant of grace, called the covenant of his peace (Isa. liv. 10). And this founded upon his blood, which is the price given to purchase our peace, and to set all things at rights between God and us. Having made peace between God and us (Col. i. 20; Isa. liii. 5). No less would serve the turn, completely to satisfy the justice of God for our wrong, and to purchase his favour for us.

3rdly, The Spirit, who is a spirit of peace (Gal. v. 22); it is one of his fruits; he worketh it in us as a sanctifier, and as a comforter.

1. As a spirit of sanctification, he doth dispossess Satan, and subdueth that rebellious disposition that is naturally in us against God, and maketh us accept the offer of friendship and reconciliation with God; and to yield up ourselves servants to righteousness, unto holiness; and then accordingly to walk, as people that are at amity with God.

(1.) Your first resignation in faith and repentance, is a ground of peace, and wrought in us by the Spirit: "Now, the God of peace fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xv. 13). Together with our faith, and in and by our faith, the Holy Ghost worketh this joy and peace. When we come to sue out our pardon in his name, to receive the atonement, and to resign up ourselves to God's use, then is the foundation laid: "Give the hand unto the Lord" (2 Chron. xxx. 8, margin).

(2.) This peace is confirmed by holy walking in the Spirit, or perfecting holiness through the power of the Holy Ghost: "As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy" (Gal. vi. 16); "Ask for the old paths, &c., and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jer. vi. 16). Keep close to God, and you will have peace; otherwise, not. Peace with God and thine own conscience, is a very tender thing; you had need be chary of it. If you grieve the Spirit, you will find it to your bitter cost. When sinful dispositions are indulged and nourished, our peace is beclouded, and hangeth on uncertain terms.

2. As a comforter, whose office it is to give us a sense of God's love,

and to help conscience to judge of our state and actions. The Spirit representeth God as a father, and showeth us what things are given us of God, and dissipateth and scattereth all the black thoughts that are in the soul: "I create the fruit of the lips [to be] peace" (Isa. lvii. 19). Peace is a sovereign plaster: God maketh it stick; and then all the world cannot deprive them of this peace. Creation and annihilation belong to the same power: the world can never give nor take; it is God's work, and he will maintain it.

Secondly, It shall be great peace, as to the nature and degree of it; as was before explained.

1. For the nature of it. It is not an ordinary peace, but of a higher nature: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled" (John xiv. 27). Wherein doth it differ from the world's peace? The world's peace is oftentimes in sin, a concord in evil, a lethargy, portending sadder troubles; but this is a holy peace (Prov. iii. 17). That is a crazy peace, that is soon broken and distorted, depending on the uncertainty of present affairs and the mutable affections of men; the more secure they are, the sadder trouble at hand: but this is an everlasting peace, which we have now in the way, and shall have in death, and then for ever. The world's peace is outward, it is but at best a freedom from outward troubles, when they are at enmity with God; but this is a peace with God himself (Prov. xvi. 7). The world's peace pleaseth the outward man; but this is a solid, soul-satisfying peace, a peace that guardeth heart and mind (Phil. iv. 7).

2. For the degree. It is many times in a great measure enjoyed; it may be more or less, as our interest in God's favour is more, or lessened in us; and it is not perfect in this life. There may be clouds and interruptions; but, as our holiness increaseth, so doth our peace; a little holiness, a little peace: but they that love thy law, have great peace.

OBJECTION.—How have God's children great peace? None seem more troubled and harassed with outward afflictions, nor walk more mournfully than they do.

ANSWER.—It is true, this peace doth not exclude trouble from carnal men in the world. They may have little outward peace; yet they shall have as much of that as God seeth good for them (Job v. 23, 24): but inward peace, which is peculiar to them. They have God for their friend, are quieted with a true sense and apprehension of his love and favour to them. It is true, as to this inward peace, God's children may sometimes be without it; they that love the law, have a greater sense of sin than others. Wicked men swallow sins without remorse; but they are very apprehensive of displeasing God. But we must distinguish between the time of settling this peace, and when it is settled. For a time, they may walk sadly; their peace is not grown up: "Light is sown for the righteous." Many times they sow in tears, but reap in joy. Sometimes their love to the law is intermitted; so their peace may be interrupted. But their worst condition is better than a carnal man's best; as the darkest cloudy day is brighter than the brightest night. There is some comfort and staying upon God in the worst condition.

USE I.—Let us from hence see the sad condition of carnal men. This clause, "love thy law," is exclusive, and confineth it to one sort of men. The unjustified, the unsanctified, want this peace; God saith to them, "They should not enter into my rest (Psalm xcvi. 11). The rest is

begun in this life, in reconciliation with God and peace of conscience, and perfected in an everlasting refreshment in that to come. Their sins are not pardoned, and therefore they continually fear; they have often refused God's peace, and therefore cannot enjoy comfort with any security, nor bear troubles with any patience and quiet of mind, nor come into God's presence with any cheerfulness, nor wait for eternal rest with any certain hope: "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked" (Isa. xlvi. 22; lvii. 21). It is not allowed to wicked men, nor vouchsafed to them. It is true, they may have a peace; but it is either in sin, or from sin; they do not mind the condition of their souls; a blind presumption that merely cometh from God's forbearance, or worldly happiness in prosperity. Carnal men seem to be in as great quietness as the children of God; as the deep sea in a calm, which seemeth to be as quiet as other waters, until a storm and tempest doth arise; then troubled, and cannot rest.

USE II.—To persuade us to love the law of God by this argument, because we shall have great peace; for the promise is made to this love.

But you will say, How must we show love to the law of God, that we may obtain this effect?

I answer, practise the duties it calleth for in order to peace.

1. Accept the articles of peace that are proclaimed between God and mankind in and through Christ. There is peace preached, not only to them that are afar off, but to them that are nigh (Eph. ii. 17): there is not only a price paid, but an offer made: embrace it, lay hold upon it by faith; God is in good earnest with you (2 Cor. v. 20). Oh! love this good word; it is the gladdest tidings that ever sounded in the ears of lost sinners. Now is your time; agree with your adversary while he is in the way, before you be cast into prison (Luke xii. 58). If you lose this opportunity, and do not embrace the offered friendship, God will be exceeding angry: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb. ii. 3.) "Therefore give the hand to the Lord" (2 Chron. xxx. 8).

2. Perform the duty of thankfulness which God requires (Matt. xi. 29). Peace is the fruit of sanctification, as well as justification; it is not to be found elsewhere (Isa. xxxii. 17).

3. Be much in communion with God, and trading with Heaven: "Acquaint now thyself with him" (Job xxii. 21).

4. Be tender of your peace, when it is once settled; of doing anything that may cause war between God and the soul (Psalm lviii. 8). Take heed of venturing your peace for the vanities of the world, those sinful and foolish courses which will lay you open to God's wrath and displeasure: "The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psalm xxxvii. 11).

SERMON CLXXX.

VERSE 165.—*Great peace have they which love thy law; and nothing shall offend them.*

I now come to the effect "Nothing shall offend them." The Septuagint, *ἐκ ἔτιν ἀποτὸς σκάνδαλον*, there is no scandal in them. The Apostle John applieth the same phrase, or form of speech, to him that loveth his brother, *ἐκ ἔτιν ἐν αὐτῷ σκάνδαλον*, there is no occasion of stumbling in him. The meaning is, they shall not be in danger of those snares and temptations

which the world is full of, and which frequently bring other men to sin and ruin; or nothing shall wound or hurt them, or cause them to fall in their journey to Heaven.

DOCTRINE.—That the love of God's law is a great means to carry a believer straight on his way to Heaven, whatever temptations he hath to the contrary.

Here I shall inquire,—

1. What scandals and offences are.

2. How a believer is preserved.

1. What scandals and offences are. I answer, scandals literally signifieth temptations, or inducements to sin, any stumblingblock or hindrance laid in a man's way, by which the passenger is detained or diverted; or at which, if he be not careful, he is apt to stumble or fall. Spiritually, it signifieth anything that may discourage, or divert us from our duty to God, or may occasion us to fall, to the great loss or ruin of our souls.

Now, concerning these scandals or offences, I shall give you these distinctions:—With respect to the subject, there are three sorts of scandals:—

1. Taken, but not given.

2. Given, but not taken.

3. Both given and taken.

1st. There is offence taken, where none is given. Thus Christ himself, in his person, sufferings, doctrine, may be an offence to the carnal and unbelieving world. In his person, as he is said to be in 1 Peter ii. 8, "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed." He that is to the believer a corner-stone, elect and precious, is to the obstinate, prejudiced unbeliever (with allusion to those that travel by land) a stone of stumbling, (to those that travel by sea) a rock of offence; his slender appearance was an offence to them. As to his sufferings, it is said, that "Christ crucified [is] unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor. i. 23). They had not a Messiah to their mind, though such a one as the Scriptures had before described. His doctrine: "Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying?" (Matt. xv. 12.) Again, when they murmured at his saying, "Except ye eat my flesh," "Doth this offend you?" (John vi. 61.) Flesh and blood are apt to stumble in God's plainest ways; at the doctrine of God, which is strict and spiritual; the worship of God, that is simple and without pomp; the dispensations of God, in chastising and afflicting his people, they are all an offence to carnal and worldly men; and so, through their sin, prove an impediment to the success of the Gospel; but this offence is causeless, and without any just ground; and, without special grace, when it prevaileth with men, will prove their eternal ruin and destruction. God never intended to satisfy men's lusts and humours: truth must be taught, whoever be displeased; therefore all our care must be, to avoid this kind of offence: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Matt. xi. 6), that doth not stumble at Christ, because of the cross, nor the holiness of his doctrine, nor the simplicity of his worship, nor the despicableness of his followers, nor the troubles that attend his service.

2ndly, Offence may be given, where none is taken; as when men counsel others to evil, or reproach the holy ways of God; as when Peter disuadeth Christ from suffering: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art

σκάνδαλον, an offence unto me" (Matt. xvi. 23). It was *scandalum in se*, though not *ratione eventus*, not that Christ was offended by it; when the heart is guarded against evil counsel, or the infection of evil example. So for reproaches, they are a means of betraying the soul into sin, and prejudicing it against godliness; but the godly are well fortified; they can see loveliness in such ways as are hated and discountenanced in the world. As David, "They have made void thy law: therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold" (Psalm cxix. 126, 127); and Moses, "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb. xi. 26). They are no more moved by the world's scorn, than a man that is straight and upright would be at the mock of cripples, because he doth not limp and walk after their fashion; they can see honour in disgrace, and beauty in God's despised ways.

3rdly, Offences also may be both given and taken; as when one provoketh, and another is provoked to evil; enticed by false doctrine, corrupt counsel, or evil example. False doctrine: "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. xv. 14); not one, but both; the blind follower as well as the blind guide. Or by corrupt counsel; as Ahab was seduced by the false prophets (1 Kings xxii.), and Amnon by his friend Jonadab was drawn to incest (2 Sam. xiii. 6); he as readily obeyeth the other's wicked counsel as he was to give it. So for evil example, it secretly tainteth us; the Prophet complaineth, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. vi. 5). It is hard to avoid the contagion of their iniquities with whom we do daily and familiarly converse; as to live in an infected air, without taint; or to walk in the sun, and not be insensibly tanned. We leaven one another by our coldness and deadness in religion: it is hard to be fresh in salt waters; to live among offences, and not be offended.

Secondly, With respect to the object, or matter of it; a scandal may be given, *dicto aut facto*.

1. In word.

2. In deed.

1st, In word, by evil counsel, or carnal suggestion: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly" (Psalm i. 1). As carnal friends and parents that relish not the word of life themselves, out of prejudice against godliness and holy zeal, dissuade their children and servants from attending on the exercises of religion, as praying, hearing, meditation, lest they grow mopish and melancholy; and lest a zealous minding of God's interest should hinder their preferment; had rather see them lewd than holy; but, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother," &c. (Luke xiv. 26.) Or by atheistical, or obscene and carnal discourse: "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. xv. 33); "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient" (Eph. v. 4).

2ndly, In deed; and so three ways:—

1. When they do things that are simply unlawful, and so propagate their sin to others by their example: "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul" (Prov. xxii. 24). The violences and furious passions of anger are so uncomely, that a man would think they should rather affright than allure to imitation; but these things insensibly overcome us, and, ere a man is aware, he is tainted.

2. By the abuse of Christian liberty to the wrong and hindrance of others in a way of godliness; as, "That no man put a stumblingblock, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But, if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably; destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died" (Rom. xiv. 13—15); "But take heed, lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak" (1 Cor. viii. 9). We must not commit a sin, or omit a duty, to avoid offence; yet, in indifferent things, we may expect from others what is lawful to do, and forbear it, as conduceth to edification. For we must have a care of offending little ones, and therefore must drive according to their pace, using our liberty as they are able to bear.

3. By persecution enforce others against their duty: "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matt. xviii. 6); better he did suffer all extremity. Offending is persecuting; as receiving is countenancing, cherishing, treating them kindly and tenderly. So, "When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by-and-by he is offended" (Matt. xiii. 21). This opposing, hating, vexing the people of God, is one way of offence, and very dangerous to those that practise it, however it succeedeth; for, though they be little ones, little in their own eyes, little in the esteem of the world, little in regard of outward interest, and so lie open and liable to offences; little in regard of their spiritual growth, and so apt to take offence: yet they are dear to the great God, who is their patron, and will take their quarrel into his own hands; and it will be a thousand times better they had been the persecuted ones, than to be persecutors.

Thirdly, With respect to the double faculty the Devil seeketh to work upon, which is our irascible or concupiscible faculty, our eschewing or pursuing; the flesh with its *πάθη ἡ ἐπιθυμία* (Gal. v. 24). It is passions and lusts, what we render affections; and these are suited to the temptations that most men are usually overcome by: such are the terrors and allurements of the world; the terrors of the world, that works upon our passions; the allurements of the world, that works upon our lusts.

1st, The terrors of the world are apt to draw men to dislike God, and distaste the way of godliness. Certainly, by these the Devil seeketh to get us into his power and reach: therefore it is said, "Whom resist, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (1 Peter v. 9). Satan's temptations are conveyed to the godly through afflictions, hoping by these to prevail with them to make them quit the truth and their duty to Christ, and grow weary of the ways of God; and it doth the more prevail, when they think they are the only sufferers. This should not be; for the drift of Christianity, it is to take us off from the hopes and fears of the world; and a full third part of the Scriptures serveth to comfort us in tribulations and afflictions for the Gospel's sake; and, if we were not exposed to troubles, these would be as unsuitable and needless, as bladders and arts of swimming were to a man that standeth on dry land, and never meaneth to go into the deep waters. But yet they are a usual stumblingblock to those that have not overcome the sensual inclination, and are not dead to a worldly interest.

2ndly, The allurements of the world, or the baits of sense. Present things have a strange infatuation upon us: "For Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. iv. 10). The troubles of the world are not so dangerous as the snares of the world; though many be discouraged by troubles, yet many times others are gained by patience, courage, and constancy of God's servants in persecutions. The offence may be more easily disproved, as not justifiable: for men may have a secret liking for the truth, and a purpose to own it in better times; but, by the baits of sense, men are inveigled and tempted to dislike religion itself, as contradicting their lusts, and nourish a base opinion of it in their hearts. In troubles and persecutions, there is not a dislike of religion itself, but of the hard terms upon which it must be received and cherished. And besides, the mischief is greater: they that cast off the profession and practice of godliness upon some great earthly hopes, involve themselves in a more heinous sin than they that shrink from it out of some great fear; for those things we fear, as afflictions, torments, and death, they are in themselves destructive of our felicity; and therefore it cannot be said how much nature abhorreth them: but those things which we hope for and desire, are such that nature may easily, and without great inconveniency, be without them; as great riches, splendour of life, noble affinities and marriages; for these things are not absolutely necessary to the worldly life, but only conduce to the greater conveniency and felicity thereof: not our worldly being, but our well-being, is concerned in them. Our being may be kept up and supported in a far meaner condition. Thence it is, that great dangers, when they are at hand, and difficulties sustained, and the fear of them, do often sway us against the conscience of our duty; but, if we lose our great worldly hopes, or be cut short in our condition and worldly expectations, it is no great matter: wise and gracious men may easily bear it with a quiet and well-composed mind. The sin of those that stumble at great and worldly hopes, is questionless the greater transgression; for they are only enticed and drawn away by their pleasures and lust, which all good Christians are obliged to deaden and mortify. But, though to fall out of fear be not so heinous a sin, yet a great and heinous sin it is; for grace should govern fear as well as hope. If the coercion and bridling of it be difficult, it doth not excuse *a toto*, but *a tanto* only; and it is hard to set a Christian in joint again, that is fallen by fear. Witness those terrors that do haunt men when once they are gotten into the snare; as Peter, who "went out and wept bitterly;" it cost him much sorrow at heart. Christ is fain to direct a special message to him by name (Mark xvi. 7). Though it doth not exclude all hopes of repentance and pardon, yet it needeth great mercy on God's part and repentance on ours. Indeed, the church is bound to consider men's weaknesses, and to judge of the fault according to the violent shock and incursion of the temptation; because we know not our own strength, and how soon we may be surprised in like kind, and need indulgence ourselves (Gal. vi. 1). But God is not in our condition, nor obliged to recover all that lapse in this kind; and therefore useth his mercy according to his own pleasure. Sometimes he recovereth them, and sometimes not; but, for the other temptations, what excuse is it capable of? (Heb. xii. 16, 17.)

II. Let us consider how a believer is preserved. Unsound professors are turned by scandal from the ways of godliness, which they seemed to walk in; but, for the sincere believer, there may be many stumblingblocks

laid in his way, but he falleth not at them, escapeth those heinous sins into which others fall, through his love to God's commandments. Observe here three things:—

First, It is not light, but love, that keepeth them from stumbling. The light of saving knowledge is a great matter; for it showeth us a sure rule to walk by, and sure promises to build upon; but love must join with it, to assist us; that we may escape those snares; for many fail, because they receive not the truth in the love of it (2 Thess. ii. 10). Till light be turned into love, it hath not such a powerful influence upon us: certainly a man is better held by the heart, than by the head: "Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. viii. 39). The love of God is not principally taken there in a passive sense, for the love wherewith we are beloved of God; but, in an active sense, for the love wherewith we love God; for affliction and persecution do expugn or assault God's love to us, but not our love to God; for this maketh us cleave to him, whatever temptations we have to the contrary. Do but consider what you are to love.

1st, We are to love God, there it beginneth. Love God once; and then you will take nothing ill at his hands: how smart soever his chastenings be, they come from a God that loveth you, and whom your souls love: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. iii. 19). Now, they will not stumble at God's dispensations, be they never so cross to their expectations and desires. But then,—

2ndly, We must love the law of God; be satisfied with our duty, whatever cometh of it. Next to a sincere love to God, there must be a sincere love to his holy law, as the right way to eternal blessedness; and then temptations will have but little force upon us, for they do not love their duty for foreign reasons, but for its own sake: so it is all one. They love the law upon its own evidenee, as it is recommended by God, and is a sure direction to true happiness: "The righteous also, shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger" (Job xvii. 9). He meaneth, notwithstanding all the troubles and assaults which they endure, they are not scandalized at God's dealings, or permitting them to be thus dealt with, but do persevere in a course of godliness: this is the way wherein they delight.

3rdly, He loves the brethren: "He that loveth his brother, abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him" (1 John ii. 10). They, together with us, uphold Christ's interests in the world. The coals, by lying together, enkindle one another; and so are the better kept from having their zeal quenched, or being ensnared by the manifold temptations in the world.

4thly, By this love, the love of the world and its prosperity, is much abated: "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John ii. 15). This man cannot part with all, when his duty calleth for it. Till we despise worldly things, we are still liable to take offence. All our disquiet cometh from too great love of the world, and too little love of the word of God. All this is spoken to show you, that it is want of love wherefore men are so easily taken off, and this love beginneth with the love of God, then goeth on to his word, and the obedience it calleth for, and is strengthened by our love to the saints, and is a higher love than that it can be controlled by the love of the world.

Secondly, This blessed peace hath an influence upon it, upon a twofold account:—

1st, This is an experience of the good of that way which the world speaketh evil of. You cannot persuade a man against his experience, that honey is bitter, when he has tasted the sweetness of it (1 Peter ii. 3). They know the grace of God in truth, they have found much comfort and peace in these ways. Most men know religion and godliness but by hearsay, or looking on; the testimony of Christ was never confirmed in them; but these have tried it, and know the good of religion by experience: therefore they cannot be so easily offended as others are, who have only licked the glass, but never tasted the honey. The pleasure they find in the duties and exercises of godliness, will with them infinitely outweigh all the transient delights and advantages that are propounded, or offer themselves as the bait to any unlawful practice.

2ndly, The particular nature of this experience: it is peace which doth guard heart and mind (Phil. iv. 7), that they are not disturbed, or distracted by anything that befalleth them; but enjoy a calm in their souls, whatever storms overtake them, or befall them in the way of their duty: “Your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace” (Eph. vi. 15). This is the Gospel shoe, there is no going to Heaven without it; and this is peace; that is, peace with God. When all is quiet within, and the quarrel is taken up between God and us, we can the better bear the frowns of the world; and he calleth it the Gospel of peace, because it mainly dependeth on the terms of grace revealed to us in the Gospel. The law discovereth the enmity and the breach; but the Gospel discovereth how peace may be had. He calleth it also the preparation, *ἑτοιμασία*, because this peace breedeth a firm and ready resolution to go through all difficulties, crosses, and hardships: “I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem” (Acts xxi. 13). Well then, this is the fruit of peace and friendship between God and sinners; it breedeth a resolution to hold on our way to Heaven, notwithstanding crosses and continual hardships, and allayeth the bitterness of all worldly trouble.

Thirdly, There is God’s providence and care over them, who is concerned in the protection of all that love his law, and take care to love and please him. On the one side, God sometimes threateneth the wicked, that he will lay stumblingblocks before them (Jer. vi. 21); that is, bring those things upon them that shall be a means of ruin to them: on the other side, that he will lead the penitent believer in a straight way, that they shall not stumble (Jer. xxxi. 9). We must not omit God’s concurrence; for it is his promise, that nothing shall offend them; his people are very near and dear to him. Our Lord telleth us, in his discourse against offending them, that “their angels do always behold the face of [his] Father which is in Heaven” (Matt. xviii. 10); that is, though the angels be appointed to be their guardians on earth, yet they have their continual returns and recourse to God’s glorious presence, to make requests or complaints in their behalf, or to receive commands concerning them; for, as God seeth fit, they are employed in service for the benefit of those little ones. I remember Solomon saith, “There shall no evil happen to the just; but the wicked shall be filled with mischief” (Prov. xii. 21). We can easily understand, that the wicked shall be overwhelmed with God’s judgments; but how shall no evil happen to the righteous, since their troubles are many? The meaning of the place is, as Augustine well glosseth, *Non ut*

non eveniant, sed ut non noccant; they do not stumble at afflictions, nor are they deserted by God as others are: God moderateth the evil (1 Cor. x. 13), or removeth it (Psalm cxxv. 3), or turneth it to good (Rom. viii. 28). Now, by this gracious dealing of God, it cometh to pass that nothing doth offend them. Those that depend on the favour of men, and the uncertainties of a worldly condition, how many troubles are they exposed unto! Therefore we should look to our confidence, whether it be faith or security; whether we rest upon a carnal pillow, or the corner-stone which God hath laid in Sion.

USE.—It concerneth us all to look to this, whether we love the law so as to have gotten peace of conscience, and assurance of God's protection; because of the multitude of scandals, and the trials and exercises we are put upon by God's correcting hand; the prosperity of the wicked; the disgrace that is cast on the stricter ways of God; the world being so full of snares and temptations, that bring men to sin and ruin: *Omnia timeo*, saith Bernard, *et quæ placent, et quæ tristantur*: I am afraid of everything; of those things that please us, and those that make us sad. What shall a poor Christian do, that he may not miscarry?

1. Be sure that your resolutions for God and the world to come, be thoroughly fixed and settled; for you will be distracted with everything, if you be not at a point, and have not chosen the better part, and fully fixed your purpose. The Apostle telleth us, "The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James i. 8): a wavering and inconstant Christian will not know which way to turn himself, being disquieted upon all occasions.

2. They never rightly begin with God, that do not sit down and count what it may cost them to be holy Christians: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 26). If you have not a preparation of mind to suffer anything rather than part with Christ, you are not fit for his turn; like a man that sets on building, and hath not a stock to hold out; or designeth a war, and is not provided with all necessaries to go through with it. You must expect temptations and troubles, because they serve to try whether you will hold your integrity; and, if God be not sufficient to be your portion, never serve him. Never pretend to religion, if you do not resolve to renounce all that is precious to you in the world, rather than forsake it.

3. Consider the necessity of standing to God's law, whatever persecutions and sufferings you meet with. There is no other way to be saved: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John vi. 68). Such as have a mind to quit Christ, have need to consider where they shall find a better master: change where they will, they change for the worse. Obedience to the word of God, is the only way to eternal life; and, whatever law you make to yourselves, God will judge you by his own law.

4. Be established in the peace of God, and never break this peace to obtain your outward peace. What a wound will it be to thy soul! and how shiftless and helpless wilt thou be, when, to make thy peace with the world, thou hast broken thy peace with God! Therefore rise up against temptations, as the trees refused in Jotham's parable to be ruler over the rest. Shall I lose my fatness; another, my sweetness, to rule over the trees? Shall I, to please men, put my conscience to a continual torment

and anguish? sell the birthright for one morsel of meat? The remembrance will come into your minds, when you had joyful communion with God and his people; whose company you have abandoned; every day of solemn assembly, will be a new torment to you.

5. When troubles surprise you, consider how unbeseeming it is to take offence at God's providence. It is an ill sign, to be so apt to pick quarrels with God and godliness: it argueth little love, either to God or his law; for love thinketh no ill of those whom we love. They are murmurers that said, "The ways of the Lord are not equal;" or, What profit is there if we serve the Lord (Mal. iii. 14).

6. Consider, the greatest hurt Satan intendeth you, is not to hurt your bodies, but your souls. To bring you to be offended at the holy and righteous ways of the Lord, he would let you enjoy the pleasures of sin; to rob you of your delight in God and celestial pleasures, let you have all the world, if it were in his power (Matt. iv. 9).

7. Consider, how short is the prosperity of the wicked and those that turn aside to the ways of sin (Psalm xvii. 14). They shall be cut off, they are soon withered and dried up, and all their outward glory perishes with them. It is a more prudent course to adhere closely to God: "I have seen the foolish taking root; but suddenly I cursed his habitation" (Job v. 3). It is a prediction: he foretold that there was a curse at the root of all his prosperity.

SERMON CLXXXI.

VERSE 166.—*Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.*

The man of God had said, verse 165, "Great peace have they which love thy law; and nothing shall offend them;" now he particularly applieth to himself what he had generally spoken before. It is sweet when we can thus comfortably apply promises, and make out our own title and interest. This is David's work in this and the following verses. Here he maketh profession of two things, his hope and obedience; which, indeed, are the two great things that belong to a Christian; graces much praised, and little practised: *Quarum multa sunt elogia, pauca exempla.* They are fitly coupled together in his plea; "I have hoped," I have "done;" for our confidence in God's mercy is no greater than our fidelity in his precepts; and they are both professed before God, who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins. "Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments."

DOCTRINE.—Sound hope of salvation is, and must be, joined with a care of keeping God's commandments.

First, I shall speak of the several branches of this profession apart.

Secondly, Then of their conjunction.

First, separately; and there,—

1st, Of the profession of his hope: "Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation."

1. The object and thing hoped for is salvation. Salvation is temporal, or eternal; of the body, or of the soul. Rabbi David Kimchi understandeth it of the latter; but it seemeth rather to imply help and deliverance out of dangers and distresses. Indeed, neither can be well excluded: not eternal salvation, for, without that, temporal deliverance is

but a reprieve for a time, not a total exemption from evil; not temporal salvation, because, before we come to look for our full and final deliverance, God will try us by the way, and train us up in the expectation of other things. As men learn to swim in the rivers and shallow waters, that afterwards they may swim in the ocean and deep waters; so, by expecting lesser things, we learn to wait for greater: both must be hoped for, but with a difference; eternal salvation absolutely, but temporal with submission to God's will. We have not temporal things always *in specie*, in kind; but sometimes in value; for these things may be recompensed and made up another way, but no recompence can be given us for eternal life. The Apostle speaketh with submission as to his temporal case, but is peremptory as to his eternal state: "Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. iv. 17, 18). Again, though we are not to neglect the meanest promise, yet our hearts should run more upon the things of another world. A Christian honoureth God by his faith about temporal things, when he will not cast away his hope in the deepest calamities; but much more when the concerns of the world to come are of the greatest force with him, and his heart is wholly taken up about them: "Looking for that blessed hope" (Titus ii. 13); there is the character of a Christian. Peace and freedom from trouble in the world is not the main thing that we should look after; but perfect conformity to God, and full fruition of him. God is the chief good; and the fruition of him as promised, is the utmost happiness of the creature. A true Christian hath a greater indifferency to the things of this life; all his business is to get an assurance of a better: he can look through the troubles of the world, and see sunshine behind the back of the storm: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Psalm xlii. 11). But chiefly his hope is laid up for him in Heaven (Col. i. 5); his portion is laid up for him, and kept safe for his use, in a sure place: here he knoweth he must be exercised with temptations and crosses. In short, temporal things are desired for the sake of spiritual and eternal; but eternal for themselves. A traveller desireth a horse, not so much for himself, as for the conveniency of his journey; so he expecteth temporal things as helps in his way and passage to Heaven. Well then, salvation is the object of this hope, temporal salvation in order to eternal; that we may have opportunities to glorify God here, and may not faint and be overwhelmed with incident crosses. This sentence is borrowed from good old Jacob: "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord" (Gen. xlix. 18). It is notable, Jacob speaketh this when prophetically blessing his children; and, when he cometh to Dan, the good old man seemed to be carried beside his purpose, breaking out this of a sudden, but in spirit foreseeing the miseries and calamities which his posterity should fall into for their idolatry; for Dan was the first tribe that made defection, therefore he opposeth his hopes to his fears. We are told in the general, "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam. iii. 26); that is, for deliverance out of troubles. It will be of great use to

us in our troubles, to look to the issue of them. The Lord doth not wholly cast off his people, when he seemeth to break down the hedge and fence of his providence, and leave them in their enemies' hands; he hath salvation for a hoping people. But mark, it is thy salvation; it is good to come out of trouble upon God's terms, in God's way, and in God's time; others break prison: "My soul waiteth upon God, from him cometh my salvation" (Psalm lxii. 1). Expect it from God, and him alone.

2. The act of grace, "I have hoped." Hope, in the general, is the expectation of some future good; as it is a grace, it is some good thing promised by God: "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope" (Psalm cxxx. 5); "I am judged for the hope of the promise," saith Paul (Acts xxvi. 6); so that hope is the expectation of good things promised. Faith and hope do both work upon the promise; but yet they are distinct graces. They differ in their object. The object of faith is larger; the whole word of God is the object of faith. We believe things past, present, and to come; but hope for things to come only. Among things to come, we believe both promises and threatenings; but the object of hope is only things desirable. We believe the torments of Hell, but do not hope for them. In the promises, faith believeth the promise, and hope looketh for the thing promised: faith looketh to the authority of the promiser, and hope to the goodness of the thing promised: faith begets hope, and then hope strengthens faith: faith holdeth the candle to the soul, whereby we see things invisible, and to come; and hope maketh this light comfortable and ravishing to us. We have comfort in believing, because hopes of enjoying. To believe eternal life, if we had not hopes to attain it, were a comfortless thing. Faith is before hope, and leadeth us to the object; and hope followeth as faith leadeth. Faith assents to, and applieth the promise; and hope waiteth for the accomplishment. There are several sorts of hope:—

(1.) There is a vain and groundless hope, the dream of a waking man. As if a beggar should hope for the succession of a crown; so there are some that dream of peace and safety, and "sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child" (1 Thess. v. 3). This is an irrational thing.

(2.) There is rational and probable hope, but yet not so firm and certain: it is likely it will be so, but we have no absolute certainty: "He that ploweth, should plow in hope; and he that thresheth in hope, should be partaker of his hope" (1 Cor. ix. 10). This is necessary for the carrying on of all human actions, that a man should have probable hope of success; for, without it, there is no labour or rational attempt.

(3.) There is a firm and certain hope, when we have assurance of the things hoped for: so, in the commerce between us and God, he giveth us assurance in his promises by his word and oath, that our consolation may be the more strong, when we fly for refuge to the hope that is set before us (Heb. vi. 17, 18). There is a blessed and glorious estate reserved to be enjoyed in the heavens, this is set before us; propounded as a prize in the view of the world. Now, when we take hold of this, gain a right and title to it, God would have our consolation the more strong, by the assurance he hath given us in the covenant made with us in Christ. Well then, Christian hope is not a conjecture, or probability, but an assurance. Many times all kind of probability is contrary to God's assurance. Abra-

ham believed in hope against hope (Rom. iv. 18): *Credidit in spe gratie, contra spem nature*. God's assurance prevailed above natural difficulties; there rational and human hope, and Divine hope, are opposed.

(1.) This assurance admits of degrees; for it may be full or not full: "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end" (Heb. vi. 11). The full assurance is that which removeth all doubts and fears; and this it may do at some time, and not at another: it may be interrupted, or continue to the end. Now, we must give all diligence that it may do so. By slothfulness and negligence, it will be lost: presumption and carnal hope cost a man nothing to keep it, it groweth upon us we know not how; but this certain hope is not kept lively and upon the wing without great zeal and diligence in the spiritual life. Oh! but it concerneth us much so to do. This hope is necessary for us,—

(i.) To quicken and enliven our duties. Hope of reward is one of the bands of a man, the weight that inclineth us to all actions; much more doth this great reward which the Christian faith propounds: "And now I stand, and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come; for which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews" (Acts xxvi. 6, 7); and, "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men" (Acts xxiv. 15, 16). I run not as one that is uncertain, (1 Cor. ix. 26), not by guess, but sure grounds: "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 14). It is great and sure, here is excellency and certainty; a man that hopeth for anything, will be engaged in the thorough pursuit of it.

(ii.) It sharpeneth our affections after heavenly things; when we look for them, we shall also long for them: "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption; to wit, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. viii. 23). Hope stirreth up serious thoughts of Heaven and blessedness to come, and hearty groans after it; and so sets both mind and heart awork. It sets the mind awork: a man cannot hope for a thing, but he will be thinking of it; as the Scripture speaketh of the labourer, that he lifts up his soul to the hire which he expects; thoughts will be sent as spies into the land of promise, to bring us tidings thence. And it sets the heart a longing and groaning, that we were at home: "For the earnest expectation of the creature," *ἀποκαταρκία κτίσεως*, stretcheth out the head (Rom. viii. 19), to see if it can spy it a-coming; as, when Sisera's mother expected him, she looked through the lattice. There will be strong desires, as well as serious thoughts; not glances and hasty wishes, such as worldly persons may have in their serious moods and sober fits; these vanish and leave the heart never the better; but earnest longings, such as settle into a heavenly frame. That taste which they have already, maketh them groan for what is behind.

(iii.) It sets the heart at rest, and allayeth our disquiets, and fears, and cares, and sorrows, that so we may go on cheerfully in God's service. It is the pleasure of God that the heirs of promise should for a while shine as lights in a corrupt world, and be exercised with all kinds of temptation,

that his power may be manifested in their weakness. Now, that we may ride out the storm, he gave us hope; not only *renium sperandi*, leave to hope for his mercy; but *virtutem sperandi*, the grace of hope, strength so to do; and what is the use of it, but to calm the heart under all distempers? therefore it is compared to a helmet and an anchor. To a helmet: "For a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thes. v. 8). A helmet is to cover the head; this maketh a believer hold up head in all his straits and troubles. The policy of the Devil is to weaken or darken the hopes of eternal life; and then he knoweth he shall the sooner overcome us: therefore the life of a Christian should be to keep on his helmet, to keep his hopes of Heaven lively and fresh; and then he will not be dejected. Again, it is compared to an anchor: "Which hope we have, as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (Heb. vi. 19). As the anchor holdeth the ship in a tempest, so doth hope keep the mind in a constant temper in the midst of the stormy gusts of temptation, that we dash not against the rock, that would break our confidence and profession: it strengthens and quiets the floating heart of man. Things will end well at last, how blustering and stormy soever the weather be at the present. The floods of temptation, and the tribulations of this present life, are permitted to invade us, but that God hath given us an anchor, that they shall not drive us from the haven of eternal happiness. Whatever our cross be, immoderate grief for the death of near and dear relations: "Sorrow not even as others which have no hope" (1 Thes. iv. 13). *Cur enim doleas si periisse non credis? Cur impatienter ferres subductum, quem iterum credis reversurum esse? pro festo est quam putas mortem;* saith Tertullian, *De Patientiâ*. If for loss of goods and estate: "And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in Heaven a better and an enduring substance" (Heb. x. 34). If a poor man that had all his wealth about him, should fall into the hands of thieves and robbers, and be rifled by them, he must needs cry and take on pitifully; for, alas! he is altogether undone, and hath nothing left him wherewithal to succour himself and his family. But a rich man, that hath store of money at home, and sure locked up in his chest, will never complain and be much disquieted, when he hath twenty or forty shillings taken from him. For worldlings to rage and take on, when they must lose their estates, it is no marvel; those whose portion is in this life, and know no better. Alas! for, when these things are gone, they have nothing left, and are quite undone! But those that are heirs according to the hope of eternal life, they know they have a better and a more enduring substance; they consider what they are born to, what they shall enjoy when they come home to God; therefore their hearts are calmed and quieted. So if it be the oppression of wicked men, and hard sufferings and persecutions for the Gospel: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal" (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18). He that hopeth for nothing from God, will soon fall off from him, and yield to fainting discouragements, their hearts are turned off and perverted; but, when we hope, we do with patience submit to the cross. What troubles will not they undergo, that expect undoubtedly their speedy ending in everlasting and endless bliss and happiness? If God hideth his face, that raiseth a storm: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, &c.: hope in God" (Psalm

xliii. 5); casting anchor upon the rock, as the crying child falls asleep with the teat in his mouth. Or when God delayeth the performance of what is promised: "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick" (Prov. xiii. 12). Expectation is a tedious thing, as smoke to the eyes and vinegar to the teeth, an ordinary messenger sent on a trifling errand. Now, "If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. viii. 25); "And patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes. i. 3). Is a title nothing before possession? It is not a matter of debt. Or is it the fear of approaching death, which is the king of terrors? "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous hath hope in his death" (Prov. xiv. 32). The wicked, being arrested by death, is hurried away into Hell; but the righteous dismisseth his soul into his Redeemer's hands. Never more cheerful, than when our confidence in God's mercy is most put to trial.

2ndly, Here is the profession of his obedience, "I have done thy commandments."

Here is,

1. The object, "thy commandments."

2. The act of duty, "done."

1. The object, "thy commandments," *quia tua*; therefore kept them, because they are thine; things thou hast given in charge: men were ready to persuade, or threatened him out of his duty.

2. The act of duty, "done thy commandments." The act of duty, to do, noteth the substance of the act, or omission; the doing things commanded, by eschewing things forbidden.

3. The manner of doing: out of knowledge of God's command, and conscience of obeying it, to his glory and our salvation. Now, saith David, I have done it; implying, I have not only care and conscience, but strength and ability, in some measure to do thy will.

But is not this plea proud word for a creature to say, I have done thy commandments? Who can thus say, and aver it to the face of God?

ANSWER.—There is a twofold keeping or doing of the commandments; legal and evangelical.

1. Legal. When we do them so exactly, as is answerable to the rigour of the law, and as the rule of strict justice doth require; which exactness is, when our obedience is universal in every point; when everything commanded by God is done by us, without failing in one point: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. iii. 10).

(1.) In all things; and that,—

(2.) Continually, in respect of time; from the first minute of our birth till our dissolution: one failing in thought at any time casteth off our plea.

(3.) Full and complete in respect of the degrees and measure of obedience, with the utmost intention and affection of the heart, which the Scripture expresseth by all the heart and all the soul. In this sense, never man was able to keep the law, save only the first Adam in innocency, and the second Adam Jesus Christ; and therefore, according to this rigour, there is no hope for us; one sin once committed, would undo us for ever, as it did the apostate angels.

2. Evangelical, according to the *ἐπιείκεια* and moderation of the Gospel; that is, when we do the commandments according to those terms of grace

which God offereth to us in Christ; that doth, as to obedience, mitigate the rigour of the law in two things:—

(1.) It granteth a pardon of course, to some kinds of sins.

(2.) Accepteth of repentance, after any the most heinous sin committed.

(1.) It granteth a pardon of course to some kinds of sins, as sins of infirmity; either of ignorance, which if we had known we should not have committed; or sins of sudden surreption, which escape without our observing them; or sins of violent temptation, which, by sudden assault, sway against the right rule, before we have time to weigh both it and ourselves, or in cool blood to think what we are a-doing. Such as do not arise out of any evil purpose of the mind, but out of human frailty, and from which we shall never be free as long as we live in this body of corruption (Rom. vii. 34). Paul groaneth under these relics; when what we have done is not out of deliberate consent, giving way to the growth and reign of sin: “For sin shall not have dominion over you” (Rom. vi. 14); *Non dirit, non sit, sed non regnet; inest peccatum cum perpetras, regnat cum consenseris*, saith Austin. When we give obedience to it, freely, willingly yield up ourselves to be servants of it, then sin reigns: therefore he doth not say, let not sin be in you, or tempt you, or please you; but let it not reign in you. It is a misery to be tempted, a snare to be delighted, and a forfeiture or renouncing the grace of the covenant, to give up ourselves to the full sway of it.

2. The Gospel doth herein moderate the rigour of the law, because it leaveth a sinner a way and means of recovery; namely, by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ; and upon repentance giveth him a pardon (Matt. ix. 13). Remission or forgiveness is a privilege of the new covenant; the law knoweth no such matter: “But, if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die: all his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him” (Ezek. xviii. 21, 22). Well then, this is to be understood in the Gospel sense; it is the plea of a man justified freely by God’s grace, and one that is sincere and upright for the main: one that had received grace to be faithful, though not without his infirmities, and did not make a practice to live in any known sin against conscience.

Secondly, We now come to show the connexion between these two.

1. None can and do rightly hope for salvation, but they that keep the commandments.

2. None do and can keep the commandments, but they that hope for salvation.

1st, None can and do rightly hope for salvation, but they that keep the commandments. That will appear to you,—

1. Partly, because God hath, by a wise ordination, conjoined means and end, and offered the promises with a qualification: “To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life” (Rom. ii. 7). God hath not simply promised blessedness; but the promise requireth a qualification, and a performance of duty, in the person to whom the promise is made; and therefore, before we can have a certainty of hope, we must not only look upon the assurance on God’s part, but make out our qualification. So, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sit-

teth in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm i. 1, 2). So, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart" (Psalm cxix. 1, 2); and many such places, which intimate that blessedness belongeth to such as are of a holy heart, and entirely give up themselves to a holy course; that doing the commandments uprightly, and in a Gospel sense, is a necessary condition to qualify those persons which shall be saved. And therefore they that live in any sin against conscience, may take notice how fearful their estate is for the present, and how needful it is to begin a good course, before they can have any hope toward God.

2. And partly, because true hope is operative, and hath an influence this way. There are two parts in sanctification, mortification and vivification; and true hope hath an influence on both. Mortification: "And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John iii. 3); that, when we see God, we shall be like him. He that hopeth for such a pure and sinless estate, either to see God, will he appear before him in his filthy rags? Joseph washed himself when he was to come before Pharaoh: so when to appear before God, what! with this wanton, vain, unclean heart? We are to be like him; is this to be like Christ, where there is such a disproportion between head and members? And if this hope be fixed in our hearts, it will set us a-purifying more and more. So for vivification, it urgeth and encourageth to obedience: "For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus. ii. 11, 12). Look backward or forward, it urgeth the heart to obedience. Why backward to the duties of holiness? shall we be lazy in his work, when we expect such a great reward?

3. Because there is no such thing to damp hope, and weaken our confidence, as sin. We cannot trust him whom we have offended freely, and without restraint; and therefore, while we please the flesh, we break our confidence. Sin will breed shame and fear; and it is impossible to hope in God, unless we serve him in love, and seek to please him. If we feel it not presently, we shall feel it: sin, that now weakeneth the faith which we have in the commandments, will in time weaken the faith that we have in the promises. Every part of God's revealed will cometh to be tried one time or another. Our confidence in God's mercy is not earnestly and directly assaulted till the hour of death, or the time of extraordinary trial. When the evil day cometh, then the consciousness of our own sin, whereunto we have been indulgent, will be of like force to withdraw our assent from God's mercies, as the delight and pleasure we took was to cause us to transgress his commandments: "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. xv. 56).

4. Because our hope is increased by our diligence in the holy life. This fostereth and augments it: "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end" (Heb. vi. 11). It must needs be so: for, since there is a qualification, the more clear our qualification, the more full is our assurance of hope; and so far as a man neglects his duty, and abateth in his qualification, so far doth his assurance abate. To look on one side of the covenant, is a groundless presumption.

2ndly, None do or can keep the commandments, but they that hope for

salvation. This is plain from the order of the words in the text; first, I hoped for thy salvation, therefore have done the commandments; implying, that thereby he kept the commandments. Without this, none can have a heart or a hand to do anything for God. *Peccator* (saith Bernard) *nihil expectat indique peccator est quod bonis presentibus. Non modo delectus, sed etiam contentus; nihil in futurum expectat.* He that looketh for nothing from God, can never be diligent in his service, nor faithful and true to him. Hope, it is our strength: "And I said, my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord" (Lam. iii. 18): we first begin, continue, and go on with God, upon the hope he offereth to us.

USE I.—It reproveth those that hope well, but take no care to do anything for God. Every one will say they must hope in God, but none looketh after this lively and operative hope: their hope is barren and unfruitful. Who are they that can make application of the promises? (2 Tim. iv. 8.)

USE II.—Is to persuade us to the coupling of these two. When this conjunction is founded, then are we in a right frame. If we would keep the commandments, we must hope for the salvation of God; if we would hope for the salvation of God, we must keep the commandments. This is most acceptable to the Lord: "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy" (Psalm cxlvii. 11). Such as believe, and fear to offend him, they have acceptable communion with him. It is for your comfort (Acts ix. 31), it is for the honour of religion on the one side, to avoid the carnal confidence of Papists; on the other, the cold profession of Protestants; if you hope for temporal deliverance. They that make no conscience of obeying God, cannot hope for deliverance from him; for his salvation must be expected in the way of his precepts: "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land" (Psalm xxxvii. 3). So, "Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it" (verse 34). Then we may commend ourselves and all our affairs to God's care and trust: it becometh them that look for salvation, and to be helped out of their troubles, to be more earnest than others in keeping his law. If you would enjoy the comfortable assurance that you shall be saved at length, live so as you may never mar your confidence: "Be sober, and hope to the end" (1 Peter i. 13). Live answerably to your hope: (1 Thes. ii. 12). On the other side, hope; study promises: "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (Rom. xv. 13); he is not only the object, but the author of it

SERMON CLXXXII.

VERSE 167.—*My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.*

The man of God goeth on in his plea. In the former verse, he had spoken of the influence of his hope upon obedience; now of the influence of his love, and so more expressly and directly maketh out this qualification or title to the promise, mentioned verse 165.

Before we go on, let me answer a question or two.

First, How can a gracious heart speak so much of itself, and insist so much upon the plea of obedience? Is not this contrary to our Saviour's

doctrine, who in the parable of the Pharisee and publican that went up to pray (Luke xviii.), teaches us to make use of the plea of mercy, not of works?

1. I answer, as to that part of the scruple which concerneth *περιανγολογία*, that cannot be imagined to be faulty in David, who was a prophet; and therefore, to instruct the world, propoundeth his own instance, and setteth forth himself as a pattern of obtaining comfort in the way of godliness.

2. As to the plea of works, they may be produced by way of evidence, not by way of merit; as they prove our interest in the promises, not as the ground of self-confidence. The Pharisee came not to beg an alms, but to receive a debt, and therefore went away without any mark and testimony of the Divine favour and approbation. But holy men plead this to God, as expecting mercy and favour at his hands; not in regard of any merit in themselves, or of reward deservedly for the same done to them; for they acknowledge all that they do or can do to be but duty, and due debt: but, in regard of the gracious promise freely made unto them, in a humble and modest manner they dare appeal to God himself for the sincerity and integrity of their hearts, for their serious care and sedulous endeavours to please him, and approve themselves to him.

Secondly, But why is this plea reiterated, for three verses together?

Answer.—Too much care cannot be used in making out an interest in so sweet a promise; and it teacheth us this lesson, that we had need examine again and again, before we can put in our claim. Jesus Christ puts Peter to the question thrice, “Lovest thou me?” (John xxi. 15—17.) So here, it was David’s plea thrice repeated, for the more assurance; I have done thy commandments, my soul hath kept thy testimonies, and again, I have kept thy commandments and thy precepts. After a believer hath found marks of saving grace in himself, it is wisdom for him to examine them over and over again, that he may be sure they are in him in deed and in truth. The heart is deceitful; our self-love is great, our infirmities many, and our graces so weak that we should not easily trust the search. Truly such a holy jealousy doth well become the best of God’s children, and doth only weaken the security of the flesh, not their rejoicing in the Lord.

In the words, you have the testimony of David’s conscience, concerning the sincerity of his heart, evidenced by two notes.

1. The sincerity of his obedience, “My soul hath kept thy testimonies.”

2. His exceeding love to the word, “I love them exceedingly;” or, if you will, by the manner of his obedience and the principle of it.

First. The spirituality of his obedience, “My soul hath kept thy testimonies.” Mark, the notion by which the act of duty is expressed, is varied: in the former verse, it is, I have done thy commandments; here it is, I have kept thy testimonies; “done” more expressly noteth his sedulity and diligence; “kept,” his constancy and diligence, perseverance, notwithstanding temptations to the contrary. And how kept them? Saith he, “My soul hath kept them;” not with outward observance only, but with inward and hearty respect: “my soul;” that is, myself; a part for the whole, and the better part; I with my soul, and so it showeth his sincerity. It is a usual expression among the Hebrews, when they would express their vehement affection to anything, to say they do it with their souls: as, “Bless the Lord, O my soul” (Psalm ciii. 1); and, “My soul doth magnify the Lord” (Luke i. 45); as, on the contrary, vehemency of hatred: “Your new moons and your ap-

pointed feasts, my soul hateth" (Isa. i. 14): that is, I hate them with my heart.

The note is,—

DOCTRINE.—God must be served with our souls as well as our bodies. David saith, "My soul hath kept thy testimonies."

1. Because he hath a right to both, as he made both, and therefore hath required that both should serve him. He that organized the body, and framed it out of the dust of the ground, did also breathe into us the breath of life, and framed the spirit of man within him; therefore, since God may challenge all, it is fit he should have the best. "My son, give me thine heart" (Prov. xxiii. 26). Look upon it; whose image and superscription doth it bear? Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's; he hath redeemed both: "Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God both in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. vi. 20). Shall we rob God of his purchase so dearly bought? We would not rob a man of his goods; and will you rob God? He challengeth a peculiar right in souls, "All souls are mine;" and therefore they should be used and exercised for his glory. If we use them for ourselves only, and not according to his direction, we do as Reuben did, that went up into his father's bed. To withhold the heart from God, is a robbery: nay, sacrilege, which is the worst kind of robbery; for God's right in redemption is confirmed and owned by our personal dedication in baptism. Once more, God hath right to the service of both body and soul, because he offereth to glorify both, and reward both, in the heavenly inheritance. The body and the soul are sisters and co-heirs, as Tertullian speaketh. If we expect wages for both, we must do work with both; if God should make such a division at death, as men do all their life to him, can they be happy, if any part of them be excluded from Heaven? If the body and lifeless trunk were taken into Heaven, and the soul left in torments, what were you the better? But that cannot be, God will have all, or no part; therefore, "your whole spirit, and soul, and body, [must] be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. v. 23): otherwise, your souls cannot be joined to God in Heaven, if they be divided from him on earth.

2. Because this is service suitable to his nature, when we serve him and obey him with our souls. God is an all-seeing spirit, and therefore will be worshipped in spirit and truth (John iv. 23, 24). It is agreeable to his spiritual nature; therefore shows and fashions have little respect with him, but reality and substance; for he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins: it is not the bowing the body, so much as the humble, affectionate reverence and submission of the soul. God hath appointed service for the body; and, so far as God hath appointed it, we must submit to it; but chiefly for the soul: our worship must be chiefly inward, flowing from grace engaging the heart in God's service. Bodily exercise is of little profit: that worship which is most agreeable to God's nature, is most pleasing to him: he hath not eyes of flesh, and seeth not as man seeth (Job x. 4). Therefore external duties, without the inward exercise of the spirit, is scarce worthy the name of worship to God: he is not taken with the pomp of ceremonies, and external observances: "For man looketh on the outward appearance; but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. xvi. 7). Men are taken with external pomp and formalities, they suit

with their fleshly natures; but the more spiritual, the more suitable to God. That which you do, be it in worship, it is not done unto God, but unto men, when the heart is not in it: "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. iii. 23). Without the heart, all that we do is but a mocking of God, giving him the shell without the kernel.

3. Because the soul is the principal thing. That swayeth the body, and stirreth it up to all that it doth: it being of itself a senseless block, it followeth the disposition and inclination of the heart. I shall make it good in two considerations. First, it is *fons actionum ad extra*. And Secondly, it is *terminus actionum ad intra*. It is the fountain of all actions that go outward, from man towards God; and the subduing the heart to God's will, is the end of all operations inward, from God towards man.

(1.) *Fons actionum ad extra*, the fountain of all actions that go outward from man towards God. All natural actions proceed from the soul or heart. It is not the eye that seeth, nor the ear that heareth, nor the hand that toucheth, nor the feet that walk; it is the soul seeth by the eye, and heareth by the ears, and toucheth by the hand, and walketh by the feet. So in all moral actions, the heart is all: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. iv. 23). All our actions proceed thence; all the evil that we do, cometh from the heart: "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. xv. 19). All that we speak, and think, and do, followeth the frame of the heart. This is the burning furnace from whence the sparks fly: the occasion of sin may be without; but the cause of it is ever from the heart. It is the heart that filleth the eyes with wantonness, pride, and fury; and the tongue with blasphemy, slanders, and detraction; the hands with blood. So for good actions and thoughts, they come out of the good treasury of the heart: "A good man out of the good treasury of the heart bringeth forth good things" (Matt. xii. 35). The tap runneth according to the liquor wherewith the vessel is filled; that a man hath laid up in his heart, that he layeth out in his thoughts, and speeches, and actions: it is the heart that enliveneth all our duties, and we act ever according to the constitution of our souls.

(2.) It is *terminus actionum ad intra*, all actions inward. The aim of it is to come to the heart. The senses report things to the phantasy; the phantasy represents them to the mind, that counsels the heart. So, in God's operations upon us, his business is to come at the soul. Wherefore doth he speak, and reason, and plead, but that we may hear? And wherefore do we hear, but that the truth may be lodged in the heart or soul? "Let thine heart retain my words" (Prov. iv. 4). Ay; then God's word hath its effect upon us. We are never subdued to God, till the heart be subdued. The word, for a while, may stay in the memory, and it is good when the memory is planted with the seeds of knowledge, as children receive the principles of religion in catechisms; but the end is not there: at length, they exercise their understandings about them, when they begin to conceive of what they learned by rote; and afterwards they begin to have a judgment and a conscience: these truths begin to stir and awaken them. But it must not rest there neither; it soaketh further, and wisdom entereth upon the heart (Prov. ii. 10). Ay; that was God's aim, to bring the work thither; and then the cure is wrought with man: "Ye have

obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. vi. 17). So this is the end of all the operations of grace, that the soul and heart may keep God's testimonies. So where is it that Christ would dwell, when he taketh up his abode and residence in us? The Apostle will tell you: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. iii. 17). Till he get possession of the heart, all is as nothing. He will not dwell in the body only; that is the temple of the Holy Ghost at large. There is a holy of holies, a more inward place, where he will dwell. He will not dwell in the tongue or in the brain, memories or understandings, unless by common gifts; but the heart, the will, and the affections of man, are the chief place of his residence: there he dwelleth as in his strong citadel, and from thence commandeth other faculties and members: so that the heart is the beginning and ending of the whole work of religion; from thence come all holy actions, and thither tend all holy, gracious operations.

4. It is thy hearty soul-service only that will bear weight in the balance of the Gospel. There may be many defects in the action; yet, if the heart be right, God will accept the will for the deed, and you will find comfort in that another day, when you most need it: "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart" (Isa. xxxviii. 3). Hezekiah had his infirmities and failings; but his heart was upright: "In all things, willing to live honestly" (Heb. xiii. 18): that is a Gospel good conscience, and will yield comfort to you. God accepts the will without the deed, but never the deed without the will: infirmities may overtake the action; but, when the heart is unfeignedly set to serve God, we shall be accepted. We allow grains to true, but not to counterfeit, gold: the church pleadeth, "The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee" (Isa. xxvi. 8). When we follow in rugged ways, though we oftentimes stumble, yet, if our soul be with him, we may have comfort.

USE I.—This is for the conviction of divers persons, that they do not more serve God in their souls, do not keep his testimonies.

1st, There are some that serve God with neither body nor soul, as all loose persons, who do not so much as make a show of his service. They are all for their brutish pleasures; their souls to hunt them out, and their bodies to pursue and follow them. Their soul is a cage of unclean birds, and a sty of all filthiness; and their bodies only a strainer for meats and drinks to pass through, or a channel for lust to run in; so that they have nothing at all to spare for God. The soul is an ill guide, suggesting all manner of evil; and the body, a ready instrument to accomplish it. These are those that yield up their members to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity (Rom. vi. 19). Oh! the time will come, when God will tear them in pieces, and rend the guilty soul from the embraces of the unwilling body. A sad time it will be for these. The soul will curse the body, as an ill instrument; the body the soul, as a corrupt guide; and curse the day of their first union, when they cannot expect but to meet again in flames.

2dly, Some that give their bodies to God, but withhold their souls from him. How may this be done?

ANSWER.—1. Generally, when men content themselves with a naked profession of Christianity, and some external conformity thereunto. It is a stupid religion that consists in outward actions: Judas was externally a

disciple; but Satan entered into his heart (Luke xxii. 3). Ananias joined himself to the people of God; but Satan filled his heart (Acts v. 3). Simon Magus was baptized; but his heart was not right with God (Acts viii. 22). Many men may not only make profession, but perform many good actions; be, as to external conformity, blameless; yet, fill their hearts are subdued to God, they should not be satisfied with their condition. Though you pray with the Pharisee (Luke xviii.), pay thy vows with the harlot (Prov. vii.), offer sacrifice with Cain, fast with Jezebel, sell thine inheritance to give to the poor with Ananias and Sapphira; it is all in vain, without the heart. Many hypocrites are all ear, to hear; all tongue, to talk; all face, to appear; but not a heart, to obey. Something must be done for religion for fashion's sake and shame of the world: yea, though thou dost not dissemble, do many things; yet, if your hearts be not renewed and changed, all is nothing: you do not keep the testimonies of the Lord with your souls.

2. And more particularly, when men make conscience of ceremonies and outsides, rather than sincere obedience.

As the Pharisees: "Ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Matt. xxiii. 25, 26); pretend great purity in eating their meat, but care not with how great iniquity they purchase it. Papists think they have done enough, if they mutter over a few idle words, without spirit and life: the most part of their service, it is but that of the body, without the soul: they worship in a strange language, not knowing what they do or say; and, nearer home, draw nigh with their lips, when their hearts are far from him (Matt. v. 8). These leave their hearts at home; the Devil findeth them other work, that suffer their hearts to straggle, and to be, like the fool's eyes, in the corners of the earth, when with their bodies they are engaged in serious and solemn duties of God's worship.

USE II.—Is to press you to serve God with your hearts and souls, as well as your bodies.

1. This is the character of true worshippers: "God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit" (Rom. i. 9); and, "God whom I serve, &c., with pure conscience" (2 Tim. i. 3). This was not peculiar to Paul alone; it is the description of the spiritual circumcision: "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. iii. 3). These are such as are true worshippers.

2. God will accept of no other; for he looketh for the heart, and knoweth whether we give it him, yea or no. Men care not for fawning and the obsequiousness of empty courtships; but look for reality, if they could discern it: "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" (2 Kings x. 15): it was Jehu's question to Jehonadab, the son of Rechab; Dost thou really affect me as I do thee? And men do not look to the matter of the gift, but the mind of the giver; and will God, think you, who can infallibly judge, and will one day bring the hidden thoughts of the heart to light (1 Cor. iv. 5), will he be put off with shows and empty formalities? Well then, see that your souls be in it; otherwise, he will not accept of rivers of oil and thousands of rams; all your pomp and cost upon outside services is lost. But it is not every soul that will keep God's testimonies. When the people said, All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do it, "Oh! that there were such a heart in them!" (Deut. v. 29.)

It must be such a heart ; for man is naturally averse from God : sin sets up its throne in the heart, and thence diffuseth its venom into his actions (Gen. vi. 5). It must be,—

1. A broken heart.
2. A renewed heart.
3. A heart purified by faith.
4. And acted by love.

1. A broken heart it must be ; for, before that, all that we do is forced and superficial. We are never serious, till acquainted with brokenness of heart ; but serve God in a slight, careless fashion. That bruising is to cast into a new mould ; it is a preparative to the new heart. Wheat is not bread till it be grinded ; and a cracked vessel cannot be renewed, till it be melted in the furnace ; nor we formed anew, till we be first melted, humbled, and broken for sin.

2. The heart must be renewed by grace ; for it is a renewed soul only that keepeth the commandments : “ A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : and I will, &c., cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezek. xxxvi. 26). The hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil, till God change them, and renew a right spirit within them : “ The heart of the wicked is little worth” (Prov. x. 20). A vain, sottish, sensual, careless heart, will never do God any service : there must be life before there can be action ; a supernatural principle, before there can be supernatural operation ; for all things act according to their form. All that we do else, is but like adulterating coin, gilding over copper or brass.

3. A heart purified by faith (Acts xv. 9). There are fleshly lusts in us which must be mortified more and more, and deadened to the pleasures, and profits, and honours of this world, by remembering our great obligations, and expectations from Christ’s death, and eternal life ; for, while any fleshly or worldly lust prevaileth with us, and is the chief principle in our hearts, we cannot heartily serve God.

4. A heart acted by love : “ For the love of Christ constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that, if one died for all, then were all dead : and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. v. 14, 15). This is the active principle which sets us awork with cheerfulness : Christ often intimateth that keeping the commandments is the fruit of love (John xiv. 15), all the expression of our love to him, is turned into that channel.

Secondly, I come now to the second evidence and testimony of his sincerity, his love to the word : “ I love them exceedingly.” Mark,—

1. His affection. I love thy testimonies.
2. The degree, in the word “ exceedingly.”

Ist, From his affection, note,—

DOCTRINE.—That it is not enough to keep the commandments ; but we must love them, and that obedience they require from us.

This love to the law, is often spoken of in this psalm ; therefore there needeth the less to be said now. Paul speaketh of this love, as well as David : “ I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. vii. 22).

The reasons of the point :—

1. We can never thoroughly and constantly keep the law, without love to it. It is no easy thing to keep the law of God : there needeth much

labour and striving. Now, where there is a sincere love of the law of God planted in the heart, there will be this striving and endeavouring to perform it. None so sensible of the weight of sin, none so active for God's glory; there is nothing so difficult, but love maketh easy; *nihil amarum*. In a word, labour and toil prove a pleasure, and pain a matter of delight, where we love: the careful mother, who bringeth forth the child with pain, and nurseth it up with toil and trouble, is well enough pleased with her work, and cheerful in it, because of the love she hath to the fruit of her womb, and her child is dear to her. Jacob's seven years' labour seemed to be a few days, for the love he had to Rachael (Gen. xxix. 30). So God will have us serve him out of love, because nothing is grievous to love (1 John v. 3). It beareth all things, suffereth all things; poverty, nakedness, bonds, injuries, labours; never tireth, or groweth weary (2 Cor. xiii. 7).

2. Except we obey because we love, our obedience is not sincere and acceptable: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal; and though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing:" *ὅτι ἐν εἰμ* (1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2). Many are frightened into a course of religion, and go on from duty to duty out of a fear of being damned. This is not true obedience, that is done servilely and by constraint; these unwilling services which we perform to Christ, out of urging of conscience, and fear of wrath: "They have turned their back unto me, and not their face; but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us" (Jer. ii. 27). They come to God, not out of delight and choice, but out of necessity, and only then. They that did not care for God at other times, will then come with their flocks and their herds" (Hos. v. 6). The spirit of bondage is clamorous for duty, as the spirit of adoption sweetly inclineth to it. Many obey God no further than they are forced; as slaves, whom nothing but fear induceth to perform their masters' command; and so do not love the work, nor do it for the work's sake.

3. The next object to God, fit for our love, is God's law. It is clear that God is *primum amabile*, the first thing that is to be loved; but what is the second? Surely that which hath most of God in it; next after God, his word. There is *vestigium* in the creature, there is *imago* in his testimonies: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord" (2 Cor. iii. 18); the fairest draft and print of God that can be taken; his people have his image, but it is overshadowed with weakness; it is but the *ἀποφαίνισμα*, the off-set of his word: it is the word that maketh saints. There is the liveliest stamp and print of God; his testimonies lead, not only to the knowledge of God, but also to the fruition of him. Whatsoever leadeth us to the fruition of God, is incomparably better than any other thing; therefore, if we love God, we must love his precepts, love them so as to keep them: it is the greatest testification of that love we can show to God.

USE. I.—Is to show us the reason why so many miscarry in the profession of godliness. Many walk in the ways of God for a while, but have no sound love to them. Either by-ends or slavish fears forced them into some profession; but they did not love godliness as godliness, and therefore cannot hold out with God. When a man is biassed and poised by

his heart to a thing, you cannot easily divert and break his inclination; that is a rooted evil. Others were but forced; and forced subjection will not always hold. Men are hoping they shall shake off an displeasing task; and, where they obey from constraint, and the iron yoke of terror, they will not long obey.

USE II.—To press us not only to keep God's testimonies, but to love them.

Let me use some arguments.

1. From its excellency. To love is more than to do; as to love sin is a greater evil than to commit it. *Gravius est peccatum diligere, quam facere.* A man may commit sin out of infirmity; but he that loveth it, sin reigneth in him. Practice may be overruled; a man may do evil that hateth it, being overborne by the violence of a temptation; as Paul saith of himself, "What I hate, that do I." So a man may do good, that hateth it, being influenced by by-ends; but our love is our own, the genuine offspring of the soul.

2. The necessity of it. Unless we love our work, we shall never be the more earnest in the performance of it. Nature, of itself, is unwilling: the heart hangeth off, till it be poised by love. Reasons and motives will not do it: "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law" (Rom. viii. 7). The commandments of God cross our will, profit, and pleasure; therefore we need not only reasons with us, but a strong inclination of heart to hold us to it; else we shall be off and on with God. The building went on, because "the people had a mind to the work" (Neh. iv. 6). Nothing else will do it but this.

3. The utility. We shall have more comfort in the sincerity of our affections, than we can ever have in the perfection of our actions. The people of God, that cannot plead the perfection of what they do, plead the reality of their love: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (John xxi. 17).

4. *Ex debito.* We owe so much love to God, that everything that he requireth should be welcome to us for God's sake. They are his testimonies; therefore your souls should love them, and bind them upon your hearts, and the rather, because we are to do our duty, not as servants, but as friends: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John xv. 14); not, Ye are my servants. Between friends, there is a perfect harmony and agreement in mind and will; to do a thing for love's sake to one's friend, this is an act of friendship. Not by servile constraint, but to keep them as they are his; we are to do what Christ commandeth, because he commandeth it; and that is to do it in love: otherwise, we break the commands, when we keep them. Besides the outward act, there must be a ready inclination, and delight in our work. Carnal men, the good they do, they would not do. That obedience is not worthy the name of obedience, that is extorted from us; men had rather live ungodly, if they durst for fear of punishment. It is but a slight kind of religion, when fear prevaileth more than love: they do somewhat God willeth, but they had rather leave it undone. A man is never firmly gained to God, till he prefer service before liberty, and love holiness as holiness.

But how must we show this love? By two things; by being awful and cheerful; grieved when we offend him, glad when we please him: awful in avoiding what he forbiddeth, and cheerful in performing what he requireth.

(1.) Awful. You dare not break with God in any one point, but are very chary and tender of the commandments, keep them as the apple of his eye (Prov. vii. 2), that is offended with the least dust; or keeping of jewels: "Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck" (Prov. vi. 24), as jewels. Choice of them.

(2.) By being cheerful, ready, and forward to every good work: A willing people (Psalm cx. 3). You need not stand urging and pressing; the inclination of their hearts swayeth them. A man is hardly kept from that he loveth: "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected" (1 John ii. 5).

Secondly, The degree; "I love them exceedingly."

DOCTRINE.—Our love to the law must be an exceeding love.

1st, In the general. It noteth the height and intensiveness of our love; not a cold love, as children love things, but are soon put out of the humour; but a high, strong love, that will not easily be broken or diverted; such as doth deeply affect the heart: "Oh! how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psalm cxix. 97). We that are so coldly affected to spiritual things, do not understand the force of these expressions. A high and strong love will break forth into meditation, operation; make us sedulous and serious in obeying God: "My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved" (Psalm cxix. 48). Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected" (1 John ii. 5). Lift up our eyes to the receiving, our ears to the hearing, our hands to the doing of thy commands; this argueth love.

2ndly, The prevalency; not only high and strong, but to a prevailing degree.

1. Such as prevaileth over things without us. This is such a love as is greater than our love to all other things, wealth, honour, credit, estate; yea, life itself; for, if anything be loved above our duty to God, it will soon prove a snare to us: sold all to buy the field wherein the treasure was hid (Matt. xiii. 44); all for the pearl of price. A believer seeth such a treasure in the word of God, that he maketh no reckoning of any worldly thing in comparison of it, but will part with whatever is pleasant and profitable to him to enjoy it, rather than be deprived of his grace. If any fleshly, sensitive good or interest lieth closer to the heart than the word of God, it will in time prevail so as to make God's will and glory stoop to it, rather than this interest shall be renounced or contradicted. There is no talking of serving God, till you have this prevailing love, and hate all things in comparison of your duty to God: "If any man, &c., hate not his father and mother" (Luke xiv. 26).

2. Such as doth prevail over carnal desires and evil affections within us; if it be not a love that doth eat up and devour our lusts within us, if the bent of your hearts be not more for God than for sin. See Baxter, pp. 273 to 279, in his Directions about Conversion. There will be evil in the best, and some good in the worst: the critical difference lieth in the prevalent bent of the heart. When your dislike of sin is greater than your love, then you may say, "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. vii. 20). There must be a renewed self that prevaileth above corrupt self.

Well then, rest not in some general approbation of the ways of God, or inclining to good, but this prevailing affection that justleth sin out of the soul

SERMON CLXXXIII.

VERSE 168.—*I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies; for all my ways are before thee.*

David still goeth on in his plea. He had spoken of his faith and love, and now of his fear. We must,—

1. Labour for faith to believe the promises. The man of God beginneth there, “I have hoped for thy salvation.”

2. This faith must work by love; that is his next step: My soul loveth thy testimonies exceedingly. And,—

3. Love must breed in us a reverend fear of God’s majesty, and a care to please him in all things. This is the third part of the plea, mentioned in the text: “I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies,” &c. In which words,—

First, His integrity is again asserted.

Secondly, The reason and encouragement of it.

First, His integrity is asserted; “I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies.” Where it is notable, the object of his duty is expressed by two words, precepts and testimonies: *Mandatis adjungit testimonia* (saith Calvin), *ut ostendat se non tantum agere de regula bene vivendi, sed complecti totum salutis fœdus*; he addeth the word testimonies to that of precepts, to comprise the whole covenant of salvation. Precepts signifieth the moral law; and testimonies, doctrines of grace.

Secondly, The moving cause or proper reason of this obedience, “for all my ways are before thee;” whereby he understandeth either the providence of God apprehended by faith as always watching over him and all his affairs for good, or a sense of God’s omniscieny and omnipresence. The interpretations are subordinate one to another; and, in both respects, all our ways may be said to be before the Lord; namely, as he doth govern and dispose of them according to his will: so it is said, “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Prov. iii. 6). Or that he doth know and see all; “His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings” (Job xxxiv. 21). And in this double sense may a parallel place be expounded: “I have set the Lord always before me” (Psalm xvi. 8). In point of reverence and dependence; as inspector, helper, observer, second. But why is it mentioned here? Three reasons interpreters give for it; either by way of appeal, or as the reason of his obedience, or as evidence of his sincerity.

1. By way of appeal, as calling God to witness for the truth of what he had said; Lord, thou art conscious to all my ways, knowest the truth of what I spake. “Lord, thou knowest all things:” thus Peter useth it (John xxi. 17).

2. As a reason why he was so careful to keep all God’s precepts. All my thoughts, words, and deeds, are known to thee; and so I desire to approve myself to thee, in every part and point of my duty.

3. Or it is produced as an evidence of his sincerity, that he did all things as in God’s sight, and set him before his eyes as the judge of his doings, and so would not offend God to please men; for, in this octonary, he speaketh as a man in trouble, and ready to miscarry by carnal fear.

DOCTRINE.—That walking as in the sight of God is a note of sincerity, and a good means to make us keep his precepts.

First, In those few words which God spake to Abraham, all godliness is comprehended: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. xvii. 1); walk before me as in the sense of my eye, and the confidence of my all-sufficiency; behave thyself as in my sight and presence. Let me give you a note or two, concerning this walking as in the sight of God.

1. All men are in God's sight, but few think of it; they forget God's eye that is upon them; as Jacob saith in another case, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not" (Gen. xxviii. 16). God is in them, though they do not see God, and therefore act as if God did not see them. The Apostle telleth us plainly, "Though he be not far from every one of us" (Acts xvii. 27). Though God be not far from us, yet we may be far from him; at a great distance in our minds and affections: God is near us in the effects of his power and providence; but the elongation and distance is on our parts. We do not consider his eye that is upon us; for many dare do that in the sight of God and angels, which they dare not do in the sight of a little child.

2. This walking as in the sight of God, implieth a looking upon God as witness and judge; as one that seeth for the present, and will hereafter call you to an account. And so it works upon those two great articles of present providence and last judgment; the one consideration puts an edge upon the other, and maketh it more operative. God is to be looked on as one sitting upon his throne; and Solomon telleth us, "A king sitting upon the throne of judgment, scattereth away all evil with his eyes" (Prov. xx. 8). Would a subject break the laws in his sovereign's sight? So, when God looketh on, shall we affront him to his face? the great Judge of all the earth? "He seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it?" (Job xi. 11.) As Ahasuerus said, "Will he force the queen also before me?" (Esther vii. 8.) The greatest malefactors will carry it demurely in the presence of their judge: "Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand."

3. We are not only to remember God's eye in the duties of piety which we perform directly to God, but also in the duties of righteousness which we owe to men: "In holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life" (Luke i. 75). Holiness hath relation to God, and righteousness to men: in both, we must act as before him, as in his eye and presence; not only in praying, and hearing; then we are before him, immediately speaking to him; but before him as to men. All our respects there, must be done as in and to the Lord; performing duties we owe to men, as in the sight and presence of the Lord, as it is often said; so as to approve ourselves to God, who seeth the heart, do it unto the Lord heartily: "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord" (Psalm xxv. 15).

4. God doth not only behold our actions, but our principles and aims, and the secret motions of our hearts. He is neither ignorant of man, nor anything in man. Men may judge of actions, but not of principles, no further than they are discovered; but God judges of principles, when the action is fair: "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts" (1 Chron. xxviii. 9); words that imply an accurate search. God looketh to the bottom and spring of actions; not only the matter, but the principle. A man that standeth by a river in a low place, can only see that part of the stream that passeth by; but he that is aloft in the air

in a higher place, may see the whole course, where it riseth and how it runneth. So God at one view seeth the beginning, rise, and ending of actions; whatever we think, speak, or do, he seeth it altogether. He knoweth our thoughts, before we can think them: "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off" (Psalm cxxxix. 2): before we can conclude anything. A gardener knoweth what roots are in the ground, long before they appear, and what fruits they will produce.

Secondly, This is a good means to make us keep his precepts.

1. It maketh for the restraint of evil; the sight of God is a bridle to us: "How, then, can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. xxxix 9.) Shall we break God's laws before his face? We take heed what we say and do before informers, and should we not much more before the judge himself? If we be not thus affected, it is a sign we never had a sight and sense of God's eye: "He that doeth evil, hath not seen God" (3 John 11). God taught his people this by the type of covering their excrements: "For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, &c.; therefore shall thy camp be holy, that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee" (Deut. xxiii. 14). The flesh would soon seduce us, were it not for the awe of God's eye. Inferiors, when they are in the sight and presence of their superiors, are very careful of their behaviour: he were an unhappy son, or a lewd servant, that would misdemean himself in the sight and presence of his father or master. Children at school, all is hushed when the master cometh. She were a lewd and impudent wife, that, in the sight and presence of her husband, would prostitute herself to another man. This is our case. God is father and Lord; and we are always in his sight, if we believe it, and can remember it; would we be so shameless as to sin, he looking upon us? The wise Heathens were sensible that such a thought would be a curb to us; therefore admonished their disciples that they should always set before them some Cato or Cælius, some grave and reverend person, that they might behave themselves as in their presence; for, saith Seneca, *Magna pars peccatorum tollitur, si peccatoris testis adfuit*; a great part of sins would be prevented, if, when we are about to sin, some witness were present with us. They thought this fiction would be a restraint, and the fiction of grave men; but we speak now of the eyes of God; and that, not as a fiction and supposition, but as a certain and undoubted truth; no less certain than that there is a God, which of all truths is most certain. Therefore should not the eye of God restrain, who is with us always, and in all places?

2. For the encouragement to every good work, so it is a spur to us: God looketh on; he that is thy judge and rewarder, he knoweth how faithfully we keep his law. All the labours, miseries, slanders, which thou endurest for his sake, are known to him: "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience" (Rev. ii. 2); he taketh notice of thy faithfulness. Do not think only that God doth spy out our failings: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. xv. 3). He taketh notice of both, both as rewarder and avenger. Now, cowards will adventure much in the presence of their general, and idle servants will work while their master looketh on; and shall not we do the Lord's work, since he taketh notice? He knoweth our work and our discouragements, and will help accordingly: "I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast my name" (Rev. ii. 13). See Basil, *Regulis Brevioribus*, quest. xxxiv.

More particularly.

1. It is a great means to make us serious in all our addresses to God, that we may behave ourselves with that reverence and awfulness that will become the Divine majesty. What is the reason men are so slight and customary in their prayers and other acts of religion? They do not see the invisible God, and think of him to whom they speak. From practical atheism and unbelief, we have little sense of things unseen. In speaking to a man, we behave ourselves with that gravity and reverence that his quality deserveth; but, in speaking to God, our thoughts wander, our hearts are dead and vain, because we see not him with whom we have to do. "Make us gods, which shall go before us" (Exod. xxxii. 1). Ay; that we would have; a visible God, whom we may see and hear; but, the true God being a spirit and an invisible power, all the service we do him is a task; performed more out of custom than affection; in a slight, perfunctory manner. Now, when we believe God's eye and are sensible of his presence, that maketh us more serious. He telleth man his thought; thoughts speak louder in his ears, than our words. Oh! with what reverence should we creep into his presence, before whom all things are naked and open! It was a direction Seneca gave to his friend Lucilius, *Epist. 10th, Sic vive cum hominibus, tanquam Deus videat; sic loquere cum Deo, tanquam homines videant*: so live with men, as if God saw; so speak with God, as if men saw. Shall such a speech come out of the mouth of a Heathen, and shall not Christians remember God, and set themselves as in his sight when they come before him? We should be ashamed, if our hearts were turned in and out in any duty, and men did know all our light, foolish, sinful thoughts that take up our minds; and doth not God see, and hate these things more than men? So that it is a powerful consideration to make us come with humility and reverence into God's presence.

2. It maketh us sincere in our whole course; for this is sincerity, to do all things in order to God. Sincerity lieth in the universality of obedience and purity of intention.

(1.) For universality of obedience, we have an instance here in the text. David, by keeping himself as in God's all-seeing presence, performed a uniform, acceptable obedience to him. So will all do that habituate this thought, and make it familiar to them; this is that that maketh them obey in presence and absence, to perform secret duties (Matt. vi. 6). Therefore a Christian is as religious, if not more, alone and in secret, as before others. The hypocrite walketh before men, who see the outward man only, seeketh chiefly to approve himself to men, and therefore is more religious before others than alone; but it is otherwise with a heart deeply possessed with a sense of God's omniscieny and omnipresence. So to avoid secret sins, which are only liable to God's cognizance; he that knoweth all the workings of his heart lie open before God, maketh it his business to abstain from fleshly lusts, as from sinful practices, which would betray him to shame before the world, and dareth not allow himself to sin anywhere, but there where God cannot see, that is nowhere. Yea, when God's children forget themselves to be in their Father's presence, and corruption gets the start of grace, they afterwards come to be ashamed and grieved for those sins for which the world cannot tax them: "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Psalm xix. 12). All our actions are seen by the Lord: some of them may be known to men, but others may escape their eye: therefore, if we look to men only, we are partial; but, if

to God, universal in our obedience. If this be not all our aim, that men may not impeach us of any crime; but if this be our aim, to approve ourselves to God, it is a sign we are sincere.

(2.) As to purity of intention, the proper reason of that is, because God seeth our aims, as well as our actions, and knoweth all the deceits and tricks of a false heart. Our business is not with men, but with God, the searcher of hearts, who can distinguish between the motions of the flesh and those inspired by his Spirit. Certainly, if we make him paymaster, we must intend his work: "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly, &c.; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly, &c.; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. ii. 28, 29). He that maketh God his witness, approver, and judge, must chiefly mind what God looketh after: "All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight; but the Lord weigheth the spirit" (Prov. xvi. 2). That which he chiefly regardeth, are men's principles and ends.

(3.) It maketh us faithful in our relations, by considering he appoints them to us, and seeth how we improve them for his glory. Magistrates, there is a special presence of God, not only to direct and protect, but also to note and observe them: "The Lord, who is with you in the judgment" (2 Chron. xix. 6); "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods" (Psalm lxxxii. 1). When they are for the execution of his office, God is there; and therefore they, above all, must be men fearing God, have a reverend regard to his eye and presence. Diodorus Siculus telleth us of some Heathens, that had several empty chairs advanced aloft near their tribunals, as for their gods; to show they were present, and had an inspection over all acts of judicature. So for ministers; they must not only give an account at last, but are observed for the present. God hath a watchful eye over them, as they have and should have over the flock: he observeth how we discharge our trust, and what are our aims; whether to promote our own interest or his: "But as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ" (2 Cor. ii. 17). Our doctrines must not only be sound, but our aims and principles: it is not enough to speak of God, in his name, his truth; but sincerely approve our hearts to him, in the faithful discharge of our duty. So, "We speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts" (1 Thes. ii. 4); in all singleness and sincerity of heart discharging our trust. So masters of families are to walk in their houses with a perfect heart (Psalm ci. 2). Though they are shut up in their families from the observation of others, yet at home as well as abroad, they must be careful to walk with God in their domestical converse, when men are wont most to discover themselves; and should behave themselves most prudently, and holily, and faithfully there. The Apostle mindeth masters of their Master in Heaven (Eph. vi. 9); one who noteth and observeth your dealings, and will call you to an account for all your carriage: your sins and graces are not hid from him. So for servants: "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. iii. 22, 23). Still the consideration of God's eye is suggested to them, they must be careful of their master's concernments, whether their master be present or absent, or whether the things they do will come to his knowledge, yea or no: for, though the eye of men will not find them out, yet the eye of God must be regarded: therefore with respect to God, they must

be careful and faithful. So again, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men" (Eph. vi. 5). They should be cheerful, laborious, painful: showing all faithfulness in things committed to their trust, even to a pin, or the smallest matter (not saucy, stubborn, and malapert), because the Lord looketh upon them, and, if they so do, will own them and bless them. Thus, you see, we should have better magistrates, better ministers, better masters, better servants, better fathers, better children, if this principle were once deeply imprinted upon their hearts, that all their ways are before the Lord, and he still observeth what they do in all their actions.

USE.—Is to press us to walk as in the sight of God, and to foresee him before you, in all your ways. To press you hereunto, consider these things:—

1. You are in the sight of God, whether you think so or no. We can no more be removed from the presence of God than from our own beings; for he is in everything that subsists, and it subsists by him. The Apostle telleth us, "There is one God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. iv. 6). The sun is some representation of God's eye, nothing is hid from its sight; if the sun were an eye, it would see all things that it shineth upon. So doth God; only with this difference, the sun cannot pierce through dark and thick bodies, but God is over all, and through all, and in all; upholding and overruling all by his powerful providence. Therefore you cannot lie hid from God; only this sight is not comfortable and profitable to you, unless you see him as he seeth you. They say of the panther, when it hideth the head, it thinketh it is not seen, because it seeth not, and so is taken by the hunters. This is an emblem of wretched sinners; they see not God, and therefore think they are not seen by him, and so go on doing evil till their iniquities find them out.

2. What a noble thing it is always to live in the sight of God; for by this exercise, in some measure, and as this mortal state will permit, you enjoy the happiness of the blessed angels; for this is the privilege of the blessed angels: "That in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. xviii. 10). So when you live in the thought of God in some measure, you are doing their work, and your minds become as it were another Heaven; for Heaven is where God is, and there God is in that heart that thinketh of him; not only there by the powerful effects of his providence, and the impressions of his grace, but there by the workings of our hearts.

3. The profit is exceeding great; by conversing with God often, we become like him. As musing of vanity maketh us vain, heavenly and holy thoughts produce a heavenly mind; and frequent remembrance is one means to introduce the Divine nature. Moses, in that extraordinary converse with God, his face shone; he carried away some strictures and rays of the Divine Majesty in his countenance. We cannot look for that effect upon our bodies; but serious and ponderous thoughts leave some change upon the soul: there is the lustre of grace, and the beauty of the Divine nature, which is a greater thing, left upon us. The Apostle saith, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit"

of the Lord" (2 Cor. iii. 18); by seeing him in the word, considering him as always present with us: the heart is coloured and dyed by the object it often thinketh upon. Oh! therefore, be persuaded to set the Lord before you.

For means:—

1. To see God aright, we need faith; for God is invisible, and invisible things are only seen by faith (Heb. xi. 1); and the instance is in Moses: by faith he saw him that was invisible (verse 27). Many have an opinion that God knoweth all things; but they have not a sound belief of it: it is what is owned by the tongue, rather than the heart. Cold and dead opinions are easily taken up, but a lively faith is God's gift; this is a sight not easily gotten.

2. We must often revive this thought; for the oftener we think of it, the more deeply it is impressed upon the soul: "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm ix. 17). It is not said, that deny him, but forget him. On the other side, there is a book of remembrance for those that thought upon his name (Mal. iii. 16). God takes it kindly when our minds are set awork upon him and upon his attributes. We have, every moment, life, and breath, and all things, from him: he thinketh of us; and therefore, out of a necessary gratitude, we should oftener think of God. Nazianzen saith twice (Naz. Orat. de Curâ Pauperum, Orat. 10; and Orat. de Theol., Orat. 11), we should as often think of God as breathe; for we cannot breathe without him, and without his continual providential influence we fall into nothing, as sun-beams vanish when the sun is gone. Therefore the Apostle telleth the Ephesians, they were, in their natural estate, ἀθεοί (Eph. ii. 12). There are two sorts of atheists, they that deny God, and they that wholly forget God: the latter are more common, and the latter sort are described Psalm x. 4, "God is not in all his thoughts." Oh! what misery is this, that we have thoughts more than we can tell what to do withal; and yet we will not afford God the least share in them. He were a cruel man that should cast his provisions and superfluities into the street, and deny them to the poor; that should let his drink run into the kennel, rather than they should taste a drop of it. Such are we to God; we know not what to employ our thoughts upon, and yet we will not think of his name. We go musing of vanity all the day long, and grinding chaff rather than take in good corn into the mill.

3. There are certain seasons when we are bound not only habitually, but actually, to think of God.

(1.) In a time of temptation, when the flesh, being enticed by profit or pleasure, or seared by fears, tempts us to do anything contrary to the will of God. Thus did Joseph; when he might have sinned securely and with advantage (Gen. xxxix. 9), the thoughts of God's eye and presence dashed the temptation. We forget him that seeth in secret, and therefore take the liberty to indulge our lusts. Can I consider that God looketh on, and do thus unworthily? It is a daring him to his face, to go on with these thoughts; therefore God seeth what I will now do, it is a seasonable relief to the soul.

(2.) We should actually revive this thought in solemn duties, when we come to act the part of angels, and to look God in the face. Surely God is greatly to be had in fear of all that are round about him. It would prevent a great deal of carelessness in worship, to remember who is the

party with whom we have to do; who is speaking to us in the word, and to whom we speak in prayer: "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. iv. 13). He knoweth how we hear, what thoughts and affections are stirring in our hearts: "We are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (Acts x. 33). We come not hither to see and to be seen of men, but to see God: we are here before God, as if God himself were speaking to us. God is everywhere with us; but we are not always everywhere with God, but when we lift up our hearts, and set him before our eyes. So in prayer, when we speak to God, we should think of him, who is an eternal being, to whom belong kingdom, power, and glory. Prayer is called a coming to God; we beg his eyes be open (Neh. i. 6), to behold us as well as hear us. Now, what an awing thought is this in prayer, that our preparations, motions, affections, dispositions, aims, are all naked and open to his eyes!

(3.) When God findeth us out in our secret sins by his word, Spirit, and providence; or the wrings and pinches of our own consciences. By his word: "And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (1 Cor. xiv. 25); and, "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; for all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. iv. 12, 13). So by his Spirit setting conscience awork: "Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth" (Job xiii. 26). Old, forgotten sins come to remembrance: own God and his omniscience in the dispensation, when God sets our sins in order before us, as if anew committed. So providence: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother," &c. (Gen. xlii. 21). Affliction opens the eyes; it is his rack, to extort confessions from us.

(4.) Consider upon what good reason God's knowing all things is built; his creation and providence. If he made all things, and sustaineth all things, surely he knoweth all things in particular; for every wise man knoweth what he doth. A father cannot forget how many children he hath: he that leadeth us by the hand wherever we go, knoweth where and how we go. Christ knew when virtue passed from him in a crowd; he said, "Somebody hath touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me" (Luke viii. 46). Certainly God knoweth there is such a creature as thou art, such a man or woman of the world; knoweth thy uprising and down-lying: "Thou understandest my thoughts afar off" (Psalm cxxxix. 2). He knoweth whether we are laughing, mourning, or praying: he that will judge thee, knoweth thee; or else he were an incompetent judge.

(5.) Humble thyself for walking so unanswerably. It would trouble us to have our thoughts, counsels, actions, all we think and speak, divulged and published. All is naked and open to God. If we did not think God's eye a fancy and fond conceit, we should at least walk more humbly. It would trouble us exceedingly, if men had a window into our hearts, in a time of prayer; why not because God seeth? How watchful are we not to incur the penalty of man's law, but offences against God are lightly passed over! With what copiousness and flowings of language will men

enlarge themselves in prayer, when in company, and how slight and overly in closet duties, if not wholly neglective of them! which is in effect to say, Our heavenly Father seeth not in secret.

SERMON CLXXXIV.

VERSE 171.—*My lips shall utter praise; when thou hast taught me thy statutes.*

In the two former verses, he had prayed, first, for an increase of saving knowledge (verse 169); secondly, for deliverance out of his trouble (verse 170). He reinforceth his request, by a promise of thankfulness, if he could get a gracious answer to that: “My lips shall utter praise,” &c.

In the words we have,—

First, A resolution of praise, “My lips shall utter praise.”

Secondly, The reason and occasion of it, “when thou hast taught me thy statutes.”

First, A resolution of praise.

The word for “uttereth praise,” signifieth, that praise should break from him as water boileth and bubbleth up out of a fountain. Indeed, words come from the abundance of the heart (Matt. xii. 34); either from the plenty of spiritual knowledge, as a fountain yieldeth water, so his knowledge breaketh out into praises; or from the plenty of spiritual affection rather, from the great esteem of the benefit or fulness of joy, at the thought of it. It is a great privilege to be delivered from blindness and ignorance: “It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. xiii. 11). Now, they that have a spiritual gust and taste, are so affected with it, that they cannot be enough thankful for it; and it is notable that this thankfulness is promised upon granting the first request.

DOCTRINE.—Divine illumination is so great a gift, that all who are made partakers of it, are especially obliged to praise and thanksgiving.

This will appear by these considerations:—

1st, That upon the receipt of every mercy we should praise God. There is an equity in it, for this is God’s pact and agreement with us: “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm l. 15). We are forward in supplications, but backward in gratulations: all the lepers could beg health, but only one returned to give glory to God (Luke xvii. 18). Self-love puts us upon prayers; but the love of God, upon praises. Now, we should be as much affected, or rather more, in receiving mercies, as we were in asking mercies; because, before, we knew it only by guess and imagination; but then, by actual feeling, and experience of the comfort of it. Therefore to seek, and not to praise, is to be loving to ourselves.

2ndly, Those that have received most from God, are most bound to honour him and praise him; for the return must carry some proportion with the receipt: “Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done unto him” (2 Chron. xxxii. 25); not according to the kind, only good, and not evil for good; but according to the degree. Great mercies require great acknowledgments; she loved much to whom much was forgiven, and she loved little to whom little (Luke vii. 47). More sins pardoned, more mercies received; God expecteth more love, more praise,

more thanksgiving: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke xii. 48). Christ pleadeth the equity from the practice of men; the more helps, the more work and service we expect: he should come sooner who rideth on horseback, than he that cometh on foot; so the more light and knowledge God vouchsafeth, the more honour and glory he expecteth from us.

3rdly, That we should praise God especially for spiritual benefits. Usually these are overlooked; but they deserve the greatest acknowledgment: these are discriminating, and come from special love. Corn, wine, and oil, are bestowed upon the world; but knowledge and grace upon his saints: these are the favour of his peculiar people: "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: oh! visit me with thy salvation" (Psalm cvi. 4). To have the favourite's mercy, is more than to have a common mercy. Protection is the benefit of every subject; but intimate and near admission is the privilege of special favourites. Love and hatred cannot be known by the things before us (Eccl. ix. 1—3). Christ gave his Spirit to the good disciples, the keeping of the purse to Judas.

1. Partly, because these concern the better part, the inward man (2 Cor. iv. 16). He doth us more favour that healeth a wound in the body, than he that soweth up a rent in the garment. Is not the body more than raiment? the soul more than the body? and the soul as furnished with grace, more than the soul only as furnished with natural gifts and endowments?

2. And partly, because these are brought about with more ado than temporal favours. God, as a creator and merciful upholder of all his creatures, doth bestow temporal blessings upon the ungodly world, even upon Heathens, who never heard of Christ; yet saving grace he bestoweth only as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. i. 3), with respect to the merit of Christ, who was to purchase these blessings, before he could obtain them.

3. And partly, because they are pledges of eternal blessings, and the beginning of our eternal well-being (John vi. 27). These and eternal blessedness are so linked together that they cannot be separated: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. viii. 29, 30). And, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 6).

4. Partly, because these incline and fit the heart for praise and thanksgiving. The one giveth occasion to praise God, the other a heart to praise God: outward mercies give the occasion to praise God, these the disposition; other mercies the motives, these the preparations: these dispose the heart to it: "I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments" (Psalm cxix. 7); here they dispose the lip, and open the mouth: "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise" (Psalm li. 15). The work of grace doth set our lips wide open in the magnifying and praising of God: grace is the matter of God's praise, and also giveth a ready will to praise God; yea, the very deed of praising him.

5. Partly, because temporal favours may be given in anger, but the graces of the Spirit are never given in anger. God may give an estate in judgment, and indulge large pastures to beasts fitted for destruction; but he giveth not an enlightened mind, and a renewed heart, in anger; it is a token of his special love: "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. xiii. 11). Well then, for all these things should we praise God. We have a quick sense in bodily mercies; but in soul concernments we are not alike affected.

4thly, That, among spiritual blessings, Divine illumination is a very great gift, and accordingly should be acknowledged by us. To make this evident, I shall—

1. Open the nature of this Divine illumination.

2. Show you the worth of it, and how much it should be valued by us.

1. For the nature of it. There is a twofold wisdom and knowledge of Divine mysteries:—

(1.) One which is only a gift: "We know that we all have knowledge: knowledge puffeth up; but charity edifieth" (1 Cor. viii. 1). This is an excellent gift; but yet it floweth from the common influence of the Spirit, and puffeth up the party, because it is apprehended only such an excellency as conduceth to the interests of the flesh, and to attain esteem in the world; and because he hath not thereby a deep and piercing knowledge of his misery, but is cold and weak, and doth not warm the heart with love to the thing known: therefore we should see to it, what kind of knowledge we have, whether it be a gift or a grace? whether we use it to exalt God or ourselves? The bare gift puffeth us up with a lofty conceit of ourselves, and a disdain of others; but grace keepeth us humble; for the more we know that way, the more we see our defects, and what little reason we have to glory in our knowledge, or any other grace; and besides, by it we are suitably affected to what we know.

(2.) There is a special knowledge of Divine mysteries, wrought in us by the special and sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost. This is the wisdom which cometh from above, which is first pure, and then peaceable (James iii. 17); which humbleth the man that hath it; for the more he knoweth of God, the more his own opinion and estimation of himself is lessened: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job xlii. 5, 6); I have spoken unadvisedly of God. This knowledge also maketh him serious, and is operative upon the heart, and worketh love to the thing known: "If thou knewest the gift," &c. (John iv. 10), and maketh us to know God in Christ, so as to acknowledge him, and give him due honour, respect, and reverence. It is a knowledge joined with oblation and affection. This knowledge is considerable as to its beginning and increase.

(i.) Its beginning; the first removing of the natural blindness and darkness of our understandings, so that we have a clear discerning of the things of God, when the scales fall from our eyes. Naturally, we were ignorant of God, and the way to Heaven; but now, brought to the saving knowledge of God in Christ, we are acquainted with both. The first creature which God made was light; so in the new creation, the new creature is illuminated with a heavenly light, and cured of its former blindness, so that we see things in another manner than ever we saw them before: "Called out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter ii. 9);

as a man brought out of a dark dungeon into an open light. And, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts xxvi. 18). So, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord" (Eph. v. 8). To be seeing is better than to be blind; to be in light, than to be in darkness. This is God's first work; and it is marvellous in our eyes. It is double; when we first begin to have a clear knowledge of our own misery (Rev. iii. 18); whereas, before, we lived in gross ignorance of our own condition; so, when we begin to see the remedy, as well as our misery: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6). The first thing that God convinceth us of, is our own sin, guilt, and misery. So that those things that either we knew not, or that did swim loose in the brain, we begin now to be affected with them. We talked before of sin as a thing of course, and were wont to marvel why men kept such a deal ado about sin; but now the case is altered. God hath opened his eyes; and therefore he complaineth of it as the greatest burden, and fain would be rid of it at any rate. He beginneth to seek after Christ, as his only remedy, and nothing will satisfy him but Christ; and all things are but dung and dross in comparison of the excellency of Christ, and that he may be found in him. He lamenteth his case, and can trust himself nowhere but in Christ's hands. A natural man slippeth into a heedless credulity, and either doth not look upon the Gospel as a real truth, or else is not affected with it, so as to venture his salvation in that bottom.

(ii.) As to the increase and progress; and so those that are taught of God need to be taught of God again, and seek a further increase of spiritual wisdom, or a further degree of the saving knowledge of Divine mysteries; as the Apostle prayeth for the Ephesians, towards whom he acknowledgeth God had abounded in all wisdom, and prudence, yet prayeth that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that the eyes of their understandings might be opened (Eph. i. 17, 18, with the 8th verse). We are yet ignorant in many things; for we know but in part, not fully rooted in the knowledge of those things which we know. We need to be refreshed with new illumination from God, that our knowledge may be active and lively, and stand out against new and daily temptations; and that that oblivion and forgetfulness which is a kind of ignorance, and which is apt ever and anon to creep upon us, may be prevented, and truths may be ready at hand for our use (James i. 5). And this is that which David beggeth an increase of knowledge for: he, being a holy man and a prophet, needeth not the first illumination; and every degree is a great favour, to be acknowledged with praise.

2. Let me speak of the worth of this Divine illumination in itself. The worth of it appeareth in four things:—

(1.) Its author. God, by his efficacious teaching, doth cure the blindness of our minds, and doth open and incline our hearts towards spiritual and heavenly things: "They shall be all taught of God" (John vi. 45); "Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (1 Thes. iv. 9); "The same anointing teacheth you of all things" (1 John ii. 27). As the Heathen Cato would have none to teach his son but himself; for he said, that instruction was such a benefit, that he would have his son beholden to none for it, but himself. Oh! it is a blessed privilege to be taught of

God, to be made wise to salvation; and not only to get an ear to hear, but a heart to understand; and learn by hearing, not only the power to believe, but the very act of faith itself. God's teaching is always effectual; not only directive, but persuasive; enlightening the mind to know, and inclining the will and affections to embrace what we know: he writeth the truth upon the heart, and puts it into the mind (Heb. viii. 10). He sufficiently propoundeth the object, and rectifieth the faculty, imprints the truth upon the very soul. But how doth God teach? In the very place where Christ speaketh of our being taught of God, he presently addeth, "Not that any man hath seen the Father" (John vi. 46): God's teaching doth not import that any man must see God, and immediately converse with him, and talk with God, and so be taught by him. No; God teacheth externally by his word, and internally by the Spirit; but yet so powerfully and effectually that the lesson is learned, and deeply imprinted upon our souls. This teaching is often expressed by seeing. Now, to a clear sight, three things concur; an object conspicuous, a perspicuous medium, and a well-disposed organ, or clear eye. In God's teaching, there are all these. The object to be seen plainly in the Scriptures, are the things of God, not fancies but realities; and by the light of the Spirit represented to us, and the eye of the mind opened. A blind man cannot see at midday, nor the most clear-sighted at midnight, when objects lie hidden under a veil of darkness. The object must be revealed, and brought nigh to us in a due light; and God secretly openeth the eye of the soul, that we see heavenly things with life and affection. The author then showeth the mercy, when God will not only teach us by men, but by his Spirit.

(2.) The objects known; the highest and most important matters in the world, the gracious soul is savingly acquainted with. It is more to have the knowledge of the profoundest sciences, than of some poor and low employment; as Themistocles said, to know a little of true philosophy, is more than to know how to play upon a fiddle. But now, to have the saving knowledge of God, and of the life to come, is more than to have the most admired wisdom of the flesh, than all the common learning in the world: and therefore how much are we bound to praise God, if he will teach us his statutes, more than if we knew how to govern kingdoms and commonwealths, and to do the greatest business upon earth. Two things do commend the object of this knowledge.

(i.) It is conversant about the most high and excellent things.

(ii.) The most necessary and useful things.

(i.) Things of so high a nature as to know God, who is the cause of all things; and Jesus Christ, who is the restorer of all things; and the Spirit, who cherisheth and preserveth all things: especially to know his heavenly operations, and the nature and acting of his several graces: "Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me" (Jer. ix. 24). There is the excellency of a man, to know God, to conceive aright of his nature, attributes, and works; so as to love, trust, reverence, and serve him. Alas! all other knowledge is a poor, low thing to this! God hath written a book to us of himself (as Cæsar wrote his own Commentaries), and by histories and prophecies hath set forth himself to us to be the creatures' Creator, preserver, deliverer, and glorifier. This is the knowledge we should seek after. Common crafts teach us how to get bread; but this book teacheth us how to get the kingdom of Heaven, to get the bread of life, the meat that perisheth not. Law preserveth the estates

and testaments of men ; but this, the testament of God, the charter of our eternal inheritance. Physic cureth the diseases of the body ; this, afflicted minds and distempered hearts. Natural philosophy raiseth up men to the contemplation of nature ; this, of the Maker of all things and Author of nature. History, the rise and ruin of kingdoms, states, and cities ; this, the creation and consummation of the world. Rhetoric, to stir the affection ; this, to enkindle Divine love. Poetry moveth natural delight ; here psalms, that we may delight in God. These are the only true and sublime things. As light is pleasant to the eye, so is knowledge to the mind ; but where have you the knowledge of such high things ? What are the mysteries of nature to the mysteries of godliness ? To know the almighty, living God, and to behold his wisdom, goodness, and power in all his works,—surely this is a sweet and pleasant thing to a gracious soul ; but especially to know him in Christ, to know the mystery of the incarnation, person, natures, and mediation of Christ : “ Great is the mystery of godliness ” (1 Tim. iii. 16). This is a mystery without controversy great, to know the law and covenant of God : “ This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes ” (Deut. iv. 6) ; and the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, by which we are wrought and prepared for everlasting life.

(ii.) So necessary and useful to know the way of salvation, the disease and remedy of our souls ; our danger and the cure ; our work and our wages ; the business of life and our end ; what is to be believed and practised, what we are to enjoy and do. These are the things which concern us ; all other knowledge is but curious and speculative, and hath more of pleasure than of profit. To know our own affairs, our greatest and most necessary affairs ; these are the things we should busy ourselves about. *Ἐνὸς χάρις*, “ One thing is needful ” (Luke x. 42) : other things we may well spare. Now, what is necessary, but to know our misery, that we may prevent it ; our remedy, that we may look after it in time ; our work and business, that we may perform it ; our end, that we may intend it, and be encouraged by it ; what course we must take, that we may be everlastingly happy ? Well then, if God will show us what is good (Mich. vi. 8), and teach us what is good, that we may know whither we are going, and which way we must go ; if he will give us counsel in our reins, to choose him for our portion (Psalm xvi. 5), we ought to bless his name. So the 11th verse, “ Thou wilt show me the path of life.” Though ignorant of other things, we are highly obliged for this discovery ; it is the work of God to give us counsel, and should be matter of perpetual thanksgiving to us.

3. The use for which this knowledge serveth.

(1.) To entertain communion with God for the present ; for by knowing him, we come to enjoy him : “ As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness ” (Psalm xvii. 15) ; that is more than to have a portion in this world. And, “ That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us ; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ ” (1 John i. 3). By communion or fellowship, is not meant a society of equals, but the dutiful, yet cheerful, attendance of an inferior on his superior, the creature on his Creator ; but yet so, as that there is a holy intimacy and familiarity in it, because we both love, and are beloved of God : in every ordinance, they draw nearer to God than others do ; for, “ If we walk in the light, as he is in the light,

we have fellowship one with another" (1 John i. 7). All our duties are the converse of a sanctified creature with a holy God, and an humble creature dealing with the blessed God, for a supply of all their wants. They pour out their souls to him, and he openeth his ear and bosom unto them; he teacheth them his way, and they walk in his paths (Isa. ii. 3); they walk in the fear of his name, and the comforts of his Spirit (Acts ix. 31); they seek his glory as their great end, and live in the sense of his dearest love.

(2.) To enjoy him for ever: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3). Alas! what is the knowing how to get riches, and pleasures, and the vain-glory of the world, to this! Surely you that are taught of God, your business is above other men's: while they drive on no greater trade than providing for the flesh, or feathering a nest that will quickly be pulled down, you are providing for everlasting glory and happiness: they aim at nothing beyond this life, all their cares are confined within the narrow bounds of time and the compass of this world; but you look higher, and begin a life which shall be perfected in Heaven; you are laying up treasure in Heaven.

4. The manner of knowing things, when taught of God; they see things with greater clearness, and certainty, and efficacy, and power.

(1.) With greater clearness. Others know words; but they know things, and therefore know as they ought to know them. They know the grace of God in truth (Col. i. 6). They have the spiritual discerning; and that is a quite different thing from a literal discerning (1 Cor. ii. 14). He hath an experimental and sweeter knowledge than learned men that are ungodly. He hath tasted that the Lord is gracious; the sweetness of his love, and the riches of his grace in Christ. The theory of Divine knowledge, though never so exact, giveth us not this: they have more of the words and notions, but less of the thing itself; they have the sign, the other the thing signified; they break the shell, the others eat the kernel; they dress the meat, but the others feed upon and digest it; dig in the mines of knowledge as negroes, but others have the gold. A rotten post may support a living tree.

(2.) With more certainty. There is a great deal of difference between taking up religion out of inspiration, and out of opinion or tradition. Faith is the gift of God; but credulity is received by the report of men. Men may guess at the truth, by their own wit; they may talk of it by rote, and according to what they read, and hear from others; but Divine knowledge is the fruit of the Spirit: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. xvi. 17); "Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John iv. 42); "For our Gospel came not unto you, in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thes. i. 5). We never apprehend the truth with any certainty, nor can we discern God's impress on the word, but in the light of the Spirit. God's illumination maketh our knowledge of things certain and infallible: "Know ἀσφαλῶς, assuredly" (Acts ii. 36); ἀληθῶς (John xvii. 8). It is not a may be, a bare possibility, or likely to be, a probability; but it is sure to be, and will be so, a certainty that belongeth to faith.

(3.) For efficacy and power: "For our Gospel came not unto you in

word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost" (1 Thes. i. 5); "Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost" (Acts vi. 5). We are affected with the truths we know; yea, transformed and changed by them (2 Cor. iii. 18); changed into a Divine nature (2 Peter i. 4). Our hearts are moulded and fitted for God, and for every good work: so that this is a benefit which should be much acknowledged.

USE I.—Is to inform us how the saints do and should esteem this benefit of Divine illumination. In this psalm, they esteem it more than if God should bestow a great deal of wealth upon them. See Psalm cxix. 14, "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches;" and, "than thousands of gold and silver" (verse 72). Once more, they think themselves well paid, if they get it by sharp afflictions, though by loss of health and wealth: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes" (verse 71). The reason is, because they value it as mercy for which they can never enough be thankful: "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I might win Christ" (Phil. iii. 8). The people of God have no reason to envy others that live in the pomp of the world, and the splendour of outward accommodations, if he give them the saving knowledge of them: "Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous" (Prov. iii. 31, 32). If God will teach us his statutes, though he keepeth us low, it is more to be one of God's disciples, to be owned by him in an ordinance, than to live a life of pomp and ease.

Secondly, none are fit to praise God, but those whom God hath taught: "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth?" (Psalm l. 16.) The new song and the old heart do ill agree together; but, when God hath framed our hearts to obedience, then is praise comely in our mouths.

USE II.—Is to direct us,—

1. How to pray for spiritual grace, if we would obtain it. The glory of God is the end of all grace vouchsafed to us; with this end we must pray to God for it. The end of our petitions and requests to God should be, that we may be enabled to praise God; then we seek God for God, much more when we ask spiritual grace. To ask temporal benefits to consume upon our lusts, is very bad, and the ready way to bespeak ourselves a denial: "Ye ask, and receive not; because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James iv. 3): much more to ask spiritual gifts, for our lusts' sake; to beg God to open our mouths, to show forth our own praises rather than his; or knowledge to advance ourselves; as it is a greater indignity to void our excrements in a cup of gold, for a prince's own drinking, than in a common utensil. Besides, it showeth our value of the benefit, to think of praise before we have obtained it: "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. i. 6).

2. It must be used and improved to that end. When we have obtained, we must not be proud of any spiritual gift, but lay our crown at God's feet: "Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou, that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor. iv. 7.) We pervert the end of the end, when we are

puffed up; and give shrewd suspicion that it is a common gift, not saving grace, when we are puffed up with it.

USE III.—Is exhortation, to press you to glorify God and praise him, if he hath given you any knowledge of himself, and of the way of salvation.

1. This is God's end in bestowing his grace, that, in word and deed, we should be to the praise of his glorious grace: "That ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darknes into his marvellous light" (1 Peter ii. 9).

2. You were as indocile and unteachable as others; only God made the difference: "For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt" (Job xi. 12); "As a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke" (Jer. xxxi. 18); and therefore the glory must entirely redound to him. You might have perished as a witless fool, and gone to Hell as others do, but that God gave you counsel.

3. It is the way to increase it: "Rooted, and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving" (Col. ii. 7). Thanksgiving for what we have received, is an effectual means to make us constant, grow and abound in every grace: "Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee" (Psalm lxxvii. 3). Look, as the vapours go up, so the showers come down. Experiences of former mercies thankfully acknowledged, draw down more mercy.

4. Prayer necessarily inferreth praise: "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." (Phil. iv. 6.) Blessing God for favours already received, is necessary to be joined with prayer; it is disingenuous to be always craving, and never giving thanks. Be thankful, and depend for more; not always pore upon wants, but take a survey of your mercies; and that will not only enlarge your hearts in thankfulness, but even invite God to bestow further mercies.

SERMON CLXXXV.

VERSE 172.—*My tongue shall speak of thy word; for all thy commandments are righteousness.*

The man of God had spoken in the former verse how his lips should praise God; here is his second promise that he maketh, of holy conference with others.

In the words we have,—

First, David's resolution; "My tongue shall speak of thy word."

Secondly, the reason; because it contained matter that deserved to be spoken of; "for all thy commandments are righteousness."

1. He speaketh of the whole word of God, "all thy commandments."

2. In the abstract, "are righteousness;" altogether righteous and faithful.

First, from the first branch, David's resolution, "My tongue shall speak of thy word;" observe,—

DOCTRINE.—The subject of a believer's ordinary discourse should be the word, and those spiritual and heavenly matters contained therein.

1st, Not that they are always talking of these things. There is a time for all things. The business of our calling will sometimes take us up,

and sometimes our recreations; but yet there should be generally a difference between us and others: the people of God should be observantly different, as to their words and discourse, from other people: "Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb" (Cant. iv. 11). The lips of Christ's spouse should flow with matter savoury and useful. So, "The tongue of the just is as choice silver; the heart of the wicked is little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many; but fools die for want of wisdom" (Prov. x. 20, 21); where the speech of the righteous is compared to silver; of the wicked, to dross; for, because their heart is little worth, their discourse will be accordingly. And then the good man is compared to one that keepeth open house, that feedeth all those that resort to him; but fools do not only not feed others, but perish themselves by their own folly. So, "The lips of the wise disperse knowledge; but the heart of the foolish doeth not so" (Prov. xv. 7). Men usually discourse as their hearts are: a man of a frothy spirit will bring forth nothing but vain and frothy discourse; but a gracious man will utter holy and gracious things; for the tap runneth according to the liquor with which the vessel is filled. One place more: "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment: the law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide" (Psalm xxxvii. 30, 31). All men's discourses are vented according as their hearts are busied and affected. A man that hath the word of God rooted in his heart, and maketh it his work to suit his actions thereunto, will also suit his words thereunto, and will edify those that he speaketh unto. Thoughts, words, and actions, are the genuine products and issues of the heart: grace in the heart discovereth itself uniformly in all holy thoughts, holy words, and holy actions; otherwise, their conversation is not at all of a piece. All these places show, that a Christian's discourse will differ from other men's; but, alas! our conference is little different from ordinary men's.

2ndly, More particularly, I shall show you that we are not left to run at random in our ordinary discourse, as if our tongues were our own, to speak what we please. This I shall show, 1. Negatively. 2. Positively.

1. Negatively; no profane, no idle discourse.

(1.) No profane discourse; "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth" (Eph. iv. 29). Christians are accountable for their words as well as actions.

QUESTION.—But what is corrupt communication?

ANSWER.—(i.) Obscene, scurrilous discourse. When the heart is filled with such corrupt stuff, the mouth will be apt to vent it. So, "Filthy communication out of your mouth" (Col. iii. 8). Sins of the tongue and outward man, must be abstained from, as well as sins out of the heart. That *αἰχρολογία*, that filthy speaking, rotten speech, is one of the great sins of the tongue. When we speak of those things which belong to uncleanness, this is quite unbecoming the purity and cleanness of Christians; the heart of man being as powder to the fire, easily taken with such temptations.

(ii.) Calumnious and censorious discourses, when we cannot meet together but we must be speaking of others; suggesting evil against them, blemishing their graces, or carping at their weaknesses, or aggravating their sins, or divulging their secret miscarriages, beyond what Christianity requireth. This sin the Scripture brandeth as mischievous to ourselves and others. Ourselves: "If any man among you seem to be religious,

and bridled not his tongue, &c., this man's religion is vain" (James i. 26). Censuring is a pleasing sin, very suitable with corrupt nature; but yet it is a bad sin; it is made to be the hypocrites' sin, who, being acquainted with the guile of their own spirits, are apt to suspect others, and deprave their best actions; and upon the ruin of other men's credit, build their own reputation for religion. And it is mischievous to others, and against that justice and charity which we owe to them: "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Prov. xviii. 8). They wound men's reputation unperceivably, and secretly strike them with a blow that smarts not for the present, but destroyeth their service, at least to such as receive these privy defamations and whisperings; and it is more craftily carried when they wound while they pretend to kiss, and make their praise but a preface to their reproach; as an archer draweth back his hand that the arrow may fly with the more force. They say he is this, and that, "but," &c.

(iii.) Proud and arrogant speaking, when all our discourse is self-boasting. The pride of the heart sometimes shooteth out by the eyes, and therefore we read of haughty eyes and a proud look; but usually it is displayed in our speech, in a proud ostentation of our own worth and excellency: "Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let no arrogancy come out of your mouth" (1 Sam. ii. 3). When "I" cometh in at every sentence, *πειροτολογία* wanteth not its vanity: "For men to search their own glory, is not glory" (Prov. xxv. 27). All their discourse is to set off themselves, and to usher in something of themselves; and, if religion be talked off, it is to commend their own knowledge, and their own notions, or their own endeavours for Christ, or to blemish others, that they may shine alone.

(iv.) When anger sets us a-discoursing. Therefore the Apostle saith, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice" (Eph. iv. 31). Where there is bitterness, or a secret, smothered displeasure, or alienation of affection, it soon breaketh out into rage; which if an impetuous rage, or passionate commotion, that produceth anger, or a desire of revenge; anger produceth clamour, or boisterous words, loud menaces, and brawlings, or inordinate speeches, which are the black smoke whereby anger and wrath within doth first manifest itself; then clamour produceth evil speaking, disgraceful and contumelious speeches; therewith the party incensed doth stain the reputation of him with whom he is angry; and then malice is rooted anger and continued wrath. Now, all these should be put away; Christians should have nothing to do with them. But that we have in hand is disgraceful and contumelious speaking, as it is the result of anger, wrath, and malice; either by open railing, or derision, and jeering at their sins and infirmities to shame them; or by imprecation and cursing, and wishing evil to them: all which is contrary to that meekness and love which should prevail in the hearts of Christians: as Saul in his anger called Jonathan, "Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman" (1 Sam. xx. 30); in his raging fit he blemisheth his own wife, of whom we hear elsewhere no such imputation: Thou art more likely to be a bastard than my own son: frantic words all interpreters think them to be.

This is a taste of that profane discourse which is forbidden to Christians. Now, the reasons of it are these:—

1. Because this, allowed and habituated, argueth a rotten and unrenewed

heart: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. xii. 34). Words much discover the temper of the heart, there being a quick intercourse between the heart and the tongue.

2. Because it is noisome and offensive to honest ears; it is not a speech that hath any grace or comeliness in it: "Let your speech be always with grace" (Col. iv. 6).

3. It is contagious and infectious to ordinary hearers; especially to children and weak ones. Evil words corrupt good manners (1 Cor. xv. 33): we convey our taint.

4. Sinful, vain, and frothy discourse, doth make the heart more vain, perverse, and wicked; while the corruption that is in it doth strengthen itself by getting vent. When the sparks fly abroad of the fire kindled in our bosoms, a man waxeth worse and worse. His reverence of God is lessened and weakened, as he hath dared to give vent to his sin and folly, and is more emboldened to sin again: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false-witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man" (Matt. xv. 19, 20). Evil-speaking is one thing mentioned, and it layeth men open to Satan: therefore, as the heart should be kept from framing such conceptions, so the tongue from uttering them; for so they prove more dishonourable to God, hurtful to ourselves, and offensive to others.

5. I will venture at one reason more against profane discourse; it grieveth the Spirit. Many, by their obscene, putrid, and carnal discourse, intend no further than to make themselves merry, jovial, and glad: "They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies," saith the Prophet (Hos. vii. 3); yet, alas! it is but a poor sport, and will prove so in the end; for it draweth God to be against them: the Holy Ghost is displeased and grieved with it; these things being against his light, motions, and directions, and so an offence to him, which a tender conscience is soon sensible of.

(2.) Not idle discourse, which tendeth not to the glory of God, and the edification of our neighbour. We should have an eye to the good of those with whom we speak, so as to edify them with our speech; for Christ telleth us that we must give an account to God, not only for words, but even for idle words: "I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. xii. 36). Men esteem little of their words; yet, when they are put into God's balance, they may weigh heavy; not only wicked words, but even idle words, such as serve for no good purpose, or for no lawful end; and in your account they will come in as so many sins, and sit heavy upon you, if you have not received pardon before it is a strict sentence. But what is this idle discourse? Such as wanteth the solidity and substance of truth; such as tendeth to no use and benefit: *de jure*, God may condemn you for these, though, *de facto*, upon repentance he pardoneth greater sins. Or possibly such are idle words, as come from a vain, idle frame of heart; for he had spoken before in the 35th verse, that a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things, and an evil man, evil things. Now, such idle words are a note of the wickedness of the man, of the evil treasure that is in his heart; for these he is responsible at the day of judgment; as for a vain conversation, and the unfruitful works of darkness. However, we must not open a gap to licentiousness; as, when the Apostle forbiddeth profane discourse, he enjoineth profitable discourse, as the only

remedy: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. iv. 29). As much as may be, holy conference should be mixed with all our discourses and converses; otherwise they are accountable to God. And it is very notable the Apostle forbiddeth *μωρολογία, ἡ ἔντραπελία*, foolish jesting: "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. v. 4). As he condemneth filthiness, or words contrary to Christian gravity, decency, or modesty, so he condemneth foolish talking, which is impertinent, superfluous, and vain discourse. And then jesting; not all honest mirth, or use of wit, but an intemperate use; when men give up themselves to a frothy vanity, that they cannot be serious; or to tart reflections upon the personal imperfections of others, or to impious jests, by wresting the Scripture to express the conceptions of a vain and wanton wit. In the general, there must be a great guard on all jesting, lest it degenerate; and that we entertain one another with thanksgiving, and discourses of the love of God, and his manifold mercies to us; for it is not an easy matter to keep within bounds of cheerful and allowed mirth. Hearts that are kept sensible of God's goodness, are desirous to express it to others whenever occasion offereth, and vain and idle communication is nothing so pleasing to them.

2. Positively. We are to edify one another, as David professeth here, that his tongue should speak of God's word, his conferences and discourses should be filled up of no other matter.

(1.) Because our tongue is our glory: "My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth" (Psalm x. 9). Compare Acts ii. 26, "Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad." Now, why is our tongue our glory? Not only as it was given us for the use of tasting meat and drink; so the tongues of the brute beasts serve them; but because thereby we must express the conceptions of our minds. So speech is the excellency of man above the beasts; but Christianity giveth us a higher reason, because thereby we may express the conceptions of our minds to the glory of God and the good of others: "Therewith bless we God, even the Father" (James iii. 9). That is our glory, that we cannot only think of God, but speak of God, his word and works.

(2.) Because conference and edifying discourse is one means of spiritual growth and spiritual improvement to ourselves and others. To ourselves: "The wise in heart shall be called prudent; and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning" (Prov. xvi. 21). The more he venteth what he knoweth, the wiser himself groweth, and learneth by teaching others; for the more he draweth forth his knowledge, the more it is impressed upon his own heart. It is a truth, he that watereth shall be watered, and our gifts, as the loaves, are increased in the breaking; or as the widow giving oil to the Prophet, was enriched by it: not only as we occasion others to draw forth their knowledge, but as our own is confirmed and strengthened by using it; as, "Unto every one that hath shall be given" (Matt. xxv. 29). As venting of sin and folly increaseth sin and folly, so doth venting spiritual knowledge still increase it. To others: it is a great benefit to them when we communicate our experiences to them: "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke xxii. 32). When he was converted by repentance, he should be more careful to convert and strengthen others, that they fall not in like manner; or help them to recover out of the mire of sin. And the Apostle saith: "Who [God] com-

forteth us, &c., that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. i. 4). The Lord comforts one, that another may be comforted; as, in the celestial bodies, whatever light and influence the moon and stars receive, they bestow it on these inferior bodies: they have their light from the sun, and they reflect it again on the creatures below. Or as the official part in the body; as the heart and liver receive, and convey, and derive the blood and spirits to all the other parts, so a Christian, when he is strengthened in himself, ought to convey his comfort and strength to others. It is mighty edifying, when we have found the usefulness of the word, to speak of it to God's praise: if we have gotten direction in doubtful cases, or benefit by it in the mastery of our lusts, and the promises have afforded any support and deliverance in our distresses, we are debtors for the comfort and experiences we have, and are stewards to dispense it to others. Many take a glory that they have cordials, strong-waters, and medicines, in their closets and repositories, that may be a relief to the bodies of others; so should we delight to refresh their souls with what hath done us good. The humiliation and brokenness of heart which thou hast found, may be powerful to persuade others of the bitterness of sin. David, when he had smarted for sin, saith, "I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee" (Psalm li. 13). He had found how bitter a thing it was to provoke God by sin, and he could tell them such stories of it as would make their hearts to wake, and cause them to hate it. The faith and knowledge which God hath given thee, may direct and preserve others; thy temptations may conduce to the succouring of others who are tempted.

(3.) It is a mighty comfortable duty, that hath much sweetness in it, to confer together of holy things: "That I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me" (Rom i. 12). Holy discourse doth refresh more than vain and foolish jesting: it is a far sweeter thing to talk of the word of God, and those spiritual and heavenly things which are contained therein, than to spend the time in vain and foolish jesting, or discoursing about mere worldly matters. Should anything be more delightful to a Christian, than Christ, and Heaven, and the promises of the world to come, and the way that leadeth thither? and should it be burdensome to talk of these things, which we profess to be our only hope and joy? Certainly our relish and appetite is mightily depraved, if we think so; judge ourselves in a prison, when we are in good company who remember God; and, when they invite you to remember him with them, will you frown upon the motion, because it is some check and interruption to your carnal vanity?

(4.) The well ordering of our words is a great point of Christianity, and argueth a good degree of grace. He that bridleth his tongue is a perfect man (James iii. 2). "Death and life are in the power of the tongue," saith Solomon (Prov. xviii. 21): upon the good or ill use of it, a man's safety doth depend. Not only temporal safety, but eternal: "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. xii. 37). These evidences are brought into judgment; therefore it concerneth us to see what our discourses are, as well as our actions: Solomon often describeth the righteous by his good tongue: "The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom" (Prov. x. 31); and, "The tongue of the wise is health" (Prov. xii. 18).

USE I.—Is reproof. It reproveth us for being so dumb and tongued in holy things. We can speak liberally of any subject, only we are dumb in spiritual matters, which concern our edification. We show so little grace in our conferences, because we have so little grace in our hearts. Alas! many that profess religion, their talk is little different from other men's; as if they were ashamed to speak of God, or had nothing to say of him and for him. I do not bind you always to talk of religious things, but sometimes it bindeth. Now, when is it your tongues speak of the word in a serious and affectionate manner? Can you love God, and never put in a word for him? Can you see or hear God dishonoured, and suffer your mouths to be sealed up with a sinful silence, that you should not have a word to speak in the cause of God?

USE II.—Is to exhort us to be frequent and serious in our discourses of God, and spiritual, heavenly things.

For means to help us:—

1. Divine illumination to teach others the way of God, requireth that we ourselves should be taught of God. Then it cometh the warmer and fresher, when we speak not by hearsay only, but experience; as heart answereth heart, so the renewed heart in him that heareth, to the renewed heart in him that speaketh; and we show others, what God by his illuminating grace hath first showed us: it savoureth of that Spirit that worketh in both. He will easily kindle others, who is once on fire himself. The word passeth through others as water through an empty trunk, without feeling; they may speak very good things, but they do but personate and act a part; but, when we have been in the deep waters, and God hath bound up our wounds, we can more feelingly speak to others.

2. A sight of the excellency of the word, and a value and esteem thereof: the reason in the text, "for all thy commandments are righteousness." We are apt to speak oftenest of those things which we most affect. Did not your souls grow out of relish with these holy, spiritual, and excellent things, your speeches about them would be more frequent, lively, serious, and savoury; for we cannot conceal our affections. Our coldness in speaking to others of these spiritual and heavenly things, cometh from want of this persuasion, that all his commandments are righteousness; for they who are persuaded of the excellency of the word, will be talking of the sweetness of its promises continually.

3. A stock of spiritual knowledge: "A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things" (Matt. xii. 35). Every man entertaineth his guests with such provisions as he hath. It is the word which enableth us to edify ourselves and others with holy conference: the more store, the more we have to bring forth upon all occasions: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another" (Col. iii. 16). A plentiful measure of Gospel knowledge enableth us to direct and instruct others: there all wisdom is made plain; things revealed, which cannot be found elsewhere: that which may by long search be found elsewhere, is made ready to our hands, and brought down to the meanest capacity. The heart is the fountain from whence the tongue doth run and flow; and, when the heart is well furnished, the tongue will be employed and exercised.

4. Zeal for the glory of God, and love to others' souls. We should communicate to others, what we have learned ourselves. David would not reserve his knowledge to himself: "Teach me, and my tongue shall speak

of thy word." Fire turneth all about it into fire. David's "Maschil" (Psalm xxxii., title) is to instruct others. True good is diffusive in itself; our candle enlightened should enlighten others. When Philip was called, he inviteth Nathanael to come to Christ (John i. 45); Andrew calleth Simon. True grace showeth itself in zeal to promote the kingdom of Christ, and the good of our neighbours' souls; and the new nature seeketh to multiply the kind, and such as are brought to Christ will be careful to invite others.

5. Wisdom is necessary: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. iv. 6); that is, seasoned with the salt of holy and Divine wisdom, that it may be savoury and acceptable to the hearers, and both delight and edify. Without this holy skill and wisdom, how often is conference turned into jangling or mere babbling!

6. Watchfulness and heed. Otherwise, corruption will break out in pride, in a vain ostentation of parts; passion, in some heat of words; worldliness and sensuality, in diverting from holy conference to that which is carnal and worldly; discontent in some; unseemly expressions of God's dealings with us; indiscretion and folly in a multitude of impertinent talk. "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Psalm cxli. 3). The tongue must be watched, as well as the heart; all watching will be to little purpose, unless God bridle and direct our tongue, that nothing break out to his dishonour. There must be a constant guard, that nothing break from us that is unseemly.

Secondly, we come to the reason; "For all thy commandments are righteousness."

DOCTRINE.—There is righteousness, nothing but righteousness, all righteousness, to be found in the word of God.

1. There is perfect uprightness in all God's promises. They are sure principles of trust, and dependence upon God: "The word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all those that trust in him" (Psalm xviii. 30). He is most just and faithful; and his promises without all deceit, or possibility of failing; and will certainly protect all those that rely and depend upon him.

2. As to his precepts, nothing is approved in them, or recommended to us, but what is holy, just, and good. There is no virtue which it commendeth not, no duty which it commandeth not, no vice which is not condemned therein, nor sin which is not forbidden.

I shall prove the doctrine by three things:—

Ist, By the sufficient provision that is made for man's duty. In a moral consideration, there are but three beings, God, neighbours, and self; Paul's three adverbs are suited to these, "soberly, righteously, and godly" (Titus ii. 12).

1. For self-government, or living soberly in the present world. Nothing conduceth to that more than God's precepts; the whole drift of his word is to check self-pleasing and sense-pleasing, and to condemn all excess of meat, drink, or apparel: lest our hearts be besotted and overcharged, and, by indulging sensuality, diverted from spiritual and heavenly things.

2. For carriage to our neighbour. What religion provideth so amply as the word of God doth, against all fraud and violence, requireth us in all things to do as we would be done by? Yea, it not only enforceth justice, but charity, and to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to account

his welfare our own, and rejoice in his good, and mourn for his evil, as for our own.

3. For the third, godliness. God is nowhere represented and discovered, so much as in his word, nor a way of commerce between him and us anywhere else so clearly established; nor what kind of worship we should give unto him, both for matter and manner. In short, the Scripture is written to teach us how to love him and entertain communion with him, and to serve him in holiness and righteousness all our days; and maketh our daily converse with God in holiness, our great work and business.

2ndly, It appeareth by the connaturality and suitableness which they have to the best and holiest: "Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it" (Psalm cxix. 140). It is written in our hearts, as well as in God's book; and there is something in the one akin to the other: "I will write my law in their hearts and minds" (Heb. viii. 10). On the contrary, so far as a man is depraved, so far he hateth it (Rom. viii. 7); yea, the more he feareth it: "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John iii. 20).

3rdly, The event showeth it; for the more the word of God is preached, the more is righteousness spread in the world, and men grow wiser and better. Banish the word of God, or discourage the preachers of it; and there followeth nothing but confusion of manners and corruption in religion. The word, then, is the only means of reforming the world, and curing the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Where either the word hath not been received, as among the Pagans; or where it hath been restrained, as in Popery, Scriptures locked up in an unknown tongue; or where neglected or sleepily urged, as in churches that have left their first love; there is a greater overflow of wickedness: their ignorance hath caused a greater part of them to degenerate into a more sensual, sottish sort of people.

QUESTION.—But are not people very bad that have the Scriptures? do we not ourselves complain of a flood of wickedness?

ANSWER.—1. Christianity must not be judged by the rabble of nominal, literal Christians; no more than we will judge of the cleanness of a street, by the foulness of a sink or kennel; or of the sound grapes in the bunch, by the rotten ones; or of the fidelity of subjects, by the rebellion of traitors; or the honesty and justice of a nation, by a crew of thieves and robbers; or of the civility of a nation, by the rusticity of ploughmen or carters. Those who are serious in their religion, are the best men, and of the choicest and most excellent spirits in the world: the scandals and wickedness of others do not impeach their rule.

2. The strictly religious must not be judged by the revellings of the carnal, who are their enemies: ignorant and ungodly men will blast them: "Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead" (1 Peter iv. 4, 5).

3. Neither is the state of religion to be judged by the complaints of friends, hating the least evil; ashamed of men's unthankfulness. Light maketh it odious, as bad as we are. It is worse where the word is not preached in a lively manner.

USE.—1. Let us approve of those things which God has bound us to

believe and practise; they being all suitable to the nature of God and man. The first ground of obedience is consent and approbation: "I consent unto the law that it is good" (Rom. vii. 16). So to the Gospel: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation" (1 Tim. i. 15).

2. Let us answer this word. Let the fruit of the Spirit be in us all, righteousness, goodness, and truth. The stamp is answerable to the seal: this is the genuine result of the doctrine we profess.

SERMON CLXXXVI.

VERSE 173.—*Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.*

The two first verses show the drift of this portion. He begs two benefits, instruction and deliverance. His first request for instruction is enforced by a promise of praise: "My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes" (verse 171). In verse 172, of conference or holy discourse, whereby others may be edified: "My tongue shall speak of thy word." Now he comes to enforce the second request for deliverance, by an argument of his ready obedience: "Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts."

Observe here,—

First, the petition, "Let thine hand help me."

Secondly, the argument, or reason to enforce it, "for I have chosen thy precepts."

First, for the petition, "Let thine hand help me." Hand is put for power: Let thy power preserve me and defend me; and help is sometimes put for assistance, and sometimes for deliverance. God may be said to help us when he doth assist us, and support us in troubles, or when he doth deliver us from troubles. This latter acceptation suits with this place, and it is equivalent with what he said before: "Let my supplication come before thee; deliver me" (verse 170); so, "let thine hand help me," "deliver me according to thy word" (verse 170). A good man may be brought into great straits, in which his own hand cannot help, and stead him; but then he may fly to God, and say, Lord, "let thine hand help me." His argument and motive which he urgeth is, "I have chosen thy precepts;" and from thence he infers his hope of deliverance.

The points will be two:—

DOCTRINE I.—That this is the character and description of a good man, that he is good, and doth good out of choice. So David pleads it here, "I have chosen thy precepts."

DOCTRINE II.—That a man who makes conscience of God's commands, is encouraged to seek help from him in all his straits; for he prays, "I have chosen thy precepts;" therefore, Lord, "let thine hand help me."

DOCTRINE I.—It is the plain character of a good man, to be good, and do good, out of choice.

It was not out of rashness, and ignorance, and inconsiderate zeal, that David with so much hazard betook himself to God's service, and was so exactly faithful with God; but upon due choice, trial, and examination: "I have chosen thy precepts."

The point may easily be proved out of Scripture. God's people are described to be those that choose the things that please him, and take hold of his covenant (Isa. lvi. 4). Taking hold of his covenant, relates there to the privilege part of the covenant. As they seek their happiness in the

privileges of God's covenant, so, as to the duty part, they choose the things which please him. After serious and mature deliberation, and judgment rightly informed, and affection thereon grounded, they embrace the ways of God by a free election and choice. And so you shall see it is the charge against wicked men, this is the disproof of their confidence, that they "did not choose the fear of the Lord" (Prov. i. 29); mark the expression; that is, prefer it before the baits of sin. So, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deut. xxx. 19). We shall never have life, unless we have it by choice. He sets both before them; choose life, not as if it were indifferent in point of duty, to do the one or the other; but to set an edge upon their affections, I have set both before you. God will have his service entered upon by choice: "And, if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me," &c. (Jos. xxiv. 15.) He leaves it not arbitrarily to the Israelites, whether they should serve God or no; but this he saith, that they might freely and without compulsion declare what they were minded to do, and that they might be the more firmly tried to serve the Lord, because they had voluntarily taken upon themselves to do it: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve;" that is, compare that which is best with that which is worst, life and death, light and darkness, Heaven and Hell, together; and resolve accordingly; because no man in his right wits, would make any doubt after such a representation which to choose. Joshua's speech is just such another speech as that of Elijah: "If the Lord be God, follow him; but, if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings xviii. 21). Not as if he made it any doubt, or would have them make it any doubt, or as if it were uncertain, but that they might choose more freely, and delight, and persevere in their choice. These places show we never rightly enter into God's service until we enter upon it by choice.

Here I shall inquire,—

First, What it is to choose God's precepts.

Secondly, Give some reasons why they must be chosen, else they can never be rightly kept; or why this is so necessary.

First, What is choosing God's precepts? It implies five things:—

1. Deliberation.
2. Esteem or preference.
3. A voluntary inclination.
4. A firm and steadfast resolution, by which we are bound all our days.
5. A complacency and contentment in what we have chosen.

1. Deliberation, or a due consideration of what is chosen; its nature, worth, and excellency; for, until we compare and weigh things, how can we make a choice, but take them hand over head? and therefore there is a weighing the reasons on both sides. God's children are not ignorant what it is to flow in worldly wealth, pleasures, and earthly comforts, and to enjoy the favour of the world, and to sail here with a full stream. And, on the other side, they are not ignorant what it will cost them to be thorough with Christ, to be religious indeed: they do not run hand over head to resolve upon such a course. No; they sit down, they count the charges (Luke xiv. 27). The business sticks with many in this first

work: we cannot bring them to any serious consideration; they will not weigh things, but act as their brutish lusts incline them. It is said, "Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors" (Isa. xlv. 8). It is a disgrace to our reason, when we will not consider well of things, and bring them not back to our hearts, as the word signifies; but we run on as chance offereth objects or occasions. Consider what this and that will tend to, weigh things in your souls. Even good itself, if we stumble upon it, it is but a lucky hit or a happy mistake; therefore the Apostle adviseth us to resolve upon trial: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thes. v. 21). Men will not hold fast that which is good, unless they first prove and try. Indeed, those things which usually oppose themselves against the spiritual life, are such poor, paltry, inconsiderable vanities, that they are not worthy to be brought into competition, or into any serious debate with them; for it is no hard question to resolve, whether God or the flesh shall be pleased? whether the transitory pleasures of sin should be preferred before eternal glory or the happiness of the saints? But yet serious consideration will discover this to us, and shame us out of perverse and preposterous choice; whereas, otherwise, we should go on like men asleep, or like men out of their wits, choose poor, base things, delight in inconsiderable trifles, before the things wherein we are so deeply concerned. Therefore it requires deliberation in weighing.

2. Choice notes esteem or preference; for election and choice is a preferring of one thing before another. Though God and Christ be good, and grace and Heaven be good, yet there are other things that come in competition with them; and, when we set ourselves to seek after God and Christ, these competitors are suing for our hearts, and rival Christ in the soul. And therefore this choice implies a renunciation of all other things, a trampling upon them, and a high esteem and value of Christ and his ways. The Scripture speaks of selling all for the pearl of great price (Matt. xiii. 45, 46), of accounting things but dung and dross in comparison of Christ (Phil. iii. 8, 9). In choosing the ways of God, many things will be offered to us that may hale us this way and that, many pleasures and contentments of this life. Now, we must trample upon them all, and renounce them as they are temptations, that we may actually exalt, prefer, and esteem Christ and his grace. There are two things which assault our resolution for God; the terrors of sense, and the allurements of the flesh, or the vanities of the world. Now, a soul resolved to serve God, must actually and positively prefer obedience before both of these, before temptations on the right hand and on the left.

(1.) For the terrors of sense, we must be resolved rather to suffer than to sin. In choosing the ways of God, the heart must come to a firm resolution, rather to suffer the greatest inconvenience than to commit the least sin; this was Moses's choice (Heb. xi. 25). When once it came to a case of sin, then he renounceth pleasures, treasures, honours. Whatever it cost us, we must resolve to be faithful with God; and to run the greatest hazard, rather than to do the least thing that is contrary to his will.

(2.) We must prefer obedience before all the allurements of the flesh and vanities of the world. David chose God's precepts; that is, valued them more than all other things. See verse 14 of this psalm, "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches." He ex-

plains the choice here mentioned. If we have grace to serve God, and to keep the way of his testimonies, we count ourselves more happy than if we had all the world. It is not enough to approve God's ways simply, but we must approve them comparatively; not only as good in themselves, but as better than all other things; and it should be more to us to be taught our duty, and to know how to serve God, than if we did enjoy the fulness of all earthly comforts.

3. Choosing the ways of God implies a voluntary inclination, that we should of our own accord follow them; for choice is free, and it is opposed to force and constraint: and a man is said to choose those things which he likes, which he loves, which his soul inclines to, when he is carried to them, not by the compulsion of an external principle, but by his own propension and inclination: look, as the wicked are described to be those "who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness" (Prov. ii. 13); that is, have an inclination to one rather than another; for what is expressed that the wicked leave the paths of uprightness, it is explained John iii. 19, by loving darkness rather than the light. And so it is said of Mary, she "hath *chosen* that good part;" of her own voluntary accord and free inclination, she was moved to sit at Christ's feet, to attend upon the improvement of her soul. The business of salvation is offered to our choice, it is left to our own free inclination; though God gives the inclination beforehand, as by-and-by. If you choose death, you willingly and freely forsake your own mercies.

4. Choice implies a firm and immutable purpose, a resolved adhesion to those things we choose. The mind is not anxious, and doubtful, and hanging between two contraries, when we choose; but fixed and determined. "I have chosen thy precepts;" that is, firmly resolved to observe them. We never choose till we come to a full purpose. He exhorteth them with purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord (Acts xi. 23). A wavering inclination infers no choice: there may be good thoughts and meanings in the soul; but, till we are resolved for God, we do not choose his precepts. Many are convinced of a better way, but their hearts are not engaged to walk in it. We are fixedly determined by our choice: "Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord" (Jer. xxx. 21). He hath sincerely obliged and bound himself to live in a close way of communion with God. The soul begins to pause and consider the vanity of earthly things; there is the first. Yea; and, after this, they are brought on that they say, Certainly it is much better to be a servant of the Lord than to be a servant of sin; and they see that the greatest inconvenience is a more tolerable thing than sin, and all the pleasures and profits of the world will not countervail our duty to God. There is an inclination to the way of God. Ay; but this inclination while it is wavering it may be taken off, till it come to a resolution. Here I will stick, I will seek my happiness and comfort in seeking God: "It is good for me to draw near to God" (Psalm lxxiii. 28); and therefore I am resolved to seek my happiness and contentment, whatever I do.

5. Choice implies a contentment and complacency in that which we have chosen; and the act of the will is quickened by a suitable affection that accompanieth it. Mark, election is properly an act of the will. Ay; but the affections are but the vigorous motions of the will. Where there is a remiss will, that is without affection; but where there is a strong bent in the will, that is always accompanied with some suitable affection. As, if

I have a strong bent and nilling of sin, there is an affection of hatred accompanying it: if I have but a remiss will for holiness, that will never save me. That is made to be one of the seven deadly sins which the schoolmen call listlessness; but where there is a serious will, such a willing as a choosing, certainly there is an affection that accompanieth it. Look, as David, when he had chosen God for his portion, presently he professed his complacency and delight in his choice: "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psalm xvi. 6). Where there is a choosing God for our portion and all-sufficient happiness, there is presently a delight and satisfaction which results from this choice, and the soul is affected with its own felicity in God, and finds a joy and pleasure in choosing him. So it is in choosing the precepts of God, "I have chosen thy precepts;" see the next verse, "Thy law is my delight;" where there is choice, there is delight. A man loves what he chooseth, and is ready and forward to do it; and it is a pleasing thing to serve the Lord, for election in such a weighty case is accompanied with love; it is not an act of a remiss but strong will; and, where there is love, nothing will be grievous (1 John v. 3).

Secondly, To give reasons why we must thus choose the precepts of God. I shall reason,—

1. From the necessity.

2. From the congruity and conveniency.

3. From the utility and profit of it.

1. The necessity of it. It must needs be so, that God's ways must be taken up upon choice, because there are several competitors that bid for the heart of man; where there is but one thing, there is no choice. There is the Devil, by the world, through the flesh, seeks to get in, and reign in your hearts; and there is God, Christ, and the Spirit. Now, there must be a casting out of one and putting in the other. Look, as in Prov. ix., the whole chapter: there wisdom and the foolish woman are brought in pleading, to draw in the heart of unwary man to themselves. Wisdom is pleading, and the foolish woman is pleading. In the beginning of the chapter, Wisdom tells what comfort, what peace they shall have, if they will take her institutions. Wisdom offers solid benefits; but folly offers stolen waters, and bread eaten in secret; some carnal mirth when conscience is asleep. Ay; and the dead are there too. The intoxicating pleasures of this world bring death along with them, when they can choke the sentiments of God that are in his heart. "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither," saith Wisdom; and, "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither," saith Folly; as the poets feign of their Hercules, that Virtue and Vice appeared to him, and the one showed him a rough, and the other a pleasant way. Certainly, as soon as we come to years of discretion, we come to make our choice, either to go on in the ways of death, or to choose the ways of God; either to give up ourselves to the pleasures of sin, or else to seek after the comforts of the Spirit. Now, since there are two competitors for the heart of man, and his love cannot remain idle, it must be given to one or the other. Love and oblectation cannot lie idle in the soul; either it must leak out to the world, or run out to God. There is a necessity of a choice, of renouncing the bewitching vanities of the world, that we may seriously betake ourselves to the service of God.

2. Consider the congruity and conveniency of it, both to the honour of

God and nature of man, that no man should ever be happy or miserable but by his own choice.

(1.) It is not for the honour of God, that a man should be happy, or have such great privileges settled upon him, without his own choice; such great benefits as justification, sanctification, and eternal glory. On the other side, that a man should be miserable without his knowledge, or against his will, or beside his purpose and consent, that God should give eternal death whether men will or no; it is not agreeable to the honour of God, to inflict eternal death upon them without their consent, unless they choose the ways of death; man's heart, else, would have a plea against God. Certainly the wise God will never make any happy without their own consent; and never make any miserable, but their destruction is of themselves (Hos. xiii. 9).

(2.) Neither will it agree with the nature of man, who is a reasonable, rational creature, or any agent capable of election or choice. The brutes are ruled with a rod of iron. God guides all things by his providence; inanimate creatures by mere providence; brutes by their own instinct; and man as a free agent, capable of knowing and prosecuting his chief end. Now, every creature of God is governed according to the nature which is put into it; and therefore, since man is a free agent, God expects in submitting to his service the creature's consent and choice; and, before we can submit to his service, before he will admit us to the benefits, there must be a choice, and an actual will on our parts: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. xxii. 17). The business is brought home to us, and left with our will. If we miss of happiness, it is because we would not choose it, and the way that leads to it. The Lord chargeth it still upon man's will (John v. 40; Luke xix. 14; Matt. xxiii. 37; Psalm lxxxix. 11). Our misery is from our wilfulness. But in all that are brought into grace, there is a will it is true; but God prevents them, and inclines their will: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Psalm cx. 3). You have a grant, and an offer of mercy from God; and then he inclines and moves you to make a right choice. So that of the good and bad it may be said they have their choice. If you neglect and refuse holiness, you choose your own destruction, and neglect life: your hearts must tell you this, Thou hast been the fault of it; as Plutarch brings in one Apollodorus, that dreamed one night that he was boiling in a kettle of scalding lead, and that his heart cried out to him, I have been the cause of all this. This Heathen improves it to show there is a vengeance that attends sinners; I mention it only allusively. Now, it was your own perverse choice and will that made your hell; thou hast but the fruit of thine own choice. Indeed, as to what is good, if you have chosen the precepts of God, there God must have the glory; you must say, Not I, but Christ, as the Apostle. Ay; but there you come in, there is an act of your will, but as disposed and rightly inclined by God. You come both to the duties and privileges of religion by a choice also; though not of yourselves, but of God.

3. Let me reason from the utility and benefit. A man that takes up the ways of God upon choice,—

(1.) He is able to justify the ways of God; for he seeth a reason for what he chooseth. When temptations come strong, there will be many misgiving thoughts. Ay; but then, wisdom should be justified of all her

children (Matt. xi. 19). A blind, accidental love is the fruit of chance; but a love that is grounded upon knowledge and judgment, that is choice; this is so grounded, therefore he seeth reason for what he doth: "I pray God that your love may abound in all wisdom and understanding; that ye may approve things that are excellent" (Phil. i. 9, 10). They see a reason; for they took it upon choice. The Lord hath showed the worth and excellency of his ways; therefore they can better justify God against all their prejudices.

(2.) Such will be more firm and steadfast. The cause of all halting in religion is the want of a choice, of a purpose resolutely set. A wavering, double-minded man, that is half off and half on, will be unstable in all his ways (James i. 8); *διψυχος ἀκατάστατος*, a two-soul-man; a man that seems to have a soul for God, and a soul for earthly things; and the heart hangs sometimes for one, and sometimes for the other. A scoff or scorn, or a little inconveniencce, a little fear, a little enticement or stirring of the rebelling flesh within, will make him turn out of the way; and how can such a one hold out with God, when his way to Heaven is a continual warfare? But, on the other side, a man that is a Christian, and a servant of God by choice, his course is likely according to his choice, because he is fixed upon evidence; he knows he is upon sure ground, and, depending upon God, he will not miscarry. And therefore Joshua, when he would engage the Israelites to continue faithful with God, he draws them on to a choice, and then saith, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve him; and they said, We are witnesses" (Josh. xxiv. 22). It much strengthens the bond, when a man binds himself freely and willingly; and he makes himself the more culpable, and the more inexorable, if he do not observe it.

(3.) They will carry on the work of their heavenly calling with the more ease and delight; because a choice is nothing else but the inclination of the soul guided by reason, strengthened by a purpose, and quickened and actuated by our love. This reason justifies our choice; purpose binds it, makes it firm; but now here comes love, which makes it easy and sweet to do what we have resolved upon. A resolute traveller will go through his journey, and overcome the tediousness of it; his mind is set to finish it, let him have what way or weather he will: so a Christian will overcome his difficulties, when his heart is inclined to this course; it is his own choice, and he will hold to it. It is a hard heart that makes the work hard; but, when the will is engaged, a firm resolution of the will is the life of our affections, and to affection all is easy.

USE I.—To show that they act upon a wrong principle, who are not good, and yet do good out of chance. To this end, I shall show you,—

1. That a man may do good by chance, and not be good.
2. A man may do good by force, and yet not be good.
3. That some do good out of craft and design; but to do good out of choice this only doth discover the truth and sincerity of religion.

1. Some do good by chance. As,—

(1.) The man that taketh up religion by example barely, and tradition; not out of any sound conviction of the truth and worth of it. Thus many are Christians by the chance of their birth in those countries where the name of Christ is professed, and had in honour; and the main reason into which their religion is resolved, is not any excellency in itself, but the custom and tradition of their forefathers: "Our fathers worshipped in

this mountain" (John iv. 20); and, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers" (1 Peter i. 18). It was hard to reclaim them from their inveterate customs; this is the religion in which they have been born and bred. It is true that tradition from father to son is a duty, and a means to bring us to the knowledge of the truth; and that Christianity is such an institution as doth so clearly evidence itself to be of God, and speaketh to us of such necessary and weighty matters, that it cannot but a little rouse and affect the mind of him that receiveth it, however he receiveth it. But most men do but blindly and pertinaciously adhere to it, as that religion wherein they have been born and bred, without any distinct knowledge of the worth of it; so that, if there be any goodness in their Christianity (as their profession is good in itself), they are but good by chance; for, upon the same reasons they are Christians, if they had been born elsewhere, they would have been Mahometans, or idolators.

(2.) Not only these, but also those who stumble upon the profession of religion they know not how, and those who in a pang and sudden motion are all for God and for heavenly things, but this vanisheth into nothing; as fire in straw, which is soon kindled and soon out. This is a free-will pang, not a choice; the heart is not habitually inclined and devoted unto God (John vi. 34): "Let me die the death of the righteous" (Num. xxiii. 10). Such kind of wishing of holiness as a necessary means, there may be, as well as happiness; these are accidentally stirred up in us.

2. Some do good by force. These also are of two sorts; such as are forced by the fear of men, or of God.

(1.) Forced by the fear of men, because they dare not be bad with credit and security; as fear of parents, tutors, and governors: "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest" (2 Chron. xxiv. 2). He did that which was right as to external acts; but, after Jehoiada's death, he revolted from the Lord (2 Chron. xxiv. 17, 18). So, fear of magistrates, as Josiah compelled them to stand to the covenant: therefore, "Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly" (Jer. iii. 10). Fear of the times when set for religion: "Many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them" (Esther viii. 17).

(2.) Forced by the fear of God. A little unwilling service may be extorted from them, by the force of a convinced conscience. There is a slavish kind of religiousness, arising from a fear of punishment, without any love and delight in God. Men may be against God and his ways, when fear only driveth them to them. They do something good, but had rather leave it undone; they avoid some sins, but had rather practise them. By the spirit of bondage they are brought to tender some unwilling service to Christ; and their only motives are fear of wrath, and Hell, and a sight of the curse due to sin. The falseness of this principle appeareth,—

(i.) Because it is most stirring in a time of eminent judgments, when they are sick and likely to die: "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. xxvi. 9); "In the time of their trouble, they will say, Arise, and save us" (Jer. ii. 27). Metal in the furnace is very soft; but take it out, and it returneth to its old hardness. See Psalm lxxviii. 34—37. The sense of present devouring wrath, and the terrors of an angry God, may drive men to some tem-

porary acts of devotion; these proceed only from the natural fear of death, and love of self-preservation. This may put a stand for a while to their former ways of provocation, and incline them to seek God with some diligence in the outward forms of religion; but it produceth no steadfastness in the covenant: as if there had been some weak effect upon them; as if it brought them for a while to some temper of piety; but it was not hearty and durable, but only formal and temporary.

(ii.) Because they take all occasions to enlarge themselves out of the stocks of conscience; and, as soon as their fear is worn off, away go all their religious pangs, and thoughts of the other world, and care about it. How often is this verified by daily experience! Many that were frightened into a course of religion, went on from duty to duty, out of a fear of being damned; but their hearts were another way: but afterwards they cast off all, when they have sinned away these fears; as Herod feared John, and afterwards put him to death (Mark vi. 19, 20). Yea, all the while they did good, they had rather do otherwise if they durst, and therefore did but watch the occasion to fly out.

(iii.) Because men of this frame dispute away duties, rather than practise them; and are quarrelling at those things which the new nature would sufficiently incline them unto, if they had it. In the New Testament, God much trusts love; and the number and length of duties are not stated so exactly, because, where the love of God prevaieth in the heart, men will take all occasions of glorifying God, and edifying themselves; but when men quarrel, How do you prove it to be my duty to do so much, and to give so much? when the duty itself is instituted; love will make God a reasonable allowance, and not stand questioning, How do you prove it to be my duty to pray so often in my family, or in secret, or hear so many sermons? which our constant necessities do loudly call for. Men that have a love to a thing, will take all occasions to enjoy it, or be conversant about it; and a willing heart is liberal and open to God, and is rather disputing the restraint than the command, How do you prove it is *not* my duty? and is loth to be kept back from its delights.

3. Some do good out of craft and design, there is some by-end is the cause; as Jehu was not so much zealous for God, as for his own interests (2 Kings x. 16). And our Lord telleth us of some that made long prayers, to devour widows' houses (Matt. xxiii. 14): made piety a colour and pretext to oppression; and, that they might be trusted, took up a show of great devotion; and of this strain were those that followed Christ for the loaves (John vi. 26); to be fed with a miracle, and to live a life of sloth and ease. God never set any good thing afoot, but some temporal interest grew upon it, with which men were swayed more than with what belongeth to God.

USE II.—Is to persuade you to choose God's precepts; "I have chosen thy precepts," said the man of God. To this end, I shall give you both motives and directions in what manner things are to be attended upon in your choice.

First, For the motives:—

1. Choose them because they are God's, to whom you are indebted for life, being, and all things. Shall we not obey him that made us, and in whom still we live, move, and have our being? We are debtors to him for all that we have, and truly we cannot have a better master. He was angry with his people, that, when the beasts would own their benefactors,

his people would not own him from whom they had all things (Isa. i. 3). The brute-beasts, the dullest of them, the ox and the ass, are willing to serve those that feed them, and pay a kind of gratitude; and shall not we own God? Every day your health, strength, and comforts, come out of his hands; so every night's rest and ease; and, after this, can you sin against God, that keeps you by night and by day?

2. These precepts are all holy, just, and good. What is it the Lord requires of you, but to love him, and serve him, and fear him, and forbear those things which hurt the soul? thus he speaks to Israel (Deut. x. 12). Surely these commands are not unreasonable, nor grievous. You dare not say sin is better, that it is more profitable to please the flesh, and to wallow in and seek after worldly things. Oh! why, then, dost thou not choose God's precepts before the work which Satan would put thee upon? for these precepts commend themselves by their own evidence.

3. In keeping them there is a great deal of benefit.

(1.) For the present, there is a deal of comfort and peace to be found in the ways of God. If there were no reward of Heaven, yet there is such comfort and peace that attends holy living, even as heat from the fire, that certainly this should draw our choice: "Her ways are ways of pleasantness" (Prov. iii. 17); and again, the Prophet tells you, "The fruit of righteousness is peace." A man that doeth evil hath a sting in his conscience, and a wound in his own soul; but every good action is followed with a serenity of mind, and an approbation from the heart of him that doth it. Nay, you shall not only have peace, but joy in the Holy Ghost; for, if you walk in the fear of God, you walk in the comforts of his Spirit (Acts ix. 31). And the kingdom of God stands in righteousness, and peace; ay, and a distinct privilege, joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. xiv. 17). What is the difference between peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost? Peace is a tranquillity of mind resulting from the rectitude of our actions; but this joy is an impression of the comforting Spirit. This joy hath God for its author, he puts it into our hearts; therefore it will more affect us than the bare act of our natural faculties. Peace is an acquittance from conscience; but joy in the Holy Ghost is an acquittance from God, who is our supreme judge, and is the beginning of that endless joy which he hath prepared for them that love him in Heaven.

(2.) For the future and final reward, that is great and glorious indeed. Surely the glory of the everlasting kingdom should invite us to choose God's precepts, whatever it may cost us to keep them; for, in choosing holiness, you choose life; and, in choosing the ways of God, you choose the heavenly inheritance, which is the certain end and issue of them. So, "Whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord; but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me, love death" (Prov. viii. 35, 36). Christians, when you are about choosing, these are the terms propounded to you, and they should be seriously weighed by us, evil and death, good and life; will you choose sin and death, or holiness and life? Are the pleasures of the flesh for a few hours, better than the endless joy of the saints? If you believe Heaven and Hell as you profess to do, why should you stand demurring? Are you content to be thrust out from the presence of the Lord, with the Devil and his angels, into unquenchable flames, for a little contentment here in the world, for a little ease and delight here given to your carnal nature? Is an earthly life, that you cannot long hold, more valuable than an eternal Heaven

which you shall enjoy for ever? No; let us go to Heaven, though we get thither with many pains and sufferings. If you forsake all, not only in vow and purpose, but actually and in deed, yet still you have something better, you shall be no loser in the end; you shall so choose the blessed God, and live with him for evermore, and be filled with his love, as full as you can hold, and be employed in his service; and all this in an eternal perfection and glorified estate.

4. Choose; for you will never have cause to repent of your choice. The Lord stands upon his justification, is very tender of giving his people any cause to repent of his service: "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me" (Micah vi. 3). Pray what hurt hath holiness done you? Who was ever the better for sinning, or who was the worse for holiness? There was none that ever made a carnal choice, but, first or last, they had cause to repent of it; either they repent of it in a kindly manner, while they may mend the matter, or else they shall repent for ever in misery: but who ever repented of his repentance, or cursed the day of his new birth? To whom ever was it any grief of heart that they were acquainted with God and Christ, or the way that leadeth unto life? Who dieth the sweeter death, or who repents of their choice then, the serious or the carnal? Oh! they that have chosen the world, they cry out, how the world hath deceived them; but never any repented of choosing God and the ways of God. Let these things persuade you to choose his precepts.

Secondly, For directions:—

1. In choosing, the object is to be regarded; God's precepts indefinitely, all of them, not one excepted, the smallest as well as the greatest, the troublesome as well as the easy, the most neglected as well as the most observed. We must choose all God's precepts, not abate anything, but especially the main or the essential precepts of Christianity, or the fundamental points of the covenant. Now, the question is, what is the fundamental point of the covenant? Truly that is known by the form of baptism. Baptism is the solemn seal of entering into covenant with God; it is the seal of our initiation, or first entrance into covenant with God. Now, what is it to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? (Matt. xxviii. 19.) When you first choose the ways of God, here you must begin; you must close with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, heartily take them to be your God; that is, you must close with God the Father, as your all-sufficient portion, or chiefest happiness, to be loved above all; and also as your highest Lord, that he may be served, pleased, and obeyed above all. Well, and in the name of the Son, that is, Jesus Christ; he must be taken as your Saviour and Redeemer, to bring you to God, and to reconcile you to him. And to be baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, is this, to take him as your sanctifier, guide, and comforter, to make you a holy people to God, to cleanse your hearts from sin, to write all God's laws upon your hearts, and put them into your minds, and to guide you by the word and ordinances to everlasting life. This is the main thing that is first to be minded, because it contains all, and doth necessarily infer the rest; for, otherwise, to be resolute in some by-point of religion, though it be right, this is but the obstinacy of a faction, not the constancy of a Christian zeal.

2. As you must look to the object of this choice, so to the causes of it;

and what are they? An enlightened mind, a renewed heart, a love to God; and then the Spirit of God enlightening and inclining our hearts.

(1.) An enlightened mind is a cause of choosing the ways of God. When the Lord hath taught us his precepts, an enlightened mind discovers a beauty and amiableness in the ways of God: "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right" (Psalm cxix. 128).

(2.) A renewed heart, wherein all the precepts of God are written over again. They were written upon our hearts in innocency, but that is a blurred manuscript; therefore in regeneration they are written over again. God writes his law in our hearts, and puts them in our inward parts (Heb. viii. 10); and then the law within suits with the law without; for the new creature is created after God in righteousness and true holiness. In true holiness, which relates to the first table of the law; and righteousness, which relates to the second table of the law; the renewed heart that hath this inclination and propension, is carried out to them.

(3.) Love to God; for that is implied in the choice: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John xiv. 21); and he that loveth me, hath my commandments and keeps them. It follows the other way, where there is love to God, there will be choosing of his ways.

(4.) God's Spirit, the Lord enlightening and inclining our hearts to this choice. God enlightens; for he teacheth us the way that we shall choose (Psalm xxv. 12); and, when we see these things in the light of the Spirit, then we see the beauty of them. It holds good as to the path of life, and in particular cases; but chiefly in the main case, God teacheth him the way that he shall choose. And the Spirit of God inclines the heart too, as well as enlightens the mind: "Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit" (1 Peter i. 22).

3. There are the effects of this choice: what are they? delight, diligence, and patience.

(1.) Delight: "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalm xl. 8). When the law is not only written in the book, but written in the heart, then there is a delight, a ready and willing obedience. It is spoken first of Christ; of David it was said in type; it is true also of all believers, for they have the Spirit of Christ, and the same also is expressed of the people of God: "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments" (Psalm cxii. 1). When a man hath chosen the precepts of God, and bound himself in this way, then his heart is taken with a delight.

(2.) Diligence. God's precepts are the great business and employment of our lives; and then there is a constant study to please him: "Filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that ye may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (Col. i. 9, 10). We must do God's will and precepts, that we may order our practice accordingly. There must be an habitual aim and purpose to please God.

(3.) Patience; a resolute continuance till our service be over. This is the way I have chosen, and here will I stick, until the great reward come in hand: "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" (Rom. ii. 7); and, The good ground brought forth fruit with patience (Luke viii. 15). That distinguished the good ground, from all other grounds; they had some little

liking of it, but never came to a serious choice; but the good ground, though there be several weathers between sowing and reaping, it cherisheth the seed, that it is ready at harvest time; so we pass through many weathers before we come to our harvest of happiness and rest.

DOCTRINE II.—That man who makes conscience of God's commands, is encouraged to seek help from him in straits.

First, Such a one may be in great straits; as David, his own hand could not help him, therefore he flies to God. The Lord permits it, that he may be trusted alone in his own hands; he will break our carnal dependences, that his ways may be chosen for their own sakes, and not for temporal reward; and that his love to his own people may not be shown too sensibly, that the mysteriousness of Providence may leave a room and place for faith: therefore doth God darken the glory of the godly with afflictions, and put them into straits, that their own hand cannot help them.

Now, in these straits, those that make conscience of God's precepts, they are encouraged to seek help from God's hand. Why? Partly, because integrity breeds a confidence, so that a man who hath been faithful with God, can look him in the face. It breeds a confidence in life (2 Cor. i. 12), and in death (Isa. xxxviii. 3); when they are sick, weak, and know not what to do, they can fly to God. And then integrity also, it entitles to God's protection all that heartily and sincerely depend upon God: "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely" (Prov. x. 9). An upright, plain-hearted man, that trusts himself under the shadow and protection of God's providence, he hath no shifts and tricks; this man shall walk safely, God is engaged to defend him. But the perverse, that fly to their shifts, God will disappoint them, and show them their folly: "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. xvii. 1). Do you uprightly serve God, and study to please him; and you need not seek elsewhere for a patron, or for one to defend you and plead your cause. And partly, too, because they are exposed to the greater difficulties because they are faithful with God, and trust themselves alone with his protection; for so the Apostle, "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God" (1 Tim. iv. 10). Faith begets faithfulness: their dependence is upon God, and their faithfulness costs them dear; and so they suffer reproach, because they did trust themselves in God's ways by God's providence. As you stand in need of God's protection, you shall have it. God will not forsake us in our greatest needs, as the world will; but in our greatest extremities, when all carnal dependences fail us, he will not; then is the time for God to show himself. He hath still a providence and fatherly care over thee; but his power is especially engaged at such a time. If you will take care of your duty, he will take care of your safety; for he will either keep you out of troubles, or sustain you under troubles.

SERMON CLXXXVII.

VERSE 174.—*I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.*

In this verse, you have a twofold assertion, or protestation:—

First, Of a vehement desire of the salvation promised, "I have longed for thy salvation."

Secondly, A great love and complacency in the word of God, “and thy law is my delight.”

This verse may be understood either of temporal salvation or eternal salvation; the words may be accommodated to either sense. The context would seem to limit it to the former, and so an enforcing of the second request of this portion, “Deliver me according to thy word” (verse 170). Many interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, carry it for the other. Jewish: Rabbi David Kimchi expoundeth it thus, “thy salvation” *seculo futuro*; and the last clause, “thy law” *quia medium est ad salutem*. Christian: Chrysostom, Theodoret, Calvin; and, because these senses are not contrary, but subordinate, I shall insist upon both.

1. Let me handle the words as they may be understood of temporal salvation; and so the sense will be, I have long expected thy deliverance, and yet do desire, and wait for it: the preterperfect tense, as Vatabilus noteth, includeth also the present; for a long time I have expected thy deliverance, and do expect help from thee: and the other clause, “thy law is my delight,” though his help seemeth to be delayed, yet thy counsel is my consolation and perpetual delight. The words, thus understood, yield us two points:—

DOCTRINE I.—That God’s people do look to God for deliverance, and longingly expect the accomplishment of it.

DOCTRINE II.—We should delight in the promise, before the salvation cometh.

For the first point:—

That God’s people do look to God for deliverance, and longingly expect it.

The point shall be discussed in these considerations:—

1. What longing for God’s salvation implieth?
2. The encouragements and reasons of it.
3. What singular thing there is in this longing expectation, since it is natural to all to seek deliverance out of trouble.

1st, What it implieth?

1. A sense of our impotency or insufficiency to save ourselves, and help ourselves out of trouble, by any ways and means that we can find out and use: “Salvation belongeth unto the Lord” (Psalm iii. 8); “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah ii. 9). Salvation and deliverance of all kinds, is God’s prerogative royal, and God’s proper work; none can save and give peace when he commandeth trouble; and, when he will save his people, none can let. It is an evidence of men’s neglecting a deity, when they would help and save themselves in all conditions, without depending or employing a god: “Hast thou an arm like God? Then will I also confess unto thee, that thine own right hand can save thee” (Job xl. 9 and 14). Alas! if we look elsewhere, how soon are we disappointed! Man is a mutable creature; his affections change, or his power may be blasted; an arm of flesh is soon dried up. Besides the distraction and uncertainty that we have while we depend upon man, and look to man, we involve ourselves in greater miseries, and meet with a shameful disappointment at last. Sometimes man will not if he can; sometimes cannot, if he would. If he will and can, yet he shall not help us without God; for what can the instrument do without the principal agent? the sword without the man that wieldeth it? That is one lesson God hath been teaching his people in all ages, that “salvation belongeth unto the Lord;” they must take their

deliverance out of his hands. He sits at the upper end of causes, and saveth his people when he will, and how he will, and by what means he will; and, till he take their cause in hand, how sadly do the most hopeful attempts and expectations miscarry! for to give salvation is a Divine property, given to no creature, and must not be usurped by them. Looking to man is the readiest way to miscarry.

2. It implieth a dependence upon his fatherly care and powerful providence, and a persuasion that he will guide us unto Heaven in a way that is most convenient for us. The great cause of God's anger against his people in the wilderness, was "because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation" (Psalm lxxviii. 22). He had undertaken to bring them into Canaan; but they mistrusted his conduct, either that he had not power enough, or enough fatherly love and care, to do it; and therefore his wrath was kindled against Jacob, and his anger was hot against Israel; and so do they greatly dishonour and provoke God by their distrust, who do not believe that God will bring them out of every strait, in a way most conducing to his own glory and their welfare. Now, God's children are so satisfied in his conduct, that in their worst condition they can cheerfully depend upon God, and look and long for salvation from him: "I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. iii. 18); "My spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour" (Luke i. 47). They are satisfied in his love and power: "But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation" (Psalm xlii. 5).

3. Holy desires vented in prayer; there we express and act our longings. Words are but the body of prayer; but desires are the life and soul of it. The children of God are described once and again, to be such as love his salvation (Psalm xl. 16). Now, there are but two acts of love, desire and delight; the one concerneth the object as future, the other as present, either to faith or to sense: they rejoice in it as present to faith in the promise, as well as when they enjoy it. But the desire we are now upon, this is vented in prayer, there they express their vehement longings for his salvation: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation" (Psalm xxxv. 3). God's saying is doing; he speaketh by his providence; and this is that the saints long for, they plead with him: "I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts" (Psalm cxix. 94).

4. It expresseth waiting God's leisure and submission, for the kind, time, and means of deliverance: "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam. iii. 26). They continue looking and waiting: "Blessed are all they that wait for him" (Isa. xxx. 18). We must wait in the midst of manifold disappointments. When means miscarry, it is in his power to rescue his people from the greatest dangers, and he hath a prerogative to save and deliver those whom reason and probability have condemned, and given over for lost: as the Israelites, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exod. xiv. 13). They were enclosed, the mountains on each side, the Egyptians behind, the sea before; yet what cannot the salvation of God do? There is a holy obstinacy in faith, trusting him in all dangers. Nay, when God himself appeareth as an enemy, cutting off our hope, and hewing and hacking at us, yet we must wait upon him: all strokes come from the hand of God, and no wound given by himself is above his own cure: Jacob, when he fainted, was forced to interrupt his speech, and utter this ejaculation, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord!" (Gen. xlix. 18.) In short, God

bath ways of deliverance more than his people know of; and can save his own, when they count their case desperate: "He that is our God, is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death" (Psalm lxxvii. 20); the escapes from death and imminent destruction.

2ndly, The reasons and encouragements of looking and longing for God's salvation.

1. God hath bound himself by covenant as our God; it is his covenant style, to be the God of our salvation. Psalm lxxviii. 19, 20, in the one verse, he is called "the God of our salvation;" in the other it is said, "He that is our God, is the God of salvation." If he be the God of salvation, he will be the God of our salvation; for whatever God is in himself, that in the covenant he will be to his people. You shall see the blessing of his people is inferred out of his title: "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord; thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah." (Psalm iii. 8.) If God can save, and the salvation be a blessing to his people, he will save them, and deliver them. It is true this title doth mainly concern our eternal salvation; but the conduct of his providence by the way is aimed at in the covenant, as well as our entrance into Heaven at the end of the journey. Promises relating to temporal things, are put into the believer's charter; but the dispensing thereof is left in the hands of their wise and tender father. Now, temporal deliverance being a part of our charter, if it be not always performed, it is not for want of power or truth, but out of wisdom and love. God doth what is most convenient for us; it is in a wise hand: if it be good for me, I shall have it. Now, this is a mighty encouragement to look and long for God's salvation. He shall have the stating of it, for time, means, and kind of deliverance; but we must look for it.

2. We must look to God for deliverance, because he is every way able, and fitted and furnished, to make good his covenant-undertaking. He hath power enough, wisdom enough, and love enough.

(1.) Power enough: "There is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. xiv. 6). The same supported Asa (2 Chron. xiv. 11). The same supported the three children: "Our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace" (Dan. iii. 17). Now, a desire is mightily quickened by this confidence; God hath promised to do what is good, and it is in the power of his hands to do this for us.

(2.) He hath wisdom enough to bring it about in such a way as may be most for his glory: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Peter ii. 9). It is an art he is versed in, how to distinguish between his people and their enemies; to bring it about so as may be most for his glory. What is the usual work of Providence, but to give salvation according to his covenant, in such a way as the beauty of his providence may be seen, the patience and faith of his people may be tried, and yet his enemies reckoned with.

(3.) He hath love enough; God doth concern himself in all our affairs: "We trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (1 Tim. iv. 10). A protector and deliverer; yea, it is said he saveth man and beast (Psalm xxxvi. 6). The object of his providence is very large; all creatures have their being and preservation from him, much more man, much more his children: they are allowed to believe a special providence; and the more they depend upon him, the more is

his care assured to them: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter v. 7). The Lord is free from all passions of care and sorrow; but we shall find no less proof of his keeping off danger, or delivering us from danger, than if we were solicitous for ourselves. Surely our Father is not unmindful of us.

3. Because there is no difficulty that can fall out to check this confidence, which is built upon God's undertaking and sufficiency to make it good.

(1.) Not any danger from men, though of never so dreadful an appearance: "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us" (2 Cor. i. 10). The danger was trouble in Asia, a great danger, pressed above measure and above strength; great trouble was at Ephesus, where the people, in an uproar, were ready to tear him in pieces, so that he received the sentence of death in himself; yet God found a way and means to save, and he came off safe and sound.

(2.) Not any appearance of anger from God himself: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job xiii. 15). Sometimes trouble may represent God as the party dealing with us; yet faith can take him for a friend, when he seemeth to deal like an enemy: and we must resolve to adhere to God, and his ways, and trust his power, with submission to his good will and pleasure, and believe that he hath more respect and care over us than is seen in the present dispensation.

3rdly, It is natural to all to seek deliverance out of troubles: "The captive exile hasteth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit" (Isa. li. 14). How, then, is it any part of grace to long for God's salvation?

I answer, it is proper to the godly to love no deliverance but what God sendeth, by his own means, in his own time, and to wait for it in God's way.

1. There is somewhat of grace in it, that they look for salvation from God alone, as the author, and are resolved to take it out of his hands, whencesoever it cometh. Man naturally would be *αὐτάρκης*, live upon himself, be sufficient to his own happiness; and so they are vexed when they are left upon God, and put upon dependence, and submission and waiting upon him; for they think it little worth to wait upon God as long as any other shift will serve the turn: as Ahaz when troubled with the fear of Rezin and Pekah, and the Prophet assureth him of God's salvation, and biddeth him ask a sign: "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord" (Isa. vii. 11—13). I will not trust the Lord, he meaneth, though he useth that pretence; his expectation was fixed on the friendship of his confederates. If he had asked a sign of God, he must wait for the issue in God's way. Now, Ahaz could not endure to trust God alone; he depended on the Assyrian, and not on God's salvation: he believed nothing the Prophet spake, but counted it vain and frivolous, and was resolved to go another way to work.

2. God's salvation as to the means, not by our shifts; that maketh a breach upon our sincerity: "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. xvii. 1). A man that doth not trust God, cannot be long true to him: you go off from God to the creature, by distrust and unbelief (Heb. iii. 12): this is making more haste than good speed (Isa. xxviii. 16). It plungeth us in sin; it is the greatest hypocrisy that can

be, to pretend respect to God, and shift for ourselves; it is to break prison, to get out of trouble before God letteth us out.

3. In his own time. "Thy salvation," they resolve to wait till he sendeth it. Carnal men, when other means and expectations fail, will seek to God; they are beaten to him; but, if their expectation in waiting upon God be delayed, they wax weary and faint: as that king put on sackcloth for a while (2 Kings vi. 30), afterwards said, "This evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" They give it over as a hopeless service.

4. That, in the height of trouble, they still go to God, and will not cast away their confidence and dependence, come what will come: "In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee" (Isa. xxvi. 8). They still look to him, and, though often disappointed, will seek salvation from no other; they still cleave to God's way: "All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant" (Psalm xlv. 17). They persevere in prayer: "Unto thee have I cried, O Lord; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?" They will not give over, but show their vehement longings after God; whereas wicked and carnal men, when great troubles continue, are driven to despair, and give over all hope.

USE.—In times of trouble, let us look to God, and continue looking all the time that God will exercise our faith and patience; and express our longings and desires of God's salvation in humble and earnest prayer.

1. It is no time to look elsewhere: for God will show us that vain is the help of man, by many disappointments: "I, even I, am the Lord; and besides me there is no saviour" (Isa. xliii. 11). He will break all confidences, till we come to this, He shall be my salvation; as Job resolved, when God brake him with his tempests, and pursued him with his waves, and was ready to slay him as he thought. In all extremities, this should be our fixed ground of faith, that salvation and deliverance are to be expected from God only: "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel" (Jer. iii. 23). God will teach us this lesson ere he hath done with us. Usually, there is no serious dealing with God, till we find the vanity and inability of all other dependences: looking to the hills and mountains, strength of situation, forces, all these will fail us.

5. It is no time to dally with God and his service any longer; for, when troubles come close and near, the spirit of prayer should be revived; and what was cursorily sought at other times, should now be sought with some vehemency and longings in prayer: "And ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart; to give you an expected end" (Jer. xxix. 11, 12). We do not stir up ourselves to take hold of him. "Oh! that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!" (Psalm xiv. 7.) There should be a longing; we should not content ourselves with a few dead and drowsy prayers.

3. Salvation may be comfortably expected from God; for, as necessity enforceth these longings, so hope quickeneth them. Now, it may be expected, for he is "mighty to save" (Isa. lxiii. 1); he is willing to save a distressed people: "I looked, and there was none to help, &c.; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me" (verse 5). God struck in for

the deliverance and help of his people; when all human help failed, he did the work alone himself. Once more, when he meaneth to save, he covereth himself with frowns and anger, as if he meant to destroy: "Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour" (Isa. xlv. 15). He seemeth to hide and stand aloof from his people in their afflictions, and carrieth himself so closely and covertly in the passages of his providence, that his people know not what he meaneth to do. What is our work, then, but to keep longing and waiting and looking to God's hands, till he have mercy upon us?

DOCTRINE II.—That we should delight in the promise, before the salvation cometh.

So doth David say here, "Thy law is my delight;" that is, whilst he was longing for God's salvation; and by law is meant God's word in the general; the promise is included in it, as well as the precept.

1st, A believer should not be comfortless in his troubles: "Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John xiv. 1). Immoderate sorrow for temporal evils, will not become one that hath an interest in God and Christ. Whatever falls out in the world, God is the same still, and the covenant is the same; and our better part and our happiness is above the reach of trouble. There is a long-suffering with joyfulness.

2ndly, All our delight and solace must not arise from the delights of sense, but out of the word of God. It is good to see what is our solace and support in troubles; for the man is as his solace is: "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" (Psalm xciv. 19). How do we ease ourselves in our perplexities and griefs? is it with God's comforts? Now, God's comforts are Gospel comforts: the comforts we have from the word, they will make us more love the word and trust more upon God's word, and the more confidently expect the performance of it.

3. The promises should support us upon a twofold account; partly, because they are good; and partly, because they are sure.

(1.) They are good, there is a fulness in God's allowance, that suiteth with all our cases: "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psalm lxxxiv. 11). So, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. iv. 8). Heaven and earth are laid at the feet of it. A man cannot desire a greater cordial, than necessary provisions for this and the future life: "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart" (Psalm cxix. 111). The promises of the world to come should swallow up all our present grief; for there is more in Heaven than can be taken from us in the creature: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. iv. 17); and, "And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that in Heaven ye have a better and an enduring substance" (Heb. x. 34). We have a treasure and a happiness elsewhere, which cannot be infringed by the afflictions we endure in this world. We do not lose much if we get eternal salvation in the issue; and, so we get to Heaven, no matter how dark soever our passage be. Then, for the promises of this life, they suit with all our troubles, wants, dangers, breaches, and distresses. But what confidence

can we have of these temporal deliverances or mercies? Answer: Either we shall have the mercies themselves, or God will order providences so as it may be good for us to want them, and have something better given in lieu of them (Rom. viii. 28). We know he will not leave us wholly destitute (Heb. xiii. 5), nor bring upon us insupportable difficulties (1 Cor. x. 13); and this should be enough for us, to maintain us in life and comfort.

(2.) They are sure as well as good.

1. As promises. A promise is more than a purpose; for it is a purpose not as conceived in the mind of a man, but declared to another to invite hope. It is more than a doctrine: a doctrine giveth notice of privileges; but a promise giveth us an interest in them. It is more than a revelation or a prophecy: Scripture prophecies will be fulfilled, because of God's veracity; but Scripture promises, not only because of God's veracity, but also his fidelity and justice. There is a kind of righteousness in making good promises, because we give another a right and claim to the things promised by the promises we make to him. A promissory lie is worse than an assertory lie; a promise gives us a holdfast upon God: *promittendo se fecit debitorem*.

2. As the promises of God, who cannot lie and deceive the creatures: "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation" (Heb. vi. 18). And therefore by acting faith on these declarations of his will we may have the accomplishment of them. None that ever depended on God's word, were disappointed: "The word of the Lord is tried" (Psalm xviii. 30): God was never yet found worse than his word; he hath been tender of the credit of his word: "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psalm cxxxviii. 2). Heathens have acknowledged that God hath never so much showed himself in the world, as in these two things, ἀληθεύειν ἢ ἐνεργεῖν, in doing good and keeping promise. Above all that is named and famed of God, this is most conspicuous.

USE.—Is to exhort us all in our straits, dangers, and troubles, to be contented with his word, and to delight in the promise, as if it were performed. I shall here show you how we are to carry ourselves towards the promises.

1. You must rest confident of the truth of what God hath promised, and be assured that in time the performance will come to pass, as if you saw it with your eyes. Heb. xi. 13, they were "persuaded" of these things. This is the "assurance of faith" spoken of Heb. x. 22. I know I shall find this to be a truth. Men are conscionable and faithful in keeping their word; much more God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

2. You are to delight in the promise, though the performance be not yet, nor likely to be for a good while; neither performed, nor likely to be performed. Heb. xi. 13, they saw them afar off; and yet, being persuaded of these things, they embraced them. And, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it, and was glad" (John viii. 56). You hold the blessing by the root, where you have the promise (Heb. vi. 18).

3. You are to take the naked promise for a ground of your hope, however it seem to be contradicted in the course of his providence: it is his word you are to go by, and stand by, and according to which you must interpret all his dispensations. It is said, that Abraham believed in hope against hope (Rom iv. 18). When faith dependeth upon God's naked

word, then it standeth upon its own basis and proper legs. Everything is strongest in its props and pillars which God and nature hath appointed for it. He hangeth the earth upon nothing, in the midst of the air; but there is its place. So faith standeth fast upon his word, who is able to perform what he saith.

4. This faith must conquer our fears, and cares, and troubles: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord" (Psalm cxii. 7). And, "In God I will praise his word; in God have I put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me" (Psalm lvi. 4). The force of faith is seen in calming our passions and sinful fears; or else it is but a notion, and our reverence and respect to God will be weakened by it.

5. When faith hath done its work in the quieting of our own hearts, you must glorify God in your carriage before others: "Set to his seal that God is true" (John iii. 33); that is, when we confirm others in the faith and belief of the promises, by our joyfulness in all conditions, patience and contentedness under the cross, diligence in holiness, hope and comfort in great straits. You shall see, that God was angry with Moses and Aaron, because they believed not, to sanctify him in the eyes of the children of Israel (Num. xx. 12). We are not only to believe in God ourselves, but to sanctify him in the eyes of others; as the Thessalonians, by receiving the word in much affliction, much assurance, and joy in the Holy Ghost, were examples to all that believed in Achaia (1 Thess. i. 5—7). Thus we should do; but how few do thus believe? Some count these vain words; and the comforts thence deduced, fanatical illusions, or fanatical impressions; nothing so ridiculous in the world's eye, as trust and dependence on unseen comforts: "He trusted in the Lord, that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him" (Psalm xxii. 1). Ungodly wits make the life of faith a sport, or matter of laughter. Some have more modesty, but as little faith; they are all for the present world, present delights please them, but present temptations altogether unsettle them (1 Tim. vi. 9); cannot bear present smart, nor despise the present world (Heb. xii. 11); anything in hand is more than the greatest promise of better things to come (Rom. viii. 19): they do not deal equally with God and man. If man promise, they reckon much of that, but cannot tarry upon God's security, count his promise little worth. They can trade with the factor beyond sea, and trust all their estate in a man's hand whom they have never seen; and yet the word of the infallible God is of little respect with them. The best build too weakly upon the promise, as appeareth by the prevalency of our cares and fears. If you did take God at his word, you would not be so soon mated with every difficulty; there would be more resolution in trials, more hardiness against troubles (Heb. xii. 4—6). A man may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me." If we had faith to believe it, it would more effectually quiet our hearts and minds in all our straits, necessities, and perplexities; it would calm our desires and fears. We should not desire the best things of the world, nor fear the worst.

SERMON CLXXXVIII.

VERSE 174.—*I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.*

We now come to the second acceptance of the word “salvation,” as it implieth eternal salvation; and so the points are two:—

DOCTRINE I.—That we should vehemently long, and earnestly wait, for eternal life.

DOCTRINE II.—That we should not only long for salvation, but delight in the way which leadeth us to it.

For the first point, that longing for salvation is the duty and property of God’s children.

The reasons are taken from,—

1. The object of these desires.
2. The subject of these desires.
3. The use of these desires.
4. The state and condition of the present world.

1st, The object. The object of desire is good, considered as absent and not yet obtained good. All desire that it should be well with themselves. This desire is confused and general, not the hundredth part longeth after the true good: “Who will show us any good?” (Psalm iv. 6.) Some are carried by ambition, others by covetousness, others by sensuality: “All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John ii. 16); and, “All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way” (Isa. liii. 6). As the channel is cut, so corrupt nature finds a vent. But now, God’s salvation is the true good, and ought to be desired, and will be desired, by all his children. It importeth a freedom from all misery, and an enjoyment of all good. There sin and sorrow shall be no more, and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes (Rev. xxi. 4). The blessed spirits above have none of our cares, and fears, and sorrows: we are sighing, and they are praising; we sinning, and they pleasing God; we full of infirmities, and they are perfect and without blemish, and in the full enjoyment of all good: “In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm xvi. 11); “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psalm xvii. 15). Alas! the preparations to this estate in the world, are far above the vain delights of the flesh, much more the pleasures there; these the soul longeth for. Though they are thankful for refreshment by the way, yet they long to be at home.

2ndly, The second reason is taken from the subject of these desires; and there we have,—

1. The suitableness.
2. The experience.
3. Our pressures.

1. The suitableness. They are suited to this happiness, wrought for this very thing (2 Cor. v. 5). Everything hath a propension to the place for which God framed it: it is the wisdom of God to put all things in their proper places, as every creature is placed in that element which is suitable, and answerable to its composition and frame; as fishes in water, fowls in the air. God’s children are framed for this very thing; therefore have an

inclination and a tendency thither. As Heaven is prepared for them, so in some measure they for it: "Afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. ix. 23); and, "Made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. i. 12). They grow more dead every day to the interests and concerns of the animal life, and have a greater agreeableness to this happiness.

2. Experience: "Ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption; to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. viii. 23). A Christian here is unsatisfied, and longeth for a better and purer state of bliss and immortality, light, life, peace, joy. One drachm of grace is more precious than all the world; but yet it setteth them a longing for more. The first fruits show us what the harvest will be, and a taste what the feast will prove. Here we get a little knowledge of God, a sight of him in the ordinances, a twilight discovery of Christ, a look through the lattice (Cant. ii. 9), a little glance of his face. When neither doth he let the believers in to him, nor doth he come out to them, this glance maketh them long for more. So that, in effect, they send up the same message to Christ, which his mother and brethren did because of the press; "Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee." Tell him, thou standest here without, but desirest to see him. So for the communion we have with Christ, it is but a taste: "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter ii. 3); but that taste is very ravishing and delightful. Here we get a little from him in an ordinance; but that little is as much as we can hold; but there he is all in all: here our holiness is not perfect, the seed of God remaineth in us; but there it groweth up to perfection, as every spark of fire tendeth to the element of fire.

3. Our pressures and the miseries of the present life: "Groan, being burdened" (2 Cor. v. 4). We are pressed under a heavy weight, burdened both with sin and misery; and both set us a groaning, and a longing, as men in a tempest would fain be set ashore as soon as they can.

(1.) Sin, to a waking conscience and a tender, gracious heart, is one of the greatest burdens that can be felt: "Oh! wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 24.) If any had cause to complain of afflictions, Paul much more: he was whipped, imprisoned, stoned, in perils by land and sea; but afflictions did not sit so close to him as sins; the body of death was his greatest burden, and therefore did he long for deliverance. If others go away silently under their load, the children of God cannot; as light and love increase, so sin groweth a greater burden to us. They cannot get rid of this cursed inmate, and therefore are longing for their final estate, when sin shall gasp its last. They long for the parting day, when, by putting off the flesh, they shall put off sin, and dwell with God.

(2.) Miseries. The children of God have not divested themselves of the feelings of nature, are not grown senseless as stocks and stones. The Apostle telleth us, that the whole creation groaneth, because it is under misery and vanity (Rom. viii. 20—22). It is a groaning world, and God's children bear a part of the concert; they groan, and desire earnestly their full deliverance: "Few and evil are the days of the years of my pilgrimage," said holy Jacob (Gen. xlvii. 9). Our days are evil; therefore it is well they are but few; that, in this shipwreck of man's felicity, we can see banks, and shores, and a landing-place, where we may be safe. Here is

our travail; but there is our repose: we should sleep too much here, and take up our rest, if sometimes we did not meet with thorns in our bed.

3rdly, The end and life of this longing and desiring.

1. It is an earnest desire; it maketh us industrious and stirreth up, and keepeth up our endeavours after another world: "For our conversation is in Heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. iii. 20, 21). Where there is a lively expectation, there men drive on a trade for another country. Desire is the vigorous bent of the soul, and so beareth us out under all the difficulties of obedience. If we do not desire, we shall not labour, nor seek it in the first place; and, if our desires be weak and feeble, they are controlled by every lust, abated upon every difficulty. Whatever gets your heart, that will command your endeavours; for, as a man's desire is, so is he.

2. To make us constant, notwithstanding troubles, reproaches, persecutions: "The violent take it by force" (Matt. xi. 12). They will have no nay; they must have it, whatever it cost them: though sore troubles and persecutions, yet, if we may get Heaven and glory at last, it is enough. But, where a thing is coldly and carelessly desired, everything puts us out of the humour.

4thly, The state and condition of the present world. It is called, "This present evil world" (Gal. i. 4). The pleasures of it are mere dreams and shadows; and the evils of it are many and real. God's children are pilgrims here, and hardly get leave to pass through; as Israel could not get leave to pass through Edom. Sometimes they meet with such bitter and grievous persecutions as make them weary of their lives; as Elijah requested for himself, that he might die; or as the spirits of the Israelites were filled with anguish, because of their hard taskmasters. God will give his people rest hereafter; but, before the rest cometh, they are sorely troubled: "And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. i. 6, 7). Nay, the company that we go with to Heaven, are apt to fall out by the way, and to deal perversely one with another; unministering, unchurched, unchristianing one another, impaling, enclosing the common salvation, and justling one another out of the way to Heaven: so that the church, which should be terrible like an army with banners, marching to Heaven in order, in one whole body, is like an army in rout; and most are forced to get home in straggling parties. Now, every tender soul should long for God's salvation, to get up to that counsel of souls, who, with perfect harmony, are lauding and praising God for evermore (Heb. xii. 23).

USE I.—Is to reprove them that are loth to leave this woeful life, and do not long and prepare for a better. God driveth us out of the world, as he did Lot out of Sodom; yet we are loth to depart: as if it were better to be miserable apart from God and Christ, than happy with them. Surely they are far from the spirit of true Christians, who would live always here are at home in the world, and cannot endure to think of a remove. There are two causes of this.

1. An unmortified heart.

2. An unsettled conscience.

1. An unmortified heart. They are not yet weaned from the world; their hearts are set upon satisfying the vile lusts of the body; carry it as if their portion lay in this world (Psalm xv. 14). Sucking yet upon the world's dug, they have no longing nor desire for that happiness and glory which God hath provided for them that love him; they desire no other portion than what they have in hand.

2. And the other cause is an unsettled conscience. Some fear the state of the other world, rather than desire it and long for it. There are two degrees, not knowing for certain it shall go well with us, and not knowing for certain but that it shall go ill with us; both suppress this desire, especially the latter.

USE II.—Is to rouse up our languid and cold affections, that they may more earnestly be carried out after heavenly things: that we may seek after them with more fervency, and constancy, and self-denial.

The motives to press us are these:—

1. God giveth Heaven to none but those that look and long for it. Men may go to Hell against their wills; but none go to Heaven against their wills. In a punishment, there is a force offered to us, but not in a reward. We suffer what we would not, as Christ saith to Peter, Another shall guide thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not (John xxi. 18); but happiness must be embraced, pursued, and sought after. Well then, let the concerns of the other world more take up our hearts and minds; and stand as at Heaven's gate, expecting when God will open the door and call you in. Christ will appear to them that look for him (Heb. ix. 28).

2. The children of God long to see God in his ordinances: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple" (Psalm xxvii. 4); and, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm xlii. 2.) "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary" (Psalm lxiii. 1, 2). Now, if there be so great and longing a desire to see the glory of the Lord in a glass, wherein so little of his glory is seen with any comfort and satisfaction, how much more to see him immediately, face to face! If a glimpse be so comfortable, what will the immediate vision of God then be? Surely, if this be salvation, every one of us should long for this salvation.

3. If it be not worth our desire, it is little worth. The estate being so excellent, such a complete redemption from all our troubles, so perfect, and so full a happiness in body and soul, will not you send a groan, or a hearty act of volition, after it? It is great ingratitude, that, when Christ hath procured a great state of blessedness for us at a very dear rate, we should value it no more. He procured it by a life of labour and sorrow, and the pangs of a bitter, cursed death; and, when all is done, we little regard it. Surely, if we choose it for our happiness, there will be longing and looking for it. No man will fly from his own happiness; a man's heart will be where his treasure is (Matt. vi. 21). If you prize it, you will sigh and groan after it. The Apostle expresseth "a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. i. 23); *πολλῶ μαλλόν*. If you count it better to be there than elsewhere, you will be desiring to

be there, and longing to be there; for we are always longing for that which is better, chiefly for that which is best of all. There is the best estate, the best work, the best company; all is better: if you count it so, it will be no difficult thing to bring you earnestly to desire it.

4. All the ordinances serve to stir up this longing after Heaven, and to awaken these desires in us. The word is our charter for Heaven, or God's testament wherein this rich legacy is bequeathed to us; that every time we read it, or hear it, or meditate upon it, we may get a step higher, and our hearts more drawn out after heavenly things. In prayer, whether in company or alone, it is but to raise and act these heavenly desires; there we groan, and long for God's salvation. In the Lord's Supper, we come solemnly to put ourselves in mind of the new wine we shall drink in our Father's kingdom (Matt. xxvi. 29), to put a new, heavenly relish upon our hearts.

5. The imperfection of our present estate. We are now imperfect, and straitened; like a fish in a pail, or small vessel of water, which cannot keep it alive: it would fain be in the ocean, or swimming in the broad and large rivers. So we are pent up, cannot do what we would; there is a larger estate, when filled up with all the fulness of God: that holiness we have now, maketh us look for it, and long for it; and surely holiness was never designed for our torment.

6. We are hastening into the other world apace; and therefore we more desire it. Natural motion is *in principio tardior, in fine velocior*; the nearer to fruition, the more impatient of the want of it. When a man is drawing home after a long journey, every mile is as tedious as two. We are drawing nigh to the other world; let us leave this willingly, not by force; let not trouble chase us out of it, but love and desire draw us out of it. God doth loosen our roots by little and little, that we may now be fit for a remove: the pins of our tabernacle are taken down insensibly, and by leisurely degrees. Now, as fast as we are going out of this world, we should be going into another; the inner man renewed day by day; that is, as it groweth more holy and heavenly. From our first renovation, we should be dying to this world, and settle our affections on a better: much more when God beginneth to call us home, then draw home as fast as you can.

For means to this desire and longing, there is necessary,—

1. A sound belief of this blessed estate, or a certain confidence of the truth of it: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from Heaven" (2 Cor. v. 1, 2). Not a bare conjecture, but a certain knowledge. Surely Heaven is amiable, and the object of our desires; if we be persuaded of the truth of it, we shall long after it.

2. A serious preparation for it: "If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked" (2 Cor. v. 3). They have made up their accounts between God and their souls, sued out their pardon, stand with their loins girt and their lamps burning; then they long and wait when God will draw aside the veil of flesh, and show them his glory. A seafaring man desireth his port, especially if laden with rich commodities: where there hath been diligent preparing, there will be serious waiting and desirous expectation. While we make provision for our fleshly appetites and wills, we dream of dwelling here; we take it for granted they have no thought of removing

to another place, who make no provision before their coming thither. When a tenant hath warning to be turned out of his old house, he will be providing another, and be preparing and making it ready, before he enter upon it.

We now come to the second clause, "thy law is my delight."

DOCTRINE II.—That we should not only long for salvation, but delight in the way which leadeth to it.

Here I shall speak to two things:—

1. That we must take the way that leadeth to it.

2. That we must delight in the way.

First, That we must take the way that leadeth to it.

1st, Partly because of the nature of God's covenant, which is conditional. There is in it *ratio dati et accepti*; something required, and something promised: "For thus saith the Lord, Unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant" (Isa. lvi. 4); "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. x. 22); "And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he took the book of the covenant and read in the audience of the people; and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Exod. xxiv. 4). Surely, in the covenant of grace, God requireth conditions; it is not made up all of promises. Now, a condition is this, when one promiseth any good, or threateneth any ill, not simply, but upon covenant: if the thing required be performed, or the thing forbidden be committed, the performance of the thing required is the condition of the promise; the doing a thing forbidden, the condition of the threatening: "And all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee. And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel" (1 Sam. xi. 1, 2); and, "While the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace" (Luke xiv. 32). Now, these conditions are twofold; making covenant, and keeping covenant.

1. The conditions as to making the covenant arise from the law of grace, or the *lex remediens*, faith and repentance. Faith performed or omitted: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John iii. 36). So repentance performed: "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin" (Ezek. xviii. 30); omitted: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke xiii. 5).

2. Then conditions of keeping covenant, which is conformity to the law of God, or new obedience performed: "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psalm lxxxiv. 11); omitted: "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. xii. 14). Well then, upon the whole we thus judge, that it is not enough to desire God's salvation, but we must also delight in his law: that is to say, we must repent and believe, and so begin our acquaintance with God in Christ; and we must also walk in the ways of God's precepts, if we mean at length to be saved,

and to enjoy the vision of the blessed God. That which is propounded conditionally, we must not presume on absolutely, and so make reckoning to go to Heaven as in some whirlwind, or as passengers at sea are brought into the harbour sleeping, or to be crowned without striving.

2ndly, From the nature of this longing and desire, which must be regular and according to the tenour of the covenant of holiness as well as happiness; and it must be strong, so as to overmaster contrary difficulties, lusts, and desires. Let us instance in Balaam: he said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his" (Num. xxiii. 10). He saw that the state of a righteous man, at the end of it, is a blessed estate; and this he longed for. But there was a double defect in his desire: it was not regular. Balaam desired to be saved; but he did not delight in God's law. He would be at the journey's end; but was loth to take the way: there was a complacency and well-pleasèdness in the end, but a refusing of the means. Again, this desire was but a flash, a sudden motion, occasioned by contemplation of the blessedness of God's people, but no operative, transforming desire; a desire which the love of the wages of unrighteousness prevailed over. All men will long for salvation; but all men will not take a right course to obtain it: and so it is a wish rather than a desire, if we long for salvation, but have not a heart to use the means appointed thereunto. Where there is a true longing, there will be a using the means, and a using the means with delight. They that will not submit to these conditions, or snuff at these conditions as troublesome, they do not long for his salvation, nor delight in his law.

Secondly, That we must delight in the way that leadeth to glory; but, this argument being handled in other verses of this psalm, it is omitted here.

SERMON CLXXXIX.

VERSE 175.—*Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.*

This verse containeth three things:—

1. David's petition for life, "Let my soul live."
2. His argument from the end, "And it shall praise thee."
3. The ground of his hope and confidence, "And let thy judgments help me."

1st, David's petition for life; "Let my soul live." My soul; that is, myself: the soul is put for the whole man. The contrary; "Let me die with the Philistines," said Sampson (Judg. xvi. 30); Hebrew, margin, "Let my soul die." His life was sought after by the cruelty of his enemies; and he desireth God to keep him alive.

2ndly, His argument from the end; "And it shall praise thee." The glorifying of God was his aim. The fruit of all God's benefits is to profit us, and praise God. Now, David professeth that all the days of his life he should live in the sense and acknowledgment of such a benefit.

3rdly, The ground of his hope and confidence in the last clause; "And let thy judgments help me." Our hopes of help are grounded on God's judgments, whereby is meant his word. There are judgments decreed, and judgments executed; doctrinal judgments, and providential judgments. That place intimateth the distinction: "Because sentence against

an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. viii. 11). There is *sententia lata et dilata*. Here God's judgments are put for the sentence pronounced; and chiefly for one part of them, the promises of grace. As also, "I have hoped in thy judgments" (Psalm cxix. 43). Promises are the objects of hope.

The points are two:—

DOCTRINE I.—That we may beg the continuation of life, for the honouring of God.

DOCTRINE II.—That God's judgments are a great help and relief to his people, who desire to praise him even when they are in danger of their lives.

For the first,—

That we may beg the continuation of life, for the honouring of God.

This point must be divided into two parts.

1. That the principal end for which a man should live and desire life, is to praise and glorify God.

2. That we may desire life upon these ends.

1st, That the principal end for which a man should live and desire life, is to praise and glorify God. This appeareth,—

1. By direct Scriptures: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for, whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and, whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. xiv. 7, 8); and, "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. i. 20, 21).

2. By the prayers of the saints: as, "Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live," &c. (Psalm cxix. 17), and, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord" (Psalm cxviii. 17). This was David's hope in the prolongation of life, that he should have further opportunities to honour God. But of this more at large on verse 17 of this psalm.

3. By the arguments urged in prayer: "For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?" (Psalm vi. 5); and, "What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?" (Psalm xxx. 9.) "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise, and praise thee? Selah. Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" (Psalm lxxxviii. 10—12); and, "For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit, cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee," &c. (Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19.) A man may praise God in Heaven; but from their bodies no service is performed for a long while in the other world; there is no such service there as here; as reducing the stray, instructing the ignorant, propagating godliness to others who want it, by our counsels and example.

4. By reasons.

(1.) Life is given us by God at first: "He giveth to all, life, and breath, and all things" (Acts xvii. 25); and, "In him we live, and move, and

have our being" (verse 28). Now, all things that come from God, must be used for him: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things," &c. (Rom. xi. 36); angels, men, beasts, inanimate creatures. He expecteth more from men, than from beasts; and from saints, than from men. Life was given for this end, and therefore not to be desired and loved but for this end, even God's glory. How grievous a thing is it to go out of the world, ere we know why we came into the world! We live, not barely to eat and drink, as brute beasts live; we live, not to live as Heathens: the end of our life is service and obedience to God; yea, and it is the life of our lives, the perfection of them. Well then, since we live by God, we must live to him.

(2.) It is preserved by him. It is God's prerogative to kill and make alive, to wound and to heal (Deut. xxxii. 39). Our life dependeth wholly on him. It is said Job xii. 10, "In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind." God hath a dominion over all his creatures, over every living thing, and man in especial, to dispose of them according to his pleasure; not a hair of our heads can fall to the ground without him (Matt. x. 29, 30). Our life is wholly in his hands; we cannot add one cubit to our stature, make one hair white or black, at our pleasure. Life cannot be taken away without him, how casual soever the stroke is: "If a man lie not in wait [for his brother], but God deliver him into his hand," &c. (Exod. xxi. 13.) Well then, in all reason we should serve and glorify him, who by his providential influence continueth life to us every moment: "That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him; for he is thy life, and the length of thy days" (Deut. xxx. 20). It is a charge against Belshazzar, "God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (Dan. v. 23). We must not look upon ourselves as made for ourselves, but for God; he gave us life, and keepeth it, that we may be wholly at his disposing. While we have it, we must have it for God, that he may be glorified in the use of it, and, when he cometh to take it away, he may be glorified by our submitting to his dominion. It is a presumption and encroachment on God's right, to seek satisfaction to ourselves in any state, without a subordination and subserviency to his glory. He that giveth and preserveth life, may dispose of it at his pleasure; and our life, so continually preserved by him, ought to be devoted to him.

(3.) When he preserveth it in any eminent danger, it is twice given. I say, in such preservations our life is twice received from God; in our birth, and as spared in the danger; and therefore, in all justice, it ought to be dedicated to his service: "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us" (2 Cor. i. 9, 10). Many times there is but a step between us and death, as if God were putting the old bond in suit, and executing the sentence of the law upon us: deliverance, in such a case, is called a pardon and remission; and even in the case of the wicked and impenitent: "He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not" (Psalm lxxviii. 38). It was but properly a reprieve for the time, a forbearance of the temporal judgment, not executing the sentence, or not destroying the sinner presently; much more to a godly man: "Thou hast, in love to my soul, delived it from the pit

of corruption" (Isa. xxxviii. 17). To be loved out of a danger, and loved out of a sickness, that is a blessed thing, a great obligation upon us.

(4.) We must surrender our life to him again; and therefore, while we have it, we must employ it for him (Luke xix. 23). Into his hands we must resign our spirits; every one must give an account of himself to God, what honour he hath by our lives.

(5.) We shall never glorify him in Heaven, unless we glorify God on earth first, or carefully serve him: "I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John xvii. 4, 5). Here is our trial, our present service; saints above are *ἔξωκελαῖ*. That is our reward, to glorify God in Heaven.

2ndly, That we may desire life upon these ends; as, "Oh! spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more" (Psalm xxxix. 13); a little time of relaxation, to serve and glorify thee ere I die.

1. Long life is in itself a blessing taken into the promises, though more frequently in the Old Testament than in the New. Of this, see more at large on verse 17.

2. It is well sought, when this is our scope; for then the request is lawful both for matter and end: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James iv. 3). Life should not be loved, but for further glorifying of God; for all our natural interests must be subordinate to our great end.

Well then, we may lawfully pray for long life with submission to the will of God, and that death may not come upon us suddenly, but according to the ordinary course of nature.

But how will this stand with the desire of dissolution, and willingness to depart and to be with Christ, which certainly all Christians that believe eternity, should cherish in their hearts?

To this I answer,—

1. By concession.
2. By correction.

1st, By concession. It is true, we are to train up ourselves in an expectation of our dissolution, &c. See verse 17 more fully. But,—

2ndly, By correction. Though it be expedient to desire death, yet we are not anxiously to long after it, till the time come. For,—

1. They do not simply desire death for itself, but as a means to enjoy those better things which follow after death: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. i. 23). It is not our duty to love death as death. No; so it is an evil which we must patiently bear, and may holily deprecate it; but, because of the good beyond it, it is our duty to love God, to long after communion with him, and to be perfected in holiness: had it not been an evil to be avoided and dreaded, Christ had never prayed against it. And, "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. v. 4). It were an unnatural desire to desire death as death. A creature cannot desire its own destruction; Jesus Christ, before he manifested his submission, did first manifest the innocent desires of nature: "Father, let this cup pass from me." The separation of the soul from the body, and the body's remaining under corruption, is in itself evil, and the fruit of sin: "And so death passed upon all men;

for that all have sinned" (Rom. v. 12). Grace is not given to reconcile us to corruption, or to make death, as death, desirable, or to cross the inclinations of innocent nature. But,—

2. Upon these terms, death is sweetened to them, and they readily submit to it. Though it be not to be desired, as it is death; yet Heaven and eternal happiness beyond it is still matter of desire to us. Death is God's threatening; and we are not threatened with benefits, but evils; and evils of punishment are not to be desired, but cheerfully submitted unto for a higher end. Nature abhorreth and feareth death; but yet grace desireth glory. The soul is loth to part with the body; but yet it is far lother to miss Christ, and be without him. A man is loth to lose a leg or an arm; yet, to preserve the whole body, he is contented to part with it. In short, the soul is bound to the body, with a double band; the one natural, the other voluntary, by love and affection, desiring and seeking its welfare. The voluntary bond is governed and ordered by religion, till the natural bond be loosed, either in the ordinary course of nature, or at the will of God.

3. There are certain circumstances in death, which do invite us to ask longer life in order to this end; as,—

(1.) God's children would not have the occasion of well-doing, or self-denying obedience, taken from them too soon; so great is their love and desire of gratitude to God, that they would yet longer praise God in this self-denying way. Death would shut their mouths.

(2.) They would not be taken away in a cloud, or before they see the issue of some present trials on the church or them; they have no will to die till the sense of wrath be removed: "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Psalm xxvii. 13).

(3.) They may have some design afoot for God, and therefore are desirous of a little more time to attain this design; therefore pray to God to prolong their lives a while: "Now, I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea, and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints, that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed" (Rom. xv. 30—32).

(4.) To breed up their children in the nurture of the Lord, and that they may be useful in their families, as Jacob desired to see Joseph.

(5.) We may beg it, that we may not fall into the hands of men, lose our life by murderers: "My times are in thy hand; deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me" (Psalm xxxi. 15). The dispensation of all mercies, comforts, troubles, life, death, are in God's hand, not in man's power: therefore we pray that it may rest there; that we may not be given up to the will of those that hate us.

All these desires have a respect to the glory of God; and, if conceived with submission and trust, that God will do what is for the best, they are all lawful.

USE I.—Exhortation. It presseth you,—

1. To consecrate yourselves to God: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. xii. 1). Under the law, the bodies of beasts were to be slain; yours is

living sacrifice. Both were set apart for God; the one to die, the other to live, to God.

2. Having given up yourselves to God, use yourselves for God; there will be an inquiry what share God hath in your time: "God, whose I am, and whom I serve" (Acts xxvii. 23).

3. Praise the Lord, with heart, mouth, and life. A Christian's conversation is nothing but a hymn to God: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter ii. 9). The virtues of God, his attributes.

4. Whenever you pray for continuance of life in any danger or distress, either for yourself or others, propound this as the end, not so much for our own satisfaction as the honour of God. A Christian is not content to have the use of the benefit to himself alone.

(1.) For self. Every man desireth life; the whole world would, all and every of them, put this request to God, "Let my soul live;" but very few consider why they should live. Some desire life only to please the flesh, and that they may enjoy the delights of the present world. A brutish wish! A Heathen could say, He doth not deserve the name of a man, *qui unam diem velit esse in voluptate, &c.*; certainly, not of a Christian, that would desire life merely to enjoy the delights of the flesh! These would not leave their hog's trough to go home to their father. Some there are, who desire life to see their children well bestowed, or to free their estate from incumbrance; and are loth to part from their natural relations, wife, children, friends. This is a natural respect, and should be subordinate to a higher end. Though this desire, keeping its place, may be lawful; yet, out of its place, sinful. We use to profess, "Whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee" (Psalm lxxiii. 25).

In short, two motives I will urge, why the glory of God should have the chief respect in our affections.

(i.) The benefit it giveth: hope of prolonging life, if this desire be true and real. And it giveth certain assurance of not perishing for ever. The one it doth; for God doth all things with respect to his glory: the other also; for he will glorify those that glorify him.

(ii.) This is the temper of a sincere Christian. Surely, to a believer, it is a piece of self-denial to be kept out of Heaven longer: therefore it must be sweetened with some valuable compensation; something there must be to calm the mind, and contentedly to spare the enjoyment of it for a while. Now, next to the good pleasure of God, which is the reason of reasons, there is some benefit we pitch upon; there is nothing worthy to be compared but our service. If God may have glory, if our lives may do good; a gracious heart must be satisfied with gracious reasons.

(2.) For others. If we make it our request, we must have the same aims in this case, that the faith and grace of others may benefit them: "When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee" (Mark ii. 5). Now, in such requests, bare natural reasons should not move us, but that God may not lose an instrument of his glory, and that his power and providence may be more seen in the world in the recovery. It is good to beg of God for God: "Not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" (Psalm cxv. 1). It should be accounted as a mercy unto us: "For indeed he was sick nigh unto death, but God

had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow" (Phil. ii. 27).

5. This end is known by the use in having, and submission in asking.

(1.) The use in having; how we use a mercy when we have it, if we do indeed live to the glory of God, and the rather for these experiences.

(2.) Submission in asking; whether we fight, or are crowned; work, or receive our reward; for God is the best judge of what is most for his own glory.

USE II.—Is direction; but of this see verse 17.

I come now to the second point.

DOCTRINE II.—That God's judgments are a great help and relief to his people, who desire to praise him even when they are in danger of their lives.

Here I shall show,—

1. What are God's judgments?

2. How they are a help.

1st, What is the meaning of *misphalim*, judgments, here?

1. God governeth the world, that is called judgment: "He hath prepared his throne for judgment; and he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness" (Psalm ix. 7, 8). So, when the government is put into the hands of Christ, it is said, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John v. 22).

2. God governeth the world according to this word. There is his judgment concerning things and persons, stating what is good and evil; the reward of the one, and punishment of the other: "The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether" (Psalm xix. 9). The precept is the rule of our duty, the sanction of God's process. Therefore in Scripture, the punishments of the wicked are sometimes called judgments; so also the rewards of the righteous, as verse 43 of this psalm. The word pronounceth concerning every man's condition. His delivering of the righteous: "Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from Heaven, &c., when God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth" (Psalm lxxvi. 8, 9). The moderation of their affliction: "Correct me, but with judgment" (Jer. x. 24); that is, his merciful judgment, according to the new-covenant dispensations. Punishment of sins; that they are judgments, we are sufficiently convinced of, and sensible of it. Well then, he prayeth that that of the word may be executed either, (1.) By breaking his enemies, and giving them the merit of their doings; or, (2.) That his promises may be accomplished, by sending him help and relief in his troubles.

3. This government is to be observed; for it confirmeth the word: "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect," &c. (Heb. ii. 2, 3.) And he punisheth them, "as the congregation have heard." Carnal men attribute all to chance; but God's people observe his word.

2ndly, Now, these judgments must needs be for a help to God's people, because the word of God speaketh more good to them than it doth to others; and, if God judgeth according to his word, they may conclude that his children are never finally forsaken, nor will their enemies escape unpunished. There will be an accomplishment of promises, and an execution of threatenings; which is a comfort to them that walk uprightly.

1. In the general case, it is a relief to us; for God hath a provident care over all those that desire to honour and glorify him. Their hopes will not altogether be frustrate; keep his commandments, and it will turn to good. They shall have seasonable preservation according to God's promised and wanted mercies.

2. In the particular case of contests and conflicts with the wicked, he will punish enemies, and reward the faithful. This is the tenour of the word; and to this word of God he ascribed his deliverance. Not this power, or this means; but "thy judgments help me." God doth not deceive us with vain promises. When matters are strangely carried on in the world, here is our comfort.

SERMON CXC.

VERSE 176.—*I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.*

These words are the close of the whole psalm. In them observe,—

1. A representation of his case, or, if you will, a confession of his sin; "I have gone astray like a lost sheep."

2. A petition for mercy, "seek thy servant."

3. A protestation of obedience by way of argument, "I do not forget thy commandments."

The chiefest matter that needs to be opened, is the representation of his case; "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." Sheep are *animalia gregalia*, such kind of creatures as naturally gather together, and unite themselves into a flock. Many other creatures live single and apart; they may sometimes sort together, yet are oftener severed and kept asunder; but the property of sheep, and their safety, is to come together in a flock. But now, when they are out of the flock, then they are exposed to all manner of misery; and therefore a strayed sheep is usually put in Scripture for misery and sin. Lost sheep are represented as those that are ready to perish (Isa. liii. 6; Matt. xv. 24). Now, the business is, whether this similitude here mentioned, is to be interpreted of David's misery or his sin. Interpreters are divided, both ancient and modern. The similitude itself is applicable to either, and accordingly used in Scripture. Sometimes it is put for sin: "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isa. liii. 6). Sheep are creatures very subject to stray and wander, especially if driven by wolves or dogs; and sometimes by a disease, a sort of madness incident to them, follow not the rest of the flock. And so they would have it signify here, his going astray out of infirmity, from the way of God's commandments. Or else, sometimes the condition of strayed sheep is put for misery; as, "The Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place" (Hos. iv. 16). A lamb that is out of the fold, goes up and down bleating, to seek the fold again, and some company with which it may join itself. It is spoken of them that affected liberty: the Lord by his prophet tells them they should have liberty enough, but little for their profit and comfort; leave to wander in the world, and should bleat alone, bewailing their solitude and danger, and be exposed as a prey to the next wolf; he would not feed them in the flock and body of the Israelites together, but would scatter them by exile and banishment, so that there should be Israelites amidst many Assyrians, like a lamb bleating up and down that is gone out of the fold. Some

think David here represents his misery, when he was a banished exile from the assemblies of the faithful; not living like a prince in his palace, but wandering from place to place to shift for his life, as a poor sheep doth that is driven from the flock, exposed to beasts of prey; and thus it befel him in the case of Saul's and Absalom's persecution. If this be the meaning, the following clauses must be suitably expounded: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant;" that is, consider my affliction, and in thy good time relieve me and restore me; and the last clause, "for I do not forget thy commandments;" he did not forget his duty, whatever his condition was.

If we should follow this sense, it yields us these points.

I. That a believer may be driven from place to place, in perpetual hazards and distresses; wandering up and down like a strayed sheep, driven by the wolf, and scattered from the fold: "We have (saith the Apostle) no certain dwelling-place" (1 Cor. iv. 11).

II. In such a case, we may with confidence go to God, the good shepherd, who hears the bleating of the poor wandering sheep; takes care of them, seeks them, and reduceth them into the fold.

III. That whatever befalls us, we should still go on in the way of obedience; "I have gone astray," &c.; driven up and down; and yet "I do not forget thy commandments;" when God seems to forget us, we should not forget his precepts. These points might profitably be insisted upon.

But, because many ancient and modern, both Jewish and Christian, interpreters, understand it of sinful errors; and the words will commodiously enough bear this sense, and it being a similitude very frequently used in Scripture, to compare the faithful to sheep, and God to a shepherd, I shall handle the words with respect to this interpretation; "I have gone astray," &c. We may all of us make this confession to God, we are too apt to straggle from our duty; and we all of us need to make this petition to God, to beg his watchful providence, and shepherdlike care over us; and we may do it with encouragement to be heard of God, if our hearts are unfeignedly set to keep his law, that God will hear us and keep us from wandering.

DOCTRINE.—That a Christian that is obedient for the main, yet may run into many failings and errors of life.

David was right for the main course of his life; he professeth here he did not forget God's precepts, he did not cast off the yoke of his law; but yet, in particular acts, he acknowledgeth he did err and fail, and went astray like a lost sheep. And so many who are God's own servants, that do not forget his precepts, may thus err and go astray.

First, In our natural estate, man is of a straying nature, apt to turn out of the way that leadeth to God and true happiness. The Holy Ghost sets forth the degeneracy of mankind, by the similitude and emblem of a strayed or lost sheep: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Luke xv., and Isa. liii. 6). Mark, he speaks of our estate by nature collectively and distributively. Collectively, and in common, "All we like sheep have gone astray; and distributively, "Every one to his own way." We all agree in forsaking the right way of pleasing and enjoying God; but we disagree, as each one hath a by-path of his own. Some are running after this lust, some after that; and so are not only divided from God, but divided from one another, whilst every one

makes his own will his law; *quicquid velit, licet*. As the channel is cut, so corrupt nature in every one finds an issue and passage: "They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good; no, not one" (Psalm xiv. 3). Some run this way, some that way: some are enslaved by pleasures, others are captivated by the honours of the present world, and some are oppressed by the cares of this life. Every man hath his way of sinning, and running away from God. But however, the emblem and similitude of the Holy Ghost is to be considered, that our departing from God and his ways, is like the straying of a sheep. What doth that note?

1. In general, it implies this, that we are brutish in our sin and defection from God, led by sense, fancy, and appetite: and therefore our condition could not be expressed but by a comparison fetched from the beasts. Silly sheep are carried away by their fancy and appetite, from the flock. "Man, being in honour, abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish" (Psalm xlix. 12); that is, he abode not in the honour of his creation. Some would render it for a night; Adam abode not for a night. What we translate man is Adam, the excellency and dignity wherein God had set us; he became like a beast. How is man like a beast? We are governed by our senses and lower appetites. The senses are grown masterly and inordinate, so eagerly set upon their objects, that they will not be reclaimed, and man's life just like that of the brutes. It is things of the same nature we value and adhere unto; terrene and earthly things, the comforts of the animal life; and, as we have the same objects, so the same ends, to enjoy our sensual pleasures, and satisfy our fleshly minds as long as we may. Now, what is this, but to suffer the beast to ride the man; to put reason and conscience in vassalage and subjection to sense and appetite?

2. This similitude is used to show our proneness to err. There is no creature more prone to wander, and lose its way, without a shepherd, than the sheep. Sheep are creatures subject to straying, if they be not kept in the pasture; so all men are obnoxious to erring and straying: they love to wander (Jer. xiv. 10); it is a delight to us to be pleasing our flesh, and gratifying our carnal senses. So, "It is a people that do err in their hearts" (Psalm xcvi. 10). We do not only err in our minds, but err in our hearts. To err in our mind, is to err out of ignorance; but to err in our heart, is to err out of sensual obstinacy: so are we carried away with the desires of the flesh, think ourselves never better than when we run away from God. Ah! the best of us is soon out of the way! If God takes off his guidance, and leaves us to ourselves, we are apt to transgress the bounds wherewith God hath hedged up our way, and make it our business still to be running away from the chief good, into the bushes and thickets of carnal error, wherein we are entangled.

3. Our inability to return, and set ourselves into the right way again; for we stray like sheep, not like swine and dogs. Swine and dogs, though they wander, they will find the way home again; but a sheep is irrecoverably lost, without the shepherd's diligence and care: "My people hath been lost sheep, &c.; they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting place" (Jer. l. 6). So should we run, and keep running away from, and forget our resting place. I remember Austin in his meditations hath this passage, *Domine, errare potui, redire non potui*: Lord, I could go astray by myself; but I cannot return of myself. The sheep easily straggle; but it is the shepherd must bring home the lost sheep

upon his own shoulders (Luke xv. 5). And to this we may apply that of the Prophet, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help" (Hosea xiii. 9). We could destroy and ruin ourselves; but we cannot recover and save ourselves. The shiftless infant can defile himself; but it is the nurse must cleanse it; and we ourselves can fall from God, but to recover us to God, that is the shepherd's care.

4. It shows our readiness to follow evil example. A sheep is *animal sequax*, a creature that runs after the drove: they run out of the gap one after another, and one straggler draws away the whole flock. When the Apostle speaks of the sinful state of mankind, he reckons up example as one: "Walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. ii. 2). In that place, there is the Devil, the world, and the flesh. There is the prince of the power of the air, and there is the course of this world (that I quote it for now); there is Satan, corrupt example, and evil inclination; all which are depravers of mankind, and all concur to our ruin and destruction. We easily swim with the stream and the torrent of common example, do as others do, and so mutually propagate and receive taint from one another. Imitation is not the whole cause of sin, but propagation and inclination of nature; yet imitation and example doth much to the perverting of the world and increasing wickedness, and fleshly mindedness makes us addicted to worldly vanities; and so we run with the fowl into the snare, walking according to the course of this world (Eph. ii. 2): "I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. vi. 5). We have sin within; but it is mightily increased by example without: by dwelling among those that are polluted, we are more defiled; we catch sickness one of another, we do not get health one from another. As in the law, by touching an unclean thing a man was made unclean, but not on the contrary, we, being polluted ourselves, are more defiled by others, by conversing with them. We live among them that are neglectful of God, and unmindful of heavenly things; and we come also to grow more so ourselves.

5. To represent the danger of straying. Sheep, when they are out of the pasture, are in harm's way, exposed to a thousand dangers: "All that found them have devoured them" (Jer. l. 7). So are we in danger to become a prey to the roaring lion, who goes about seeking whom he may devour, and to the dogs and wolves that are abroad. In this sinful state, man is a sheep whom no man taketh up, out of God's protection, and a ready prey for Satan, taken captive by him at his pleasure (2 Tim. ii. 26), till the Lord recover him by repentance. Thus God forms, represents, and points out, our condition before conversion: certainly, before we were converted to God, we were as sheep wandering in our ignorance and sinful ways to our own destruction, and in hazard to be preyed upon continually by the roaring lion.

Secondly, See if it be better with us after conversion. For here is a man of God; he saith, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." Now, after grace received, though our heart was set to walk with God for the main, yet we often swerve from our rule, through ignorance, or through inadvertency, and sometimes are blinded by worldly desires and fleshly lusts, and so transgress our bounds, and neglect our duty. "Who can understand his errors?" (Psalm xix. 12.) Our errors are so many, who can bear them all in mind? who can know and remember them all? I say,

even the best who are tender of displeasing and dishonouring God by sin, they have their errors; yea, and sometimes too their foul faults.

Let me a little show this.

1. There are some unavoidable infirmities, and frailties which we cannot get rid of, though we fain would; as, "What I hate, that do I" (Rom. vii. 15; and, "The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do" (verse 19); and, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, &c.: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. v. 17). A true Christian would love God more perfectly, delight in him more abundantly, and bring every thought into subjection to his will. He would get rid of the fountain of sin, of natural concupiscence, and all the stirrings of envy, lust, pride, anger; but, alas! the spirit that worketh in us, lusteth to envy, and bewrayeth itself in these carnal affections. These are aberrations from the strict law which God hath given to us, but such as men are subject unto in this state of frailty. Though they be hated, resisted, though they be restrained in a great measure, that they do not break out into gross act; yet a child of God cannot get rid of them: though this fire is not blown up, but smothered; yet, in some degree, it burns in our bosoms; there is life in it still.

2. There are other things which they might get rid of, if they would; and yet they are not always so happy as to withstand it: certain sins that are avoidable by the ordinary assistance of grace which God vouchsafes to his people; yet a believer may relapse into them many times. Men are not always so watchful, nor is the bent of their hearts so strongly fixed in them; and there is very much security in the saints, and they run into the snare till they be awakened either by some powerful convictions, or some smart affliction; as David saith, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray" (Psalm cxix. 67). The best of God's children, many times in their peace and prosperity they fall asleep, and forget themselves, and so let some infirmity still be upon them, before God doth awaken them, and bring them to themselves again. Hezekiah was no sooner settled in a peaceful estate, but presently he forgets himself, and suffers pride to steal upon his heart, till the Lord humbled him for the pride of his heart (2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26). When all things went happily with him, he was recovered out of his sickness, and had congratulatory messages from the princes of the nations round about him, and lived in great prosperity; then his heart was lifted up. Some carnal distemper may grow upon us, or evil practice we may fall into. David, when he had gotten a carnal pillow under his head, he lay down and slept, and dreamed of nothing but prosperity, a perpetual, uninterrupted temporal happiness (Psalm xxx. 6). He was full of carnal complacency, until God made him look about him. Thus by our carelessness do we often provoke God to use sharp remedies. There are some are not avoidable, but left for humiliation; but those that are avoidable by such ordinary assistances of God's grace to his people, yet many times, through our folly and inadvertency and sleepiness of conscience, we run into them.

Having showed the kinds of these sins, let me now show the causes why many times those whose hearts are right with God, that do not forget his precepts, yet they go astray like lost sheep.

1. The first cause is their present imperfection. Though grace doth heal all the faculties, yet it doth not totally heal them, or wholly overcome the weakness which is in them. God promiseth to put his law into their

hearts and minds; yet both the understanding and will, and all the inferior faculties, they are but in part sanctified. You know our soul is divided into two parts, into the *ἡγεμονικόν*, and the faculties which should command and direct, and into the faculties which should be commanded and directed. The commanding faculties are called spirit, and the faculties which should be commanded are called soul. The reason, or the incitation, the affections, the dispositions, which incline us to things good for us; there is a weakness in all these. Whence come all the weaknesses and errors of the saints? There is a defect in the leading or commanding part of the soul, which is the understanding and the will: in the understanding, is the directive counsel; and, in the will, is the imperial power. Now, the understanding, which should direct and guide us, is blind and sleepy, and not so vigilant and watchful as it should be; and so, in many cases, it proves but a dark and imperfect guide and director to us, and so we err like lost sheep. We have not always so clear and so deep a sense of our duty as we ought, and find not such lively, powerful, and effectual thoughts of God and heavenly things, and so clear a sense, so that the directive part fails us. Then for our wills which should command us where the imperial power resides, they are imperfect. There is, I confess, in the regenerate, a sincere will to please God in all things; but it is not a perfect will; so that our willing and nilling, our consent and dissent, are not so powerful as they ought to be; but, the will being tainted by the neighbourhood of a distempered sense, it yields a little, and bends to the flesh, and gives way to evil, and many times it opposeth that which is good; at least, we are often overtaken in a fault, being inconsiderately and suddenly surprised, as the Apostle useth that expression, "If a man be overtaken in a fault" (Gal. vi. 1). Though a regenerate man hath a new light put into his mind, he is renewed in the spirit of his mind, though he hath a new bent and bias put upon his heart; yet the imperial and directive powers have flesh in them still, and the wisdom of the flesh is so ingrained and kneaded into our natures, that it cannot be totally dispossessed, any more than we can sever the leaven and the dough, when once they are mingled together. If there be a defect in the governing and leading part of the soul, there will be disorders in the life and conversation.

Come we now from the *ἡγεμονικόν*, the leading faculties, to the faculties which should be commanded and directed. Alas! they are by sin grown obstinate and masterly, and are so eagerly set upon their objects (carnal vanities) that they will not be reclaimed, but rebel against the direction of conscience and inclinations of the renewed will. The Apostle speaks of a law of his members warring against the law of his mind (Rom. vii. 23). In the lower, in the more sensitive faculties, there is much headstrong opposition against the directions of the will. We have but a slender, feeble guide. The leading part of the will is defective; and there is much of the wisdom of the flesh there. It is a trouble to the flesh to be restrained from what it desires and inclines us to, as a headstrong horse is loth to be governed; therefore we yield and suffer ourselves to be transported, and led away by our passions and carnal affections. Now, though the rebellious and disobedient disposition of the appetite and senses is in a great measure broken and subdued in us by the power of grace, yet the best have somewhat of inordinate sensuality and weakness; and, being imperfect, are tempted by the world and sense, as well as others. Well then, ever weigh in your mind, for your direction, these two grand reasons of all

the weakness that is in the saints; there is the debility and weakness of the leading and commanding part, and the rebelling of the inferior faculties, which should be ruled and commanded.

(1.) The debility and weakness of the leading and commanding part of the soul. And thence it is that we are so inconsiderate, so dull of apprehension, have such dark and ineffectual thoughts of God and heavenly things; and thence is it that the will doth not so potently and rulingly command the directive faculties, but is apt to yield, that it doth not stand upon its authority as it was wont to do.

(2.) The other part is the rebellion of the inferior faculties, and stubbornness of our sensual and carnal inclinations. Look, as in a kingdom and commonwealth, where are rebellious subjects and a feeble empire, things must needs run into disorder; so here the reins are managed very weakly; there is a feeble empire in the soul, and here are strong, rebellious desires not easily controlled, and so draw the soul away. To make this more evident a little, I will show the order of all human operations, if rightly constituted. Their actions are governed in this manner. The understanding and the conscience, they are to direct the will; the will, according to right reason and conscience, moves the affections; the affections, according to the counsel and command of the understanding and will, move the bodily spirits; the bodily spirits, they move the senses and members of the body. But now, by corruption, there is a manifest inversion and change; for bodily pleasure doth affect the senses, the senses corrupt the fantasy, the fantasy moves the bodily spirits, and by them the lighter part of the affections; the affections, by their violence and inclination, captivate the will, and blind the mind; and so the man is carried headlong to his own destruction. Now, though this servitude be in a great measure broken in them that are called into the liberty of God's children, they are not slaves to their lusts and the vain pleasures of this life; yet, too, too often, the senses are too masterly, and too, too often transmit objects into the soul in a rebellious way, against the command of sanctified reason and conscience. Affections are stirred by thoughts, and thoughts by objects thus represented. I am the larger in this, that you may more perfectly understand the reason of the weakness of the saints.

2. The violence of temptations. As sheep may be driven out of the pasture by the wolf, so is a poor soul hurried into evil, to commit known sin or omit known duty, by the incursion and shock of temptations; though, for the main, he doth adhere to Christ by faith, love, and new obedience. Thus Peter was drawn to deny Christ; and many are drawn, in the violence of passion, to do things which their hearts do utterly condemn and disallow. In a storm, it is hard for a skilful pilot to steer aright; and, though it be dangerous to dash against the rocks, yet Christians come off without a total shipwreck, though they may be sore bruised and battered. In such hurries, God's children may go astray; but God will not suffer them to be totally lost. David wandered far as well as Saul; but God sought David again, he would not lose him so. A strong temptation may drive us out of the way; as sheep, when thieves come, are driven out of the fold, whither, else, they would not have gone.

3. The Lord may withdraw himself for just and wise reasons; and then, when the shepherd is gone aside, we have neither wisdom to direct ourselves, nor strength to defend ourselves; as, when Moses went away

for a while, how soon did Israel corrupt their way? So, if God be gone, we see how little we can keep ourselves. God left Hezekiah to try him (2 Chron. xxxii. 31). God will show us what is in our hearts, and that our standing is not of ourselves. We represent ourselves to ourselves in a feigned likeness; and therefore God will truly show ourselves to ourselves. We do not know what pride, and passion, and carnality, lie hid in our hearts, when he is present, warming, comforting, quickening, guiding, directing the soul in the way to life. Now, God, by withdrawing, will show us the folly of our wisdom, and the weakness of our strength, and the pride of our humility, and the passionateness of our meekness. Divines distinguish of desertion; they say that there is *desertio correctiva*, *et desertio eruditiva*; a desertion by way of correction, and a desertion by way of instruction. Sometimes by way of correction, because of former sins, or some unkindness, or ungracious dealing with God, God withdraws; and there is a desertion by way of instruction, to teach us to know the sovereignty of grace, and to know our own weakness. Usually, both go together in the same dispensation. It is very hard almost to imagine that the same dispensation should not be both instructive and corrective; but the reason why they distinguish thus is this, because some dispensations are more clearly for correction, and others more clearly for instruction; but, usually, they go together. We provoke the Lord by some slight or unworthy dealing with him; and then the Lord corrects us, and corrects us that he may instruct us, to see our all depends upon him, and how he should be prized in these things.

4. The fourth reason is some special disease, it may be, not yet cured, in our going astray like a lost sheep, even though our hearts be right in the main with God. It may be some corruption, too, that they cherished, some carnal interest which is too near and dear to us, either worldly, ambitious, or sensual lusts. Though these reign in the unconverted, yet they dwell too much in a heart that is gracious, and so may prevail sometimes to turn us away from God; something there is which we may call our iniquity (Psalm xviii. 23). Though in the general we keep ourselves from it, as an upright heart will, yet it may sometimes foil us.

USE I.—Let us stand upon our guard. Oh! let us not leave the boat to the stream; for there is an erring, straying disposition in a great measure left in the people of God. Consider, Satan is subtle and assiduous in tempting: "He goes about like a roaring lion" (1 Peter v. 8): he is searching up and down after the prey; and an unwary and unmortified soul soon falls into his snare. The flesh is ready to close with the temptation, as soon as it is presented; and therefore the best of God's children had need be circumspect and diligent: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt. xxvi. 41); lest you be surprised unawares by some sin or other. There is enough corruption in every one of you to betray you to it, if you be not aware; and your resisting graces are very weak, and imperfect in degree; and, which is one consideration more, the danger of a fall is very great; for thereby God is dishonoured (2 Sam. xii. 14), and your own peace is mightily ruffled: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long, &c. My moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (Psalm xxxii. 3, 4); yea, and a stumblingblock is laid before others; and you may destroy those for whom Christ died, and wo be to men by whom offences come (Matt. xviii. 7). Under the law, the Lord ordered that, if two men strove and hurt a woman

with child, that her fruit departed from her, he who did it should surely be punished. To hinder birth was counted murder; so to hinder those that are coming on by any sins of yours in a way to life. If the offence be foul, you may feel it long afterwards, as an old bruise is felt upon every change of weather; and this sin may cost you dear, though your salvation be secured. This should make us stand upon our guard; it shows that a Christian should live in constant vigilancy, and daily conflict with sin, and deny the desires of the flesh, that he may love God, and live to him.

USE II.—It shows us the need of the new covenant, wherein the pardon of sins is established. All the saints that ever lived have had their failings; and what would become of them, even of God's own children, if there were not a forgiving God, and a gracious covenant, a way found out to remit their offences? If the righteous God should call us to a strict account, how could the best of his children stand before him? (Psalm cxxx. 3.) So it would go ill with all the world, if strict justice of law were still in force (Psalm cxliii. 2). All are guilty, and all must perish; the holy, humblest soul cannot abide the trial of that court; not only God's enemies, but his servants cannot. The good they do, it cannot be laid in balance against the evil, it would yield no relief as to remission and pardon. Plainly, if the guilt of sins remain upon us, our duties will not compensate with our sins. But such was the Lord's mercy, that, when we all like sheep had gone astray, the Lord found a ransom for us, and laid upon Christ the iniquity of us all (Isa. liii. 6), that there might be pardon for poor creatures.

USE III.—It teacheth us again the necessity of dependence upon God's care and power for our spiritual preservation. Of all creatures, sheep need a shepherd; so do we a spiritual shepherd to keep us from straying, to reduce us from our wanderings, to weaken our distemper, to drive away the wolf. In short, these two considerations will enforce the necessity of dependence, the indefatigable malice of Satan, and the unknown weakness and imperfection of the saints.

1. The indefatigable malice of Satan, and his unwearied diligence in tempting us to sin. His hatred and envy against God and mankind are such, that he leaves no man untempted, he would not leave the Lord Christ untempted. Especially, in some regards above others, he labours to draw the children of God into sin, because he knows their sins, by reason of their profession, will give great occasion of scandal to the weak, and blasphemy to the profane and wicked. Now, as his power is very great, so are his subtilty and diligence. That which Hannibal said of Marcellus perfectly agrees with him, whether he gives or takes the foil, he ever renews and reinforceeth the fight. When Job had carried it very innocently in his prosperity in a dangerous time, yet try him in adversity (Job. i. 12); nay, when he had carried it off in a very grievous trial, as the loss of his goods and children (Job ii. &c.).

2. The weakness and imperfection of the saints. How easily, if we take not more diligent heed and care, may we fall into sins, both with respect to the weakness of our understandings and perverseness of our affections.

(1.) Our understanding is so weak that we are ignorant of many things necessary to be known; for we know but in part (1 Cor. xiii. 12). And if we know something in general, we do not know it as we ought to know it (1 Cor. viii. 2). How is that? Either we fail in particular application,

as the heathens that knew there was a Divine, an eternal, and almighty power in general, yet were vain in their imaginations, in their discourses, and practical inferences; or, if we should know how to use these truths, if we know them habitually, yet we do not actually consider, here is a great part of man's misery, being hurried by a multitude of business, or violence of temptation, that, being laid asleep by the pleasures of the flesh, we many times fall off. Though men have a perfect knowledge of their duty, and how to apply it habitually, yet actually do not consider, their sin carries them away: "They consider not that they do evil" (Ecc. v. 1). Thus for the understanding.

(2.) Our affections they are so apt to be led by the sense, and not by right reason, that there are many times great danger, that in seeing we should not see, lest seeing, knowing, and approving that which is better, we should embrace and follow that which is worse, act contrary to our knowledge and conscience. Thou approvest the things that differ (Rom. ii. 18), yet doest thus and thus. Many have an approbation, yet cannot bring forth grace to victory, cannot govern their hearts according to their speculative approbation. Now, if a man be such a blind, indigent creature, it is his wisdom still to look out of himself, to lift up his eyes to God, that is the God of our salvation, and our guide and defence; all our confidence must be in him.

USE. IV.—We learn hence the encouragement which one hath, who is right for the main, but hath run into some errors of life, to apply himself to God to remedy that evil, as the good shepherd who must seek the lost sheep, and reduce him into the right way.

Here let me show two things:—

1. Who are those that are right for the main, and may look upon their sins as particular errors and frailties.

2. What encouragement they have to apply themselves unto the Lord.

1st, Who are those that are right for the main, and whose sins are infirmities, such as David's are represented to be here in this text; for I will go no further than the text. To represent that in five things,—

1. Such as have a conscience, an awful sense of their duty: I do not forget thy "commandments." He had transgressed some of God's commandments; but still he had a sense of his duty, that was kept alive in his heart, that awakened him to return again to the Lord.

2. Such as have an habitual will to keep the commandment of God, though there be failings, as David when he asks for his servant, "Seek thy servant," he acknowledged his duty still. God's children may sometimes go astray, but not totally and finally: they never fall so, but there remains something that maintains God's interest in the soul: "Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin, &c.; he cannot sin," &c. (1 John iii. 9), he doth not sin so as to lie in sin; the seed of God still remains, and so he is more easily reclaimed than others. Look, as in Nebuchadnezzar's vision there was represented a tree that was to be cut down by the watchman, but yet the stump of the roots remained in the earth (Dan. iv. 23); that is, in his melancholy, when he crept on all four like beasts (I suppose there was not a transformation into a beast), he did lodge in the forest among beasts, and eat their kind of food; yet there was a stump of this great tree, that should bud and scent again; there was a stock of human nature, that should recover and show itself again. So here, though a child of God behave himself like a brute beast, and be mastered

by his sense, yet the root of the matter is still in him; there is something that will put forth itself again. Or, as a spinster leaves a lock of wool to draw on the next thread, so there is something left, they do not wholly cast off the fear of God, nor the yoke. No; their souls are habitually bent to please God more than they are to sin; "I am thy servant."

3. As here is a conscience of his duty, and an habitual will to serve God, so here is a broken-hearted confession of his error: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep;" and so a repentance of the sin committed. It is grievous to a child of God in the remembrance of it, the sin is thereby more mortified and subdued.

4. Here is an unfeigned desire to return to his duty, and grace humbly sought that he may be set in joint again; "Seek thy servant." He would not remain in this condition still: his desire was to do the will of God, and to live in no neglect; and therefore he complains of his straying disposition, and would fain have it cured; "Seek thy servant."

5. The conscience of his sincerity was not wholly lost. Mark, not only the conscience of his duty, but of his sincerity; for he prays still to be sought as a sheep belonging to the fold. I am thine, though I am gone astray: "The sheep hear his voice" (John x. 3). Now, this evidence was yet left, I am, Lord, thy servant, and I do not forget thy precepts. He was willing to hear the voice of God. In grievous falls, it is otherwise. If a man fall grievously (this doth not relate to any grievous fall), then all were to begin anew, that robs all our peace; as David, "Create in me a clean heart" (Psalm li. 10). After his grievous fall, he speaks as if all were lost. David here professeth still his devotedness to God as his servant, his love and respect to his law as his rule; he could own such a thing in it; it was an evil that annoyed him, but it had not rifled his peace.

2ndly, To speak of the encouragement that we have to go to God if this be our case, as the man of God here desires the Lord to seek him out, and to bring him again into the right way. Those that have gone astray, yet should not keep off, but run to their shepherd; "Seek thy servant:" Why?

1. We have a shepherd that loves us, whereof he hath given full proof and demonstration in that he died for us: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John x. 11). He is not only the great Shepherd (as called sometimes), but the good Shepherd, who gave his life in a way of ransom to expiate our sins. When he came to seek and to save that which was lost, his first work was to redeem them by his blood. If he could find in his heart to redeem us by his blood, and expiate all our faults, he will recover us.

2. It is one great part of his office to reduce his people from their straggling, "The Lord is my Shepherd" (Psalm xxiii. 1). What then? "He restoreth my soul" (verse 3). If the Lord be our Shepherd, it is a great part of his work to restore our souls. We fall into the disease of sin, sometimes wander out of the path, in which we should perish if God did not reclaim us from our wandering. Now, it is his work to restore our souls; that is, to keep us from going on still in our by-paths: therefore we may come and press it. He is inclined to show favour to those who confess their errors; and, for the glory of his grace, and constant love, and sworn covenant, he will not be unmindful of us.

3. He delights to guide us in our wanderings (Luke xv. 4, 5). The

good Shepherd leaves the ninety-nine, and seeks out the strayed saeep upon the hills and mountains, and brings it home upon his own shoulders rejoicing. It is a pleasing thing to Christ to be reducing strayed souls. He was angry with the under-shepherds, and rebukes them because they discharged not their duty; "The diseased have ye not strengthened," &c. (Ezek. xxxiv. 4); and he promiseth his own care, "So will I seek out my sheep" (verse 12).

4. He will bear with our infirmities, and, if humbly sought to, will take care of us. We straggle sometimes out of weakness, and out of vanity of spirit, and lose ourselves through our own folly; therefore Christ saith, I will seek that which was lost. Sometimes we are driven away by wolves; Christ will fetch us back again, that we may not be meat for their mouth. If sin be as a breach upon conscience, he will heal that wound, and bind up the broken. If we be weak, ready to straggle, he will confirm us, and strengthen us more and more. Having such a shepherd, this should encourage us more to go to him.

USE V.—Here is caution; take heed not to run into infirmities, as if it were matter of nothing. Why? They must be repented; and it is part of wilfulness, voluntarily and avowedly to do that which he must undo again, and which must necessarily be repented of; as David confesseth his error. Little sins allowed, and customarily committed, on the presumption of a pardon; they are not infirmities, but are of a dangerous nature. If you indulge iniquity, you lose your claim, as those that are devoted to God; you will hazard this, if you indulge your straying humour; and consider, even infirmities may cost us dear; for, though they do not make void the eternal reward, yet usually God reduceth us, not by internal grace, but by some smart providence; as David, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray" (Psalm cxix. 67). God will teach you your duty by briars and thorns, by sharp affliction. And where the distemper is more rooted in us, if it be not an act only, but a kind of rooted distemper, then the dispensation of God's providence may be very sharp. As Paul's thorn in the flesh, when he was apt to be lifted up in pride, he prays thrice, the Lord was terrible to him; possibly it was the stone or gout, some racking pain (2 Cor. xii.). Though he prays, God would not release him, but still keeps the pain and trouble upon him; so our strayings will cost us dear. To be sure, they must cost us repentance; but they may cost us a great deal of sorrow in the world. We should not incur the hazard of God's temporal displeasure. Again, you have no assurance and command of the time and measure of the Spirit's assistance; and therefore, if you give way to little failings, they may become grievous enormities in the end; and, when you grieve the Spirit, you do what lies in you to drive him from you, and provoke him to suspend his assistance the longer: and therefore, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephes. iv. 30).

AN ALPHABETICAL TABLE,

DIRECTING THE READER TO THE PRINCIPAL MATTERS CONTAINED IN
THE FOREGOING SERMONS.

A.

Able. God able to perform his promise, vol. ii., p. 218.

Abhorrence of sin more than hatred, iii., 382.

Absolution of God dischargeth the law, conscience, and Satan, i., 51.

Abundance of mercies in God, i., 167.

Acceptance of prayer, before its answer, i., 230.

Acceptation of our services must be sought after, ii., 411—God accepts no bodily service without that of the soul, iii., 126—God accepts the heart when it is, 1. Broken. 2. Renewed. 3. Purified by faith. 4. Acted by love, iii., 128.

Account must be given to God shortly, i., 55; ii., 78, 219.

Accomplishment of promises to be diligently observed, ii., 65.

Acknowledgment of God in afflictions, i., 192—of mercy a great duty. Reasons, uses of it, ii., 61, 62—they that acknowledge justice, may expect mercy, ii., 155.

Acknowledge the benefit of all afflictions due to God's Spirit, ii., 90—justice and faithfulness of God in afflicting must be acknowledged, ii., 150.

Acquittance from sin, and acquittance from hypocrisy, i., 86.

Acted. They that are acted by God, act under him, i., 310.

Actions, a better discovery of our thoughts than words, i., 11.

Action is the perfection of the habits of grace, i., 46—not only required, but good principles, iii., 191.

Acting in spiritual duties fits us for duty, i., 222.

Activity in duty a sign of the quickening Spirit, iii., 291.

Actual consent to the covenant required, ii., 119—grace necessary, as well as habitual, i., 162—uses of actual grace, 1. To direct us in the exercise of grace received. 2. To excite the habits of grace. 3. To strengthen us in the operation. 4. To fortify against temptations, ii., 511—necessity of actual grace on three accounts, i., 356, 337; ii., 512

—thinking of God, an eminent duty at certain seasons, iii., 138.

Adam (*vide* man).

Admonition, impatience under it a sign of pride, ii., 182.

Advantages by God's first work of grace upon us. 1. Inclination towards what is good. 2. Preparation of heart to holy actions. 3. Power to do good, i., 335, 336.

Affection to the word necessary, in order to our keeping it, i., 14, 48—God delights in them, i., 342—to God's word for its innate goodness and truth, ii., 313.

Affections, two-fold. 1. Affections of aversation. 2. Affections of choice and pursuit, i., 2; ii., 387; iii., 379—easily bribed, ii., 69—without knowledge not good, ii., 201—must be purged and quickened, ii., 197—sensitive, differ from the solid complacency of the soul, i., 120—when strong are very painful, i., 169—strong, constant, and earnest towards God's word, a mark of a child of God, i., 169; iii., 82—expressed by, 1. Opening the mouth. 2. Panting. 3. Longing, iii., 81—spiritual, their objects, end, and properties, i., 169, 170—carnal to be avoided, ii., 211—false and flashy, i., 170—not nullified, but rectified, by grace, ii., 550; iii., 65—of the mind usually expressed by words proper to the bodily senses, ii., 375; iii., 81—follow apprehensions, ii., 392; i., 325—they are good or evil according to their objects, iii., 379—spiritual, will take all occasions to remember God's name, i., 516—four things about our affections considerable, i., 350, 351.

Afflictions, God is always just in them, ii., 119, 150; yet patient and moderate, ii., 152, 153—long and sharp, usually attended with either. 1. Impatience. 2. Revenge against instruments. 3. The using indirect means for redress. 4. Despondency. 5. Questioning our interest in God. 6. A heistical and despairing thoughts, ii., 89, 227—229

- 588, 589 — sanctified, advanced holy thoughts, ii., 189 — they are good, in what respects, i., 216—218 — may be long and grievous before deliverance comes, ii., 204, 423—425 — three agents in the afflictions of God's people. 1. God. 2. Satan. 3. Wicked men, ii., 204—206 — God's end is to reduce us into the right way, ii., 154, 424 — to humble and purge us, ii., 424 — of great use to the converted, and unconverted, ii., 154, 464, 465 — why God afflicts his children so sorely, ii., 421 — their necessity, i., 119, 217; ii., 271 — and utility, ii., 84, 88, 115, 424 — increase our comforts in God's word, iii., 69 — though great, are alleviated by the consolations of the word, i., 209 — choicest saints have their afflictions, iii., 328 — are great privileges, ii., 33 — work not for good of their own nature, but by the Spirit of God, ii., 90, 120 — they should bring us to God by prayer, iii., 331.
- Age*, one age sees more than another, ii., 348 — brings wisdom by experience, ii., 349.
- Aged* ought to be revered, ii., 354.
- Aggravation* of sin, to vow, and not perform it, ii., 416.
- Allow*, we must not allow ourselves in the least sin, i., 48.
- Aids* of grace, either necessary, or liberal, i., 308.
- Alphonsus*, king of Arragon, his counsellors, i., 206
- Allurements* and terrors of the world, means to draws us from God, iii., 410.
- All-sufficiency* of God, encourageth. 1. Our dependence on him. 2. Our subjection to him. ii., 267, 268 — it makes him the soul's only portion, i., 562.
- Ancients*, who? ii., 349.
- Anger*, wrath, envy, how they differ, ii., 182 — of God, when discovered, bespeaks holy awe, and dread, ii., 552 — and hatred of sin, how they differ, iii., 56 — and passion in discourse renders it evil, iii., 450.
- Anguish* of spirit, even in gracious souls, caused by great troubles; partly from nature, partly from grace, iii., 227.
- Answers* of prayers to be duly observed, i., 232 — and why? Reasons, iii., 253, 255 — of prayer, either in kind or value, i., 231—234; iii., 257, 258 — God's children are earnest for answers of prayer, iii., 252 — of a good conscience, what it signifies, ii., 410 — of prayer neglected, proceeds from either, 1. Heedlessness. 2. Atheism. 3. Distrust. 4. Disesteem of God's favour, iii., 254 — great evil effects of such neglect, iii., 254, 255.
- Antecedency* of God's work before man's work, i., 307, 308.
- Antinomians*, who deny the law to be a rule, i., 5.
- Antiperistasis* in grace as well as nature, iii., 46.
- Antiquity* should not sway against truth, ii., 349.
- Apostasy*, one ground of it, the not receiving the truth in the love of it, i., 95. (*Vide* distrust) — as also from our inbred corruption, ii., 545 — dissuatives against, iii., 451, 503 — evil consequences of, i., 292, 503 — is beastial, and brutish, iii., 493 — caused from, 1. Errors. 2. Persecutions. 3. Scandals, i., 505. (*Vide* Backsliding, defection.)
- Appeal* to God, on a double account, ii., 185 — no, from God's judgment, i., 54 — many pretend to serve God, that cannot appeal to him, i., 399.
- Appetite* follows life, and holy desires spring from a new nature, i., 395.
- Application* of mercy personally called coming to God, i., 168 — of the word by faith, ii., 496 — of Providence to their own selves, a mark of God's children, ii., 555 — of God's mercies to our own souls, ii., 563 — effectual application of mercy, ii., 563.
- Approbation* of God, a great comfort under reproach, i., 445 — of God's law by the sanctified judgment, i., 48; ii., 476 — means to bring our hearts to approve God's law, iii., 54 — of purity, without choosing it, is not sufficient, i., 310; ii., 420; iii., 19 — of that in ourselves, which we condemn in others, an evil character, i., 4.
- Arbitrary*, God is so in gifts, not in judgments, iii., 156.
- Arts* and sciences not comparable to God's word for the obtaining of true wisdom, ii., 348.
- Arrogance* in discourses odious to God, iii., 450.
- Ascribe* all to God, i., 61; ii., 224.
- Arguments* to prevail with God. 1. From his mercy. 2. His truth, iii., 299.
- Ask* God's counsel, his leave, and blessing, i., 44 — of God saving knowledge of divine things, iii., 79 — grounds of it, iii., 79 — how temporal deliverance is to be asked, iii., 274.
- Ashamed* of God, Christ, and his Gospel, reasons of it; arguments against it, i., 460.
- Assaults* of Satan make assisting grace necessary, ii., 512.
- Assurance* strengthened by perseverance, i., 503.

- Astray*, the best saints apt to go, iii., 495. Reasons: 1. Present imperfection. 2. Reminders of corruption, iii., 125, 196—not totally and finally, iii., 500.
- Assistance* of God necessary to preserve both habitual, and actual grace, ii., 525.
- Attributes* of God in a conflict about sinners, i., 472, 473.
- Atheistical* persons are great deriders of saints, for. 1. Their faith. 2. Obedience, i., 195.
- Atheism*, to observe God's signal judgments on the wicked, a cure of it, ii., 537—a man may have atheism enough to question providences, when there is faith enough to justify God, ii., 589.
- Avenger*, God is the avenger of breach of vows, oaths, and covenants, ii., 416, 417.
- Averse*ness of the heart from God, a cause of the delaying of repentance, ii., 10—of heart in coming to God, makes us need not only leave to come, but power to come, iii., 315.
- Audience* of God, how manifested, how procured, i., 230.
- Augustine's*, St., prayer about the Scriptures; that he might neither be deceived in them, nor deceive others by them, i., 255.
- Augustus Cæsar*, his way to prevent hasty and rash judgment, ii., 12.
- Avoiding* evil company not enough, except we choose good, ii., 509.
- Authority* of God, the reason of our obedience. i., 32, 33—of God to be eyed in our obedience, and why, i., 34, 35—God urges his authority, i., 37, 49—and power, might and right in God, ii., 261—of God speaking in his word, iii., 296.
- Awakening* of holy desires, means to obtain it, i., 457—of prayer by suspending mercy, ii., 218—of God by prayer, iii., 31.
- Awe*, standing in awe of God's word, a mark of God's children, iii., 368—what is it to stand in awe? Why we must stand in awe of God's word, iii., 370—of God's word two-fold, iii., 370—reasons, iii., 371.
- B.**
- Backsliding*, causes of, (1.) From without. 1. Errors. 2. Persecutions. 3. Scandals. (2.) From within. 1. Ungrounded assent. 2. Ungrounded profession. 3. Unmortified lusts. 4. Easiness of temper. 5. Self-confidence, i., 505.
- Baits* and snares in all conditions, ii., 513.
- Baptism*, the answer of a good conscience, i., 63, 64.
- Begin* with God early, ii., 190.
- Beginnings* of sin to be suppressed, i., 505, 506.
- Begging* grace to obey, a sign that the commandment is not grievous, but our lust, i., 41.
- Behold*, a note, 1. Of admiration. 2. Demonstration, i., 393.
- Believers* only take God's testimonies for their heritage, ii., 463—are princes in disguise, ii., 463, 464—they are heirs of the world, *ib.*—they have a covenant right to all their outward mercies, ii., *ib.*
- Believing* with the whole heart, what is it? i., 21—falls under a command, i., 31—gives us hold of God, ii., 213.
- Benefactor*, God is so, 1. To all. 2. To his own, ii., 245.
- Benefits* of God are all for our profit and God's glory, iii., 485.
- Bent* of the heart, i., 170. (*Vide* frame of the heart).
- Blamelessness* required in those that reprove others, iii., 24.
- Blessed* man, his characters: 1. Keeping God's testimonies. 2. Seeking God with the whole heart, i., 11—or cursed, whom Christ pronounces such in the last day, i., 15.
- Blessedness*, the aim of all rational creatures, Pagans, Christians, good men, evil men, i., 1, 312—a true notion of it necessary to be got by all men—i., 1—we may be right in the doctrine, when we are erroneous in the practice of blessedness, i., 4—sincere, constant, uniform obedience, the way to blessedness, i., 7—lies in the enjoyment of God, i., 97—God's, is in himself, what it is, i., 98—in this life annexed to sincere obedience, i., 9.
- Blessings* spiritual, flow from special love, i., 60—to be expected according to the tenour of the covenant, i., 468, ii., 523.
- Blessings* temporal, not absolutely to be expected, i., 468.
- Blessing* God, respects his benefits to us, i., 60—for mercy, the way to have more, ii., 30.
- Blindness* spiritual, is natural to every man, i., 150—is worse than natural blindness, i., 151—it is our great misery, iii., 186.
- Blind* obedience of Papists to their superiors, i., 36.
- Blood* and water, how they bear witness, i., 12.
- Body*, God must be served with the soul as well as with the body. Reasons, iii., 424, 425.
- Boldness*, grounded in innocency, i., 51—in duties, distresses, death, i., 51—in confessing and professing God's ways, an excellent gift of God, i., 456—causes of it, i., 157—1. Faith. 2. Love to

God. 3. Fear of God. 4. A sense of the other world, i., 457.

Bond upon man to God, threefold: 1. Natural. 2. Voluntary. 3. Sacramental, ii., 412.

Born again, (*vide* Regeneration.)

Bountifulness of God to all his creatures, especially to his saints, i., 99.

Bounty and mercy of God a great encouragement to ask any spiritual gifts, ii., 49—How they differ, ii., 49.

Breastplate of a Christian, is righteousness, ii., 565.

Brethren, love of the, a duty, iii., 411.

Broken heart in confession of sin, argues one right in the main, iii., 500.

Building on the righteousness of God's word, what? ii., 584—reproof to them that do not build on God's faithfulness, ii., 585.

Business, they that would be blessed, must make it their business sincerely to seek after God, i., 16—discovers the man, i., 25—they are blessed that make it their business to avoid all sins, i., 25—mark of one that makes religion his business, i., 58—in all business God must be sought to, 1. For his leave. 2. His counsel. 3. His blessing, i., 82—prayer is made our business. 1. When it is secret. 2. Early. 3. Vehement and earnest, iii., 119.

C.

Call of God to be observed, i., 15.

Calling, general and particular, they help one another, iii., 13.

Calumnatory discourses forbidden, iii., 449.

Calumnies against religion will not long prevail with rational men, i., 499—comforts against them, i., 445.

Cares of the world drive out duty, i., 45.

Carriage, we must glorify God before others by it, iii., 477.

Carelessness in prayer. The reasons of it, iii., 246.

Careless walking. Cured by reproof, i., 386.

Case of conscience, i., 287—two great cases, i., 308—how it is lawful to rejoice in God's judgments, i., 347.

Cases of conscience about confessing lesser truths, iii., 386.

Carnal pleasures, nothing to spiritual, i., 462—love to spiritual things, iii., 183—principles, what they are, i., 327—and spiritual hearts argue contrarily from one and the same principle, ii., 254, 255 481, 482,—walking cured by reproof, i., 192, 193—compliance, ii., 210, 426, 504—fear and policy, ii., 341—affections, are heady and hasty, ii., 589.

Cause, a good, well managed, may expect God's protection, ii., 558, 565—Causeless persecution, iii., 367—that comes in debate threefold: 1. *Inter hominem et hominem*. 2. *Inter hominem et diabolum*. 2. *Inter hominem et Deum*, iii., 337, 328.

Caution to magistrates, i., 202—against murmuring under affliction, ii., 117—against carnal fear and carnal policy, ii., 341—needful, that we be not carried away by example, iii., 39.

Cautions about speedy setting upon duty, ii., 13, 14.

Censure of men's persons under God's judgments, evil, ii., 535.

Censures of the Church separate the dross from the gold, ii., 546.

Censuring cured by reproof, i., 192, 386.

Change of exercise, good, not change of affection, i., 131—of state may be without change of affection, i., 216.

Changes. 1. In men's affections. 2. In God's dispensation, are balanced by the comforts of God's unchangeable word, iii., 71—are to be expected in our lives, i., 3.

Chastening whether in anger or no, ii., 118.

Cheerful service to God. What it is, ii., 477.

Charity to be maintained toward those that differ from us in lesser matters, i., 278.

Child of God, known by two marks, iii., 45.

Children of God, such as fear God and hope in his word, ii., 129. (*Vide* Heirs of promise)—desire things passionately, and then soon cool in their desires, such are slothful professors, i., 2—of God, desire to be taught of God, i., 320—reasons why they desire it, i., 320—they long for eternal salvation, iii., 478.

Choice of God's testimonies gives us a right to them, ii., 462—after inquiry into the way of truth, we must come to the choice of it, i., 273—what it is to choose them, iii., 458—to do good out of choice, the character of a good man, ii., 457—causes of a right choice, iii., 467—effects of a right choice, iii., 468.

Christ our surety, ii., 568, 569—by way of caution, and by way of satisfaction, ii., 568—the object and end of worship, i., 18—uses subordinate teachers, not out of indigence, but indulgence, i., 58—a tender shepherd, iii., 501—all sin a great injury, 1. To his merit. 2. To his example, i., 29, 30—undertaking, the end of it, to make us blessed in the enjoyment of God, i., 102. (*Vide* Blessedness.)

Christianity is not to be judged by nominal professors, iii., 456—its design not to

- set up a kingdom of power, but patience, ii., 181. (*Vide* Conditions of Christianity)—it hath two parts. 1. Destructive. 2. Adstructive, i., 251.
- Christian* religion only, worthy our choice, i., 137.
- Church*, is Christ's school, i., 58—true and false, their difference, ii., 178—false, hath usually the advantage of worldly power above the true, ii., 178.
- Choosing* God's precepts, what it is, why they must be chosen, iii., 458—motives to choose them, i., 245—directions how to choose them, iii., 465.
- Civil* policy, and interest, not opposed by religion, i., 200.
- Circumstances* in our obedience much insisted on by God, i., 37—great prudence in applying, ii., 66, 67.
- Claim* to comfort from God's tender mercies, ii., 166.
- Cold* prayer teaches God to deny, i., 169.
- Comfort* denotes two things, ii., 161—it is the soul's strength, ii., 161, 162—in all its causes, matter of comfort, ii., 273—right, when according to the tenor of the word, i., 56, 57—spiritual, eternal, temporal, ii., 222—all to be ascribed to God, ii., 160, 222, 223,—in death from the everlastingness of God's testimonies, iii., 73—when we beg comfort, we must beg grace to serve the God of our comforts, iii., 282—in afflictions may be asked from God's mercy, ii., 155, 156—from God's word, which teacheth us, 1. To look off from men to God. 2. From providences to promises, i., 204, 485; ii., 271, 321,—under afflictions. 1. From God the author of them. 2. From the necessity of affliction. 3. The manner of God's afflicting. 4. His helps to bear them, i., 208, 209—false, i., 492—none in afflictions like those that are fetched in from God's word, i., 485—for, 1. The quality of those is excellent. 2. The provision he has made for our comfort is great. 3. The manner is sweet, i., 485—488.
- Command* of God to be feared as well as the penalty, i., 36.
- Commands* for public and private duties relating to the outward and inner man, i., 47—to God and man, i., 47.
- Commandments*, are exceeding broad. 1. In respect of their uses. 2. Of their duration, ii., 306, 307—of God called his ways, why, i., 31—of God excellent in their matter, i., 464, 465—of God above the power of corrupt nature, why, i., 40, 41—great and small must be obeyed, and why, i., 47—they make us wiser than our enemies, how, ii., 333—have, 1. God for their author. 2. God in giving them to be considered as a lawgiver. 3. They are holy, just, and good, ii., 75, 76.
- Commerce* with God, (*Vide* Communion.)
- Common* favours not to be rested in, iii., 261
- Communion* of saints, its excellency, ii., 142—with God makes blessed, i., 15—none with him, without obedience to him, i., 15—with God, discovers his gloriousness, and our vileness, i., 87—with God in donatives and duties, iii., 311.
- Company* of wicked men, how far to be shunned, 1. As to familiarity with them. 2. Durable relation to them. 3. Compliance with them in their sins, i., 518; iii., 504 (*Vide* Carnal compliance, reproof to such)—observations and directions about it, iii., 507—509—it is to be kept with those that are gracious. Reasons, i., 40, 41.
- Complain*, we may complain to God, not of God, ii., 222.
- Complaints* under affliction, what they usually are, ii., 426, 427.
- Compliance* with God, our safety, ii., 331.
- Condescension* of God in arguing with us, iii., 55, 56—of God in using his supremacy over us. 1. In making overtures of peace. 2. In seeking to reclaim us by mercies, i., 182.
- Condition* of him that falleth off from God, worse than his that never begun, i., 503.
- Conditions* of professing Christianity, and of enjoying outward things, iii., 19—conduct of the Spirit necessary, i., 235.
- Confidence* religious, either stated, or occasional, i., 115, 116.
- Confession* of sin with a broken heart argues one sincere, iii., 500, 501—of the truth, gives inward liberty, when it brings us into outward bonds, i., 392—of the truth hindered by, 1. Carnal fear. 2. Carnal shame, i., 398, 488, 489—of sin, its usefulness, i., 227—not enough to believe the word with the heart unless we confess it with our mouths, i., 488—Reasons, i., 488. (*Vide* Profession.)
- Confidence* in death, and, in the day of judgment, i., 51, 52.
- Confirmation* in the belief of God's word, a matter of very great moment, i., 371, 372.
- Congruity* of choosing God's precepts, iii., 461.
- Conscience*, erroneous, will mislead us, i., 5, 6—hath no lawgiver but God, i., 371—a good, comfort against reproach, ii., 392—must be the Lord's, as well as our afflictions, i., 21, 22—its light not to be opposed, i., 29, 36—it takes notice of thoughts as well as actions, i., 47—it is

- a bridle to restrain from sin, and a whip to lash us for sin, ii., 196—a great comfort under, and against, reproach, i., 196—a good, gives encouragement to come to God, iii., 469—when it works, Christ knocks, i., 15—to be kept, necessary, why, how it may be kept, ii., 22, 23—we must have a good conscience, as well as a good cause, iii., 314.
- Consent* of every individual person to the terms of the covenant of grace; necessary to partake of its benefit, iii., 258.
- Consideration*, consideration of our ways makes way for conversion, i., 576—fit matter of it. 1. Who made thee? 2. Why did God make thee? 3. Hast thou answered the end of his making thee? 4. What unkindness, not to remember him that made thee, &c., i., 313, 578, 579—God's considering our afflictions, what it signifies, iii., 333—of God's judgments, what, and how? i., 508.
- Consolation* for the afflicted from God's word, ii., 271. (*Vide* Comfort from God's word).
- Constancy* in Gods ways a great duty, i., 291—motives, ii., 206—in obedience will turn to good account at last, i., 549—551 (*Vide* Perseverance)—the glory of obedience, i. 499.
- Constant* endeavours against sin a sign of grace, i., 28—obedience, from a new principle, ii., 476—zeal for God, iii., 23, 24—obedience against all temptations, ii., 371
- Contempt* of God's word, two reasons of it, i., 498; iii., 378—must not drive from duty, i., 499, 500.
- Contemptuous* wanderers from God's precepts, God will pull down, ii., 530.
- Contention* with equals a fruit of pride, ii., 181.
- Contentment* in trouble from the faith of God's protection, ii., 497—we should be content with what measures of grace God alloweth, iii., 93.
- Continuance* in sin exceeding dangerous, i., 29—in obedience, the same reason to continue it that there was to begin it, and more, i., 502.
- Contraries* subserve God's designs, ii., 187.
- Conversation* of a Christian should be a hymn to God, iii., 489.
- Converse* with God delightful, iii., 312—with saints comfortable, ii., 142.
- Conversion* occasioned by afflictions, ii., 88—may be observed, and known, ii., 287—God's method in it: 1. In Conviction of sin. 2. Compunction for sin, ii., 287, 288, 316—1. By humbling for sin. 2. Cleansing the heart. 3. Binding up the broken heart, ii., 316.
- Conviction* in various degrees, ii., 288—1. By way of prevention. 2. Humiliation, ii., 396.
- Convictions* stifled harden the heart more, i., 15, 16—their saving effects, ii., 289
- Corruptions*, always ready to break out upon us, ii., 526—a cause of apostasy, ii., 545.
- Corrupt* communication, 1. Obscene. 2. Calumniating. 3. Proud. 4. Passionate discourses, &c., iii., 449—its evil, iii., 451.
- Cost*, and charge in the service of God an argument of true zeal, iii., 22—a privilege of the covenant to be taught God's statutes, iii., 11.
- Covenant* of works, leaves no room for repentance, iii., 2—arguments to enter into covenant with God, and keep it, ii., 418, 419; iii., 98—right the privilege of them that walk with God, i., 10.—of grace in the form of precepts and promises, i., 40—it differs from all other covenants, ii., 293—between God, and man is mutual, iii., 299—difference and agreement between the two covenants, iii., 93—95—not to be modelled by our fancies, ii., 526—relation to God, implies an entire surrender of the whole soul to him, iii., 390—it ought to be often renewed, and why? ii., 417—when? ii., 418.
- Covetousness* a great enemy to righteousness, ii., 565—and to obedience, what it is? i., 351—reasons, i. 356.
- Counsel, Wisdom, Understanding*, how they differ, ii., 457.
- Counsels* of God are commands, i., 31—counsel of God in his word sufficient for all our necessities, i., 212.
- Counsellors*, God's testimonies the best counsellors, i., 206, 212—evil counsellors; envy, covetousness, pride, revenge, ii., 580.
- Courage*, Christian, what it is? difference between it and military valour ii., 451—objections answered, ii., 453—for God. A Christian must not only be laborious as an ox, but valiant as a lion, iii., 19, 20.
- Court* of God's judgment, iii., 173.
- Creation*, discovers the author to be of God, i., 12—end of creation, to make us seek God the Creator, i., 19, 579; ii., 9—it discovers God to be merciful, ii., 50—gives God a right to the whole heart, and our whole obedience, i., 23.
- Creatures* serve man; man his Creator, ii., 131., 269—when spoken of as eternal, it must be understood of a communicated and dependent eternity, ii., 246—utmost perfection is vanity, ii., 299—it is of a perishing nature, ii., 300

Credit. God stands upon the credit of his word, ii., 583.

Cross hath done its work when it hath purged away our sins, iii., 42—we never more advance in Christianity than under the cross, i., 205—serves to awaken the drowsy conscience, ii., 88, 89.

Crosses must, 1. Be looked for. 2. Prepared for. 3. Borne with patience when laid on us, iii., 592.

Crown of glory to be set against the cross, ii., 273—under the cross, to have good thoughts of God glorifies him, ii., 155—forfeited by apostasy, i., 503.

Crying to God in prayer, opposed to lifeless formality, iii., 244—we may cry, we must cry to God, and why so? what it is to cry to God, iii., 241, 245—reasons why men do not cry to God? 1. They want a right sense of their necessities. 2. They are tongue-tied through guilt. 3. They have no spiritual desires. 4. Nor reverence of God. 5. They want faith, iii., 247, 248.

Cure of sin, two ways. 1. By abating the inward lust. 2. Removing the outward bait, iii., 205.

Curiosity, and conscience, ii., 399.

Curse of God, the nature of it, i., 184—lies upon every man by nature, i., 185—how to know we are not under the curse? i., 186, 187.

Custom, no safe rule to walk by, i., 6—in sin makes sin stronger, i., 56—it is a second nature, i., 394.

Customariness, and compliment in praying, makes no business of that great duty, iii., 273.

D.

Day of judgment. An account of thoughts, words, and actions to be given in that day, i., 54, 55—the necessity of that day, ii., 79—the triumph of God's justice will be glorious at the last day, iii., 162, 164.

Daily grace to be sought as well as daily bread, ii., 525—why God permits his children to be in daily danger of their lives, ii., 444.

Danger, sense of it, puts an edge on prayer, iii., 268—may be nigh to God's people, iii., 300—reasons, iii., 300—302.

Deadness of heart in the children of God, whence? 1. From some sin committed. 2. Some good omitted. 3. Unthankfulness. 4. Pride of gifts. 5. Great outward troubles. 6. Carnal liberty indulged to themselves, ii., 278, 279—helps against deadness, ii., 283, 284—of heart towards that which is good, cautioned against, ii., 509—in prayer

reproved, whence it comes? iii., 89, 90.

Death to the soul to be without sense of God's love, ii., 166—how far it may be desired and how not? i., 146; iii., 487—ministers should preach, and people hear, as if death were at their backs, i., 9, 10—itself should not make us warp from the word, ii., 450—not desirable for itself, iii., 187.

Deceitfulness of sin in two particulars, ii., 386.

Decay, first decays of the soul to be observed, ii., 505.

Deceived; wicked men are deceived in their trust, ii., 537.

Deceivings of the heretic, the superstitions, and the seeming religious person, ii., 539.

Declaim. A man may declaim against other men's sins, and yet never mourn for them in secret, iii., 150.

Declaring our case before God argues sincerity, i., 227.

Defection of others should make us more esteem Gods word, why? iii., 45. (*Vide* apostasy.)

Degenerated man the worst of all creatures, iii., 493.

Degeneracy of man, and mankind, ii., 131; iii., 492.

Degrees of holiness, i., 26—of love to the word, iii., 40, 41.

Delay in helping and delivering discourageth God's children, ii., 218—God may delay so long till, 1. The enemies be proud. 2. A land wasted, ii., 218.

Delays in turning to God dangerous, i., 79; ii., 1, 2—why we must obey without delay? ii., 2, 3—great mischief of delays, ii., 2, 3—causes of these delays, ii., 5, 6—heinousness of the sin of delaying, ii., 6—as well as denials are painful, i., 169—of God in making good the promises proceed not from ignorance, nor forgetfulness, nor mutability, nor impotency, i., 476—of spiritual mercies, sharpen desires, iii., 268, 264.

Delaying mercy is not denying mercy, i., 232—why God delays mercy, i., 232, 479.

Deliberation in sinning a great aggravation of sin, i., 30.

Deliberate sin, charged on David, when many others were omitted, ii., 459.

Delight in worldly things as our portion, is a main branch of covetousness, i., 214, 215—in God's word, what it is? why the word is so delightful, i., 118, 119, 131—in God's word the property of saints, ii., 274; iii., 65, 66—in God's testimonies an evidence, that we have made them our choice, ii., 460—trial

- whether we delight in his testimonies? i., 123—125, 133—how we are to delight in them? i., 135—reasons for delighting in them? i., 134—136—exhortation to it—means to get it, i., 137, 138; ii., 274—it puts us upon prayer for grace, and gives us hope to speed in our prayer, i., 240—in God's commandments the causes of it; 1. Suitableness. 2. Possession. 3. A precedent love of the object, iii., 228—what is necessary to delighting in God's commandments, i., 340—its effects. 1. Enlarging the heart. 2. It causeth thirsting after more, iii., 60; i., 311—spiritual, its objects perfect, iii., 230—examine whether we have this delight, iii., 230. 1. By the extent. 2. Effects. 3. Its perpetuity. 4. By comparing these delights with those in sensible things, iii., 230—true only to be had in God, i., 544.
- Delights* spiritual and carnal, distinguished, i., 206; iii., 475—promises to be delighted in before fulfilled, i., 14.
- Deliverance* to be sought for in prayer, iii., 273, 274—it engageth us to God's service, iii., 273—from the power of sin, as well as from guilt, iii., 103—when pleaded for, we must get 1. Right principles. 2. Right ends; what they are? iii., 31, 32—it is lawful, iii., 331—will come in due time, ii., 232—natural to desire deliverance, iii., 473—two ways, ii., 454.
- Deliverances* apt to be forgotten when danger is over, ii., 529.
- Demerits* in the best of saints, iii., 3.
- Denial*, we are to pray against denials, and delays, iii., 264.
- Dependence* on God, a condition of those that expect counsel from him in straits, i., 215; ii., 498—on God better than carnal riches, ii., 342—it is a great duty, i., 478; iii., 499—on God never disappointed, ii., 583—on God, what it implies. 1. Committing ourselves to his care. 2. Submitting to his will. 3. Waiting his leisure, ii., 509.
- Dependencies* carnal, God weans his people from them, i., 199; ii., 342.
- Departure* from God twofold, ii., 372—reasons of it, ii., 372.
- Desire*, its proper object, holiness, i., 43, 397—how to awaken them? i., 101—moderated towards earthly things by considering their vanity, ii., 305—of holiness the character of saints; and why? i., 42; iii., 87—God will satisfy it, i., 449—strong desires a cause why saints press after God's word, iii., 248—what it is, i., 169, 393; iii., 478; iii., 243—it denotes the absence of the good desired, iii., 228, 243, 478—of man either, 1. After truth, or 2. Immortality, ii., 313—several sorts of desires evil, i., 396.
- Desires* of the godly, and the wicked distinguished, i., 43—unactive desires come to nothing, i., 44—vehement sweeten enjoyment, iii., 262—excellency of vehement desires after spirituals, ii., 244, 248—how to get these iii., 249, 250.
- Desertion*, the kinds of it. Reasons and causes of it, i., 68, 69; iii., 129—it is either, 1. In appearance, or, 2. In reality, iii., 129—the greatest of sufferings, i., 205—two special sins the causes of desertion; 1. Too much liberty in carnal things. 2. Laziness in spiritual things, iii., 129.
- Design*, to do good out of design is evil, iii., 463.
- Despair* in ourselves, not in God, i., 40.
- Despised* Christians are despised by men, when brought low by God, iii., 208—saints are highly honoured by God, ii., 225; iii., 209—the common lot of saints to be so, iii., 208.
- Despising* Christ's little ones a great sin, ii., 180.
- Despisers* of God's word, who they are, iii., 378.
- Despondency* an ordinary evil in sharp and tedious afflictions, ii., 226.—reproved, i., 220; ii., 529.
- Destruction*, no creature can desire its own destruction, iii., 487.
- Devil*, works much on the concupiscence, and irascible faculty, iii., 409—a great enemy to us in hearing the word. 1. By diverting us. 2. By raising prejudices. 3. By furnishing us with excuses, evasions, delays, &c., i., 88—not to be believed, ii., 13. (*Vide* Satan.)—seeks to weaken our opinion of God's goodness, i., 54.
- Devisers* of reproaches and calumny, i., 390.
- Devices* of the heart of man, ii., 484.
- Devoting* ourselves to God. 1. Entitles us to the comforts of the Gospel. 2. Engages us to all the duties of it, ii., 266.
- Difference* of judgment causeth discord, ii., 192—between men and men from free grace, ii., 344—between the delights of the godly, and the wicked, i., 206—between the service of God, and all other services, iii., 18—made by God in common judgments, ii., 547—between good and evil, is real, iii., 179—in things, call for different affections, i., 120—between carnal and regenerate, and the regenerate and themselves, ii., 378, 398.

- Different* measures in them that are converted, ii., 288.
- Difficulties* broken through by the promises, iii., 58—in Scripture though it be light, yet no discouragement to us in searching it, ii., 406.
- Dig a pit*, what that expression imports, ii., 232.
- Diligence* in obeying God's commandments required, i., 38; reasons of it, i., 38, 39—wherein it lies, i., 39, 40; ii., 332—in prayer, makes it a business, iii., 272, 273—1. In observing. 2. Improving afflictions, ii., 119.
- Direction* of God, general, and particular, i., 41—literal, and effectual, i., 45; ii., 6—God must be depended on for direction. Reason of it. 1. The blindness of our minds. 2. The forgetfulness of our memories. 3. The obstinacy of our hearts, i., 45—1. For general choice. 2. Particular actions, ii., 403—sufficient from God's word, i., 56, 57; ii., 320, 399, 400—necessary from God, to him that would keep in with God, i., 211, 334—how to carry ourselves till deliverance comes, a great mercy, iii., 9—why? iii., 8, 9—an act of the judgment, ii., 67.
- Disappointment* of wicked men's designs, ii., 187—God will not disappoint the confidence which he raises, i., 481.
- Discontent* with God's allowance, a cause of covetousness, i., 353—how to cure it, i., 359.
- Discord* amongst godly persons, whence? ii., 191—how to remove it: how to carry ourselves under such circumstances, ii., 193.
- Discovery* of a man's heart by what he accounts his bondage, i., 34—of a covetous heart, i., 353, 354.
- Discouragement* in God's way, by reproach, an argument of a low spirit, i., 48, 201—be not discouraged from repentance by the difficulty of it, ii., 15.
- Discoursing* of God seriously, helps to it, iii., 545.
- Discourses* evidence the heart and nature, i., 111; iii., 448—should be of God's word ordinarily, iii., 448—they discover what is within, iii., 450—what discourses Christians must avoid, iii., 450.
- Disdain of inferiors* a notable fruit of pride, ii., 181.
- Disgrace*, how can we bear death, if not disgrace? iii., 209—encouragements under it, iii., 210.
- Disingenuity* not to turn to God now, ii., 11—to be always craving mercy, and never returning praises, ii., 29.
- Dispensation* of grace is gradual, that we may learn to depend on God for daily grace, iii., 293—God never dispensed with the 9th commandment, i., 260, 261.
- Disobedience* against God, not to turn now; as well as not to turn at all, ii., 10—folly and ingratitude in disobedience, i., 512.
- Distance* from sin must be kept, ii., 359.
- Distinguishing*, an act of the judgment, ii., 66.
- Disposition*. (*Vide* temper.)
- Distresses* bring us to God, i., 11—in deep distresses we may plead with God to interpose, ii., 567—advice what to do in deep distresses, ii., 571—the main thing we should look after, is not so much the removal of God's anger, as the renewed sense of his favour, iii., 89.
- Distrust* of God the first rise of apostasy, ii., 267—of God reproved, iii., 327—of God's providence, a cause of covetousness, i., 352—how to cure our distrust, i., 359.
- Divertisements*, holy, an excellent mean to cure heart troubles, i., 203; ii., 210—of wicked men, sinful, i., 203.
- Doing* good. 1. A man may do good by chance. 2. By force. 3. Out of design, and yet not be good, iii., 463—465
- Divine* nature, to love the word for its purity, an argument that we partake of the Divine nature, iii., 200, 201.
- Doctrines* of the Romish synagogue, i., 282, 283.
- Dominion* of sin ought to be deprecated by saints, iii., 115—117—What it is? Distinctions about it, iii., 115, 116—a great evil, iii., 113.
- Divisions* fomented by the enemies of the Church. 1. Between Christians themselves. 2. Between them and their rulers. 3. Between them and their God, ii., 235, 236.
- Doubting* conscience, ii., 409.
- Dread* of God useful in many respects, ii., 555.
- Drawing* near to God. What to be considered therein? iii., 315, 316.
- Dross*, wicked men are as dross, in what respect, ii., 543—God separates dross two ways, ii., 545—what required that we are not put away as dross, ii., 548.
- Drudgery*, no drudgery in God's service, iii., 19.
- Dumbness* about holy things reproved, iii., 454.
- Dust*. The "soul's cleaving to the dust, what it implies, i., 216, 217.
- Duty* must be performed in every condition, iii., 491—not known, no conscience made of it, i., 13, 11—must be kept up with affection, iii., 389—sweet to a good heart as well as privilege, i., 119—and mercy must go together, iii., 260—and

- comfort must go together, ii., 474, 475—more our concern, than what we may suffer for it, i., 204—more considerable than success, i., 235; ii., 342; iii., 413—whether we are to perform duty in case of indisposition, deadness of spirit, i., 309.
- Duties of religion, and graces of the Spirit fortify each other, i., 134*—which imply not weakness, as loving and praising God, are part of our happiness, iii., 236—none are above duties of religion, i., 314, 315.
- Dying hour gives other notions of godliness, i., 9*—righteousness a great comfort in that hour, ii., 561. This comfort arises. 1. From a good conscience. 2. From God's promises, ii., 562—willingness to die, and prayer to live, how they are consistent, i., 145—daily, what that phrase imports, ii., 443.
- E.
- Early seeking God in prayer (viz., in the morning) pressed from five considerations, iii., 276, 277.*
- Earnest prayer comes home laden with fulness of blessing, iii., 245*—prayer, though private, though the answer delayed, a duty, iii., 278, 279. (*Vide vehemency.*)
- Earnestness of longing for salvation arises.* 1. From suitableness. 2. Experience. 3. Our present pressures, iii., 478, 479—the end and use of earnest longings, iii., 480—of the affections, not loudness of voice makes an importunate prayer, iii., 245—means to get it, iii., 482.
- Earth, wicked men are of the earth, iii., 540*
- Earthy things, in vain to seek comfort from them, i., 219*—whilst the heart is set on them, it cannot be set on God, and heavenly things, i., 347.
- Eating the Word. Three things required.* 1. Sound belief. 2. Serious consideration. 3. Close application, ii., 380, 381. (*Vide taste spiritual.*)
- Educification of others a great duty.* 1. In our own families. 2. In our converses, i., 110. Reasons of it, i., 111; iii., 452, 453.
- Education, some men's best reason for their religion, i., 374.*
- Effects of God's mercy either common or saving, ii., 177.*
- Efficacy of the word requires.* 1. Sound belief. 2. Serious consideration. 3. Close application, ii., 325.
- Elect are taught of God, i., 58.*
- Emblems of the stability of God's word.* 1. From the heavens, ii., 253. 2. From the earth, ii., 261.
- Encouragement to wait on God from his wonted goodness in former ages. Why?* iii., 101—to weak Christians to study the word, iii., 79, 80—to go to God. 1. From the covenant. 2. God's affections. 3. Our relation to him. 4. Our going itself to God, ii., 569, 570.
- Encouragements to the services of God.* 1. From the wages at the end. 2. The vails by the way, i., 12.
- End of creation seriously to be considered, i., 579, 580*—wicked men desire the end, not the means, i., 43—is first in intention, last in execution, iii., 277—fixed a main branch of wisdom, ii., 333—ultimate, well fixed will influence, I. Our company. 2. Our business. 3. Our recreations. 4. Our religious duties, ii., 509—ultimate in conjunction with the means, ii., 309—of prayer often given, when the means is denied, i., 232—as we long for the end, so must we desire the means, iii., 483. Reasons of it, iii., 484.
- Ends of God in afflicting his people.* 1. To try them. 2. To awaken importunity. 3. To make them sensible of their own weakness. 4. To advance his own glory, ii., 204, 205—in prayer, when right, are a sure evidence of success, iii., 272.
- Enemies of God. Who? Such as forget his word, &c., iii., 181*—of God, are to be accounted our own, iii., 181—of the church, how far they may be prayed against, ii., 183—word of God makes wiser than our enemies, ii., 333, 337, 338.
- Engagement of the soul to come to God.* Its usefulness, i., 310.
- Enjoyment and use of a thing, how they differ, i., 98*—of God, should be our end, and scope, ii., 250—of God, either mediately, or immediately, i., 101.
- Enlarged heart given.* 1. At conversion, consists in a freedom from guilt and power of sin. 2. A particular enlargement given by exciting grace. Necessity of an enlarged heart, i., 300—302—means, i., 307.
- Enmity of wicked men against the church, ii., 447, 448; iii., 225, 365.*
- Entertain God's word; how to do it aright, iii., 67.*
- Entrance of God's word, giveth light, how, iii., 69.*
- Envy. Difference between envy and wrath, ii., 182*—strikes at some excellency, i., 190; ii., 237—at the prosperity of the wicked, checked by the consideration of God's judgments upon them, i., 189—not the comforts of sinners, i., 528—makes men undermine others, ii., 182.

- Equity*, the duty should continue whilst we expect mercy, i., 411.
- Error* about God's word from, 1. Presumption. 2. Prejudicate opinions. 3. A spirit of opposition. 4. Carnal affections. 5. Superficial apprehensions, &c., ii., 404, 405—1. From ignorance. 2. Judicial blindness, ii., 385—is natural to us, i., 255; iii., 493—out of frailty, or out of pride, i., 179; ii., 530.
- Errors* a ground of apostasy, i., 293, 413.
- Erroneous* principles in policy, a cause of persecution, i., 200.
- Esteem* practical of spiritual things, ii., 383. (*Vide* Valuation)—of the word, motives to get it, iii., 41—what it is, &c., iii., 47.
- Eternity* applied to keep the soul awake, ii., 16—all our actions relate to eternity, i., 410.
- Eternal* things to be secured before temporal, ii., 3, 4—salvation, longing for it, is the duty and property of God's children, iii., 478—life makes us willing to submit to temporal death, iii., 488.
- Evangelical* obedience, and legal; how they differ, i., 15, 22—obedience accepted, its imperfections pardoned, i., 15, 22.
- Events* of things confirm the truth of the word, i., 370—of things are not seen, do depend on God, i., 45; ii., 339—good or bad, holy men provided from them, ii., 310.
- Everlasting* punishment awarded to the despisers of everlasting mercy, iii., 215—things should be our chief comforts, iii., 216—covenant, iii., 215.
- Everlastingness* of God's testimonies, what it is, iii., 223.
- Evidence* of blessedness, conformity to God's law. 1. Inclusive, all such are blessed. 2. Exclusive, none but such are blessed, i., 11—of reason, and of the Holy Spirit differ, ii., 395.
- Evidences* of God's favour to be sought earnestly. Why, iii., 272.
- Evil* speaking very sinful, either against truth or charity, i., 195—whether in any case lawful, i., 390.
- Exact*, and constant obedience against all temptations. Reasons for it, iii., 205.
- Example* no safe rule to walk by, iii., 463.
- Examples* of purity in God's word, iii., 195—are very prevalent, especially in evil, iii., 37, 204, 494—it is no excuse for sinning, iii., 37—of others' fallings, a great temptation, iii., 526—and instances of God's goodness should confirm our faith and patience, iii., 101—to take up religion merely by example, no good ground, iii., 463.
- Excuses* for not speedily turning to God, vain, ii., 2, 3—and evils against keeping God's law argue an evil temper, iii., 403.
- Exercise*, God may exercise his children with sharp and long afflictions, ii., 227; iii., 25—God exercises them according to their reward, i., 246—in God's word, how? i., 210—it increaseth knowledge and judgment, ii., 73—saints are exercised from within and without, iii., 118.
- Exceeding* great love to be given to God's commandments, iii., 431.
- Expectation*, its qualifications, ii., 216—God has more expectations from those that are related especially to him, than from others, iii., 35—God's people expect deliverance from him, i., 1—what it is to expect it? The reasons for it, i., 5—the singular excellency of it, iii., 470, 471—when it is right, i., 473.
- Experience* of God's goodness, the privilege of those that walk with him, i., 11—of God's ways, a reason of our desire after them, i., 42, 172—it teaches us how ready we are to wander from them, i., 86—reasons thereof, i., 86—brings good and sound judgment, ii., 74—compared with God's precepts as to getting understanding, ii., 350, 351—of God's faithfulness in former ages, of great use to succeeding ages, ii., 259; iii., 363—proves the good of obedience ii., 525—of God's grace, a great encouragement, ii., 528—it breeds confidence, i., 230—it is a ground of our valuation of the word, ii., 128—it begets high thoughts of God's tender mercies, iii., 165.
- External* profession and conformity, not accepted without the heart, i., 328, 329.
- Extremes*, two, we are apt to run into under affliction, either to slight or faint under God's correction, iii., 227—two, 1. Self-confidence; 2. Desperation, i., 415.
- Extremity*. God permits his people to be reduced to the extremity of danger, iii., 301—reasons: 1. To exercise trust. 2. To quicken prayer, iii., 301.
- Extremities* are to be endured rather than offered against God's word, ii., 452.
- Eyes*, the windows whereby sin hath been let into the heart, proved doctrinally and historically, i., 362—they are to be watched. Great evils from not watching the eyes, i., 362, 363.
- Eye* of God an engagement to obedience. Reasons, iii., 433, 434. (*Vide* Sight of God.)—It is always on us, i., 439—it hath many blessed effects, iii., 436, 347.

F

Face of God shining, what it implies? i., 12—implies his favour and strength, i., 16.

- Facility of spirit*, a reason of apostasy, i., 295.
- Fadingness of the world* should excite us to look after an eternal state, ii., 613.
- Faculties of the soul*, either such as command, or are to obey, iii., 496.
- Failings in the choicest saints*, i., 15, 21, 435; iii., 492, 493—pardoned to the sincere, i., 16, 24; iii., 500—daily, and infirmities, i., 26, 39; ii., 478—how to discern the infirmities of saints from other men, ii., 478, 590—how to distinguish them from wilful sins, ii., 415—when disallowed, they exclude us not from the privileges of God's servants, iii., 13—we must not be too severe upon men's failings, i., 436.
- Fainting of soul* from delaying salvation, ii., 207, 274—argues weakness, if not nullity of grace, ii., 21.
- Faintings of spirit*. 1. Their nature. 2. Causes. 3. Kinds described, ii., 208, 209, &c.—remedies against, ii., 208, 209—it is cured by the word, which is, 1. A proper, 2. A universal cure, i., 251—twofold: 1. Of dejection; 2. Of defection, ii., 208.
- Faith must conquer*, 1. Our fears; 2. Cares; 3. Troubles, iii., 477—ultimately resolved into God's testimonies, i., 13—expressed by terms of motion, i., 16—by lifting up the eyes, ii., 586—hath an eagle's eye, ii., 586—how to get it, ii., 586, 587—strengthened from the consideration, 1. Of creation; 2. Of Providence, ii., 263—from events, i., 370, 371—and fear makes us truly wise, ii., 343—concerning the world to come, a great help to the keeping of a good conscience in this, ii., 22—increased by thankfulness, ii., 61—conjecture, opinion, how they differ, i., 372—brings meat out of the caters, ii., 32—it keeps alive in a dead condition, i., 223—how we may know that faith is of God's raising, i., 482—may faint and not fail, ii., 110, 589—it may fail in some degree, ii., 588, 589—its use in application of promises, ii., 497—has notable operations. 1. The adventure. 2. The waiting. 3. The resolution. 4. The resignation. 5. The prudence. 6. The obedience of faith, i., 422, 423.
- Faith's excellencies*. 1. Eminent wisdom in it. 2. Nobleness of spirit, it lives upon invisible things, secured by God's faithfulness, ii., 466, 467.
- Faithfulness of God*, relates to some promise, it depends on God's unchangeableness. It has been evidenced in all ages of the world, ii., 275, 582—of God to us, should encourage our faithfulness to him, ii., 260—how we are to depend on God's, ii., 585—seen, 1. In bringing. 2. Guiding afflictions, ii., 154.
- Falling off*, a greater dishonour to God than bare refusal, i., 442.
- Fall*, all may, in some measure, ii., 516.
- Fallen man*, compared to a lost sheep, iii., 494.
- Falsehood* is either, 1. In point of opinion; or, 2. Practice, ii., 385.
- Familiarity* reconciles us to troubles and temptations, iii., 49—with wicked persons to be avoided. Why? 1. From the contagion. 2. The molestation. 3. The seduction. 4. The scandal that arises thence, &c., ii., 504, 505. (*Vide* Company of wicked men.)
- Family*, God provides for his, iii., 15.
- Fast-day*, the work thereof, to put away the evil of our doings, ii., 359.
- Fatherly love of God* to his children under discipline, ii., 272.
- Father of mercies*, not of punishment, ii., 159.
- Favour of God*, in the sense of it, may be withdrawn from his dearest children, iii., 129—it is the soul's life, ii., 170—sought for by all that choose him for their portion. Why? When? How? i., 571, 572—it is the fountain of all goodness, iii., 129, 130—the privilege of those that walk with him, i., 10—God's children account it a great favour if he will but look upon them, iii., 89—it is better than life, iii., 132—reasons: 1. From the necessity. 2. Their value of it. 3. Their confidence, iii., 89.
- Fear* is balanced with a sense of God's great mercies, iii., 365—of God, What? i., 379; ii., 36—twofold, servile and filial i., 378, 379; ii., 36—a great resister of sin, i., 25; ii., 366—a qualification of those that expect counsel from God, i., 215—the great principle of obedience, ii., 37—filial, twofold: 1. Of reverence. 2. Caution, ii., 36—its influence on obedience, ii., 37—of God consistent: 1. With blessedness. 2. Comfort. 3. Courage. 4. Free grace, ii., 39—to offend, an effect and sign of love, iii., 198—a note of a true servant of God, i., 378, 379—of God drives out the slavish fear of man, ii., 551—and faith makes us truly wise, ii., 342—of man a great snare, i., 455—of God from the word of God, i., 378—and shame, how they differ, ii., 552.
- Fears and cares checked by God's faithfulness*, ii., 155.
- Feeling of deadness* a sign of some life, iii., 289.
- Feet*, what meant by feet in Scripture? i., 583, 576; ii., 160.

- Fellowfeeling* a duty, though we feel nothing in our own persons, i., 102.
- Fellowship* with the godly a great happiness, ii., 190.
- Fervour* and vehemency, required in prayer, iii., 221, 281—What it is? How to obtain it? iii., 87. (*Vide Earnestness and Vehemency.*)
- Few* wicked may bring great judgments, ii., 542—punished, should make all the rest fear, ii., 553.
- Fickleness* in obedience, matter of humiliation, i., 410. (*Vide Unsteadiness.*)
- Fidelity* in keeping the commandments should be joined with faith in believing the promises, ii., 80
- Fire* of trials purgeth away dross, ii., 511.
- Fixed* spirit, its excellency, ii., 188, 189—necessary to the sound heart, ii., 196, 475—means to get a, ii., 201, 277—desires after holiness to be laboured for, i., 104, 105.
- Flee* to God's mercy through Christ, ii., 168.
- Flesh*, not to be consulted, ii., 14.
- Floods* of wickedness breaking out should put us upon prayer that God would deliver his people, iii., 21.
- Footholdness* to rush into evil company, ii., 508.
- Folly* in sinning, ii., 391.
- Fore-armed* against temptations, a duty, iii., 209.
- Forbearance* of God with sinners, upon what grounds, iii., 24, 25.
- Force*, some do good by; two ways, iii., 164.
- Forfeiture* of mercy by ingratitude, ii., 29—by using indirect means to get out of trouble, ii., 211.
- Forerunners* of mercy, iii., 207.
- Forgetting* is neglecting, ii., 225—227.
- Forgetfulness* of God's word, i., 139—it is twofold, ii., 277—helps against it, i., 140—we are naturally apt to forget God, ii., 227.
- Formality* not regarded by God, i., 62.
- Formalists* insist much on little matters, i., 47.
- Formal* and godly professors, how they differ, i., 17.
- Former* judgments to be laid to heart, when like sins abound, i., 506; ii., 552, 553—judgments are to be told to after ages, i., 506, 507.
- Forsaken* of God visibly. What. 1. When God lets loose enemies. 2. When he comforts not. 3. When he directs not. 4. When he supports not in an afflicted condition, ii., 506.
- Forsaking*, utterly to be forsaken of God ought to be earnestly deprecated, i., 135—God, and duty to him in trials.
- What? 1. To lose our patience. 2. Our confidence in him. 3. To desert the truth, ii., 18, 19—arguments against forsaking of God, ii., 20, 21—God forsaketh none but those that forsake him, ii., 131—God is, 1. Folly. 2. Rebellion. 3. Ingratitude. 4. Injustice, i., 512, 513.
- Fortitude*, true; when we can bear reproach for Christ, iii., 210.
- Fortify* within against temptations without, i., 113—against, 1. Errors. 2. Persecutions. 3. Scandals, i., 113.
- Foundation* of the stability of God's testimonies. 1. God's nature. 2. The blood of Christ, iii., 317. (*Vide Testimonies.*)—of righteousness the sure foundation, ii., 563—of spiritual life, said in the word, iii., 58.
- Fountain* of all goodness, is God, ii., 98, 161—of wisdom and knowledge, God, ii., 331.
- Frame* of heart right: 1. When the principle is right. 2. When there is a constant progression, suitable to that principle, iii., 237—to long for subjection to the will of God, i., 394—spiritual in holy things, difficult to be maintained, ii., 477—several inquiries about the, ii., 478—required by the word, as well as the outward act, iii., 194—a right, in six particulars, ii., 106, 107—evil, when we continue not in prayer, because we have not the mercy presently, iii., 262—awful; means to get it, iii., 375.
- Fraud* and cruelty, certain prognostics of ruin, ii., 241.
- Freewill* offerings must be given to God, ii., 439, 440.
- Friendship*, 1. Sinful. 2. Civil. 3. Religious, ii., 45, 46—in having all good things common, iii., 184—tried, most valuable, ii., 21—of God our security, i., 329; ii., 338.
- Fretting* of spirit, cured by thanksgiving, ii., 28.
- Fruit* of God's word is everlasting, ii., 308—holy of affliction, better than deliverance, ii., 96, 273—it must be believed, and waited for, ii., 119.
- Fruits* of mourning for other men's sins, iii., 155.
- Fruition* more than expectation, ii., 523.
- Fugitives* as well as exiles, all are by nature, iii., 313.
- Fulness* of God, not exhausted by giving, ii., 65—of Christ, and our own wants considered, the means to awaken holy desires, i., 401.

G.

Gain in Christ, more than loss in the world, ii., 20.

- Generation**, one receives the promises that are made good to another, ii., 258—all, have the same common promises made good to them, ii., 258—one, should report to another, what they have found of God's faithfulness in making good the promises, i., 505; ii., 258—saints are a generation of such as seek God, i., 81, 82; iii., 275.
- Guessing** at the world to come, is not persuasion of it, iii., 72, 73.
- Gifts** of God an argument to seek for more, ii., 133.
- Gift** of prayer, not so much as the grace, iii., 250.
- Giving** ourselves to God is a debt; it is to gain ourselves, ii., 290—it alters the nature as well as the use of ourselves, ii., 290.
- Glory** of God is the end of the grace of God, ii., 296; iii., 418—not to be given to the instrument, but the chief agent, ii., 347—of God seen in his people's deliverance, iii., 207.
- Glorifying** God, 1. By subjection. 2. By dependence, ii., 266—exhortation to glorify God, iii., 447—motives, iii., 447—none shall glorify God in Heaven, that do not glorify God on earth, iii., 487—two reasons why we are to aim at God's glory above all things, iii., 489.
- God** the best master, he doth good to his servants, ii., 56, 57—the first cause, last end; chiefest good, i., 1, 559—he only makes blessed, and shows who is so, i., 5—living to him, what it denotes, i., 8, 9—he writes his law in the heart, i., 13—he will not be our God, unless we make him our guide, i., 13—blessed in himself, and needs nothing to add to his blessedness, i., 100—he is willing to communicate his blessedness, i., 101; ii., 97, 98—engages to be, 1. An advocate. 2. A Redeemer. 3. A fountain of life to his people, iii., 172, 173—is eternal, what that is; how proved to be so. 1. By Scripture. 2. By reason, ii., 242; i., 505—showeth himself eternal, 1. As a governor. 2. As a benefactor, ii., 245—is true. 1. In promises. 2. Precepts. 3. Threatenings, ii., 250—considered. 1. As our absolute Lord. 2. As our Governor and Judge, iii., 156—is to be feared. 1. For his mercies. 2. His judgments, ii., 553. (*Vide* Goodness of God; Power of God; Wisdom of God.)—bears much affection to man as his creature, ii., 133—mercy is, 1. Natural. 2. Pleasing to God, i., 415.
- God's** love to us is bounty; ours to him, duty, ii., 28—wisdom, power, mercy, are eternal, ii., 241.
- Godly** men continually in danger, in respect, 1. Of the soul. 2. The body, ii., 491—the more others despise, the more godly men prize God's ways, iii., 199—man described by two properties. 1. Fear of God. 2. Knowledge of his word, ii., 190—fellowship with the godly a great happiness, ii., 190.
- Gold**, put for all worldly comforts and profits, iii., 34—reproof to them that prefer gold before God's word, ii., 127.
- Good** men, and bad men, exercise one another, iii., 35—the chiefest good should be sought, with our chiefest care, love, and delight, i., 19—we should desire deliverance no further than as good for us, ii., 572—brought out of evil by God, ii., 33, 573—chiefest good, and last end should influence all our actions, ii., 508—God is good of himself, and doth good to us, ii., 96—he doth good to his servants; why? ii., 56—it becomes them that have to do with God, to have a deep sense of his goodness, ii., 96. (*Vide* Do good.)
- Goodness**, 1. Temporal. 2. Spiritual. 3. Eternal, ii., 574—in God threefold. 1. Natural. 2. Moral. 3. Beneficial, ii., 97, 98—of God manifested, 1. In creation. 2. Redemption. 3. Providence, i., 540; ii., 101, 102.
- Gospel** called a testimony, because therein God hath testified how a sinner may be pardoned, &c., i., 11—the, offers life now, and hereafter will accuse for refusal of it, i., 13—it teaches us how we may be blessed in the enjoyment of God, i., 102—reveals eternal life. Nature hath some guesses at it; the law some shadows of it, ii., 246—showeth that we are liable to eternal misery, ii., 249.
- Government** of God, encourages to commit ourselves to his protection, ii., 49—of God, moral and natural, ii., 265—natural government either ordinary, or extraordinary, ii., 265—of God naturally extends to all creatures. 1. Celestial bodies. 2. Angels. 3. Winds, seas, &c. 4. Diseases, &c., ii., 266.
- Grace**, daily, necessary on many accounts, iii., 101—107—great, needful because we know not how long trials may last, ii., 590. (*Vide* Covenant of grace.)—habitual, and actual, i., 335, 336; ii., 510—Question. Whether real grace can make men proud, ii., 184—turns punishments into medicines for sin, i., 205—it must be always working, i., 438—one act of, makes way for another, i., 342; ii., 84—it is but weak in the best, ii., 588—preventing, i., 21

- discovers itself where it is, i., 28—
gives to will, grace assisting to do, i.,
41—God does all in the work of grace,
i., 307, 308, 336—supporting, ii., 524—
preventing, working, and co-working,
i., 251, 252—all, as to kinds infused
at once, i., 49—comes in by the under-
standing, i., 238—confirming as neces-
sary as converting, ii., 511—justifying,
takes away the condemning power;
sanctifying, the reigning power; glo-
rifying, the very being of sin, ii., 387,
388—qualifications of those that sue for
grace, i., 131, 135.
- Gracious* souls find more joy in God's
way than in all worldly things, i., 117
—they take occasions to employ them-
selves in holy things, iii., 286, 287.
- Gratitude*, the bond of duty to the fallen
creature, ii., 28.
- Grief* at the violation of God's law, a sign
of true zeal, iii., 23, 512—worldly, caus-
eth death, ii., 270—it must not be smothered, i., 219.
- Grieve* not the Spirit, iii., 502.
- Groans* of the spirit distinguished from
the eruptions of the flesh, iii., 215.
- Grounds* of love to the word, the most
noble is the word's purity, iii., 200—of
faith and obedience, iii., 171.
- Guidance* of God to be submitted to, if we
will have him to be ours, i., 13, 14.
- Guilt* makes us jealous of God, ii., 100.
- Guilty* creatures cannot immediately en-
joy God, i., 20.
- H.
- Habitual* and actual reign of sin, iii.,
114.
- Hand* of God, notes the power of God, iii.,
456—our mercies are in the, ii.,
161.
- Happiness* of the saints not in this world,
iii., 204—as well as honour to be God's
servants, iii., 20—mistakes about it.
1. Some mistake wherein it lies.
2. Others mistake the way that leads
to it. 3. Some are indifferent in the
use of means leading to it, i., 2, 41, 42—
mistakes herein very dangerous, *Ibid.*
—many would be happy, that would
not be holy, i., 42—of saints, that God
is near them on all occasions, iii., 306.
(*Vide* Blessedness.)
- Hardness* of heart from delaying repent-
ance, ii., 5—by converse with wicked
men, ii., 506—prevented by acknow-
ledging mercies, ii., 61—from neglect-
ing answers of prayer, iii., 254—wicked
men harden themselves, 1. From Di-
vine patience. 2. Divine mercy, iii.,
296.
- Harmony*, between the Spirit, Scripture,
and grace, i., 93, 94—between God's
work, and our duty, i., 93, 94—between
the word and Spirit teaching us, i.,
104.
- Hasty*, we are apt to be hasty with God,
ii., 589.
- Hatred* of God under the notion of a judge,
not as a preserver, ii., 481—of sin,
when it is right, iii., 382—it is two-
fold, iii., 382—of the world against
Christians, because God loves them,
ii., 513—of sin. 1. The kinds.
2. Causes. 3. Effects of it, ii., 390—
392; iii., 381, 383, 384.
- Hating* of sin, as it is sin, ii., 361, 386,
390—it is a character of those that are
good, ii., 387, 388, 390—none hate sin,
but they that hate all sin, ii., 391.
- Hearing* the word without practice not
sufficient, i., 470—prayer, God may
hear, when he does not answer, iii.,
248.
- Heart*, tender, soon affected with God's
judgments, ii., 554—means to get a
tender heart, iii., 288, 289—purity of,
the internal principle of good actions,
i., 11—the word of God to be laid up
in the, i., 13—what a man's heart is,
that the condition is, ii., 118—what it
implies. 1. The mind. 2. The affec-
tions, i., 13—God will be sought with
the whole, i., 21, 328, 575—half, what
it is, i., 332, 574—whole, what it is.
It implies, 1. Extension of parts.
2. Intention of degrees, i., 21, 22—
examine whether we give God the
whole, i., 333—why God will be sought
with the whole, i., 21, 22, 83, 84, 328,
329—motives, i., 332, 333—God inclines
the, and man inclines his own; how,
i., 65, 349; ii., 474. (*Vide* Inclina-
tion.)—inclined to keep God's statutes,
what it is; the necessity of it, ii., 475—
God requires the, in his service, i., 328,
329—its bent towards the word, how
expressed, i., 170—must, 1. Be drawn
off from the creature, self, and sin.
2. Drawn unto God, i., 517, 518. (*Vide*
Enlarged heart.)
- Heaven*, the belief of it a great support
under the terrors of this world, i., 458.
- Heavenly* things; motives to press after
them, iii., 481, 482.
- Heavens*, an emblem of the stability of
God's word, ii., 251.
- Help* and hope, when delayed, we may
complain to God, ii., 222—to be sought
of God in heavy troubles, ii., 231—to
be sought of God to incline our hearts
to God's statutes, i., 65—in straits may
be expected by them that make a con-
science of God's commandments, iii.,
469.

- Height*, when is iniquity come to its height? iii, 28, 29.
- Hell*, a worm that never dies, a pit that hath no bottom, a fire that shall never be quenched, iii., 197.
- Heritage* denotes, 1. The substance of our portion. 2. Our right to it. 3. The tenure by which we hold it. 4. Our actual possession of it, ii., 463—465—God's testimonies are, 1. A full. 2. A sure. 3. A lasting, ii., 465, 466—marks of one that hath God's testimonies for his, ii., 468, 469—consideration to move us to take God's testimonies for our, ii., 47, 471.
- Heirs* of the promise, rejoice in each other's company, and in each other's mercies, ii., 138, 139—reasons of it, ii., 138.
- Hiding* God's word in the heart, what? i., 90—why God's word must be hid in our heart, i., 91, 92—great advantages of, in our heart, in seven particulars, i., 91, 92—how we may hide it in our hearts? 1. By meditation upon it. 2. Receiving it in the love of it, i., 94.
- Hide* God's word, not as a talent in a napkin, but as gold in a treasury, i., 106—God's hiding his commandments from us, is his not opening our eyes to see into them, i., 167.
- Hieroglyphic* of the Egyptians, ii., 43.
- Hiding-place*, God is a, to his own. It implies many things for their comfort. 1. Secrecy. 2. Capacity. 3. Safety. 4. Consolation, ii., 493, 494.
- Hindersers* of preaching the word, great judgments threatened against them, i., 435.
- Holiness* in God is his essence, in us a quality, iii., 195—it is a means of maintaining communion with God, i., 389—negative and positive, i., 21—31—not enough to avoid evil, but we must do good, i., 31—reasons and uses thereof, i., 31—of life is often made a scorn by carnal men, i., 496—it is better than wisdom, wisdom better than strength, iii., 138.
- Honesty* in our dealings with others, directions about it, ii., 564.
- Honest* heart, one sign of it is, when a man fears to offend, and cares to please God, ii., 107.
- Honour*, great, to be God's servant, i., 142; iii., 17, 18—to be dishonoured for Christ's sake, i., 460.
- Horror* at men's forsaking God's law, argues, 1. A due sense of sin. 2. Of God's wrath. 3. Of the truth of the threatenings. 4. The effects of sin, i., 515—it proceedeth from a good cause, i., 516.
- Hope* teaches us to purify ourselves, i., 25.—and to obey God's commandments, iii., 414—and help when delayed, we may complain to God, ii., 222—and obedience, much praised, little practised, iii., 414—in Christ, consider what we have of that hope, i., 582—keeps the soul alive under faintings, how? ii., 210—what hope is, iii., 416 keeps us from being utterly overcome, i., 436—and faith, their difference, ii., 210—its excellency and certainty; it causeth earnestness to be delivered out of the trouble, and yet patience under the trouble, ii., 211—nourished by the word of God, ii., 212—from worldly things causeth shame, ii., 521—true and false, distinguished, ii., 522; iii., 416—false, 1. Is not built on God. 2. It is slight and superficial. 3. Dead and cold. 4. Weak and inconstant. 5. Lazy and loitering, ii., 522—true, 1. Draws the heart from earth to heaven. 2. Enlivens the heart in duty. 3. Engages the heart against sin, ii., 323; iii., 417—grounded on God's word, iii., 281—puts the soul upon diligence in prayer, iii., 282, 421.
- Humble* carriage becomes us when we have most mercy, iii., 4.
- Humbling* considerations under mercy, iii., 4.
- Humiliation* caused by the consideration of the multitude of vain thoughts, ii., 487—under God's hand gives ground of hope, i., 219.
- Humility* caused by the fear of God's judgments, ii., 555.
- Hypocrite* appears best when he is taken in pieces; the sincere Christian when he is taken altogether, i., 8.
- Hypocrites* zealous about lesser, slighty in great, matters, i., 47—discovered by scandals, iii., 410.
- Hypocrisy* to serve God with the body, not soul, iii., 426—to go from sin to sin, from duty to sin, from sin to duty, &c., i., 50—to let God carry the name of our praises, when we sacrifice to ourselves, i., 61—to be speaking of good things, without hearts affected with their goodness, i., 108, 125—hateful to God, ii., 539.

I.

- Idle* words weigh heavy in God's balance, i., 55—none of God's servants must be, iii., 18—discourses sinful, ii., 477; iii., 452.
- Illumination* by the word, ii., 320—of God necessary to a right understanding of God's word, i., 150; iii., 22—a great mercy; why? iii., 140—a double work

- of God in, i., 150—several uses of Divine, i., 152; iii., 22—worth of it in four things, iii., 413, 414.
- Imitation* of God in his goodness, ii., 104.
- Immortality* of the soul, iii., 234.
- Immoderate* sorrow checked from the consideration of God's justice, and faithfulness in afflicting, ii., 152, 154.
- Immutability* of God's word, emblems of it, and reasons of it, ii., 251; iii., 233—a ground of comfort to God's people, iii., 320—a reason of the, of our obedience, i., 5 H.
- Impartiality* of God in punishing and rewarding, i., 50, 54; ii., 554.
- Impatience* in waiting for returns of prayer, argues, 1. Disobedience. 2. Weak faith. 3. Want of love. 1. Want of patience, iii., 268—under delays, whence, ii., 221; iii., 261—from an opinion of our own merit, iii., 243—makes afflictions sharp and tedious, ii., 227—it is fed from a double spring, iii., 331—it causeth fainting under afflictions, ii., 211.
- Importunity* in prayer has great effects, iii., 261.
- Impotency* of the creature takes not away God's right, i., 40—commands of God convince us of our, i., 40—we can do evil, not good, by our own power, i., 343.
- Improvement* of afflictions, by the word, ii., 271.
- Imprinting* the word on the soul, how discovered, iii., 234.
- Impulse* to sin, and not be ashamed, i., 52.
- Inability* to return, and proneness to err, the characters of fallen man, iii., 493.
- Inclination* to present things uneth us, i., 435—of the heart to God's statutes, what it is not? what it is? i., 343; ii., 476, 477—(1.) Negatively: 1. It is not a simple approbation of the word. 2. Nor a bare desire or wish. 3. Nor a hypocritical will to the word. (2.) Affirmatively: 1. It is a determination of the judgment for God. 2. The will powerfully swayed to the word. 3. Seconded with endeavours after new obedience, ii., 476, 477—of the heart, either from the world, or to God's testimonies, is of the Lord's grace, i., 345—how God inclines the heart, and how man? i., 349.
- Indifferency* in religion reproved, i., 286.
- Indirect* means not to be used for relief, i., 222.
- Indisposition* of soul, a case: whether we are to set upon duty under indispositions, and deadness of soul? resolved in eight propositions, i., 222, 223.
- Indwelling* of sin, i., 26.
- Infinately* good, God alone is so, i., 569.
- Influence* of God's grace is not the warrant, but the help of the soul in duties, i., 262—we need continual influences of grace, iii., 57.
- Infirmities*, great sins may be but, and smaller sins may be damnable transgressions; how? i., 27; iii., 502—Christ bears our, iii., 502—how to distinguish between sins of infirmity, and wilful breaches of our covenant, ii., 415, 590—unavoidable by the best, iii., 495—they are to be watched against, and repented of, iii., 502.
- Ingenuous* and open dealing with God procures audience, i., 230.
- Ingratitude* not to repent; how that is? ii., 11.
- Inheritance* of believers, full, sure, lasting, ii., 465, 466. (*vide* Heritage.)
- Iniquity*, what it is to do; who are they that do, in God account? i., 24, 25—comes to its height, 1. When general. 2. Impudent. 3. Incurrible. 1. Against nature, &c., iii., 28, 29.
- Injudiciousness*, either total, or partial, ii., 71.
- Injustice* to God, not to turn to him, now, ii., 11.
- Intemperance* gives holy boldness in prayer, i., 51, 188; ii., 185—till it be lost, a Christian is not overcome, ii., 21—may be pleaded against men, not God, ii., 558.
- Innocent* persons may be sore oppressed, &c., ii., 563.
- Inordinate* desires of having more wealth than the Lord allows in a fair way of Providence, is a main branch of covetousness, i., 341—it is a natural evil, the effects of it, i., 355, 356.
- Instruments* of troubles, too much eyed, provoke God to anger, ii., 18—whoever is the instrument, God is the principal in all our afflictions, i., 205.
- Insulting* enemies, not to be insulted over, when God's judgments fall upon them, ii., 553—over others in affliction, reproved, ii., 557.
- Integrity* and sincerity, the whole heart, i., 21—of parts, i., 83.
- Inticements* to sin, what use may be made of them? ii., 458.
- Intimacy* with few, friendship with all that are godly, ii., 46—it must be improved for edification, ii., 46.
- Interest* of God in the world lies, 1. In his truth. 2. His worship. 3. His servants, iii., 184, 185—of God oftentimes stands alone, yet God can carry it on though all the world be against it, i., 198—of God must be uppermost in the

soul in prayer, iii., 250—of a Christian is to keep in with God, i., 210; ii., 341—in God necessary, that he be our portion, i., 561—in the hearts of God's people a rare mercy, ii., 142, 143.

Intermission of duty loseth ground, i., 500.

Interposition of God lawful to be desired in dangers. Reasons, ii., 509, 570—only so far as may be for our good, ii., 372.

J.

Jealous, God exceeding, in matters of worship, i., 55; iii., 185.

Jewels, God's, are the world's filth, i., 196.

Joy of heart arising from a believer's heritage. 1. From the portion itself. 2. From the disposition of a believer's heart. 3. From the dispensation of God, ii., 472, 473—it is communicative, ii., 141—in God's word must be mixed with reverence, iii., 376—is, 1. Real. 2. Cordial. 3. Great. 4. Pure. 5. It ends well. 6. Perverts not the heart. 7. Overcomes sense of affliction, i., 207, 208—it is compared to the joy of victory, iii., 376—carnal, has contrary qualities and effects, iii., 376.

Judge, God is the, of his law, iii., 208.

Judgments, spiritual, the sorest, iii., 161—God's precepts called, why? i., 54, 55, 169—use of it, i., 194—promises called, iii., 358—of God on the visible church, are to separate the dross from the gold, ii., 517—felt or feared call for mourning, and why? iii., 149—of God's mouth, denotes God's will revealed in the Scriptures, and why? i., 108—and of his hand, i., 502; ii., 25—they are both righteous, iii., 388—of God on sinners, a mean to preserve us from sinning, ii., 529—they are to be wisely observed, iii., 534—God's, of old, i., 502, 505—509—ordinarily begin at the house of God, iii., 547—on the wicked, his mercy to his church, i., 505, 506; ii., 549—God to be praised for his, ii., 490.

Judicious mind, a great blessing, ii., 66—a threefold use of a judicious mind: 1. To distinguish. 2. To determine. 3. To direct; why to be begged of God? ii., 66, 67.

Jurisdiction of God, the greatest, i., 181—how it differs from propriety? i., 181.

Justice and mercy distinguished, ii., 155—and judgment, how distinguished? ii., 558—to do, is the saint's comliness, ii., 559—1. By it we are made like God. 2. It is acceptable to God. 3. Fits us for communion with God. 4. It is suitable to the new nature. 5. Is honourable in the eyes of men. 6. Con-

duceth to the good of society, ii., 559—no escaping it if God should deal with us in strict, i., 7—is either, 1. General. 2. Or particular, iii., 157—1. Legislative. 2. Judicial. 3. Remunerative, iii., 157, 158—and mercy, are both friends to saints, iii., 168—of God to be acknowledged, iii., 169.

Just, God is, proved by four reasons, iii., 159.

Justification of a sinner, a great secret, i., 57.

Justified, Divine wisdom, of all its children, iii., 214.

K.

Keeping and doing the commandments, how they differ, iii., 423—God's law, requires, 1. Labour. 2. Courage. 3. Self-denial. And understanding, i., 325 iii., 401, 402—examine whether we keep God's law or no? iii., 403—God's precepts, brings, 1. Peace of conscience. 2. Joy in the Holy Ghost. 3. Increase of grace, &c., i., 550, 551.

Keep, what it is to keep God's testimonies? i., 13—it implies, 1. Exactness. 2. Perseverance, i., 14, 549—it relates to a charge committed to us, i., 13, 40, 547—it is twofold, legal, evangelical, i., 330, 518; iii., 419—covenant with God. Motives, ii., 422—Question. How far a man may be said to have kept God's law? iii., 409—a good conscience: dispositions required to the keeping of it. Considerations to move us to keep a good conscience, ii., 22, 23.

Keeping the commandments, no, without love, iii., 428.

Kindness of God is either, 1. General; or, 2. Special: the nature of both, ii., 157; iii., 295. (*Vide* Lovingkindness.)—it is the original cause of all mercy, ii., 157.

Kings, princes, &c., have great need to know God's precepts: reasons of it, i., 453—their countenance a great advantage to religion, ii., 381—they are jealous of their prerogative, ii., 234.

Knocking of Christ at the door of the heart, what it is? seasons of Christ, ii., 15.

Know, none, so much of God, but they still need to know more, why? iii., 241 to, signifies, 1. To understand. 2. To consider. 3. To believe, iii., 331—333.

Knowledge of Divine mysteries, is twofold. 1. That which is a gift. 2. That which is a grace, iii., 442—twofold. 1. Of faith. 2. Of sense, iii., 317—of God's mind inactive, not sufficient, i., 21, 320—without practice, is not right, i., 321; ii., 71, 392, 400, 401—of God's

will, various degrees of it, i., 150—in order to, much is required, i., 318—saying, what it is? 1. Such as establishes the heart against delusions. 2. Such as brings the soul under its dominion. 3. Such as gives prudence to practise it, i., 234—it is the effect of Divine bounty, ii., 40, 106—should be one part of our constant prayer, iii., 238—we can never enough ask it, i., 236; ii., 71—reasons why, i., 238, 239; ii., 48, 238—in getting, we must pass through the porch before we can come to the deep mysteries, iii., 237, 240—our cure; ignorance our disease, iii., 238—of God's testimonies, the only way to live, iii., 243—of God causeth us. 1. To trust him. 2. To love him. 3. To fear him in proportion to our knowledge of him, i., 238—two things considerable in, iii., 412—(1.) The necessity of it. (2.) The excellency of it. 1. It is man's excellency in general. 2. Divine, is better than all other. 3. Practical, the best part of Divine. 4. Transforming, the best part of practical, iii., 239, 240—ought to be. 1. Comprehensive. 2. Distinct. 3. Experimental. 4. Practical, i., 244—to be desired for a right end. 1. Not out of curiosity. 2. Nor vain-glory. But, 3, to satisfy others. 4. To save our own souls' i., 244.

L.

Lamentation for other men's sins, special seasons for it; 1. When gross sins are frequent. 2. Universal. 3. When incorrigible. 4. When they grow impudent, iii., 14—reasons thereof, 1. They do it because it is their duty. 2. Their property, *ib.* (*Vide* Other men's sins)—reasons why it is the disposition and property of saints to mourn for other men's sins. 1. They are tender of God's glory. 2. They have a pity for men. 3. They have an antipathy against sin as such. 4. It proceeds from the foresight of the effects of sin. 5. They are public spirited, iii., 445.

Late coming to God, many have come too late, none too soon, ii., 13.

Law of God is truth, iii., 56—in what sense? 1. It is the chiefest truth. 2. The only truth. 3. The pure truth. 4. The whole truth, iii., 57—reasons why it is truth. 1. From the author, God. 2. The matter. 3. The end. 4. Its own assertion, iii., 220—uses, *ib.*—of God, the rule of our lives, i., 22—24—it is put oftentimes for the whole word of God, ii., 310—Christ's human nature under a law, i., 5—angels, rational

beings, inanimate creatures, are under a law, i., 5, iii., 51—of God, taken in a limited or a large sense, iii., 398—of God, informing and awing, i., 5—of God, must be loved, that it may be kept, iii., 101—its office and work, i., 5—it abates human pride by propounding the rigour of the first covenant, i., 21—it brings us to Christ, i., 22—it is holy, just, and good, how, i., 47; ii., 71, 76, iii., 418—it is not obscure in itself, but our eyes are blind, i., 119—of God is, 1. Plain. 2. Good. 3. Pure. 4. Sublime. 5. Sure, iii., 400, 401—gives knowledge of sin three ways, ii., 321.

Laws of God and men, how they differ, iii., 48, 49, 154, 535—have their sanctions, iii., 54.

Lawgiver, God the, will be obeyed, i., 473.

Laying open our case before God, the way to speed, i., 224—what it is to lay open our case before God, i., 224.

Laziness of soul requires vows, promises to stir up the soul. It causes backwardness in coming to God, ii., 420.

Learning, no learning will enlighten savingly without God's word, iii., 238.

Learners, the most knowing of God's children are but, i., 58—true, who get the power of what they know upon their hearts, i., 59.

Legal and evangelical commands, i., 302— and evangelical keeping God's law, i., 330, 331.

Lessons that we are to learn from the word. 1. To know. 2. To obey the command of God, i., 59.

Liberty to walk in God's ways, no such freedom as in his ways, i., 449, 450— carnal, is thralldom. Reasons of it, i., 446—given by the Spirit. 1. From slavish fear. 2. Power of lust, i., 394—signs of true liberty, i., 451.

Libertines and Papists, enemies to Scripture, why, ii., 409.

Lie is either, 1. Assertory. 2. Promissory. The latter is the worst, i., 257; ii., 581—way of lying, what, whence, i., 256. (*Vide* Lying.)

Lies, three sorts of lies to men: 1. *Mendacium jocosum*. 2. *Officiosum*. 3. *Perniciosum*, i., 259—all these are sinful, i., 259, 260—reasons why the children of God should keep far from the way of lying, i., 260. (*Vide* Way of Lying.)

Life prolonged is God's free grace, i., 142; iii., 485—a mercy to saints and sinners, i., 142; iii., 487—how far desirable, i., 147; iii., 487—spiritual, what it is, 1. The life of justification. 2. The life of sanctification. 3. The life of glorification, iii., 242, 243—excellency of spirit-

- ual, above natural, ii., 376, 518—all, originally in God, i., 407—it is life to the soul to have a sense of God's tender mercy, i., 176, 178—when the spiritual, is vigorous, ii., 519—1. When it shows itself in a sense of God's love. 2. In a holy disposition to please and serve God, *ib.*—the end why we should desire continuance of, is, that we may glorify God, iii., 485—should be a continual expression of thankfulness to God the author of it, ii., 33—men are loth to leave this present life, iii., 480—two reasons, 1. Unmortified heart. 2. Unsettled conscience, iii., 480—natural, its uncertainty improved for a speedy turning to God, ii., 4—natural, the end of it is, that we may glorify God, iii., 485—natural, spiritual, and eternal, iii., 241, 242—desires of, below a Christian, which, iii., 489—natural, rationally preserved by keeping God's commandments, iii., 242—the question, "How can the desire of long life consist with the desire of dissolution?" answered, iii., 487—some circumstances of death may make us desire longer life, iii., 488.
- Lifting up of the eyes* implies, 1. Faith. 2. Hope. 3. Patience, ii., 585, 586—up of hands, its various uses, i., 469.
- Light*, its properties, iii., 238—of nature will not discover the first motions of the heart to be sinful, i., 212; ii., 395 the Scripture is a light in three respects, ii., 396.
- Likeness to God in purity*, scorned by the profane, iii., 36.
- Limiting God*, a very great sin, ii., 219.
- Litotes*, a figurative speech, wherein more is intended than is expressed: examples of it, i., 56; ii., 333; iii., 40.
- Little sins* allowed become great, iii., 502.
- Living to God*, how known, ii., 294—is when the spiritual life is in good plight and vigour, ii., 516—God must be served with living service, iii., 291.
- Looking with favour*, implies, 1. Observation. 2. Compassion, iii., 88, 89—whom will God look on? iii., 90.
- Longing*, what it implies, iii., 471. (*Vide Expectation.*)—encouragements to look and long for deliverances, iii., 472.
- Lot*, it is the lot of God's children to be spoken against, in counsels, and upon thrones of judgment, i., 198—of God's children to be despised, reproached, mocked, iii., 210.
- Love to God* is a love of inferiors to a superior, iii., 399—to sin secret, and hatred of sin remiss, very dangerous signs, iii., 385—and hatred are the two great influencing affections, i., 343; ii., 480—carries the soul after the beloved object, i., 17, 344—God's goodness draws out our love, ii., 102—signs of true love to God, i., 17, 40—it interprets all that God doth to be good, iii., 411—to God's commandments, reasons of it, i., 465—arguments to press the love of God's word, ii., 319, 320—goeth before delight, i., 464—to God puts a value upon everything that comes from him or leads to him, i., 469—it is necessary to keep a good conscience, i., 469—arguments to enforce the love of God's commandment, iii., 428—of good-will, and of complacency, ii., 197, 198—of the word, abates the love of the world, iii., 411—of complacency passeth from the person to the action, ii., 198—to God's word, 1. As our rule. 2. Our charter, iii., 40, 41—and praise are twin duties, ii., 26—to the word a character of a godly man, ii., 310—why, ii., 310 of God's word, what it is, 1. Negatively. 2. Positively, iii., 197—why necessary, 1. For acceptance. 2. To make the work easy. 3. To make us constant, iii., 199—examine upon what reasons we love God's word, iii., 200, 201—of the world, an impediment to repentance, ii., 10—trial whether we love the world, i., 358, 359—of God's word demonstrated by hatred of sin, iii., 380—what it implieth, iii., 380, 381, 430, 431—to the word, 1. Weans us from the world. 2. Makes us constant in profession. 3. Gives understanding, ii., 319—trial of love to the word, ii., 320—of God and faith in God, the main ingredients of spiritual life, ii., 519—to God accompanied with the hatred of all sin, ii., 549—of a man's self, a reason why men turn not to God, how, ii., 10—and anger cannot endure to be despised, iii., 228.
- Lovingkindness of God*, it is our strongest argument in pleading with God. 1. It is an humble argument. 2. A comfortable argument. For clearing of which consider, 1. The nature. 2. The kinds. 3. The proofs. 4. The end of this lovingkindness, ii., 157; iii., 293, 294 it is to be improved: 1. For a ground of trust. 2. For a ground of holy fear, iii., 297, 298.
- Lying*, the true notion of it, reasons against it, iii., 385.
- Luther's notable saying, i., 290, 485.

M.

- Main*, who are they that are right in the, iii., 500.
- Maintain*, God will maintain us whilst he has work for us, ii., 339.
- Malice* seeks the destruction of God's

- people, iii., 300—is industrious, diligent, vigilant, iii., 301—whence it is against the righteous, ii., 455.
- Man*, a straying creature, i., 88; ii., 85; iii., 192. (*Fade Wandering*.)—a weak, mutable creature, i., 66; ii., 589—his strength lies in God, i., 66—he is God's workmanship, both as to body and soul, ii., 129—he is so now as well as in the first creation, ii., 130—he was made to serve his Maker, ii., 131—he is not now what he was at first, ii., 131—the word used for, 1. Distinction. 2. Aggravation. 3. Limitation, iii., 118.
- Manner* of obedience, regarded by God as well as the matter, i., 38, 323.
- Martyrdom* greedily affected by the primitive Christians, iii., 185.
- Maxims* of true wisdom, nine, ii., 312.
- Mean* and low condition ordinary to them that love God, why, iii., 205—it renders God's people liable to mockings, iii., 208—and low gifted ministers not to be despised, ii., 317.
- Means*, in the use of we are to wait for grace, i., 222—choice of proper, a part of wisdom, ii., 335—to attain true blessedness. 1. Take the word for your rule. 2. The Spirit for your guide. 3. The promise for your encouragement. 4. The glory of God for your end, i., 9—relate to the end, i., 471; ii., 336; iii., 422—private as well as public to be used, ii., 347—diligently used an evidence of respect to all God's commandments, i., 47—of comfort, not to be separated from the God of comfort, ii., 282—of grace, their continuance uncertain, ii., 5—they cannot work without the principal agent, ii., 282—indirect, to get out of trouble, ii., 210—they that use them forfeit God's protection, ii., 210—of receiving comfort, faith, and prayer, ii., 162.
- Meanings* and general intentions not enough, i., 289.
- Measure*, the precepts of God are the measure of our lives, ii., 529—of good and evil: 1. Wisdom of God. 2. Its respect to the chiefest good, &c., ii., 113, 114—all things in respect to the world to come, ii., 126—God measures to us as we to him, ii., 316.
- Mediator*, God only found in a, i., 20.
- Mediation* of Christ, they blessed for whom he mediates, i., 16—Christ mediates for none but those that keep his word, i., 17.
- Meditation* often finds what prayer missed, i., 19, 20—required to a serious course of obedience, i., 475—reasons of the necessity of, i., 476; ii., 327—upon God, a means to prevent vain thoughts, ii., 327, 490—is threefold, ii., 316—causeth delight, and delight meditation, i., 126—it causeth love to the word, and love to meditation, ii., 322—in order to practice, i., 127—It is twofold: 1. Occasional. 2. Set, solemn, and fixed, i., 128—fixed or stated, is either, 1. Reflexive, or, 2. Direct. Direct is either dogmatical or practical, i., 128, 129—its excellencies, i., 130, 131; ii., 186, 187, 322, 316; iii., 283, 281—works on the soul, when cursory reading operates nothing, i., 205; ii., 322; iii., 283—on eternity, its use and excellency, ii., 250 on God's word, its usefulness, ii., 252, 321, 322, 327, 332; iii., 283, 281—three sorts reprov'd for not rightly meditating, ii., 325—it is a profitable duty: 1. To our natural faculties. 2. To our graces. 3. Our duties, iii., 283, 284.
- Meekness* of spirit in suffering, glorifieth God, i., 216—a qualification of those that expect counsel from God, i., 215.
- Memory* strengthened, 1. By the impression that truth makes on the soul. 2. By the concernment of the soul about those truths, ii., 283, 281.
- Mercenary* spirit, to love religion for its portion, and not for itself, iii., 40.
- Merit* in the creature, none, why, iii., 2, 293.
- Mercy*, described under several notions, i., 110—bespeaks praise, i., 60—how to obtain it, i., 115—what it is, ii., 176—of God (misapplied) one of the sinner's vain excuses for not speedy turning to God, ii., 6—shown in creation, &c., ii., 58—the cause of all God's gracious dealings with us, i., 575; iii., 91—and fidelity are God's great glory, ii., 275—general and special, ii., 170, 171—when we find mercy our care should be to walk worthy of it, i., 234—moved by misery, i., 219, 228, 413—the best plea of saints, why, iii., 2, 252, 293—God's great argument to do us good, i., 413—115.
- Mercies* are to be heightened by considering their circumstances, ii., 31—they are to be expected according to the tenor of the promise, i., 412—new, call for new thanksgivings, ii., 26—great and tender, are in Jehovah, iii., 335, 336.
- Method* of God, in begetting grace, ii., 360—in bringing a sinner from under the covenant of works to the covenant of grace, iii., 100—to encourage his servants by showing his favour. Objections answered, iii., 99—100.
- Midnight*, praising of God at, ii., 31—it argues, 1. Ardency of devotion. 2. Sincerity, which God sees in secrecy.

3. Preciousness of time. 4. Value of spiritual exercises, above natural refreshments. 5. Reverence of God in secret adoration, ii., 34, 35.
- Mind* enlightened will check us for sin, ii., 392—true Christians are always like-minded but not always like-affectioned, ii., 376.
- Miscarriages* of soul by murmuring and despondency, i., 41, 42—of professors most shameful, i., 299—what we must do that we may not miscarry, iii., 413.
- Mischief*, God brings men's mischievous plots upon their own heads, ii., 239.
- Ministry* necessary, though the Scriptures be clear: why, 1. It is God's institution. It serves to vindicate and explain truth. 3. To apply generals to particular cases, &c., ii., 405, 406.
- Misery* moves mercy, i., 219, 228; iii., 333.
- Mistakes* very common and very fatal, about. 1. Misery and happiness. 2. Wisdom and folly. 3. Bondage and liberty, i., 392.
- Mixture* of corruption in our vexation, and anguish about outward troubles, iii., 226.
- Mocked*, God is not mocked, iii., 251.
- Mockings*, God's people liable to them in their low estate, iii., 208—they are very grievous to flesh and blood, i., 498; iii., 208—we must persevere against mockings. Reasons, i., 498—directions, i., 499.
- Moderation* of desire, sorrow, fear, how, ii., 305—of afflictions promised, ii., 209—in the use, discovered by submission to the loss of worldly things, i., 355.
- Monarchies*, four great ones, of the Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Grecians, Romans, ii., 258.
- Moods*, reproof of them that are only religious in good moods, i., 442.—and pangs of love to God's word may be in a carnal heart—i., 298; iii., 199, 252—and pangs of religion, whence they proceed, ii., 69—no good ground of religion, iii., 463.
- Moral* law still obligatory to Christians as a rule, iii., 11.
- Mortification* of the flesh, the first step to obedience, ii., 86—pressed, i., 365—it helps, and is helped by vivification, ii., 36—necessary to walking with God, i., 361, 362.
- Murmuring* against Providence. 1. In entertaining crosses with anger. 2. Blessings with disdain, ii., 180—caution against it, ii., 117—it makes afflictions sharp and long, ii., 227—it is cured by thanksgiving, ii., 27, 61—reproof of murmuring in God's children, ii., 152; iii., 138—from consideration of God's faithfulness in afflicting us, ii., 152—mourning for sins of others, a constant disposition to it necessary, and occasions often given, iii., 139—special seasons that call for it, iii., 139. (*Vide* lamentation.)
- Multiplying* of expressions in Scriptures to the same purpose, is not in vain, i., 445.
- Mutability* of the creature, ii., 512—of man aggravated from the immutability of God's testimonies, iii., 319, 320.
- Mutual* engagements between God and man in the covenant, ii., 293.
- Mysteries*, though deep in themselves, are yet revealed in a plain and familiar style, iii., 69.
- N.
- Name* of God well-studied, the way to remember him, i., 537—of essence and attributes, i., 537—is that whereby he is made known, i., 530—glorified by acknowledging his mercies, ii., 65—taken in vain by slighty prayer, iii., 253—of the church, afflicted and tossed with tempests, iii., 224—a good name to be highly prized, i., 190, 191—to rob a man of his good name is the worst kind of theft, i., 194.
- Names* of contempt and scorn put upon the best parts of religion by carnal men. 1. Seriousness, called melancholy. 2. Self-denial, folly. 3. Zeal, fury. 4. Holy singularity, faction. 5. Converse with God, enthusiasm. 6. Heavenly discourse, canting. 7. Faith, credulity. 8. Humility, stupidity. 9. Exact walking, preciseness, i., 496, 497.
- Nature*, the course of nature stable and regular, an emblem of the stability of God's promises, ii., 261, 262—all natures have a propension unto their perfection, i., 393—more susceptible of evil than good, iii., 153.
- Natural* light and strength cannot help us out of our misery, 153, 154—natural conscience takes notice only of gross sins, iii., 194—men are bound to pray, i., 222—blindness an obstinate disease, i., 238—instinct, i., 171—spiritual instinct, i., 171—and gracious expectations distinguished, iii., 473—changeableness of our spirits, shows the necessity of actual assisting grace, ii., 512.
- Nearness* to God calls for our reverence and dependence, iii., 314—of God, what it imports, iii., 305—what it is and how brought about, iii., 306—309.
- Nearer* to God, the more hateful the sin, ii., 546.
- Necessaries* ought first be sought, ii., 3.
- Necessity*, a reason of desire after God's word, i., 173; ii., 285—of choosing

Gods precepts, iii., 458.
Necessities put us upon secret prayer, iii., 275.
Negative faith may be in the wicked, and negative distrust in the godly, iii., 227—holiness not sufficient, ii., 359.
Neglect of God, damnable as well as prophaneness, ii., 509—God's word, the cause of it, ii., 286—in trouble a great evil, iii., 269.
Negligence in duty, dishonourable to God, i., 38.
New heart God's gift, and the principle of durable obedience, ii., 477. 478—and soft heart both of grace, i., 246.
New nature, the spring of holy desires, i., 395—God's commandments are suitable to it, i., 466—it carries the soul to God, iii., 133.
New creature in order to new obedience, ii., 132.
New Testament, God trusts love under that dispensation, iii., 465—Why God does not state duty so exactly under the New Testament as under the Old? iii., 465.
Night, a season for converse with God, iii., 287. (*Vide* Watches of the night.)
Novelty, an itch to it, a ground of apostasy, i., 296.

O.

Oath, lawful, in some cases necessary, ii., 410, 411—arguments for an, ii., 411, 412—God is invoked as a witness, and as a judge, ii., 412—in what cases an oath is lawful: 1. In lawful matters: 2. Weighty necessary things, ii., 414—to God must be performed, why, ii., 416, 417.
Obedience to God's laws indispensable, ii., 133—it must be given without delay, why, ii., 3, 4—without arguing, iii., 179, 180—it must be, 1. Sincere. 2. Constant. 3. Uniform: such is, 1. The beginning: 2. The evidence of blessedness, i., 7—in three things are considerable, 1. The principle. 2. The matter. 3. The matter of it, ii., 474—to God, is, 1. Reasonable, 2. Profitable, i., 29, 30—it must flow from a principle of love, iii., 199—it must be free and unconstrained, i., 469—how to bring our hearts to it, i., 469—which is, 1. Labourious. 2. Costly. 3. Dangerous, is troublesome to the flesh, ii., 477, 478—whether we are to resolve for obedience, when uncertain of God's assistance, i., 308—a necessary qualification of those that would be taught of God, i., 215—to God our great security, ii., 340, 399—difficulties in the way of obedience overcome by consideration

of God's testimonies, iii., 237—How far we may ascribe our comforts and blessings to our obedience? i., 555—can never be right without hope of salvation: and hope can never be true without obedience to the commandments, iii., 420—see reasons of both, iii., 421, 422—object and end of worship, Christ, i., 17.
Objections against the Scripture answered, ii., 401, 405.
Obscene discourses an abomination to God, ii., 449.
Observance of God's commandments must be, 1. Universal. 2. Serious and diligent. 3. Settled. 4. Constant and persevering. 5. From principles of faith and love. 6. Directed to a right end, i., 472, 473. (*Vide* Obedience.)
Observe, God observes how we carry it in our troubles, iii., 211—observation of what passeth between God and us, conduceth much to the comforting and quickening of the soul, ii., 286.
Obstinacy, there is a holy obstinacy to cleave to God when he seems to thrust us from him, iii., 248.
Occasions of thanksgiving, ii., 34—of sin to be shunned, ii., 364.
Occasional meditation, what it is, how to be improved, i., 127—taking occasion to employ ourselves about holy things, a sign of a gracious heart, iii., 286, 287
Office of Christ to reduce straying sheep, iii., 501.
Offerings, God's people have their spiritual offerings, ii., 434—they must be freewill offerings, ii., 439.
Old-age makes sinners more unfit for God's service, ii., 5.
Omission, sins of, damnable, i., 31, 37.
Omnipresence of God, iii., 306.
Omniscience of God, a motive to obedience, i., 37—cannot be deceived nor mocked, i., 475.
Opening the eyes by God, shows great wonders in the word, i., 156—our condition before God under sorrow and sin, urged, i., 228, 229—though God knows our case, yet there is need to open our case before him, i., 230. (*Vide* Laying open our case.)
Open profession of religion necessary, i., 148.
Opinions about the chiefest good very many, St. Austin reckons up, ii., 396.
Opportunity to sin, tricks our sincerity, ii., 564, 565.
Opposition increaseth true zeal, iii., 190—it increaseth vehemency in prayer, iii., 265.
Oppression, a great calamity, ii., 565—what it is, ii., 577—and to be deprecated by the people of God, ii., 577; iii., 118

- when are we said to be left of God under the oppression of wicked men? ii., 565—it is oftentimes masked with a law, i., 199—it is odious to God, ii., 577, 578—burdensome to men, ii., 578, 579—of man, a prejudice to our spiritual concerns. God is concerned to deliver us from them, iii., 123—directions to the oppressed what to do, iii., 121, 122.
- Order of things in our care according to their worth, i., 323.*
- Ordinances, God will be sought in them, i., 17—God's children long to see God in them, iii., 482—they are made precious. 1. From the necessity of them. 2. Spiritual appetite, and inward inclination to them. 3. Experience, ii., 286—they are to be considered under a fourfold notion. 1. As duties. 2. Privileges. 3. Means. 4. Talents, iii., 92—they stir up desires after heaven, iii., 482.*
- Original sin, i., 73, 74—it issues out first in evil thoughts, ii., 486.*
- Other men's sins are bitterly to be mourned for, iii., 139—1. By all Christians as well as eminent saints. 2. By private Christians, as well as those in public places, iii., 206—reproof to, 1. Those that mourn not for their own sins. Nor, 2. Own the dishonour cast on God's name, iii., 149, 150.*
- Overcoming, saints overcome one way, sinners another, iii., 206—outward senses set the inward on work, ii., 377.*
- Outward things cannot make us blessed; for, 1. They want sincerity. 2. Fulness. 3. Eternity, i., 103—how to know whether our care for the outward or inward man be greatest, i., 250—acts of duty, commanded as well as the inward, i., 222—trouble may revive inward trouble, iii., 227.*
- Owued, God will be owued the Author, whoever is the instrument of prayer, ii., 164—truth is sometimes not owued for want of liberty, or courage, i., 493.*
- P.
- Panting, what, iii., 80.*
- Pangs of love to God not sufficient, ii., 381, 382; iii., 198. (Vide Moods.)*
- Papists, who forbid the simple use of the word, confuted, iii., 78—their government, doctrine, worship, corrupt, i., 282, —284.*
- Pardon of sin, the main matter of our comfort, ii., 273—No, for want of sincerity, iii., 257—granted in the Gospel. 1. A pardon of course to some sins. 2. A pardon upon repentance to all sins, iii., 420—established in the new covenant, iii., 499.*
- Partakers in sin, partake of the punishment, ii., 548.*
- Particular faith and hope, i., 482.*
- Partiality in obedience, destroys our confidence in God, i., 32.*
- Partial reformation will not serve, i., 470.*
- Paschalis the Martyr cites the Pope to appear before Christ's tribunal, i., 51.*
- Passions dim the eye of reason, i., 318—are like wild horses, i., 447—cured by prayer. 1. Fear. 2. Sorrow. 3. Anger. 4. Impatience and despair, iii., 270, 278.*
- Passionate expressions differ from serious desires, i., 145—saints liable to various passions, ii., 550.*
- Passionateness of sin, and passionateness of spiritual desire, iii., 85.*
- Patience put to the utmost trial, i., 199.*
- Patron, God is the patron of his people, but not of their sin, iii., 344, 345.*
- Paul, Rom. vii., speaks as a converted person, i., 67.*
- Peace in abundance, the privilege of them that walk closely with God, i., 9; iii., 404—great peace, the privilege of them that keep and love God's law, iii., 404 405—reasons, *Ibid.*—the result of the rectitude of our actions, i., 460—fortifies against scandals, iii., 413—how it differs from joy in the Holy Ghost, i., 407—*Object.* How have they great peace that love God's law, when none are more troubled than they? *Ans.*, iii., 405, 406—is either, 1. External. 2. Internal. 3. Eternal, iii., 397—with saints, not only to be embraced when offered, but pursued when rejected, i., 192.*
- Peculiar people, peculiar favour, peculiar spirits, peculiar actings, ii., 291, 292.*
- Pelagius, his doctrine and subtlety, i., 350.*
- People of God, in a special sense, God has such a people, grounds of God's title to, and interest in them, ii., 290, 291—they may boldly commend their cause to God, when the proud are vexatious, ii., 185—described by their principles, ii., 35, 292.*
- Peremptoriness of God's command to turn now, as well as to turn at all, ii., 10—God is peremptory, in the terms of salvation, iii., 235.*
- Perfection of the creature, cannot give, 1. Rest to the soul. 2. Nor procure acceptance with God. 3. Nor stand us instead in troubles, iii., 301, 302.*
- Persecution, whence. 1. On God's part. 2. On the part of persecutors, in whom, 1. Blind zeal. 2. Prejudices. 3. Erro-*

- neous principles in politics cause persecution, i., 200—persecutors' wickedness is some ground of confidence to the oppressed, iii., 304—several pretences to justify persecution, ii., 230—of saints will undo any nation, iii., 29—it is greater under the New Testament than the Old, why, ii., 417.
- Permission* of God in suffering malicious enemies to draw nigh to his people, iii., 301.
- Perseverance* in ordinances a duty, though we find not God in them at present, i., 17, 133; iii., 73—one great help to perseverance, ii., 81—directions, helps, means for perseverance, i., 293, 295, 338—necessary to persevere in obedience, i., 321, 333.
- Persuasion* of God's word slighted, provoke him to use a more severe discipline, i., 583.
- Pilgrims*, who are the true ones? i., 161.
- Pilgrimage*, house of pilgrimage, what it is, i., 519—saints account the world their pilgrimage, i., 520, 522.
- Pity* to the sinner, must be joined with zeal against the sin, iii., 139, 189—of God engages him to do his people good in their distresses, ii., 571.
- Plainness* of the Scriptures to private Christians, iii., 240, 241—reasons thereof, iii., 240, 241.
- Plea* with God twofold. 1. A law plea, the merits of Christ. 2. A Gospel plea, sincerity, i., 86—no plea allowed that is contrary to free grace, iii., 15—from God's mercy, and our relation, iii., 1, 12, 243—no pleading mercy, while we go on in sin, iii., 11—God pleads the cause of his oppressed servants, iii., 337—how? iii., 328—340. why? iii., 332, 333.
- Pleas* of sinners for delaying repentance, ii., 89, 90. (*Vide Delays.*)
- Please* God, endeavour it in all things, or nothing, i., 49—it ought to be the end of our service, iii., 19—it is pleasing to God to hold out in trials, iii., 37.
- Pleasure* in sin an excuse to delay repentance, ii., 7—it costs the sinner very dear, iii., 358—not the happiness of the rational creature. For (1.) it cannot satisfy; and that because of its, 1. Imperfection. 2. Uncertainty. 3. Disproportion to the desire of man. (2.) Being inordinately loved it detiles. (3.) Being lost it increases sorrow, i., 3.
- Pleasures* spiritual, are, 1. Substantial. 2. Such as perfect the rational creature, i., 461.
- Plotting* mischief exceeding sinful on many accounts, ii., 456—the property of wicked men, iii., 156.
- Plottings* against God's people an ancient practice, they arise from pride; God forbids them, and will deliver his people from them, ii., 231—236.
- Policy*, civil, is not opposed by Christ's kingdom, and liberty of Gospel-worship, i., 199.
- Pocrisy*, three grand evils in it. 1. Universal sovereignty. 2. Absolute supremacy. 3. Infallibility, i., 282, 283.
- Portion* of believers, is full, lasting, sure; sure, because 1. Confirmed by God's word and oath. 2. Cannot be wrested from them by violence. 3. Shall not be wasted by their own prodigality, ii., 403, 404—of believers is not in this life, iii., 205—a double notion of the word, i., 557—God alone is the godly man's portion, 559—563—whether God be our portion, i., 569.
- Power* and faithfulness often engaged for defence, ii., 527—of God's word is wonderful, in what respects, iii., 61, 65—1. Natural. 2. Moral, from God, i., 455—of God seen, 1. In preserving his saints in dangers. 2. In overruling all accidents for their benefit, ii., 446—seen in providence, i., 538, 540.
- Practice* the end of giving forth the word as a light, ii., 339, 340—the end of all teaching, i., 321—without it, the hearing, knowing, liking of the word are nothing, i., 11, 57, 470; ii., 299—to approve, love, delight in, commend, &c., God's ways, without practice profits nothing, i., 305-470; ii., 71, 72, 399, 400.
- Practical* holiness, the way to increase in spiritual understanding, ii., 357—why? ii., 357—knowledge is, 1. Directive. 2. Persuasive, i., 240.
- Prayer* of faith is the voice of God's Spirit, i., 482—and faith must be conjoined, ii., 527; iii., 251, 276—faith set on work in prayer, i., 412; ii., 161—often-times a better vindication of our innocency than an apology, i., 188—an excellent means to persevere, ii., 525, 526—it is a duty proper to the best of Christians, ii., 201—its excellencies, i., 17—private and public prayer, iii., 272—it supposes our impotency, emptiness, &c., i., 40—it is an excellent remedy against pride, ii., 182—doubled, argues great sense of sin, and mercy, ii., 165.
- Prayers*, sluggish, i., 40, 11; iii., 245—prayer must be joined with hearing, i., 81. (*Vide Sincere prayer.*)—with purposes of better obedience, iii., 276—reasons. We must be the same out of prayer, that we are in prayer, iii., 251. (*Vide Business.*)—we must be

- more affectionate in prayer for heavenly and spiritual, than earthly things, iii., 252—precepts must be turned into prayer, i., 40—fit matter for prayer, ii., 108—how we may know whether what we pray for, comes from the temper of the heart, in four particulars, ii., 108—in what manner we are to pray? ii., 109; iii., 259, 276—what are the grounds of prayer, ii., 110—it must be continued under the sorest afflictions, ii., 429.
- Praise*, unseemly in a wicked man's mouth, i., 50—belongs to God, especially for his lovingkindness, iii., 297—and blessing, how they differ, i., 99; iii., 389—why we are so backward to praises, iii., 395—and faith live and die together, ii., 26—matter of, iii., 391, 392.
- Praises* continue in Heaven, i., 59; iii., 389.
- Praising* God a profitable duty, ii., 61, 62; iii., 391—1. The nature. 2. The grounds. 3. The formality. 4. The fruit of it, iii., 389, 390—motives to it, iii., 390—we must not cease to praise God, iii., 391—393.
- Precepts*, God's, must be turned into prayer, i., 40. (*Vide* Commandments, testimonies, statutes, &c.)—of God, to choose them, implies, 1. Deliberation. 2. Esteem. 3. Inclination. 4. Resolution. 5. Delight, iii., 461, 462—reasons why they are to be chosen, iii., 463.
- Preachers*, teachers, &c., are to preach God's word only and wholly, i., 190.
- Predominant* sin, i., 27—love to God's commandments, iii., 431.
- Prejudice* against God removed by consideration of his goodness, ii., 102—one great cause of persecution, i., 200.
- Prejudices* lie more directly against the means of salvation, than salvation itself, i., 3—why men are prejudiced against holiness? i., 98, 99—how to remove, i., 395—against obedience answered by God's sovereignty, i., 36—cause discord amongst God's people, ii., 191—they are a cause of error about the word, ii., 404.
- Prepared* for all events and conditions, wisdom, ii., 310.
- Prerogative* of God to kill, and make alive, iii., 486.
- Present* things not to be too much pored upon, ii., 216—state imperfect, iii., 482.
- Prescreation* of life, is to give us our life twice over, iii., 486.
- Presumption*, a rock to be shunned, i., 67, 68—it renders us incapable of grace and pardon, i., 473—it forfeits God's assisting grace, ii., 515—the discovery and cure of, i., 67, 68—it is a cause of error in judgment, ii., 404.
- Presence* of God with us, in our houses of clay, and our, with God in the mansions of glory, the best comforts of a Christian, ii., 164.
- Pride* makes persecutors, ii., 237—discovery of, in three things: 1. In envying those that are more excellent. 2. In contending with equals. 3. In disdain of inferiors, ii., 181, 237—cure of, by three things, ii., 183—renders not to God according to his benefits, i., 62—it is abated by the rigour of the first covenant, i., 22—is either moral or spiritual, i., 179—it is an enemy to knowledge, ii., 74—the worst sort of, to err wilfully from God's commandments, i., 178—180—it opposes, 1. The authority. 2. The power of God, i., 180—it is discovered by impenitence and obstinacy, i., 179; ii., 508—it is cured by reproach, i., 192, 331—and by a sense of our own emptiness, i., 338.
- Priests*, all Christians are, to God, ii., 433, 434, 437.
- Principal* mercies, promised absolutely, others conditionally, ii., 152.
- Principles* by which we are acted, the most considerable things in our actings, ii., 485, 528—of obedience, true and false; some rotten, some less evil, some tolerable, some purely evangelical, ii., 528; iii., 202, 203—evil. 1. Example. 2. Force from fear of God, or men slavish. 3. Bad designs, iii., 463—465.
- Privilege* and duty of the godly, iii., 1, 270, 271.
- Private* prayer, iii., 275. (*Vide* Business.)—spirit, i., 12—Christians are to confer of, not to preach God's word publicly, i., 110, 111—whether they are to study controversies? and how far? i., 271.
- Prize* the Scriptures, why? ii., 343.
- Profane* persons, who, iii., 426.
- Profession* of the truth, twofold, i., 398—of Christianity upon terms of losses, ii., 19—it is necessary, why? in what manner? how far? i., 430, 431.
- Profit* by the word of God, comes from the grace of God, i., 102—and from owning the word as righteous and faithful, iii., 171, 172.
- Progress* of sin, i., 393, 394.
- Promises* should be our delight before their accomplishment, iii., 223, 224—our encouragement in walking with God, i., 41—they go hand-in-hand with precepts, i., 40, 487; ii., 79, 461—they

give more comforts than arguments drawn from reason, i., 91—they are to be applied, i., 375—they are to be made familiar to us, i., 91, 95—they make God a debtor, i., 178; ii., 582—they are God's testimonies, and why? ii., 462—they are more than simple declarations, ii., 581, 582—they are to be prized on a double account, ii., 214—they are made to perseverance, i., 442—they are most certain on a threefold account, ii., 352—they are, 1. Good. 2. Sure, iii., 475—three things in, 1. Truth. 2. Faithfulness. 3. Righteousness, ii., 581—there is usually some time between the promise and the performance, i., 492; ii., 158—reasons of the delays in performing, i., 479; ii., 388—properties of God, 1. To do good. 2. Keep his word, ii., 582, 583.

Prosperity makes us go astray, ii., 85—takes off affections from heavenly things, ii., 85, 86—of the wicked should not dismay us, ii., 534; iii., 161, 162.

Proud men, denotes two sorts of persons, ii., 232, 233—none should be, because he hath more than others, ii., 345—who are the, i., 494; ii., 580.

Protection is the privilege of the saints. God is their hiding-place and shield, ii., 490, 492, 491. (*Vide* Hiding-place.)

Protestant religion, its excellencies, i., 277, 278.

Providence, the belief of it, a good help to keep a good conscience, ii., 21—vindicated, iii., 161, 162—it is seen in fulfilling promises and threatenings, ii., 31, 32—observation of, will show us we have more cause to bless God than to complain, ii., 31—executes the sentence of the word, iii., 339, 340—is either, 1. Common; or, 2. Special, ii., 98, 99—takes care of all that love and please God, iii., 412.

Providences seem contrary to those that are most obedient, ii., 370—must not be racked to make them speak what we would have them, ii., 531—536—well observed, will cause gracious souls to love the word of God more than ever, ii., 548—reasons thereof, ii., 548—they are to be considered, ii., 157—they are reconcilable to the word, r. a commentary on it, i., 55; ii., 90.

Providential care and conduct the privilege of them that walk closely with God, i., 9—wisdom, seen, 1. In the seasons. 2. The kind. 3. The manner of God's afflicting his children, ii., 86, 87.

Provisions for the flesh should be cut off, iii., 205.

Proving his people a ground of God's forbearing enemies, iii., 26.

Prudence, when we are tempted to sin, it is great, to chain ourselves to the contrary duty, ii., 28—required in applying general rules to particular cases, ii., 68, 69.

Punish, God has a time to, sinners, though he bear long with them, iii., 26.

Punishment in this life for breach of God's law, ii., 55.

Purity of the word of God, what it implies, iii., 192—of heart, from the purity of the word, iii., 193, 194.

Purpose of the heart settled in seeking God, i., 23—it must be universal to all commandments, and accompanied with affections and endeavours, i., 48—to please God habitual and actual, i., 211.

Purposes of obedience must be made with the greatest seriousness, iii., 266—reasons thereof, iii., 267, 366—of heart, against sin, when defective, iii., 381.

Q.

Qualifications of those that have God for their hiding-place, 1. They that believe. 2. They that obey. 3. They that seek it in the way that God has promised it, ii., 495, 496—are to be cleared in our pleading promises, i., 412, 482, 485.

Qualm of conscience may beget lean affection to the word of God for a season, i., 170.

Questioning our interest in God a usual sin in sharp and tedious afflictions, ii., 240—sometimes we question God's love, because we have no afflictions; and sometimes we question it because we have nothing but afflictions, ii., 229.

Quiet, great, to the minds of God's people, under sad dispensations, to consider the justice and faithfulness of God in them, ii., 148.

Quickening grace promised in the new covenant, both in general and in particular, iii., 299—twofold. 1. When of dead we are made alive. 2. When of dull we are made lively and active, ii., 278, 367, 431, 432—by the word, obliges us to remember it for ever, ii., 278—is only from the word. Why? 1. The word contains the most, considerations. 2. The Spirit delights to quicken us by the word, ii., 280, 281, 433—denotes, 1. The renewing of comfort. 2. The actuating of grace, i., 221, 367, 404; iii., 289—great need to go often to God for, 1. Because of our constant weakness in this world. 2. Because of our frequent indispositions of soul to duty, i., 221, 222; iii., 289—and the oppositions of the flesh. &c.

- ii., 431—433; iii., 291, 292—of the soul to duty by holy zeal, iii., 187—denotes either, 1. Restoring to happiness; or, 2. Renewing of grace, i., 401, 402; ii., 451; iii., 289—and sharpening of prayer by the fear of God, ii., 556—is one blessing which God's children have often need to beg of God, iii., 288—sense, appetite, and activity, are the fruits of the Spirit's, i., 408; iii., 290—is necessary on many accounts, i., 367—labour to get it, beware of losing it, i., 368, 369, 415—how quickening grace may be lost, i., 316.
- R.
- Rashness*, a great troubler of the church, ii., 70.
- Ready*, God is, to receive returning sinners, and as ready to punish them that refuse to return, ii., 12—God is always, to hear prayer, i., 232.
- Reason* is supplied by faith, ii., 209—depraved cannot judge of spiritual things, i., 1.
- Reasonable* creatures are made for eternity, ii., 248.
- Reasonings* against God's sovereignty, are usually in the points, of the imputation of the sin of the first Adam, election, Providence, &c., ii., 481—reasons and grounds of religion are to be inquired into, i., 271.
- Rebellion* to decline God's government, ii., 265.
- Rebukes* of Providence, against impenitent sinners, are of great use to the saints, i., 184, 190.
- Reclaiming* sinners, i., 183.
- Reconciliation* and atonement only in the word discovered, i., 76; ii., 314—*non opus divinæ naturæ, sed liberi consilii*, ii., 314.
- Records* ought to be kept of our comfortings, quickenings, and supports by God's word, and why? i., 554; ii., 278, 283.
- Recreations* are not to swallow up religion, iii., 281.
- Redeemer* is the head of the renewed estate, i., 473—requires obedience, i., 473—he is honoured by obedience, i., 473.
- Redeemed* sinners shall have their judgment, i., 471.
- Reduce*, God reduces straying sinners by some smart providences, iii., 505.
- Reflection* upon ourselves and ways implies, 1. An examination of our past course of life. 2. A careful watch over them for the future. 3. A consideration of the event, i., 572.
- Regenerate* persons may be discerned from unregenerate, i., 26, 27—how they differ? ii., 378, 379.
- Regeneration* goes before new obedience, ii., 132.
- Reign* of sin is either, 1. General; or, 2. Particular; either more gross or more secret, iii., 111, 112.
- Rejoicing* in God's testimonies, greater than in all riches, and the reasons of it, i., 118, 119; iii., 376, 377—it is a character of God's people, iii., 376—in God's word, when it is right, iii., 376, 377.
- Relation* to God honourable, ii., 293—it is a good plea for protection, &c., iii., 1, 2—a ground of God's pleading their cause, iii., 343.
- Relief* in distress, where to be had? i., 503—505.
- Religion* hath a great influence on the welfare of human societies, i., 455—it is but one, i., 269—taking it up by way of essay, reproved, i., 413—the truth of it not to be measured by its friends or enemies, i., 273—characters of true, i., 274, 275—it has a privilege-part and a duty-part, iii., 1. (*Vide Privilege.*)
- Renewed* person differs from the civil person, i., 5—and reconciled persons easily love God's word, ii., 321—hearts, yet apt to decline, i., 349.
- Remember*, God is said to, when he declares by the effects that he doth, i., 477—we, what we are concerned about, ii., 287.
- Remembering* mercy a most sweet employment, ii., 28—either notional or practical, i., 532, 533; ii., 277, 412; iii., 204—God, a means to keep his law, i., 531, 532—what it is to remember God? i., 531, 532.
- Remembrance* of God's former dealings, a great relief in distress, i., 503.
- Repentance* quickened by zeal, iii., 190—it is encouraged by the goodness of God, ii., 102—late, seldom found, never safe, ii., 67—it is encouraged by the greatness and tenderness of God's mercies, iii., 363.
- Reproach* for keeping God's commandments very ordinary, i., 189, 381—and for trusting in God, i., 423—upon religion, or religious persons, i., 189—it is very grievous to be borne, why? i., 190, 381, 382, 482—both to nature and grace, i., 482—permitted by God. 1. To humble us. 2. To try us. 3. To reform us, i., 383, 386, 387—of the most spiritual things, —God stops the mouth of reproachers by appearing for his people, i., 426.
- Reproof* enrages a proud heart, ii., 183, 181.

- Request* to God, that he would consider our afflictions, iii., 333.
- Resign* to God without exception, ii., 156.
- Resignation* to God, persuasives to it, ii., 293 of life to God, iii., 187.
- Resistance* of, and watchfulness against sin, two great duties, ii., 368.
- Resolution* necessary to keep us good in bad times, iii., 39—a great advantage to the keeping of a good conscience, ii., 21—it is a great help to a godly course, reasons of it, i., 63, 64—it shakes off temptations, ii., 120, 510—when it comes not up to reformation it is lost, i., 581—and consideration, pressed, i., 313—assaulted. 1. By terrors of sense. 2. Allurements of the flesh, iii., 459.
- Resolve* practically for God, i., 40, 41—1. With the heart. 2. It must be full, &c., ii., 420. 3. It must be serious. 4. Absolute. 5. Present. 6. According to the covenant of grace, i., 309; ii., 422.
- Respect* to all God's commandments, what it is? i., 48, 127—must be equal to them all, i., 48—why we must have, to God's commandments, i., 49—examine whether we have such a sincere, i., 50, 51—to God's word causeth delight therein, i., 134.
- Rest* to the soul in God's word, ii., 398—none to be taken up in this world, motives, directions, i., 523.
- Retaliation* of God to wicked men, ii., 536.
- Return* as well as receive mercy, ii., 28, 29.
- Returns* must be suitable to receipts of mercy, iii., 410—reasons, iii., 410.
- Revelation*, Divine, profitable in three respects, iii., 21, 22—besides outward revelations, we need inward teaching, i., 316.
- Revenge* hath cursed consequences, i., 194, 195—men usually, themselves on instruments when they dare not rise up against the principal author of their afflictions, ii., 227.
- Reverence* due to God as well as dependence, iii., 314, 315—to be given to magistrates, and why? i., 455.
- Reward* an encouragement to purity of heart, iii., 196—none can, like God, i., 31.
- Rich* believers are truly, ii., 467—God's testimonies more delightful than all riches, i., 120; ii., 121—reasons thereof, i., 121, 122; iii., 40.
- Riches*, true, they lie, 1. In experiences of God. 2. Knowledge of God. 3. Faith in God. 4. Good works done for God, i., 122. (*Vide Wealth.*)—why these are true? i., 122—we cannot be robbed of the true, ii., 21—the nature, use, durability of, both true and false, ii., 69, 122.
- Right* in the main, who? their character, and privilege, iii., 379, 380—to creatures. 1. A covenant right, peculiar to saints. 2. A providential right, common to all, ii., 161, 165 covenant right to creatures, implies, 1. A sanctified enjoyment. 2. A sure tenure, iii., 319—God hath a, to us, ii., 59, 292; iii., 156—and the whether we consent or no, ii., 59, 119—God's, to us. 1. By creation. 2. Preservation. 3. Redemption, ii., 59; iii., 16.
- Righteousness*, the word called, because it shows, 1. How a man may be justified before God. 2. How a justified person should approve himself to God, i., 56—God a righteous judge, his law a righteous law, i., 504; iii., 166, 167—wrought out for believers, and, wrought in believers, i., 56—of God in afflicting saints vindicated, iii., 165, 166—variously taken in Scripture, iii., 212—1. For vindictive justice. 2. The rectitude of God's nature, iii., 306—the word of God is, and it is a copy of the, that is in God. 2. The rule of, among men. 3. The instrument of, iii., 213—word of God is, all, and nothing but, iii., 455, 456—of God, is everlasting in two respects, iii., 214. (*Vide Justice.*)—of justification and sanctification, iii., 213—of God's testimonies is everlasting. 1. Wherein the everlasting, of God's testimonies lies? 2. What it is to have them deeply imprinted on our minds? 3. Why they should be so deeply imprinted there? iii., 233, 234—word of, the Scripture so called, why? ii., 581, 582—1. God is righteous. 2. He hath given us a righteous rule. 3. All his dispensations are accordingly righteous, iii., 156, 166.
- Rod* of God wastes the strength, defaces the beauty, ii., 226—end of the, to bring us home to God, ii., 84.
- Root* of all evil, vain and evil thoughts, ii., 486.
- Rooted* affection to God's word, iii., 199.
- Rooting* in grace, want of it, a reason of apostasy, i., 295.
- Rule*, the law of God is the, of our lives, iii., 313—it is a, in three respects, ii., 396, 397—all created beings are under a, i., 5—we must not exceed nor come short of the, i., 5—of the law neglected, its evil effects, i., 6—and law, how they differ: a rule is for information; a law for obligation, iii., 218, 269, 270—holy, inconsistent with an unholy life, i., 288 must always be set before us, i., 289—

- why? i., 289—bless God for a, and walk exactly by the, ii., 409, 549—enemies to the word as a, 1. They that set up reason instead of the word. 2. Passions and lusts. 3. Example. 4. They that go to witches, &c. 5. They that expect new revelations, ii., 409.
- Rules*, false to judge, or walk by. 1. Good meanings. 2. Custom. 3. Example. 4. Our own inclinations. 5. The laws of men, i., 5.
- Rulers*, when religious, a signal blessing to a people, i., 201; ii., 234—are not to be provoked, iii., 367.
- Running* the ways of God's commandments, what it imports, ii., 313.
- S.
- Sacrament*, what it signifies, ii., 410.
- Saints* love the word, 1. Because their hearts are suited to it. 2. They have tasted its goodness, ii., 318.
- Sacrifices*, three things required in them, ii., 437.
- Safety*, none in apostasy from the truth, but perseverance in it, ii., 380, 524—it lies in two things, ii., 338.
- Sanctification* of afflictions, a greater mercy than deliverance out of them, ii., 96, 273—it hath two parts, iii., 420, 421.
- Sanction* of the law in promises and threatenings, i., 514.
- Salvation*, the word variously taken in Scripture, ii., 202—temporal and eternal, i., 408; iii., 414—it denotes sometimes temporal deliverance, ii., 581—is far from the wicked, ii., 581—both in a temporal and eternal notion, iii., 470, 478—is the fruit of mercy, i., 408, 409.
- Satisfaction* in God's providential government, ii., 210—it is not to be had without enjoyment of God, i., 18, 559—Question. What it is that will satisfy and content our souls? iii., 131.
- Satan* resembled by lying, i., 260.
- Satan's* design in afflicting God's people, ii., 205—he is subtle and diligent in tempting, iii., 494—baits are profit and pleasure, i., 121.
- Scandal* is either active or passive, iii., 398, 408.
- Scandalous* terms put upon the best parts of religion, i., 496.
- Scandals* given either by word or deed, iii., 407—never fall out in the church, but some notable woe follows, iii., 206—an enemy to perseverance, i., 294.
- Schism* a great evil, i., 279—Protestants not guilty of, in separating from Papists and popery, i., 279, 280.
- Scorn* a grievous temptation, i., 501. (*Vide* Contempt.)
- Scorns* and scoffs must not draw us from obedience, i., 499—why religion is scorned, i., 496.
- Scripture* reveals, 1. Reconciliation. 2. Eternal life, not elsewhere revealed, ii., 314, 315—is the church's book, i., 58—it is to be highly prized, ii., 342—in opposition to, 1. Tradition. 2. Carnal reason, i., 58—its excellency, i., 93, 94 it is a record and a calendar, i., 108—Question. How we know the Scriptures to be God's word, iii., 221, 323. (*Vide* Word of God.)—it gives directions in all cases, i., 212—it is for the strong as well as for the weak, ii., 407—before it was complete as now, yet had promises for support of the soul, i., 223—truths, of two sorts, iii., 64—affords, 1. True doctrine. 2. True piety. 3. True consolation, ii., 311; iii., 222—four main ends of God's giving the: 1. To secure the truth. 2. That it might last to all ages. 3. For converting sinners. 4. For the trial of faith and manner, ii., 403, 404.
- Seasons* of mercy, neither too soon nor too late, ii., 222—when God eminently calls to consider our ways, i., 584—for particular duties, ii., 61, 330, 331; iii., 129.
- Scaling* to God's truth as witnesses, what it is, ii., 584, 585.
- Searching* the heart, a mark of one that hath respect to all God's commandments, i., 50.
- Seventimes* denotes many times; *numerus definitus pro indefinito*, iii., 387.
- Secret* prayer as well as public, a duty, iii., 251—it hath promises of reward, iii., 119—arguments to press to, iii., 121—duties argue sincerity, i., 547.
- Security*, carnal, will leave us ashamed at last, ii., 521—it is a note of pride, ii., 183—it is a cause of delaying repentance, ii., 9.
- Seducers* the most dangerous company, ii., 509.
- See*, a man may, and yet be blind, ii., 304.
- Seeds*, two, at enmity from the beginning, i., 423; ii., 18.
- Seek*, to, anything from God, above God, more than God, or not for God, is brutish, i., 19—it is a mark of election to seek God, i., 20—it is not in vain to seek God, i., 19—how to seek him, iii., 134—six arguments to move us to seek God, i., 20—encouragements to seek God's favour, iii., 134—directions for a due seeking of God, i., 20.
- Seeking* God implies, that God is not wholly gone, ii., 135—God arises from a sense of the want of God, i., 16—when we find not God in one ordinance,

- we must seek him in others, i., 17—it is the end of our creation, i., 17—the last way of seeking ourselves, i., 20—God's children are a generation of seekers, i., 81—83; iii., 275.
- Self-fulness*, leaves no room for grace, i., 40, 41.
- Self-conceit*, i., 385.
- Self-denial*, a main part of wisdom, ii., 337.
- Self-seeking* argues false zeal, iii., 191.
- Self-confidence*, a reason of apostasy, i., 246.
- Sense* of God's goodness, what it is? why we must keep a sense of it? ii., 98, 99—and faith are opposed, ii., 215—of sin renders God's mercies exceeding great, iii., 363—comforts from, are base and dreggy, ii., 274—outward senses betray the heart, i., 362—discovers the vanity of created excellency, ii., 303.
- Senses*, spiritual, what they are, ii., 475, 476—how they differ from the natural, ii., 376, 377.
- Sentence* of our state and actions is by the judgment of the word, i., 53, 54.
- Servant* of God, who he is? i., 376—a good argument, i., 376—a good plea for deliverance, why? ii., 294, 295—arguments to persuade us to clear up this relation, ii., 295, 331, 332—characters of God's servants, ii., 164; iii., 13, 19.
- Shame*, twofold, i., 51—it entered with sin, i., 52, 298, 299—is caused by disappointments, i., 299, 300; ii., 181, 520—is a fear of just reproof, ii., 200—we may be ashamed either before our own selves, or others, ii., 199—and that upon the account, either, 1. Of scandal; or, 2. Of punishment, ii., 199.
- Sheep* are creatures subject to stray, iii., 491—man compared to a, in several respects, iii., 493—Christ a tender shepherd of straying, iii., 501.
- Shield*, God is the, of his people, and what that imports? ii., 494.
- Sight* of God, to walk as in God's, a rule of sincerity, iii., 432—it is a good means for keeping God's precepts, iii., 432—of believers, and unbelievers, how they differ? ii., 304—spiritual, denotes faith, ii., 370.
- Simple*, simplicity in a good or evil sense, iii., 71.
- Sin* is not imputed to the renewed, i., 24—separates from God, i., 25—it is contrary to the blessed Trinity, i., 28—contrary to the new nature, i., 30—it is of an encroaching nature, i., 30—in, three things. 1. The fault. 2. The guilt. 3. The blot, i., 31, 257—never goes single, i., 411. (*Vide* Other men's sins.)—not allowed: a ground of com-
- fort, i., 52—all, must be refrained. 1. Notorious and plausible. 2. Inward and outward. 3. Pleasant as well as not pleasant. 4. Sins against both tables. 5. Great and small, ii., 361, 362—weakens both grace and comfort, ii., 365; iii., 421—heinousness of, in breaking God's law; striking at God's being, contradicting his sovereignty, ii., 391—removed, 1. In justification. 2. Sanctification, i., 257—its dominion, iii., 309—312—brings trouble two ways. 1. Meritoriously. 2. Effectively, i., 409, 410.
- Sins* incident to a condition of trouble, ii., 8—differences of, iii., 112, 113.
- Sincere* prayer must be, as well as fervent, iii., 249, 259, 260.
- Sincerity* in prayer, implies, 1. Seriousness. 2. Affectionateness. 3. Prevalency of those affections. 4. Universal care to please God, iii., 251—of sanctification, what it is? i., 7—marks of, 1. Carefulness to practise what we know. 2. Inquisitiveness to know more of our duty. 3. To stand in awe of God's word, i., 8, 15—it makes God judge of its heart, ii., 318—may be accompanied with failings, i., 15—and integrity, constitute the whole heart, i., 21—it aims at universal obedience, i., 46, 83—it is to be asked of God with earnestness, ii., 191—it gives confidence with God, i., 8; ii., 198—it keeps us good in bad times, iii., 112—two notes of, 1. The manner. 2. The principle of obedience, iii., 420.
- Sinking* under burdens by looking on the bare affliction, ii., 271—prevented by considering that God is, 1. Wise. 2. Just. 3. Good in afflicting, iii., 227, 228.
- Sinners*, the greatest when converted, are the greatest mourners for the sins of others, iii., 142—reasons, iii., 142.
- Slander*, not only in the deviser, but the receiver, i., 196, 390, 391.
- Sleep*, there is a surfeit in sleeping, as well as eating, iii., 279.
- Slight* prayers argue low thoughts of God, iii., 245—we are apt to be slighty in our prayers, iii., 266.
- Sluggish* prayers teach God to deny, i., 41; iii., 84.
- Snares* of the Devil and wicked men, of several kinds, ii., 454, 456—what use we are to make of these, i., 189, 190.
- Song*, God's word is our, in the house of our pilgrimage, i., 525, 526. (*Vide* Rejoicing.)
- Sorrow* wastes the natural spirits, i., 244; ii., 226—it must be proportionable to sin, ii., 6—of God's children greater

- than others, why? i., 245—*affect solitude*; joy, company, ii., 141.
- Sovereignty* of God, must be submitted to, i., 167; ii., 525—God sometimes forsakes his people out of, i., 72—of God in distributing wisdom, ii., 346, 352.
- Soul* is the man, i., 60; iii., 424—God must be served with the, as well as the body, iii., 424, 425 is, 1. *Fons actionum ad extra*, 2. *Terminus actionum ad intra*, iii., 435.
- Soul-blessings* are special blessings, i., 60—they are pledges of eternal blessings, i., 60—to take one's soul in his hand, what the phrase imports, ii., 412—soul's life is God's favour, ii., 169, 170.
- Soundness* of heart, what it is? ii., 191—196.
- Speedy* turning to God necessary, why? ii., 1, 2—pressed in general, and particular, ii., 12.
- Speeding* with God should make us come again, i., 321—how to speed with God? i., 224.
- Spirit, Holy*, is a spirit of peace. 1. As a sanctifier. 2. As a comforter, ii., 404—*bearth witness* to the Gospel, i., 12—gives help, as Christ gives leave to come to God, i., 21—gives, 1. Direction how to apply the rule. 2. To make a good choice. 3. To act grace, 4. To manage civil affairs, i., 45—gives liberty. 1. From slavish fears. 2. From potent lusts, i., 396—*increaseth our delight* in God's commandments, i., 467—the author, the Scripture the means of light, ii., 402.
- Spirit* of God our guide, as the word is our rule, i., 11, 212, 213—water, and blood, how they bear witness? i., 12.
- Spirit's* work to draw the heart from earthly things to God, i., 5.
- Spiritual* seeing requires, 1. That the object be clear. 2. That the organ be right, ii., 402—blessings call for praise, why? iii., 441—give us a heart to praise God, temporal blessings only give us an occasion, i., 61—sense and life, ii., 376, 377—it differs from the bare understanding, ii., 377—delight, exceeds that in worldly things, i., 122; ii., 274—there are three spiritual senses (chiefly) 1. Seeing. 2. Tasting. 3. Feeling, ii., 375, 376.
- Spiritualizing*, common and earthly things, i., 127; ii., 490.
- Springs* of comfort all in God, by the word, ii., 163.
- Stability* of the earth, an emblem of the, of God's word, ii., 261—and of his being, ii., 268—of God's testimonies, ii., 308; iii., 70, 71, 317, 318—of God's word, opposed to the creature's vanity, ii., 308, 309.
- 'Stablishing* of the word to us, two ways, i., 369—how to get the word established to us? i., 374, 375.
- Statutes* of God, what? what it is to seek them, iii., 346.
- Strangers* on earth, the condition of all God's children, i., 154—men may be, on earth, as to their condition, who are not so in affection, i., 154—why God's children are, and account themselves to be, i., 159, 160—how to carry ourselves as, in this world, i., 166.
- Straits*, he that makes conscience of God's commands may boldly seek help from God in his, iii., 169—in all, we are to delight in promises, iii., 476.
- Strength* natural, and spiritual, both may fail as they are ours, ii., 205—spiritual, what it is? how given out? how God is concerned therein? i., 257—how to get spiritual, i., 252, 253.
- Study* the word, but take God for your teacher, i., 59—arguments to study the word, ii., 351—the word. 1. Not out of curiosity. 2. Nor merely to be able to teach others. 3. Nor merely for delight, &c. but in order to practise, i., 96, 97—God's name. 1. What. 2. How.
- Stumbling*, preservatives against it, iii., 411. (*Vide* scandal.)
- Stupidity* under the rod a great evil, i., 220—it argues, to be careless in prayer, i., 254—not to be affected with God's judgments on others, ii., 557.
- Subjection* to God to be chosen before liberty, ii., 419—pressed from two grand motives, i., 400, 401.
- Submission* to Providence advanced by thanksgiving for received mercies, ii., 27—to God's disposing and commanding will, ii., 269—to God. 1. For the mercy. 2. For the time of the mercy. 3. For the ways and means of it, ii., 576.
- Suffering* for Christ very reasonable, who suffered such hard things for us, iii., 210—better than sinning, i., 205; ii., 187, 449, 450; iii., 8, 137, 282—condition has its peculiar allowances, ii., 273.
- Sufferings* are like to be long, 1. When reformation is rejected. 2. When deliverance would be a greater mischief. 3. When there is a damp on the spirit of prayer. 4. When God is about to punish us, and we go not about to reconcile ourselves to him. 5. When God's dispensations seem to tend towards a removing of the Gospel, ii., 207—are not to be drawn upon ourselves, iii., 227.

- Suitableness* of the heart to God's word, iii., 201—of the word to our conditions causeth us to remember it, ii., 283—to the soul, i., 136.
- Superiority* of God the greatest, on what accounts, i., 171, 180.
- Superstition* and profaneness, are two extremes, ii., 70.
- Superstitious* holiness, contrary to Scripture holiness, i., 6—it pleases the flesh, it consists in a conformity to outward rites, and external mortifications, after the commandments of men, i., 6—it makes men ill-natured, i., 191; ii., 241.
- Supper*, Lord's herein we renew our covenant, i., 444—of the Lord. 1. To commemorate God's goodness. 2. To get a renewed taste of it. 3. To stir up our love to God, ii., 105.
- Suppression* of religion plotted by the wicked: the means how to suppress it. 1. By denying the advantages of learning. 2. By vexing the profession of religion, ii., 233, 234.
- Support* to be prayed for under affliction as well as deliverance, ii., 430—why, ii., 431.
- Supreme* power has two branches, legislation and jurisdiction, iii., 218.
- Surety*, the notion of a, what it implies? ii., 567, 568—God is a sufficient, ii., 567, 568—twofold. 1. By way of caution. 2. By way of satisfaction, ii., 569, 570.
- Suretyship* for men dangerous unto men, ii., 568, 569.
- Surfeit* of the Gospel discovers itself by five marks, i., 175, 176.
- Suspension* of promised mercy. 1. That we may be better prepared for it. 2. That prayer may be awakened. 3. To exercise faith. 4. That patience may have its perfect work, ii., 218. (*Vide* Decays.)—of promised deliverance causeth the godly not to suspect the truth of God's word, but their own darkness and unbelief, iii., 10.
- Sustaining* grace the safety of God's people, ii., 526.
- Sympathy* a duty, though there be no idiopathy, i., 202. (*Vide* Fellowship.)
- Synonymous* words, increase the signification, iii., 223.
- T.
- Taking* occasions to employ one's-self about holy things, a sign of a gracious heart, iii., 286, 287.
- Talking* of God's word a duty, why? ii., 380.
- Talents* increase by using, i., 108.
- Taste* of God's love whets the desire and love after more, ii., 375.
- Tastes*, spiritual, that it is what it is? ii., 376, 377—there is a threefold use of spiritual taste. 1. Discerning. 2. Comforting. 3. Preserving, ii., 379—spiritual taste, its main blessing requires something. 1. About the object. 2. About the faculty, ii., 379, 380.
- Teacher*, supreme or subordinate, i., 58; iii., 6—not needful to make us sin, but necessary to make us obedient, i., 238, 318—commandments of God make us wiser than our, ii., 343.
- Teachers* have need to be taught of God, i., 104—corrupt and sound, ii., 313, 314.
- Teachings* of God inform our reasons, and move the will, i., 59—they make God's word effectual, i., 59; iii., 6, 282—God's teaching, what it is? the necessity and benefits of it, i., 104; ii., 374; iii., 6—ground of constancy, ii., 374—it gives clearness, certainty, efficacy to what is taught, iii., 446—we must be taught of God if we would learn God's statutes so as to keep them, i., 104, 158, 314; iii., 6—God teacheth, 1. By common illumination. 2. Special operation, ii., 373, 374—arguments to press us to go to God for his teaching, i., 314, 316, 317; ii., 211—he that would have covenant mercy, must submit to God's teaching, iii., 10.
- Tears* are not absolutely necessary to express mourning for sin, iii., 142, 143.
- Temporary* grace wherein defective? ii., 194—1. In the root. 2. In its predominancy over lust, ii., 195—professors endure but for a while, iii., 51, 52.
- Temper* of saints to mourn for the sins of others, iii., 144.
- Temporal* life, a great mercy, i., 141, 142—blessings may be prayed for, reasons, iii., 119—losses should not make us forsake our duty, ii., 18—Question. How we ought to depend on God for supplies? i., 418, 419—deliverances, why great comforts, ii., 222—spiritual welfare often concerned in our, iii., 119—things, two reasons why we are addicted to them. 1. From corrupt nature. 2. Custom, i., 345—good promoted by temporal loss, ii., 152, 153.
- Temporizing* reproved, i., 289.
- Temptations* of one kind foil some, and those of another kind foil others, ii., 580—violent, drive from God, iii., 497—arise from good as well as evil things, ii., 223—from loss of goods for the word's sake, ought to be prepared for, ii., 23—we are not to expose ourselves to, ii., 516—excuse not cowardice, iii., 211—to draw us from con-

- stant obedience, ii., 369, 370—they raise clouds and mists in the soul, ii., 589—the first temptation of the Devil, was to weaken their opinion of God's lovingkindness, iii., 297.
- Tender* mercy of God, what? ii., 165—it is the spring of all comfort and happiness, i., 162, 163.
- Tenderness* of conscience much impaired by prosperity, ii., 85.
- Terms* of salvation, not impossible to grace, ii., 255.
- Terrors* and allurements of the world draw us from God, iii., 409—of conscience bring nigh to the grave, i., 216.
- Tertullian's* complaint of those *Qui Platonice, et Aristotelice Christianismum procudunt Christianis*, iii., 70.
- Testimonies*, they that keep close to God's, are blessed, i., 11—word of God called his, why? i., 11; ii., 460—the end of God's, is to direct us how to seek God, and to bring home the wandering creature, i., 16—of God when thoroughly understood, are wonderful, in what respects? iii., 57—61—are of everlasting stability, &c. 1. From the Author. 2. Their foundation. 3. Use, iii., 317, 318.
- Thankful* carriage under mercy, suitable, iii., 4, 5.
- Thankfulness*, stirred up by the fear of God, ii., 556—it regards God's truth as well as goodness, ii., 64.
- Thanksgiving*, a special duty of God's children; how it differs from praising God? and what it is? the objects of it, ii., 25—it is a duty. 1. Necessary. 2. Profitable. 3. Delightful, ii., 26, 27, 61, 62—public, for private mercies, ii., 142.
- Thoughts*, are the noblest and eldest offspring of the soul, i., 129—they fall under a law as well as actions, i., 129; ii., 488—words, and actions, all judged by the word, i., 54, 55—vain, expressed by, 1. *ἐπιθυμῆσεις*, Musings. 2. *νοήματα*, Devices. 3. *λογισμοί*, Discourses, ii., 481—how to be prevented, ii., 327—they are to be abhorred, ii., 481—of wicked men usually taken up with some of these sins. 1. Uncleaness. 2. Revenge. 3. Envy. 4. Pride. 5. Covetousness. 6. Distrust, ii., 485—conscience to be made of vain, why, i., 132; ii., 486.
- Threatenings*, none can threaten like God, i., 33.
- Throne* of justice, grace, and glory, iii., 315—of grace threefold, iii., 315.
- Time*, and things of time, lessened by consideration of eternity, ii., 248—when God will wipe off the reproach of his people, iii., 211—whether it be convenient to have fixed times for prayer, iii., 390.
- Times* for converse with God must be chosen, iii., 279—what time is to be allotted for immediate worship, iii., 395—bad, discover good men, iii., 38—God has a time for punishing sinners, iii., 26—and his time is the best time, iii., 27—and a short time, iii., 26—his time is when impiety is come to the height, iii., 28—how to be good in bad times, iii., 38, 39.
- Tongue* must not only pray but the heart, iii., 251.
- Trade* of sin, what? i., 24.
- Tradition* of the church not a sufficient ground for our receiving the word, iii., 33.
- Treading* underfoot, what it implieth? ii., 531—God treads the wicked underfoot, why? ii., 532.
- Treasures* heavenly, beyond those of the earth, ii., 188—God's promises are our, ii., 462.
- Trembling*, the import of that word, ii., 551—at God's word, hinders not our delight in it, iii., 376.
- Trial* of faith and patience, i., 193, 387; ii., 205—God delays to try faith and patience, i., 478—of uprightness, i., 194, 377—of God's word, iii., 192.
- Trials* ought not to abate our love to God, or his word, ii., 225—God tries his people before he crowns them, iii., 37—one of the ordinary trials of God's people is persecution, iii., 366.
- Tribunal* of Christ, we may appeal thither, when unjustly condemned by men, i., 54—sincerity gives confidence to appear before that, ii., 198.
- Troubles* of the righteous, many, ii., 17, 18—when they become blessings, i., 219; ii., 186—the word supports under, ii., 186—188—the word cures troubles of heart, i., 203—they should drive us to the word, ii., 189—and to God, iii., 269—why? iii., 474—God exercises churches and persons with great, iii., 224.
- Truce*, no, to be made with sin, i., 499, 500.
- Trust*, two grounds of trusting in God. 1. God's wisdom. 2. His vigilancy, what it is? i., 419, 422; ii., 238, 239.
- Trusting* in God hath great benefits annexed to it, i., 421—God to be trusted upon his naked word, i., 419, 420, 422—in outward helps evil, iii., 270—arguments to trust in God, i., 421, 499, 500—God's goodness the life of our trust in him, ii., 102, 103—God engages God to secure us, i., 422; ii., 571—we may

- plead our trusting God in our prayers, i., 423—means for trusting in God, i., 422—characters of it, i., 123.
- Truth* and justice in all God's providences, i., 55—of Scripture is, 1. Certain. 2. Profound, ii., 311, 315—is the perfection of the understanding, i., 118, 119—must be professed. 1. Knowingly. 2. Wisely. 3. Godly. 4. Sincerely. 5. Meekly, &c., i., 131, 132—of Scripture suitable to all our necessities, i., 118—of God's word. 1. In making. 2. Making good his promises, iii., 159, 170—relates to some word of God, ii., 257—will prevail at last, i., 435—what interest God hath in, iii., 184—God is, ii., 581—is to be chosen because there are many crooked and erroneous paths in the world, i., 267, 268—way of, 1. To be taken upon good evidence; reasons thereof, i., 287, 288—2. We must cleave to it when we have chosen it, i., 288.
- Turning* the back upon God's counsels, what it is? who they are that do so? i., 214—when a lesser truth hinders a greater good, it ought to be concealed, i., 431—to God, is the end of considering our ways, i., 582—what turning to God is? i., 582, 583.
- Type*, Israel guided by the pillar of cloud by day, and pillar of fire by night, a type of our conduct by God's word, ii., 297, 398—lamp of the sanctuary, a type of God's word burning and shining, ii., 397, 398.
- U.
- Unactive* desires come to nothing, i., 41, 45.
- Unbelief* sins against God's authority and truth, i., 13—it is a cause of delaying repentance, ii., 9—the cause, 1. Of coldness in duty. 2. Boldness in sin, i., 373, 374.
- Uncertainty*. 1. Of life. 2. Of the means of grace. 3. Of the grace of God accompanying those means, ii., 4, 5.
- Unchangeableness* of God and his testimonies, iii., 233, 234—of God's nature, argueth the, of his purposes, ii., 217.
- Unconstancy* of our hearts needs vows, resolutions, oaths, ii., 412, 120.
- Undeified* implies not absolute purity, or legal perfection, but sincerity, i., 4.
- Undeifiedness* is to be understood according to the tenour of the new covenant, which excludes not God's mercy, i., 6, 7.
- Undertaking* of God more than ours, i., 307—of God for us is sufficient for our security, i., 308; ii., 569.
- Understanding* necessary to the keeping of God's law, i., 322—means to get it, i., 324, 325—wisdom, counsel, how they differ? ii., 329—moves the will and affections, ii., 393; iii., 200—motives to get, ii., 393—gotten from God's word (*Vide* Knowledge) is better than that gotten by long experience, ii., 319.
- Undutifulness* to superiors argueth pride, ii., 182.
- Undervaluing* God's word reproved, iii., 66, 67.
- Unfeigned* desire to return to duty a note of sincerity, iii., 501.
- Ungrounded* assent to truth, a reason of apostasy, i., 295.
- Uniform*, a true Christian is, in all times, places, &c., i., 47, 83; ii., 352, 479.
- Uniformity* of obedience to God, its nature, i., 7.
- Universal* obedience, without it, all is nothing, i., 49—they that obey not all, will not long obey any of God's commandments, i., 49.
- Unkindness*, to forget our Creator, i., 580.
- Unmortified* heart makes men unwilling to die, iii., 480—lusts, a reason of apostasy, i., 295.
- Unsatisfied* desires of having more, a part of covetousness, i., 251.
- Unseasonable* truth, not to be preached, i., 453.
- Unsettled* conscience makes men unwilling to die, iii., 474.
- Unsteadiness* with God will cost us much sorrow, i., 410.
- Unthankfulness* proceeds from greedy desire, ii., 63.
- Unworthiness* either, 1. General. 2. Particular, iii., 92.
- Until*, doth not always note *terminum temporis*, but *continuacionem actus*, ii., 408.
- Upholding* grace, means to attain it, ii., 514, 515.
- Upright* ones shall not be ashamed, i., 51—men in the sight of God, and in the sight of men, i., 51—men are safe men, ii., 241.
- Uprightness*, 1. In all God's promises. 2. Precepts, iii., 455—lies in two things, i., 62—it is a right frame for praising God, i., 62—it is God's gift, ii., 202—God has a singular respect unto it, ii., 197.
- Use* of the Scripture, 1. To increase the knowledge of God. 2. To content souls. 3. To make us perfect, ii., 316, 317—of a mercy when we have it, and submission in asking it, show what our ends were, iii., 490.
- Utility* of choosing God's precepts, 1. Such a one will justify the ways of

- God. 2. Will be more firm in his obedience. 3. Carry on the work of their heavenly calling with delight, iii., 462, 463.
- V.
- Vain-glory* cured by reproach, i., 384, 385.
- Vanity*, what meant by it, i., 361—of thoughts appears, 1. In their slipperiness. 2. Folly. 3. Carnality. 4. Filthiness, ii., 483, 484—how to be prevented or suppressed, ii., 327, 489, 490—cured by meditation, iii., 285, 286. (*Vide* Thoughts.)
- Valentinian*, his zeal against false worship, iii., 186.
- Valuation* of God's word above wealth, iii., 447—of the word, whence? ii., 127; iii., 217—what it is, iii., 213, 214—motives to value the word, i., 493; ii., 126—try all whether we value the word, ii., 126; iii., 43.
- Value* of the word to be judged by the cost that we are at for it, i., 53, 54, 175, 176.
- Variety* of gifts and graces in the saints, and all useful, ii., 181, 190—of mercies in God, meet with the variety of necessities in man, both in respect of sin and misery, i., 410, 411—of providences very useful, ii., 576.
- Vehemency* required in prayer, iii., 244, 245, 273—it implies the heart not the voice, iii., 273.
- Veil* upon the understanding, fourfold, i., 150.
- Vigilance* in prayer an argument, we make a business of it, iii., 272.
- Vigilancy* of Providence, a ground of trusting in God, ii., 239.
- Vindication* of God, by his impartial punishing of his own people's sins, ii., 554; iii., 159—of God's love to his people, though he afflicts them, iii., 99, 100, 155—157, 348, 349.
- Vindicative* justice of God on sinners, iii., 159.
- Visible* church is mixed, ii., 54—God's judgments on the, to make a separation between sincere and hypocritical professors, ii., 547.
- Virtue* of God's word must be expressed in our lives, iii., 180—in righteousness and truth, iii., 180.
- Volution* and velleity, how they differ? i., 43; iii., 40.
- Vows* to keep God's commandments, objection against them answered, ii., 415.
- Void*, Law of God made void, how? iii., 23, 24.
- W.
- Wages*, a Christian's work is part of his wages, iii., 73.
- Waiting* on God, what it is? ii., 186—it is better than by carnal policy to deliver ourselves, ii., 312—it teaches us to wait more, ii., 209—it is an argument of love, iii., 32—on God in the way of his providences ii., 547—long may make the eyes fail, ii., 588—two things make waiting tedious, 1. The sharpness. 2. The length of the troubles, ii., 588.
- Walking* in God's way, denotes 1. Uniformity 2. Constancy, i., 5—with God makes blessed, 1. In hand. 2. In hope, i., 9—six privileges of walking with God, i., 10—as in God's sight: a note of sincerity, a help to obedience. Its excellency and usefulness, iii., 432—435—means to help us so to walk, iii., 438, 439.
- Wandering*, a great proneness in man to wander from God, i., 88—man is a child for weakness, a sheep for wandering, i., 88; ii., 462; iii., 491—man is a wandering creature in respect of his pilgrimage condition, iii., 492—and in respect of sin, iii., 494.
- Wandering*, straying condition very dangerous, iii., 494—Christ guides his sheep in wandering, and reduces them from it, iii., 501—a main reason of our seeking God, both, 1. In the unconverted. 2. The converted, i., 16—we have little in comparison of what we want, i., 16.
- Want* recommends the word as precious, i., 174, 175.
- Warfare*, our life is a warfare, iii., 397.
- Warnings* of God they are to be taken, ii., 530—of God to men in prosperity, ii., 533—God warns us by his judgments on others, ii., 552, 553—ages, or places, ii., 553.
- Watches* of the night, what? preventing the night-watches, what? iii., 282.
- Watchfulness*, stirred up by the fear of God, ii., 555—a main point of wisdom, ii., 336.
- Watching* against the first declinings of the heart, ii., 372, 388—great need of watchfulness, i., 441.
- Way* of a man, it is the course he takes to reach his end, i., 440—442, 312, 326, 327—way of lying, what? i., 255, 256—to hell most beaten, i., 6.
- Ways* of God the same, therefore we should be the same, ii., 34—they are to be taken together, not apart, iii., 290—of God, and precepts of men, how they differ in the notion, i., 125, 126—our ways are to be considered, what it is to consider our ways, the necessity of it, iii., 290, 291—how God brings us to consider our ways? i., 577 (*Vide*

- Consideration)—just, though we see not the reasons of them, ii., 149.
- Weak** Christians have a sense of the great evil, that is in the least sin, ii., 524.
- Weakness** must be confessed to God, ii., 590—sense of it in ourselves makes us cry out for sustaining grace, ii., 524—accounted more reproachful than wickedness, iii., 243—of the understanding, and perverseness of the affection make us liable to fall into sin, iii., 199.
- Wealth** and the word, compared, ii., 120, 121.
- Weaning** from the world, ii., 511—love to the word weans us from the world, ii., 319.
- Weary**, God is neither weary, nor wasted with giving out mercy, i., 219, 234.
- Wicked** men are condemned, 1. *Sententia legis*. 2. *Sententia judicis*, iii., 162—have no true peace, iii., 406—run from God; are weary of God, i., 16, 17—they are said in a special sense, to be men of the earth, ii., 516—they are wicked men who keep not God's statutes, iii., 346.
- Wickedness**, may be established by a law, iii., 215—in morals, not accounted so reproachful as weakness in intellectuals, iii., 243.
- Will** of men no co-ordinate cause of grace, i., 350—ungenerate, is a tough sinew, i., 63—accepted for the deed, in what case, iii., 426—follows the last dictate of the understanding, i., 324—of God twofold, 1. Commanding. 2. Disposing, ii., 266—habitual to obey argues our right in the main, iii., 500—of God, and wisdom of God make a law, iii., 218—it must take place of our cross inclinations, ii., 80—God must be allowed to do what he will, ii., 15—God's will, the supreme reason of our obedience, i., 36, 37; ii., 576—the truth improved, ii., 576, 577.
- Wisdom** to hate every false way, ii., 391—to esteem things according to their intrinsic worth, ii., 119—it consists in three things, ii., 333—of God, a good ground for our trusting in him, ii., 233—seen in providence, i., 538—540—of God seen in afflicting his children, ii., 86—the perfection of the reasonable creature, ii., 329—what it is not? ii., 329, 330—what it is? ii., 335, 336—twofold wisdom from God's word, ii., 330—of the flesh, scorns tenderness of conscience, ii., 180—worldly, wherein it lies? ii., 335, 343.
- Wishes** for death, their grounds and reasons, are to be well considered, i., 146 difference between a wish and a desire in many particulars, i., 398, 399.
- Withdrawing** of God a reason of our wandering, iii., 497.
- Wondrous** things to be seen in the Scripture, 1. Concerning God, and his works. 2. Christ and his redemption. 3. Mysteries of religion. 1. That law, its precepts and sanction, i., 240, 241; iii., 60—63.
- Word** of God, gives true wisdom, ii., 72—compared with wealth, ii., 121—123—it teaches many excellent lessons, ii., 273, 274—it deserves love for the author, matter, use, ii., 310—it is a full declaration of God's mind, i., 11, 212—it is a certain declaration of his mind and will, i., 11—it declares, 1. What we must do. 2. Whether we do it or no, i., 3, 4—what we may expect from God, i., 12, 13—it is self-evidencing, i., 12, 13—it will excuse or accuse in the day of judgment, i., 13—it is not only a direction, but an injunction, i., 34—it is a light by day, a lamp by night, ii., 396, 397—why? ii., 395—it is a rule and an instrument, i., 75; ii., 397—in it we are to consider, 1. The authority. 2. The ministry of it, ii., 120, 124—it is a glass to show us our spots, and water to wash them away, i., 76—three main uses of the word of God, ii., 124—it is 1. The saints' direction. 2. Their support. 3. Their charter, i., 137; ii., 124, 307; iii., 408—it makes rich and happy, i., 122; ii., 121—123—it is an antidote against sin, and a cordial against sorrow, i., 168, 210, 490; ii., 397, 527—it is comfort in two respects, i., 519; ii., 397—it is bread and water, i., 173, 175, 176—how we are to be affected towards the word, ii., 308—it is pure in many respects, 1. In itself. 2. It makes the soul pure, and that 1. As it is the appointed instrument of the Spirit. 2. As it is a proper instrument for purification. 3. As it proposes precepts, examples, and other helps for purity, iii., 193, 194—it is righteousness, all righteousness, &c., iii., 455—it ought to be our meditation, ii., 253—it is a light proved from—1. The author. 2. instruments. 3. The ends of it, ii., 399, 400—it is our comfort in the day of outward trouble, and inward anguish: It gives these comforts, 1. The privileges of the afflicted. 2. The blessedness of another world, acceptance with God, iii., 231. (*Vide* Commandments.)—believers may humbly challenge God upon his word, i., 180—it may be hidden in two respects, 1. In respect of the outward administration. 2. In respect of the inward influence, and efficacy, i., 212—it is as good as God's

actual performance or deed, ii., 60—there are wonders in God's word, to be seen when God opens the eye, i., 156; iii., 60—62—what God's opening the eyes contributes to the sight of them, i., 157.

Words, idle, weigh heavy in God's balance i., 55—are the female issue of the soul, works the male issue, i., 126.

Work of God upon the soul may be mentioned before him, and pleaded to him in prayer, and how? i., 81, 85—when God intends to, he sets prayer on, iii., 31—of God, in what respects, and sense ascribed to the creature, and why? ii., 471—God is always at work for us, i., 439.

Works, covenants of grace and, wherein they agree, and wherein they differ? iii., 93—96.

World not our home, not to be abused, i., 164—it is preserved for the elect's sake, iii., 29—the spirit of this, ii., 349—the Spirit of God, and the spirit of this, differ, ii., 107—love of worldly things, two great causes of it. 1. A distrust of God's care. 2. Discontent with God's allowance, i., 352—present world, iii., 480.

Worship, false, severely punished, i., 55—of God, his interest therein, iii., 186 true zeal appears for purity of, and against the corruption of it, iii., 185—corrupted by Papists, i., 281, 285—false, makes men, 1. Subtle. 2. Cruel, ii., 159.

Wounding and healing, God's prerogative, ii., 155.

Wrath of God, they that walk closely with God are discharged from it, i., 10.

Y.

Yoke of afflictions to be borne from the youth, iii., 226.

Young and raw Christians, have much zeal, little knowledge, ii., 79—Christians may have more true wisdom than aged persons, ii., 357, 387—men exhorted to beware of evil company, as the pest and bane of youth, ii., 508—not to be discouraged nor despised, ii., 354, 355—encouragement to youth, and to those that educate them, ii., 355.

Youth regardless of serious work, i., 71—God must be remembered in, reasons of it, i., 74, 75—is tainted with sin, i., 71—how a, may cleanse his ways? i., 75—advantages of remembering God in, i., 578.

Z.

Zeal for false worship quenches the fire of real godliness, i., 6—it is a high degree of love; it consumes the natural spirits, iii., 184—great and pure, becomes those that have any affection for the ways and word of God, iii., 182—it is hottest in cold times, iii., 203—spiritual and carnal, their differences; carnal, is faulty in the, 1. Cause. 2. The object. 3. Measure, iii., 183—spiritual, described, 1. By its causes. 2. Object. 3. Effects. 4. Usefulness to public reformation. 5. Use in private Christian exercises, iii., 184, 185—blind, a cause of persecution, i., 200—it makes a man a prey for the Devil, ii., 392—young Christians have much, but little knowledge, ii., 71—shows itself for purity of worship, iii., 185—is less, when there is more light, ii., 357.

Zion, mourners in, and sinners in, iii., 140.

THE END.



[REDACTED]

