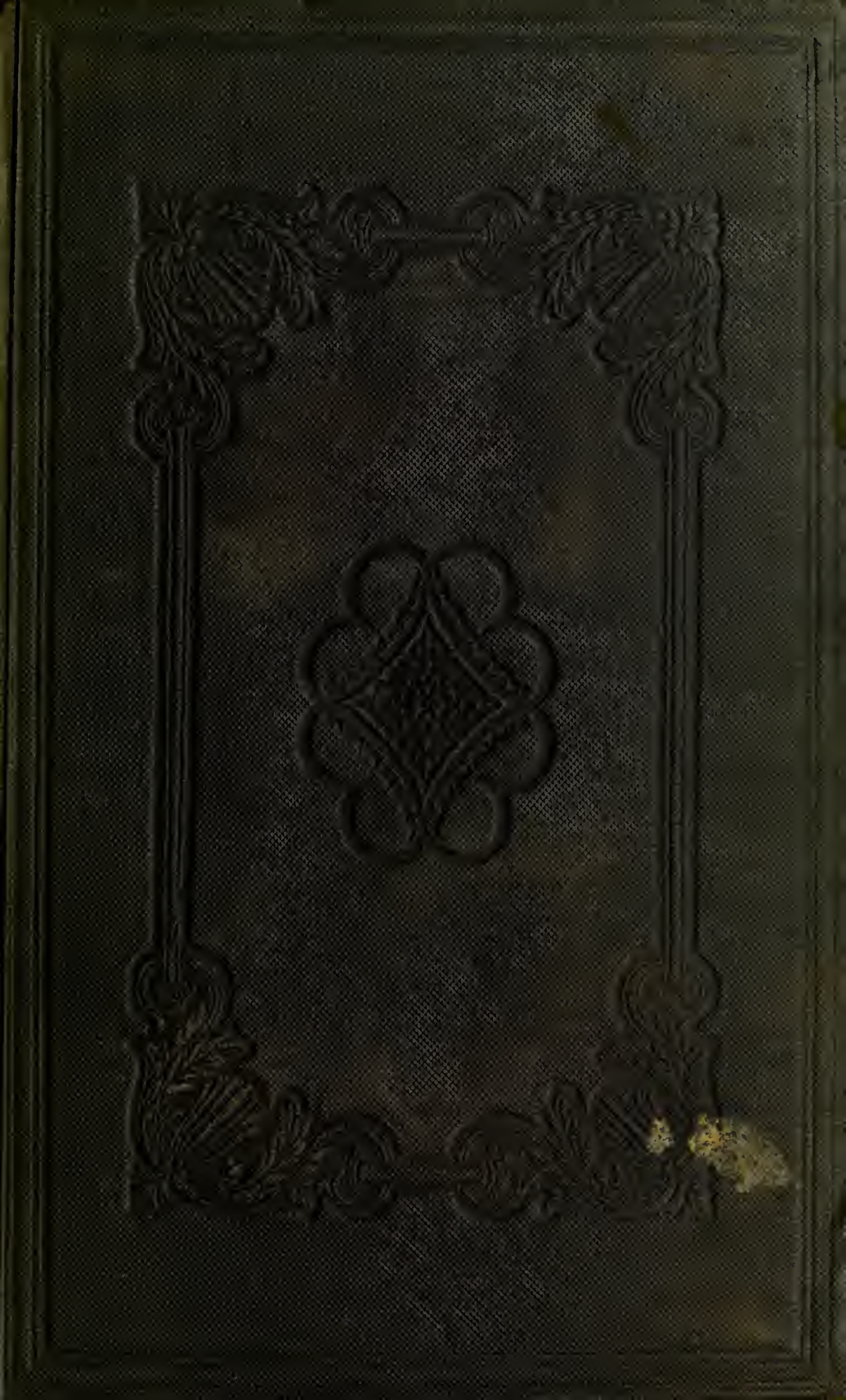

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SERMONS.

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SERMONS

BY THE LATE

REV. THOMAS SCOTT, M. A.

RECTOR OF WAPPENHAM, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE,
AND FORMERLY INCUMBENT OF GAWCOTT, BUCKS.

WITH A BRIEF MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE.

EDITED BY

THE REV. SAMUEL KING, M. A.

RECTOR OF LATIMER, BUCKS,

PUBLISHED BY R. B. SEELEY AND W. BURNSIDE;
AND SOLD BY L. AND G. SEELEY,
FLEET STREET, LONDON.

MDCCCXXXVII.

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,

JOHN,

LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN,

This Volume of Sermons

IS, BY PERMISSION,

MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

UNDER A GRATEFUL SENSE

OF

HIS LORDSHIP'S KINDNESS

TO

THE AUTHOR

AND HIS FAMILY.

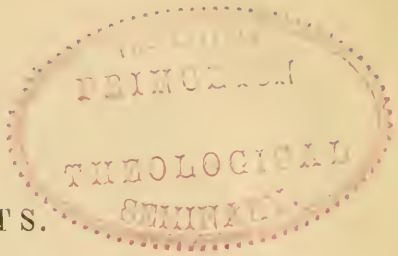
PREFACE.

The present volume of Sermons is not published with any special intent of benefiting the family of the author in a pecuniary point of view; such a step is rendered unnecessary by the late tribute of gratitude and respect offered by the Christian public, to the labours and memory of the venerable Commentator on the Bible, and divided amongst those of his descendants who stood most in need of the kind aid thus liberally and spontaneously afforded. At the same time, whatever profit may accrue by the sale of this volume will, of course, be devoted to the service of the widow and family of the Author. The chief object in presenting the work to the public, is to place an useful book in the hands of those to whom it may be acceptable, and especially to furnish the congregations of its lamented author, with a memorial of his faithful and affectionate addresses to them.

The Editor had a very large number of sermons to choose from; so many indeed, as almost to bewilder him; and now that the selection is printed,

he has some fears that a better might have been made;—a feeling, however, which would not perhaps have been avoided under any circumstances. He will only add, that he has taken much pains in discharging the trust committed to him; and he hopes that, under the Divine blessing, the volume will prove of great benefit to many persons. One or two of the sermons have especial reference to the duties and responsibility of the pastoral office; these have been inserted, because discourses upon such important points, rarely find admission into modern collections of Sermons, while at the same time, they are peculiarly interesting to Clergymen from the circumstance of their so seldom having the opportunity of hearing such subjects discussed; a disadvantage which ought perhaps more frequently to be taken into consideration, and, as far as possible, remedied.

It is right to mention, that Mr. Scott very seldom wrote out at length the application of his discourses, so that many comprised in this volume will appear somewhat incomplete; the Editor choosing rather to allow an abrupt termination in some instances, than to add any thing where it could, with propriety, be avoided.



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MEMOIR.

The author of the following Sermons was the second and last surviving son of the Rev. Thomas Scott, Rector of Aston Sandford, the venerated and well known Commentator on the Holy Scriptures. He was born at Weston Underwood, in Buckinghamshire, November 9, 1780, and had the advantage, in common with his brothers, of being educated at home, under the care of his pious and learned father. About the age of sixteen he was attacked with severe ophthalmia; and a residence by the sea-side being recommended by the late Mr. Pearson, the surgeon, he was kindly received into the family of Captain Hooper, of Margate. During this season, in which all his ordinary occupations and pursuits were suspended, it appears that those deep convictions on religious subjects, which abode with him ever afterwards, and influenced all the steps of his future life, were implanted in his soul; and his bodily loss of sight was thus, by the blessing of God, made conducive to that spiritual illumination which rendered him the exemplary Christian and faithful labourer in the Gospel, which he afterwards became.

On recovering his sight, he resolved to dedicate himself to the work of the ministry; and accordingly, in his twenty-first year, he entered at Queen's College, Cambridge. For the first two years of his college life, he gave himself diligently to the studies of the place; and there can be little doubt, from the progress he then made, that, had he been enabled to persevere in reading, he would have attained high academical honours; but, his eyesight again failing him, he was obliged to give up all hope of this distinction. He however proceeded to his B. A. degree in 1805, when he had the satisfaction of receiving an intimation from the tutor of his college, that, if he thought it desirable to sit for a Fellowship, the fact of his not having taken an honour would, under his peculiar circumstances, and from the exemplary manner in which he had conducted himself as an under-graduate, prove no bar to his success. This measure however, for various reasons, he declined; and at once proceeded to take upon himself those sacred obligations, to the discharge of which he ever afterwards assiduously devoted his labours. He was ordained deacon shortly after leaving Cambridge, and became curate of Emberton, Bucks. The following year he was admitted to priest's orders, and was presented as the first Incumbent to a chapel at Gawcott, near Buckingham. by the pious and excellent patron, Mr. John West, who had built and endowed it.

In this obscure village, containing a population of six or seven hundred persons, who, with very few exceptions, were in a state of the greatest poverty, Mr. Scott lived and laboured for twenty-seven years; and he will long and deservedly be remembered by them, as

their principal benefactor and friend. Feeling the great importance of residing in the midst of his flock, his first object was to build a parsonage-house. This he effected by the aid of various friends, and at an expense to himself of more than five years' income of his benefice, which he could ill afford; but by this means the advantage of always having a resident clergyman was secured to the place.

In a mere worldly point of view, a more undesirable piece of preferment could hardly have been met with. The endowment, £100. per annum, was to include all expenses, the clerk's salary, and the *repairs of the chapel.* It might have been supposed that this latter provision would have little affected the first Incumbent; but the case was far otherwise, for the builder employed by Mr. West had performed his work so badly, that in less than twenty years from its erection, the chapel became too ruinous to admit of repair, so that it was necessary to take it down and erect a new edifice. This, of course, was utterly out of Mr. Scott's power to effect himself; he therefore once more appealed to his Christian friends, who came forward liberally and cheerfully to his assistance; and a substantial new church, of which he himself was the architect, was built (at the cost of about £1,700.) which for elegant simplicity and convenience may serve as a model for other similar erections. In addition to this, by advancing a sum of money himself, aided by Pynson's charity and Queen Ann's bounty, he added between £30. and £40. per annum to the endowment; so that he may justly be considered as a co-founder with Mr. West of the chapelry, having been the means, by his own private

contributions, and by his exertions in exciting the liberality of his friends, of rebuilding the Chapel, erecting a Parsonage house, and materially increasing the originally small endowment of the living.

With these and other expenses, and with the wants of a large and increasing family to provide for, it is not surprising that Mr. Scott, notwithstanding his unceasing labours as a tutor, should have had to struggle with poverty. When however, early in 1833, the bishop of Lincoln, who had long regarded him with esteem, on account both of his ministerial labours and his personal qualities. presented him to the rectory of Wappenham, in Northamptonshire, the income of which is about £350. per annum, his family and friends fondly hoped that many years of comparative comfort, as well as of increased usefulness, lay before him. Alas! these hopes were very soon destroyed. He preached his first sermon to his new flock, Feb. 10, 1833, and his brief ministry amongst them was terminated in the space of little more than two years, he being suddenly removed to his heavenly rest, on the 24th of February, 1835, in the fifty-fifth year of his age. For a considerable time previously, he had suffered much from apparently dyspeptic symptoms, but neither he nor his family suspected the real disease from which they originated. On the morning of the day of his death he went to Brackley, and called upon two or three friends in the neighbourhood. On returning home he seemed better and more cheerful than for some time past; but shortly after dinner, a violent paroxysm of the distressing symptoms to which he was subject came on, and he went groaning up stairs to bed, unable to speak. Severe sickness followed, and he

breathed his last in the arms of an affectionate pupil, who was supporting him. The fatal complaint proved to be organic disease of the heart.

Before Mr. Scott came to Wappenham, there had not been an Incumbent residing in the place, for nearly a hundred years. It was necessary that here also he should build a Parsonage-house, to enable him to dwell amongst his people; and this he was enabled to do, by the amount received for dilapidations, and by borrowing on the living from Queen Ann's Bounty, but still not without incurring considerable expense to himself. The house, a plain but commodious and respectable edifice, was completed but a very short time before he was removed to those heavenly mansions, which the Lord hath prepared in heaven for his faithful servants.

Such is a slight sketch of the uneventful, but useful life of my departed friend and brother. His lot was cast in places little known, and amongst the poorest and most uneducated people; though his talents were such as might perhaps have been advantageously employed in populous and refined situations. But the great Lord of the vineyard, who appoints to each of his labourers that station in which his efforts will be most productive of good, saw fit to assign him, no doubt for the wisest purposes, these obscure fields of labour. And unquestionably his exertions were eminently blessed; and the state of moral and spiritual cultivation to which, by long and assiduous toil, he brought a place, once nearly a heathenish waste; in addition to his usefulness as a tutor—an usefulness to which many excellent Clergymen and others now living, will be ready to bear ample testimony, and from which he would have been nearly

precluded in a more active sphere of clerical exertion—forms an ample compensation for a retirement, which his friends were sometimes disposed to lament, and which occasionally cast a degree of gloom over his own mind.

The character of Mr. Scott was particularly calculated to shed a lustre upon his religious profession, and to attract the regard and confidence of those who might be opposed to the humbling and holy nature of the doctrines he taught. He had a remarkably pleasing address, and the happy faculty of at once winning the hearts of those he conversed with. A kind enquiry, or a cheerful remark, was ready for every one he met, and often opened the way to some useful instruction or advice. Nor was his kindness confined to words: he greatly interested himself in every thing relating to the comfort and welfare of others, especially of his poor people, and was ever willing to afford them assistance to the utmost of his ability, often indeed beyond it. This readiness to undertake labour and trouble for the advantage of others, formed a conspicuous part of his character, and many have in this way been greatly indebted to him.

As a minister of the gospel he was much blessed. His discourses were generally of a powerful and awakening nature; combining earnestness with much affection, and displaying a thorough acquaintance with the scriptures, united with an understanding and judgment more than ordinarily vigorous and sound. His diligence in this respect is attested by the very large number of sermons he has left; for, though quite capable of what is called extemporary preaching, and having an abun-

dant flow both of words and ideas at command, as his regular family expositions proved, he always preached written sermons: indeed, he had a particular fondness for the act of writing, and often had recourse to it—too often for his health—as a relaxation after his long and laborious day's work with his pupils. His correspondence also was very extensive; and judicious advice or well-timed reproof, conveyed by him in a letter, has proved of important service in many instances. It is indeed rather remarkable, that, with the particular facility for composition which he possessed, he never became an author to a greater extent than writing a few occasional papers for periodical works, and two brief memoirs—one of Mr. West, his early patron; and the other of his brother, the Rev. Benjamin Scott, prefixed to a volume of his Sermons, which he edited. But his time was fully and usefully occupied. The necessity which he was under of taking pupils, in order to provide for the wants of his family, has been already adverted to. This laborious and burdensome occupation, which of late years he particularly felt to be such, was continued to the time of his death; no one, however, can tell the amount of good which his truly evangelical mode of instruction has, under the Divine blessing, already produced, and will continue to produce, through the instrumentality of those who had the advantage of being educated under his roof.

It is unnecessary to dilate upon other parts of his character: not only as a minister and tutor, but as a husband, parent, and friend, Mr. Scott's conduct was most exemplary, and becoming the gospel of Christ. It is not, however, pretended that his was a faultless

character:—far from it; but he had no *prominent* faults. Whatever he might feel in his own mind, and confess before his God upon his knees, there did not appear, to those who knew him, any thing that might be pointed to as his "easily-besetting sin." By the grace of God he became what he was. This led him constantly to place before him, as his great ruling motive, the honour of God, the credit of the religion he professed, and the spiritual welfare of his family, of his pupils, and of the people committed to his charge; and though his natural temper was kind, affectionate, and conciliating, in no ordinary degree, and he was ready to become all things to all men, as far as he consistently could—scrupulously avoiding to give unnecessary offence to any one—still, where his principles were concerned, he was most unbending, and would never shrink from declaring them, and acting up to them, be the consequence what it might.

The suddenness of his removal from this world, prevented his bearing that testimony to the efficacy and truth of the faith he professed, on his death-bed, which has been so edifying to survivors in the cases of many of the faithful servants of Christ. But for a considerable time he had been impressed with a conviction that his life was drawing to a close; and though it does not appear that he apprehended so speedy a dissolution, or was aware of the nature of the disease under which he laboured, he felt that his days were numbered, and he lived and conversed like one habitually expecting, and prepared for the solemn event. Continued allusions, indicating the state of his mind in this respect, pervaded, for some time past, his sermons, expositions

and prayers; as well as his letters and conversation: and while finishing his house, and stocking his garden with fruit-trees, it was his frequent remark, that he was doing this for others. His anxiety that every thing in this respect should be substantially and usefully done, was another indication of his amiable and conscientious character; for there is not the least reason to believe, that the idea of his son's succeeding him in the living, ever entered his mind.

It is a painful consideration, and amongst the mysterious dispensations of providence, that a man so talented, so laborious, and so exemplary, should be, as he was, constantly oppressed with poverty, and harassed with pecuniary difficulties: nor can it be doubted, that distress of mind, arising from this cause, served materially to shorten his days. He is, however, now at rest, and his worldly cares and sufferings, " blessings in disguise," sent to him in infinite love by his heavenly Father, will serve to render more vivid the enjoyment of those pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore.

Mr. Scott married, in 1806, Euphemia, the only daughter of Dr. Lynch, of the Island of Antigua, and niece of the Rev. Nathaniel Gilbert, Vicar of Bledlow, and few unions have been blessed with a greater portion of domestic harmony and comfort. He had in all thirteen children, of whom six sons and three daughters survive. The eldest son has been most kindly presented by the Bishop of Lincoln to the living so prematurely vacated, out of respect and regard to the memory of his excellent Father. Shortly before his death, to his great satisfaction, the trustees appointed

by Mr. West, conferred the perpetual curacy of Gawcott upon his son-in-law, the Rev. J. H. Oldrid. He was interred in that place, in the Church which he himself built, amidst the tears and lamentations of his affectionate family and friends, and of his loving and beloved flock, from whom he had been separated so short a time. May the additional conviction, which the perusal of the short narrative is calculated to produce, of the uncertainty of life, lead us all to increasing watchfulness—to more careful preparation for death,—and to more diligent attention to our blessed Saviour's solemn exhortation, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that WAIT for their Lord."

*** The preceding Memoir is reprinted, with some necessary alterations from a paper sent by the Editor to the Christian Observer, and which appeared in that periodical in the Number for April 1835.

SERMONS.

SERMON I.

2 CORINTHIANS iv. 5.

FOR WE PREACH NOT OURSELVES BUT CHRIST JESUS THE LORD; AND OURSELVES YOUR SERVANTS FOR JESUS' SAKE.[1]

SUCH is the language in which that most eminent servant of God, the Apostle Paul, describes the manner in which he discharged the office of the Ministry. We pretend not to place ourselves on a level with him; we claim none of his infallibility; we boast not of a zeal like his, or of success like that which attended him; the purpose, however, for which we are appointed to the ministry is exactly similar, and, by the blessing of God, we hope to see some of the same happy effects. But if we would accomplish this, we must use the same

[1] Preached at Wappenham, the first Sunday after Institution to the living.

means, and must preach the same doctrines as St. Paul did.

When, a few days ago, I received from the Bishop of the Diocese, the charge of this Parish; there was one clause in the deed of Institution which deeply affected my mind; it was this, 'And we do by these presents commit unto you the *cure and government of the souls of the Parishioners of the said Parish.*' Consider, my brethren, the force of these words—the cure—the government—of the *souls*—the never-dying souls of all the inhabitants of the Parish! To the same effect did Almighty God speak to the Prophet Ezekiel, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel, therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life: the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." [1] Such has been the nature of the ministerial office in all ages. Every one who bears that office has the care of immortal souls intrusted to him; the souls of men who have sinned against the Lord, and therefore are in danger of perishing; these souls must be sought, and brought back to the fold of God. The work, you see, is intrusted to us, and woe to us if we do not, to the best of our power, fulfil the solemn charge.

[1] Ezekiel iii. 17, 18.

But the question arises, How is this to be done? What means must he employ, to whom the cure of souls has been confided? In other words, how are we to seek and save that which is lost?—how are we to make full proof of our ministry? In no way can we answer these questions, but by referring to the word of God. There we find rules laid down, and examples given, to teach us the manner in which we may accomplish the great end of our appointment. In St. Paul's two epistles to the Corinthians, these subjects are most plainly set forth. In his first epistle, the Apostle says, "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified."[1] And again, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."[2] And again he says, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."[3] In perfect accordance with all this, is the language of the same Apostle in the passage before us. "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not: but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness,

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 1, 2. [2] 1 Cor. iii. 11. [3] 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but 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; for we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." In taking these words as the subject of my discourse on this interesting occasion, I desire to preach as much to myself as to you. I wish to recal to my mind what were the subjects upon which the holy Apostles preached, whereby they converted multitudes to God and saved immortal souls. The same weapons, I know, when rightly wielded, will still be "mighty through God." I wish, in fact, on the commencement of my ministry in this place, solemnly to pledge myself to those whose souls are intrusted to my charge, that, so far as I am able, I will endeavour to preach to them the same doctrines as St. Paul preached. And I pray to God so to enlighten my mind and guide my heart by his Holy Spirit, that I may keep back nothing that is profitable for you, nor shun to declare the whole counsel of God. And let me beg your most fervent and unceasing prayers that the divine blessing may so follow all my ministrations among you, that many may hear and wel-

come the truth from my lips, and be led diligently and successfully to seek for the salvation of their souls.

The words of the text simply teach us,

I. What St. Paul and his brethren DID *not* PREACH; and,

II. What THEY *did* PREACH—"We preach *not* ourselves; but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

I. Let us then inquire what St. Paul DID *not* PREACH.

In a passage to which I have already referred, the Apostle tells the Corinthians, that when he came to them, he "determined not to know any thing among them, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." He could, had he been so minded, have dwelt on many subjects which would have been highly pleasing to numbers of his hearers; but they would have derived no advantage from them; their souls would not have been brought into the way of salvation by them; and therefore the great end of his ministry would not have been answered. But there was one overwhelming subject, in comparison with which every other was as nothing, and for the sake of which he would renounce them all; this subject was "Jesus Christ and him crucified." As in this passage he renounced all other *topics*, so in the text he renounces every other *object*.

Of all things, nothing is so near to man as *self*.

It pervades us in all our employments; and in all our pursuits we have a continual eye to our own interest, ease, or reputation. And to a certain extent this is allowable. In other business and in other occupations, a man may be permitted to keep in view what he considers likely to be advantageous to himself. But St. Paul here teaches us, that every thing of this kind must be excluded from the ministrations of him who is sent forth to "preach Jesus Christ and him crucified." "We preach not ourselves."

1. A man may be said to preach himself, when he is aiming thereby to promote his own *worldly interest*. The apostle has indeed taught us, that as under the Mosaic law, an ample provision was made for the priests, and they who ministered at the altar, lived by the altar; so also in the Christian church, they who preach the gospel, should live of the gospel. The minister is a man of like feelings with others. He needs, and naturally desires a supply for the necessities of himself and of his family. But still on this point, moderation should mark his character. He should look only for such plain and simple support, as may free his own mind from anxiety, and enable him to do something toward relieving the distresses of his poor neighbours: much beyond this he ought not to desire. But when, for the sake of inducing his hearers to enlarge his income, he shapes his doctrines, and arranges his discourses, and regulates

his behaviour in that way which may please them, and secure their favour, then is he most flagrantly *preaching himself*. He is not considering how he may advance the glory of God, or promote the salvation of the immortal souls committed to his charge. He is taking the oversight of the flock of God for filthy lucre, and not of a ready mind. Not so St. Paul; he suffered the loss of all things; he voluntarily endured poverty and want, and laboured to support himself and those that were with him, working at the business of a tent-maker by night, that he might preach the gospel by day, and make it without charge to those who heard him. In our time and in our country, the necessity for such labour has ceased. The benevolence and piety of our ancestors has made a provision for the support of the ministers of religion, of which they cannot be deprived, without the same injustice that would take away the property of any other class of persons in the kingdom. But if this be so, we are the more bound to give ourselves wholly to the work of the ministry. We have a provision made for us, on purpose that we should the more devotedly seek the everlasting good of the souls committed to our charge. We are therefore under the less temptation to preach ourselves, or to suffer our minds to be occupied with worldly interests, while discharging the sacred duties of our calling.

2. In the expression "we preach not ourselves,"

the apostle no doubt meant to intimate also, that a life of ease and enjoyment was not what he and his brethren sought after, when they became ministers of the gospel. If we look through the history of St. Paul, as we find it in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles, we shall at once see that such could not have been *his* object ; for no other man ever went through such labours and fatigues, such trials and distresses as he did.

But circumstances are now changed. With us persecutions have ceased ; the most faithful of all Christ's servants are not exposed to such things as St. Paul had to encounter. In consequence of this change, it is to be feared that too many have entered the church as ministers, with the idea that in this way they should live a more easy, genteel, and self-indulgent life, than they could otherwise do ; that they should have more leisure for their favourite studies or amusements, and more opportunity for enjoying refined society. But here again we must be on our guard, lest we should be influenced by unworthy and unchristian motives. The orders of the ministry were instituted for the benefit of others, and not of those who are admitted into them. We are *shepherds* over the flock—we are *watchmen* over the souls committed to our care—we are *labourers* in the Lord's vineyard—we are *soldiers* in the army of Christ. All these representations teach us that we have a work to do, a labour to perform, and trials and difficulties to

encounter, quite inconsistent with a life of ease and indulgence. To this work we ought to give ourselves—to it ought we to devote the best of our time and of our talents; none of us should live unto himself—none of us should die unto himself.

In the expression, "We preach not ourselves," the apostle may be considered as also including another declaration, namely, that it is not the object of the minister to gain the approbation, or win the applause, or even acquire the affections of his people, unless he can do so by the faithfulness of his preaching, and the holiness of his life. We are indeed "to please all men to their edification." We are to seek to win the attention of our people. We are to endeavour to make not only the poorest, but also the most ungodly persons in our parishes feel that we are their friends, that we are affectionately desirous of their good, both in this world, and in that which is to come; that we are willing to do all in our power to promote their welfare, yea, that we deem ourselves bound to act always for their benefit;—still we must not think that we have obtained our reward, when we see our churches well attended, or find that our preaching is acceptable to the people; or that they look upon us with respect and esteem. Were we satisfied with this, we might well be considered as *preaching ourselves*. Much higher objects are placed before us; we are to seek the approbation of HIM who hath put us into the ministry; we are to seek the

everlasting welfare of those to whom we preach. These are the only things which ought to satisfy the minister of Christ. If he gain not the first of these objects—if the great Head of the church do not approve him: after he has preached to others, he may himself be a cast-away. If he prove not the means of saving the souls of those who hear him, he may indeed, as is said of Ezekiel, be unto them as "the very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument," but he will have none who will be "his joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus."

But I must now proceed,

II. To consider what the apostle DID PREACH "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

There were two parts, it appears, into which the preaching of St. Paul and his brother apostles might be divided; let us consider each of them separately.

1. The Apostle says, we "preach Christ Jesus the Lord." He says on another occasion, "We preach Jesus Christ and him crucified." And again, "A dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me;" and "woe unto me if I preach not the gospel." We see then, that preaching Christ Jesus the Lord; preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified; and preaching the gospel, are all one and the same

thing. Each describes the grand subject of the Christian ministry.

We cannot read over the expression of the text without being reminded of the words of the angel who was sent to tell the shepherds of the birth of Christ. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."[1] The message of the angel, and the preaching of St. Paul were precisely the same. They both preached the gospel, for the word gospel means *good tidings*—"good tidings of great joy to all people. They each proclaimed a Saviour which is "Christ the Lord." And our errand to you, my brethren, is the same. We too, if we perform our duty, "preach Christ Jesus the Lord."

The Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, by whom all things that are in heaven and on the earth were made; who upholdeth all things by the word of his power—He whom all the angels of God were commanded to worship, came down from heaven, was born of a woman, and in order to be the Saviour of mankind he lived on earth a life of suffering and contempt, and at last died like a malefactor upon the cross, for us men, and for our salvation. This was the subject on which the apostle tells us he dwelt in his ministry, this was

[1] Luke ii. 10, 11.

his favourite theme, this was the topic on which he every where insisted, and this he lived and died to make known to mankind. Have you, my brethren, ever allowed your minds to dwell upon this all-important subject with that seriousness which it deserves? You have read of it in your Bibles, you have heard of it in the Church, you have avowed your belief in it, when you have repeated the creed, or rehearsed your catechism. Yet it may be that you have never felt that it was good tidings of great joy. You may perhaps have never considered how deeply you are concerned in it; how entirely all your hopes of eternal happiness depend upon it. The apostle calls it "a faithful saying, and worthy of *all* acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to *save sinners*." The angel said it was "good tidings of great joy which should be to *all people*, that to them was born a Saviour, Christ the Lord." All therefore, are concerned—deeply concerned in the fact.

And why is it a saying worthy of *all* acceptation? why is it good tidings to *all* people? why are *all* so deeply concerned in it? The apostle's words will answer the question, "There is no difference, for *all* have sinned and come short of the glory of God." And thence he argues that none can be saved otherwise than freely—by grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. My dear friends, we have just been on our knees confessing before Almighty God, that this declaration of his

word applies to us, that we are miserable sinners; 'that we have erred and strayed from his ways like lost sheep; that we have left undone the things we ought to have done, and have done the things that we ought not to have done, and that there is no health in us.' *We*, then, are sinners; and if sinners, we are in danger of eternal misery. We therefore want a Saviour; and "there is salvation in none other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," but that of "Christ Jesus the Lord," whom St. Paul preached, and whom all the ministers of the gospel are commanded to proclaim. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[1] Such was the language our Lord used to Nicodemus. Let us reflect upon this for one moment. Men are likely to perish through their sins, but God so loved them as to give his only begotten Son—"Christ Jesus the Lord"—"that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." This, brethren, "is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." When the jailor at Philippi, filled with terror, cried to Paul and Silas, "Sirs! what must I do to be saved?" they said unto him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." They preached

[1] John iii. 16.

to him "Christ Jesus the Lord." And such, my brethren, is the errand on which we are sent unto you. We cannot conceal from you our full persuasion that both you and ourselves are sinners against God. Our consciences tell us that this is the case; we see death and judgment before us, and we tremble at the thought of what will be the consequence of sin in that world to which we are going. And we are persuaded that there is no means whereby we can escape the wrath of God ourselves, or by which you can escape it; but through Christ. We are assured that he is able to save to the uttermost all them that come to God by him. We therefore preach unto you Christ Jesus the Lord. We set him forth as the Saviour, "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." We beseech you to look to him for salvation, to believe in him that you may have everlasting life. If we have any of that mind in us which was in St. Paul, we can say, "We seek not our own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."[1] For this purpose we preach to you the Lord Jesus Christ; for we are sure that he is able to save you from sin and from hell, and to bring you to heaven; and we are equally sure thatyou can find no salvation but through him.

If then, brethren, in my future ministry among you, I should say much upon the subject of Christ

[1] 1 Cor. x. 33.

and of his salvation, I trust you will believe that I do so, because I am fully satisfied that thus only I shall rightly discharge my duty amongst you; that I shall best consult your advantage by directing you to this only source of happiness and peace.

I shall have much, very much to say to you, should GOD spare me, of the need of repentance, and of the necessity, the absolute necessity, of good works, of leading a sober, righteous, and godly life—without which no one can be a Christian, a traveller in the way to heaven; in this also I would follow the example of St. Paul and his brethren, and most earnestly do I hope that I may be able to say as he did, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

2. To this last clause of my text I must now briefly call your attention.

In his first Epistle, the Apostle declares to the Corinthians,—"All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas." These eminent ministers of Christ were all of them, as it were, the property of the church, for the advantage of which they were willing to spend and be spent. And in the ninth chapter of the same Epistle he says, "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became a Jew that I might gain the Jews:—to them that are under the law, as under

the law, that I might gain them that are under the law:—to them that are without law, as without law, . . . that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things unto all men, that I might by all means save some."

In these passages we have a striking comment upon the last clause of the text. "I have made myself the servant of all—I have become all things to all men, *that I might save some.*" I am willing to sacrifice every interest and every pleasure, and to submit to any degradation and self-abasement; if I may but *save* some. Such was the spirit which glowed in the breast of St. Paul—such was the feeling that led him from kingdom to kingdom, "preaching to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Such too should be the feeling with which the Ministers of the Gospel engage in their duties. The love of Christ should constrain them to live no longer to themselves but to him "who died for us and rose again." The love of the immortal souls for whom Christ died, should make them willing to undertake any service, however mean, any duty however laborious or distressing, by which they may save some.

In this sense, brethren, we preach ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. We deem ourselves bound to labour for your good—to promote your

best, your eternal interests—to seek the salvation of your souls. We cannot indeed allow our people to tell us what we are to preach, or in what manner we are to discharge our ministry. For these matters we have another Master to whom we are answerable. He has given the rules by which we are to proceed; he has told us what doctrines we are to preach; and "if any man, yea, even an angel from heaven, should dare to preach any other Gospel," he would be *accursed*. We must speak God's word, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. Here we can admit of NO dictation from others—we must, as we shall answer for it at the great day, preach what we believe to be the word of God, and not alter it even to please those, whose favour and esteem we might naturally be most anxious to secure. With this one exception however, our duty is "to preach ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

It was the pious intention of the Founders of our Church, that there should be constantly residing in every parish one individual at least who should have no other business than to do good of every kind to every person. His property might indeed be small, his income scanty, and he might have to witness much distress, which it would not be in his power to relieve—but, by kind condolence, by friendly advice, by visiting the fatherless and the widow in their affliction, by keeping himself unspotted from the world, by

endeavouring to check ungodliness and evil, by trying to lead the young into the paths of religion and truth, by pointing the sick and dying to Him who alone is able to save; a man of scanty income and no great talents might, under the divine blessing produce much benefit to the people of his charge.

I am aware that in speaking thus I may be raising expectations respecting myself, and my conduct, when I become resident among you, which it may never be in my power to realize. But as I before said—I wish to preach to *myself*—I wish to pledge myself to you, not to preach myself but Christ Jesus the Lord, and myself your servant for Jesus' sake. And there is one thing more that I wish to do; I wish to direct and call forth the fervent prayers of every inhabitant of this place and neighbourhood on my behalf, that I may be enabled, by divine grace, to act up to my professions—to follow St. Paul as he followed Christ—to "make full proof of my ministry"—that so I may "come unto you in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of peace," and be the happy instrument of "turning many unto righteousness,"—of bringing many sinners to Christ, many wanderers back to the fold of God.

SERMON II.

ROMANS xii. 1.

1 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.

How strangely erroneous are the opinions which men take up of the genuine doctrines of the Gospel, and of the effects they have a tendency to produce; true indeed, there are some, who have strangely separated between the doctrine and its fruits, who have supposed that the free salvation of the Gospel could have nothing to do with the holy lives and practice of its professors; and from a dread of diminishing the glory of God as displayed in the gratuitous justification and salvation of a sinner through Christ—have treated with much disregard, that renewal unto holiness which is the never-failing attendant on justifying faith. We would hope however, that few have carried these notions into practice, and have lived in sin almost on *principle;* as though, because the infinite mercy of God sometimes has caused

grace more to abound where sin had previously abounded, we were to be allowed to sin on, that an opportunity might be afforded for the more surprising exhibition of divine mercy. On the other hand, many, having seen and heard something of this vile perversion of the doctrines of the Gospel, have entertained a jealousy of them; forgetting that the most useful and valuable things are always most dangerous when abused, and yet are not on that ground to be rejected; they would *conceal* those principles on which all our hopes of heaven must depend, because men of perverted minds have made a bad use of them. No wise man ever refused to take medicine when he was sick, because his neighbour had, through mistake, poisoned himself by using a wrong drug; no man ever refused to admit the use of fire in his habitation, because his neighbour's house had been consumed; the injury thus sustained by others, is a fair reason for our employing caution, but not for rejecting the use either of medicine or fire.

As we see how easily in these and other instances, the *use* may be maintained, and the *abuse* avoided, so is the case in respect of the doctrines of our holy religion. We need but go to the same divine source whence we derive them, and we shall there learn what their genuine application is. None ever stated more strongly the doctrine of *free* and *gratuitous* salvation, and all the other doctrines connected with this, than St. Paul; but

none was ever more practical, more *strictly* practical, in enforcing every duty than he; and he enforces them, not as something detached and separate from his statements of doctrinal truths, but as the result of these truths; as the effects which naturally and certainly flow from their being really embraced from the heart.

The subject before us will illustrate this remark. In speaking upon the text, I shall simply follow the order in which it lies, and consider—

I. THE ARGUMENT USED BY ST. PAUL.

II. THE OBJECT FOR WHICH HE URGES IT.

I. We will look at the ARGUMENT USED BY ST. PAUL, or the motive to which he appeals, as one which would affect the heart of every Christian. "I beseech you, brethren, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD."

There is something well calculated to keep us humble, in the perpetual reference made in the Scriptures to mercy. We read of nothing granted us on the ground of merit; of nothing that comes from the hand of God as the reward of our good deeds, or obtained by us as matter of desert; but the MERCY of God meets us at every point: the food we eat, the air we breathe, the garments we wear, the domestic comforts we enjoy, our civil advantages, and our religious privileges, are all represented as matters of mercy, undeserved mercy. This I say is humbling, yet it is just; mercy

must be the plea of the sinner, mercy must spare from day to day, the man who deserves to be cast into hell; mercy must supply the daily bread of the man, whose very life is forfeited to the justice of his offended creator. And as we are spared, and our wants supplied; and ten thousand sources of comfort are opened to us, and not to us only, but to all the sinners of our race; we may well say that "the earth is full of the *goodness* of the Lord," and "that goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life."

And, my brethren, it would be well for us to habituate ourselves to look at all our comforts in this light; they are continued to us in *mercy;* since by sinning against God, we have forfeited every one of them; this would silence many a murmur, and produce delightful feelings of gratitude under circumstances, which excite us now to any thing rather than contentment and praise; our language would often be like that of Jeremiah, "Wherefore doth a living man complain; a man for the punishment of his sin?[1]

But though a most powerful argument in support of a duty like that of the text, might be drawn from the consideration of the innumerable *temporal* mercies bestowed upon us by our gracious God; yet these are not the things to which St. Paul here alludes. He is drawing this epistle to a close, which, while it is highly practical, is also

[1] Lament. iii. 39.

most highly doctrinal. In its commencement, after friendly salutations and expressions of Christian affection to his brethren in Christ residing at Rome, he exhibits in all its awful nature, the depraved condition of the gentile world; he then urges home upon the Jews, the question whether they were at all better than the gentiles, and having shown that they were not, he draws the melancholy conclusion, that "there was no difference, for that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Having thus established the universal sin and consequent condemnation of the whole human race; he proceeds to meet the grand inquiry, "How may *man* be just with God?" Had he remained spotless, innocent, and pure, in the state wherein he was created, the answer would have been easy, he will be justified by his works, by his own acts and deeds, his constant, never-failing obedience to the divine law; but when that law had been violated again and again by every child of Adam, no conclusion could possibly be clearer than that by the deeds of the law could no flesh living be justified in his sight; justification could not, therefore, depend on the law, or on merit. The apostle then goes on to shew, that though man cannot justify himself, and is consequently in a state of condemnation, he is not on that account to be shut up under despair; but he proceeds to prove, that there is a righteousness imputed without works,

even that righteousness which Christ hath brought in, and which he hath provided by his own perfect fulfilment of the law, and by his obedience unto death in our place. This is by *grace*, all of unmerited favour, free goodness, mere mercy; "We are justified *freely* by his grace." In this righteousness we obtain a part through *faith;* faith receives the record which God hath given concerning his Son; faith stretches out the hand to "receive the things that are freely given to us of God;" faith relies on the promise, and applies in assured expectation of receiving that which it asks, and which it knows God is ready to give; so important is the grace of faith, that we are said to be *justified by it*, and by it *alone;* yet faith has in *itself* no merit, it is no work which will compensate for failures in other things; it only receives with firm reliance those promises and those gifts which God bestows on the sinner, of mere mercy, and free grace.

The apostle then shows how blessed is the state of those who have thus received righteousness without works; salvation by grace; justification by faith in Christ, "for them there is no condemnation," their happiness is certain, "all things are now working for their good," they are "made the children of God," and "receive the spirit of adoption;" none shall dare "to lay any thing to their charge," or to demand their condemnation, for it is God who justifieth them, it is Christ who

hath died for them and risen again, and "nothing shall separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Time will not allow me to follow the subject further; but such is the view of the mercy of God which St. Paul takes, on which he grounds the argument of the text. And can we conceive of any thing on which a stronger argument can be grounded? of any thing which is so well suited to reach, and bring into action, the best feelings of our hearts? Apply the subject to yourselves, my brethren. Do you trust that you are Christians? have you hope that you are in the way to eternal glory; have you now some cheering anticipations of heavenly happiness? some of the fruits of Canaan brought to you in this dreary wilderness? Now to what do you owe all this present consolation, and all these hopes for futurity? what has made you to differ from what others are, and from what you once were? once you were dead in trespasses and sins; once you were walking according to this world, "a child of wrath even as others;" "without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world;" an utter stranger, in short, to religion, and utterly thoughtless about your eternal inheritance; or else the prey of many fearful forebodings of the wrath to come. What then has awakened your souls? what has delivered you from these fears and inspired these hopes? You will answer, 'it is the mercy of God, mercy

shewn to me through Christ Jesus my Lord; he loved me, and came down from heaven to seek me. He "gave himself as a sacrifice to God" for me; "he bare my sins in his own body on the tree;" he sent his Holy Spirit to renew my soul, and that Spirit now imparts comfort and hope, while he "witnesses with my spirit that I am a child of God." Yes, the whole from first to last is mercy; it was mercy which pitied my ruined state; mercy which brought the Son of God from heaven; this mercy inclined me to listen to the proclamation of the gospel; and to embrace it as "all my salvation, and all my desire;" it was mercy which brought me into a state of reconciliation with God; it is mercy which daily supports my feeble steps; and on that mercy I rely to keep me to the end: when I go down to the grave it will be "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life," and my last prayer, when I quit the world to meet my God on his judgment seat shall be, that "I may find mercy of the Lord in that day."

Thus, every Christian, from the hour when first under the feeling of penitential sorrow, he "smites on his breast and cries, God be merciful to me a sinner," to the last moment of his earthly existence, will say that mercy is his only stay, his only hope; but that the mercy of God in Christ is so infinitely great that he can want nothing else, either for time or eternity.

And can there be this sure dependence on the boundless grace of our God; without our feeling, that the offended Creator who thus shews mercy to his guilty creatures, has the most strong claims on our gratitude and love? Can it be that any man can hope in God's mercy to this amazing extent, and yet not often ask himself, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me?" It cannot be! The heart which does not feel the mercy of God, and "the love of Christ constraining it," can know nothing of true religion; it must be a stranger to the hopes of the gospel: and all pretences to such hopes must be a delusion.

Such was the opinion of St. Paul, and therefore when addressing many practical instructions to his Christian friends, and when exhorting them to cultivate the highest degree of holy abstraction from the world, and the utmost devotedness to the service of God, he felt that he needed no other argument than that which would at once suggest itself on the review of the mercies of God towards them.

I now proceed,

II. To consider the OBJECT for which the Apostle urged this argument:

"I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, THAT YE PRESENT YOUR BODIES A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR REASONABLE SERVICE."

In some parts of the writings of St. Paul, the word *body*, like the other term the *flesh*, is used in a figurative sense to represent the corrupt and wicked nature ; but here it seems to be used in a literal sense. In the former case, we are taught that we must mortify, crucify, and utterly destroy it, as an accursed thing that must be sacrificed to the justice of God, against whom it has rebelled, and to whose laws it cannot ever be subject ; but here it is not to be a slaughtered, but a *living sacrifice ;* not, like Agag, " hewed to pieces before the Lord" as his implacable enemy ; but like Samuel, who was from his infancy lent unto the Lord, to be a *living* sacrifice, and to serve him in his courts all the days of his life. The Apostle gives us something of the same idea, when he describes his own conduct in the first Epistle to the Corinthians. " I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest at any time when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." [1] That body which others pamper, and to whose appetites they are enslaved, he " kept under," reduced to a state of servitude and submission, that it might be prepared to execute the commands, and obey the impulses of the soul with alacrity and effect.

In what manner the members and faculties of the body may be made subservient to the purposes of the renewed soul, we may learn in the way of con-

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

trast, by observing how St. Paul has described them as under the government of the corrupt nature. "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood." [1] There is also another passage illustrative of the subject before us, wherein the members of the body are represented as being the instruments by which the soul, both in the regenerate and unregenerate, carries on its purposes; "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." [2] In the former of these passages you perceive, that the body and its different members are the instruments by which the unrenewed soul accomplishes its wicked and unrighteous purposes; in the latter they become the instruments by means of which those works of righteousness are performed, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father.

The Apostle, in the text, assumes that he is speaking to those who had undergone a change of heart; to men who were well prepared to feel

[1] Rom. iii. 13—15. [2] Rom. vi. 12, 13.

the deep obligation under which they lay to the mercy of God and the love of Christ; and who felt an earnest desire to "shew forth the praises of him who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light." The address is to Christians,—to believers in Christ; to those whom an Apostle would call his *brethren*. It will indeed well apply to *all* who know "the good tidings of great joy" revealed in the Gospel; the mercy of God *ought* to affect *all* who have ever heard of it, in the same manner; since it is offered to all indiscriminately; but, none will feel the force of the motive, and consequently none will yield to the call, except those who have "*tasted* that the Lord is gracious."

To such the Apostle says, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present yourselves a living sacrifice." "Ye are not your own," he says in another place, "for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."[1] The soul is as it were called upon to act as the priest, and to bring the body, with all its members and with all its powers, and to present it an offering—a living sacrifice to the Lord, that it should be wholly and entirely devoted to the service of God, to doing his pleasure, till it shall "return to the dust whence it was taken," there to rest till the morning of the

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

resurrection, when the trumpet of the Archangel shall again call it to live, and to enjoy an immortal existence.

The service of God is always spoken of as a *spiritual* service; as valuable and acceptable just in proportion as it is the service of the heart, without which "bodily exercise profiteth little." But still, as the body is the instrument by which the soul of a wicked man practises iniquity, so is it the instrument by which the godly man practises righteousness, and by holy actions exhibits the purity of his heart. Those feet which were naturally "swift to shed blood," now are employed in executing errands of mercy and kindness to men, and conveying their possessor to the courts of the Lord—the hands by which iniquity was practised, and robbery, and plunder, and violence were committed; now are engaged in "working that which is good," that they may relieve the poor and distressed,—the ear which once was open to listen only to that which would corrupt and defile the mind, and call every evil disposition into exercise, now hearkens with reverent attention to the word of God, to gather from it those holy truths which may transform the soul into the Redeemer's image;—the tongue, that "unruly evil,"—that "setteth on fire the course of nature, and "is set on fire of hell"—which once loved to speak all manner of words that can do hurt, no more permits any filthy communi-

cation to proceed from it—any word that may kindle the evil tempers or pollute the imaginations of others; but it speaks "that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers," and become the instrument of doing them good. These brief notices may serve to shew how the body may be presented as a living sacrifice by the soul; how it may exhibit the work of grace in the heart, and become the instrument of glorifying God and conferring benefits on man for the Lord's sake.

"By the mercies of God," my Christian brethren, says St. Paul, "I beseech you thus to present your bodies a living sacrifice;" consider what God's mercies have been; view *generally* what he has done for our race; consider *particularly* what he has done for you individually; how far he has been from "dealing with you after your sins, or rewarding you according to your iniquities." Had he done this, where would you have been? In how different a state from that dispensation of grace and mercy, of peace and hope, under which you are now! What will you then render to the Lord? what can he ask for, which is not already his own? He asks for your heart, for your supreme affection, for your highest love; is this an unreasonable demand? Surely not. He asks for your body also—he promises that though now it is a body of humiliation—a vile body—the source of many cares and troubles, and sentenced

to fall a prey to worms and corruption, yet he will raise it a glorious body,—the fit companion of the renewed soul in heavenly worship and in heavenly glory. But in the mean time he calls on thee, O Christian, to lend its powers to him—to devote it to God's service—to employ it for his glory. And can you withhold it? Can you say no? Will you say, My body and all its powers must now be employed about the business and the pleasures of this life—I cannot spare time for it to be devoted to God? No Christian would ever dare to harbour such an idea—though those worldly-minded beings of whom there are so many bearing the name of Christians, seem to feel, if they do not actually speak thus. And this leads to the inquiry, why, since God's "service is perfect freedom," Christ's "yoke easy and his burden light," the Apostle should use the word *sacrifice*? The term seems to import the giving up of something which we value, sustaining the loss of something which we deem precious; but how can this apply to that decided service of God, which we are always taught to esteem a source of enjoyment and happiness? Were the exhortation addressed to some holy being in whose heart no sinful propensity ever had a place, there would not be room for applying such a term; this perfect and complete surrender of all his powers to God his Creator, would be the very thing he would choose naturally; he would have no idea of happiness to be derived from any other

source. And such indeed is the fact with regard to us; we can find no true gratification elsewhere, but we have not the same full conviction of this truth on our minds; nature in us runs the other way; it is only when faith is in full exercise, that we feel sure that our enjoyment is in God. We hanker after worldly and carnal pleasures; such pleasures as the body craves at the expence of the soul's peace. Now while this is the case, we shall feel as though we were sustaining a loss and making a sacrifice, when we refuse to afford the body any further gratification of this sort, and determine, by God's help, to force it into his service, to keep it under, and bring it into subjection; —the attempt is wholly against nature.

But further than this. That surrender of all our powers to God, of which I have been speaking, must not only be made in opposition to the sinful lusts of the flesh, but it must also be in defiance of the world. This is one of the great enemies we have to contend with, when working out our salvation. It will frown and it will smile; it will threaten and it will allure; it will oppose and it will tempt us, that it may turn us out of this path of duty. We must make up our minds to be considered singular, and be willing to be laughed at and even hated, if we will thus be decidedly on the Lord's side. Hence in the following verse, the apostle says, "Be not conformed to this world." Now this gives it still more the character of a

sacrifice; and though no circumstances will excuse any one for neglecting it, yet we must allow that some persons are so situated, as to render it no *small* sacrifice. But as the sacrifices of Israel, however costly, were never lost, but returned to them an hundred fold in blessings from above; so is it with this sacrifice: it may be costly, it may require much self-denial, yet it shall never be repented of.

My brethren, you who profess to be the servants of God, what has caused you most uneasiness? What has done most to diminish your happiness? Has it been the sacrifice you have been called to make? has it been the scorn, contempt, and hatred of the world? or has it not rather been this, that your conscience has been disturbed, and your fears excited by a conviction, that you were not following the Lord fully? You see then that whether you consider the mercies of your God, or the effect it will have on your own happiness, it is a *reasonable* service which is required of you; such St. Paul, in the text, pronounces it to be. Carry your ideas of the devotedness of heart and life here demanded from you, to the highest extent you can reach, and you can hardly carry them *too far*, still you must feel that it is no more than God has a right to claim; still it will not amount to an adequate return for that infinite mercy which God has showed to you; still it will call for nothing which will not ultimately produce comfort and satisfaction

to yourself, even in this life, and infinitely more in that which is to come. Is not then this a *reasonable service?* Oh, learn to view it as such, and be thankful that with all its imperfections, it is an acceptable sacrifice. We wonder not that the man of the world should look on religion as a task; but that Christians should allow any such idea to lurk in their breasts, is strange indeed: yet when we see how much they hang back from this full surrender of themselves to God; when we see how worldly they are, we cannot but fear that there is this feeling still concealed within. My Christian brethren, let us examine ourselves as to our conduct and feelings in this respect; and when we find, as no doubt we shall, how much we fall short in that unlimited surrender of ourselves which we ought to make to God, let us humble ourselves before him, and pray that our hearts may be penetrated with a more lively sense of his mercies towards us, and that the contemplation of the unspeakable love of Christ, may constrain us to live no longer to ourselves, but unto him that died for us and rose again.

SERMON III.

1 JOHN v. 3.

FOR THIS IS THE LOVE OF GOD, THAT WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS: AND HIS COMMANDMENTS ARE NOT GRIEVOUS.

THERE is something very humiliating in the reflection, that the human heart is not only "desperately wicked," but that it is "deceitful above all things," so that "none can know it," none can arrive at any certainty that his heart is not practising some gross and fatal deceit upon him. This is *so* humiliating, that few will allow it as respects themselves, though they are very forward to make their observations on the want of self-knowledge which is betrayed by their neighbours. No one, however, will be able in this respect to cast the first stone at his brother, if he is to stay his hand till he can prove that he is without sin himself. We are continually showing that we think ourselves pure, on points where those around us most clearly discern our defilement; we are perpetually taking credit for virtues, in which those who know us best, see that we are remarkably defective, so that we are startled, and conceive ourselves injured,

when by any means we discover the estimate formed of us.

But well would it be for us, if this system of deception extended only to those things of which our neighbours are cognizant; it follows us also into matters, in which we have immediately to do with God; and where therefore self-flattery, when carried to its utmost extent, can afford us no lasting comfort; for soon, very soon, we must be naked and open to our own view, just as we are now to that of God; these false and deceitful imaginations are the refuges of lies, which shall be all swept away in the "day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." To discover what we really are, will *then* be of no other use than to show us the justice of God in our condemnation; but if we can detect the error *now;* if we can discover our mistakes while opportunity is afforded of correcting them, we shall be infinitely gainers, though the discovery will in some respects be painful; hence all those exhortations to diligent watchfulness, and self-examination, which abound in the Holy Scriptures; hence all those minute displays of the fruits and effects of Christian graces;—all are intended to assist us in guarding against self-deception, to enable us to ascertain what manner of persons we really are; that thus we may know to what points we have special need to pay the closest attention. Such is the nature and design of the text; it is intended to show us whereby we

may distinguish *true love of God*, from every spurious imitation, and from every delusive feeling. There are, we see, two particulars which characterize this principle, by which we may be enabled to judge whether it exist in our hearts or not.

I. IT KEEPS GOD'S COMMANDMENTS.

II. IT RENDERS THOSE COMMANDMENTS EASY AND PLEASANT.

I. This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. The apostle here puts the effect for the cause: the two are inseparable, and therefore the substitution of the one for the other is productive of no mistake.

As the love of God is the first and great commandment of the law, it might be considered as the sum total of the religion of a creature. So long as this principle existed, and bare rule in the heart of man, every thing else that was holy and good naturally followed; but when these right affections toward the Creator ceased to prevail in his breast, then rebellion and disorder immediately ensued.

But not only is the "love of God the first and great commandment of the *law*," it holds an equally important place, under the gospel dispensation. The Son of God was not merely manifested, that he might make provision for pardoning sinners, and saving them from everlasting woe, but that he might destroy the works of the Devil, that he might bring back man to God, "redeem

him from all iniquity," and save him from that state of moral and spiritual decay, into which he had fallen by sin. We are told therefore, that again shall the law of God be written in the soul of the true believer in Christ, and the first and great commandment, the love of God, will of course be engraven in indelible characters on the fleshly table of the heart. No sooner does a man become possessed of true faith ; no sooner does the Holy Spirit, as the sanctifier of the elect people of God, commence his work in the soul ; no sooner is the rebellious creature reconciled to his God, than he beholds in the divine character every thing that is calculated to excite his fullest admiration. If he views it as displayed in Jesus Christ, and so sees that *God is love*, the very perfection of all that is kind, compassionate, long-suffering, and bountiful ; this awakens in him the deepest sense of his own obligations and dependance ; the strongest feelings of gratitude for mercies already received, and the fullest reliance on him for supplies of future mercy and grace ; united with adoration, wonder, and love. If again he looks on God as perfect in holiness, abhorring iniquity, and determined that it shall not go unpunished, though thus he appears as a consuming fire ; yet even the dread with which he contemplates the perfections of the godhead, is mingled with admiration ; they excite no hard thoughts, no rebellious murmurs in his breast ; they produce

fear indeed, but a fear which, mingling and uniting with love, forms that which is the right disposition of a creature toward his Creator.

Dispositions like these, the law required, and the gospel is intended to produce; they are as necessary under the covenant of grace, as they were under the covenant of works; for there can be no religion without them. Every man's heart and conscience allow this; every one knows that it is only so far as he is possessed of these feelings, that he can indulge the hope that he is in the favour of God, and in the way to heaven. And, here occurs that danger of self-deception, of which I spoke at the commencement of my discourse. We feel that it is right and just, that we should thus love God, and delight in the contemplation of his perfections; we know indeed that if we be strangers to this, we cannot be in a state of preparation for the company and the worship of heaven, and of course cannot be admitted there; this is a reflection we wish to shun; we naturally "speak peace" to ourselves; we dread the idea of discovering that we "have not the love of God in us," because that would blast all our hopes; and as we easily persuade ourselves of the truth of any thing we wish to believe, we *think* we can trace some feelings in our breasts not quite consistent with a *total* destitution of love to God, and so we persuade ourselves, that all is right. Thus are we in perpetual danger of "deceiving our own hearts;"

and of indulging ideas which may lull us to sleep in false security.

Now it is to remove such dangers that the Holy Scriptures are so careful to trace out the effects and tendencies of things. Do they speak of repentance? they shew us what "the fruits meet for repentance" are; that we may not be deceived by "the sorrow of the world." Do they speak of faith? they tell us that it is a "faith which worketh by love;" which purifies "the heart;" which "overcometh the world;" and all this, that we may not rest our hope upon that "faith which hath not works," and is therefore "dead being alone." Do they speak again of hope, that "anchor of the soul;" they tell us that it is connected with "the love of God shed abroad in the heart;" and they add that "every one who hath this hope" in Christ "purifieth himself even as he is pure;" thus do they guard us against "the hope of the hypocrite," which shall perish "when God taketh away the soul."

So with respect to the love of God. We might easily be deceived by some lively transient natural affections; and therefore we are taught in our text, that it is inseparably connected with obedience to His commandments. "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." There is, I trust, my brethren, no need for me to enter very widely into the consideration of these commandments. As they were given to Israel at Mount

Sinai, they are read to such as will attend the Morning Services of our Church, every Lord's day. You know how these are expounded and applied to a multitude of particulars, in different parts of the Holy Scriptures; and you are well acquainted with the manner in which they were shown by our Saviour to extend to the very thoughts and intents of the heart.

Now to all these, both in the spirit and in the letter of them, true love to God pays universal respect. As the commands of God they carry with them an irresistible claim to the reverential regard of every creature; the sanctions and penalties by which they are enforced, may well make us *afraid* to disobey them; but it is the love of God shed "abroad in the heart," which *secures* our submission. The slave dares do no other than fulfil the orders of his master, the undutiful son is awed into subjection by the chastening rod of his parent; but the affectionate wife, and the loving child, wants nothing more than an intimation of the husband's or the father's will, to make them hasten to execute it with alacrity. Such is the nature of the love of God when shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. The person under its influence requires nothing more than to "know the will of God;" he has his loins girded, prepared for action, asking with St. Paul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

We see at once that this is a principle which will

produce *an universal obedience.* In many instances we meet with persons, who act like the young man, who, when our Lord told him to keep the commandments, asked *which?* One precept seems so opposed to a man's natural disposition, that it would cost him more self-denial to obey it, than it would some of his neighbours, and therefore he trusts he may be excused in neglecting it; while to others, not so difficult to him, he is willing to pay due attention; another commandment requires something which would cause him to offend so many of his friends, if he were to act up to its spirit, that he hopes he may be permitted to lower it down so as to make it more easy for him to practise. Another man says, I wish to perform my duty towards God, but some of the commands and regulations of scripture, seem to have been given, when society was in a very different state than it is now; were I to attempt to obey them to their full extent, I should be a laughing stock for the whole circle of my acquaintance; surely then, it cannot be required of me to be so very strict as to adhere quite to the letter of scripture under such circumstances. And another declares, that business and trade in all their branches are so conducted in the present day, that he must do as do others, for the attempt to adhere to the rules laid down in the Bible would cause him ruin.

Thus is it the almost universal cry, how much

of God's law *must* we obey, and how many of its precepts *may* we violate? But such is not the language of *love;* such is not the inquiry of the man whose pleasure is to please God. No!—where these reasonings prevail, God is not loved so much as our own indulgence, or our ease and character, and worldly interests. Whatever that is, for the sake of which, we should be willing to neglect even *one* of God's laws, that thing, whatever it may be, is loved and served by us more than God.

Where this is the case, we can meet with no acceptance. God demands the whole heart, and the whole soul. Every interest and every affection must be subjected to this one ruling principle, *the love of God.* When our blessed Lord was on earth, as God manifested in the flesh, he made a demand of the same kind; "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."[1]

Such was the regard—the supreme regard which our Saviour demanded; and such does our Creator require of us all: the affection we bear to the nearest and dearest of our earthly relatives must be subjected to this; the desire we feel to please them

[1] Matt. x. 37—39.

must give way to the still stronger desire to please God, by keeping his commandments ; our most valued worldly possessions must be sacrificed, when his glory may be promoted by the sacrifice ; yea, life itself must not be esteemed dear to us, when it cannot be retained without disobeying and offending God. Such was the love of God which inspired all the noble army of martyrs, who like their divine Master were " obedient unto death ; " and with Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, " yielded their bodies" to the burning fiery furnace, " that they might not serve nor worship any God except their own God."

Say not, brethren, that these were extraordinary instances ; doubtless they were so, but the principle is the same ; the love of God produces similar effects, whether the possessor stands before a raging monarch like Nebuchadnezzar, or whether he be exposed to the more ordinary persecutions which befal those " who will live godly in Christ Jesus ; " in either case it produces obedience, a firm and resolute determination to do the will of God, and keep his commandments, whatever may be the consequence. Here then is the balance in which our professed love to God must be weighed ; by this means we may ascertain how far this grand and fundamental part of religion exists and rules in our hearts. Let me beg of you, my brethren, to bring yourselves to this test, review each day and its transactions according to this rule ; ask yourselves

in what instances you have acted in opposition to the maxims of the world: in what you have renounced your own gratification, made a sacrifice of your interest, and braved the scorn and contempt of your connections, because, and simply because you desired to please God, and would not offend him by breaking his commandments. It is this which makes true Christians so unlike the rest of mankind; motives such as the world knows not of, influence them to love God, and to shew that love by doing whatsoever things they perceive are according to his will and acceptable in his sight.

II. But we must proceed to consider the second characteristic of love to God—IT RENDERS HIS COMMANDMENTS EASY AND PLEASANT: "His commandments," says the Apostle, "are not grievous."

This expression reminds us of our Saviour's declaration, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

In both cases the sentiment is directly contrary to all that human nature suggests. The first command ever given, though accompanied with so large and free a grant—"of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it,"[1] even this, was, at the suggestion of Satan, thought to be so hard, that it was doubted whether such a precept could have come from

[1] Gen. ii. 16, 17.

God; and was at last rejected as too grievous to be regarded. And such still is the case; there is scarcely a precept in the whole scripture which at one time or other we have not felt to be too severe a restraint on our liberty, too great a mark of subjection, or against which our hearts have not risen, and disobedience been the result. But right reason shews us that this is the view which passion and love of present indulgence alone takes of them. With respect to each, God may say, "Come now and let us reason together." The strictest injunctions, the most spiritual commands are such as God might most justly give to his creature; none of them require a holiness and purity beyond what was *natural* to a being formed after the image of God; even that which says "be ye holy for I am holy," only bids us continue what God made us, and not only so—*they all conduce to our good.* Each one says, "Do thyself no harm." We need only trace back most of the misery we have seen in the world, and which we have even felt in ourselves, to its true origin, and we shall find that it sprang directly from a departure from God's laws; and that a return to a strict obedience, and universal regard to them, would immediately remedy half, and more than half the evils that exist on earth. Commandments therefore which tend thus directly to the good and happiness of those to whom they are given, cannot justly be considered as *grievous.*

Yet in this light they are viewed by the bulk of mankind, insomuch that they "are not subject to them, nor indeed can be." At the very time that they are forced to confess them "holy, and just, and good," they feel an invincible dislike to them; every attempt to obey them is *irksome:* even external submission is a most heavy task, and *perfectly to keep them* (were it possible to beings in such a state of mind) would be perfect wretchedness.

We have the opportunity, in a few instances, of seeing this contest between judgment and feeling; between the convictions of the conscience, and depraved inclination; and we cannot fail to observe how generally the latter obtains the victory. The drunkard, for instance, is in his sober hours, thoroughly convinced that the prohibition of excess is perfectly reasonable; he is often miserable because of the ruin which he knows he is bringing on himself and his family, as well as on his future prospects. And we might therefore hope to see some marks of improvement, to see his evil practices abandoned, since he approves the law which condemns them. But exactly the reverse is the case: he loves the sin and he follows it, even with ruin before his eyes; the commandment is grievous to him—so grievous that he cannot, he will not, he does not submit to it.

In this instance, the whole process is open to our inspection, we see the whole without any disguise; but the same passes as really, though more

covertly in a thousand other ways, with regard even to every precept of the word of God. The man who loves the gaiety of the world, or its splendour, or its applause, is in his serious moments, forced to acknowledge its vanity, its utter unsuitableness to a being like himself, standing on the verge of eternity; yet the commands, "come out and be separate," "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," are *grievous* to him, and he pays them no regard. There is scarcely a person who has ever given one moment's serious attention to the grand doctrines of revelation, who does not admit the propriety of the command to repent and believe in Christ, and so to "work out his salvation with fear and trembling"—scarcely one who does not allow that this is right and proper; and yet how few are there who act accordingly! The general case is, that all live in neglect of these precepts, and if they are urged upon them from the pulpit, they are looked on as too grievous to be obeyed, and the preacher is too often considered as bigoted or enthusiastical.

But where, by the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, "the love of God is shed abroad in the heart," a total change is produced. "Two cannot walk together," as "Enoch walked with God," and as every true believer walks with him, "except they be agreed."—Christians are "made partakers of a *divine* nature," and that produces

not only external agreement between the new creature and his God—not merely a conformity of *judgment* even, but a conformity of *feeling*. That which God loves and approves, is loved and approved by him who is born of God; hence, instead of deeming these commandments grievous, he cries with David, "Oh, how I love thy law, it is my meditation all the day." "I delight in the law of God." A man in such a state of feeling looks at every precept with pleasure; and even when most distressed with the consciousness of the imperfection of his obedience, and most pained by thinking on that law of sin and death which is in his members and frustrates all his efforts to do good, he would not have "one jot or one tittle" taken from the law, to make it more easy for him to practice, or less opposed to the inclination of his corrupted nature. No; it is good and only good, though "*he* is carnal, sold under sin."

Here, my brethren, is the great work of true religion; here are the fruits of salvation "by grace through faith;" here we see what genuine reconciliation to God is; and here consequently we see what an ample field for self-examination is presented to us. If such be the love of God—if it keep God's commandments, and render them not grievous, but pleasant and satisfactory—if it reconcile the mind to the strictest and most self-denying injunctions; and make the soul to long after perfect holiness; what must we think of much that

passes for religion? Nay what must we think of our own religion? If our faith were genuine, it would work by such love as this; if our hope were what it ought to be, it would lead to such purification of heart as this; if our repentance were sincere these would be its fruits; if our reconciliation to God were complete, such would be our perfect accordance to his will. What need then have we for circumspection and holy jealousy over ourselves, lest we should "fail of the grace of God!" What need to watch and pray, lest after all we should be destitute of this "meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light," and so be excluded from heaven because not fitted to enter there through the want of the love of God.

SERMON IV.

MARK IX. 24.

AND STRAIGHTWAY THE FATHER OF THE CHILD CRIED OUT, AND SAID WITH TEARS, LORD, I BELIEVE; HELP THOU MINE UNBELIEF.

THE evangelist commences this chapter with an account of our Lord's transfiguration. He ascended, what is called by St. Peter, the holy mount, accompanied by only three of his apostles as spectators and witnesses of the glorious scene. They had been used to behold him in the form of a servant, as the "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; without form or comeliness, and having no beauty that they should desire him;" but upon this occasion Peter, James, and John, the three most favoured of his attendants, were permitted to behold him, in something like his native glory. His whole appearance underwent a most surprising change, his very raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; while Moses and Elias, the two most remarkable characters under that dispensation which was just vanishing away, attended on him and talked with him; and that decease which he

was shortly to accomplish at Jerusalem; that most mysterious subject which angels desire to look into, formed the topic of their conversation on this extraordinary occasion. This scene was so delightful to the minds of the three apostles, that they said, "It is good for us to be here;" and fain would they have persuaded our Lord to lengthen out these cheering, happy moments: but they knew not what they said; delightful as were the feelings of their souls, it would not have promoted their advantage had this blissful scene continued long; and their enjoyments, if they had been permanent, would have frustrated that wonderful design of mercy on which Moses and Elias had just been conversing. The splendid vision speedily vanished from their view; again they saw their master as a poor man divested of all his glory; again was it needful for them to return, and encounter the sorrows of a vexatious and troublesome world.

On reaching their brethren, they found them in circumstances, which rendered the return of their Master peculiarly welcome. They had just failed in the attempt to work a miracle, and the Scribes and Pharisees had availed themselves of this discomfiture, to increase their anxiety by reasoning and disputing with them: no doubt with the intention of persuading them, that their faith in Christ was a delusion, and that he was only a deceiver. A man we find had, during our Lord's absence on the mount, brought his son, who was tormented

with a devil, from whose power he suffered more than was customary even in those dreadful cases. His design seems to have been to bring him to Jesus, but as he was not to be found, he applied to his disciples for a cure. From our Lord's answer to them, when they asked the cause of their failure, we may perhaps gather, that they had become negligent and slothful in religious duties, and it pleased God to punish them by exposing them to shame before the multitude; they attempted to cast out the devil, as they had often done before, but they could not; for a time, the Spirit of the Lord had departed from them, and Satan scorned their unavailing efforts.

Just at this critical moment our Lord appeared, and having ascertained the cause of the tumult, he ordered the youthful demoniac to be brought to him. The afflicted father described the dreadful state of his child. "He hath," said he, "a dumb spirit, and oft times it hath cast him into the fire and into the waters to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing"—the failure of the disciples seems to have made the man distrust the power of Christ himself—"*if* thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." These words of our blessed Lord, are remarkable. Such is the effect of unbelief, that it seems even to disarm almighty power itself. Our Lord could do no mighty works

among his own countrymen because of their unbelief. And in the present case, the possibility of the unhappy youth's being delivered from the bondage of Satan was made to depend upon the faith of the father who had brought him to Christ. God saith, "Them that honour me I will honour, but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed:" unbelief dishonours God. He that believeth not maketh God a liar; he shall receive no blessings at his hand, for God will be believed and relied upon by those who seek mercy from him. And the more we expect, and the firmer is our confidence in his power and goodness, the more we honour him, and the greater benefits we shall receive. Such is clearly the doctrine of the passage before us, and of every part of the divine word.

This declaration of our Saviour seems to have produced a different effect upon the mind of the distressed father, than might have been expected; the benefit he sought was apparently placed within his reach,—it depended upon his faith, "*if* thou canst believe; all things are possible to him that believeth." Easy however as the condition seemed, it was beyond the man's ability to perform it. So he felt it to be, and therefore we read, that "straightway the father of the child cried out with tears, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

Having thus brought before you the circumstances connected with the words of our text, I propose, in the further consideration of them,

I. To dwell more at large upon THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND FEELINGS OF THE FATHER OF THE CHILD, and

II. To INQUIRE HOW FAR THE LANGUAGE HE EMPLOYED IS SUITABLE TO OURSELVES.

I. Let us consider THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND FEELINGS OF THE FATHER OF THIS POSSESSED CHILD.

He had as we see a great object in view; an object which called all his parental and all his pious feelings into action. His son, perhaps an only one, and tenderly beloved by him, was in a state which harrowed up his soul; for he was possessed by a foul spirit; Satan had entered into him,—driven him utterly frantic. He neither thought nor spake, nor acted rationally; and oft was urged to the very brink of destruction by the devil, that murderer from the beginning. To lose a child by ordinary disease wrings the heart of a parent with an anguish which none but a parent can conceive; but to lose a child by the direct agency of Satan—to see him hurried on to destruction by an evil demon, who had seized on all his powers of body and of mind, and aimed to ruin both, was unspeakably dreadful to think of; while at the same time to see him *live* under the dominion of Satan—to behold day after day his mad and frantic actions—was if possible still worse than death: living or dying, the condition of such a child must go well nigh to break a parent's heart.

We can hardly form a conception of exactly such a source of anguish as this, though alas! there is many a family where a sight too much akin to it is to be seen ; many a son, and many a daughter, whom a pious parent weeps over, because he cannot help seeing that Satan dwells within them, and is driving them on to destruction. And many more such tears would be shed, and many more fervent prayers would be offered, if the same evil spirit that worketh in the children did not exert his power in the parents also.

This afflicted father had doubtless tried many remedies, but he had tried them all in vain ; he had just brought his son to the disciples in hopes that they could cast the devil out; but they too had failed : now however he had brought him to Christ ; this was his last, his only remaining hope. He had earnestly besought him, if he could do any thing, to have compassion on him and help him. He did not meet with a repulse—Christ did not refuse his petition ; yet he proposed a condition to him which went to his heart—which damped his hopes—which almost made him sink into despair. "If thou canst *believe*." The health, the happiness, the deliverance of his child from present and future misery, was thus made, as it were, to depend upon himself; if his faith wavered ; if his reliance on Christ did not prove firm ; if there were any want of sincerity in his application ; Satan would still hold fast his prey : the beloved child would

still be led captive by him at his will, and at last be plunged into destruction.

Where, my brethren, is there one of us who could bear to have the life, the health, the happiness of one of our children, thus made to depend on the sincerity of our prayers, or the stedfastness of our faith ? The trial would be dreadful; so it was to this afflicted parent, for he not only felt that our Lord's reply made the great blessing he sought for his child to depend in a sense upon himself, but he also manifestly felt conscious that his faith was not such as could be relied on.

A view of the importance of his faith doubtless produced an examination of it—an inquiry into the state of his own mind, such as he had never before made, and never before thought necessary. He had brought his son to Christ in hope that he might be cured; but he had never examined into the grounds on which his hope and expectation rested; and when asked whether he could believe,—whether he *could* and *did* rest on Christ's power and love, in full assurance that he was both able and willing to do that for him, which was so near his heart; he was filled with alarm, being conscious of the weakness of his faith. The question of our Lord came home to his soul; he felt that he stood in the presence of one with whom he could employ no disguise; his heart condemned him of weakness of faith, and feebleness of reliance,—and there is an implied

consciousness that Christ was "greater than his heart and knew all things."

His faith was so deficient that he scarcely dared to expect anything from it; if that were the foundation on which his hopes were to be built, they must fail; but for hope to fail—utterly to fail in such a case, was dreadful to his parental feelings. What then was the result of this conflict in his soul? His distress led him to the only unfailing source of consolation to every troubled mind: it led him to prayer,—"Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

Though his faith was weak, and he was ashamed and confounded to think how feeble it was, and how much it had been staggered by the inability of the disciples to cure his son; yet he could not say that he was wholly unbelieving. As Peter afterward, though he had had lamentable proof of the weakness of his love to Christ, could yet say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee;" so this man could, with deep conviction of the weakness of his faith, still say, "Lord, I believe." Yet could he not trust to that, his faith was too feeble to deserve our Lord's regard; he felt that he could himself rise no higher in faith and calling upon God: and if his faith were feeble so was he himself; he could not give it such an increase of strength as should make it meritorious in Christ's esteem; yet he dared not, he would not wish that the demands of

God should be lowered down to meet the powers of his feeble mind. If the honour of the Almighty and the glory of the Redeemer, required that his faith should grasp the blessing God's mercy bestowed, he would not that the just and holy rule should be changed, that without faith he might obtain his heart's desire. No; rather would he once more betake himself to the Saviour's mercy; "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." He that could rescue his son from the dominion of Satan, could take from himself the evil heart of unbelief;—he could cause him not to stagger through unbelief, but to be strong in faith, and to give glory unto God.

That prayer was heard. The faith of the afflicted father was helped—unbelief was overcome; he rested with an unshaken confidence in the power and love of the Saviour, and the favour he asked was granted to its full extent, for we read in the following verse, that Jesus "rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou deaf and dumb spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him."

II. And now, my brethren, we will proceed to inquire, IN WHAT RESPECTS THE LANGUAGE AND FEELINGS OF THIS AFFLICTED FATHER ARE SUITABLE TO OURSELVES?

That this narrative was intended for the benefit of all who should in after ages become acquainted

with it, we cannot doubt, for "*all* scripture is profitable." There are however some portions which are more clearly and evidently so than others; some from which we can derive advantage with ease, while other portions can only be made useful to us individually, by careful study, or by indirect application. The passage we are considering, appears to belong to the former class; and perhaps there never was a Christian, who has not adopted as his own, the impassioned exclamation and prayer which it contains: "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief;" and the more we consider the subject, the more we shall feel, that the language suits us; that there are many occasions on which we might utter the prayer, with tears as sincere, and feelings as painful, as those of this distressed parent when he brought his afflicted child to Christ.

We will first consider it in a way exactly agreeing with the case before us. We are often called on, indeed it is our daily duty, to intercede for others. On every side we behold persons who need our prayers, and in proportion as we come nearer home and contemplate the state of those with whom we are closely connected, the more are our feelings excited, and the more do we find ourselves constrained to pour forth our prayers to Almighty God on behalf of those whom we love. Many an anxious thought has the husband respecting his wife, and the wife respecting her husband,

under which they can find no relief, except at the throne of grace; thither does the pious parent carry his beloved children, and there does he pour forth for them a petition such as Abraham offered, "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee:" when he sees his offspring, the objects of his tenderest love, forgetting their Creator in the days of their youth, neglecting religion, and running into sin; when he sees that example, and advice, and correction, produce little effect, and cannot change their hearts or renew their souls, he *does*, he *must* retire into his closet, and pour out his soul before God. Thus is a Christian an intercessor with heaven; he pleads for his family—he pleads for his neighbour—he pleads for his country—he pleads for the church of God; oft does he say with pious Samuel to the ungrateful Israelites, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

But on what does the success of prayer depend? We are taught in the passage before us, as well as in many others, that it must be *the prayer of faith*. "Let him," saith St. James, "ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, 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. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."[1] Our Lord also makes use of this remarkable language when speak-

[1] James i. 6.

ing to his disciples—"Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." All this clearly implies that it is the prayer of *faith* which hath power with God and prevails; faith which honours God by placing a full reliance on his power and love, and feels assured that he is ready to give all we ask, if only it be consistent with our good, or the good of those for whom we venture to intercede.

But alas! how seldom do our prayers and intercessions rise to this! How wavering are we in our hopes and expectations! How many doubts do we entertain of God's mercy, and loving kindness, and power! How do we thus limit the Holy One of Israel—and in consequence, how cold and languid are our prayers even for those whom we most love, and for whose happiness in time and eternity we are most deeply concerned! Which of us could bear the thoughts of the blessedness of our children or friends being made to depend upon the vigour of our supplications on their behalf? Should we not feel as the man in our text did? If Christ were to say, "if thou canst believe," thy child or thy friend shall be saved and blessed, would not the conscious languor of our faith make us tremble as being accessary to their eternal ruin? We should feel it so; and so we ought to feel it; and the dread of all our prayers for those for whom we plead proving ineffectual through our want of

faith, joined to the conviction, that for this cause many of our prayers still remain unanswered, should draw from us a supplication like his, accompanied with tears like those he shed, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief." It is not by such unfeeling, unbelieving prayers that we shall "stand in the gap, to turn away the indignation of the Lord" from those we love. Not such were the prayers of Abraham in answer to which Sodom itself would have been preserved, if only ten righteous persons had been found therein. Let the consideration humble us and make us more fervent and earnest in seeking an increase of faith.

But important as this application of the subject is, and nearly as it is connected with the narrative we have been considering; I feel inclined rather to turn your attention to the passage as it relates to ourselves personally, and to the vast concerns of our immortal souls.

Brethren, in the dispensation of the Gospel of the grace of God, every thing is made to depend upon faith. It is by the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus, that we are to obtain pardon of our sins; by faith we are justified and accounted righteous before God—by faith we overcome the world —by faith the heart is purified—by faith we work righteousness: in short every part of our salvation depends upon it. For all is the gift of God's mercy, and is obtained only through faith in the promises of his holy word; through a firm reliance

on that record which he hath given us of his Son ; we are therefore taught that we must "believe to the saving of the soul."

Thus we may apply the words of our Saviour in a higher sense than that in which they were used on the occasion we have been considering. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." "He that believeth shall be saved." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Such is the language of the holy Scriptures ; such is the way in which it has pleased the God of all mercy and grace to answer the trembling sinner, who alarmed at the danger of coming short of eternal life, asks, "what he must do to be saved ?"

But merciful as is the answer—gracious as is the provision—easy as the *condition* (if I may be allowed the term) seems to be ; often does the man whose conscience is awakened, and who is used to try himself by the standard of God's word, feel even *this* beyond his reach ; he cannot (as our church expresses it) turn and prepare himself to faith and calling upon God. [1]

Brethren, we assign no merit to faith even when in most vigorous exercise ; we consider it not as putting away sin or deserving God's favour, which we have lost by the failure of our obedience to the law. Were it otherwise, so feeble, so mingled with

[1] Art. V.

infirmity is this principle *in all*, that even the best of men might well yield to sorrow and despair. But viewed only as the means whereby we receive God's mercy,—whereby we rely on his gracious promises,—whereby we come to Christ to accept the blessings he purchased by his blood; considered only in this way, and this is the only point of view in which we regard it, we see that it is a firm reliance on God's promises, an assured confidence that Christ, and Christ alone is able and willing to save us both from sin itself and from all its consequences. And where is there one, who does not tremble at the idea of his eternal happiness depending on the strength and sincerity of his faith?

The man who is striving to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, knows that this faith is a principle to which all the temptations of Satan, the world, and the flesh, and all the corruptions of a depraved heart, are steadfastly opposed. How hard does he feel it to suppress every idea of his own works and deservings, so as to rest wholly on the merits and atonement of Christ, and to forbear the attempt to lay other foundation than that which is laid! How difficult to act up to the convictions of his judgment, and keep a constant, firm, and fixed reliance on Christ! to overcome the careless thoughtlessness of his nature, that forgetfulness of spiritual things, and that carnal security into which he is so prone to fall, so as to "live a life of faith in the Son of God!" so to feel his own weakness

as to rely on Christ's strength—his own corruption, so as to rest entirely on the Saviour's promises of grace to enable him to resist temptation, to renounce sin, to serve God in righteousness and holiness of living! The man that will content himself with a dead faith, which does not change the heart and purify the life, may speak of it as an easy thing to attain and support; but he who understands, and feels its spiritual nature, who knows the steady reliance on Christ, the unshaken dependence on divine mercy, the constant and habitual application to the Redeemer which is implied in "believing on the Son of God," he will be sensible that to a corrupt heart, faith is most difficult to attain, and most hard to support from day to day, and from year to year. The recollection of past sin would fill him with terror and despair, were he under a covenant of works; but even under the covenant of grace, the feebleness and the unsteadiness of his faith fills him with alarm; if that fail, it cuts him off from the fountain of mercy; if that give way, even the grace of God, as displayed in the gospel of Christ, will prove in vain; he can obtain no pardon, no justifying righteousness, no sanctifying Spirit; no sense of God's favour on earth, and no meetness for his presence in heaven.

From this source the deepest distresses and the darkest gloom that the Christian knows often take their rise. When he would "examine himself

whether he be in the faith," the point, at times, seems so doubtful that he is filled with dread: he enjoys so little of "the substance of things hoped for, and of the evidence of things not seen." The important realities of the eternal world affect him so much less than they ought, and "the things which are seen and are temporal" so much more than they should; his hold of the exceeding great and precious promises of God is so feeble, and his dependence on, and his expectations from them so unsteady, that he stands in doubt of himself; he feels as though the means of salvation were placed within his reach but he cannot use them; he is astonished at the deadness of his heart, and that it should be only now and then that he can rise heavenward and rejoice in the glorious prospect that faith opens to his view. And when he goes on to contemplate the awful consequences that must follow, if his faith, feeble and unsteady as it is, should quite fail—if God at last should pronounce it insincere, dead, and worthless, it is more than he can bear. This reflection drives him again to the throne of grace; and the language of my text describes what occurs there. "He cries out, and says with tears, Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief."

If I am speaking to any who are earnestly engaged in working out their salvation with fear and trembling, they will enter into the subject, as one with which they are experimentally acquainted.

Though they can truly say that they would not for ten thousand worlds give up the hope which their faith, feeble as it is, inspires; yet, when they reflect on the awful magnitude of those subjects on which it is employed, the dangers on the one side, and the glorious hopes on the other, they cannot but wonder at their want of feeling and earnestness; they cannot but be ashamed and confounded as well as alarmed. If God were to say to them, "Be it unto you according to your" faith, they would almost look upon it as a sentence of judgment rather than of mercy, with so much less earnestness do they seem to ask for spiritual good from Christ, than, when he was on earth, men shewed in seeking temporal relief from him. But how cheering the thought, that he who gives other good to those who believe, will give faith to those who seek it. This endears the throne of grace to the true Christian; he may "come with boldness to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need;" he shall be heard and answered when he cries "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief." Let us not then, with such encouragement, rest satisfied in this low and debased state, let us urge our plea that the Lord would increase our faith. If our soul cleave unto the dust, let us pray, "quicken thou me according to thy word;" and in proportion as we do this will our joy in God abound, and we shall rejoice in hope by the power of Christ.

But though, as I have remarked, every Christian

present will enter into the subject, and feel it one in which he is deeply interested; may I not fear that there are some with whom this is far from being the case? The grand, the all-important subject of *faith* is one to which they have given no attention. They have never seriously asked themselves whether they believed or not, nay perhaps they have even ridiculed and scoffed at the idea. You, my unhappy friends, (for most unhappy you will at last be found,) know nothing of those anxious feelings, those deep lamentations over weakness of faith, of which I have been speaking. And believe me, you are on that account objects of my unfeigned pity. Ere long, that distinction between the believer and the unbeliever, at which you scoff, will be the very distinction which will separate the inhabitants of heaven and of hell, a great gulf which none can pass. Are you prepared for this? Are you willing to abide by it? O then, let me call upon you to be wise, to remember these things, to consider your latter end. Now is the accepted time, pray earnestly while the opportunity is afforded you, to Him who is the author and finisher of our faith, for this all-important Christian grace—pray that you may believe to the saving of your soul; and remember for your encouragement, that he is always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and that he has graciously declared, "He that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

SERMON V.

PSALM xvi. 11.

IN THY PRESENCE IS FULNESS OF JOY, AT THY RIGHT HAND THERE ARE PLEASURES FOR EVERMORE.

This Psalm presents to our view one of those instances, in which the ancient prophets and servants of God were led to make use of language, of which they did not themselves fully comprehend the meaning. The writer evidently considered himself as describing his own case, and the happy experience he had of the Lord's goodness toward him; and the cheering and delightful prospects which lay before him in that state on which he should enter, when after his flesh had slumbered awhile in the grave, it should be aroused to life and immortality by the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God.[1] But though the Psalmist thus described his own state and cheering prospects, he was unconsciously using language, brought by a divine impulse to his mind, which represented the glorious termination of our Saviour's woes and

[1] Psalm xvi. 5—11.

sufferings on earth. We are not here proceeding on mere conjecture,—for what the Holy Ghost once spake by David, he a thousand years afterwards explained by St. Peter.[1]

But in speaking on the verse I have read, there is no occasion to advert to this distinction; the text, if it relate to David, is an expression of the full satisfaction with which he contemplated the prospects faith presented to his view beyond the grave. If we rather consider it as used by the divine Redeemer, then is it an exhibition of that joy which awaited him as the Captain of our salvation; and for the sake of which he endured the cross and despised the shame. But in this the true believer has a deep concern; the delight of Christ, as the Head, belongs to each member of his mystical body; and he has assured us that he will at last say to those who have done his will and sought his glory, "well done good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord." "To him that overcometh," he says in another place, "will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

Our minds are therefore led by the words before us, to a contemplation of the joys and pleasures which are possessed by Christ himself, and which in virtue of their connection with him, shall be possessed by all true believers in the presence, and

[1] Acts ii. 23—31.

at the right hand of God. It is unnecessary to inquire whether these terms are ever employed in a lower sense ; here the " presence " of God evidently means Heaven, and his right hand is the place of favour, where He vouchsafes to receive the disciples of the Lord Jesus for the sake and through the merits of their divine Redeemer.

That heaven is a place of happiness, no one doubts. That the presence of God, when he smiles upon his people, imparts delight, we cannot hesitate to believe. But when we venture to speak upon that happiness, we soon find ourselves in danger of darkening counsel by words without knowledge. Heavenly things can only be adequately spoken of in heavenly language, and of that we understand nothing. We must, therefore, be contented with a little information conveyed in terms descriptive of what *here* creates pleasure and gives satisfaction ; and wait with patience till that day, when faith shall be lost in sight, and hope in full enjoyment of those things which " eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man " to conceive, but " which God hath prepared for them that love him."

The text does not at all aim to remove the clouds that rest upon a subject which to us at present must be mysterious and incomprehensible ; it tells us of joys in the presence of God, and pleasures at his right hand, but it does not tell us what their exact nature is—or how they will be imparted ;

that would be beyond our conception; we feel assured, however, that since they are possessed in "the presence" of God, and at his "right hand," they must be HOLY in their nature; and we are assured that they are SATISFYING—and that they are LASTING; it is to these three points then, my brethren, I wish now to call your attention.

The joys of heaven are HOLY—they are SATISFYING—they are ETERNAL! Let us meditate a little upon them, and may the Holy Spirit, from whom all good counsels and holy desires proceed, so direct our minds that we may contemplate the joys of heaven till our hearts and affections are fixed upon them, and we are stirred up to use all diligence in making them our own.

I. The first remark the words suggest, is that the joys and pleasures of heaven are all HOLY.

This is manifest, because they are enjoyed in the presence, and before the throne of God; and since he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look on evil without abhorrence, nothing impure, nothing polluting, nothing contrary to the most spiritual interpretation of his holy law, shall ever approach him. Accordingly we are told of the new Jerusalem, the city of our God, "there shall in no wise enter therein any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie." [1]

[1] Rev. xxi. 27.

The fulness of joy is therefore a *holy* joy, the pleasures at God's right hand are *holy* pleasures, such as *holy* beings can enjoy in the immediate presence of a holy God. Alas! how little can we conceive of this! How hard do we find it to unite the ideas of joy and holiness, of pleasure, and the presence of God! Is not this the case, my friends? I would hope that I am not speaking to many who are in the habit of allowing themselves in what are called *criminal* pleasures, even by the world, but I believe that there are some persons who preserve a good moral character, who yet think, that in abstaining from such pleasures, they are making no small sacrifice of delight and enjoyment, and who are kept back from these criminal gratifications more by dread of consequences, than from want of inclination to follow them. Here then there is a most clear and manifest opposition between their ideas of holiness and pleasure.

But to say nothing of such characters, do not many feel that even in the more correct and moral sort of pleasure-taking, in which they allow themselves, there is, there *must* be something very adverse to holiness? Those who often ask what harm is there in this amusement, or in that scene of gaiety, which are condemned by such as they think "righteous over much;" are yet forced to acknowledge, that their amusements are very little allied to holiness, that there is something in them

not at all connected with, though they would fain hope not altogether opposed to religion. The theatre must therefore be shut in passion-week; the scenes of gaiety must be suspended during the week's preparation for the sacrament.

Nay, do we not all feel, that on almost every occasion when we intend to enjoy a little pleasure, however innocent we think it, we make a sort of suspension of pursuits of a religious nature. We hope there is nothing wrong in our gratifications, but we know not how to unite them with spiritual affections, with a mind fixed on things above, with devotedness of heart to God, with a realizing impression of His eye upon us, with a supreme desire to please him, and to do all to his glory, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To unite the ideas of pleasure and holiness, is then what we scarcely know how at all to effect. And why is this? Is our Creator a foe to our happiness? Is he only to be pleased by melancholy and gloom? Is his service a slavish drudgery? Is religion 'with gloomy horrors overspread?' Oh no, brethren! corruption of our nature lies at the bottom of all this. When God made man in his own image, he afforded him abundant sources of pleasure, which he might have enjoyed, while the Lord God beheld, approved, and blessed them all; but man cast them all away when he ate the forbidden fruit; no indulgence could satisfy him, but that which his Maker forbade him to touch. This

was the first instance in which holiness and pleasure were set in opposition to each other ; and it is still from the *forbidden* tree, that men expect the sweetest fruits. Thus is he fallen away from God, he is become an enemy at heart to his Maker, and seeks his gratification in that which God forbids and disapproves.

But the gospel of God our Saviour is intended to repair the ruins of the fall : to recover man, to renew him unto holiness ; and in the case of every true believer, this is actually effected ; with him " old things pass away, and all things become new." ' Again, a life divine he feels, despises earth, and walks with God.' Now he raises his trembling eye to heaven, and says, " In thy presence is fulness of joy." Now holiness and happiness are reunited in his thoughts, though not in his experience, to the full extent of his wishes and his hopes.

But in heaven the union shall be perfect ; then every remainder of sinful nature shall be done away ; never more shall the idea cross the mind, that *sin* can afford delight. Never more shall the soul of the redeemed sinner feel a desire which he cannot express before God, with full confidence of his gracious approbation.

Though, as I have already observed, we cannot expect, with our present scanty perceptions to understand distinctly wherein the happiness of a glorified saint consists, there are a few things which we

may readily conceive of, as tending to produce this perfect enjoyment; and these are all holy both in their nature and effects. I will just touch on some of them.

1. I apprehend all will feel that one source of the happiness of heaven, is a confidence of perfect *security*.

To this even, Adam in paradise was a stranger; his was a state of probation and trial, and therefore it was a state of danger. The Christian upon earth too, is in a state of trial, and though, while living near to God in the exercise of faith, and walking in holiness, he may rejoice that it is said, that He who hath "begun the good work, will carry it on until the day of Christ:" and be cheered by the hope that "he is kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation;" still while he has daily to contend with the world, the flesh, and the Devil, while he is conscious of the power temptation has over him, and feels the evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, still exerting a dangerous influence; the utmost he can reach is a state of *hope*, sometimes indeed an assured hope; but more frequently a hope that is but feeble, and mingled with many a fear and unknown apprehension, lest he should finally come short. But in heaven, the danger, the fear, the anxious apprehension are known no more. Those who reach that blessed place, have their iniquities forgiven, the days of their mourning are ended, their con-

flict is finished, the conqueror's crown is awarded them, they sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, they shall go no more out, and therefore all tears are wiped away from their eyes.

2. Joined to this is a second source of happiness, arising from a consciousness of their perfect holiness, their complete conformity to the will of God.

Men who know nothing of religion by experience, cannot judge what this is; they cannot comprehend it as a source of happiness; but he who has known what it is to *suffer* being tempted, who has cried with the apostle, "Oh wretched man that I am," because he could not do the things that he would; who with Isaiah has said, "Woe is me, I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips;" or with Job, "I abhor myself;"—the man who has often retired to his closet to weep, because "when he would do good, evil was "present with him." That man can conceive of nothing, even in heaven itself, that can be more delightful, than that he shall sin no more; no more offend God; no more grieve his Spirit; no more wound his own conscience; no more have a thought in his heart that shall not be acceptable in the sight of his God. Oh! who can ever conceive the joy of being conscious of perfect freedom from all evil of every kind; of knowing that our whole souls are so sanctified that there is nothing in us which God will not behold with satisfaction and delight.

3. This is connected again with an assurance of *God's favour*,—of his complete approbation. Here, alas ! though we call God our Father, though we are encouraged to come to him with all the confidence of children, and have the fullest assurances of his kindness and love ; yet we feel our sins separating between us and him ; we cause him to frown and correct us, and the consciousness of having deserved his displeasure, makes us to feel as did the Psalmist, when he said, "I thought of God and was troubled." But in heaven all this too shall finally cease. The work of sanctification being completed ; the Christian being "changed into the same image from glory to glory ;" the whole mass of natural corruption being done away and every pure and holy affection raised to full maturity ; he shall for ever live under the smile of his God and enjoy all the blessedness which the high favour of the Almighty can bestow. Here however "we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness." That the saints in glory are the objects of divine love and approbation we know ; and that a consciousness of that love and approbation must be productive of the most exquisite delight, we are sure ; but of the way in which divine love will bless those who are and shall be its objects for ever, we can form no conception. I will only add on this part of my subject,

4. That it clearly appears that the pleasures

of the redeemed in glory are heightened by the recollection, that they owe them all to Christ.

This forms the theme of all the songs of the saints in light;—once they were enemies, but they were "reconciled to God by the death of his Son;" once they "were far off, but they were made nigh by the blood of Christ;" once they were "dead in sins" but they were "quickened by his grace;—" all that blessed company who are "before the throne, washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;" he redeemed them to God by his blood, and therefore they "sing a new song, saying, Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation." Now all this employment, is holy; all this pleasure is holy pleasure; and it is perfect, exquisite, such as is worthy of God to bestow, and of the sons of God to receive. But I must pass on to the

II. Second observation deduced from the text. THE PLEASURES OF HEAVEN ARE SATISFYING. "In thy presence there is FULNESS OF JOY."

This too, my brethren, is what we have little or no conception of. In the world men have their joys, but there is no *fullness* of joy; no complete satisfaction in them. It is very rare to hear a person say—'that matter afforded me all the satisfaction I looked for from it; I was better pleased

than I expected.' This language is uncommon, the general complaint is, 'I have been disappointed; I expected much, but found little. Sometimes the fault is in the thing, or in the person on whom we depended for satisfaction, but more commonly in ourselves. I have been often struck with marking the countenances of those who are flocking to some place where amusement and pleasure is expected; and then comparing them with the same persons on their return. When going, life and animation and cheerful expectancy are expressed in their looks, but how changed on their return, almost every face seems to denote disappointment, weariness, dissatisfaction. The difference is much the same as that which exists between the cheerful countenance of youth, and the dull and weary expression of age. And what does all this mean? Why all this anxious inquiry "who will show us any good?" Why this perpetual call for something new—for some fresh pleasure—some new amusement? It is that "man has forsaken the fountain:" it is that our cisterns are all broken: it is that we are "seeking the living among the dead:" it is that we are putting the creature in the place of the Creator.

Yes, my friends, this is the source of all your disappointments. The world and the things of it would answer every purpose they were intended to answer; but you look to them for what they cannot afford. You put them in the wrong place,

and therefore you have so much to complain of. Would you but return to God the fountain of living water: would you but attend to his word, and hearken to his advice, you would not be unhappy as you are. The Christian has joys which *satisfy* as well as sanctify the mind to a certain extent. He is not, it is true, fully satisfied with the degree of his enjoyment, but he wishes for no change in the nature and source of it. He knows he is come to the spring of living water, though he sometimes feels as though the well were deep and he had nothing to draw with; but he does not therefore return to his broken cisterns; he waits—he prays—he uses all the means of grace, and at length he draws with joy from the wells of salvation. But in heaven this living water of life flows in a broad and open stream, where it may be enjoyed to full satisfaction without labour and without fear of exhausting its mighty current. "In thy presence is *fulness* of joy." There the blissful spirit of the redeemed sinner shall have unmingled happiness shed upon him without measure from his God and Saviour. There, not one want shall ever be felt—not one desire that shall not be perfectly satisfied. Oh what a change from a world where everything is hollow and deceitful—where every gratification carries with it disappointment, and every flower has a thorn; for a world where all is solid and substantial joy—where there is no fear of exhaustion—no dread of change; where every power

shall find full employment—every passion its corresponding gratification—every faculty an object on which it can fix with full delight, and yet never be satiated, never be wearied with enjoyment!

But this, brethren, is above our thoughts! it is so unlike anything we have ever experienced that we cannot realize it.

III. Lastly our text teaches us that the HAPPINESS OF HEAVEN IS ETERNAL. "There are pleasures at thy right hand for *evermore*."

Here again we feel ourselves confounded so soon as we attempt to grasp the full meaning of the words we use. We speak of eternity;—yet when we endeavour to form an idea of endless duration, of age succeeding to age, in perpetual succession, and yet drawing no nearer to a termination we feel utterly lost; we are forced therefore to rest where we set out, with an assurance that the happiness of heaven, as well as the miseries of hell, shall last for evermore.

But how striking the contrast between this, and the pleasures of the present world! These compared even with our lives, seem but momentary;—few enjoyments, with long intervals of pain or sorrow, or vacuity: the more exquisite our delight in general the more speedily is it ended; such are all our bodily pleasures; nay, such also are the higher gratifications of science and of intellect, as well as all other worldly enjoyments,—all perish

in the using; —our very capacities for receiving pleasure gradually wear away as life advances, till with Barzillai, every old man is forced to say, 'Can thy servant taste any more what I eat and what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men or of singing women?'[1]

But I will not dwell longer on the contrast between the everlasting pleasures of heaven, and those mean and paltry gratifications which depend on our frail and feeble bodies; there are pleasures that better deserve to be compared with the former and yet are to be enjoyed even in the present world. Such are the delights the Christian feels, when, withdrawn for a season from the cares and business of life, he communes with his God and Saviour; when retired to his closet, he pours out his soul before the Lord, and feels the love of Christ shed abroad in his heart; when going to the house of God with the assembly of the saints, his affections are warmed, his thoughts raised heavenward, his strength renewed by waiting upon God. Then does he say with the disciples, "it is good for me to be here;" he can hardly conceive of enjoyments more pure, or pleasures more exquisite than those he feels in these happy moments, when "the Lord lifts up upon him the light of his countenance, and gives him peace." But all these joys, alas! are transitory; the hour of prayer soon ends; the sabbath closes; duty soon calls him back to the

[1] 2 Samuel xix. 35.

bustle, the trials, and the snares of the world. The liveliest affections soon die away, the tear of penitence is soon dried, and too often succeeded by a hard unfeeling state of soul ; the light of God's countenance is soon withdrawn, because the world and sin reassert their power; thus darkness succeeds the light, and a gloomy night often follows the brightest day.

This, my brethren, is the reason why the Christian is not constantly a happy man ; this is the source of those sudden and surprising changes which take place in him ; could he always live near to God, could he keep his faith, his hope, his love in continual exercise, his joy would flow like a river, with full and uniform course. But alas ! this cannot be, while he is in this world of sin and temptation, and while he is so imperfectly sanctified. From this cause he " groans being burdened ; " and often when he thinks his " mountain stands strong," the " Lord hideth his face and he is troubled." But in heaven it shall not be so. There

> ' No groans shall mingle with the songs,
> Which warble from immortal tongues;
> No midnight shade, no clouded sun,
> But sacred, high, eternal noon.'

" At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore ;" these pleasures flow direct from God himself, and " he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And there they will not as now, be

vouchsafed to beings changeable in their state and feelings, who destroy their own happiness and peace as we do here; but "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality," then we shall be as capable of enjoying unchanging, eternal pleasure, as God is of bestowing it; it shall therefore flow on without diminution, yea continually increasing for ever and ever.

We have thus, my brethren, taken a slight glance at those glorious prospects which the word of God presents to our notice. The view I have led you to, is, I know, very confined; and I have thrown but little light upon it, yet we have seen enough to lead us to make one inquiry that is most interesting and important to us all. Since such are the prospects which open to us beyond the grave, how is it that we feel such repugnance, such chilling horror at the thought of death? Since we know there is no real happiness in this world, while in "His presence there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore," how is it that we are not ready to 'hail the sharpest pangs of death, that break our way to God?' This inquiry brings with it many painful reflections. It is not because these *holy*, *satisfying*, and *enduring* pleasures are out of our reach. No, they are the joy set before us; they form the conquerors crown held out to us, they are the joy of the Lord, into which the faithful servant shall

enter. It is not because "we have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Such indeed *is* our case, but the gospel brings us a remedy for this our misery. Christ has made an atonement for us, and through his blood we may rise from the ruins of the fall; as our Redeemer, he has purchased for us the inheritance we had forfeited, and is now ready to restore it to us; all is offered freely without money and without price. To what then is it owing that we can look forward with so little comfort? Why

So low our hopes of joys above, so few affections there?

alas! my brethren, is it not because our consciences reveal a painful truth to us. We know that these treasures are laid up in heaven, but we do not know that they are laid up for *us*. We know that the faithful servant shall enter into the joy of his Lord, but he must be a *faithful* servant, and alas! we dare not presume to take that title to ourselves. Our hearts misgive us while we make the attempt. Our activity and zeal in the service of God are so small that we can hardly hope that they will be accepted at all by him who demands our whole heart—our whole soul; our *faith* is at so low an ebb—it does so little in overcoming the world—so little in purifying our hearts—it works so little by love, that our *hope* must necessarily be very low also, and low as it is we must fear that even the portion we have, may be

presumptuous. Hence it is that we feel so little encouraged by meditating on such a passage as that now before us; this is the reason why the fear of death is so little overcome; why we have so little appearance of happiness to comfort us in the prospect departing hence.

And shall we be contented to let things remain so? Shall we willingly pass on toward the awful hour of dissolution, without any thing to cheer us? Shall we be satisfied to go down to the grave without knowing whether we are about to enter upon everlasting joy or endless woe? No, my brethren! let us arouse ourselves from this state of stupid insensibility. There are cordials provided for us in this melancholy vale. There are supports to be had under all our troubles. The valley of the shadow of death may be made light about us. Death may be made gain. We may rise to a state in which we may be always confident. We may fix our minds on the joys above, with an assurance that they are all our own. But it will not be attained by dull inactivity, or by stiff formality in religious duties. It must by careful keeping of the heart—by steady watchfulness against sin—by constant faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—by abounding in love—by "holding fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."

SERMON VI.

JOHN x. 27, 28.

MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE, AND I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME: AND I GIVE UNTO THEM ETERNAL LIFE; AND THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH, NEITHER SHALL ANY MAN PLUCK THEM OUT OF MY HAND.

THE parables of our Lord are most beautiful representations of heavenly things, by means of similies taken from scenes and incidents with which we are well acquainted. But beautiful as they are, they were in some measure connected with that shadowy system of instruction, by which God was pleased for many ages to teach his people the grand truths of religion. Had not the subsequent parts of the New Testament more clearly revealed the things signified, we should probably now feel the same difficulty in comprehending them, that they did to whom the parables were first spoken. To this, allusion is made in the sixth verse, "this parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them." Accordingly we find

our Lord giving several intimations that he employed this figurative style, because there were some of his hearers so much prejudiced, that either they could not, or they would not understand him, had he used ever so great a degree of plainness in his expressions. On persons of this character, the obscurity of the parables was intended to act as a punishment; that "seeing they might see and not perceive, and hearing they might hear and not understand." But there was also another reason why our Lord spake in this obscure manner;—as yet the mystery of redemption was not fully completed; and to have more clearly displayed its nature, and the means by which it was to be effected, would have been improper, and would in fact have thrown insuperable obstacles in the way of its accomplishment. But our Saviour intimated that the time was coming "when he would no more speak unto them in parables, but would shew them plainly of the Father;" there would then be no more occasion for those dark and figurative forms of instruction; but the whole counsel of God should be fully unfolded. This took place after our Lord's resurrection from the dead, when "he breathed on his disciples, and said, receive ye the Holy Ghost;" and still more fully "when the Spirit was poured upon them from on high," to "guide them unto all truth." From that period, the language of parable was laid aside; and we find no traces of the Apostles

having ever imitated their Master in this particular kind of address.

While then we have great cause for thankfulness, that we are blessed with the full display of gospel truth, we may, if we become diligent students of the Bible, derive infinite benefit from the careful perusal of these parables of our blessed Lord, illuminated as they now are by the clearer light of the dispensation of the Spirit.

May that Holy Spirit enlighten our minds while we proceed to consider the figurative language used by our Saviour in this passage—"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

These words appear to teach us

I. THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT OF THE TRUE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST. And

II. THE UNSPEAKABLE HAPPINESS BELONGING TO THAT CHARACTER.

I. We have a peculiar view given us of the CHARACTER AND CONDUCT OF THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST.

Our Lord in this chapter shews that He is the true Shepherd, who has displayed the amazing extent of his love by "laying down his life for the sheep." This flock, which the Shepherd purchased with his blood, is the whole company of

true believers and real Christians, wherever they are scattered throughout the world, or in whatever age they may chance to live; these constitute the church of God, which his ministers are to feed as a flock, and which he purchased with his own blood.

In the preceding verses, for the sake of illustrating the character of the under shepherds of this flock—the ministers of his church,—and the source whence they derive their authority, our Lord uses a different emblem, and says, "I am the door of the sheep," thereby teaching us that none can enter into the fold of God, and become an heir of heaven and of immortal happiness, but by him: nor can any one become a shepherd over the flock of God, or a true minister of his church, unless he be appointed by Christ, and moved by his Holy Spirit, to take that office upon him.

The emblem of sheep is so constantly employed to represent the people of God, both under the Old Testament dispensation and the New, that there must be something peculiarly appropriate in it. Man, as a sinner, is a sheep that is gone astray. The sinner reconciled to God through Christ, is a sheep whom the good Shepherd has sought and brought back again to the fold.[1]

Let us then inquire what there is in this emblem which particularly suits and illustrates the charac-

[1] 1 Peter ii. 25.

ter of a Christian. There are many points in which the similarity is striking, but I will only mention a few.

1. In its harmlessness and purity, the sheep is an apt emblem of the Christian.

For these qualities this animal has always been proverbial. And surely they ought to be equally conspicuous in the followers of him "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who when he was reviled reviled not again, when he suffered, threatened not."[1] True indeed if we choose to misapply the term, and make the name of Christian a kind of national distinction, whereby those who profess the religion of Jesus, are distinguished from the followers of Mahomet or the worshippers of idols; if we choose to call all the inhabitants of such a country as this by the title which was first applied to the disciples at Antioch; if every man is to retain the name of Christian because he has been baptized, though he habitually violates every one of his baptismal vows —then the emblem fails—then harmlessness and purity form no distinguishing feature of the people so called. Among those who are permitted to bear that sacred name, we may find the ambitious tyrant and destroyer of mankind; the hard-hearted oppressor of the poor; the man who keeps the scant measure, the false balance, and the bag of

[1] 1 Peter ii. 22, 23.

deceitful weights: the quarrelsome contentious disturber of family and social peace, the covetous man, who is an idolator, and the malicious, who is a murderer: in short among Christians, commonly so called, we may find every degree and every species of whatever is impure, unjust, and abominable. But such is not the *Christian character;* and however now mingled together, all that do such things shall be finally separated from the disciples of Christ, by that great gulf which forms the impassable barrier between heaven and hell. No! such are not Christians; not men who have "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof;" whose tempers are subdued, whose passions are calmed, whose lusts are mortified; "who put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications out of their mouths" —"who lie not one to another, but have put off the old man with his deeds"—who have put on as the elect of God bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another." [1] Such is the harmlessness and the purity of the Christian, which is represented under the emblem of the text.

2. When the sheep is made the emblem of a Christian, there is no doubt a reference intended

[1] Col. iii. 12, 13.

to its weakness and helplessness, in which respect its similarity to the believer in Christ is striking.

Of all the animals with which we are acquainted there is none that seems so little able to defend itself against enemies and dangers as the sheep, and hence arises the need for the constant watchfulness and care of the shepherd. In a country like our's, where there are no widely extended deserts, the abodes of ravenous beasts of prey, this character of sheep is not so conspicuous as it was in Judea; but even here, the life of the shepherd is one of constant labour and care. If absent from his flock only for a few hours, he is sure to find something which requires prompt attention; and where lions, tigers, wolves, and such like animals abound, the sheep are their constant prey: while their proneness to wander from the fold, and their indisposition and inability to return to it when strayed, exposes them to innumerable dangers which they cannot resist, and from which they cannot escape.

How apt an emblem is this of the state of the disciple of Christ upon earth, where Satan, "as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour;" where the world, the flesh, and the devil are always plotting his destruction; where every connection in life and every situation in which he can be placed, abounds with temptations and incitements to evil; while in every hour

of trial he feels his best resolutions broken, and his firmest determinations, weak as flax touched by the flame. Every one who with a sincere desire to serve God, has made the attempt to do it, knows by sad experience how utterly weak and helpless he is; while he knows also, that his wayward foolish heart is perpetually leading him into difficulties and dangers from which he cannot escape, unless the great Shepherd of the sheep interpose for his rescue.

3. The sheep notwithstanding the weakness and feebleness of its nature, is yet of great *value*, and as such is used as the emblem of a Christian.

No animal renders more extensive benefit to mankind than the sheep; and in consequence in almost every country it has been tended with the greatest care, and been esteemed a very valuable species of property. The language of Scripture authorizes us in applying this emblem to the believer in Christ. He knows indeed that in himself he is worthless, and undeserving of that high regard which his gracious God and Saviour pays to him; yet when he reflects on the infinite price at which he was redeemed, he perceives that he is valuable in the sight even of the Almighty. "He was not redeemed by corruptible things as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." Who indeed can set a value on the immortal soul of man? Who can tell what the worth of that soul is, when after having gone astray from the way of peace,

it is brought back again, pardoned, reconciled, and saved; prepared to spend eternity in the worship and enjoyment of its God, and in everlastingly praising and exalting its Redeemer. It is beyond our conception. We may learn something, by contemplating, even according to our feeble powers, the price paid for our salvation, and the glorious inheritance for which the Christian is kept by the power of God; but we shall never understand what the value of that soul is, which was first formed in the image of God; when lost, was redeemed by the precious blood of Christ; and when saved, shall be the companion of angels and archangels, and shall join all the host of heaven in everlasting praises and in everlasting joy.

4. But the text leads to the consideration of another quality of the sheep, in which our Saviour teaches us, it bears a strong resemblance to his people;—its *docility*.

This too, is a circumstance in the natural history of the sheep, with which, living as we do, in an inclosed country, we are little acquainted; but in open and extended plains and wild mountainous regions, it is well understood. The shepherd's voice is known—his call is obeyed by the whole flock, and they follow him whithersoever he goeth. But "they know not the voice of a stranger," and give no heed to him. Such is the point to which our Lord here particularly refers. "My sheep," he says, "hear my voice, and they follow me."

And such, brethren, is the conduct of the Christian. He hears his Saviour's voice: for this he reads the Scriptures daily, for this he attends the house of God; for this he retires from the world into the privacy of his closet, that he may hold communion with his Saviour, and learn his will; his object is to hear Christ's words; the language of his heart is, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." "I am a stranger upon earth, O hide not thy commandments from me." "I am as glad of thy word, as one that findeth great spoil." "Lord, to whom shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life." Whether the Lord speaks in invitations or in warnings, in promises or in precepts, the Christian stands with listening ear to hear whatever he may say; for he knows that "by every word of God doth man live." His language is—'On thy word do I rest, on that word I confide in every time of danger or of fear; on that word do I hope, when all other circumstances would drive me to despair.' On that same word does he ground all his opinions; it matters not to him how learned or how talented men may be, "if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," and he therefore rejects them all, that he may keep close to the word of his Saviour, who is the truth and the life.

But, "they follow me," saith our Saviour concerning the sheep of his fold. They not only listen

to, and make themselves acquainted with Christ's words, they obey his voice. O, my brethren, let us never lose sight of this fact, that knowledge, even the knowledge of Christ's words, is worthless unless it be accompanied with obedience. In the path of obedience, the Christian follows his Saviour; in this way he puts on the Lord Jesus; this forms the peculiarity of his character; *he follows Christ*, he imitates his example, he treads in his steps: as Christ was in this world, so is his servant; his inquiry in every case is, how would the great shepherd of my soul have me act? whither would he have me to go? how would he do were he again upon earth, leaving me an example that I should follow his steps?

Let us, brethren, apply this part of the subject to ourselves. Have we these marks whereby the sheep of Christ's flock are distinguished? It is not enough that we say in the church, "we are thy people, and the sheep of thy pasture—;" that little flock bears a very peculiar character—a character grounded on hearing Christ's words, and following him. Is this our character also? Oh! let us not be deceived; religion is not a name, but a reality; it is not calling Christ Lord, Lord, but doing the things that he says.

But I must proceed to speak,

II. Of the PECULIAR PRIVILEGES and HAPPY STATE of those who belong to the fold of Christ.

This is expressed by our Lord in two distinct particulars. "I know them," and, "They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."

1. I know them. "I know my sheep and am known of mine." The expression seems to imply that our Lord, as the searcher of hearts, can distinguish his people from all who have the appearance of Christianity without the reality; according to what we read in another part of this gospel, "Jesus knew from the beginning, who they were that believed not, and who should betray him." [1] When we look abroad into the Christian church, we see much that perplexes and confounds us. We observe many for a time maintaining a steady profession of religion and seeming to adorn it by a holy conversation and blameless behaviour; but within a while all this fair appearance vanishes; they abandon their profession, and return to the world. We see again others strangely mingling correct notions and warm feelings, with a conduct far from that purity and holiness which the scriptures describe as essential points of religion.

And if we turn our thoughts homeward, and examine ourselves, we shall find a great deal that is contradictory and inconsistent; a little of what is right, mingled with so much that is wrong; that

[1] John vi. 64.

we shall be almost as much at a loss in forming an opinion of our own case, as we are in making an estimate of that of others. Then again the Christian, while diligently labouring to "keep a conscience void of offence," finds himself often censured and condemned by his brethren, who pass their sentence upon him with as much confidence, as if they were capable of diving into the deep recesses of his soul, and discovering what is known only to himself and to his God.

Amidst all this doubt and confusion, "the Lord knoweth them that are his." He searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins"—every character is fully known to Him; no secrets can escape His eye; so that with the same unerring accuracy, the great Shepherd *now* distinguishes his flock, as that by which he will separate between them and others at the last day. There is no danger of mistakes; no goat will be found among the sheep, nor shall one of Christ's flock, that multitude which no man can number, be condemned with the goats; no wicked man shall stand in the congregation of the righteous, nor shall one righteous man have his portion with the wicked; the marks of distinction to us may be small and obscure, but they are not so in the eyes of him with whom we have to do: this is a most consolatory thought to the humble believer, the good Shepherd knows his sheep.

But when he says, "I know my sheep," it

doubtless also means, that they are the objects of his constant care. The shepherd makes himself acquainted with his flock, and sets his mark upon them, that he may watch over them more effectually, and the more fully supply all their wants. It is for this reason that our blessed Saviour applies to himself the emblem. He is the good Shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep, and thus, having purchased them with his blood, now considers them as his most valued property; he protects them from danger—he supplies all their wants—he affords them every comfort. How beautifully is this emblem explained and illustrated in the twenty-third Psalm.

Such, my brethren, is the happy state of the true Christian, though he is of his own nature weak and feeble, and apt to turn aside from the right way, and to wander from the fold of God. In his ordinances, both public and private, the Lord meets his people; the Saviour imparts the solace of his favour, and gives unto them the joy of his salvation.

But however great the consolations of the true Christian may now be, they would all vanish before the dread of a final departure from God, a final and complete prevalence of sin. The believer knows something of his own weakness; experience has shown him the power of temptation, and the treachery of his heart; his secret fear, like that of David frequently is "I shall one day perish."

Nothing can be more clear than that such a state of doubt and anxiety must cast a deep cloud over the mind of the servant of God; now our Lord meets this by another most consolatory assurance in the text.

2. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." The word *man* is not in the original, and its introduction too much restricts the meaning of the passage; the declaration extends to every creature—neither fallen man, nor fallen angel, shall ever be able to pluck from the hand of our great Shepherd one whom he knows and receives as the sheep of his fold. Our Lord, aware that his disciples, who had only as yet seen him in his humiliation, had very inadequate ideas of his native glory and dignity, in order to confirm their feeble faith, adds, "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; neither can any one pluck them out of my Father's hand." So saith St. Peter, "Ye are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation."

Oh! what consolation is there in these declarations to him, who with humble faith and obedience is listening to the voice of the good Shepherd. "They shall never perish, none shall pluck them out of my hand." What though Satan, as a roaring lion is going about seeking whom he may devour—what though the world spread its dangerous temptations around him—what though

the evil of his own heart often fills him with gloomy apprehensions—still he hears his Shepherd's voice, and that voice says, that such "shall have eternal life, shall never perish;" it tells him that none can pluck him out of his Saviour's hand —none can pluck him out of the hand of the Almighty and everlasting God, who is his heavenly Father; the same unfailing mercy which first gave him to the Saviour, and made him to belong to the flock of Christ, will still preserve him from either being carried away by Satan, that roaring lion, or being persuaded to quit the fold of God, and turn into the road that leadeth to destruction.

True, were he to depend upon the firmness of his own resolution, the strength of his own principles, or the goodness of his heart, he would soon fail; he could not support himself even for a single hour; but it is the hand of his Saviour that holds him fast; of that Saviour whose voice he hears, whose commands he obeys, in whose love he confides; of that Saviour who, when hanging on the cross, displayed his compassion and power in saving the dying thief, and assuring him that he should be with him, that day, in paradise. It is the arm of that Saviour, who being one with the Father, has all power in heaven and in earth committed to his hands. That arm, my Christian brethren, is engaged to secure your salvation. Go on then, listen to your Shepherd's voice, and follow him;

rest entirely in his love, trust to his atoning sacrifice, seek his sanctifying Spirit, press onward in the way of his commandments, and you will be enabled in due season to make the Apostle's exulting language your own, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?—Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.[1]

And oh! what glories shall that day reveal, when the final division shall take place, and all the sheep of Christ's flock shall be for ever separated from amidst the goats; when the true believers shall no more be found mingled amidst the people of this wicked world; when the roaring lion shall no more even seek to devour them, because they are placed wholly and for ever out of his reach. Then will be understood, but not till then, the full import of this word, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." "Over them the second death hath no power." Their eternal happiness shall be secure, not one

[1] Rom. viii. 35, 37—39.

more fear will ever cross their minds, but unmingled joy and perfect *peace* shall be their portion for ever. "Lo! thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord."

My brethren, you have now had brought before you in some feeble measure the high privileges of the people of God, let me, in conclusion, warn you against the attempt to separate these privileges from the character they are assigned to. All the blessedness I have been describing does indeed belong to some, but to whom? Who are they whom the Saviour knows and watches over with a Shepherd's care? Who are they who "shall never perish:—" shall never be "plucked out of the Saviour's hand?" They are those who hear Christ's words and follow him. Is this your case? Is such your character? If so, claim and exercise the privilege. But take care that you be not deceived; many profess and call themselves Christians, who are, alas! destitute of the Spirit of him whose name they bear; many there are, who have outwardly been "baptized into Christ," who are far from having "put on Christ;" who are far from exhibiting those fruits of faith, by which God is glorified, and the sincerity of their profession attested. While therefore I would exhort you, to take to yourselves, for your support and encouragement, the comfort which the passage we have been considering is calculated to afford, if upon careful self-examination you find reason to trust that you are the faithful

followers of Christ ; I would at the same time caution you not to suffer self-love, to which we are all so prone, to induce you to form a wrong judgment upon a matter of such infinite importance. Let it then be your prayer in the words of the Psalmist, " Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me and know my thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

SERMON VII.

ISAIAH xxxv. 8—10.

AND AN HIGHWAY SHALL BE THERE, AND A WAY, AND IT SHALL BE CALLED THE WAY OF HOLINESS; THE UNCLEAN SHALL NOT PASS OVER IT; BUT IT SHALL BE FOR THOSE: THE WAYFARING MEN, THOUGH FOOLS, SHALL NOT ERR THEREIN. NO LION SHALL BE THERE, NOR ANY RAVENOUS BEAST SHALL GO UP THEREON, IT SHALL NOT BE FOUND THERE, BUT THE REDEEMED SHALL WALK THERE. AND THE RANSOMED OF THE LORD SHALL RETURN AND COME TO ZION WITH SONGS, AND EVERLASTING JOY UPON THEIR HEADS; THEY SHALL OBTAIN JOY AND GLADNESS, AND SORROW AND SIGHING SHALL FLEE AWAY.

THE preceding chapter foretells, under the emblem of the vengeance of God which was about to fall on Idumea or Edom, the final destruction of all the enemies of his church. This we are taught, will make way, as might naturally be expected, for the universal spread of true religion over all the earth. It is foretold, according to the figurative language of prophecy, under the emblem of the wilderness, and the solitary places being filled with fruitfulness and joy; as though the forests of Lebanon, or the different productions of the rich lands of Carmel and Sharon, should be seen flou-

rishing in the midst of the sandy deserts of Arabia. Such were the effects produced, when the apostles and the first ministers of the Christian church, "preached among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." In consequence of this, the desert became as a fruitful field; the genuine character of Christianity and true piety began to be manifested, by the cruel and corrupt worshippers of abominable idols becoming the worshippers of the living and true God, waiting for his Son from heaven, while their holy practice agreed with their altered profession. The prophet then proceeds to utter another prediction, which, while in its full import, it describes the spiritual effects of the gospel; in its literal meaning may be considered, and indeed must be considered, as foretelling the astonishing miracles, which Christ, from whom all these blessings would flow to the world, would work while dwelling in human nature. "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitations of dragons where each lay, shall be

grass with reeds and rushes." Then follow the words of the text. The connection of which, with the verses I have read, appears to me to be this ; —when we are told that " in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert," it in figurative language assures us that the blessings of true religion should be afforded to the gentiles, who had been as destitute of all the fruits of righteousness, as the sandy desert is of vegetation. Then the text referring to Jerusalem, and the temple built on Mount Zion, the centre of all true religion, the place where men ought to worship, and whither the pious and holy people flocked up on the sacred festivals, tells us that an high way should be cast up, by which the newly-created worshippers of Jehovah might come even from the most distant parts of heathen lands, to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Almost all the predictions of the spread of religion throughout the earth, which we find in the Old Testament, have a reference to the Jewish forms of worship, and to Jerusalem as the place where the Lord especially met his people ; this was necessary, in order to meet the ideas of those to whom the prophets spake ; but we know that now, " all who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus, shall be saved." But then the question occurs, " How shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed ? and how shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard ? " Alas ! this is

the state still of hundreds of millions of the inhabitants of the world; for them the highway into the church of Christ on earth, is not yet opened, and they see no path conducting them to the heavenly Zion. Let us never forget to pray for these our brethren in the flesh, our companions in sin and condemnation; but with our prayers, let us mingle our thanksgivings to that God of grace, who hath made us to differ; who to us in this distant part of the gentile world, hath fulfilled the promise of the text; and may he of his infinite mercy grant, that we, to whom these blessings are afforded, may walk in the way of holiness till we "come to mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven; and to God the Judge of all; and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant."

You see then, my brethren, that our text is a description of the way to heaven, the way of true religion, the way in which the redeemed of the Lord all walk. And in considering the account of this way, there are three things which especially call for our attention.

I. THE DESCRIPTION WHICH IS GIVEN OF THE WAY ITSELF.

II. THE COMPANY WHICH IS MET WITH IN THAT WAY.

III. THE END TO WHICH IT LEADS.

I. Let us consider what is said about the way—ITS CHARACTER AND DESCRIPTION.

This I think may be considered in four points of view. 1. It is a free and open way. 2. It is a way plain and easy to find. 3. It is a way of safety: and 4. It is a cheerful road. Such is the way of holiness.

1. The text intimates that it is a road that is free and open to all. Not a bye path, a private road, on which only a few individuals are permitted to go; it is a *highway*, a public road, as free to the poor as to the rich, to the ignorant as to the learned, to the child as to the old man, to the most unworthy as to him whom we should be ready to esteem deserving of higher favour than others enjoy. There is no distinction: it is the king's high-way, and open alike to all.

My brethren, who can conceive the mercy and goodness that is contained in this idea! the way of religion, the way from misery to happiness, the way from destruction to glory, is closed to no one. Our natural state is one of awful guilt and misery, a state of tremendous danger; guilt, misery, and danger, increasing every hour; the place in which we dwell may well be called, in the language of the author of the Pilgrim's Progress, the *City of destruction*, for soon shall it be burned up, and all the works that are therein; but there is a warning voice that cries, Go ye up out of it, "flee from the wrath to come,"—which speaks to

every sinner here, and says "vengeance is coming to the uttermost," escape without delay from the accursed land, the land devoted to destruction. Does any one ask, "Whither can I flee?" how shall I escape? the text tells you; the highway is there, it is cast up on purpose, enter upon it, flee in that direction, there is no obstacle to impede you, the stumbling-blocks are removed out of the way, the path is made smooth, the road is free.

Is not this, my brethren, the exact manner in which the gospel addresses itself to all, without exception. Does not Jesus Christ, who is "the way, the truth, and the life," speak thus? Does not he say, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?" Does not he say, "him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out?" Is it not declared that "he is able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him?" Are we not assured that "his blood cleanseth from *all* sin?" Is not the invitation universal, "let him that is athirst come, and *whosoever will*, let him take of the water of life freely." Can any thing be more explicit than this? The king's highway is not more open to every passenger that chooses to walk in it, than is the way to heaven to every sinner who is willing to tread therein.

2. It is a plain path: such a path as David prayed for, when he said, "Make thou thy way plain before my face."

When Israel was come into the lot of their inheritance, they were commanded to appoint, or rather God himself appointed, certain cities, as cities of refuge, that the man who had accidentally caused the death of any person, might flee thither and be safe ; but the nearest relation of the slain man, the avenger of blood, was allowed to put the manslayer to death, if he overtook him before he reached one of these cities ; it was therefore necessary that the roads leading to them should be free, and not only free, but also *plain ;* there must be no intricacies, no difficulty in finding them ; and we are informed in fact, that great pains were taken to make them so : and wherever there was the least danger of a mistake being made, a guide-post was erected pointing out the road, and marked in large letters with the word REFUGE.

And was all this care used, where the *life* of man was at stake, and all these means employed to render the gracious provision of the city of refuge effectual ; and shall we suppose that when vengeance, eternal vengeance is pursuing the *soul* of the sinner, and just ready to strike him down into the pit of destruction ;—and when God has provided salvation for him,—shall we, I say, suppose that the road to it is such, that the soul fleeing from the wrath to come, cannot find it ? Shall we believe those who would tell us, that the Bible, which was written for the very purpose, is so dark, so obscure a book, that a poor, or unlearned

man, must not be intrusted therewith, lest he should not only get no good, but, on the contrary, injury from it? No, thanks be to God, the way to heaven revealed therein is so plain, that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein;" and he, who anxious to do the will of God, and to find the salvation of his soul, takes up his Bible with the Psalmist's prayer upon his lips, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," shall never make any fatal mistake, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God," he "shall hear a voice behind him, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when he turns either to the right hand or the left."

My friends, what an unspeakable mercy is this! no such light shines on the paths of science and literature, or on the road to honour, or on the way to wealth. It *is not* necessary that men should be highly learned, or be extolled by the trumpet of fame, or be rich and increased in goods. But it *is* necessary that they should find the way to heaven, if not, it had been better for them that they had never been born. And therefore God himself has undertaken to be their guide. He has drawn the map, he has made the road, and he has made it so plain, that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. No man ever missed the way to heaven and perished, because he wanted scholarship, or because he wanted talents; but thousands, and tens of thousands miss it, and are

lost, because they have none of the spirit of the "wayfaring man," they are not intent on reaching home, they are occupied in choosing smooth and flowery paths, in finding present amusement and present pleasure, and so wander from the "narrow way that leadeth unto life."

3. This way is also described as a way of *safety*. "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast go up thereon, it shall not be found there."

This part of the text seems to have a special and peculiar reference to that happy period, when the church of Christ shall enjoy a complete rest from the attacks of all her enemies; when Satan, that roaring lion who goeth about seeking whom he may devour, shall be bound for a thousand years. We need not, however, confine the interpretation to this glorious period. True indeed, Satan does now go about hunting for souls; and the world spreads its snares about the Christian's path, and many a professor of religion has fallen a prey to these ravenous beasts; but is it equally certain, that such persons were actually walking in the way of holiness? The lions and the ravenous beasts crowd about the path in which the Christian walks, but God hath set an hedge along it, they cannot "go up thereon;" and therefore our Lord says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand,

my Father which gave them to me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."[1] No doubt Satan is always on the watch, and ofttimes does terribly harass and alarm the true believer, but while in this high way of holiness he need fear no evil; the path is perfectly secure, "no lion shall go up thereon, nor any ravenous beast; it shall not be found there."

4. But it is not only a safe way—the text intimates that it is also a pleasant and a cheerful road, for it tells us that the travellers go on their way singing. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return to Zion with songs."

My brethren, this is what the men of the world will not believe; and many who seem not wholly worldly, give them too much reason for not believing it. The prevailing idea of mankind is that religion is safe, and that it is necessary; but that it is a gloomy and sad necessity which obliges men to attend to it; and they will ask whether repentance be not a gloomy thing? and whether conversion, and sacrificing all our natural inclinations, be not gloomy? and whether coming out from the world does not import something very unlike cheerfulness? Now to all this we have but two things to oppose: the one is scripture, and the other experience; but again they appeal to fact, and they refer us to instances, as they think, fully sufficient to overthrow the declarations of scripture and the results of ex-

[1] John x. 27, 28.

perience. They name men whom all have deemed religious, whose religion has assumed a most gloomy aspect, and spread melancholy over their whole character. Now we do not deny that such persons are to be found, but we must remark with respect to many of them, that the gloom arises not from religion, but from their nature and constitution ; they would have been equally melancholy had they never set one foot in the way of holiness. The only blame that can in this case be cast on religion is, that it has not worked a miracle ; that it has not effected what medicine and the skill of physicians, and the efforts of friends have attempted in vain—it has not changed the constitution—it has not counteracted the natural effects of the structure both of their minds and bodies.

There are other cases where religion does seem to have produced an effect opposite to that which we ascribe to it ; but " is there not a cause ? " Too generally would it be found, that it was not the *prevalence* of religion, but the *deficiency* of it which occasioned the depression complained of. The sadness arises from the consciousness that there is something, (so secret it may be that no eyes but those of God and the man's own conscience ever saw it) in which the demands of religion have not been, and are not complied with. " The faith that hath not works," may well produce gloom ; this it is which makes the devils tremble ; the more a man believes of the Bible,

while he does not obey it, the more wretched must he be ; his very faith pronounces sentence of condemnation upon him.

But where nothing of this sort intervenes—where the mind is sound, the conscience clear and the heart right with God, there the road is peaceful and pleasant, the traveller passes along it with songs of joy and exultation on his lips ;—but as it will be necessary for me to recur to this subject again, we will leave for the present.

We have thus considered the description of the way itself, let us now proceed to notice,

II. THE CHARACTERS WHOM WE MAY EXPECT TO MEET WITH IN THIS ROAD.

1. We are first told whom we shall *not* find there. " The unclean shall not pass over it ; " and who are they?—plainly, all the great company of those who are living in sin ; following the lusts and corruptions of their depraved nature and of this evil world. Such as these may be found in the visible church, for that is " like a net cast into the sea, which gathered of every kind, both bad and good : but it is one thing to belong to the visible church, and another to be in the way to heaven. When the net is drawn ashore, a separation shall be made—the good are gathered into vessels, and the bad are cast away ; and almost all the descriptions of the day of judgment dwell on this point—the separation—the eternal separation,

that shall take place between those who were members of the same church and professed the same religion.

It matters not whether a man be a member of the church of Christ or not—if he be *unclean*, defiled, and polluted by sin, he is not walking in the road that leadeth unto life. Exactly the same remark is made in the book of Revelation, relative to those that shall be admitted into the new Jerusalem, as is here made respecting those who are travelling the road that leads to it: "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."[1] Oh listen to this, all you who are conscious that sin—sin unrepented of—sin unresisted, unsubdued, and therefore unpardoned, still defiles you. In this state you cannot enter heaven, nay in this state you cannot take one step in the road that leads to it; sin defiles you and renders you too unclean to find admission among the sons of God. The unclean shall not pass over the way of holiness.

2. But the text goes on to say, "it shall be for those"—for those who had before been spoken of—for those for whom the way had specially been prepared—for those who "once were far off from God, but now were returning to him—who once were Gentiles led away by dumb idols, but now

[1] Rev. xxi. 27.

were turning to God—for those who had in earnest set out for Zion, way-faring men, who were intent on this one object, namely to find the road to heaven, and were prepared to encounter every difficulty, and to listen to every instructor, ready to learn of any one who could answer the all-important inquiry—"What must I do to be saved?" Brethren, let this ever rest with due weight on your minds, that as God has in his providence rendered labour and exertion necessary to the attainment of any good and important object, so is it also in the dispensations of his grace. Though his gifts are bestowed without money and without price, they are still only given to the diligent. It is the way-faring man, though a fool, that shall be the happy and successful traveller on the way to Zion.

But those who are travelling along this road are more particularly described in the terms—"the redeemed," "the ransomed of the Lord." Such terms were employed respecting Israel when brought out of the bondage of Egypt. These however were only types of the true Israel of God—of those whom he hath redeemed from all iniquity—redeemed from this wicked world—ransomed from everlasting destruction. Once they were the slaves of Satan, tied and bound by the chains of their sins—earning the wages of sin which is death—condemned already, and on the very verge of eternal ruin. In themselves they were utterly helpless

and, of consequence, entirely without hope. But God, the Most High God, was their Redeemer, not however with "corruptible things, as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." This, is the first, the only source of hope and happiness;—all the company of those before the throne ascribe the glory to him who redeemed them to God with his blood; all the saints upon earth, though with feebler notes and weaker voices, take up the same song of praise to him who loved them and gave himself for them; this merciful, this glorious Redeemer, is the theme of all those songs which are sung by Zion's travelers as they are passing along this new and living way to the mountain of holiness;—the Saviour is precious to them all—all their hearts glow with love and gratitude, with affections which constrain them "to live no longer to themselves, but to him who loved them and gave himself for them." Brethren, such is the company we shall meet with, if we are ourselves travellers on this high way. Allow me then to ask, Is this the sort of company in which you can find delight and satisfaction? Can you enjoy the society of those whose favourite theme is Christ and his salvation? Whose songs are the songs of Zion, whose conversation is in heaven? or must you have recourse to the world for pleasure, to the sinful and unclean, for such intercourse as cheers your spirit? If the last be the case with you, away with all pretences to religion;

such as you seek are not to be found in that way which we have been considering; you must look for them in a road which bears a far different character, and which has a far different termination, in a road of which it is written, "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat." But this brings me to consider,

III. THE END TO WHICH THE WAY OF HOLINESS, MENTIONED IN OUR TEXT, LEADS.—It leads to Zion the city of the living God.

Zion was of old the seat of religious worship; there was the tabernacle—there was the ark—there were all the ordinances which rejoiced the hearts of the people of God. Glorious things were spoken of Zion the city of their solemnities. With what animation does the Psalmist describe the alacrity with which they surmounted all the difficulties and bore all the privations of the long journey which many had to take when going up to Jerusalem to worship. "They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."[1] So again, when lamenting his own banishment from the courts of the Lord, in consequence of the persecutions of his enemies, he says—"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh

[1] Psalm lxxxiv. 5—7.

longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." [1]

But the highest spiritual enjoyment which the most pious person ever experienced, in the most favoured seasons, while waiting on God in his courts on earth, are all nothing, compared with what he expects in heaven. Out of the heavenly "Zion, God shall shine in perfect beauty," there he shall display his glory so as no mortal eye could bear to look upon. But "when this mortal shall have put on immortality—when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption"—when we shall "be changed from glory to glory," then shall we "see as we are seen, and know as we are known,"—no more clouds and darkness shall ever intervene. "The sun shall no more go down,"—the days of "mourning shall be ended,"—the ransomed "of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

I have thus, brethren, endeavoured to shew you the road which is pointed out to us in the text. We have seen that it is open and free to all who choose to walk in it; that it is a way perfectly easy to find: a way of complete

[1] Psalm lxiii. 1, 2.

security: and that it is a cheerful and happy road. We have seen too, that it is frequented by the best of company; and leads directly to heaven and everlasting joys.

Now since such is the case, how is it that it is said, and that the saying is so fully borne out by observation, that "few there be that find it?" Is it that mankind at large are so well pleased with the way in which they are walking—and so fully satisfied that it will lead to a happy end, that they want and seek no other path, and wish for nothing else? Far, far indeed is this from being the case. On the contrary, the universal cry is, who will shew us any good? Who will tell us where we may find peace and happiness? Who will teach us how we may get rid of the fear of death, and meet the terrors of eternity with composure?

My brethren, I may make my appeal to some of you; I fear, nay, I may say I know that there are many of you, who are conscious that you are not walking in this road. Now, I ask, are you happy? Is it not true that your minds are very ill at ease? Why then do you not turn into the way which God has set before you? Here is the very thing you are seeking for: peace, cheerfulness, and enjoyment now, and complete and everlasting happiness at the end. Why do you hesitate to set out? Why do you so cleave to this 'city of destruction,' which you know is doomed with all its inhabitants to eternal ruin? Alas!

my friends, there is one word in the text on which I have not yet dwelt, and which, I think, affords the true reason of all this delay. "It shall be called the way of *holiness*." This it is which makes the gate so straight that few enter it; this which causes the road to seem so narrow that few walk in it. "The unclean shall not pass over it:" the impenitent sinner can find no admission; he who would carry any one favourite iniquity with him shall never set foot on it. It affords no prospect of pleasure to him whose heart is not renewed so as to delight in the enjoyments of heaven; the very thing which renders it pleasantness and peace to all the people of God, makes the sinner recoil from it. Is not this the cause, brethren, why some of you cannot be persuaded to set out for Zion? why with all your present uneasiness, with all your trouble of conscience, with all your deep conviction that you must some time enter on this road, if you mean to be happy for ever, you yet hang back—you put off the day—you wait for a more convenient season. Oh I know the reason. You see that it is the way of holiness; you cannot walk there without undergoing a great change, of nature, of habits, of practice. Were a way pointed out that was less holy, that promised to conduct to heaven without leading you so far away from the world and sin, we should see no such delays then though it required you to do some great thing; yea, even to give your first-born for your trans-

gression, the fruit of your body for the sin of your soul." But the "carnal mind is not subject to the law of God," and therefore it shrinks from a way of holiness.

See, then, the true cause why so many have not in earnest set out in religion;—you are afraid to allow the thought, but it is the dislike of holiness; this keeps you in the road you are travelling. But "let thine eyes look right on, let thine eyelids look strait before thee;" see where you are going,

'A thousand ways in ruin end—one only leads to joys on high.'

Oh then turn your steps to this blessed road, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.

SERMON VIII.

GENESIS XLVII. 7—10.[1]

AND JOSEPH BROUGHT IN JACOB HIS FATHER AND SET HIM BEFORE PHARAOH: AND JACOB BLESSED PHARAOH. AND PHARAOH SAID UNTO JACOB, HOW OLD ART THOU? AND JACOB SAID UNTO PHARAOH, THE DAYS OF THE YEARS OF MY PILGRIMAGE ARE AN HUNDRED AND THIRTY YEARS: FEW AND EVIL HAVE THE DAYS OF THE YEARS OF MY LIFE BEEN, AND HAVE NOT ATTAINED UNTO THE DAYS OF THE YEARS OF THE LIFE OF MY FATHERS IN THE DAYS OF THEIR PILGRIMAGE. AND JACOB BLESSED PHARAOH, AND WENT OUT FROM BEFORE PHARAOH.

I THINK we may venture to say, that if we were to search all the books that were ever written in ancient or in modern times, we should scarcely find any thing equal for tenderness, simplicity, and beauty, to the narrative of Joseph, of which the text forms a part. My time will not allow me to enter upon it, but I would recommend it to your repeated perusal, and I can hardly conceive that any one will not admire and feel it more and more every time that he reads it;—its equal is no where to be found but in the Bible. For this sacred

[1] Preached the last Sunday of the year.

volume, written under the inspiration of the Almighty, not only contains matters infinitely more important than all other books, but it abounds also with the most admirable specimens of fine writing ; the most interesting histories and the most sublime poetry : so that were not the subjects of which the Bible treats, uncongenial to the depraved heart of man, it would be held up to admiration by all persons of elegant and refined taste.

Jacob having discovered his favourite and long lost Joseph, who had by a wonderful combination of circumstances risen to great wealth and honour in Egypt, is now brought down into that country with all his family, in order that they may be preserved from the dreadful seven years' famine that was desolating Canaan and the neighbouring nations. Lands having been assigned by the king to all the brethren of Joseph, Jacob is brought before Pharaoh. Abraham the grandfather of Jacob had been very wealthy and very powerful ; the people of Canaan called him a mighty prince among them. Isaac, too, had great possessions, and lived in a style of splendour peculiar to those countries ; but Jacob had, partly in consequence of his improper conduct, to encounter many difficulties, and with his large family was reduced far below the rank and opulence of his father and grandfather. And had not Joseph brought them down into Egypt, he, and all his, would through the famine, have come to poverty. We are not,

therefore, to consider the interview between Pharaoh and Jacob as a meeting between two persons nearly equal in rank; it was the introduction of an apparently very aged, and in some respects, poor man, to the mighty monarch of one of the then most celebrated kingdoms upon earth. From this prince, Jacob had already received much kindness, and on his power and bounty he depended for the future protection and support of himself and his family.

Yet there is one point in which Jacob assumes a superiority over Pharaoh, when he enters into his presence; and again when he leaves it, he solemnly gives Pharaoh his blessing—"Now," saith the Apostle, "without all doubt the less is blessed of the greater." Jacob had the God of Abraham for his God. He was surnamed Israel, because as a prince he had power with God and prevailed. Jacob was conscious of the high privilege he possessed;—Pharaoh amidst all the splendour of royalty had nothing like this; and it is therefore deeply interesting to see the poor old man standing before his royal benefactor; and repaying him for all his kindness, by pronouncing a blessing on him—by offering up his prayers to God—the God of Israel on behalf of the king of Egypt.

Has God made any of you, my dear brethren, in his providence to be poor? and has he in his infinite mercy made you to know him as your God, reconciled to you through Christ Jesus? think not

that you have no way in which you can reward your benefactors. You have, you can bless them; you can pray for them; "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much;" Kings and their senators, are not above your prayers; the request of your ministers to you is, "brethren, pray for us;" neglect not this gift of God that is in you; pray for us—for all that seek your good, that we "may obtain mercy of the Lord in that day."

But my main object at present is to call your attention to the other part of the text; "and Pharaoh said unto Jacob, how old art thou? and Jacob said unto Pharaoh, the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." This passage contains

I. A VERY COMMON QUESTION. And

II. A VERY UNCOMMON ANSWER.

I shall call your attention to each, and I trust we may be able to deduce from them some useful instruction suited to the present season, when we are bringing one year to a close, and entering upon a new one.

I. We have A VERY COMMON QUESTION,—*How old art thou?*

Often has this question been put to us, and

often have we put it to others ; yet common as it is, it often causes pain to those of whom it is asked ; some indeed are not a little offended when inquiries are made respecting their age and time of life ; while now and then we find one by whom such inquiries are met with cheerfulness and pleasure, and apparently without exciting the least uneasiness of feeling ;—perhaps we may be able to discover some reasons for this difference as we proceed. We can conceive of two men travelling along the same road toward the same place,—the one views each mile-stone as he passes it with cheerfulness and satisfaction ; he reflects with pleasure upon the decrease of the distance he has to travel ; he is going to his home from which he has been long absent—and he anticipates the enjoyments which he shall possess when once more he finds himself in the bosom of his beloved family. The other too counts the miles as he passes over them : the rapidity of his motion distresses him—the shortness of the journey fills him with uneasiness ; he has left all he loves behind him ; the journey he is taking is the last remainder of his liberty and pleasure ; he is a criminal and is going to prison ; or to perpetual banishment and slavery. Such a difference of feeling may be excited by the question—How old art thou ? as addressed to various persons according to the state of their minds, and the difference of their prospects.

We meet with a person who has, during the

short season of youth, been the object of general admiration for beauty, for wit, or for accomplishments of some kind—a sort of idol in the circle of friends and acquaintance. You ask the question How old art thou?—a sudden gloom is seen to spread over the before cheerful countenance, indicating some internal uneasiness ; you have inflicted a wound you never thought of; the question suggested the reflection that youth is passing away —that beauty is fading—that wit and accomplishments are losing their charms—that admiration will soon be transferred to younger and more pleasing objects—that dull old age is creeping on, and death with all its gloomy horrors is fast approaching ; hence all the depression of mind which was shown by the altered countenance. If reflections like these are excited, can we wonder that the question—How old art thou? should be a very unpleasant one, or that offence is given when it is asked.

We meet with another person whose whole happiness arises from pleasure and amusement, or from those enjoyments in which the body must take a large and an almost exclusive share. We ask of him the question in the text ; and again, we find that we have excited pain, or perhaps have given offence. We have brought to his mind a subject which of all others he wishes not to think upon ; he is aware that his enjoyments cannot last long; the body will not long bear them ;

time will take away the capacity of enjoyment. We have by our question forced this upon his thoughts. When we said, how old art thou? we seemed to ask, how long will you be capable of these indulgences,—how long will it be before the style of Barzillai will be yours. "Can I taste any more what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women?" Oh! how painful must such thoughts be to one who lives only for enjoyment! The idea of the effects of time, as destroying the ability to seek pleasure, must be most painful: and we need not wonder that such a one shrinks back from the inquiry that Pharaoh made of Jacob.

Again, you find a number of persons in such a country as this, who set out with the impression on their minds that he who increaseth riches increaseth happiness; they have therefore laboured hard—and laboured successfully; they have goods laid up for many years, and are saying, "soul, take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry:" they are surrounded by thousands praising their industry, their skill, their good fortune; for "men will thus praise thee when thou doest good unto thyself." But some one asks such a fortunate and enviable man, as he is called, the question we are considering. In an instant he feels that "vanity of vanities" is written on his whole life; all his days he has been toiling after riches—and he has attained them; he is rich, he is honoured

and envied,—he is praised and he praises himself; but the time for enjoying his wealth is gone, or fast going. The question reminds him that he has been toiling for others—few, very few years can remain for him, and he wishes you had not and would not ask him how old he is—for the answer tells him that death standeth at the door; and that he is going to his long home—that the time he has for enjoying his riches is, and must be, very short.

We put the same question to another man. He is one who in many respects differs from those whom we have been speaking of, and yet we see the inquiry has produced much discomfort; it clearly brings some painful thoughts into his mind. The fact is, he is one whose heart has long been affected by religious feeling; he has felt the necessity of repentance, of conversion, of faith in Christ. He has long known that he ought to be employed in working out his salvation with fear and trembling; and many have been the resolutions he has formed, and the attempts he has made. But he has as yet effected little. Years have passed away, and he has continued to hear the gospel, to read the Bible, to feel convictions, and to make resolves to little purpose; so that when the question is put to him, how old art thou? a distressing thought is forced upon him; many years are gone—and but few remain, yet I have not made my calling and election sure. Time with me is drawing to its close,

yet I know not whither I am going, or what will become of me. I fear that death will come upon me, and I shall not be found ready; I have not yet obtained an interest in Christ, and I fear I never shall. We might naturally suppose that a person in this state could never enjoy any rest, that he must be always unhappy; but it is not so. He contrives to occupy his thoughts with other things, and quiets himself with indulging hopes, which he takes no pains to realize. But when asked how old he is, when reminded how time is flying, and eternity is approaching, and the day of salvation is drawing to its close, reflections most distressing must occupy his mind.

Am I not speaking to some who have felt all this? to some who dare hardly allow themselves to think of their age, or to look back on the past, or forward to the future. Oh! do not allow yourselves thus to hide the truth from your own eyes; the past is *bad*, but a little more of this thoughtlessness, and you render it quite incurable! Instead of shunning reflection upon the flight of time, let it be your constant meditation. Ask yourselves often—how old am I? how much of my time is already run to waste? that so you may seize the moments as they pass, and turn them to good account, by becoming more watchful, more instant in prayer, more earnest in your applications to Jesus as your Saviour, and to the Holy Ghost as your Sanctifier. By looking at instances like these,

we see both the importance of the question of the text; and the reason why so many shrink back from the inquiry with pain and dislike.

We may however sometimes put the same question to a person who shows a widely-different state of feeling. The inquiry, it is true, brings many painful reflections to his mind, yet painful as they are, he does not shrink from them. 'How old am I? Through so many years I have been experiencing the mercy of God, for a large part of that time I was constantly provoking him by my sins, I broke his laws, I despised his grace, I neglected his salvation: but blessed be his name, the time past has sufficed me to have wrought the will of the flesh; through the goodness of God I trust I have been led to repentance; I have received Jesus as my Saviour; I am endeavouring to live a sober, righteous, and godly life, and so am preparing to meet my God, in hope that being found in Christ, there shall be for me no condemnation.'

'When you ask how old I am, it leads me to take a humbling view of myself and my past years, but it is not all dark and gloomy; goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and my hope is, that sinful as I have been, and still am, I yet shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. I feel an awe in thinking of my age, but it is not an awe of despair, but of hope,—hope that God "has not appointed me to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ;"

my hope is, that when this short and uncertain life is ended, I shall enter on that eternal life which he will bestow on all those who believe on him ; all I now wish is, that, be the remainder of my days longer or shorter, I may be enabled to serve my God and Saviour in a better and more holy manner than I have ever yet done ; and at last to hear him say, " Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord." '

This, brethren, may serve to show how many and how important are the things which are connected with the common question of the text. It may show too how it is that such different feelings are excited by the inquiry, How old art thou ?

Let us now proceed to consider,

II. The UNCOMMON ANSWER which Jacob on this occasion gave to the King of Egypt.

To us it would appear an unusual reply, when he stated that he had reached the great age of one hundred and thirty years. Man was not always the short-lived being that he now is ; originally even his body seems to have been formed for immortality. It was sin which brought death into the world. *But* for this, no sickness, nor pain, nor decay would have ever attacked our frames. But when man became a sinner, he became a dying creature ; yet though sentenced to die, that sentence was long deferred ; seven or eight, or nine hundred, or even almost a thousand years, was

allowed to some of the early inhabitants of the earth, as the term of their lives. To such a pitch of wickedness however did they rise in consequence of the length of their days, that to preserve the world from intolerable corruption, the duration of human life was shortened. This was done gradually, and many instances were suffered to occur of what we should now deem *extreme* old age. Thus Jacob in the text did not consider that he was a very old man when he had reached *one hundred and thirty years*. And he observes that he had not yet attained to the age of his fathers, for Isaac was *one hundred and eighty* when he died, and Abraham *one hundred and seventy-five*; and Jacob lived after this *seventeen* years. So that he was *one hundred and forty-seven* years old when he died.

In this answer we have Jacob's view of what his life had been, and of what in fact the life of every man is.

1. He calls it a pilgrimage.

A pilgrim is one who leaves his home, his family, his native land, to travel or to wander through distant countries in which he is a stranger, unknown and disregarded, except as he is looked on with a jealous eye by the people among whom he sojourns, who suspect, it may be, the motives by which he is influenced, and think that he either has some bad design in view, or for his crimes is compelled thus to become a wanderer and vaga-

bond upon earth. A life of this sort must be a life of much uneasiness, and of little pleasure. Probably Jacob made here some allusion to the command given to Abram to leave his father's house, and to set out from home, not knowing whither he went: and to his sojourning as a stranger in the land of Canaan, which God promised as a residence for his posterity. He was a pilgrim in a strange land. Isaac and Jacob followed his example, and "confessed," as St. Paul says, "that they were strangers and pilgrims upon earth;" that "they had here no continuing city, but were seeking one to come;" even "a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The life of a pilgrim is a very apt representation of the life of man. So the Psalmist, many ages after the time of Jacob, says, "I am a stranger upon earth, hide not thy commandments from me."

Such was Jacob's life, such too were the lives of Abrahamand Isaac, in the days of the years of their pilgrimage. Such too is our life; it is a pilgrimage; here we have no fixed abode—nothing that we can call our home; we are upon a journey; it is of no use for us to build, and furnish, and ornament our house, and provide comforts for ourselves; for we are going away, to-morrow perhaps, or perhaps to-day we shall be called to depart from this strange land.

The great body of mankind endeavour to forget their unsettled and wandering state; in this land

of their pilgrimage, they find many things that interest and please them—many things which afford them gratification and which they wish to keep and enjoy; they cannot bear the thought of relinquishing them; they have given them their hearts; and that they must die and leave them all is a truth that they would fain shut their eyes to. Do not you, brethren, feel something of this? and is not this the reason you like not to hear the question "How old art thou?" It reminds you of your state of pilgrimage; it reminds you that you must travel onward, and leave this land where you are but strangers, though you would gladly linger here for ages if you might. But Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob confessed, and every godly and heavenly-minded man confesses the same—that they were strangers, that life was a pilgrimage; they sought not here a continuing city. This is one striking difference between piety and worldliness. The pious man would not on any account continue here; he finds nothing upon earth to satisfy his mind; he cannot be content to feed upon these husks, to live in this strange land, this country so far from, and so unlike that home, where his treasure and his heart both are. He is habitually waiting the call for his departure, and has his loins girded ready for his journey; if he finds himself becoming so attached to what he meets with here as to forget his character as a pilgrim, and to think little of his home, his eternal rest, he is

alarmed and ashamed. Oh, then, my brethren, let us keep this in view; let the years, as they so rapidly roll by, teach us to be prepared for the call which will soon come. Oh! let us not love this vain world and its broken cisterns of earthly enjoyments, but let us look toward heaven, where is the throne of God and of the Lamb, and where flows the river of the water of life. Let this be our home, this the place on which our hearts are fixed.

2. In his answer to Pharaoh, Jacob intimates that the time of his pilgrimage was but short—"Few have the days of the years of my life been."

Could we realize eternity—a never-ending duration—a space in which we should have just as much to look forward to, when thousands of thousands of ages have passed away, as we have now, we should then enter fully into those expressions which the eternal God has used in his word to describe the shortness and vanity of human life; but we cannot do it fully, and are seldom inclined to do it at all; and therefore we attempt to keep up the delusion, that life consists of a long space. Yet, whatever the young may feel, we all as we grow old are struck with the rapidity with which time passes away. Ask the oldest man you know, how life appears to him, and he will tell you as Jacob does, "short, very short: each year seems shorter than that which went before; it seems but the other day since I was exulting in childhood

and youth, and now I am become an old man tottering on the brink of the grave."

Yes, such is life! a few days, a narrow span, a shadow that passeth away, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." But there is one thing for which life is always long enough if rightly improved;—it is always long enough to secure the great end for which, as relates to ourselves, we live; to secure eternal happiness. It is not long enough to gain and enjoy wealth; it is not long enough to pursue pleasure, or to possess the admiration and applause of our fellow-creatures; these things are not necessary for us; they will do nothing towards securing our happiness as immortal beings; but life is always long enough for him who is seeking eternal glory, through faith in the Lord Jesus. No man ever perished because the days of the years of his pilgrimage were so few, that he had not time to repent, and to flee to the Saviour; that he had not time to give his heart to God, and renounce iniquity; but thousands lose their souls, because they throw away these few precious days; they lavish away their lives in vanity and folly, and in the love of the world, and sink down into the grave, vainly complaining that they had not time to seek salvation, or to attend to religion. Oh! be upon your guard, my brethren, redeem the time from trifles, and apply it to the grand object for which you ought to live.

3. But when Jacob tells us that the days of the

years of his life had been few, he adds that they were also *evil*, "few and evil."

Though the patriarch had been born in a situation in life possessed of many and great advantages, yet had he experienced many and heavy afflictions; these cast a gloom over the review of his past years. Read his history for yourselves, and you will see that he had a large portion of sorrow, some of it *real*, and some, the result of his own misconception; as when he said, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away also, all these things are against me." His distress was founded on ignorance and mistake, but it was heart-rending. Many such things rushed into Jacob's mind when Pharaoh said, "How old art thou?"

And is there one among us, in whose breast the same question does not produce a similar feeling? It makes us call to mind our sicknesses, our times of difficulty and want, the friends, the relations, the children we have lost, the distress which the unkindness of some, and the ill-treatment of others have occasioned us. So many things of this kind rush into our thoughts, that life seems to us like Ezekiel's roll, "written within and without, lamentation, and mourning, and woe."

But when Jacob said, "few and evil," I apprehend there was one thing more, which rested heavily on his mind; this was *the evil* he had done in the few years of his pilgrimage. He could

trace back many of his troubles to his sins ; he would never have been in the uncomfortable state in which he was for twenty years in Laban's family ; he never would have feared the wrath of Esau as he did ; he would not have left his much loved mother never to see her more ; he would not have married under such strange and uncomfortable circumstances ; he would not have had so many severe trials in his family ; had he not sinned against the Lord, in lying unto Isaac to secure the blessing. this served to make a large proportion of his few days very bitter to him ;—how many tears of repentance must he have shed ; what a darkness must this reflection have cast over his mind ; and how must he have justified God in the chastisement he inflicted upon him !

But is there one among us, who is not forced to acknowledge, that here is the true source of much of the sorrow which we have felt during the few and evil days of the years of our pilgrimage ? Sin has been the bitter root whence all this sorrow has sprung. How different a character would life have borne with most, but for the sin that has defiled their days ; and how will they feel this when the end shall come, and life shall be reviewed from the bed of death !—Blessed be the God of all grace, though such may well be our feeling when reflecting on the past ; and though our days must be few ; still the termination of them need not be evil. It was not so with Jacob. The clouds passed

away, and in the eventide it was light, because he could say, I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.—God, grant us all, my brethren, the same happy experience,—the same gracious deliverance out of the miseries of this sinful world!

SERMON IX.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.

WHEREFORE, MY BELOVED, AS YE HAVE ALWAYS OBEYED, NOT AS IN MY PRESENCE ONLY, BUT NOW MUCH MORE IN MY ABSENCE, WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING. FOR IT IS GOD WHICH WORKETH IN YOU BOTH TO WILL AND TO DO OF HIS GOOD PLEASURE.

When St. Paul, writing to the Romans, alludes to the state of his own countrymen, he says "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they may be saved." And when speaking to the Corinthians on the manner in which he had discharged his ministry, he says, "I am made all things to all men, that by all means I might save some." This then was the subject that was uppermost in his mind—to save some—to rescue immortal beings from eternal ruin, to save them from the condemnation they had brought upon themselves by sin. It was the rejoicing of his heart that he did not labour in vain; but that every where the Lord manifested his approbation of his labours, by turning sinners "from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God."

But though he could say, " Now thanks be unto God which always causes us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place,"[1] yet there were some instances, in which he could contemplate the effects of his ministry with peculiar satisfaction, not only while he continued on the spot, but after he was removed to distant parts of the world, and had no longer the opportunity of personal intercourse with those, who had by his means been converted to God. This was eminently the case with regard to the Philippians, of whom the Apostle says, " I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." " Being confident of this very thing that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it unto the day of Christ."

When the Apostle wrote this epistle, he had been for a great length of time prevented from holding any personal intercourse with the churches he had planted; and was then a prisoner at Rome. During his imprisonment he seems to have been in want of many things necessary to his comfort. The Philippians had heard of this, and had sent Epaphroditus, one of their ministers, the long journey from Macedonia to Rome, with supplies for his necessities, and to assure him of their strong affection, and grateful remembrance of his faithful labours and successful ministry among them. These tokens of their love to him, as the minister

[1] 2 Cor. ii. 14.

who had first preached the Gospel among them, and by whom they had been led to believe in the Lord Jesus, were a refreshment to the Apostle's spirit, and afforded him a happy assurance, that the same docile obedience which had always been manifested by them while he was at Philippi, was increasing, and not diminishing by his absence.

But observe the use he makes of this circumstance. He does not seek to turn it to his own advantage, but to theirs. The influence which he had as the prisoner of the Lord Jesus, was exercised for the advancement of their eternal benefit; was turned into an argument for their pressing forward toward the full assurance of hope unto the end; and "making their calling and election sure." "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling."—That which was so near the heart of the Apostle with respect to the Philippians, is the earnest desire of every faithful servant of Christ, as to all the flock of God, over which he is appointed an overseer; but especially with respect to those among whom he has been long engaged preaching the kingdom of God. With this view, I would most earnestly press upon you the important—the infinitely important exhortation. "Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

The text presents three subjects for our consideration.

I. THE DUTY which it enforces,

II. THE DISCOURAGEMENTS to the performance of this duty.

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENTS to persevere.

I. Let me call your attention to THE DUTY which is urged upon us, "Work out your own salvation."

The word "salvation" as here used, leads us to the consideration of our real state; it refers to dangers to which man is exposed. We must look to other parts of the scripture, to tell us what the danger is, and whence it arose. There we are told that "God created man in his own image," and placed him in a situation of complete happiness and apparent security. His happiness was, however, dependent on his holiness, and his security on his obedience to the commands of his Creator. The tempter assailed him, persuaded him that more exalted satisfaction and higher honours were to be gained by breaking the commands of the Almighty, than by keeping them. The act of disobedience followed, and thus the parents of the human race fell under the curse of God's law. Then sin entered into the world, and was propagated as fast as the human species. Every man born into the world has brought with him the disposition to disobey; and every one who has lived long enough

to know good from evil, has done what was contrary to the will of God. Thus have we all of us fallen under condemnation; and the sentence is tremendous; infinitely more so than any of us can conceive;—it is the everlasting wrath of God; the misery of hell; "the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone which is the second death;" "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." Such is the language employed in scripture to teach us what will be the misery of those who die in their sins.

The word of God assures us that "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"—all, all of *us*, the whole human race, have so sinned as to forfeit heaven, and entail upon ourselves the inheritance of everlasting woe.

Hence then arises our need of salvation and a Saviour; of one who can deliver us from the dreadful danger to which our sins have justly exposed us. My dear friends, let me beg every one of you to consider me as if speaking to you individually. In many particulars I am aware you differ much from each other; but here is a point, and that the most important one imaginable, in which you are all alike. You are all *sinners*, all condemned, all in danger of eternal misery, and therefore you all need *salvation;* and unless you seek so as to find it, you will die in your sins and perish for ever.

Here you must allow me to use great plainness

of speech. You must not be offended if I utter the full conviction of my heart, and say, that there is not one person in this congregation—no, nor in all the world, who is not so great a sinner, that he will assuredly perish, if he do not seek and find salvation. This then should be the first and grand business of every man's life ; this is that wisdom of which Solomon speaks, " Get wisdom, get understanding. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee ; love her and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom ; and with all thy getting yet understanding."[1] The wisdom of the world passeth away, but *this* endureth for ever, and " giveth life," eternal life, " to him that hath it." Let us then give our hearts to this one thing, to obtain the knowledge of salvation ; to know what *we* as sinners " must do to be saved."

The attempt to search for this heavenly wisdom and knowledge, elsewhere than in the Word of God, will be utterly vain. It is that inspired and holy book which teaches us at once our disease and our remedy—our danger and our means of deliverance. St. Paul therefore reminds Timothy of his high privilege, " that thou," he says, " from a child hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

[1] Prov. iv. 5—7.

But, my brethren, when we have recourse to our Bibles, to learn how we may be saved, we may perhaps be struck with a seeming contradiction between the manner in which the text speaks upon the subject and the tenor of other passages. We are continually taught, that it is to Christ alone that we are to look, and that he alone can save us; that our salvation is all "of grace through faith;" that "it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast;" while here we are commanded to "work out our own salvation." There *seems* therefore to be a complete contradiction; but I trust we shall see that it is only in appearance and not in reality that St. Paul thus contradicts himself.

In the first place, the language of Scripture is too plain to be mistaken, that the only meritorious cause of salvation is what the Lord Jesus did, and suffered, when he came into the world to save sinners. "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus." By his sufferings and death, he made a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement and satisfaction for our sins; by his perfect obedience "he hath brought in everlasting righteousness." And since "God so loved the world, that he *gave* his only begotten Son," thus to suffer and die for us; and since nothing that we had done or could do, could

deserve such a gift as this; the blessings that flow to us through him are all *of grace*, of free undeserved mercy; and therefore leave man nothing whatever to boast of. And since these blessings, thus bestowed upon us through Christ, are given only to those who believe in, trust upon, and apply to Christ as the Saviour, it is said that we are saved *by faith*, or by believing on the Son of God.

Thus it is made most plain, that our salvation is not effected by works of "righteousness that we have done," but only "by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." But while we humbly acknowledge that all our doings are nothing worth, still there is clearly a work which man has to do; a work which must be done earnestly and perseveringly, or he will not obtain that salvation which he needs. This is what St. Paul refers to in the text, when he says "work out your own salvation;—if the whole were to be wrought by our own power and might, and we were to depend on ourselves for salvation, stronger words could scarcely be used. Nor are they only to he found in this place, many other passages of Scripture speak in the same manner, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." And our Lord strikingly puts the two together, "*Labour* not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall *give*

you." [1] This ever-during nourishment of the soul is the gift, the free gift of God, and therefore it is all of *grace;* yet we are commanded to labour for it, as a poor man labours and eats his bread, as the reward of his honest industry.

To a man then, earnestly inquiring what he must do to be saved, the direction is, that he must believe on the Son of God, who will grant salvation to him without money and without price; while at the same time, he receives commands, some of which lay upon him duties of a very difficult nature, requiring much exertion and much self-denial.

The prophet Isaiah says to him who is asking after deliverance, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." [2] This is a declaration of God's infinite mercy, and readiness to grant salvation to the perishing sinner; but still there is a work for the sinner to perform; sin must be given up, neglected duties must be fulfilled; and this must be set about at once. Not one step is taken in the way to heaven, till the sinner is willing to give up his sins, or in other words is *converted*, and manifests a change of feeling and of character.

Again, we read that repentance is necessary to

[1] John vi. 27 [2] Isaiah lv. 7.

salvation; there is not a word in scripture which gives any hope of heaven to the sinner till he repents and mourns over his sins. The proclamation of mercy is "repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Here then is a work to be done, absolutely necessary, and till the command is obeyed, and the work is begun, the impenitent sinner remains still in the broad road that leadeth to destruction. And, once more, the call of the gospel, is to believe in the Son of God. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." And when our Lord was discoursing with the Jews, and they asked him what they must do that they might work the works of God, he replied, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Here then, is a command to be obeyed, and a work to be done before a man can be said to have come to the Saviour.

Thus we see that there is a scriptural sense in which faith, repentance, conversion, and a holy and renewed life, are all a part of that great work which we have to do in securing for ourselves that salvation, which is nevertheless all of God's free mercy and grace.

But no sooner does a convinced sinner attempt to perform this necessary work, than he feels himself baffled. Something is required of him which it seems utterly impossible that he should ever

achieve. Are sins to be broken off? are new duties to be performed? He immediately finds that the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil, are too strong for him, and he is hurried away into those very sins which he wished to renounce. When he fain would weep over his transgressions, it seems as if his heart was become harder and more unfeeling than ever. When he would believe in the Saviour and renounce every hope but that which springs from faith in him, he cannot bring his proud spirit humbly to accept the offers of mercy—he cannot lay hold on the hope set before him.

Hence then result new duties, new exertions to be made in working out our salvation. God knows our weakness—he knows the power of temptation—he is acquainted with the evil of our hearts; and in his boundless mercy he has appointed means whereby these difficulties are to be overcome. He has given us his holy word, and he bids us to study it, and apply it to our own state—to bring home its exhortations, its commands, its threatenings, its promises to ourselves, in order to stir us up to more diligence in the pursuit of salvation. He has given us the public ordinances of religion that we should attend on them and walk in them blamelessly, and so find our strength renewed. He has set before us the throne of grace and bids us come boldly thither "that we may find mercy, and grace to help in time of

need." Now, brethren, if we are working out our own salvation, these means, which the infinite goodness of God has provided for us, will be diligently and constantly made use of by us; while at the same time we shall come out from the world and be separate from it, lest its alluring snares should draw us away from the great object, of escaping the wrath to come.

Thus in the command to work out our own salvation, we see that all which constitutes a religious life, in the most enlarged meaning of the word, is required of us. In a world like this, we cannot thus serve God, without much labour and watchfulness; we shall have a daily struggle to maintain, while our treacherous hearts will be always giving way, and deceiving us. Hence the language used by our Lord "Strive to enter in at the strait gate:" "Labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life." And hence St. Paul, when speaking of himself and his brethren, says, "Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent we may be accepted of him."[1] And hence the peculiar expression of the text, "Work out your own salvation," and not only so, but "work it out with *fear and trembling*." This imports that there are peculiar discouragements and difficulties, which may well induce us to fear lest we should fail in accomplishing so important an object; let us then proceed as was proposed,

[1] 2 Cor. v. 9.

II. To consider THE NATURE OF THESE DISCOURAGEMENTS.

How unlike is the language of our text, to that which seems the general opinion of mankind. People evidently think that nothing is more easy than to make sure of salvation; that if it do not fall to the lot of him who has been baptized, and who has led a tolerably regular life, as a matter of course, yet that a very little pains will make all safe and secure! Aye, and that if a man be so occupied with this world, as to make it impossible for him to attend to religious matters with any degree of devotedness, he may very safely put off serious consideration to a sick bed, or to a time when he will have nothing else to do; and that just before he leaves the world, will be soon enough to make his calling and election sure.

Were this correct, there would be no room for fear and trembling, except, perhaps, in the case of a few very desperately bad characters. But the Apostle addresses the exhortation to those whom he never thought of without thankfulness to God; to those "who had always obeyed, not as in his presence only, but now much more in his absence" nay, to those of whom he says, "We are confident of this very thing, that he that hath begun a good work in you, will carry it on until the day of Christ." He felt what St. Peter did, when he said, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" But we

may be ready to ask, whence can all this arise? why is our salvation to be worked out with all this fear and trembling, when we know it is all of grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus, who we are assured, is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him, and whose goodness and love is so great, that he will cast out none that come to him?

Brethren, these are blessed truths, on which we may place the fullest reliance, and but for this, our fear and trembling must be turned into absolute despair. If our Saviour were as fickle, changeable, and weak as we are, there would be no hope whatever, but we should without all doubt fail of the grace of God, and finally perish. When St. Paul says "Let us fear lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it;"[1] and when in the text, he calls on us "to work out our own salvation *with fear and trembling*," he does not exhort us to distrust either the power, or the love, or the faithfulness of Christ. But all our fears spring from ourselves, and the corruption of our own hearts; from our own instability and want of faith.

Would you see what need there is for fear and trembling?—look back at what has taken place with regard to yourself. When first your attention was drawn towards religion, and you set out in

[1] Heb. iv. 1.

the ways of God, could you have believed that you should have made so little progress as you have done? Could you ever have thought that your applications to Christ would have been so cold, and your love of him so feeble? Did you ever suspect that temptation would have had so much power over you, that you should have been overcome as you have been; that you should have had so little the mastery over your easily besetting sin, and your unholy tempers as has been the case with you? If it has been so in time past; and if it be so still, what confidence can you have for the future? surely you must feel, that if the time to come should bear any resemblance to the past, your prospects are but dreary; and you may easily conceive that Satan, encouraged by the victories he has already gained over you, will make still more furious assaults upon you. And shall not this make you fear and tremble, even while you are endeavouring to stir yourself to greater earnestness in working out your salvation.

And when you have thus reflected upon your own case, then consider that of others. What strikes you, while you read the history of the church? "How are the mighty fallen, the beauty of Israel slain!" How do we see the first become last; those who did run well hindered! How many of those, who seemed likely to have "an entrance ministered unto them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour

Jesus Christ," after awhile have turned aside to vain jangling, embraced some damnable heresy, or, sinking under the power of some secret iniquity, have at length "made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience!" The ancient church, and the church in our own day, has produced multitudes of such instances; and each one of them says to us, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." For what security do we possess, that they had not? Wherein are we stronger than they, who have thus been seized upon and carried away by that "roaring lion that walketh about seeking whom he may devour?"

Then again reflect, my dear friends, on what you have at stake. Think *what* a man loses, who loses the salvation of his immortal soul—all, all is lost, lost for ever! Heaven is lost, and eternal ruin alone remains as the sinner's portion! On this narrow neck of land, between the ocean of endless happiness and glory, and the gulph of perdition are we standing, while we are working out our salvation; and shall we not do it with fear and trembling? Oh, my brethren, such fear is rational, it is salutary. Our greatest danger arises from want of serious thought, from carelessness;—so that we may well say, "Happy is the man that feareth always."

But if he who is engaged in working out his

salvation has such discouragements as may well cause him to fear and tremble, he has at the same time many things to animate and comfort him in this arduous work. Let us then proceed to consider,

III. His encouragements to persevere.

These the text sets before us in the concluding clause. "For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure."

This passage is addressed to those, who already had felt the importance of salvation, and were disposed to seek it with some degree of earnestness, but were ready to be disheartened by the difficulties which lay in their way; they were urged forward, therefore, and excited to work out their own salvation,

1. By the consideration of who it was that had already produced this conviction on their minds, and inclined their hearts to seek after the salvation of their souls. "It is God that worketh in you to will."—Such is the corrupted state of man's heart, such the enmity of the carnal mind, that though every one dreads the thought of eternal punishment, no one, if left to himself, would be willing to seek for pardon and deliverance, in the only way in which it can be found, even through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence all that neglect which we see of the "great salvation;" men make light of it, because they like not the humiliating nature of the terms proposed. Nay,

our Lord carries the matter still further; he represents the corruption of the human heart, as placing an insurmountable obstacle in the way. Not only does he say to the unbelieving Jews, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life:" but he even says, "no man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." And again does he repeat it. "No man can come to me, except it be given to him of my Father."[1] This apparently "hard saying" is turned to a motive of encouragement in the text. Not only is the sinner taught to cry with penitent Ephraim, "Turn thou me, and so shall I be turned," but he is led to reflect on what has already been done for him; on the extent to which he has already been turned; and to consider by whom this was effected. Once, his whole soul was careless and insensible; he lived year after year without even a desire after any spiritual good; the invitations of God's mercy, aud the threatenings of his justice, were equally unheeded; the love of Christ to lost sinners, excited no constraining influence upon him; he seemed to have neither hope nor fear upon religious subjects. But a change has taken place;—he has not indeed done much toward working out his salvation; but while the consciousness of this, makes him fear and tremble; it excites in him more fervent desires, for increased earnestness and diligence in this great work.

[1] John vi. 44, 65.

Now whence did this change arise? Who inclined his heart to seek everlasting blessedness, instead of this world's vanities? When one who has experienced this change, begins to think upon its source, he cannot ascribe it to any thing else than that to which it is ascribed in our text. "It was God who wrought in him to will;" it was God who put this good thought, this holy desire into his soul;—left to himself, he is convinced that he should never have felt any thing of the kind.

Here then is a strong ground of encouragement, to work out his salvation. God has already begun with him. He is already drawing the sinner by his grace; already is he making him willing in the day of his power. Yield then, my fellow-sinner, to these gracious influences of the Spirit; and encouraged by such tokens of the divine presence, "work out your own salvation."

But the encouragement of the text reaches still farther, and the apostle, being confident, as he says in the beginning of the epistle, that "he who had begun the good work, would carry it forward," adds to his working in us *to will*, that he worketh in us also *to do*. The Christian is here taught that every thing depends upon the grace and goodness of God. He it is who disposes him to commence the all-important work, and will enable him also to bring the same to good effect. The difficulties that we have to overcome in securing

our salvation are indeed many and great; they are such as we could never surmount by our own strength, however powerfully our minds might seem set upon our object. But that grace which put into the mind the good desire, will alway be ready to aid us in accomplishing it; so that while we can of ourselves do nothing, we "can do all things through Christ who strengthens us." Here is the true source of the hope of every Christian enduring to the end, and being saved; so many and so powerful are the enemies that oppose his salvation, that, when fighting against them, he in his own strength might well fear, and tremble, and despair;—he could not have one thought of victory. But he is fighting "the good fight of faith." Faith relies upon unseen, but promised support, support such as will render him more than conqueror. By his grace and power, the Lord who has wrought in him to *will*, will also work in him to *do*. See then, my dear friends, what encouragement there is for you! There are no such hopes and assurances of support and success held out to you in other pursuits. But in the all-important object of attaining the salvation of your souls, there is no fear but you will succeed, if only you comply with the call of the text, and work out your salvation with fear and trembling, with earnestness and diligence; relying upon the Saviour, whose strength shall be made perfect in your weakness, and through whose grace you shall be made victorious over all your enemies.

SERMON X.

1 CORINTHIANS ix. 26, 27.

I THEREFORE SO RUN, NOT AS UNCERTAINLY; SO FIGHT I, NOT AS ONE THAT BEATETH THE AIR: BUT I KEEP UNDER MY BODY, AND BRING IT INTO SUBJECTION: LEST THAT BY ANY MEANS, WHEN I HAVE PREACHED TO OTHERS, I MYSELF SHOULD BE A CASTAWAY.

THERE are few things so interesting and instructive, as a near view of the internal feelings, and the private conduct of an eminently pious Christian. In general it is expedient even for such, to keep themselves in the back ground, and to conceal their experience, lest they should "cast their pearls before swine;" and appear rather to boast of themselves, than to set forth the Lord Jesus, and the power of his grace as manifested in them; but there are some occasions when it is proper and necessary for a man to say, as St. Paul does, "Be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample."[1] There are seasons, when one who has had long experience of the power and influence of religion, should

[1] Phil. iii. 17.

tell what he has seen and felt; for the purpose of instructing and encouraging his brethren.

When such a man as David says "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul;" or when a Christian like St. Paul tells us of his internal conflicts and difficulties, this is an occurrence of no ordinary kind; and we ought to be thankful that a few such narratives are left upon record in the word of God. Did we know St. Paul only as the bold and intrepid preacher of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" among the gentiles; as the man who "from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum, had fully preached the gospel of Christ, in nothing moved," though "the Holy Ghost testified, that in every city, bonds and afflictions abided him;—" or, had we only heard him saying, "I am ready to be offered up;"[1] we should be disposed to look upon him as almost of a superior order of beings; we should say of his example, "it is high, we cannot attain to it." But when we hear him cry, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death," or in the language of my text, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection;" we see him standing upon our own ground; we look at him as a man like ourselves, though of immensely higher attainments. We are not discouraged by our conscious inferiority,

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 6, &c.

when we hear him say "by the grace of God I am what I am;" though we are chided for our sloth and negligence, in not seeking as he did for help from above, to enable us "to run with patience the race set before us," and to fight the battle in which we are engaged.

The words of our text are evidently full of most important instruction. May we be enabled to improve them for our own advantage. I propose

I. To consider THE QUARTER FROM WHICH THE APOSTLE APPREHENDED DANGER.

II. THE MEANS HE EMPLOYED TO AVERT THAT DANGER.

III. THE PECULIAR REASON WHICH HE GIVES FOR HIS EARNESTNESS.

I. Then we will consider THE QUARTER WHENCE THE APOSTLE APPREHENDED DANGER.

There is, throughout the whole passage, a reference to the public games and sports which were exhibited in the immediate neighbourhood of Corinth, and which were called the Isthmian games. In these, prizes were proposed, amongst others, to those who excelled in running and in boxing; to these especially the apostle refers in the text, as illustrative of that spiritual race and conflict in which he was engaged. "I so run not as uncertainly," or *obscurely*.[1] He did not run as

[1] ἀδήλως.

the racer did when privately exercising himself for the course, when he cared not if his exertions were occasionally suspended, or his attention drawn aside : but he ran as the racer when actually conflicting, when the prize was in view, his competitors by his side and ready to leave him behind, when the eyes of all the spectators were turned toward him, and when a few more efforts were to decide whether he should be crowned with glory, or depart disgraced from the field. " So fight I, not as one that beateth the air," not as the boxer strikes to the right or to the left, when he is only exercising for the conflict with an imaginary foe : but as when his formidable antagonist is before him, parrying his blows, and endeavouring to strike him to the ground ; when the slightest failure in watchfulness may produce defeat, disgrace, or even death. Such is the emblem which St. Paul makes use of, to represent the conflict he had daily to maintain, in " making his calling and election sure." " *They* did it to obtain a corruptible crown, but he an incorruptible." And the contest belongs not, my brethren, to St. Paul alone, it is ours also ; to us the prize is exhibited ; to us the enemies are opposed ; we too are " made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men ; " to us, victory is glory, eternal glory ; defeat is " shame and everlasting contempt."

The apostle tells us who the enemy was he had to contend with, from whom he apprehended special

danger. It was not indeed the only foe he had to combat, but it was one always ready for the conflict, always at hand to avail himself of every opportunity; —this foe is the body. The terms the flesh, the body, the members, are often used by the Apostle to represent the corrupt and carnalized state into which the soul of man as a fallen creature is sunk. With this no parley is to be held, no quarter given to it; it must be destroyed without mercy, its very existence is inconsistent with the happiness and almost with the safety of the Christian. But here the apostle does not speak of an enemy that is to be utterly destroyed, but of one who is to be mastered, kept under, and reduced to a state of subjection and servitude. This is then the body with all its members, which was originally given to the soul as its servant, capable of performing the most important services, but which, in our present fallen state, has risen in rebellion, and even ventures to usurp dominion over the soul desirous of returning to God and being reconciled to him. While the soul continues to be subject to Satan, the body readily yields all its members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but no sooner does the work of regeneration and renovation commence, than it shows the utmost unwillingness to render them instruments unto holiness; it is perpetually throwing obstacles in the way of the man who desires that God may be glorified in him and by him; hence it becomes the source of much danger

to every one who is "working out his salvation with fear and trembling." This is a subject with which all must be in some degree acquainted, who have ever applied themselves to the work of religion with seriousness. Yet it is necessary that it should be illustrated a little more fully.

The apostle in the passage before us, is asserting the right of the minister of the gospel to a proper maintenance from the people of his charge; but then he observes, that owing to peculiar circumstances he had never insisted on this right, while preaching Christ and his salvation among the Corinthians; but he had "laboured with his hands" as a tent-maker, to support himself and those that were with him, lest the people should say, that he "sought not them but theirs," and was turning the gospel into a source of wealth. This led him to refer to other sacrifices which he made, and other hardships which he endured in the discharge of his ministry. Now to all this the body would raise opposition; it would call for indulgence, it would require ease, it would shrink from suffering, and so persuade St. Paul to relax his exertions and to consult his ease, enjoyment, and respectability. Complied with in one instance, it would have advanced fresh demands for indulgence, till it had robbed him of all his glory and joy, and left him a self-indulgent useless minister, of no use to the church, and of no benefit to the world. Such alas! has been the case in unnum-

bered instances, with those who ought to have been zealously engaged in preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ, to a perishing world. St. Paul was aware of the danger, and repelled it; and such also, you will readily say, ought to be the conduct of all who are put in trust of the ministry. You easily see, that we ought not to confer with flesh and blood. Without doubt it does apply to us—but my dear friends, the danger attaches to you also.

Are there not many things, which in your consciences you know you ought to do—things in which the honour of God is concerned—things whereby you might be of signal service to your brethren—things whereby you might do much good to your own souls? but they are not done,—and why?—Because your body advances a claim to indulgence incompatible with the performance of these duties: and therefore they are neglected. Take an instance or two to explain what I mean, and to enable you to apply it to other cases. You are, it may be, necessarily engaged in business, so as to have little time at your own command; you feel that your soul does not prosper and remain in health, for want of more retirement, more leisure for searching the Scriptures, for meditation, and prayer. That time you might obtain by rising earlier in the morning or giving less of your evenings to company;—but here the body wars against the soul—it claims indulgence and gratification;—sloth and love of ease prevail, and you go on, year after year injuring

your soul, and living in darkness and in doubt, because the body cannot bear to be denied.—You look around you, and see many suffering from poverty, or you see many important designs failing from want of support. You acknowledge the Christian duty of being "ready to distribute and glad to communicate," but you live so nearly to the extent of your income, that you can save little to give to the poor, little to help forward any pious design, unless you commence a system of economy such as you have never been used to. You must deny yourself many indulgences, which the body desires, but which the conscience says ought to be renounced. These may serve as instances to show how the body endangers the welfare of the soul, by sloth, and what is called innocent indulgence.

But we cannot look into the history of the church of God, without seeing that many both of ministers and private Christians, have found immense danger from other cravings of the body. What are called the pleasures of the table, the love of rich and delicate food, and of wine and strong drink, have made terrible havoc. Many an one by means of these, has made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. And where it has not proceeded to the full extent of the evil, it is well worth inquiry, whether numbers who are poor as well as those who are rich do not carry their desire of indulgence both in eating and in drinking, especially the latter, beyond that mode-

ration and sobriety, which ought to mark the Christian's conduct. The "man of might to mingle strong drink," is as much condemned in Scripture as he that is overcome by it; and it is not easy to calculate how much is expended on these excesses, how much which ought to be employed in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked; the body is indulged, while the soul is robbed and injured. Nor can we help adverting to the desire which the body feels after those grosser sensual indulgences, which are procured by a departure from the original institution of marriage; gross as they are, and destructive, as experience has abundantly proved them to be, to all true peace and enjoyment, even in this world, yet do they form a source of dreadful temptation; and by them have many fallen, whose rank and station in the church of God, as well as their age and religious experience, might have led us to suppose them placed quite out of danger. The melancholy history of David's fall, as well as numerous instances exhibited in the church in later days, all serve to add force to the exhortation which St. Paul addressed to Timothy, "Flee youthful lusts."[1] Lusts which, as St. Peter tells us, "war against the soul."

In these, and numberless other ways, the body, always shrinking from pain and self-denial, always hankering after ease and indulgence, becomes a

[1] 2 Tim. ii. 22.

most dangerous enemy to the soul. It is impossible for me to describe the various ways in which it carries on its destructive warfare. I have endeavoured to illustrate it by a few examples, but you can carry it into more particulars for yourselves. Let each man carefully consider his habits, his peculiar constitution, his accustomed indulgences; let him consider what those things are which most disturb his conscience, and which he feels it most difficult for him to renounce, and he will easily discover how, and in what respects, his body becomes the enemy of his soul, and exposes him to perpetual danger of coming short of everlasting life. Let us now—

II. Consider THE MEANS WHICH THE APOSTLE RESORTED TO, TO SECURE HIMSELF AGAINST THIS DANGEROUS ENEMY.

"I keep under my body and bring it into subjection." The word rendered, "I keep under" is rather peculiar, and seems to be taken from the practice of the combatants to whom the apostle had before referred; it literally means, *to strike under the eyes.*[1] In this way these persons assailed each other, each endeavouring to render his adversary incapable of seeing, and so unable either to direct his own blows, or avoid those of his antagonist. Such is the emblem St. Paul employs to show the

[1] ὑπωπιάζω.

earnestness he used to overcome the body, to render it incapable of mischief, and to force it to submit to, and obey the spirit.

It is most certain that Christianity knows nothing of self-denial, for self-denial's sake; it says nothing about self-inflicted austerities; it attaches no merit to penances and mortifications, such as the church of Rome has extolled in her imaginary saints. It teaches us that God hath given us all things richly to enjoy; and that while all is to be used with moderation, yet that every creature of God is good, and to be received with thanksgiving, of them that believe and know the truth.

But though all things may thus be lawful, there are times when all things are not expedient; and all things edify not: and therefore we are to take care, that we are not so "brought under the power of any," that we cannot at once give them up, when we find them leading us either to dishonour God, to injure our brethren, or to expose ourselves to danger. "I am persuaded," saith the apostle, "that nothing is common or unclean; but to him that thinketh any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean," and therefore must be shunned by him with the utmost caution, lest he should be guilty before God. And on another occasion he says, to a member of the Church of Corinth, who asserted his Christian liberty, and would not be brought in bondage of another man's conscience,

but would eat the meat that had been offered to an idol, without regard to the feelings of a weaker Christian; "Now walkest thou not charitably, destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died." And declaring the determination of his own mind, he says, "I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."[1] With a similar disregard to his own ease and indulgence, he avows in the passage before us, that nothing should induce him to forego his practice of labouring with his hands to "support himself, and those that were with him," that he might throw no obstacle in the way of the gospel: nature would recoil against all this, the body would crave the indulgence of support and repose, but it must be kept under, its claims must be disregarded, its clamour must be stilled.

Take one more instance from the history of St. Paul. The prophet Agabus had taken the apostle's girdle, and having bound himself with it, he said, "Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and deliver him into the hands of the gentiles." In consequence of this prediction, the disciples, and other friends who were with him, besought him with the most affectionate entreaty, that he would not go up to Jerusalem; his reply to them however was, "What mean ye to weep and break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound

[1] Rom. xiv. 15. 1 Cor. viii. 13.

only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus."[1] Here we see a man who conferred not with flesh and blood, a man who kept under his body, and all the feelings and the demands of nature, and brought them into subjection, when the glory of God, and the good of his fellow-creatures, called for the sacrifice of ease and liberty, yea, of life itself. My brethren, these things are written for our instruction; they are designed for our imitation. What then are the lessons which we are to learn from them? We should learn that there are other objects, for which we are to live, more important than the indulgence of our mere animal nature. The pleasure which we can enjoy from sloth, or the gratification of our passions, is common to us with the beasts that perish; but we were formed for nobler pursuits, for delights of a higher and more exalted character. The present life is of infinite moment to us, for short, uncertain, and full of trouble as it is, it is the space, the *only* space allowed us for securing our everlasting bliss: it is the only opportunity we shall ever have of doing good, either to the bodies or to the souls of our fellow men: but while we are seeking to gratify the appetites and passions of our bodies, while we are indulging in ease and slothfulness, the precious season is fast slipping away; soon it will be all gone, gone for ever, and eternity will alone afford us space in which to

[1] Acts xxi. 10—13.

lament our folly. And what are all these enjoyments, which the body craves of us, and would fain receive, though purchased at the price of present comfort and eternal bliss ? Are they not unworthy of our regard ? Are they not all things which can produce no real good to us. Yes, they are all in reality of little value, and must " perish in the using," while the good they hinder us from gaining is eternal and infinite,—good, such as the Lord of glory, in his infinite compassion, died to obtain for us, and in his boundless mercy, invites us to seek for, in the certainty of obtaining.

When therefore the body lets and hinders us in running the heavenly race ; when it acts as an antagonist, a formidable enemy in the good fight of faith, we must keep it under ; every indulgence it demands that impedes us in our spiritual course, must be denied firmly and resolutely ; and this, not because we attach any merit to self-denial, or would put it in the place of the Saviour's meritorious obedience and perfect oblation, sacrifice, and atonement ; but because we feel, that if the body be not thus kept under, it will inflict the most serious injury on our spiritual interests, that while we are caring for its gratification and indulgence, we are endangering the eternal happiness of the soul.

But as I said before, though the body may become one of our most dangerous enemies, it is not an enemy that is to be utterly destroyed and ex-

tirpated. No, it is only to be "brought into subjection." It shall live, but in a state of submission and servitude; such is the language of the text. Its members shall all become the instruments of righteousness; the feet shall be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, ready for every errand of mercy and of kindness; the hands shall labour, working that which is good, that there may be to give to him that needeth; the eyes shall be engaged in perusing the word of God and looking out for opportunities of benefiting man; the ears shall listen with fixed attention to the commands of God, and the truths of his blessed gospel; the tongue by nature an unruly evil, and full of deadly poison, shall "speak that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." Thus the body and all its powers, its health, its strength, and its energy, shall be all brought into subjection to God, and his most holy law; and in this way did the apostle shew the sincerity of his own language, "I desire that Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death." But I must pass on to speak briefly,

III. ON THE PECULIAR MOTIVE WHICH INFLUENCED ST. PAUL, IN THUS KEEPING UNDER HIS BODY, AND BRINGING IT INTO SUBJECTION.

It is a motive, which, it would at first sight appear, could only be felt by the ministers of the

gospel; but though it belongs principally to them, yet it bears an application to every Christian, in whatever station of life he may be placed. It is this, "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away."

The word rendered "cast away," is the same which is elsewhere rendered "reprobate."[1] It signifies any person or thing which is *disapproved* and *rejected*. "The stone which the builders rejected,"—cast away as *reprobate* and worthless.

The apostle here evidently carries his view forward to the great day, when we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, to undergo the final trial, by which our eternal state shall be decided. He was one who evidently "set the Lord always before him," and lived under the impression, that "every one must give account of himself to God." He did this as related to himself as a man, and as a minister. In that day, when the judgment shall be set and the books shall be opened, and every man shall be judged according to those things that are written in the books; all whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life shall be accepted; but all whose names shall not be found there shall be rejected and cast away. Who can conceive what will then be the force, the dreadful force of that word *cast away*—reprobate—eternally reprobate: to hear the Judge say, "I

[1] ἀδόκιμος—2 Cor. xiii. 5, 6.

never knew you; *depart* from me, ye workers of iniquity." How terrible for every one; but how unspeakably terrible to him who has "preached to others," whose whole employment has been about religion—whose business was to conduct others in the way to heaven, to bring them acquainted with Jesus the Saviour, whose blood cleanseth from all sin—for him to be *cast away*—to have it declared that he never truly believed in the Saviour he preached to others, never practised the repentance and the holiness of life he inculcated on them—never kept under his body and brought it into subjection, but while he preached self-denial, and mortification, and renunciation of sensual gratifications to others, was secretly under the power of those very things himself, and is only fit to be rejected and cast away from God, and from Christ, and from heaven, into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, to be for ever the companion of the Devil and his angels.

My brethren, you, perhaps, are sometimes ready to look up to those who are ministers, with a kind of envy, as if we had peculiar advantages,—and so undoubtedly we have, if we have but grace to improve them. But we have also peculiar dangers and disadvantages, which counterbalance our privileges. We have temptations, which others know nothing of, and who can tell how much more awful will be our doom, should we "fail of the grace of God." No zeal in preaching the gospel,

no nor the most enlarged success in converting sinners, will do any thing towards saving a man's own soul. His very preaching may prove his condemnation; the very persons he has been the means of bringing to Christ, may rise up against him and cover him with confusion, because he did not for himself keep under the body and bring it into subjection. What a motive then do these considerations supply, to urge us onward in imitating the conduct of St. Paul, as set forth in my text.

But, as I said before, though the motive applies with special force to those who sustain the ministerial office, it is not their's exclusively. Every man who knows anything of religion, and can answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?" ought in his station to be, if not a preacher, yet a teacher and instructor of the ignorant, and so he shares in the peril of teaching others, and being himself "a cast away."

I trust that there are here before me parents, who feel something of the awful charge given them (alas! how little is it generally felt) to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You endeavour to teach them the fear of the Lord—to make them know the Saviour—to lead them away from sin, and to serve the Lord. As masters and mistresses of families, I trust that others of you feel that the souls of your servants and domestics are committed to your care; and

that therefore you maintain a constant habit of family worship, and endeavour to render that worship as instructive and impressive as you know how. Others again, I hope, are occasionally employed in visiting their poor and afflicted neighbours, and leading them to the fountain of mercy and comfort; or endeavouring to instruct their children to read the Holy Scriptures—all these are important duties, duties which I would urge upon you in the strongest manner. Yet at the same time they bring you under the influence of the motive which governed St. Paul.

These children—these servants—these poor persons—these sick neighbours, may all receive incalculable benefit from your instructions, and yet you may be "cast away." They may all learn from you to know the "only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent," and yet you may have no practical saving acquaintance with him. And it will be so, if, with your superior knowledge, you fail to keep under the body and bring it into subjection.

Oh! then, my brethren, let us all cultivate personal, practical, experimental religion. Let not knowledge, nor even warm and excited feelings satisfy us. But let all our lusts and passions, yea even our most lawful desires, be brought into subjection, into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

SERMON XI.

2 CORINTHIANS XII. 14.

FOR I SEEK NOT YOUR'S, BUT YOU.

THERE was one part of the Apostle Paul's conduct which appeared strange to the Corinthians, especially as it evidently was not intended that other ministers should be required in this respect to follow his steps. This, was a fixed determination, that while he preached the Gospel at Corinth, he would take no reward or emolument from the people, but would do it freely without putting them to any charge. As he was a poor man possessed of no worldly property, he could only do this by spending a considerable part of his time in working as a tent-maker to support himself, and those who were with him. His determination was evidently owing to something which he had observed in the Corinthians—for we know with what pleasure and thankfulness he received the supplies sent him by the Philippians. He even tells the Corinthians that he had robbed

other churches, by accepting their liberality, while preaching the gospel at Corinth without any remuneration; and he tells them further, that as it had been ordered that the priests who ministered at the altar, should be supported out of the offerings and sacrifices, so the Lord had ordained that they who preached the gospel, should live of the gospel; yet he was determined that at Corinth at least, it should not be so done to him, but he would make the gospel without charge to them.

We are not very exactly informed of the reasons which induced St. Paul so determinately to adhere to this resolution; but he takes occasion to tell the Corinthians, in the words of my text, that he had a much higher object in view than the obtaining any portion of their wealth, however ready they might be to impart to him of their abundance; "Behold the third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be burdensome to you, for I seek not your's but you."

Our text affords much important instruction both to ministers and people. May the Lord enable us to derive that instruction, and to apply it to our own cases.

The passage before us teaches us

I. WHAT THE MINISTERS' OBJECT SHOULD NOT BE; and

II. WHAT IT SHOULD BE.

After having briefly considered these two points, we will,

III. Notice a few matters which result from them.

Then let us observe,

I. What was not the object of St. Paul in his ministry. "I seek not your's."

Disinterestedness is so very rare a virtue in this selfish world, that where it does really exist, it is scarcely believed; some deep project, some dark design is suspected, where disinterestedness, generosity, and benevolence are professed: such seems to have been the case at Corinth with respect to St. Paul; the people would not believe that he acted as he did, from a noble and Christian disinterestedness of spirit; they suspected that St. Paul had his means of making up, what he seemed to lose by preaching to them without any recompense. There is something very painful and mortifying in being thus suspected; yet we see St. Paul meeting the imputation with wonderful calmness, and complete command of temper. He challenges them to shew any instance of an attempt to turn the preaching of the gospel into a source of gain.

It is undoubtedly very pleasing to witness such a spirit of kindness and affection subsisting between a minister and his people, that while he faithfully dispenses to them spiritual things, they cheerfully impart to him of their carnal things; while he is earnestly seeking to do good to their

souls, they feel pleasure in shewing their love to him, by promoting the comfort of him and of his family by kind attention to his wants. I say there is something very pleasing in all this—something very consistent with Christian feeling—something which we should be sorry to see wholly done away with, even by a general and adequate provision being legally made for the support of the clergy. To borrow the emblem in the conclusion of this verse; if the children are not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children; yet it is fitting and right that the children should lay themselves out, for the comfort and support of their parents.

Yet still this point must be carefully looked to, and cautiously, nay suspiciously watched. If ever it should happen, that a person in one of our congregations should, by expressions of attachment to his minister, or admiration of his ministry, or by the kindness of his attentions, or the liberality of his presents, begin to feel that his minister ought to speak to him smooth things, to keep back what he does not like to hear, and to dwell only upon such topics as are pleasing to him; then things are arrived at a most dangerous state indeed. The man is endeavouring to bribe his minister to give him poison, instead of food—to cause the way of the Lord to cease from before him, that he may walk in a smooth and easy road to destruction.

Or if, on the other hand, the minister should feel the kindness, and attentions, and the liberality of his people so grateful to him—so conducive to the comfort of his life—or even so necessary to his support—that he should begin to think within himself, how may I best keep up the good-will of my congregation?—how may I so conduct myself in the pulpit and in the parlour, as shall be most pleasing to them, and draw forth more marks of their approbation, and keep up the stream of their benevolence, that already flows so sweetly and refreshingly to me and my family? When I say this is the case, danger, awful danger, is nigh. Soon will such a minister be tempted to think, that gain is godliness—soon will "the love of filthy lucre" defile his ministrations: the poorer members of his congregation will be neglected, because they possess not the means of satisfying his covetousness—while the rich and the liberal will be flattered—their sins will be unreproved—their worldliness will be connived at—and they will be encouraged to believe themselves true Christians, because they are kind and liberal to their minister, though they shew few other tokens of the Christian character. But such was not the conduct of St. Paul. Rich as were the Corinthians—ready as they would have been to extend their bounty widely to him in his poverty; yet, when he saw that he would be expected to deviate a little from his faithfulness, he would labour with

his hands, he would submit to any privation, rather than cast the shadow of a doubt over his conscience, when he would say, "I take you to record, I am pure from the blood of all men. I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God;" not the smallest contribution, not one token of affectionate attention would he accept on such conditions. He was not seeking *theirs*—he did not seek their money or their applause, no nor their affection and good will, as the objects for which he was labouring; he might gain all these, and yet be disappointed—deeply disappointed—so much so as to feel that he had laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought.

II. WHAT THEN DID HE SEEK? Hear his own words, "We seek not your's, but *you*." As if he had said, if you mean that I should be satisfied, I must have more than a share of your riches; more than your praise, or than your affectionate attention. You must "give yourselves unto the Lord and to us:" nothing less than this can satisfy me. If we saw a man drowning in the waters, it would not be enough for us that we gathered up some of his property, which he threw away while he was sinking; or that our efforts received the applause of the by-standers, or even the thanks of the dying man. No, we must have the man himself; we should think that we had done nothing till we had rescued him and placed him safely on the shore. We should say, We sought not

his but him. So saith the Apostle, " I desire above all things that you may be saved." " I became all things to all men, that by all means, I might save some." With what delight would a man of truly benevolent mind look back on the time, when he saved the life of some fellow creature, who was just sinking in the waters, or consuming in the flames ! He would put that down as one of the happiest days of his life, though perhaps he did not effect his purpose without much danger, or even suffering, to himself. But if a man could say, this is the business of my life ; my time and my strength are devoted to this one object, the rescuing of my fellow-creatures from destruction, and scarcely a day passes without my succeeding in saving the life of one or more who were ready to perish ; we should say that such a man must be one of the happiest of mortals. And yet, what would he effect ? Those very men whom he has rescued, in a very short time must fall into sicknesses, which will terminate in death, perhaps immensely more agonising than that from which he was the means of saving them. But when St. Paul said " I seek not your's but you." When he said to the Romans, " I am sure that when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." Or to the Corinthians, " now thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in

every place."[1] When, I say, the Apostle used such language as this, he referred to things immensely more glorious, than the preservation of thousands of human lives. He was glorying in the salvation of immortal souls, in delivering them from eternal death, in rescuing them from everlasting misery, and placing them in heaven's unceasing joys; this is what he meant when he said, "We seek not yours, but you." And oh! how mean do all other objects appear, compared with this! "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."[2]

Those, my brethren, who now endeavour to follow in the steps of St. Paul, and who, like him, esteem it a token of God's grace and goodness to them, that they are permitted to "preach unto the Gentiles" and to all their fellow-sinners, "the unsearchable riches of Christ," place before them the same object that he did. They look round on their congregations, and say, "We seek not your's," though you should give us houses full of silver and gold, though you should receive us as the angels of God, we shall not be satisfied; we are seeking *you;* you have gone astray like sheep that are lost, and we must bring you back again. You are sinking under the billows of divine wrath, and we must try to save you. You are

[1] Rom. xv. 29. 2 Cor. ii. 14. [2] Dan. xii. 3.

" without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world," and we must bring you to the Saviour, that you may know him, " whom to know is life eternal."

Think not, my friends, that we are harsh and uncharitable in thus judging of your state as one of great danger. We must either consider, that every man born into the world, is exposed to the peril of eternal destruction, or we must disbelieve our bibles, and declare that it is *not* " a saying worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." If we really believe that you are in danger of perishing, it is only charity and love to tell you our convictions and our fears, and to persuade you to flee " from the wrath to come." He is not the charitable man, who sees his neighbour's house on fire, and will not disturb his slumbers, lest he should alarm him ;—but he shows charity and love, who rushes through the flames to awake him, and will not cease till he has brought him safely out of the fire. Such are *our* feelings towards you, if we are worthy of being called the " ambassadors of Christ." We seek you, and till we have reason to hope that your souls have been brought to Christ, and are placed out of danger, we must not, we cannot rest.

III. Let me now notice as THE RESULT OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS some of the peculiar effects and feelings, which will be produced on him who can say, " we seek not your's, but you."

I have already said enough to show you, that a man who in this respect enters into St. Paul's feelings, must experience great anxiety with regard to the success of his ministry. His object is so high, so infinitely important, that the very idea of a failure is beyond measure distressing. To lose money, to lose reputation, to lose the affections of his people is painful, but to lose *them*, to fail of winning their souls to God, not to have them for his joy and rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus, not to have to present them before the glory of his presence with exceeding joy, this is the heaviest calamity which can befal the minister of Christ.

If such then be his feelings with regard to the ultimate success of his work, he must have some seasons of great joy, but many more of deep sorrow. I will advert to a few of these.

Though we know that the success of our ministry is by no means proportioned to the numbers collected together to hear us; and though we should guard, with the greatest care and watchfulness, against that pride and vanity, which would cause us to rejoice in popularity, and to be elated by seeing large congregations assembled to listen to us; yet the man whose heart is full of love to the Lord Jesus, and is anxious to see good done, cannot but feel thankful when a wide door is opened and effectual; when the numbers are large, to whom he has the opportunity of recom-

mending the gospel of Christ, as the means of their everlasting salvation.

Nor, on the other hand, can he refrain from being grieved, when he perceives that the number of people who come to the house of God, is small, compared with the number of inhabitants in his parish; or when he sees that they are unsteady in their habits of attending on divine worship, and are easily drawn away to parties of pleasure, and are willing to give up the sabbath to employments and pursuits, wholly at variance with the intention of that holy day.

But how painfully does he feel this, when those are thus drawn away, whose attention, whose earnestness, whose strong feelings, nay, whose very tears, have attracted his notice, and excited a hope in his mind, that he should soon have to rejoice in seeing them give themselves unto the Lord. To find that such an one is absent from his place on the Lord's day, to be told that he is gone to join the Sunday party, that for one sabbath at least he has laid aside all thought of religion; this is painful indeed to him who can say, "we seek not your's, but you." Perhaps the minister had on that very day taken into consideration the peculiar state of such a person's mind, and with much thought and care had prepared a discourse suited to his case, something which he judged likely to lead him forward in the road to heaven; but on entering his pulpit, he finds all his designs frustrated, and

his hopes disappointed. The person he had in view, whose benefit he was specially seeking, is gone, he knows not whither.

I will mention another thing, which is often a source of much discouragement to those, whose desire it is to save the souls of the people committed to their charge. This is, the difference which is too often seen between the morning and the afternoon congregations. I am quite aware that there are many circumstances which, apparently will combine to prevent some persons from attending on both services ; but we well know that where men's hearts are thoroughly engaged in religion, they generally contrive to surmount these hindrances. They are glad when it "is said unto them, let us go up to the house of the Lord," and therefore they will "not forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is." Only consider, my friends, how short is the time we give to religion, how small is the space allotted to all our public services, compared with what we give to business, to sleep, or even to pleasure. And shall not the minister's heart be grieved, when he beholds how grudgingly his people, the persons he is seeking, give even that little to God and their own souls, and hears how miserably unsatisfactory are the reasons they give for their neglect. He cannot help it, he must grieve over this proof of his want of success. And when a large congregation is assembled, when the field

seems already ripe for the harvest; and the minister is ready to hope, that he shall sow the seed of the kingdom in many an honest and good heart, that he shall give the bread of life to many an hungering soul;—how sadly disappointed does he feel, on casting his eye around the church, to see numbers of the people either fast asleep, or so drowsy as to be utterly incapable of hearing, with any profit, the truths of the everlasting gospel which are preached to them.

But let us turn from these painful subjects, from these sources of disappointment and sorrow, with which the faithful servant of Christ is, alas, too well acquainted. There are, indeed, many things which have a tendency to make his hands hang down, and his knees wax feeble: but there are others which fill his soul with joy and gladness, and cause him to prefer his employment, to all others in which man can be engaged. Here he is a worker together with God, and when he works successfully, his heart rejoices.

But what is it which so cheers the spirit of the minister of Christ? It is when he sees the sinner, listening with earnest attention to the calls of his dying Saviour. When he sees the tears of sorrow and penitence, flowing from the eyes of one, whose heart has heretofore been hard and impenitent. When he is told, that "the wicked is forsaking his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Then he seems to share the joy which

fills all heaven, when it is heard there, that a sinner is brought to repentance, to faith in the Lord Jesus, to holiness of heart and life.

In such a one, the servant of Christ rejoices, he sought him, and he is found. That repenting sinner shall be his joy and crown of rejoicing, in the day of the Lord Jesus. Nay, more, he shall shine at last as a bright jewel in the Saviour's crown. This is joy that shall continue through everlasting ages.

May God in his boundless mercy grant, that during the short period which I may hope to live among you, I may be enabled to keep this in view, that I seek not YOUR'S, but YOU, and may I have to rejoice that my labours are not in vain in the Lord.

SERMON XII.

HEBREWS iv. 15, 16.

FOR WE HAVE NOT AN HIGH PRIEST, WHICH CANNOT BE TOUCHED WITH THE FEELING OF OUR INFIRMITIES; BUT WAS IN ALL POINTS TEMPTED LIKE AS WE ARE, YET WITHOUT SIN. LET US THEREFORE COME BOLDLY UNTO THE THRONE OF GRACE, THAT WE MAY OBTAIN MERCY, AND FIND GRACE TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED.

THIS Epistle does not bear the name of the writer, yet the voice of antiquity, and much internal evidence, serve to satisfy us that the title given to it in our Bibles is correct, and that it was written by St. Paul; who, aware of the hatred borne to him by some of his countrymen, and the prejudices entertained against him by others, judged that it would be more favourably received if it appeared without his name. The chief object of the epistle was to shew the Hebrews or Jews, that Christianity was the completion and perfection of the Jewish religion; that if they had understood the writings of Moses and the prophets, they would have been prepared to expect exactly such a change as Christianity had produced.

One principal feature of the Levitical system

was the establishment of the office of the High Priesthood, which was confined, under the law, to the family of Aaron; while the regal power, "the sceptre," was "not to depart from Judah." This arrangement, as far as regarded the priesthood, was only temporary, because God had foretold by the Psalmist, that there should be another priest, not after the order of Aaron, but of Melchisedec, who united in himself the offices of priest and king; offices which could never be united in the same person so long as the Levitical priesthood lasted. The promise therefore of a priest for ever after the "order of Melchisedec," imported a change of the law, which took place when Christ appeared. When he took upon him the priestly office, the Aaronic priesthood passed away; the Temple was destroyed, and now for eighteen hundred years there has been no temple, no priest, no more offering for sin.

It is to this High Priest, that the Apostle refers in my text. Let us then consider—

I. THE CHARACTER OF OUR HIGH PRIEST.

II. THE CONSOLATION THEREBY AFFORDED US, AND THE DUTY TO WHICH WE ARE IN CONSEQUENCE CALLED.

I. Let me call your attention to the CHARACTER OF OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST.

In the commencement of this epistle, the inspired writer exhibits the native glories of our Lord Jesus

Christ. He sets him forth as the Son of God, by whom, in these last times, God has spoken unto us, instead of addressing us through the prophets, as in times past he had spoken to the Fathers. This Son of God, he shows us, is the same "by whom the worlds were made;" who is the object of the worship of all the holy angels, and consequently ranks above them and all created beings. To him is given everlasting power and boundless authority, so that the language of the holy Psalmist is to be applied to him, "Thy throne, O God is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom."[1] Yet he who thus ruleth over all worlds, is the very same as is here described as the high priest of his church, "the priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec."

Before we enter upon the consideration of other particulars of the character of Christ, as the high priest, it will be necessary first to advert to some of the peculiar duties of the office which are referred to in the passage before us.

Particular allusion appears to be made to the service of the high priest on the great day of atonement. "Every high priest," as the apostle says in the beginning of the next chapter, "taken from amongst men, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts, and sacrifices for sins." He was accordingly to offer

[1] Heb. i. 8. Psalm xlv. 6.

the sacrifice, which was to make the atonement. One day in the year he took the blood within the veil and sprinkled it before the Lord, and so made an atonement for the sins of the people. On Aaron and his sons in succession also did it devolve to take the scape goat, and after laying their hands upon its head, to confess over it all the sins of the people, and send it away into the wilderness, typically bearing the iniquities of Israel.

By the sacrifice which was slain and burned upon the altar, was represented Christ bearing the wrath of God for us—" suffering the just for the unjust," because " the Lord had laid upon him the iniquity of us all." By the scape goat which figuratively bore the sins of the people into the wilderness, into a land of utter forgetfulness, was represented the full and complete manner in which the Lord Jesus takes away and removes out of sight the transgressions of those who believe on him. Their sins are " blotted out," " remembered no more," " washed away," " buried in the depths of the sea," " covered as with a cloud."

But when the high priest, taking the blood of the burnt offering, went within the veil, and having there sprinkled the blood, offered his prayers and supplications on behalf of his offending people, we have another view given us of the work and office of Christ. We here see Aaron and his successors acting as mediators for Israel. They indeed dared not approach unto God without shedding of blood

—they relied on the blood of others. But when Christ, having offered himself a sacrifice to God for the sins of the people, ascended into that holy place, which was only feebly typified by the holy of holies in the Tabernacle, he entered into the presence of God, not with the blood of others, but with his own blood, whereby, as the apostle says, "he obtained eternal redemption for us."

It is to this peculiar employment of Israel's high priest, that the Apostle has a special reference in the text. Aaron and his sons were the intercessors and mediators for Israel. Christ, as the high priest, is the mediator between God and man, the advocate and intercessor of his people.

In the preceding verse, the Apostle says, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." How great Jesus our high priest is, had before been shewn, when he was exhibited by the Apostle, as the Creator of the world, and the object of the worship of the heavenly host. There is at the first view something in the *greatness* of our high priest which might seem to appal the mind. To approach such an exalted being, is to approach God himself, and we are ready to shrink back and say, we are not worthy. We can indeed perceive that to have for our advocate and intercessor, one infinite in power, is an immense advantage; but when to his boundless power we add his infinite holiness, we are ready to

shrink back, and we feel as though we dare not spread our cause before our advocate himself, lest he should upbraid us, and despise us because of our infirmity and sin. Such a feeling would be natural enough, had we only a knowledge of our mediator as our great high priest, the Son of God, but every such idea is chased away from our minds, when we read the words of the Apostle in the text. Here we find that he is not only great, but merciful, not only merciful, but that he enters into all our feelings, sympathises with us in all our temptations, and even feels compassion toward us, when those temptations have overcome us and filled us with guilt and remorse. Mark, my brethren, the declaration, "We have not an high priest, who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." What an extraordinary union of apparently contradictory qualifications do we here behold. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and therefore able to sympathise with us. He took part in our nature, and was made like unto us in all things; as sensible of pain and weakness, of hunger, and of thirst, as we are. He had felt the pressure of poverty and want, and endured the distress which unkindness and contempt occasion, more than any of us. Nor has he lost the recollection of them, now that he hath entered into heaven for us. He remembers that he was man upon earth, that he was in the

form of a servant, that he was hungry in the wilderness, and faint and thirsty at the well of Sychar, that he had to encounter the slight and scorn of those whom he came to save. He remembers all this, and knows how hard it was to bear. But more than this, he remembers how wants and privations and sufferings, were made by Satan, the occasions of temptation;—of temptation to sins, the very suggestion of which to his mind, filled him with horror and distress almost intolerable! What force is there in the expression of the Apostle, "He *suffered* being tempted," as it is applied to the Son of God, the holy Jesus. *We* are tempted, but we do not suffer, because we have not that holy abhorrence of sin which he felt; our evil hearts, even in those instances in which we do not yield, are too often on the tempter's side, and place before us the delights of compliance in such a way, as to make us long for the forbidden pleasure. But with Jesus sin was odious, and therefore temptation to sin was suffering. And the more he felt of agony from the assaults of the tempter, so much the more does he feel for and compassionate us, when he sees us engaged in an unequal contest with an enemy, whom he himself could not conquer without the severest conflict.

Still, however, he did conquer; the efforts of Satan wholly failed. When the prince of this world made his most furious attack, he found that there was nothing in him, from which he could

gain any advantage; no evil heart of unbelief, no hard thoughts of God, no inclination to oppose his will to that of his heavenly Father; but all was purity and holiness, and though Satan could cause him to suffer by his temptations, he could not cause him to sin; here his malicious efforts failed; though "tempted in all points, he was yet without sin."

Let us now observe how all this qualified him for the office which he holds in heaven, as our high priest, our intercessor, our mediator.

Were we taught to address ourselves to one of the glorious company of angels that surround the throne of God, and to employ him as our high priest and intercessor, we might feel that we had a holy and exalted advocate; but we should be sensible that he had no communion, no common feeling with us; he could not put himself in our place; he could not realize the force of the temptations which assault us; he could not feel for our weakness, or pity us when fallen, because he had never partaken of our nature, never experienced our trials, never felt our infirmity. He would be kind and merciful, no doubt, but we should feel as a sick man sometimes feels, when he is talking to one who has enjoyed uninterrupted health; or as a poor man, when he is spreading the distress of his family, before one who never knew a want; the healthy man may be kind, but he is not tender, as one who himself has felt the

sorrows of a sick bed ; the rich man may be liberal, but he cannot realize the feelings of the poor, as could one, who has himself been forced by poverty to ask, what shall I eat and what shall I drink? But when we turn to Jesus the Son of God, the one, the only mediator between God and man, we find that he is a high priest " who can have compassion on them that are ignorant and out of the way," because he himself was once compassed with infirmities,—was once subjected, in the depth of his humiliation, to the same trials and temptations which we now labour under; and though he never failed, nor was ever overcome, yet, standing as he now does at the right hand of God, in human nature, he remembers how hard the conflict was even to him ; and he looks with pity on our weakness, over which Satan has again and again prevailed ; he does " not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax ;" he does not upbraid the penitent, but speaks peace to his troubled breast.

Again : were we bid to look to some one of our fellow-creatures, and rely on him as a mediator ; we should feel at once, that however such a high priest might suit the typical and shadowy system of the mosaic law, he could afford no comfort to the perishing sinner. He might enter within the veil of the tabernacle, after having offered a sin-offering for himself; but such a one could not enter into heaven, the true holy place, to appear before God for us. No ! he would himself want

a mediator; he dare not approach the throne of God, even to plead his own cause; conscious guilt would stop his mouth; how, then, could we rely on such an advocate? How could we commit our immortal souls into the hand of one, who himself was not only "encompassed with infirmities," but with sins also, as is the case universally with even the best of Adam's posterity. When, therefore, St. John would describe the Christian's hope, he says, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."[1] "JESUS CHRIST THE RIGHTEOUS," "who was without sin," and yet was the *propitiation* for the sins of the whole world. His righteousness was pure and spotless, and his blood was the propitiation. Here is the distinction between Christ, and all other intercessors. We may, we ought, to offer up our prayers and intercessions for one another; but those prayers and those intercessions must be presented through the great high priest, and in dependence on his merits; from us they derive nothing; no one of us is without sin—no one of us ever made any propitiation even for ourselves, much less for any of our brethren.

But we want, we ask for, no other mediator than him who is gone into heaven, after having

[1] 1 John ii. 1, 2.

offered himself as the sacrifice for us; and who now sitteth at the right hand of God, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Let me beseech you, then, my Christian brethren, to "consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Christ Jesus," reflect much and frequently upon the inestimable privilege you possess, in having such an advocate; one who has shed his blood to purchase your salvation—who is great, as the Son of God—who having been man, is touched with the feeling of our infirmities—who having been tempted like as we are, enters into all our feelings, and is acquainted with all our struggles—who being without sin, can plead his own perfect merits, as well as his expiatory sacrifice of himself on our behalf. Seek for no other mediator, but commit the care of your immortal interests into his hands, in the full assurance that "he is able to save to the uttermost, all them that come to God by him."

This brings me

II. To consider THE CONSOLATION AFFORDED US, BY THE STATEMENT OF THE APOSTLE, AND THE DUTY WE ARE CALLED ON IN CONSEQUENCE TO PERFORM.

"Having such an high priest, let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Prayer is ever spoken of as one of the highest

privileges, as well as the bounden duty, of every man. That a sinner should be permitted to approach his offended Creator, and ask blessings which he wants, both for his body and his soul, ought to appear marvellous in our eyes. But still we must feel appalled, notwithstanding the permission, at the idea of presenting ourselves immediately before Almighty God—before that God who is a Spirit, whom no man hath seen nor can see. The mind is lost in reflecting on the immortal, eternal, and invisible God. Man, however holy, would feel as though he could maintain no intercourse with his Creator; but God hath condescended to our infirmities. He doth not alarm us by his uncreated glory, but sets before us as the object of our prayers and of our dependence, his own Son bearing, even in heaven, our nature. We are taught to address the Father through him, to expect all from *his* hands; and of him we are assured that he enters into all our concerns, feels for all our sorrows, and takes the deepest interest in our welfare.

Having then such an high priest; having such an access to the Father, we may regard him as seated on a "throne of grace." Having appointed as our advocate, one who feels for us, and is so deeply concerned in all that relates to us, we may be assured that God is *love* toward us his guilty creatures—that he willeth not the death of a sinner, but that he should repent and live. A

Monarch, who should visit a rebellious province, and make proclamation that on a fixed day he would appear in public, and having taken his seat, would admit to his presence every rebel who was willing to lay down his arms, would grant him a free pardon, and confer on him honours, and estates ; might be said to be a " throne of grace." Such is the conduct of the Lord our God toward us, who have spent a large portion of our lives in rebelling against him and setting his authority at defiance ; he is on a throne of grace ; but still we need an advocate, one to plead our cause—our case is so bad—our rebellion has been so complicated, so aggravated, so inexcusable, that we dare not ourselves even plead before a throne of *grace*. But we have such an advocate as we want—one who is so kind, who takes such an interest in our case, that he will be sure to urge our petition with earnestness, who is so high in the favour of our God, that " the Father heareth him whatsoever he asks," and therefore he cannot plead in vain.

Having then such an high priest, we may come *boldly* to the " throne of grace." We may come with humble, yet unshaken confidence, that we shall not be driven away with indignation ; but that we shall be accepted and blessed of our God for the sake and through the merits of our Redeemer. Surely, had we not met with that word " boldly," placed in such a connexion by the pen

of inspiration, we dare never have so employed it; we should have thought that, coming with David's petition on our lips, "O Lord, for thy name's sake pardon my iniquity, for it is great;" we could never have risen to a higher degree of boldness than was evinced by the humbled publican, when "he would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, and said, God be merciful unto me a sinner." True humility arises from a strong sense of our unworthiness of the blessings we ask, and not from a fear of those blessings being refused us; in this sense, while we have all the publican's humbleness of mind, we may still "ask in faith nothing doubting;" we need not feel as he did, who once said to Christ, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean;" but we may come boldly to God on a throne of grace, confident that his love is as great as his power, and that he will not send us empty away.

But for what may we, and for what ought we, to come thus boldly? It is for *mercy*. Surely this is enough to keep us from all presumption; we have one thing above all, that we want to obtain of God, through Christ; it is *mercy*. We are rebels, condemned already for the highest crimes; and we want mercy to stay the uplifted sword of justice which is just ready to fall on our guilty heads;—we have committed numberless sins, and we call for boundless mercy; such mercy as will pardon them all. Nor have we only to look

back upon sins committed in past years, the recollection of which fills our souls with alarm ; but there are the transgressions of every day as it comes. Here is nothing right—nothing done as it ought to be—while in many things there is clear and open guilt. The penitent will say, 'It would be wondrous mercy that would blot out all the transgressions of my past life ;' but were God for Christ's sake to do this—to do it fully—to bury all these sins in the depths of the sea ; and then to say, "here my mercy must end ; I have forgiven thee enough, now take care—go and sin no more:" even though that word—"go and sin no more"—expresses the ardent desire of his most inmost soul, yet the sentence would drive him to despair. He knows that he cannot serve God as he ought,—his past experience assures him, that he shall want mercy every hour—the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life ; and that when the period approaches which shall decide his eternal state, his prayer will be like that of St. Paul for Onesiphorus, "The Lord grant that I may find mercy of the Lord in that day." Oh ! were the fountain of mercy closed, so that the best Christian upon earth could no more drink of it, his soul would sink at once into misery and despair. My dear brethren, have you ever felt the inestimable value of the privilege which the text calls on you boldly to exercise ? Have you been used to look on yourselves, as so ruined by sin, and so deeply plunged into guilt

that mercy is your only hope? Until this is the case, you will not perceive the value of such an high-priest, such an advocate as can secure mercy for you.

But our petitions are not to be bounded by calls for mercy. We are taught that we are, at the throne of grace to "find grace, to help in time of need." The word grace is used in the Scriptures in a very extensive sense. Every blessing, temporal or spiritual, which we receive from God is *grace*—it is all undeserved favour—good bestowed not only *without* our deserts, but *contrary* to what we have deserved. In the passage under consideration, it seems to refer to those supplies of wisdom and strength, which the Christian feels his need of, in his intercourse with the world, and when he is labouring to attain the salvation of his soul, or to glorify God upon earth. Such are times of need—times when unsupported he will fail, and make his weakness and his folly apparent. At such seasons he finds that of himself he can do nothing—God must be his helper, prayer must be his resource, the throne of grace his refuge. But who can conceive the comfort there is, when he recollects that he has a high-priest,—an all powerful advocate standing by the throne of grace to plead his cause! one who is touched with the feeling of his infirmities, and can supply all his deficiencies! with such an intercessor, he may in "every thing by prayer and supplication with

thanksgiving let his request be made known unto God—and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep his heart and mind through Christ Jesus." Am I then speaking to one who, after having lived for years in neglect of God and of religion, has now begun to feel the importance of becoming a Christian, a penitent, a believer, a new creature; but who, when he makes the attempt, finds such hindrances and difficulties in his way, as make it seem utterly impossible that he should succeed. Here is a time of need—all your difficulties must be overcome by prayer. Come then boldly to the throne of grace.

Are you one who is seriously inquiring after the way of salvation; and desiring to know the right path; but when you look into the Christian world, find such a diversity of opinions as perplexes your mind, so that you cannot tell what is truth and what is error? so that you fear lest even when you go to the Holy Scriptures, the fountain of religious knowledge, you should thence make out some heresy—some false religion for yourself? Here is a "time of need," a time when you want the gracious teaching of the Holy Spirit. Go then to the throne of grace; go, as feeling your ignorance, to your high priest, who is made of God unto you wisdom. Religion studied without prayer will never be studied effectually, even by men of the highest talents; they may obtain a knowledge of

it as a science; but they will never feel its sanctifying and consoling influence on their hearts.

Or are you struggling under severe temptations; terrified at the power of Satan, and expecting one day to fall by his wiles? Remember your high priest who has himself been tempted, and has learned to feel for you. He who prayed for Peter when Satan desired to sift him as wheat, will now intercede for you. Come then boldly to the throne of grace in this your time of need.

These times of need are continually occurring; and they will never cease while we are in this world. The command is therefore "to pray without ceasing;" "to watch unto prayer." Without prayer nothing will prosper; but if we come boldly to the throne of grace, all will go on well with us, and our eternal blessedness will be secure.

SERMON XIII.

LUKE xxiv. 47.

THAT REPENTANCE AND REMISSION OF SINS, SHOULD BE PREACHED IN HIS NAME AMONG ALL NATIONS, BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM.

THE passage from which these words are taken derives a peculiar interest from the circumstance of its containing the last conversation which our Lord held with his disciples, previously to his being received up into glory. Within a short period, their minds had been most grievously harassed and perplexed. Indeed it is almost impossible for us to conceive to what a degree this must have been the case with those who had been taught, from their childhood, to expect the coming of that glorious personage, of whom so much had been said, for ages, by the holy prophets. The disciples were indeed too spiritually-minded to look only for temporal benefits from his appearance, as almost all their countrymen did; but they were also too carnally-minded to look only for spiritual advantages; so that while they had willingly become the disciples of a master as poor,

nay, poorer than themselves, and were most cordially attached to him, and believed that he "had the words of eternal life;" and listened to his heavenly instructions with unfeigned delight; they nevertheless cherished the idea that he would "restore the kingdom to Israel." They most valued the spiritual blessings he proposed to them; but yet they anticipated others of a worldly and temporal nature. They conceived that their poverty and debasement were to last only for a little time, and then he would take to himself his great name, and reign gloriously. Such were the ideas they seem to have entertained, and so deeply fixed in their minds were these expectations, that their ears and their understandings were completely closed to all the intimations our Lord gave of his approaching rejection, sufferings, and death. When therefore these things came to pass, they were thunderstruck. Events so totally unlooked-for, so directly opposed to all their expectations and hopes, so contrary to every thing which they thought had been uttered by the unerring voice of prophecy, as the true sayings of God, completely overwhelmed them; their faith was staggered, and their hopes were sunk. And even when they saw him risen from the dead, their faith and hope scarcely revived. They were like men awaking from a dream, and knew not what to believe or what to hope for. They were ready to think that the promises of God had failed; especially when they

perceived that though risen from the dead, their master still took no pains to establish his kingdom, and even spoke of another speedy and lasting removal from them. All this was calculated to perplex them; though their perplexity and distress arose from their not understanding the Scriptures, and from their being slow of heart to believe.

But our Lord would not leave them in this state of doubt and anxiety. He opened their hearts, we are told, "to understand the Scriptures;" he showed them, that the sufferings through which he had passed, were all foretold; "that thus it was written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and rise again the third day; that without this, the great end for which he came into the world, could not be answered; that in this way, and in this way alone, could he be a Saviour, able to "save his people from their sins." But that now, having undergone all the suffering that was appointed him: having made a full, perfect, and sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; "repentance and remission of sins might be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Such is the connexion in which the words of the text are found. They present to us three points for our consideration.

I. The subjects of the Christian ministry, "repentance and remission of sins."

II. THE GROUND AND AUTHORITY ON WHICH THEY ARE PREACHED, "in my name."

III. THE OBJECTS TO WHOM THEY ARE ADDRESSED, "to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Let me then call your attention,

I. To the leading SUBJECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY—"repentance and remission of sins."

St. Mark, in detailing the same conversation, tells us that our Lord delivered this command to his disciples—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." To preach repentance and remission of sins, is therefore to preach the gospel; though there are some, who in their zeal to maintain the perfect freedom of salvation, would represent the preaching of repentance as legal. But the law knows nothing of *repentance*. It speaks only wrath to the transgressor, and never utters a syllable which can infer encouragement to him to repent; nothing was said to this effect, till a revelation of mercy was proclaimed. Then was it said, "let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon;" such is in fact the exact language of the text.

Though the subject of repentance is so common, that we all think we understand it, yet at the same

time it is so important, that it needs to be continually explained and enforced; for necessary as it is to every human being, yet, since it is a thing from which our corrupt nature recoils, we are apt to give so little heed to it, that many have very indistinct notions of what is meant, when the voice of the Almighty "commands all men every where to repent," and says to each individual, "except ye repent ye shall perish." The doctrine then, which we as ministers of God's word are to preach, is a doctrine in which *repentance* is to form a leading and most important point.

But what are we to understand by repentance? the question seems easy to answer, because in respect to temporal things we all know something of it by experience. There is not one, who when he looks back on his past life, does not fix upon certain parts of it, and contemplate them with regret. There was something in his conduct which, he now feels, disgraces him in the eyes of those whose esteem he values; something perhaps which has affected his circumstances in life ever since; something of which he will suffer the effect to his dying day. We say we *repent* of it; it costs us many an anxious thought, and many a vain wish that it never had been done; we cannot reflect on it without feeling vexation and disgust. And these feelings will keep pace with our consciousness of the *evil* of such actions. If, in reviewing our history, there shall be found a case in

which some part of our conduct has entailed upon us many painful consequences, and yet we are conscious that we acted right; that we obeyed the impulse of honourable feelings and upright principles, we may regret the effects which followed; we may wish that our circumstances had not been such as to make it our duty to act as we did; but we shall feel no shame, no self-abasement, no repentance. The consequences may be painful, but like the wounds received in valiant fight, they are tokens of honour.

It is the criminal, the foolish, the dishonourable actions of life on which we look back with shame, and of which we repent; and this may lead us to see something of what "repentance toward God" is.

As God is our Creator, his will and his law ought to be the rule of our conduct; and however we may dislike the idea of submission, we all know and feel that it ought to be so; we know besides, that in no one thing is that law otherwise than perfectly what it ought to be, "holy, just, and good;" for though in the tumult of passion, and when our ungoverned inclinations lead us to wish to do what is wrong, we endeavour to persuade ourselves and each other that we are excusable in doing that which pleases us, without regard to God; yet we cannot thus satisfy ourselves; and on this account most men live and die, in the vain attempt to defend themselves against

the remonstrances of their consciences, which will upbraid them with their transgressions.

Now our object as ministers is to add force and permanency to these convictions of conscience, to shew the justice of God's demands, to display the baseness of man's ingratitude in breaking his laws, and to set forth the tremendous consequences which must follow, where this is done. And thus we prove that a man ought to experience the same feeling of regret and shame, only in a far higher degree, when he reflects on the offences he has committed against God, that he does, when he recollects those parts of his life, wherein he so acted as to injure his worldly interests, and to disgrace his character.

My brethren, allow me here to ask whether you have ever felt any thing of this kind? I do not ask whether you have committed such things as you ought to repent of. Without any hesitation I charge every one with having done this, and with having done it repeatedly and extensively; listen but for a moment to your consciences, and they will urge home the charge quite as strongly, nay, far more strongly than I can do. But I ask whether, when you review the past, you feel sorrow, shame, and humiliation at the remembrance of your transgressions? God demands this of you, and it is the very first thing which he does require, and it is the first step you can take toward obtaining pardon and reconciliation with Him.

He can forgive no one, he can be reconciled to no one who is not sorry for his transgressions. I will not stop to argue the justice of this demand; you know and feel that it is right: and after all the efforts you use to palliate your sins, you are conscious that you are inexcusable, if you are not ashamed, confounded, and grieved at the remembrance of them. Has then, I ask, your closet been witness to your cries of penitential sorrow? Have you, with David, watered your couch with your tears? Have you, like Peter when he thought of his sins, gone out and wept bitterly? With the prodigal have you confessed, that you have so sinned against your heavenly Father, as to be "no more worthy to be called his Son?" With the publican, have you cried "God be merciful to me a sinner?" Alas! I fear there are many present, who are experimentally unacquainted with this feeling. Let me not appear uncharitable to you for intimating such a suspicion; I have indeed no right to judge, no right to say what has, or what has not passed between God and your own consciences; rather would I lead you to form an accurate judgment of yourselves. True repentance then is an *active* principle. He who is sincerely sorry for any thing he has done, takes care not to repeat the action, over which he grieves. He who is sorry for having offended God, will endeavour to do so no more. He who repents, will, by breaking off his sins and leading a new

life, "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." The penitent thief becomes an honest man; as far as is in his power, making restitution to those whom he has injured. The repentant profligate not only becomes outwardly moral, but inwardly pure; shunning the most distant approach toward his former transgressions. So it is with every one who repents; all sin becomes the object of his dread, but more especially that sin which has most power over him, and into which he has most deeply fallen.

Now my brethren, let me pray you to inquire and search diligently, after these fruits meet for repentance in your own experience. This is that *conversion*, that *practical repentance* of which so much is said in Scripture. Deal fairly, I pray you, with yourselves. There may be a variety of sins in which once you lived, but you have abandoned them because time has taken away your inclination for them; or because your circumstances having changed, your inducements are removed; or prudential motives may have led you to relinquish them; or it may be that the woes pronounced in Scripture on those who do such things has made you afraid to do them any more; all this may have taken place, and you may be congratulating yourselves on your improvement, and at the same time be utterly heedless of the calls to repentance addressed to you by the Scriptures and the ministers of God's word. You may have forsaken

some of your former sins, but probably you have exchanged them for others more suited to your time of life, or altered circumstances, or such as you can commit without that alarm which made you renounce your former practices. At any rate you have not forsaken them, because you were grieved and distressed at the thought of having offended God by them; you did not feel humbled and abased at the vileness of your conduct in committing them; notwithstanding all that which you look upon as reformation, there has been no conversion, and of consequence no real repentance unto salvation. We are, therefore, still bound to call on you to repent, to urge you to consider your ways, and turn unto the Lord your God; and till we have done this, with the utmost earnestness, we have not discharged our duty to you; until you have complied with the call, you have derived no advantage from our ministry, nor from any part of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; for this repentance is necessary to every man living, before he can have any share in that remission of sins, which is the second particular mentioned in our text as the subject of the ministry of the gospel.

The chief inquiry of the man who is awakened to see and feel the guilt and misery of his situation as a sinner is, How may my sin be forgiven and its penalty remitted? or in other words, "what must I do to be saved?" All other things appear to him as of comparatively trifling importance.

The object which the preaching of repentance is designed to effect is, to bring men into this state of mind; to cause them to see their guilt, their misery, and their danger, that they "may flee from the wrath to come;" that they may receive the offers of divine mercy, as they are made to us by God himself. Accordingly, when the angel was commissioned to announce the birth of Christ to the Shepherds, he said, "behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people; for unto you is born a Saviour—one who shall save them from their sins." Now my text says that remission—pardon of sin is to be preached to all nations. This is what renders the gospel so suited to us all—"all have sinned," but it offers pardon and remission of sins to every one. It assures us that every penitent sinner shall have all his sins put away—buried as in the depths of the sea—that they shall be no more mentioned unto him. "Though they be as scarlet shall they be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "I am he" saith the Lord, "that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." [1]

No language that we can use, can come up to the

[1] Isaiah i. 18; xliii. 25; xliv. 22.

extent of that full and free forgiveness of all sin which the Gospel assures us shall be granted to the true penitent. But since it might be said, that though remission of sin would fully exempt a man from deserved punishment, it would not entitle him to the reward of righteousness; the language of Scripture goes far beyond this;—it speaks not only of pardon but of justification, not only of remitting sins, but of conferring righteousness, perfect and complete in every part. A righteousness without works, distinct and separate from all merit of our own; "the righteousness which is of God," "unto all and upon all them that believe."[1] So that at the last day, the humble penitent shall not only stand before God as a pardoned sinner, delivered from eternal punishment; but as righteous, as made "the righteousness of God in Christ," and he will enter heaven claiming and receiving the reward of righteousness, not indeed his own, but reckoned to his account and imputed to him, through Him who was emphatically called by the prophet "the Lord," or Jehovah "our Righteousness."

This leads me

II. To the consideration of the GROUND ON WHICH THE WHOLE DISPENSATION OF THE GOSPEL, AND SUBJECT OF THE CHRISTIAN

[1] Rom. iii. 22.

MINISTRY RESTS. It is conveyed to us in the clause "his name," for Christ's name-sake.

This is, in fact, the peculiar characteristic of the Gospel. It abounds in promises and in blessings of the most exalted kind. It displays God, as merciful in the highest degree; it encourages the largest hopes even in the most guilty, when they become truly penitent; but all is for Christ's name sake; that is, for the sake of what he, as our mediator, our atoning sacrifice, our gracious intercessor in heaven, has done, and is still doing for us.

It is, brethren, of the utmost importance that we should keep this in view. We hear many talking of God's mercy in a general manner, as if it flowed a stream so rich, so free, so spontaneous, that all *might*, nay that all *would*, in some way or other partake of it. But rich, free, and spontaneous as that stream of mercy is, which maketh glad the city of our God, none shall be refreshed by its waters, but the humble penitent; and even he only for Christ's name sake. This applies to each of the grand topics on which I have been speaking; for though, as was observed, there may be some, who looking upon repentance as a work to be performed by man, are ready to think it opposed to the covenant of grace, and therefore call it legal; yet even this is to be preached in "his name." *But* for Christ, and his free salvation, repentance would never have been preached, it would have been of no avail; it could have done

nothing toward appeasing the anger of God, or removing the curse of the law. And even now, it is only acceptable to God through Christ. Were we to preach repentance as making atonement for sin; were we to say that the tears of the penitent washed away the stain of his transgressions, and purchased his pardon; then indeed we should "frustrate the grace of God;" we should infer that "Christ was dead in vain." Important therefore as repentance is, and essential to salvation, we ascribe to it no such merit or efficacy as this; it is a return to a right state of mind, and as such, is necessary, but it can make no atonement, no compensation for the past; that can only be effected by Christ and his sufferings, to which every penitent sinner looks by faith, as the ground of his hope.

There is a peculiar force in the expression, "that repentance should be preached in his name;" inasmuch as we are told, that "Him hath God exalted to give repentance," as well as "remission of sins."[1] To this every true Christian adverts in his own case, with feelings of unmingled gratitude; and every awakened sinner may refer to it with delight. The believer will say—'Once I was a proud and obstinate enemy of God; my heart was hard and unfeeling; in vain did the divine word sound in my ears, calling on me to repent; I was deaf to every warning, to every threatening, to every invitation. But at length that same Saviour who met

[1] Acts v. 31.

Saul in the way to Damascus arrested my progress. The arrow of conviction pierced my soul ;—in terror of conscience and in dread of destruction I cried, " Lord what wouldest thou have me to do ? " Then old things passed away and all things became new ;—then did Jesus my Lord give me " repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of." In the same manner may every awakened sinner, when, under the terrors of a wounded conscience, he still feels his heart hard and desperately wicked, look to Jesus, for this gift of his grace ; nor shall he look in vain. He will give him repentance, and that repentance shall be accompanied by faith : even that faith by which we receive remission of all our sins.

These are the things which are to be preached in Christ's name. These are gifts, which his hand bestows without money and without price, on all who are willing to receive them.

III. But I must say a few words on the latter portion of the text—THE OBJECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY—" ALL NATIONS."

This part of the subject occasions conflicting feelings in our minds. In one respect the sensations are painful, for what can be more grievous, than to regard the state of the whole world, as a state of apostacy from God ? to think of every man upon earth as being so criminal, that unless he repent, and receive gratuitous remission of his

sins, he must perish. Yet this is the view of the situation and character of all men, which is forced upon us, not only in those passages of Scripture which directly describe the wide-spread depravity of our race, but in those also which exhibit the extent of divine grace and mercy. Why did Christ die for all ; but because all were dead in trespasses and sins. Why is the saying worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ; but because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and therefore if saved at all, must be saved by grace. And why was the charge given to " preach the gospel to every creature," but because every creature under the whole heaven was lost without it. And why are repentance and remission of sins to be preached to all nations ; and why doth God command all men everywhere to repent ; but because all are in such a state that except they repent they must perish.

It is indeed painful to be compelled to make such reflections as these, respecting the whole race of mankind; it is painful to think that we must include in them all whom we hold dearest to us, and whom our affection would make us wish to think exempt from the general depravity ; but it is most painful of all to apply such reflections to ourselves, to be forced to acknowledge that if the Bible be the word of God, he hath there declared that we are in this alarming state of guilt and

danger, that we must repent and find remission, or our eternal ruin is certain. Oh, my brethren, how awful is this thought; and how strangely infatuated are we, that it produces so little effect upon us.

But if the text is suited to produce melancholy reflections, both with respect to others and ourselves; it is also intended to afford us inexhaustible consolation and delight. Be the state of the human race ever so bad; be our own situation ever so deplorable; there is no reason for despondency, so long as "repentance and remission of sins are preached to all nations." "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." And there is something peculiarly encouraging in the idea, that it was at Jerusalem that the proclamation of mercy was first to be made. Jerusalem had indeed for ages been favoured above all other places; at Jerusalem they had killed the prophets and stoned them that had been sent unto them. That generation had just filled up the measure of their father's iniquities, by crucifying the Lord of glory. And a short time before, our Lord, when he beheld Jerusalem, had wept over it, as being in the most hopeless state; they had not known the day of their visitation; the things belonging to their peace had been hid from their eyes. Every thing therefore that could aggravate guilt—everything that could render their case hopeless—seemed

to combine: still however the gospel was to be preached to Jerusalem; still its inhabitants were to be told that they need not despair; that if they would repent their sins would be blotted out; nay, that if they would ask, a spirit of repentance should be given them, for "Christ was exalted as a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins."

But though the gospel was first to be preached at Jerusalem, it was not to be confined to that city: it was to spread over ALL nations. We, my brethren, have lived to see the fulfilment of this injunction as to ourselves. There is not, among all the nations on earth, one apparently further off from God, than was our now favoured land, at the time that these words were spoken by the Redeemer. It was a land of darkness and of the shadow of death; but now are we light in the Lord. Already have thousands and tens of thousands of the inhabitants of this country heard and obeyed the call of the gospel; they have repented, they have found remission of sins, and are numbered among the saints, in glory everlasting.

It is for this end that the ordinances of religion are established and preserved; we, brethren, enjoy the clearest light of divine truth to direct our feet in the way of peace. Let us bless God for this inestimable privilege, and rejoice in his goodness towards us; but let us "rejoice with trembling,"

knowing that if the gracious message, declared to us in Christ's name be not received by us, and acted upon, and appropriated for our own individual benefit, it would have been better for us that we had never heard this ministry of reconciliation.

And while we rejoice, that "unto us is the word of this salvation sent," let us shew our gratitude for our distinguished advantages, by striving with all our power to spread the glad tidings far and wide, to cause repentance and remission of sins to be preached to those nations which are now sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, that so the knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent may be extended all over the world, and that happy time arrive, which we are encouraged to look forward to, when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." [1]

[1] Habakkuk ii. 14.

SERMON XIV.

PROVERBS xxiii. 26.

MY SON, GIVE ME THINE HEART, AND LET THINE EYES OBSERVE MY WAYS.

Though the writer of this book was the wisest of all mere men, yet if we read it only with that reverence which this consideration would inspire, we shall fail of obtaining all the benefit which it is intended to convey. Wise as Solomon was;—when left to follow the way of his own heart, he proved a sad example of the weakness of human nature. But there is in the book of Proverbs more than human wisdom, even such wisdom as Solomon evinced, when, having learned the folly of leaning to his own understanding, he prayed to God for a wise and understanding heart, and in consequence, received such a supply of the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge, as fitted him to become an infallible teacher of others. Though we may therefore in one view consider the text as an address of Solomon to his son Rehoboam, yet in another we must consider it as not the wisdom of Solomon, but the wisdom of God; not as a call upon Rehoboam to love and

obey his father, and to mark the conduct he would have him pursue, but as the call of God our heavenly Father, requiring us to give him our hearts, and yield him our constant regard and obedience. And in this way I shall now recommend the passage to your attention, while I

I. CONSIDER THE CLAIM GOD HAS TO OUR REGARD.

II. EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF THE DEMAND HE MAKES UPON US.

III. POINT OUT WHAT WILL BE THE RESULT OF OUR OBEDIENCE TO THE CALL.

I. Let us consider THE CLAIM WHICH GOD HAS UPON OUR REGARD,

In this and many other passages, the Most High, who inhabiteth eternity, and is from everlasting to everlasting, deigns to speak to us fallen and depraved creatures in the language of endearment. He speaks to us as his children, and vouchsafes to invite us to consider him as our Father, and to feel toward him as children feel toward a kind and affectionate parent. In this we see a striking instance of what he himself says—" my ways are not as your ways, nor my thoughts as your thoughts." It is not after the manner of men, that a mighty prince should address a slave and rebel as his child, and invite him to call him Father, and tell him to expect and ask from him all that a parent can bestow on a dutiful and affectionate child. Yet thus does

our Father which is in heaven address us; and though he knows all our wickedness, and is perfectly acquainted with all the aggravating circumstances that have attended it, and has seen the "evil heart" from whence it sprung; yet he passes it all by, and calls us his children, and asks, "wilt thou not from this time say unto me, my Father, thou art the guide of my youth." This is indeed wonderful; but there is perhaps one thing still more wonderful—and it is this;—though God is so kind to us, and offers us every thing that almighty power can do, and that infinite riches and love can bestow, to make us happy both now and for ever; there is scarcely any one who will pay regard to his gracious offers, "all day long hath he stretched out his hand to a disobedient and gainsaying people." Though "the wages of sin" is known "to be death," yet most men seem deliberately to prefer it to that "gift of God which is eternal life." It was so of old, when God spake to Israel by his prophets. It was so when the Son of God himself spake "gracious words," as "never man spake." It is still the same among you, to whom God now speaks by his word, by his ministers, by the convictions of your own consciences and the striving of his Spirit. Whether the Lord speak in mercy or in judgment, still he is unheeded; as the voice of a kind and indulgent father is often unheeded by an ungrateful and rebellious child.

Hence, my brethren, results the need there is

of this first division of my subject, the exhibition of the claims which God has upon our regard.

When God graciously assumes the character of our Father, there seem to be three things implied. 1. That to him we owe our being. 2. That from him we receive our support. And 3. That all our expectations and hopes for the future, must rest upon him. Let us inquire how each of these considerations should influence us.

1. God, as our Father, is the author of our existence. "He made us, and not we ourselves ; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." The connection between the two cannot be dissolved. If he made us, we are not our own but his ; and he has a right to dispose of us in what manner he pleases. This is the foundation of the authority which a parent has over his children ; an authority which God has confirmed and established by comprising it in the moral law, assigning to it a chief place in the second table, and making it the first commandment with promise. "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." However young people may dislike the restraint this law imposes, and may rebel against it, in a way which exposes them to the wrath of almighty God ; yet I am fully persuaded that there is no man who does not in his heart acknowledge that the command is perfectly consistent with right reason, that children ought to honour and obey their parents,

because to them they owe their existence. Yet it is true only in a very subordinate sense, that we owe our existence to our parents; but it is true in the largest and most extensive sense, of God. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." It was He who bestowed upon us our bodies so "fearfully and wonderfully made." It was He who "breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, and made us living souls." By his power it was that we commenced an existence which shall know no end. He gave us those faculties of body and mind by means of which we become capable of glorifying him, as well as of providing for our own necessities. In short, as all we have and are, come from his hands, so he has a claim upon us immensely higher, and more irresistible, than any earthly parent can advance, to the love and obedience of his child.

2. When God calls himself our Father, there is a reference to the constant support and provision which like a parent he has made for our necessities.

Though men be "evil," yet, generally speaking, they "know how to give good things unto their children," and are disposed to give them. Now and then, indeed, we meet with an unnatural parent who abandons his offspring to want and wretchedness, and seems by his conduct to renounce all claim to their love and obedience: but oftener is the behaviour of children such as almost to

compel their parents to give them up, in utter hopelessness of doing them any good, so obstinately bent are they on their own ruin. But neither of these cases bears the least resemblance to God's dealings with us. His perfect holiness and goodness, rendered it utterly impossible that he should act like parents of the former character; and his infinite compassion and long-suffering has, blessed be his holy name! prevented him from acting as the latter. Our sins indeed have been such as would have fully warranted him in casting us off for ever. Day by day have we "grieved and vexed his Holy Spirit." He might most justly have made the earth iron, and the heavens brass, that they might bring forth no support for us; He might have let loose every kind of misery, to sweep like whirlwinds through the world, till every spot was made empty and desolate; but, more than all, He might have pronounced a curse upon our souls, which should have sunk them without remedy into the pit of everlasting woe; and all heaven would have owned the sentence just. But there is nothing of the kind; the very threatenings of God are designed not to destroy, but to save. He seems to speak to us as he did to Israel of old, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierce-

ness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee." [1]

Such has been the tenderness of God to us. Look, my brethren, through all his dealings with you. Remember how he has fed you all your life long; how every want has been supplied; how every danger has been averted; how every sickness has been healed; and every fear removed. Remember how many domestic comforts you have had; how many kind friends he has raised up for you; in how many instances success has attended your plans; and where this has not been exactly the case, how many alleviating circumstances have soothed your disappointment. These have been instances of God's fatherly care over you, as to temporal things.

But stop not here—remember that you are also immortal beings, and sinners. The one renders the wants of your soul, immensely greater and more difficult to be supplied, than those of your body—the other makes you perfectly unworthy of any supply; a meet object of the divine displeasure for ever. Yet has God been a father to you—yea, immensely more than ever that relation implies. He saw you, as his rebellious child, rushing impetuously into every thing that was odious to him and destructive to yourself. Then it was that he called to you—that he warned you of your danger;

[1] Hosea xi. 8, 9.

then he sent his Holy Spirit to strive with your spirit, and to stop you in your mad career. And when nothing else could avail for your salvation, he sent his Son, his only beloved Son into the world to suffer and to die for you.

And if he has seen in you at any time a disposition to turn and repent, he has then been to you as the Father to the prodigal son, when he said, "Father, I am no more worthy to be called thy son." He has spoken of you at those seasons of compunction and penitence, as he did of old to Ephraim, "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."[1]

And now, my brethren, when we take even a hasty and slight review of what our heavenly Father has done for us, do we not see that he may advance the strongest imaginable claims on our gratitude and love?

3. But once more, as God is our Father, all our hopes for the future depend upon him. This is what the child feels with respect to his parents—ask him whence he expects his supplies for the future, the simple answer is, 'my father has supplied my wants hitherto, and he will do the same till I am able to take care of myself.' Just such is our dependance upon God, with this only differ-

[1] Jerem. xxxi. 20.

ence; the child may expect a time when he shall be able to provide for himself, and live without the aid of his parents, but we can look forward to no such state of strength or skill, as will make us independent of God. In his hand our life and breath have hitherto been, and so they will be to the end of our existence. And not with respect to our bodies only, but equally with respect to our souls, our expectation must be from him. If our future life be like the past, and internal corruption still remain to harass us, and Satan still spread his snares across our path, and the world still assail us with its dangerous frowns, and more dangerous smiles; all our dependence must be on mercy and on grace; on mercy to pardon, and on grace to uphold us. And even when we are sinking into the grave, and flesh and heart are beginning to fail, still this trust will be our only security; we must still look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life; still must we pray—'Suffer me not, O God, suffer me not, in my last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee.' Nor need we fear thus to live, and thus to die, fixing all our hopes on almighty grace; For he in whom we confide is our father, our friend, our strong salvation; and he has promised, "I will never leave thee, no, nor ever forsake thee." If God were to leave us, if our heavenly Father were to forsake us, if he were to close his bounteous hand; all his past mercies, great and innume-

rable as they have been, would avail us nothing ; our prospects would be dark and miserable, and would close in the blackness of everlasting despair.

Here then, my brethren, we see, that the recollection of the past, our present experience, and our expectations and hopes for the future, combine to enforce those just demands which the Almighty advances to our regard and obedience. And this leads me—

II. To consider THE CLAIM WHICH GOD AS OUR FATHER MAKES UPON US. "My Son, give me thy heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways."

The latter part of the passage seems to be only a recapitulation of the first ; a sort of practical view of the result of giving our hearts to God ;—this would manifestly be, a diligent observance of God's commands, an attempt at conformity to him, an aim to be like him. If we much love and admire any one, we naturally catch his manner ; we almost unconsciously imitate his example ; and are never better pleased with ourselves, than when we think that, in any instance, we have acted just as our friend would have acted, and have so observed his ways as to have become somewhat like him ; and such is the effect of that cordial love of God and admiration of him, which is implied in the claim which God here makes on each of us—"My Son, give me thy heart." It has been given to sin, to vanity and folly ; every trifling interest, every vain

amusement, every alluring pleasure has seized on our affections, and has held our whole soul in subjection ; on these our waking thoughts have been fixed ; and in the sleeping hours of the night, like gay phantoms, they have danced before our eyes, and made our midnight dreams partake of our mid-day pursuits. And yet we are conscious that none of these things can profit us, they are so vain, they are in themselves unworthy the affections of an immortal being, and the advantage they can confer on one soon passing into eternity, is too small to be regarded. In my text, the Lord calls on us to abandon these unprofitable pursuits, and to place our affections on real excellency, and on that which can put us in possession of real good. We have been hewing out to ourselves cisterns, that have all proved broken cisterns, and God invites us to return to Him, the fountain of living waters. "My Son, give me thine heart." Let us then inquire what this command comprizes.

1. The most evident meaning of the demand is, *Supreme Love.*

Whether we contemplate the perfections of the divine character in general, or dwell on the Lord's gracious and merciful dispensations toward us, the conviction of our hearts is, that God deserves our highest love. And such love does he require—"Give me thine heart." The heart, the centre and residence of all our affections, must be surrendered to him. He asks not for a share—he

will be satisfied with nothing less than the whole. Other regards and other affections may *dwell* there, but none must *rule*, but the love of God only. It never was meant that we should not love our relatives and friends ; nor that the enjoyments and interests of life, should have no place in our regards. But it was meant, and God will never relax from this demand, that every regard we may have for any creature, should submit and yield and be subordinated to the love of God ; therefore he says, " Give me thine heart," and " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart."

It is here that men's estimate of themselves, and God's estimate of them, are so irreconcileably contradictory. God charges them with not loving him at all ; they are quite sure they do love him, and are angry when told that they do not. The fact is, that if there be any regard at all to God in them, it is quite secondary—quite subordinate to self-love, or to the love of their friends, or to their love of the world, and the things thereof ; so that when their duty to God, and their attachment to these things come in competition, they immediately shew which rules in the heart, by neglecting and disregarding their Maker. How very hard would those persons, who are so offended by being told that they do not love God—how very hard, I say, would they find it, to point out even a solitary instance, in which they have really sacrificed any interest or any pleasure, or have refused

compliance with the wishes of an earthly friend, simply because they considered the thing required of them, as displeasing and dishonourable to God. Yet this ought not to be a merely occasional sacrifice to the love of God—it ought to be the hourly practice of our lives ; and where it is not the case, God will not allow that he is loved at all, any more than a prince would acknowledge that man as at all a loyal subject, who was in the habit of transferring his obedience to an usurper, whenever he found that his interest or pleasure could be promoted by the transfer ; such conduct would manifest a treasonable and rebellious disposition. Now God as the searcher of the heart, looks not so much at the outward act, as to this inward disposition ; the thoughts—the intents—the motives. When he says "give me thine heart," he calls for a constant and uniform intention and wish to make every other feeling of the soul submit to the love of God as the ruling principle. As the miser has his passions, and attachments, and inclinations, but every one of them completely subjected to the love of money—so in the godly man, every thing will be made subservient to the supreme love of his heavenly Father.

2. The surrender of our hearts to God, implies, a full and cordial approbation and acquiescence in God's appointments.

That surrender of the heart which God claims of us, is a reasonable service. It is just what his

divine character, and all his dealings with us, authorize him to claim from us as his creatures. The authority of God is not supported by infinite power alone, but by infinite excellency—and the reason, why we do not at once find our contemplations on the divine perfections, producing this effect upon us, and why we do not admire and delight in all his precepts and in all his appointments, is, that we are in our nature corrupt, and our hearts are depraved. It is not thus that his will is done in heaven; it is not thus that angels feel. No. They contemplate the works, and consider the ways of God, till they are lost in wonder, love, and praise; they approve and admire, and adore all they see and all they know of God, and only wish that they could find out the Almighty to perfection, that they might admire and adore him still more. And so it ought to be with us, for we were formed in the very image of God, and therefore prepared to love him, and to approve of all his ways; and though we have fallen from our first estate, and are very far gone from original righteousness, and have lost the image of God; this cannot alter the nature of true holiness, or admit of God's suffering us to love him less. His law and his gospel both say, "be ye holy, for I am holy." Love is the fulfilling of the law in both. And why should this seem a hard command? Why should it seem a burdensome task? Is there any creature, in heaven or on earth more worthy

of our love? Is there any one of the ways and appointments of God which is not holy, just, and good? Does not perfect wisdom, perfect justice, and perfect love direct every one of them? And if we do not approve them, and love them, is it not most clear that we have given our hearts to another, than that holy God who made us—that gracious God who hath upheld us, and on whom we must depend for ever? The call, thus to give him our hearts, may disturb us by reviving our convictions of guilt; but our consciences will never allow us to say, that it is unreasonable to require us, as rational creatures, to love and admire what is worthy of all love and admiration.

3. A hearty and cheerful obedience to God's will, and attention to his service are also required by the demand made in the text.

The law of God is, like himself, of perfect excellence; the ordinances he has instituted, are just such a modification of the employment of heaven, as suits our situation in this world. Were our hearts in a right state, compliance with the one, would give us such pleasure as angels feel, in obeying his commandments "hearkening to the voice of his word," and attendance on the other, would be as delightful to us, as it is to the redeemed in heaven to crowd around the throne, singing worthy is the Lamb that was slain. And accordingly we find David and St. Paul both speaking of the delight they felt in the law of God. The language

of the man after God's own heart is, "I was glad when it was said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." I have "loved the habitation of thy house, the place where thine honour dwelleth." "One day in thy courts is better than a thousand." And why was this, but because they had "given their hearts to God." They were, like Zecharias, and Elizabeth, "walking in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless." The service of a man in this state of mind, is a hearty, diligent, constant service, his worship is that "worship in spirit and in truth" which God, who is a spirit, seeks for and accepts. This is not making religion a task, or the ordinances of it a burdensome ceremony—no, it makes it a sort of heaven below. Oh! could we but feel this, we should then fully understand what our Lord meant when he said, "the sabbath was made for man," —for his *benefit*, his *comfort*, his *delight*, Then should we enter into the feelings of the Psalmist when he said, "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." [1]

Now then, brethren, can we, in taking this view, both of what God has been to us as a Father, and what he is in himself; and also of what he requires of us—can we say that his requirements are unreasonable or unkind? can we say that here is anything

[1] Psalm lxiii. 1, 2.

like a powerful superior exacting the extremity of right from an inferior? can we even think that God would have appeared more gracious, more kind, or more compassionate, had he said nothing of our giving our hearts to him; or of our being holy and like himself? Do we not see, do not our consciences testify, that it is the very thing we want to make us happy, and that therefore it was love and goodness which wrote it, as the first and great commandment of the law, that we should love God with all our hearts? But this may appear yet more fully when we consider,

III. The effect which will follow from complying with the call of my text.

This is not indeed stated in the words before us; but it is suggested to us by what follows, when Solomon goes on to show the misery and ruin, which uniformly flow from connections with bad women, and from habits of excess, which he adds as a reason why his son should give him his heart. Without entering into these particulars, we may make the reasoning *general*, and put it into the form of an appeal to the conscience of every one.

'Look back, my friends, on the time past of your life. What is it that has been the most fruitful source of trouble to you in the years that are gone by? what is it that makes the recollection of the past most painful to you? why do you sometimes

say, I wish I had my time to come over again? Is it not, because there are some things you have done, which have destroyed your peace; some duties neglected, some transgression committed which you cannot forget, and which you can never remember without distress and anguish? And if you could live your time over again, you think you would avoid these; but why do you think so? Could you trust yourself? Experience you say has made you wise;—it perhaps has, on the one point which affects you most, but it has not done it with regard to all sin. You commit transgression daily, so that if you shunned that evil, the consequences of which inspire your soul with dread, you would fall into others.

Now look back once more, and ask whether a surrender of your heart to God, would not have secured you. Had the fear and the love of God reigned within, instead of being harrassed with sorrow and regret, you would now be rejoicing in the testimony of your conscience; instead of being filled with forebodings for the future, you would have had a cheerful hope of blessedness in reserve for you.

Thank God, there is a remedy,—a sovereign remedy—for the past. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin; the Father is willing to meet the returning prodigal and to speak peace to his troubled breast, even "that peace of God which passeth all understanding."

And in gracious love, to keep you from falling into the same evils and the same distresses in future, he says, "my son, give me thy heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." Close at once, my brethren, close at once with the invitation, "give God your heart," so shall you "remove sorrow from your heart, and evil from your flesh;" so shall you be held up and be safe; so shall you walk in ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace; so shall your conscience be at ease; you shall enjoy present happiness, and be cheered with the assured hope of eternal glory; for you shall "be kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation."

SERMON XV.

MATTHEW xvi. 24, 25.

THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIS DISCIPLES, IF ANY MAN WILL COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME. FOR WHOSOEVER WILL SAVE HIS LIFE SHALL LOSE IT: AND WHOSOEVER WILL LOSE HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE, SHALL FIND IT.

WHEN we read of the sufferings and persecutions, endured by many of the most holy and eminent of the servants of God in former ages, we are ready to suppose, that some extraordinary change must have taken place in the character and disposition of the world, since we neither hear, nor read of, nor do we fear any thing of the kind, in the present day. And undoubtedly it ought to be one subject of our daily praise and thanksgiving, that we can worship God in the way our consciences approve, and profess our religion as we please, without being molested by any one; the good laws of our country affording us full protection. But if we suppose that the world has undergone such a change, as to render passages like the text quite unimportant to us, we shall greatly err. Of

such persecutions as awaited St. Paul, in almost every city; or which, in former times, kindled the fires that consumed such men as Ridley, and Latimer, and Cranmer, in our own country, we happily know nothing, in the present day. Still, however, the same enmity exists in the heart of man, to the pure and holy religion of the Bible, though it shews itself in a different manner; still, even amongst ourselves, there is a sense in which the declaration of the Apostle is true, "If any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must needs suffer persecution." It is therefore still right to call upon every one to "count his cost," before he commences a profession of being the follower of the Lord Jesus. There is then a sense, in which the words of the text belong as much to us, as they did to the persons to whom our Lord spoke them, when he was upon the earth. He said then, and he says now, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." I propose,

I. To NOTICE THE STATE OF MIND OF THE PERSON REFERRED TO.

II. THE DIRECTION GIVEN TO HIM.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS OBEYING OR NEGLECTING THIS DIRECTION.

I. Let us consider THE STATE OF MIND OF THE

PERSON ALLUDED TO. "If any man *will* come after me."

When our Lord was upon earth, and went about preaching the gospel of the kingdom, there were an immense number, who were eager to hear his discourses, and to witness the miracles that he wrought in confirmation of his doctrine. Of these, many were influenced merely by curiosity; they were inquiring after some new thing, and as the ministry and works of Christ were all new and unheard of before, they were eager to see and know all about them. But there was not in this, one spark of seriousness; they went to see and hear Christ, just in the same spirit as that in which they had before gone out to hear John the Baptist, with the same unconcern as they would have looked on a reed shaken by the wind, or on a man clothed in splendid apparel. Others, again, listened to our Saviour, from mere hatred to him and to his doctrine, hoping that they might hear something, on which to found an accusation that would prove destructive to him and his cause.

Though such as these formed a very large proportion of his hearers, they did not comprise the whole. There was another class, who were fully convinced that he was a teacher sent from God; that he "had the words of eternal life;" and that though at present, he had nothing to give to those who accompanied him, as his disciples, yet ultimately, none would be blessed but they; that

though now in the form of a servant, and despised and rejected of men, he would hereafter come in "his own glory, and all the holy angels with him, and would render unto every man according to his works." The result of this conviction was, that they wished to come after Christ; they would fain be his disciples, and partake of all those blessings, which, they were satisfied, would at last belong to his people.

With such a feeling, we are ready to ask, why did they hesitate? Why should they delay to comply with their inclinations, by avowing that they intended to follow Christ and enrol themselves among his disciples? The answers to these questions involve many matters, in which we are as much concerned as they. You, my brethren, have not indeed seen Christ, or witnessed his miracles, or heard the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth, when he was on earth in fashion as a man; but you have his words, as they are written in the Bible. Those words have been opened, explained, and applied to you by his ministers; and I have no doubt but there are several among you, who have felt that all this was very important to you, that it would be very greatly for your present and future happiness to attend to what you hear, and immediately to become the followers of the Lord Jesus, or in other words, that it is your duty and your wisdom, without delay, to become real and decided Christians,

making the care of your immortal souls your grand business; renouncing every sin, and living in holiness and righteousness all the days of your lives; you feel that this would be wise and right, and that it would tend greatly to your happiness; you, therefore, like the persons here spoken of, will wish to follow Christ. But there is some hesitation, some want of decision; you feel that you ought to do it, you wish you could do it; why then do not you follow your inclination?

The answer, in your case, must be exactly the same as in that of many of the Jews who heard Christ—"There is another law in your members, warring against the law of your mind,"—you love your souls, but there is something you love more; you feel the importance of following Christ, but there are other things which exert a higher influence upon you. Now, what are they? They vary in different persons, according to their outward circumstances, and their constitutional dispositions.

When Nicodemus was convinced that Jesus was a teacher come from God, and therefore felt a desire to follow him, his natural timidity of disposition, and wish to stand fair with the Scribes and Pharisees, held him back: he would come to Jesus, but it must be by night; and afterward, when he and some others were disposed to plead the cause of Jesus—the question, asked by his associates, checked him, "Art thou also of Galilee? Search

and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."[1] In his case, this cowardly disposition was subsequently overcome; but with many who thus believed in our Lord it was not so, "because they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God." There was a young man who came to our Lord—a most amiable, and excellent, and, as we sometimes say, a *good-hearted* young man,—who seemed to want but very little to make him all that could be wished. He came to Christ with a most interesting question—"What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?" He thought that question occupied his whole heart, he fancied that he was prepared to do for this purpose, whatever Christ should require of him; but when our Saviour, who knew what was in his heart, required him to shew his sincerity by selling all that he had, and giving to the poor, he "went away sorrowful, because he had great possessions." He was sorrowful, dejected, and low-spirited, because he could not "serve God and Mammon:" could not come after Christ without denying himself, and taking up his cross; such was the case in times of old; and if we examine carefully, we shall see that so it is still.

I said that I had no doubt that there were some present, who felt a strong inclination to be religious, and to follow Christ *now*. Yet there are reasons, such perhaps as they are scarcely conscious of, which hold them back from doing what they

[1] John vii. 52.

know they ought, and in some sense *wish* to do. These reasons are often very similar to those I have referred to. The world at large; and that society in particular, in which they live, are opposed to so much strictness in religious matters; they think it is unnecessary and absurd. The doctrines which they feel they ought to embrace, as those which Christ and his apostles taught, are unfashionable, they are held only by a few, and are scouted by the majority, or branded by some opprobrious name. And the people too, who, the person is convinced, are the most like Christ, and with whom he must associate if he would follow *him*, are so peculiar, so unlike the rest of the world, that to have much intercourse with them, is looked upon by many, as a disgrace and reproach.

Now, by thoughts and feelings like these, many an one who has a secret wish to follow Christ, is held back; he is afraid to do what he knows to be right; he is sorrowful and dejected; he wishes that he was more favourably situated; he is alarmed with the consciousness that he is not right, that things will not end well, but still he dare not, and he does not, follow Christ.

To persons in this state of mind, our Lord speaks in the text. Let us then proceed,

II. To consider THE DIRECTION GIVEN TO THEM.

When we reflect how many amiable qualities, how many good wishes and intentions there are,

in persons of this class, we might be ready to suppose that a Master so kind and compassionate, so condescending to our infirmities as Jesus was—one who said that his "yoke was easy, and his burden light,"—would be ready to make many excuses for them. We might have expected to hear him speak something that would soothe them, that he would have said, people so well disposed must have some allowance made for them, the timidity of their characters must be considered, we must wait awhile, and perhaps they may become more bold; or a favourable change may take place in their circumstances, and that which is now so difficult, may become less so to them. Such excuses, and such allowances, perhaps, we should have expected our Saviour to make for them; but we find nothing of the sort, not one intimation that such conduct can in any case be excused; even in that of the young man whose character was so good, and his disposition so amiable, that "Jesus loved him;" even with respect to him, the demands of our Saviour were not lowered in the slightest degree; but a sacrifice to conscience, and to the love of his soul was required, which our Lord knew would be harder than all others. So likewise in the text, he in the most unqualified manner says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Here is a duty to be performed, and a burden to be borne, by every one who is willing

to be a disciple and follower of Christ, which can by no means be avoided; for our blessed Lord, who was all kindness and gentleness; who never "broke the bruised reed, nor quenched the smoking flax," would never have spoken in this strong and decided manner, if it had not been a matter of essential importance. Whatever then is meant by "denying ourselves," and by "taking up our cross and following Christ," it is something, without which we cannot be Christ's disciples, and therefore cannot be in the way to heaven; and this you will find fully confirmed by a reference to other passages, where he who refuses to do this, is said not to be *worthy of* Christ; and where it is added, to language like the text, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this sinful and adulterous generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."[1]

Let us then seriously inquire into the meaning of the expressions here used.

1. "Let him deny himself." Let him refuse compliance with his own inclinations and propensities, when he feels that he cannot yield to them without offending God, and doing violence to his own conscience. I apprehend every one of us must know what this means, especially those who are in the state of mind I have been describing. A man under such circumstances, will recollect

[1] Mark viii. 38.

that he has again and again held a conference with himself, something to this effect—' I wish I could follow Christ, that I could be really and truly his disciple; I know I ought, and that, if I would be happy, I must do so; but so much is required! Here is this source of pleasure that I know is not right; I cannot keep it and yet follow Christ, but I cannot part with it. I have so long indulged in it, that it seems quite necessary to me; to give it up would be as painful, as to cut off my right hand, or to pluck out my right eye.' Or a man says to himself, ' I have been engaged in such and such practices which, I know, a truly religious man would avoid, and I fear that I cannot be a Christian while I do such things, yet I have found them so very advantageous to me, that if I abandon them, I hardly know how I am to live.' Or, again, a man may say, ' I do earnestly wish to follow Christ, and be saved by him; but if I be zealously engaged in religion as I ought to be, I cannot keep the company I now do. The society in which I have been used to find my delight, is quite irreligious and ungodly; I know how dangerous such company and such friends are to my soul, but how can I bear to give them up? What a dull and unhappy creature I should be without them.'

Here then, is the very point to which our Lord alludes; in these matters you must deny yourself; you must oppose your inclinations and refuse to yield to them. *That* pleasure, *that* practice, *that*

habit, *that* company, is the very thing which stands in the way of your salvation ; it has your heart ; and till you have learned to deny yourself, you cannot give your heart to God. I have only mentioned two or three things, but the number of cases in which we must deny ourselves, if we would be followers of Christ, is great indeed. Every one, who will commune with his heart, will discover what they are in his own case ; he will soon find out what it is that makes him backward in becoming religious. In every man, many things combine ; but there is in each individual the master sin—" the sin that most easily besets him." In one it is pride and vanity, in another it is covetousness and love of money, in another it is lust, in another drunkenness, in another the desire of pleasure. Here then must we begin to deny ourselves, to bring our passions and inclinations under controul, to refuse compliance with our most earnest desires and wishes, whenever those desires and wishes are fixed upon any thing, which we feel to be inconsistent with the commands and example of Christ. Much of this work must be done in secret ; the effects may be public, but the main contest with corrupt nature craving indulgence, must be carried on, when no eye sees us but that of God ; and when we have no motive for carrying it on, but a wish to please God, and to maintain a conscience void of offence.

But how hard a work, brethren, is this, which

our Lord calls on us to perform! To deny the request of a beloved relative or friend, when urging us to do that on which their enjoyment and comfort seem to depend—to say to them, it is of no use to plead or beseech, I never can grant this request; this is so difficult, that few men have resolution to stand out, even when compliance may be as ruinous, as was Samson's yielding to Delilah. But when the request is urged by one's own heart —when every passion and feeling of our soul craves the sinful pleasure; when the plea is urged not once nor twice, but on every occasion, and almost constantly; when the denial must be made every day, and almost every hour; who has fortitude thus to persist in striving against sin? Have you, my brethren, ever made the trial? If so, you have found that it needed more than your own strength and power to enable you to succeed. You have found that without constant application to "the throne of grace for mercy, and grace to help in every time of need," you have no chance of so denying yourself as to follow Christ. It is the severity of this conflict, and the consciousness of failure, which often makes the Christian "groan being burdened." It was with reference to this that the Apostle Paul said, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." Thus did he deny "himself," well aware that without it, he should

be in danger of being disowned and rejected of God.

But the sayings of our Lord go still further than this—we must not only deny ourselves, but we must "take up our cross, and follow him," and if we refuse this we cannot be his disciples, or be admitted to share with him in those glories that surround his throne. For as St. Paul says—"It is a faithful saying; for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us."[1]

It was the custom amongst the Romans, that the miserable man who was condemned to be crucified, should bear the cross to which he was to be nailed, to the place of execution. In this manner did our blessed Lord go forth from Jerusalem to Calvary, bearing his cross, till, exhausted by his agonies of body and mind, he sank under the load; when a disciple named Simon was met with, and compelled to carry the cross of his Master to Golgotha. Thus did our Lord Jesus Christ take up his cross, for us men and our salvation. Thus did St. Peter, and many others of the apostles, take up the cross, and bear it to the spot where they died, as their master did. Such was the way in which a man was taught that he must be prepared to follow Christ. The primitive church could shew its thousands "who loved not their lives unto the

[1] 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12.

death, but took up their cross and followed him." The church also to which we belong has produced multitudes "who did not count their lives dear unto them," when the question was to be decided, whether they would renounce the pure gospel of Christ, or die for the truth.

Times, my brethren, are so changed, that we seem as if we could have no idea of its being possible that we should ever be called thus to take up our cross, and follow Christ even to death; and God grant that neither we, nor our children may ever be put to this fiery trial; we must however possess the spirit that would cause us, should it be so, not to hesitate, but to be willing to lose our lives for Christ's sake.

But though there seems no present probability of our faith and love to the Saviour being put to so severe a trial; yet they will be tried, the cross must be borne, figuratively if not literally. Let me endeavour to illustrate this, so as to render the matter plain to you—A person who has been living a life of thoughtless gaiety, is brought by some means to think seriously upon religion; he feels that if he means to be a Christian, and to save his soul, he must renounce many things which have afforded him much pleasure, and perform many duties which he has always considered very burdensome. He sees all this is right, and begins this work of denying himself. As he proceeds, he finds a peace of conscience, which he was before a

stranger to ; the denial of self, the consciousness that he is doing right, produces satisfaction and comfort, which counterbalance all his pain. But while he is going on peaceably and happily, he is suddenly troubled by finding that he has become the laughing stock of his neighbours, the jest of all his former companions and friends. Some call him a fool, and others say with Festus, " thou art beside thyself." He feels so conscious that he is acting more wisely and rationally than ever he did, that he is not prepared for this. To be accounted a fool for Christ, he finds hard to bear ; and he is strongly tempted to give up his religion, because of these trials of " cruel mockings." But here is the very thing our Saviour meant ; he must " take up his cross and follow Christ." The Lord himself was treated so, " he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself ;" " he endured the cross, and despised the shame."

After a while perhaps, he gets over this feeling, but again he is agitated ; he is told that some person on whom he placed much dependance, and whose friendship is of the greatest importance to him, is greatly offended by the change that has taken place in him, perhaps a valuable customer is offended, because he will not sell on the Sabbath as he used to do ; or some wealthy relative from whom he had expectations of property, declares that he will have no more to say to him ; or some other prospect, opening to wealth or honour,

is closed against him: or perhaps he finds the truth of what our Lord says, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be they of his own household." [1] His domestic comfort seems likely to be destroyed because of his religion, and he is brought to a stand; but the declaration of the text strikes his mind; 'here,' he says, 'is the very thing my Saviour has spoken of, I must take up my cross, or I cannot be his disciple; now I see what the Scriptures mean, when they say that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God.' There must be no parley; the cross must be taken up, or we cannot be Christ's disciples.

Enough has, I hope, been said to explain the meaning of our Lord, and to enable each one to see in what respects he must deny himself, and take up his cross if he would follow Christ. Let me call upon you, my dear friends, to apply what has been set before you, to your own particular circumstances. But I must hasten to consider—

III. The CONSEQUENCES of obeying or neglecting the direction of our text.

This is pointed out to us in the concluding

[1] Matt. x. 34—36.

verse, " For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it." And afterwards it is added, " For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works."

Our Lord does not enter into any argument to show the reasonableness of what he demands from us ; he only tells us what the event will be. Does he seem to require hard things of us ? and do we hesitate about complying ? He bids us then count our cost. We may shun all this self-denial ; we may refuse to take up the cross ; we may think that we are great gainers, that we have found out a religion that is easy to practise ; but let us not deceive ourselves ; he who in this way escapes the cross and saves his life, shall at last lose it irrecoverably, while he who for his Saviour's sake, out of faith and dependence, out of love and gratitude to him, is willing to part with every thing he possesses, yea even to lay down his life, shall live for ever in the world above. The grand subject of inquiry at the approaching day of judgment will be, whether we have submitted to and loved the Saviour—in what manner we have shewn our love to him—what we have been prepared to do and to suffer in his cause—what sacrifice we have been ready to make in his service—whether we were willing to deny ourselves and take up our cross. If this do not prove to have been the case, we did

not follow him; we called him Lord, Lord, but did not do the things that he said, and therefore were not his disciples.

Brethren, I know well that much is demanded of us; but I know also, that the reward of obedience is infinitely great. Let us keep the end in view. Let us choose this day whom we will serve. The world will hold out many gratifications to allure us, sin will promise many pleasures to blind our eyes to the things which belong to our peace, but the end is death. Our Lord and Master says much to us about the self-denial we shall be called to exercise, and the crosses we shall have to bear; but he "is coming, and his reward is with him, to render to every man according to his works;" and when those who refuse to obey his call to "follow him," to "take his yoke upon them," (which after all, is "easy, and his burden light," when the "everlasting consolation and the good hope through grace" accompanying it are taken into consideration), when to them shall be awarded "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish;"— "to those who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality," shall be given "eternal life." Oh! let us then at once hearken to our Saviour's voice, and follow him through whatever paths of trial or affliction such determination may lead us, so shall we find mercy of the Lord in that day; so shall we become interested in all those unspeakably great

and precious promises, which are given for the support and consolation of his people. We may have the world, the flesh, and the devil to contend with, but if we are earnest and sincere, we shall be made more than conquerors through him that hath loved us; and let us remember for our encouragement, the gracious declaration of our Lord—"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."[1] "Be ye therefore," my Christian brethren," stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

[1] Rev. iii. 21.

SERMON XVI.

MATTHEW xv. 8, 9.

THIS PEOPLE DRAWETH NIGH UNTO ME WITH THEIR MOUTH, AND HONOURETH ME WITH THEIR LIPS; BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME. BUT IN VAIN THEY DO WORSHIP ME, TEACHING FOR DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN.

When our Saviour was upon earth, and residing amongst the Jews, he had not much to contend with, of open and avowed irreligion; nor was he surrounded by idolators; but he had to contend against a body of people, who were very strict in their external duties, and in general very correct in their creed. This was not indeed the case with respect to the Sadducees, but it was eminently so as it regarded the Pharisees, who yet seem to have been the most constant, and the most bitter, of our Lord's opponents. It was therefore a matter of prime importance with him, to shew how wide is the difference between external forms, and internal piety; between a strict and punctilious attention to ceremonials, and that religion of the heart, which can alone satisfy the demands of the "God of the spirits of all flesh." The Jews, indeed,

seemed as if they were determined to compel him to speak upon this subject; they intruded their forms, and their ceremonies, and their traditions upon him, in such a manner as forced him to shew how far they all fell short of forming a service, acceptable to God.

Thus, in the passage before us, they came to our Lord, and laid a formal charge against his disciples, who had "eaten bread" or taken their meal, without having first complied with the custom, the *religious* custom, as they deemed it, of washing their hands: a practice adopted by the Jews, not merely as a cleanly habit, but as a sacred rite. But though many washings and ceremonial purifications had been instituted by God, when he gave the law to Moses, this was not one of them. It was a mere tradition of the elders, which was exalted by the Pharisees to an equality with the laws of God; and thus, that was made a duty, which God had never commanded, and that was constituted a sin, which God had never condemned, displaying an unwarrantable assumption of divine authority, by vain and fallible man. But it would have been well had they done nothing worse than this; for though they had no authority to make even such a custom binding on the conscience, they had still more directly invaded the prerogative of the Most High, and had "made void the law of God" by their traditions. Thus, when Jehovah had said "Honour thy father and thy mother",

and had denounced the punishment of death against any person who should utter curses against his parents, and had thereby placed parental authority, and filial reverence and obedience on the firmest basis; these perverters of the truth maintained, that if any person should choose to dedicate to the purpose of repairing or beautifying the temple, that portion of his property, which ought to be given to relieve the wants of his aged parents, he would be blameless, even though they should suffer the greatest distress. All this arose from the habit of putting the outward shew of piety, in the place of genuine and practical holiness. Our Lord having exposed the hypocrisy of the Jews in this instance, proceeds to apply the words addressed, by the prophetic spirit, to them by Isaiah, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you. This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

My object in the following discourse, will be to offer some observations, upon THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF FORMALITY IN RELIGIOUS WORSHIP.

When man was first created, and still bore His image, after whose likeness he had been formed, it appears that there existed a free and unconstrained intercourse between him and his Creator. Free and unconstrained however as it was, it no

doubt partook of the nature of worship; and surrounded, as our first parents were, with all that was necessary to supply every want, and to gratify every wish; and strangers, as they were, to pain and sorrow, and even to the fear and anticipation of evil, we may suppose that prayer formed some part of that free intercourse which they held with their God. It was more like the worship of the heavenly host; adoration of the divine glory and perfection; and grateful acknowledgment of enjoyments and blessedness, not indeed yet forfeited, but still unmerited.

Alas! such communion between the world and heaven, was soon closed. Yet, through divine goodness, it was not wholly cut off. Man was taught, almost immediately after he became a sinner, that he was not to consider himself an utter outcast from God, and heaven, and happiness; intimations of mercy were made; the seed was promised, which should "bruise the serpent's head," and be "manifested to destroy the works of the devil." That promise opened again the communication between earth and heaven; again was man invited to draw nigh to God. The intercourse was, indeed, widely different from that which subsisted between the holy Creator, and his pure creature;—yet, though mingled with awe and fear, till then unknown, it was hailed as an intercourse of mercy by fallen Adam and his corrupted children; while, on the other hand, it was on their

part, an act of submission, of reverence, and of adoration.

That the permission thus to draw nigh to God, was accepted by man as a token for good—a sort of recovery of some of the privileges of Paradise,—we may gather from the readiness with which even Cain, as well as his more pious brother Abel, came to present his offering unto the Lord. And we, in fact, may trace the same feeling, as pervading the whole human race, in every age and in every country. However deeply men may be sunk in ignorance and vice, yet do they all seem to consider it as a privilege, belonging to human nature; to offer him some kind of worship; and to claim him as their friend in the hour of distress and alarm. So strongly is this engrafted in the mind, that even atheism itself cannot resist its impulse. He who, in the time of prosperity, has boldly said there is no God; in sickness, in danger, or when the hour of death was approaching, has been heard to call on that very Being, whose existence and providence he had before denied.

My brethren, is not this a feeling with which you are all acquainted. I fear I may be speaking to many, who are practically strangers to all religion—strangers—entire strangers to all real prayer, and to all communion with God; and, now that your health remains unimpaired, and your means of enjoyment are abundant, studiously neglect every thing of the kind. Yet I

verily believe, there is not one, who would not feel shocked at the idea that he were excluded from all intercourse with God, and that he would never be permitted to pray. Nay, I believe that it is only to some such feeling as I have been speaking of, that we are to attribute the regularity with which many attend places of worship ; they cling to the notion that there is a sort of friendly intercourse still open between man and God.

Now there can certainly be nothing more pleasing, than to behold a nnmber of people, in decent order, with devout appearance, assembling themselves from time to time, for the avowed purpose of honouring that God, to whom they are indebted for their existence and support, by rendering him the glory due unto his name. Nothing can be conceived more proper—nothing more beneficial for man, than that an intercourse with heaven should thus be maintained, in the way which God himself hath appointed. And again, when we consider this appointment, as resulting from the merciful provision which God has made for reconciling sinners to himself, the sight of numbers flocking to draw nigh to God in this manner, would give one a cheering view of the state of the world ; it would lead one to hope, that the depravity of man, and the alienation of his heart from his Maker, was not so great, nor so deeply seated, as had been represented. Take, for instance, the present state of this country. We

allow,—we are forced to allow—that there is an immense mass of wickedness and ungodliness in every part of it. Yet, look at the multitude of places of worship which exist in it; consider how these are increasing every year; and reflect again upon the number of persons, who on every Sunday are assembled, throughout the kingdom, avowedly to draw nigh to God, and to honour his holy name. The impression left upon the mind, after such a survey, at first might be, that there was a great deal of religion in the country—that the people had not departed from the living God—but were disposed to seek his favour and to serve him. But, my brethren, how different will be our feelings on making careful inquiry into the true state of things! The number of our places of worship, or even of those who frequent them; is, alas! no distinct evidence of the number of spiritual worshippers;—such "worshippers as the Father seeketh to worship him." It is true, that where many frequent the house of God, we have ground to hope that there are some, who offer him the worship of the heart; but there is too much reason to believe, that the amount of such is comparatively small. Oh! if all, who attend even here, were such, what a happy, what a holy place would this be. But alas! this is by no means the case,—the text shews us, what I believe many of you feel to be, the real state of things. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with

their lips, but their heart is far from me." This, I fear, is but too apt a description of what passes among many for religious worship. They seem to take delight in approaching unto God; they are regular in the external act of devotion; the words they employ in their addresses to the throne of grace are excellent; and, perhaps, their behaviour when in the house of prayer, may be highly proper. But still there is something wanting; the heart is not in it; the language—the gesture—the deportment—does not correspond with the feelings of the soul.

Such, our Lord, who searcheth the hearts, declared was the case with the Jews of that generation; and they have had many followers and imitators. But as it may seem harsh and uncharitable thus to speak of others; let me beg of you to pass them by, and turn your attention wholly to yourselves. Let each one ask himself what his religious services are; whether he be a spiritual, or a formal worshipper. The inquiry is a very important one—affecting that, on which our hope of the divine favour, in some sense, depends. If we are spiritual in our worship, if our hearts are engaged in it, we may expect that our prayers, and our other religious duties, as means of grace, will draw down a blessing upon us. If we are mere formalists, all our services will be of no avail; nay, rather will place us farther out of the way of happiness and peace.

The text suggests to us some matters for serious inquiry.

1. It tells us of some, whose hearts did not at all accompany their lips, in their acts of devotion. This was formality.

How then has it been in this respect with you? You have to-day been professedly joining in the beautiful and devout prayers of our church; you have been confessing before God, your sinfulness and misery; you have been deploring the numberless transgressions you have committed; you have acknowledged that by them you have deserved God's wrath and indignation; and you have prayed him to forgive you, and to save your souls from destruction, not for the sake of your own merits, but for the sake of that Saviour, whom God, of his infinite mercy hath "set forth to be the propitiation for your sins." And you have further praised and blessed God for his inestimable love, in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. This you have done to-day, and for years past, you have been in the habit of doing the same; and were any one to make objections, you would defend the practice, as both reasonable and scriptural —a duty which you owe to God, and from which you look for great and important advantage. So far is well; you have "drawn nigh to God with your mouth, and honoured him with your lips." But the great point is—was all this sincere; or was it not in part at least, hypocritical? Your lan-

guage and your deportment shewed that you were drawing nigh to God; but are you sure that "your heart was not far from him?" Did you *feel* the sins you deplored? Did you lament them as you professed to do? Was there that deep humiliation of heart on account of them, which your words implied? And are you quite clear, that your thoughts were not following other subjects, employed about other things? Are you conscious, that there was no insincerity while you avowed that all your hopes rested upon Christ, and that you asked for nothing but for his sake, and in his name, and in dependence on his merits. If you were indeed drawing nigh to God, in sincerity and in truth; if you intended to honour him with an holy worship; this was the case. But if your thoughts did not follow your words; if they were rambling abroad after vanity, while your lips pronounced the language of prayer and praise; if, while your tongue was uttering expressions of deep humility, your feelings were proud and self-confident; if, while you declared your simple reliance on the merits and atonement of Christ, you were secretly trusting to the goodness of your heart, or the excellence of your life—what can we say but that you were a formalist—drawing nigh to God with your mouth, and honouring him with your lips, while your thoughts and affections were "far from him."

Nay, brethren, if we thus examine carefully into

the nature of our worship, and of all our religious services, we shall every one, I apprehend, obtain a much more humbling view of ourselves, and of our holiest actions, than we are used to take. We shall find that we have need of mercy, where we fancied ourselves deserving of favour; and discover the want of a Saviour, even where we were ready to boast of our excellences.

But again,

2. Formality leads a person to employ a language, and adopt a deportment, when in the house of God, which is, not only inconsistent with his feelings at the time when he uses it, but directly contrary to his habitual life and conduct.

As I have before observed, the mind of man naturally clings to the idea of having some intercourse with his Maker, and keeps up an expectation of some benefit to be derived in this way. Hence we very often meet with cases of persons of most manifestly irreligious character, who still pay great attention to external duties of religion.

Now it may be so, my friends, even almost unconsciously, with you: and therefore, on this point, also I would call you to the work of self-examination. Ask yourselves whether there be not a clear and manifest inconsistency between your language and deportment in the house of God, and your behaviour, temper, and spirit in other places, and at other times. When you have been at church, your devout appearance, and

language seemed to show, that you were earnestly engaged in religion, that you feared God, and desired his favour, that you felt this world was all vanity, and that you were anxiously employed in seeking an inheritance in heaven, and in preparing for it. But, should we find this to be the prevailing feeling, were we to follow you home, and mark your conduct, your temper, your language, when in your family, when pursuing your business, or when in company? There are many, I am persuaded, who, with all the self-flattery they are used to practise, could by no means bring themselves to believe that they are, at all, the same manner of persons at other times, and in other places that they are in the Church. Indeed, I apprehend that some will find on examination, that a consciousness of this want of religion on other days, is the very reason why they pay the attention they do, to the externals of it on the Sunday. They indulge the secret hope, that by attending punctually at the house of God, they may make up for the deficiency they are aware of, in their ordinary practice.

Now my brethren, if there be this wide difference between the character which you bear in your daily walk and conversation, and that which you assume in the house of God, can we hesitate to say, that the latter is but a mere form, an exterior show. Can you pretend to deny that you are exactly described in my text, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth

me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." If your heart were right with God, so would your conduct be, not only on the Lord's day, but on every day of the week. In that case you would "set the Lord always before you:" and your aim would be, whether you ate, or whether you drank, to do all to the glory of God. And when all this is wanting, or nearly so, can you imagine that two or three hours on the Sunday, spent in the outward duties of the Church, can have such a value as to stamp a new character upon you, and make you in the sight of God a religious man; though your language, and your actions, and your thoughts are habitually irreligious? Oh, be not deceived in this manner. All such worship is mere formality.

But I must carry the enquiry a little further. There are some among you, whose general character and deportment is such, that they would not easily be led to suspect, that it is inconsistent with their profession and appearance, when engaged in religious duties. Such have need of a closer kind of examination, before we can be satisfied that they are exempt from the formality of which I am speaking.

While then you are engaged in the worship which is conducted in our Church, you use the language of deep humiliation, you declare that you have erred and strayed from God's ways; that you have no health or strength in you; that you are tied and bound by the chain of your sins:—again

and again do you speak of yourselves "as miserable sinners," and call on God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, to have mercy upon you; and you profess that you have no other hope but in that mercy. Now all this may be either mere formal compliance with the customs of the Church to which you belong, or it may result from the deep feeling of a soul, conscious of its corruption, and lamenting its sinfulness. If the latter be the case, these confessions will not only describe your feelings when on your knees in the Church, but those which are habitual with you: every day, and at all times, will you feel this humiliation and sorrow.

Again—in these same beautiful services of our Church, you must have observed how constantly the Lord Jesus Christ is brought before us, as the object of our faith, and hope, and love. We are therein taught, and we avow, that we renounce all hope from any good works of our own, to trust only upon him, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." I scarcely know whether our blessed Lord be exhibited more prominently, as the only source of a sinner's hopes, in the services of our Church, or in those Holy Scriptures from which they borrow their language, and on which they ground their doctrines. Allow me then to ask the members of this our Church, whether they enter into and feel all this? "To you," saith St. Peter,

" that believe, he is precious." The Church takes it for granted, that her worshippers are what they profess to be, " believers in the Lord Jesus," and as such, she provides prayers, and praises, and thanksgiving for their use, all importing that they do indeed rely upon Christ, that they expect justification and salvation only through him, that they seek the help of his grace and Spirit, to enable them to seek God, and walk in his ways. Now, my dear friends, do you feel toward this divine Saviour as, when you join in these services, you profess to do? Are you in the habit of speaking and thinking thus? Is Christ, and Christ alone, your hope, your comfort, your salvation? Are you in heart and soul devoted to him, and living to his glory? If you are, then, when you draw nigh to God in your Saviour's name, and in reliance on his merits; you do not honour him *only* with your lips; your heart is in the service; you worship God as in Christ, with sincerity. But is there no misgiving of mind among you upon this point? Is there no one whose conscience tells him, that though he ended all his petitions, by pleading the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, he never considered what the Church meant by it, never considered himself unworthy to approach God, but through a mediator; never felt his heart expanded in love to that Saviour, who came down from heaven, and bled and died for us men, and our salvation. What formality, what thoughtlessness,

yea, what hypocrisy there must be in such services! I might lead the enquiry into many more particulars, but enough has been said to show you the nature of *formality*. I will now conclude my discourse, by saying a very few words, to show the utter uselessness of such services as these.

It is not necessary, in fact, to say any thing in proof of it; every one feels and knows, that such services cannot be of any value. Had we a man to do with as our judge, such services might perhaps avail. He could look only at the outward appearance, and when that bore the stamp of seriousness and devotion, and the words employed were holy and good, nothing more could be demanded. But He who will accept, or reject our services, is he "who searcheth the heart, and requireth truth in the inward parts." And what honour will he esteem done to him by the excellence of our language, or the devoutness of our looks, when he sees that our thoughts are fixed on other objects, that our words do not utter the language of our hearts, but express ideas we feel not, and refer to doctrines we believe not. Is not this worse than offering the blind and lame in sacrifice, which of old drew down a curse from Jehovah on the guilty deceiver who did so! All such heartless worship is *vain*, and vain are all the expectations which men ground on such useless, empty, religious ceremonies; they will bring down no pardon of sin from God's

mercy, no supplies of grace to serve him, no cheering hope of heavenly joys, nor even present comfort to our souls. And how awful must be the case of that man whose very prayers are vain! are even turned into *sin*, by their heartlessness, a mere lip labour, a taking of God's name in vain. Yet may not many fear, that up to the present hour, they have never offered any better service than that which the text condemns? "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Let us look back, my brethren, with shame, on our formal, empty services; let us seek the forgiveness even of our holy things; let us beg of God to pour on us the spirit of prayer and supplication, that so we may escape the doom of dissemblers with Him.

SERMON XVII.

JOHN ix. 35.

DOST THOU BELIEVE ON THE SON OF GOD?

The narrative, of which these words form a part, is highly interesting. Our Lord had met with a man who was born blind; and had conferred upon him not only the power of vision, but the ability of at once employing the newly acquired faculty. A miracle so remarkable, probably the first of the kind that Jesus had performed, excited much attention, and produced, we may suppose, a conviction in the minds of many, that he was indeed the promised Messiah. The rulers of the Jews, dreading the increase of our Lord's influence among the people, had the man brought before them, with the intention, as they professed, of enquiring into the truth of the miracle; but in reality, with the design of finding some pretext for pronouncing it an imposture. In this, however, they completely failed. The man replied to some of their insidious and captious enquiries, by the plain and simple declaration, "this one thing I know, that

whereas I was blind, now I see." The change had been effected by "a man called Jesus," and since it never had been heard that any one had opened the eyes of a person born blind, he concluded, from what he had experienced, that he who had done this must be from God. Baffled in their design by this simple argument, yet in no degree disposed to admit, that Jesus of Nazareth was from heaven, they vented their anger upon the man, whose eyes had been opened. They told him that "he was altogether born in sin," and asked if he would presume to "teach," or dictate to them: and forthwith put him out of the synagogue, as an excommunicated person.

Our Lord, having been told of the treatment which the poor man had received from the Scribes and Pharisees, went out to seek him, and having found him, he put to him the question forming our text, "Dost thou believe in the Son of God?"

This question, in itself a very simple one, involves in it subjects of the deepest interest, to every one of us. I propose then,

I. To MAKE SOME REMARKS UPON ITS SCOPE; and

II. To CONSIDER THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ABLE TO ANSWER IT IN A SATISFACTORY MANNER.

I. Let us, then, consider the SCOPE OF OUR LORD'S QUESTION.

The man to whom the enquiry was primarily

addressed, had some faint and inadequate notions of the dignity and power of him who had opened his eyes. He declared his conviction that Jesus was " a prophet," that he must be " from God," or otherwise he would be able to do nothing. Still, however, his conceptions of our Lord's character and powers were very low, for he did not know whether he was " a sinner " or not, though this one thing he knew, that whereas he himself had been blind, he then could see.

Here was then a grievous deficiency in knowledge and acquaintance with spiritual things. He did not really as yet believe in Christ, because he did not know him; he had not heard of him, or been instructed in the things which related to his everlasting peace. Yet still, deficient as was his knowledge, we discover traces of a right state of mind; there was a disposition to embrace the truth, wherever it might be found. Our Lord puts the question to him, that he might be made to feel his ignorance, and apply for instruction; and, conscious of his ignorance, he did immediately apply for instruction, " who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him ? " And no sooner did Christ assure him, that he, who was then speaking to him, was the Son of God, than he felt the full force of the miracle which had been wrought on him, as demonstrating the truth of our Lord's declaration, and cried, " Lord, I believe; and worshipped him."

The question, as addressed to a Jew, was in fact

this, " Dost thou believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the true Messiah—the Son of God—the Saviour of the world—Emmanuel, God with us? Dost thou recognize in him all those excellences which were to characterise the long promised Redeemer, in whom all nations were to be blessed; and whom Isaiah announced as the " child born," yet the " mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, of whose government and dominion there would be no end." The Christian beholds all this in *him*, who was once " despised and rejected of men," when he took upon him the form of a servant, and appeared in the likeness of man.—The Jew denies all this, he says that Jesus was a deceiver, that his nation did right in condemning him to die, and that all who worship him as God, are guilty of idolatry. But it would not be at all to our profit, to follow out the argument as relates to the Jews, on whose heart " the veil still remains untaken away."

The question " Dost thou believe in the Son of God? " as addressed to the members of a Christian congregation, assumes a very different aspect, and gives rise to enquiries of a very different nature. Were we indeed to give full credit to all that passes, in the course of the services of our own Church, we should without hesitation say, it was answered, as regards all its members; for all in the most open manner avow, that they do believe in the Son of God—in all that he did on earth—in all

he now does in heaven, for us men and for our salvation. But alas ! declarations of this sort, are frequently made with little consideration, and often in total ignorance of the matter to which they relate. It becomes then the duty of the ministers of the Church, to call the attention of the people to their own avowal; to enquire how far they understand and believe their own creeds, and really mean what they say. It will not therefore be unseasonable to apply the text in this manner. You have, my brethren, to-day said ' I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord.'—And again you said, ' I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.' Now I ask, and I would have each one seriously ask himself, whether he has ever well weighed and considered his own words ?—whether he understands them ?—whether he does heartily and cordially believe them ?

1. You have said that you ' believe in the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds—that he was very God of very God '—that by him all things were made ; in short, that before he appeared as an inhabitant of this lower world, he was one with the Father, by an indissoluble union, and possessed of all the power and attributes of the Deity ! I do not wish to lead you into any nice and abstruse speculations, on points, whereon men may easily wish to know more than God has revealed, and more than their finite powers can enable them to comprehend ;

but our Lord has declared "that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father that sent him," and again, "he that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father," and of course can be no true and acceptable worshipper of God. The whole Scripture teaches us, that Christ, as the Son of God, is himself the proper object of our love, adoration, and obedience; and the Church of England absolutely requires her ministers, and all her members, to maintain the deity of Christ, as an essential part of the Catholic faith. It becomes then a matter of serious enquiry, whether you receive this doctrine of the Scripture and of the Church, and are satisfied that he whom we call our Lord and Saviour, is indeed, "the brightness of his Father's glory, the express image of his person, and upholdeth all things by the word of his power?"

"Dost thou believe in the Son of God?" also, as having come into the world in human nature, and suffered and died, in order that he might save mankind from everlasting misery? This is the very foundation of Christianity as a religion; but for this, the gospel would be nothing,—the very word would never have existed. It means good tidings—the "glad tidings of great joy, which are to all people," because that "to them is born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord—the Lord of heaven and of earth, of angels and of men. If no Saviour had been born, no such good tidings had

ever been heard. Man would have received without mitigation or rescue, the whole penalty of his sins. But the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Father, came on an errand of boundless mercy and compassion. He came to satisfy the divine justice, and to put honour on the law, by bearing the punishment due to transgression. Thus he was made an expiation—an atonement—a satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; thus did he taste death for every man, and become the author of eternal life, to all that believe.

Now my brethren, let me ask you, whether you truly and sincerely believe all this. Is your expectation of everlasting life grounded on this? Is this the foundation of all your hopes of eternal happiness, and of deliverance from guilt and sin?

This leads us to a second subject of enquiry relative to the text. There is something peculiar in the expression, "Believing *on* the Son of God." There are a multitude of facts of various kinds, confirmed to us by testimony which we cannot doubt; these facts we believe, yet we should not think of saying, we believe *on* them. This is the peculiar term employed relative to that faith which the true Christian places on the Son of God. It is a faith, implying confidence and dependence on him and his work. Were there among the children of Adam, any who did not share in the effects of his fall, whose hearts were not corrupted, whose practice was free from the least violation of the divine

law, and who, as the natural consequence, feared no condemnation, and needed no Saviour; should such sinless beings hear the gospel of Christ, and read the records of God's love toward their fallen brethren, they would believe, admire, and adore: but they would not believe *on* the Son of God; they would see in the gospel nothing that concerned them, though it was "a saying worthy of all acceptation" to every individual under heaven but themselves. Now, brethren, I fear that many of those who repeat the creed with confidence, and think themselves firmly established in the Christian faith, so forget their own state and circumstances, as only to believe the gospel, as these holy and sinless beings would believe and admire it, while they had no concern in it. And I fear that they put this kind of belief, in the place of that, whereby God purifies the heart, and whereby we overcome sin, and the world, and are made partakers of all the blessings the Saviour came to bestow, as the purchase of his blood. But when the question is put to *us*, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" it is addressed to us as sinners in danger of eternal woe, but who are informed that there is, in the Son of God, full pardon and complete deliverance to be obtained, and that there is no other foundation, on which man can ground a hope of everlasting life. And the question is not generally, dost thou believe this—but dost thou believe *on* it, so as simply to trust your soul's

everlasting interests to Christ, the Son of God. Do you believe on his atonement, so as to expect that for the sake of it, and of it *alone*, your sins shall be pardoned and you shall be accepted of God, and accounted righteous before him, and so receive the reward of righteousness? Do you so believe in Christ, as he is now the intercessor and advocate of his people, as to feel satisfied that he will keep that which we have committed to him till that day, when he will come to be our judge; and is it in this confidence, and in this alone, without any reliance on yourselves, or on your good works, that you mean to abide till death; fully satisfied that this simple dependence on the Son of God, is the only effectual preparation you can make for another world? If so, then it may be said that you "believe *on* the Son of God." You not only give some general credit to those doctrines which the Scriptures contain, relating to what Christ accomplished by coming into the world, but you make those doctrines the basis, the foundation of your hopes. What important consequences will result from thus believing on the Son of God, I shall endeavour to show in the sequel of my discourse; but I now wish to impress upon your minds, that this simple and complete reliance upon the Saviour, is the only thing that amounts to "believing on the Son of God." And I would urge you to enter upon a serious and impartial examination of yourselves on this essential point.

Most essential it certainly is; for if the view I have given of the matter be correct, and according to the Scriptures, very much of that, which often passes for faith, and believing on the Son of God, will be found delusion; and many who have said that they believed on Christ, will appear to have possessed a faith which is dead, being alone.

Oh, let us, my brethren, pray constantly and fervently, that we may not err in this matter. If we do not receive Christ as he is revealed; if we do not rely upon him, and give him our full and undivided confidence; committing our immortal spirits into his hands, as "able to save to the uttermost, "all them that come to God by him," we may come short of eternal life, while we think ourselves most staunch supporters of the faith of the gospel.

I will now pass on

II. To shew the importance of being able to give a satisfactory answer to the question of our text.

That there is some lamentable deficiency in the religion of many professors, is manifest from the circumstance of there appearing to be no result—nothing following from it. There is no perceivable difference between them, and others who reject all the doctrines they hold, and deny every article of their creed. Surely, my brethren, this ought not to be the case; surely the difference between a

believer and an unbeliever, between a man who *is* a Christian, and a man who is *not*, should be something distinct and apparent. Religion is a plant that never can grow and flourish without producing some fruit. The faith of which the scriptures say so much, is always represented as an efficacious principle, implanted in the soul.

If then, my brother, thou dost truly believe in the Son of God, the effect will be seen in various ways.

First, it will produce in thee a serious diligence and activity, in every part of thy religion.

Nothing can be more clear than that many who yet seem to think themselves religious, shew very little seriousness and anxiety about religion. It receives a sort of formal attention on the Sunday, and, perhaps, on a few other occasions; but beyond this, it is little noticed. There is a general coldness to the subject; it is scarcely ever touched upon in conversation, unless it be to raise an argument, or to afford the opportunity of railing at the enthusiasm and bigotry of those who feel more than themselves, and act more decidedly than they do, on this all-important subject. Now I do not hesitate to say, that all this cold indifference results from want of faith, and will always be done away, where a person does truly "believe in the Son of God." This chilling state of heart on religious matters, arises from the want of just ideas of the evil of sin,—of the danger of the

sinner—of the difficulty of his salvation—and of the dreadful consequences of a failure. I appeal to you, brethren, if it be not so; you know how little these subjects interest the feelings, or awaken the fears of most men.

But where shall we learn the evil of sin, and the danger of a sinner, as we learn them, by calling to mind the agonies the Son of God endured, when "the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all"? Where shall we so behold the difficulty of salvation, as when we look to the Son of God "pouring out his soul unto death and making intercession for the transgressors," that they might not reap the reward of their deeds. Where shall we better perceive the dreadful consequences of perishing among the unbelievers, than by beholding the anguish of the Redeemer, when the punishment of sin, only for a few hours, rested upon him? Oh, my brethren, let us but once look by real faith to the Son of God, bearing the divine wrath for us, and all these things will be so impressed upon us, as to effectually remove the cold insensibility which by nature rests upon us. Then our religion will assume a warmth and vigour to which we have hitherto been strangers. We shall not fear the reproach of singularity, nor the imputation of enthusiasm; but we shall sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and let him be our fear. We shall "not labour for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto eternal

life." We shall "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," and "count all things but loss that we may win Christ and be found in him." To him that believeth in the Son of God, all else appears as nothing, less than nothing, and vanity, compared with the great object which Christ came into the world to accomplish—the salvation of the never-dying soul of guilty man. This faith infuses earnestness into our prayers, and puts life into every Christian ordinance. Yes! it is the believer on the Son of God who "pours out his soul before the Lord" in secret, and wrestles, like Jacob, to obtain the blessing, which saves from sin and death and hell. It is he that believeth on the Son of God, who does not forsake or negligently attend the public services of the Church; but waits on the Lord in them, that he may "renew his strength" for running the race set before him. It is the believer on the Son of God, who with humble faith draws near to the table of his Master and only Saviour who died for him, to commemorate his unspeakable love, and afresh to seek those benefits, which, by his precious blood-shedding he hath obtained for us. It is the want of faith on the Son of God, prevailing, alas! to a lamentable degree among the population of all our towns and villages, that too often makes our congregations so small, and our services so cold and lifeless.

"Dost thou then believe on the Son of God?" Canst thou trace out these evidences of genuine

faith? Is thy heart thus warmed with a lively apprehension, and feeling view, of the importance of religion, and of all that relates to it? If it be not so, call not thyself a disciple—a believer on the Son of God.

But, secondly, the effects and consequences of the faith, of which I have been speaking, will be clearly discerned in the conduct and character.

We sometimes speak of Christ having come into the world, to accomplish the salvation of mankind, in a general way, having our minds only occupied with what shall take place hereafter; but we must not forget that this salvation is *present* as well as future. The captain of our salvation was made "perfect through suffering," that he might "bring many sons to glory:" but still they are here "prepared afore unto glory."[1] And this preparation is present holiness—the purification of their hearts through faith, the sanctification of their nature by the truth; they are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ."[2]

"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" then a great and manifest change has been effected in thee: thou art in Christ a new creature; thou art one who denieth ungodliness and worldly lusts, and liveth soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" then thou lovest him, and keepest his command-

[1] Heb. ii. 10. Rom. ix. 23. [2] Rom. viii. 29.

ments; and though these commandments may call thee to self-denial, and to take up thy cross and to follow Christ, yet still they are not grievous, but the joy of thy heart. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" then thou art one who hath overcome the world, and is no more enslaved by its customs, and its fashions, and its false principles, by the desire of its smiles, or the fear of its frowns, or by wishes for its luxuries and indulgences, its riches or its honours; thy affections are set on the things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" then art thou copying his example, treading in his steps, and studying to become daily more like him, in holiness of heart, in purity of conversation, in blamelessness of life.

Such are some of the visible results of that faith on the Son of God, of which we have been speaking. Now let me ask, my brethren, whether you can say that such effects are to be found in you? This is the touchstone to which you must bring your profession of the Christian religion. If effects like these have been produced, then may you hope that you have not believed in vain. But if not, the danger is great of your being "weighed in the balance and found wanting."

But from considering these visible effects of believing on the Son of God, let me lead you to some others, which are very different in their

nature, but equally important, though, in some degree, themselves objects of faith.

" Dost thou believe on the Son of God ? " Is it so, that after thou hast communed with thine own heart, and thy spirit hath made diligent search, thou canst say, " Lord, I believe ? " Then may we pronounce thee a happy man. It may be thy lot to be poor, or sick, or oppressed with family sorrows and cares ; thy way may be hedged up with thorns, and thy worldly prospects dark and gloomy : thy spiritual trials also may be great, and Satan may be permitted to assault thee with many and painful temptations : yet, as a partaker of faith, precious faith, thou art still a happy man ; thy hope is fixed on an unseen but Almighty Saviour, who declares, " he that believeth on me shall never perish," and " none shall pluck him out of my hand."

" Dost thou believe on the Son of God," then are thy sins all forgiven thee ; they no more shall have dominion over thee, but thou shalt be made triumphant over them all. The days also of thy mourning shall soon be ended. Death shall come, not as the king of terrors, but despoiled of his sting ; nay, like a friend, who shall put a final period to all thy sorrows, and lead thee to that eternal rest, that heavenly kingdom, that habitation in thy Father's house, which the Saviour on whom thou hast believed, is gone before to prepare for thee; to that " inheritance incorruptible, undefiled,

and that fadeth not away," for which thou art now "kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation."

How happy, how unspeakably happy is the man who is partaker of this precious faith! And how important therefore, my brethren, that we should carefully attend to the apostle's exhortation, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves." Consider for a moment what must be the result if we are *not*. If thou believe *not* on the Son of God, thou hast no share in all the blessings that he was manifested to bestow. If thou art an unbeliever, if Christ be not "precious" to thee, if thou dost not "live a life of faith in the Son of God," thou art still an unpardoned sinner, thy transgressions are all still recorded against thee, nay, more than this, thy condemnation will specially result from the very circumstance, that thou hast not "believed on the Son of God."

Oh then, dear brethren, let us not for one moment leave the important question undecided; either we are believers or we are unbelievers. The difference, is the difference between being the servant of God, and the servant of Satan; between a pardoned sinner, and a sinner unpardoned; between an heir of heaven, and an heir of hell. "He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the

only-begotten Son of God." "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." [1]

[1] John iii. 18, 36.

SERMON XVIII.

GALATIANS i. 4.

WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR OUR SINS, THAT HE MIGHT DELIVER US FROM THIS PRESENT EVIL WORLD, ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD AND OUR FATHER.

THERE are some topics in religion, to which we shall have occasion continually to advert. They are to our system, as the foundation to the building; every thing rests upon them; if they be removed, the whole falls to the ground, and becomes worthless. And it is well worth while, occasionally to compare our views of religion, with those which are given us in the Scriptures, in order to ascertain whether we attach a sufficient degree of importance to those points, which are made thus prominent and influential in the inspired volume. If this be not the case, the danger is great of our laying another foundation than that which God has laid; or even if this be not so, we shall be found raising a superstructure of "wood, hay or stubble," instead of "gold, silver, and precious stones." So that though we

may "be saved as by fire," our "work will be burned" and we "shall suffer loss."[1]

There are several of these essential points; but that which gives *name* and character to our religion, is the work and office of the Son of God: the very expression, *Christianity*, imports that Christ is the grand subject, the foundation of the whole; the preaching of the gospel, is called "preaching Christ." But it is still more distinctive,—it refers to the peculiar work of Christ; his giving himself for us; his suffering and dying, for us men, and for our salvation. Hence the Apostles not only preach Christ, but *Christ crucified.* And this gave character to their sermons, though it was, "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness;" for so important was this point, that the reception, or rejection of it, made all the difference, between those who were saved, and those who were lost. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God."[2] However little a person may be in the habit of attentively reading the Scriptures, he must have observed that this subject is continually brought forward by the Apostles, and that an essential prominence and importance is given to it.

But, my brethren, the world has undergone no change; men are still lost and ruined by trans-

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 12—15. [2] 1 Cor. i. 18.

gression; they still want a Saviour, and the only Saviour is the Lord Jesus Christ. His sufferings and death are as much the means of salvation *now*, as they were of old; the same gospel ought to be preached to people in the present day, and in the same manner, as was preached by the Apostles. Still, "he that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not, shall not see life." We ought therefore in our ministry, to advert to this all important subject, in the same manner that St. Paul and the other Apostles did; if we do not do this, we do not preach the gospel as we ought.

I have been led into these remarks, by reflecting upon the manner in which the text is introduced by St. Paul. He commences his epistle to the Galatian church, in his accustomed manner, by wishing the blessings of grace and peace, from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ;—but, no sooner had he mentioned the Redeemer's name, than all that he hath done for us sinners, immediately rushed into his mind, and he adds in the language of holy exultation and gratitude—"Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." Let us endeavour to make the Apostle's feelings our own, and pray that with him we may be enabled to say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

In speaking further on the passage before us, I propose to follow the order in which the words occur.

I. We have A MOST IMPORTANT AND INTERSTING FACT STATED.

So important, so interesting, and at the same time, so astonishing is this fact, that were we not accustomed to hear of it, and to speak of it as a thing with which we have been familiar from our childhood, we could not read the text without wonder and amazement. A Personage is spoken of, so high in dignity, and so exalted in glory, as to be joined with God the Father, in conferring the blessings of grace and peace; and as such, the object to whom the Apostle hesitated not to offer his prayer. Yet we are told that "he gave himself for us." What, we must be ready to ask, can this mean? The information afforded us in other parts of Scripture is calculated to increase our difficulty; for there we learn, that when he gave himself for us, he quitted the throne of his glory; he laid aside all his majesty; he left the bosom of his Father, and the adoring hosts of cherubim and seraphim; and was made in the likeness of man, and took upon him the form of a servant, and became the object of the world's execration and contempt; and wandered about as a homeless stranger; doing good indeed, wherever he went, yet always treated with scorn and hatred; till at length, amidst every circumstance of internal anguish, and

external suffering, he was nailed as a malefactor to the cross; and there expired, as rejected and accursed, both of heaven and earth. Yet the language of the text assures us, that all this was *voluntary ;* other passages teach us that the Father loved us, and " spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all ;" but here we see that of his own free-will, Christ submitted to all he had to endure—" He gave himself;" his will was in perfect accordance with the will of the Father : " God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son," and the Son so loved the world as to give *himself* for its salvation and deliverance.

But again, the text adds another circumstance suited to excite still higher admiration and wonder. When we read of the Son of God giving himself for men, we should naturally suppose that it was for such of our race, (if such could be found) as were recommended to his kind regard, by the peculiar excellency of their character ; such as shared in the calamity which the fall of Adam had entailed upon mankind, while they were free from the corruption that had spread over the world, and brought this suffering and woe on the descendants of the first transgressor. But neither Scripture nor reason lead us to believe that there are any persons thus circumstanced ; we read of no innocent sufferers, except indeed we choose to consider as such, the infants on whom pain and death have come, though they have " not sinned after the

similitude of Adam's transgression." All others suffer, because they are *actually* sinners; and all they fear with regard to the future, is the just reward of their deeds. There was then no reason of this sort, to induce the Son of God to give himself for us; the language of the text indeed, fully removes all idea of the kind; it says, "He gave himself for our sins;" it does not say, for our distress, or for our misery, or danger; there would be indeed truth in that, but it goes at once to the root of all our fears, distresses, and dangers, "for our sins." Sin had brought us into a state of the most awful wretchedness; it had darkened all our prospects for eternity; it had left us nothing, "but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation," that would consume us, both body and soul for ever;—every hope was blasted; every effort we could make to rescue ourselves, was utterly unavailing;—death was approaching, and with it, all the horrors of condemnation. Such was the state of all men, a state of utter despair. O, my brethren, meditate I pray you upon the dreadful condition, into which sin had plunged our race; apply it to yourselves. Such a helpless and hopeless condition would you be in, if the Son of God had not given "himself for our sins;" and such is still your condition, if you are treating, as I fear many do, the offers of his love and mercy, with careless indifference, or contemptuous disregard.

But what are we to understand by the words,

" who gave himself for our sins?" Picture to yourselves a malefactor, condemned, justly condemned, to die for his crime; but when the sentence is about to be carried into effect, a person high in rank, and unimpeachable in character, comes forward, and says, 'Let that man go free; he deserves to die, but I will give myself for his crimes; I will bear the penalty which the laws denounce against him; I will suffer, the just for the unjust, that so the guilty may escape, and for my sake the King may pardon him, and receive him into his favour.' What this kind and excellent person does for the single criminal, that the Lord Jesus Christ hath done for the whole world. All were condemned to die eternally; the law they had broken was holy, just, and good; the sentence was righteous, but it would sink the sinner into utter and everlasting destruction. But the Son of God gave himself for our sins, he died that we might live; on the cross, he bore the wrath of God in our stead:—" he suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God." He was so great, so glorious a person, that there was no need for him thus to die for each, whom he would save out of our guilty race. The sufferings of the Son of God were so infinitely precious, that there was no limit to their value and efficacy. He could taste death for every man. He could give his life a ransom for many. He was " the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

" By his one oblation of himself once offered, he hath perfected for ever, them that are sanctified." This, brethren, is the way, in which God has been pleased to save our ruined race. " He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." [1]

The great question now, with regard to each of us, is, " Dost thou believe on the Son of God? " True, indeed, he gave himself for our sins, but ere we can derive any advantage from this, we must believe so as to apply to him for the benefit, which by his precious blood-shedding he hath obtained for us. It is true, that the death of Christ was sufficient to procure pardon for all the sins of the whole world, and that on this ground the offer of pardon and salvation is made to every individual; but that offer will be of no avail to those, who do not accept it. And since none will accept a gratuitous forgiveness, but those who feel that their transgressions are inexcusable, and who are sorry for their disobedience: so we are taught that it will be bestowed on none but such as, repenting of their sins, and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, come to God through him, for deliverance from that wrath which they have deserved.

My dear friends, let me beseech you not " to stumble at this stumbling-stone." The wicked

[1] John iii.

heart of man is not easily brought to sorrow over sin. The proud nature of man is most unwilling to believe, that salvation can only be obtained for the sake of what another has done and suffered, and not by any works of righteousness which he himself has performed, or can perform. But God has purposely arranged it so; no sin shall be pardoned but that which is repented of, and even then, it will only be forgiven for the sake of what the Saviour has done and suffered. Oh! take heed not to attempt to "lay another foundation, than that which God has laid;" not to rest on any other hope, than that "Christ gave himself for our sins."

Our text declares

II. That Christ gave himself for our sins, THAT HE MIGHT DELIVER US FROM THIS PRESENT EVIL WORLD.

Hitherto I have only led you to consider the Son of God, as giving himself for us, that he might make an atonement for our sin, and so deliver us from the condemnation which we have deserved, and procure for us admission into the kingdom of heaven. But the Scriptures teach us to take a much more extensive view of the objects which he gave himself to effect. We are told that "he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."[1] A sinful nature is like a

[1] Titus ii. 14.

diseased body, it renders the sufferer wretched, and unfits him for the enjoyments of life, and the society of those who are in health. Could you procure a pardon for a criminal condemned to die, and send him from the prison, labouring under some loathsome and painful disease, you would do but little for him. Such is the state of the sinner. He is infected with a loathsome disease; a disease represented in the Scriptures, by that most disgusting of all maladies, the *leprosy:* such is sin! it corrupts and defiles both body and soul. To give pardon to a sinner, and leave him under the dominion of this disease, would afford him little comfort, and no enjoyment. To say to a sinner, your sins are forgiven, but you shall remain under their dominion, and be still the same wicked creature that you have been; you shall be admitted into heaven, but you shall enter there the same proud, rebellious, malicious being that you are, having the same corrupt heart, the same enmity to God, the same dislike to holiness;—what would such pardon be worth? The sinner would indeed be redeemed from hell, but he would carry a hell within him, which would render him miserable, amidst the joys of heaven. But nothing so unholy as man unrenewed, shall ever enter there. Heaven is the abode of a holy God, of a holy Saviour, of holy angels; an unholy being shall never be admitted into such society.

Man therefore, as a sinner in heart, as well as

practice, wants something more than pardon and justification; and when the Son of God gave himself to be the Saviour of the world, he undertook more than merely to pardon the sinner. "He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity." He bursts the bonds, in which sin holds us all as his slaves, and gives us liberty. He takes the hard and wicked heart away, and gives the heart of flesh—tender, feeling, and holy. He makes those who are in him new creatures, partakers of a new, yea a "divine nature;" and the nature being thus restored to the image of God, a life of purity, and holiness, and good works, is the necessary consequence.

But the passage before us puts the subject in a light somewhat different, though the grand outline is the same. "He gave himself for us, that he might deliver us from this present evil world."

What havoc, brethren, has sin produced! The world as God made it, was pronounced "very good," and man who was to inhabit it, was made at first in the "image of God." But so is it altered and defiled by sin; so dangerous has it become to those who are passing through it; that it is declared to be one of the grand objects for which Christ came, to deliver his people from this present evil world. And how necessary this is, we may judge, for the pen of inspiration hath recorded the awful fact, that "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." And again

it is said, "The friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God."[1]

Yet, wicked as the world is, wicked as we know it to be, still it exercises a most extraordinary power and dominion over us. We know not how to bear its frowns, or to resist its smiles. Its soothing blandishments allure us with an almost irresistible power; and its contempt and reproach, seem intolerable. How rarely do we meet with a man, who dares to be singular, and to refuse compliance with the customs or the solicitations of that little world in which he moves, even when he knows that present sin, and future unhappiness, must be the consequence. How few, I say, *dare* to be thus singular, and resist the world for the sake of keeping a conscience void of offence. Dare we, my brethren, thus act? What does the history of our past life testify on this point. I will not lead you far back, I only ask you to review more recent times; times when religious convictions have had some place in your minds. Have you dared to follow those convictions, in the face of your irreligious friends? When they have laughed at you, and ridiculed you for being scrupulous, have you not feared their sneers and mockings, more than you feared the wrath of God? There are some amongst us, I doubt not, who need look but little back, to learn how feeble they are, and what a

[1] John ii. 15. James iv. 4.

dangerous and powerful enemy they have, in this present evil world. Oh! how many would now be in the way to heaven, instead of being in the broad road to destruction, if they dared but to follow conscience, in opposition to the maxims of this evil world.

But, powerful as is this source of evil, and strong as is the influence it exerts over us, it must be overcome, or we shall have our portion with it. Its customs must be broken through, where they are contrary to God's word; its practices must be renounced—its temper and spirit must be laid aside, or we must be content to be numbered for ever among the enemies of God. Of no avail is it to speak of the power which it exercises over us all. True, that power is immense, but, it is opposed to the authority of God. We may choose to which we will submit, but we cannot be subject to both. "No man can serve two masters." "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Free as is the salvation of the Gospel, it is not made thus free, in order to enable us to live in a worldly spirit, and walk in a worldly course; and spend our time and money in a worldly manner, and then, having been joined with the world all our lives, just to be separated from it at the last hour. No, the separation must take place now; the command is, "Come out and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing."

One grand object, for which the Son of God

gave himself for our sins, was to effect this separation—" to redeem us from this present evil world, according to the will of God, and our Father." "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." See, my brethren how the whole design, both of our heavenly Father, and of his beloved Son, in the great work of redemption, is to produce a holy nation, to shew forth his praise. For this purpose Christians are placed in the world; but O let us never forget, though in the world, "the Christian is not of the world." For Christ gave himself for our sins, to deliver us from it:—he did not come down from heaven to effect a salvation, which should leave us under the dominion of the corrupt maxims, fashions, and principles, which prevail in this wicked world, and so suffer us to remain in a state of enmity to God, and of rebellion against his authority. Such is the case with every one, who walks according to the course of this world, and shapes his conduct by the rules and customs of the great body of mankind. But, it was the design of the Son of God, to deliver us from this state, and to take to himself a people, out of this wicked and ungodly mass, who should be zealous of good works. Accordingly, such is the change uniformly effected in all who truly believe on the Son of God. It is the direct and unfailing effect of the gospel, rightly received, to overcome the love and the fear of the world, to cause the believer to renounce that dominion,

under which he has so long lived, and give himself up to God, and his service. St. John therefore says, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."[1] Let this fact be but once cordially and really believed, that the "Son of God gave himself for our sins," and it will give such a view of the evil of sin, will display it before the soul in such a horrid malignity, while it exhibits God as so holy, so just, and so good, and as having so unquestionable a demand on our obedience, and faithful services; that we shall feel that we are, and ought to be his; and the desire of our hearts will be, to give up ourselves to him, who so loved us as to give his Son for our redemption.

But though such desires must and do prevail in the breast of every Christian, yet still he finds it no easy thing to gain this victory over this present evil world. So strong is the hold which it has on corrupt nature, and so numerous are the temptations which it employs, that it is an arduous matter to break loose from its grasp. But here the Christian is taught to live, and walk, and fight by faith. Believing that Christ gave himself for us, to deliver us from this present evil world, he looks to him for strength and grace according to his day, and he derives from him, by prayer, the help of the Spirit

[1] 1 John v. 4, 5.

of Holiness. And thus, though himself far too weak for the contest, he is enabled to maintain the fight, and to come off victorious. God, who "bruises Satan under his feet," enables him also to trample upon this evil world, and all its alluring snares and deceitful pleasures. Faith enables him to set his affections on things that are above; and thus the things that are on the earth lose their influence, and so he is delivered from this present evil world.

I will now bring the subject to a conclusion, by a few words of application. I imagine that I am speaking to none who hesitate to admit the fact recorded in my text. You all allow that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a subject with which you have been familiar from you childhood. You will go further, and allow that he gave himself for our sins; let me then put the question to you,—Have you ever considered your own personal concern in this matter? Is it the habitual and deep-rooted conviction of your souls, that to this fact you owe all your hope of escaping the everlasting fire of hell, the eternal wrath of God? I fear that there are many, very many, who profess to believe that the Son of God came into the world to save sinners, who have never yet been brought to consider themselves as so lost and undone, by the number and magnitude of their sins, as to be able to do nothing for their own salvation. Hence all the coldness of heart which they are conscious of,

in their application to the Saviour to wash them from their sins in his own blood; they do not rest their hopes on him, on his merits, on his death and atonement: they do not "count all things but loss for Christ;" they do not feel him "precious" to their souls; they do not find their hearts glowing with gratitude to him, who gave himself for their sins, because they are not practically convinced, that their sins have been so great, as to render such a Saviour, such a sacrifice, such an atonement necessary. Oh, my brethren, beware lest you be thus induced to build on another foundation, than that "elect and precious corner-stone" which God has laid in Zion. If ever you escape the eternal punishment of sin, it must be only through Christ, and for his sake, and not for any goodness or merit of your own; and if ever you receive this benefit from Christ, it must be by humble and penitent application to him, through faith and prayer: "He is able and willing to save to the uttermost, all them that come to God by him;" but they must come *by him*, and in no other way; the very attempt to accomplish it by other means, frustrates the grace of God, and makes it appear that Christ died in vain. Let us then take heed that we mistake not on this all-important, this fundamental point of Christianity.

But there is another danger equally great; the danger of a correct creed, without a correspondent effect upon the character. What, my brethren,

presents itself to our view, when we look abroad into this nation of professed Christians? Do we not see an immense multitude of persons, all acknowledging that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and yet as evidently a part of this present evil world, as if they were avowed unbelievers? And if we approach a little nearer to the house of God, and examine a congregation, where the gospel is plainly and faithfully preached, and where there are a number of persons who profess much to admire and value its doctrines; what do we too often see there? A few holy and heavenly-minded persons; a few, whose faith has given them victory over this evil world, and who are delivered both from the fear and from the love of it, and pursue their heavenly course, and walk in holiness before God, unmoved either by the smiles or frowns, the commands or solicitations of the ungodly, among whom they live. But these are, alas! only a few. The great body of the congregation are, under a religious name, mere men of the world, utterly unlike what the scriptures describe as real Christians, real belivers in the Son of God. And even of that number of whom we are disposed to entertain a more favourable opinion,—who sometimes seem as if they were at least *escaping*, from them that live in error, how few seem to be going forward, and how many return "as the dog to his vomit, and as the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

But why do I dwell on so painful a view of what, with alas! little propriety, we call a 'Christian congregation?' I do it, brethren, to lead you to see how much need you have to watch over your own hearts with godly jealousy. All these "fail of the grace of God;" they prove that they are not partakers of salvation, because they are not "delivered from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." Take heed then, that you be not added to the number of those who have a "name to live, but are dead."

SERMON XIX.

JEREMIAH iii. 12, 13.

GO AND PROCLAIM THESE WORDS TOWARD THE NORTH, AND SAY, RETURN THOU BACKSLIDING ISRAEL, SAITH THE LORD, AND I WILL NOT CAUSE MY ANGER TO FALL UPON YOU: FOR I AM MERCIFUL SAITH THE LORD, AND I WILL NOT KEEP ANGER FOR EVER. ONLY ACKLOWLEDGE THINE INIQUITY, THAT THOU HAST TRANSGRESSED AGAINST THE LORD THY GOD.

THE prophet Jeremiah lived at a period, when the state of things in the nation of Israel was fast coming to a crisis. He foresaw this, and was commanded to declare it; and to show the king and the princes, as well as the people of Judah, that nothing but a speedy and sincere repentance, could save them out of the hands of the Chaldeans, who were the instruments prepared by God, for punishing guilty nations.

Israel and Judah had been a people loved and favoured by Jehovah; they were the children of Abraham his friend, and He had shown his love to them, not only by rescuing them from their bondage in Egypt, and by bringing them into a land flowing with milk and honey, a land which was

"the glory of all lands," "a land which the Lord cared for," and blessed with a fertility and beauty, such as no other country could boast; but more than this, he had given to his favoured people, statutes and ordinances which, had they been duly attended to, would have done more for the happiness of their souls, than the most fertile and beautiful inheritance could do for the comfort and enjoyment of their bodies. They might have been, not only a rich and prosperous people, but also a holy and religious people. But they were not so. That same corruption of heart which has turned us, my brethren, away from God, and led us into sins and rebellions innumerable, was conspicuously displayed in Israel. They departed from the living God, not only by setting up their idols in their *hearts*, as we have done, but by making to themselves images of silver and of gold, of wood and of stone, on every high hill and under every green tree, bowing down to them, and worshipping them, as the gods who brought their fathers out of Egypt.

But sin always brings sorrow; and he whose heart departeth from the Lord, must be unhappy; for the wrath of the Almighty must needs rest upon him. Such was the case with Israel, and the men of Judah; God sent his prophets to declare to them that "the way of transgressors is hard," that sooner or later, guilt will be followed by punishment, whether it be the guilt of one man, or of a whole nation that forgetteth God.

But awful as are the threatenings of the Almighty against transgressors, and surely as they will fall on the head of every impenitent sinner, they are not so astonishing as is the tenderness of his compassion toward the sinful children of men. The severest threatenings are always accompanied with some expression of love and compassion; some persuasion addressed to the sinner, beseeching him to confess his sin, to forsake his iniquity, and to be reconciled to God: some offer of grace and mercy, something to show, that God "desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live." Such is the case in the words before us, which, though addressed to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, are just as suited to the people of this place, and to the inhabitants of England at large, as to them.

Let us then,

I. CONSIDER THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS SPOKEN TO BY THE LORD.

II. THE OFFERS MADE TO THEM.

III. THE CONDUCT REQUIRED OF THEM.

I. We WILL CONSIDER THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS addressed.

Jeremiah was commanded to proclaim his message toward the north; that is, toward the countries whence the Chaldean armies would come; for these regions lay to the north and north-east of

Canaan. By thus turning his face toward Babylon, he was to impress the people with the idea, that he was expecting the speedy arrival of the King of Babylon's armies, which were just coming to execute the Lord's vengeance on the sinners in Zion, that he was already on the look out for them. So ought those, who are set as watchmen over the souls of the people of their charge, not only to denounce the threatenings of the Almighty against all who live in sin, and especially against those who sin under a profession of religion ; but we should show them, by every means in our power, that we really believe our own message ; that we have no doubt whatever that the wrath is coming, even that wrath of the Lord, which " will burn like fire to the lowest hell," against every one who neglects the great salvation of the Gospel, and refuses to repent and turn away from his iniquities. This would cause us to feel more real pity and compassion for the careless sinners in our congregations, and so render us more faithful and earnest in our warnings and exhortations, and would make our people feel, that we do not speak to them in formality, but that we really believe their situation and their danger to be such as we describe.

Jeremiah was not commanded to speak these things to the Philistines, or to the Moabites, or to the men of Tyre and Zidon, the idolatrous nations which dwelt around the Israelites. God had his messages of wrath for them also. But here the

prophet has to do only with the men of Israel and Judah; with those who were the posterity of Abraham, and had been blessed with religious ordinances, and the knowledge of God, beyond all other people. The judgments which Jeremiah was looking for, and daily expecting, were such as the Lord was about to send on those whom he had taken for *His* people; and it was to them likewise, that the calls to repentance, and the offers of mercy were to be addressed. Just so is it with regard to us. Those who are now put in trust of the ministry, are not in general sent to heathen nations, sunk in idolatry and ignorance; nor even to those, who, though called Christians, are covered with the dark night which popery has spread over a great part of Christendom; but we are sent, in general, to people who are blessed with the knowledge of religion as revealed in the Bible; to those who glory that they are members of the Protestant Church of England; who attend on her beautiful and spiritual worship. It is to these that we are to denounce the threatenings of the Almighty; these we are to tell of "the wrath to come," and of the danger they are in; these we are to assure, that if they do not "turn and repent, and seek after God," they will surely perish.

This sometimes appears as strange to our people, as did the language of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, yea, of Christ and his apostles, to the Jews of old. When they heard the prophets thus speak, they

cried, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these."[1] 'These to whom you thus speak are the people of God—they worship in his temple—they support the ordinances of religion; why then should they be thus reproved, and threatened?' And is there nothing of the same kind of feeling among you, brethren, when you hear language addressed to you similar to that, in which the prophets spoke to their countrymen? Are you not sometimes ready to tell of your good churchmanship, of your frequent attendance at the house of God, and on the sacrament, of your alms deeds, and the other good things in your lives, and hence to conclude, as the Jews of old did, that the ministers of God ought to say, Peace, peace to you?

Our text informs us of the reason why the prophet was obliged to deliver such awful messages to the professed people of God. It is expressed in one word, "Thou *backsliding* Israel." The name of Israel was not denied to them, but they had lost all claim to the character of "Israelites indeed in whom there was no guile." They were *backsliders*. The idea seems to be taken from the untrained bullock when put into the yoke; instead of drawing the plough steadily and quietly forward, he hangs back, and suffers himself to be dragged forward by the other beasts, sliding his feet

[1] Jeremiah vii. 4.

along the ground, while resisting every effort to make him draw. So, in another part of the book before us, Ephraim is represented as making this confession, "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke."[1] Such is the representation given of the conduct of Israel. They are described as being first, "backsliders in heart;" they ceased to love God, and to find pleasure in his service; then, they went on to commit more open sin; till, as we read their history, and the addresses of the prophets to them, we discover that they practised the grossest iniquities without remorse; so that the Lord would no longer bear with them, but denounced the most awful judgments, which at last came upon them like an overflowing tempest.

And can we see nothing in this which we may take to ourselves? Look through this highly favoured Christian country as it is called; this country, which has succeeded to more than the religious advantages once possessed by Israel; this country, which has the Church of God established in it, with all its ordinances and sacraments; this country, which may be called the land of Bibles and of Schools. Look through this country, I say, and what do you observe? Drunkenness, lewdness, sabbath-breaking, lying, swearing, neglect of religion, iniquity of every kind. May we not call

[1] Jer. xxxi. 18.

our country, backsliding England, just as the prophet says, " Thou backsliding Israel."

But, leaving others for a while, commune a little with your own hearts, my brethren. Ask yourselves whether the same does not apply to you individually, that applied collectively, to Israel in old times, and to England now. The iniquity of a nation is the amount of the sins of all the individuals composing that nation. Have you not added something toward making up the character of England, as a nation that has backslidden from God? Your conscience will probably not charge you with having openly renounced the vows of your baptism, or given up all attendance on religious ordinances, or all profession of being Christians; but still you feel that your heart is not right with God, and that in your conduct, you do not keep his commandments. You may attend with considerable regularity on Christian ordinances, but you do not lead a Christian life. You " call Christ, Lord, Lord, but do not the things that he says." There are many things, many things, you know you ought *not* to do, and yet you do them; and many, which you know you ought to do, which nevertheless you leave undone. Here, then, you are backsliders from God.

But, perhaps, there may be some, to whom the term still more accurately applies. Once they were in earnest in religion, and seemed devoted to the service of God; those who observed them, saw

nothing, but what denoted a fixed determination to fear the Lord, and work out their salvation. But all, or nearly all, these favourable appearances have passed away ; all feeling of religion has departed, and sin has been yielded to, and iniquity has been cherished, and practised, if not in public, yet in secret: not known perhaps to man, but seen by God, and testified of by conscience.

If this be the case with any, can they wonder, if the ministers of God have heavy tidings for them? Can they be surprised, if, instead of its being said of them, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," we should be bid "to tell the people their transgression, and the house of Israel their sin?"

Yes! my brethren; the wrath of God is coming upon all the workers of iniquity, and it is our duty to "proclaim" it. We "have not desired the evil day." We rejoice not in denouncing woe, yet we must tell "the backslider in heart," that he "shall eat of the fruit of his own way," for the "day of the Lord is at hand, a day of clouds and of thick darkness," "the day of wrath and perdition of ungodly men," wherever they are found.

Still, however, we are not messengers of judgment, so much as heralds of mercy: this will appear while I proceed

II. To consider the OFFERS made by Jeremiah in the name of the Lord to backsliding Israel.

Though the commission of the prophet to his

apostate and ungodly countrymen, was, as might naturally be expected, to denounce the wrath of God upon them, yet we continually meet with the strongest expressions of pity and compassion, and anxious desire for their safety; and with the most striking assurances that it was not even then too late, for that the Lord was "waiting to be gracious," that he was looking for some favourable change, some sign of repentance and amendment, which might render it consistent with his glory to turn away from his anger, and be merciful to them. His wish was to save, and not to destroy; this is very strikingly displayed in the text; for though the Chaldean armies, the instruments of the Lord's judgments were all prepared, and were even on their march toward Jerusalem; and it seemed therefore, as if the doom of the people were already fixed; yet even then, it was not too late; the mercy of God was so great, that if backsliding Israel would yet return, all might yet be well with them. "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."

What language could possibly be more gracious, or more calculated to induce backsliding Israel to consider their ways, and to turn, and repent, and seek after God. And what could leave them more completely without excuse, when they determined not to forsake their iniquities?

Brethren, the case of the people to whom this

message was sent, was rendered very awful by the disregard, with which they treated such declarations of love and mercy. But *we* are in still greater danger, and from an exactly similar cause. We, like them, have transgressed against the Lord our God, and have fallen under his severest displeasure; the threatenings of his justice, and the curses of his holy law are already pronounced against us. We hear him declaring, that "the soul that sinneth it shall die," and *that* death, we know, is eternal death. Our consciences tell us, that we have sinned, and deserved all this woe and misery, yet the voice of mercy is heard, even more clearly than the voice of justice. The invitations and the promises of God, though spoken in a still small voice from mount Sion, are heard more distinctly than the thunders of mount Sinai. "God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."[1] *He* tells us of the Father's love, who hath sent him into the world to save sinners. He tells us how he has satisfied divine justice, and taken away the curse of the law, by bearing it himself, in our stead. He tells us, that he is "able to save to the uttermost;" that "his blood cleanseth from all sin;" that "he will cast out none that come;" that "he that believeth on him shall never perish," but shall be saved with an everlasting salvation; that he will

[1] Heb. i. 1.

help him by his grace, and deliver him from the power of sin, at the same time that he blots out all his iniquities. The language of the gospel is, therefore, the very same as that of the text, " Return, O backsliding Israel, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you ; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever."

Where then is the danger, after this proclamation of God's infinite mercy, and Christ's power to save? It is exactly the same, as that of Israel and Judah. It was not their past idolatries and iniquities, that caused their final overthrow ; but it was their obstinacy, their hardness of heart, their determination that they would not return and forsake their sins. Just so it is with us. It is not that our iniquities have been " as scarlet, and red like crimson." No, the blood of Christ which cleanseth from all sin, would make them white as snow, if now we were but willing and obedient ; but our danger is, that the " goodness of God " should fail of " leading us to repentance ; " this it was that ruined Israel and Judah, and if we perish at last in sin, it will be this that seals our doom.

This leads me

III. To consider what the Lord requires from those whom he pardons.

The wrath of God is what we have deserved, his mercy is all contrary to our merits. " The wages of sin is death ; the gift of God is eternal

life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Our destruction is of ourselves, but our salvation is only by grace through faith, not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. This truth cannot be too deeply impressed upon our minds. But still, no man is saved *in* his sins. The gate is straight, and the way is narrow, that "leadeth unto life," and no man can enter and walk therein, who is not willing to part with all iniquity. Hence the language of Scripture always imports, that there is something for us to do, even while we expect to receive all our own salvation as the gift of God. This is expressed in our text by two directions. "Return, O backsliding Israel," and "only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God." "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy." When the prodigal came to himself he said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Here are the very things our text speaks of. He *returns* to his father, he *acknowledges* his transgression. No one would say that such conduct, on the part of this wild and profligate youth—*merited* the love and kindness shown him by his father. It was not the *condition*, strictly speaking, yet had he not returned, had he not acknowledged his sin, he never would have been restored to his father's

family. The want of disposition to return and acknowledge his offences, places the sinner out of the way of God's mercy; he cannot ask it, he cannot receive it. Were the Lord to pardon, and receive the sinner to his favour, while he continued in a state of sin and rebellion, it would bring dishonour upon God, it would operate as an encouragement to sin. What God cannot do, consistently with the glory of his holiness, we may be sure he will not do at all.

When therefore he says to Israel, "Return and acknowledge thy transgression," or when he says to the sinner, "Repent, and be converted," he speaks of something that is absolutely necessary, in order to his sins being blotted out, and the divine wrath not resting on him eternally. But, what mercy is that, which thus speaks to us! that tells us, all is done for us by the Son of God, all that is wanting for the atonement of our sins, for the justification of our persons, for giving us admission to the favour of God here, and to happiness in heaven for ever; and that we have only to return to God, and acknowledge our transgressions, and then, every thing shall be ours.

But alas! how hard is the heart of man; how difficult do we find it to bring our minds to this; how averse are we to say, "I have sinned." Just as we have seen it a hard struggle in our children, to acknowledge their faults, so is it with us to say before the Lord, with right feeling, I have sinned.

But it must be done—done sincerely—done from the heart, or it will meet with no approbation from him, who "seeketh truth in the inward parts."

My dear brethren, let us no more stand out. Stubbornness must bring us to ruin. Let us yield at once, let us go into our closets, and there humbly and fully make our confessions to Almighty God; let us pray for the help of his Holy Spirit, to render those confessions sincere. Let us seek his grace, that while we are acknowledging our transgressions, we may forsake them all. And in this spirit of deep humiliation, let us accept that boundless mercy which is offered us in Christ, and then the Lord "will not cause his anger to fall upon us, for he is merciful, and will not keep his anger for ever," but will redeem us from all evil, will save us with an everlasting salvation.

SERMON XX.

MATTHEW vi. 34.

TAKE THEREFORE NO THOUGHT FOR THE MORROW: FOR THE MORROW SHALL TAKE THOUGHT FOR THE THINGS OF ITSELF. SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY IS THE EVIL THEREOF.

THERE is a stream of mercy flowing through every part of God's word. The whole intent and design of the Bible is, to teach man, as a fallen, and therefore a miserable creature, the way in which he may be happy. Its object is, the advancement of his everlasting interests; and it unfolds to view such a boundless display of the love of God toward our guilty race, as must fill the soul with wonder. It tells us, that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."[1] The main purpose of the Scripture is to set forth this gracious Saviour, and to persuade men to come to him, in order that they may be saved, and made eternally happy.

[1] John iii. 16, 17.

But though this be the prevailing object of divine revelation, yet the temporal suffering and sorrow, attached to human nature by sin, is not passed unnoticed or unpitied. The godliness which the Scriptures enforce, has the promise of the life that *now* is, as well as of that which is to come. All our present wretchedness is traced back to sin, and with reference to this, the divine voice says, " do thyself no harm," proceed no further along the road that leadeth to destruction, but be wise—be holy—be happy.

In various parts of Scripture, we have given us lessons of the highest worldly wisdom, inculcated on the authority of God. And in the passage connected with our text, we find our Lord Jesus Christ collecting his disciples around him on the mount, and graciously giving them lessons of heavenly wisdom, mingled with others which were calculated to render them superior to the troubles of this present life. So that we may venture to say, that were this one discourse of our blessed Lord fully attended to, many of the springs of human sorrow and uneasiness would be completely dried up.

Of how many distresses, my brethren, is the disposition to look forward to imaginary future trouble, the fruitful source? We have a burden to bear to-day, yesterday also had its load, and we expect that to-morrow will have its burden also. To-day, our load may, or may not be heavy, at any rate it would be supportable, but not content with

this, we go back to yesterday, and forward to the morrow; and when we have laden ourselves with the burden of several days at once, we complain that our load is heavier than we can bear. But who laid all this upon us? Not He, who bids us "take no thought for the morrow:" we act in violation of his command, and therefore we are unhappy. As then, we all seek for comfort, and all are inquiring "who will show us any good?" how may we escape the vexation of body and spirit to which we are daily exposed; let us devote a little time to the consideration of the injunction given us in the text, by him who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. He says, "Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

The subject naturally divides itself into two parts for our consideration,

I. THE PRECEPT, and,

II. THE REASON OF IT.

I. Let us consider THE PRECEPT of our text.

"Take no thought for the morrow." The passage is well known, and very often referred to. But I apprehend that it is more frequently looked upon as a good maxim, a piece of useful advice, which it is difficult to follow, and which we may attend to or not, as we please, rather than a precept of our Lord and Master, which we are bound

to obey, and to carry out into practice. Such is, however in fact, its real character: and common as are our deviations from it, every one of those deviations ought to be looked on as a sin; a sin which brings indeed present punishment with it, but which needs as much to be repented of, and blotted out by the blood of Christ, as those sins, of which the penalty is looked for only in the eternal world.

Let us view the passage in this light. Man is in reality, wholly destitute of the power of foreseeing any thing. He "knoweth not what shall be on the morrow." "He cannot tell what a day may bring forth." This we all are aware of, and often make it the subject of serious remark; yet how inconsistently do we act! We are looking forward, and anticipating future events; not only for days and weeks, but for months and years to come: sometimes we promise ourselves pleasures, to be enjoyed at a distant period of time, and sometimes we forebode evils, which will probably never occur, or which may occur to others, when our heads are laid low in the dust. Now much, very much of this is forbidden by our Lord and Master in the passage before us. But in order to our rightly understanding this precept, I think it will be necessary, before we inquire what the text prohibits, to consider what it does *not* forbid.

This is the more necessary, because the words of our translation are apparently very strong, and would seem to forbid all forethought, all prepara-

tion for the future. The original word[1] does not imply this. It is literally, 'let not your minds be divided,' be not full of care, be not anxious and solicitous about the morrow. The word is the same as St. Paul uses, when he says, "*Be careful for nothing*, but in "every thing by prayer and supplication, make your requests known unto God."[2] We are not therefore to understand our Lord as forbidding all forethought with respect to the future. We are told that "the prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself." We are told, to "go to the ant, and consider her ways, and be wise, which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest."[3] The providential appointments of God, moreover, render it necessary that man should use forethought. The husbandman and the merchant must look forward, they must be making provision for future months and years.

And, as prudent forethought cannot be forbidden in the text, so neither can active exertion and steady diligence in our different callings; these are necessary for the well-being, and almost for the very existence of man: yet they are only necessary in making preparation for the future, a future which we must look forward to, and provide for. Again and again do the Scriptures inculcate this

[1] μεριμνήσητε. [2] Philip. iv. 6.
[3] Proverbs vi. 6—8: xxvii. 12.

upon us: we are to be diligent in business, and to provide for our own, or we shall be worse than the infidels.

How important, how absolutely necessary, forethought and activity are in securing our everlasting happiness, we all know, though alas! few among us are prepared to make provision for our eternal wants, as the Scriptures enjoin; but with regard to temporal affairs, we must look forward, and make provision against days, which may yet, perhaps, never come to us. This is not, therefore, what our Lord meant to prohibit. To what then are we to apply the words? Our Lord clearly meant—

1. To forbid all such anxious attempts to provide for ourselves, or for our families, as would in any way imply a forgetfulness of our entire dependance upon God.

Such care is the natural tendency of our hearts. We are proud, we like not the idea of depending upon God. We employ certain means for attaining our objects, and generally speaking, the means are successful; but we forget who made them so, and take the credit to ourselves. We have found the means answer the end, and the more so, in proportion as we have been skilful and industrious. We therefore say, we will be careful and industrious for the future, and then we shall be sure to succeed. The husbandman cultivates his land with care, and is rewarded with an abundant harvest; and he says, here is my good management, and

forgets Him "who caused his sun to shine, and his rain to descend." The fisherman spreads his net, and toils all night, and collects a great draught of fishes, and then, as the prophet says, "he burns incense to his net and to his drag," and gives them the thanks, that are due to the God of providence. The tradesman carries on his business successfully, and grows rich and great, and says, "my hand, and the might of my arm hath gotten me this wealth," and "forgets the Lord, who gave him the power to get wealth." And not content with what is past, these men, in the ungodliness of their nature, all say it shall be the same for the future. And they are taking thought for the morrow, and for next year; and to-morrow's plan, and next year's plan, and all their schemes, are formed without any reference to God, and are expected to succeed without him. To such persons may be well applied the expostulation of the apostle, "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that." [1]

2. We may conclude, that all such care about

[1] James iv. 13—15.

our future temporal state, is forbidden, as prevents serious attention to our spiritual welfare.

The connexion of our text implies this. The preceding verse is, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;" comprising in these terms every spiritual benefit which man can need. To "seek the kingdom of God," is to seek admission into the true church of Christ, by sincere repentance and living faith in the Lord Jesus; to seek to be numbered with his saints on earth, as preparatory to being numbered with them in glory everlasting. To "seek his righteousness," is to seek for justification through him, who "is made of God unto us righteousness;" who "brought in everlasting righteousness," and is "called the Lord our Righteousness." It is moreover, "to hunger and thirst after righteousness," after holiness of heart, and holiness of practice, the seal and evidence of our being "made the righteousness of God" in Christ. It therefore comprehends all that *he* is seeking for, who is "working out his salvation with fear and trembling." But how is all this impeded—how sorely are we let and hindered in running the race that is set before us—by an over anxiety about the things of this present world! We cannot fix our affections on things above, when our thoughts are occupied by "what we shall eat, and what we shall drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed." Eternity, and its vast concerns, will be thrown into the back ground,

while we take anxious and over eager thought for the morrow, and its fading enjoyments. We all know this, yet we regard it not; our Lord has therefore laid his command upon us; he prohibits all this solicitude, which we find standing in the way of our spiritual progress; religion cannot flourish in the heart that is occupied with earthly cares; these cares therefore, must be kept under, that the soul may be the object of our unceasing regard.

3. But, once more, we are here forbidden to permit our thoughts to be so engaged about the things of the morrow, as to destroy the peace and comfort of our minds.

As I before observed, God graciously intends the happiness of even his sinful creatures. The import of every part of his word, as addressed to us, is, "Do thyself no harm." Man is in every way the cause of his own unhappiness, he has ever been his own worst enemy. How much this is the case with regard to the subject before us, we are all in some degree aware. Troubles we have, we are indeed, "born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward," but our present distress is enormously aggravated by the anticipation of future evils; by anticipating disasters, which may never befall us, and then making ourselves unhappy about them, just as if they had already arrived. In the case of those who are already seeking the Lord, and endeavouring to serve him, this practice springs from forgetfulness

of his word, distrust of his providence, and want of faith in his promises. He has again and again assured them, that his eyes are upon them, and that his ears are open to their prayer; they are taught that nothing can befal them without his appointment, that "the very hairs of their heads are all numbered;" and that "all things shall work together for good to them that love God." For them therefore, to look forward to the future, and thence to derive causes for anxiety and trouble, is unbelief and sin; it is to distrust their heavenly Father, as though his love and care were not to be depended upon. Our Lord, therefore, when specially addressing himself to his disciples, has expressly forbidden them thus to take thought for the morrow, thus to fill their minds with anxiety about what may then occur.

Let us now proceed to consider,

II. THE REASONS ASSIGNED FOR THIS COMMAND.

1. The injunction of our Lord which we have been dwelling upon, seems founded on some things, of which he had before been speaking. On the one hand, he had been shewing his disciples their utter helplessness in themselves, and their entire dependence upon God; on the other, he had shewn them the goodness, the love, and the power of their heavenly Father, which were exhibited in his works of creation, and in the care with which he supplied

the wants of every creature His hands had formed; and thence he had deduced the plain and simple inference, that this all-gracious and almighty God, would undoubtedly take care of those, whom he had made his children by adoption and grace. "Therefore, I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they. Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? and why take ye thought for raiment? consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Then follow those words which I have already quoted. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take

therefore no thought for the morrow;" because you can do nothing, either to supply your own wants, or to preserve yourselves from danger, and because your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of those things; and while you are seeking in the first place the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he will add all these things. Leave all in the hands of God. He that "feedeth the young ravens, that call upon him;"—"he that openeth his hand and filleth all things living with plenteousness;"—he that clothes the flowers of the field with a splendour that Solomon in all his glory could not equal;—he who hath fed you all your life long, and redeemed you from all evil; He promises that he will still provide for you, and that you and your concerns shall be still the objects of his care; therefore take no thought for the morrow. My Christian brethren, what reasons for repose have you, in the gracious assurances of your Lord! Why then will you dishonour him, and break his commands, and distress yourselves, by taking thought for the morrow? If you would have peace, attend to his injunctions. He bids you be at ease, he bids you be happy, but this can only be, by casting all your care upon him that careth for you, and giving yourselves up to your great work of "seeking *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

2. Our Lord adduces another reason why we should take no thought for the morrow, "for,"

he says, "the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself."

Were we endowed with the faculty of foreseeing events, we should indeed perceive, that there would be no part of our future lives, which would not be attended with many sorrows and many difficulties, though probably of a very different kind and character than we now imagine. Our knowledge of the future is so vague, that it is very probable that even to-morrow will be passed, under circumstances totally unlike what we now conjecture. How then can we expect to make provision for future months and years. But here again, we have the consolation of thinking, that when to-morrow comes, with its train of unexpected difficulties, it will take thought for the things of itself. If it has new wants, it will have also its new supplies; if it has new difficulties, it will have also new expedients. Look back, brethren, on the history of your past lives. How often have you met with trials that you never anticipated—difficulties that you never expected—and sorrows that you never so much as thought of! How were you brought through all these? Most clearly not by your own prudence and forethought, or by the provision you had made against the time of trial. No, but when the morrow came, it took thought for the things of itself; when the want came, God sent the supply; when the danger appeared, the means of relief appeared also; when the trouble

began to press upon you, the everlasting arms were put underneath, and you were supported through the trial, and your sorrow was turned into joy. Such has been the experience of your past life; and such will be also the experience of your future years, if future years are reserved for you. Your own anxious solicitude, has often increased your sorrows, but it has never done any thing toward relieving them; and why do you refuse to believe that it will be so for the future? You have been supported all your lives long, and delivered from threatening difficulty and danger, and why do you hesitate to trust God for the future, why will you refuse to believe him, when he says, "the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself."

3. There is one more reason given by our Lord for the precept we have been considering.

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

To the truth of this saying, we are all ready to give our assent, though we have but little inclination to act upon the acknowledged fact. It is but a sorrowful world that we live in; and though we appear to have portions in it, differing materially one from another, yet "every heart knoweth its own bitterness," and every one is ready to think his own sorrow to be more acute than that of his neighbour. The Scriptures say nothing to invalidate this;—on the contrary they tell us much to show that man, as a sinner, is the child of sorrow. The Saviour assures us that we have, every

day, a burden to bear, which is quite as heavy as we know how to carry ; a burden, sufficient to make us groan. Yet he sees us foolishly increasing our own troubles, and making our burden heavier than God ever intended it should be ; and doing this, to no beneficial purpose whatever. If we could take to-morrow's load of cares and sorrows, and so carry it to-day, that when to-morrow came we should find it a day of ease and satisfaction, a day free from anxiety and trouble ; then there might be some wisdom, in taking thought for the morrow. But this we cannot do ; and yet the burden of to-day is grievously augmented with anticipated evils, with fears and apprehensions ; while the load of to-morrow is not lightened a single grain. Thus, beside the burden God has laid upon us, we make another of our own, and groan and faint under the accumulated weight. Compassionating, therefore, our unhappiness, though it be all the result of our sin and folly, our Lord graciously says, let to-morrow alone,—leave to-morrow to take care of itself,—" sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

We all, my brethren, acknowledge that this command is right, that it is wise, that it is good ; and yet, connected as it is with our proper happiness, we find it a hard command ; a command which we scarcely at all know how to comply with, though we see, that if we could, we might be comparatively cheerful and contented. But why is this ? The

answer to this question may serve for an application, of our subject. It is because we are so worldly-minded; because our thoughts and affections are so much fixed on the things below. Examine yourselves, brethren, on this point. When your minds are led to look forward with anxious care to to-morrow, what are the things which most harass, and distress you with fears and apprehensions. I do not say that the subjects are wholly unimportant, wholly unworthy of your attention; but I will venture to say, that they are almost, if not entirely relating to this present world. They may be important, but they are only important to you, as an inhabitant of earth, and not to an immortal being, standing on the verge of eternity. Is it not so? And could your thoughts and cares and anxiety be thus confined to this spot, and to these concerns, which you are just about to leave for ever, if it were not that you were too, far too worldly? Have you not need, urgent need of the exhortation, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world!"

Would you then get rid of this fruitful source of unhappiness, look beyond to-morrow! "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee; ponder the paths of thy feet." Consider thyself as not formed for time only, but for eternity, not for this world, but for another. It is only when the things of this life are spoken of, that anxious care about the future is forbidden.

It is only then, that it becomes the source of unhappiness. There are subjects of infinite moment to each of us, where forethought, and solicitude, are not only allowable, but required of us. Such solicitude as will make us fear and tremble, even while we are using the means appointed by God to secure the prize set before us. Take thought for eternity, labour to secure an inheritance beyond the grave, to find pardon of sin through faith in the Lord Jesus; and then your most anxious solicitude your most indefatigable exertions for the future, will incur no censure. No, nor will they do any thing towards diminishing your happiness, but the more earnest you are, the more present peace will you enjoy, and the brighter will be your future prospects.

SERMON XXI.[1]

2 CORINTHIANS iii. 2.

YE ARE OUR EPISTLE, WRITTEN IN OUR HEARTS, KNOWN AND READ OF ALL MEN.

NEVER had any one a more painful task to perform, than that which was imposed on St. Paul by the conduct of the Corinthians. Though he had been the instrument of making them acquainted with the gospel of Christ, and had imparted to them those spiritual gifts, and miraculous powers, in which they so much gloried; yet certain persons had come in among them, who taught them to deny his apostolic authority, and to pour contempt on his knowledge of the mysteries of Christ; while they represented him, as endeavouring to exercise a tyrannical authority over them. Such were the insinuations thrown out against him, when he wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthian church; and he expected a repetition of the same charges, now that he addressed them a second time.

He had not, however, undertaken the painful

[1] Mr. Scott had been upwards of twenty-five years at Gawcott, when this sermon was preached.

task of vindicating himself from these calumnies, because he was anxious for commendation and applause, but because he was grieved to see the wrong state of mind, into which the Corinthians had fallen. There are few things, which more clearly shew a sad declension in spiritual feeling, than when those who profess the gospel, lose their attachment to the ministers by whom they believed. This was the case at Corinth to an extraordinary degree : and the Apostle dwells upon it, with feelings, evidently of the most painful nature.

Among other points, he declares to the Corinthians, that he was not like some of their favorite teachers, who were so little known in the Christian church, or who were of so doubtful and equivocal character, that when they went from one place to another, they had need to carry with them letters of recommendation. He wanted nothing of the kind. If he came to Corinth, he was well known there, as the minister who had first preached to them the gospel of God. Their existence as a Church, was the seal and evidence of his apostleship. If he went to other places, still the Corinthians were his epistle of commendation, written on his own heart, so as never to be obliterated ; and was known and read of all men ; all had heard of the church of Corinth. And though, in some respects, he " had had sorrow of them, in whom he ought to have rejoiced," yet still, such an effect had been produced, there were so many thriving Christians

among them, that he could not but still rejoice over them, as "manifestly declared, to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by him, written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart."

It is not my intention, to enlarge any further at present on the subject, as it relates to St. Paul and the Corinthians; but to dwell on the fact, that those who attend on the preaching of the gospel in any place, and profess to embrace the doctrines they hear; form the minister's epistle of commendation. And, in order to make a practical use of the subject, I shall point out

I. WHAT OUGHT TO BE READ IN SUCH AN EPISTLE. And

II. Apply the subject, by enquiring WHAT MAY THUS BE READ AMONGST OURSELVES?

Since then, a congregation, hearing and professing to receive the gospel of Christ, is the minister's epistle of commendation, we will proceed to consider,

I. WHAT OUGHT TO BE READ IN SUCH AN EPISTLE.

The subject, as you must perceive, is immensely broad; coextensive with all the doctrines and duties of Christianity; it is not therefore to be expected that I should enter very minutely into it, I will only touch on a few leading points.

Our Lord says to his disciples, " Ye are the light of the world. A city set on an hill cannot be hid." And, speaking with particular reference to the teachers of religion, he says, " Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles ?"[1] We are hereby taught, that where the gospel is preached, great effects will follow—effects which will be known and observed, both by friends and enemies,—by those who see the grace of God, as Barnabas did at Antioch, and are glad ; and by those who wonder at, but hate the change. These effects will correspond with the instructions given, and the doctrines inculcated ; or, to keep to the allusion of the text, an epistle will be written, such as may be " known and read of all men." All will be able to discover something of the instruction given, and of the manner in which it has been received, by observing the effects which are produced. The good seed, sown in an honest and good heart, will bring forth good fruit ; so that by observing the crop, a judgment may be formed of the nature of the seed, and of the quality of the ground.

When Christianity was a new religion upon the earth, and the apostles appeared, as they did to the Athenians, to be " setters forth of strange Gods," no sooner did they begin to preach the gospel at any place, so as to gain attention, than many eyes

[1] Matt. v. 14 ; vii. 16.

were turned to the spot. Men looked to see and to read the "epistle." They wished to know what was going forward; some for the sake of accusing and blaspheming, and some from a desire to know what the doctrine was, and what were the effects produced by it.

In our day and country, circumstances are materially changed. That Christianity is preached in any place, is not a matter that excites surprise; for it is professed every where, and is supposed to be preached every where. But though, to a certain extent, this is true, yet still there is a wide difference in the manner in which it is preached by different persons. It cannot be denied, that some insist, with much more earnestness than others, on what may properly be deemed, the *peculiar* doctrines of Christianity, as the gospel of Christ, than others do, who are, nevertheless, members of the same church, and believers in the same creed. From some pulpits, much more is heard respecting the lost and depraved condition of mankind; the salvation and atonement of Christ; the necessity of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; respecting the new heart, and the new spirit, which are produced in every true Christian by the Holy Ghost; aud the perpetual need we are in of divine grace, to enable us to serve God; than from others. In some places these subjects are little spoken upon, or are discussed in a cold, formal, unimpassioned manner; while in others, they are dilated on, as

matters of the highest imaginable importance, insisted upon with the utmost energy, and applied to the conscience as things in which every individual is concerned, as immediately connected with the eternal happiness of his immortal soul:—such difference, is too plain to be denied. And where this more earnest way of preaching and applying the doctrines of the gospel prevails, it excites attention; larger congregations, generally, are collected, and more effect seems to be produced. An "epistle" is written, and many eyes are turned to read it. The conduct of those, who regularly attend on such preaching, and seem to prefer it, is watched, and carefully observed.

The conduct and characters of such persons, is the minister's epistle of commendation, *now*, as much as it was, when the apostle employed the term with respect to the Corinthians, and their behaviour. The doctrines preached, and the tendency of the instruction given by the preacher, will be judged of, by the effects produced on the people; by his fruits he will be known.

Our enquiry then is, what ought a person, in other respects ignorant of the subject, to learn by reading this "epistle"? What impression ought to be left on his mind, by seeing, and examining the conduct of those, who thus hear the gospel preached.

1. The first thing which ought to strike his mind, and engage his attention, should be, that the

people are more fully acquainted with the word of God, and the whole system of religion, than those are who have not the same kind of instruction.

It would astonish any one who had not been accustomed to converse with a variety of people, to be told of the extreme ignorance that prevails, even in such a country as this, upon every subject of a religious nature; questions, which one would suppose a child would answer correctly, receive the most absurd replies from those of mature years; and often do we meet with persons advanced in life, who have scarcely a distinct idea on the simplest points of Christianity; they know not themselves, and therefore they cannot tell to others, what a sinner must do to be saved. I am not speaking of what is the case among men brought up in heathenism, but of what is the case with multitudes in our own country.

Now here is an "epistle;" and what do we read in it? We read, that either the appointed teachers of religion, have been most criminally negligent of their duty, or that the persons themselves have loved darkness rather than light. These things ought not to be so. The preaching of the gospel was instituted on purpose to impart instruction to men, on subjects connected with religion, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light," as well as "from the power of Satan unto God;" the former is the means whereby the latter is to be accomplished. Till the mind is enlight-

ened, till a man is made to perceive the truth, he will not feel its power, he will not live under its influence. The duty of the minister is, to give instruction: "The priest's lips should keep knowledge," and should impart it to the people, giving them "line upon line, and precept upon precept," so that every one should be well instructed unto the kingdom of God, and there shall be no danger that any one out of the whole congregation should be "destroyed for lack of knowledge." Till this is effected, an epistle cannot be written, which will prove a commendation either to the minister or to his people.

2. In reading this "epistle," it ought to be seen by all, that the gospel, and its infinitely important truths, are not received in a cold, heartless manner, but as things in which the people feel themselves *deeply* interested.

In this manner St. Paul tells us, the Thessalonians received the word which he preached to them. "For our gospel" he says, "came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." And again he says, "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] When man

[1] 1 Thess. i. 5; ii. 13.

speaks that which is the result of his own reason and wisdom, we are allowed to receive what he says, with caution and reserve. The subjects on which he treats may be of small moment in themselves, or of no concern to us, or he may treat of them in a manner that is not correct, or that does not approve itself to our reason. But when God speaks to his creatures, he speaks not of trifles, but on subjects deeply interesting to every one addressed, that is, to the whole race of mankind; and he speaks on those things with perfect truth and accuracy. If therefore what the minister of Christ says, is received as the word of God, it must be received without hesitation or gainsaying, as infinitely momentous to those who hear it, and as infinitely interesting to them.

Knowledge is undoubtedly, in matters of religion, of immense value, but it is not all we must seek for. It is valuable only as a means to a further end, as the scaffolding to the erection of the building; the scaffolding is, after all, no part of the building, and shall soon be removed; so knowledge is no part of salvation, and "shall soon vanish away," though as a means whereby salvation may be attained, it is highly important.

The minister who should be satisfied when he had imparted the knowledge of religion to his people; or the people who should be so well pleased with the acquaintance they had obtained with the truths of Christianity, and the skill they

had acquired in defending them against the arguments of objectors, would both come short of their final reward. The facts and doctrines of our holy religion, are of such a nature, that they ought to excite the deepest and most intense interest in the breast of every man who hears of them; and unless they do excite that interest, they will wholly fail of their object. We may learn that the Scripture hath concluded all under sin;—that the promise of eternal life is made to the believer in Christ;—that God will give his Holy Spirit to renew his heart, and make him fit for heaven;—and will of his faithfulness and love bring him thither. But what benefit shall we obtain, if we only receive these statements as mere facts, in which we do not feel any personal concern? To obtain any advantage from the knowledge we have acquired, we must see that we have a deep interest in it; that we are sinners who are shut up under sin, and are therefore like to perish. The promise of eternal life to the believer in Christ, must be to us like the king's pardon sent to the prisoner in the condemned cell; and so with all the other truths of God's blessed word, they will do us no good till we feel that we are personally, deeply, concerned in them. They are pardon, and life, and eternal bliss; if therefore they are received aright, they must be precious to the soul. He who preaches of man's lost estate, of the love of Christ, of the necessity of faith, repentance, and the renewing of the Holy

Ghost, of the happiness of heaven, of the misery of hell; without feeling that his subject is fearfully interesting to his congregation, can never write such an epistle as St. Paul alludes to in the text. The people that hear in the same spirit of indifference, will get no good; they will not be the minister's epistle of commendation; they will not be his glory and joy. To have this happy effect, the preacher must himself be fired with supreme love of the truth; and the people must feel, that he is declaring to them "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

3. It ought to be clear to every one who reads this "Epistle," that the doctrine taught, has produced the most happy effect upon the character, tempers, and general conduct, of those who have heard it.

We live in a world of extreme wickedness; iniquity abounds on every side; and even where no flagrant immoralities meet the eye, still we perceive that God is not loved or served, his law is not honoured and obeyed; man is not loved by his brother man, but made the prey of his passions, of his avarice, or of his pride. Many have been the confessions that have been made of this, many the lamentations that have been uttered over the melancholy fact; yet every effort to mend the world, to produce more reverence and love of God, and more good will and kindness towards man, has failed.

But God has sent forth his gospel as the remedy. So far as it has been truly received, it has answered the end proposed; wherever " the grace of God has brought salvation, it has taught men, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

This is the most legible part of our " epistle," all men can read and understand this, it comes home to the feelings of all. If a person goes to a place, in which the distinguishing truths of the gospel are preached in that pointed, zealous, earnest manner to which I have alluded; if he hears the people of that place, talking more about religion than others do, and speaking of it as a subject which they understand, and in which they are deeply interested, he will immediately ask, " What do ye more than others ? " The only way in which he can judge of the excellence of the doctrine taught, is by marking its effects on those who listen to it. But if he can see nothing different from what he has been used to see in the world; if, when he has business to transact with them, he finds that they are as ready to overreach and to seize on every advantage as others; if, when he listens to their conversation, he finds it polluted and polluting; if, when he goes into their families, he finds an air of ungodliness and worldly feeling spreading over every thing; if he sees that they are not afraid of temptation, but running

into, and yielding to it: if he hears them speak against drunkenness, and yet venturing to the very verge of excess; if they censure covetousness, yet are hard-hearted to the poor, and refuse to help them in their distresses, or contribute with an unwilling hand, and an unfeeling spirit; if he hears them talking of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, and yet sees that they are harsh, censorious, quarrelsome, unforgiving, and soon angry;—if he finds things in this state, what will he say? what can he read in such an epistle, but that their religion is all hypocrisy or delusion?

But, should he find the reverse of all this: that those who embrace the gospel, are strictly following the apostolic exhortation, "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, if there be any praise, think on these things."[1] If he finds that they are careful to "provide things honest in the sight of all men;" that they would much rather suffer loss, than take an unfair advantage of any one; that they will submit to any self-denial, rather than not render to all their dues. If, when he visits their families, he sees that their children are kept under due restraint, while they are treated at the same time with the kindest affection; that children, and servants, are carefully instructed in

[1] Phil. iv. 8.

the duty they owe to God and man; while each are treated with the mildness of the Christian temper. If he sees them coming out from the world, and not touching the unclean thing, patiently enduring reproach and ridicule, because they will not yield to any thing they deem evil; yet amidst all this, kind and compassionate, ready to give up their own inclinations, and their own interests, in order to please others, full of mercy and good fruits;—must not the man who sees all this, be forced to acknowledge, that God is with them of a truth? must he not say, that the seed was good, and the ground was good, or such fruits could never have been produced. In such an "epistle" he reads, that the doctrine taught was divine; the minister has not been unfaithful to his charge, and the people have not believed in vain." The man who has seen such things, must go away with the conviction on his mind, 'This is the doctrine I ought to believe, and this the practice I ought to follow.'

II. I proceed now, to apply the subject, by enquiring, WHAT OF THIS KIND MAY BE READ AMONG US?

Brethren, there is something peculiar in the circumstances in which I stand in this place, which brings home the enquiry on which we are about to enter, in no common manner. In most of the adjacent parishes, the people can recal to their

recollection two, or three, or many, who have discharged the office of ministers among them; various causes have removed one, and placed another in his room;—the "epistle" we have been considering has been written there by many hands. In *this* place, it has not been so; no minister was stationed here, till it pleased God to place me among you. I have been here so long, that a large proportion of the inhabitants of the village have grown up from infancy under my eye. The epistle then is, if I may so speak, all my own. This circumstance, I say, gives a very peculiar force and character to the enquiry which now comes before us. I am ready often to ask, what have I been doing through this long course of years? Where is the fruit of the labours of my life? Where are those "who were sometime in darkness, but now are light in the Lord?" Where are those, who once were ignorant, but who have now at least learned what be the first principles of the oracles of God? Where are those, who have received the "truth in the love of it?" Where are those, who are turned from the power of Satan unto God? Or, according to the idea of the text, what and where is the "epistle," that through so many years I have been composing? Where are the hearts on which it has been written, and what may be read there?

Though circumstances may give such enquiries, in my own case, a peculiar force, yet they are

questions, which every minister who is anxious to make full proof of his ministry will often ask. "The hireling who careth not for the sheep" may be indifferent to such matters, but not so he who has before his eyes, the day, when he must give account to the great Shepherd of the sheep. For the sake of himself, and of the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made him overseer, he must examine into the result of his labours. If no effect be produced—if the people remain as they were, ignorant, unfeeling, unholy, there must be an awful deficiency somewhere. "If they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings." [1] Where God's word is preached, some holy and sanctifying effects will follow, if there be no special hindrance thrown in the way, by the sin of the priest or of the people. We must "be a "sweet savour unto God, in them that are saved and in them that perish."

While then, my Brethren, I would bring the enquiry home to myself, and to the manner in which I have lived and preached among you, I must beg you to do the same.

1. Then let me call on you to enquire how far you have improved in religious knowledge.

I have said, that a man may be possessed of much knowledge, and yet be destitute of true

[1] Jerem. xxiii. 22.

religion, still however there can be no piety without some knowledge. I would therefore earnestly intreat you to examine into this matter. Have you a clear and distinct knowledge of the Scriptures, and all the different subjects on which they treat? And is this knowledge always at hand, always ready for use? so that you can bring every thing at once to the Bible, as the standard by which you decide, whether it be right or wrong, true or false? And more especially have you obtained such an acquaintance with the grand system of salvation, that your own mind is settled upon it; that you can teach it to your children; and when you meet a poor ignorant fellow creature, who is enquiring what he must do to be saved, you can at once state to him God's plan of saving the guilty, through Christ, and so point out the path to heaven, to one who is in the road to destruction. Surely you *ought* to have acquired such a knowledge as this, after all the instruction you have had, and the means of grace on which you have attended. And if not, you have reason to suspect that you have been very heedless, both in reading your Bibles, and receiving the doctrines preached to you.

2. Again let me urge you to enquire into the *manner* in which you have received the instruction afforded you.

A failure here, is the reason that so many are negligent and irregular in attending on the means of grace; and also, that so many hear without

acquiring knowledge. "A price is put into the hands of a fool to get wisdom, but he has no heart to it." But I will suppose that you do not neglect the means of instruction, and that you have acquired a fair portion of religious knowledge, still you may never have received the doctrines of the Gospel with all your heart and soul. You may not have felt your own deep concern in it. Ask yourselves then, whether the calls to repentance, the invitations to return to God, the promises of the Lord Jesus, promises of pardon, justification, and eternal life, have been cordially accepted by you. Have they led you to fervent prayer to the Saviour? Have they excited a fear, lest you should fail of the grace of God? Are you "working out your salvation with fear and trembling?" Oh, remember, that a cold-hearted reception of the Gospel will be of no avail.

3. There is one more important subject of enquiry—namely, as to the *effect* which your reception of the Gospel produces on you.

If rightly received, it will purify your heart, and the purity of the heart will evince itself, by the purity and holiness of the life. Recall to your recollection what I have said on this part of the "epistle, which is read and known of all men" where the Gospel is fully and faithfully preached and received, and ask how it is with you? What do others, and especially your own family read? The religion of the Bible is a holy religion, and if

it do not make us holy, it is because we are not experimentally acquainted with it.

My brethren, let me call upon you to examine yourselves seriously and impartially upon these important points. Rest not satisfied with mere profession, or with a barren and unprofitable knowledge in religious matters; be not content to "know righteousness," but seek to be "a people in whose heart is God's law;" whose "conversation is such as becometh the gospel of Christ," who are manifestly "the epistles of Christ .... written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart." Let the excellent effects of true faith, be conspicuous in you, and strive to adorn the doctrine you profess, by all that is lovely and of good report: so shall ye be my joy, and crown of rejoicing, in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. "For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ; and this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."[1]

[1] Phil. i. 8—11.

THE END.

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