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# **SERMONS;**

BY

**TIMOTHY DWIGHT, D. D. LL. D.**

**LATE PRESIDENT OF YALE COLLEGE.**

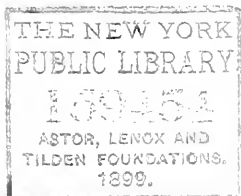
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### District of Connecticut, ss.

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*Clerk of the District of Connecticut.*

A true copy of Record, examined and sealed by me,

CHA'S A. INGERSOLL,

*Clerk of the District of Connecticut.*

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## SERMON I.

A JUST SENSE OF THE CHARACTER AND PRESENCE OF GOD A  
SOURCE OF REPENTANCE.



JOB xlii. 5, 6.

*I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth Thee.*

*Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

JOB, as every person who reads his Bible knows, was an eminently righteous man. God himself testifies, that *there was none like him in the earth ; that he was perfect and upright ; that he feared God, and eschewed evil.* Still he was afflicted beyond most other men. He lost his property, and his children. He was distressed with a most painful and loathsome disease. His wife treated him with the bitterest unkindness ; and his friends put a finishing hand to his sufferings by insisting that they were all exhibitions of the anger of God against him, on account of his peculiar guilt. *Job* vindicated his character against these charges with firmness and zeal. In the progress of the debate both parties evidently passed the bounds of moderation. While his friends attributed to him crimes which he had not committed, and guilt which he had not incurred ; *Job* strenuously challenged, in terms too unqualified, an innocence and a purity, to which his claims were certainly imperfect.

When their dispute was ended, *Elihu*, a young man, who had been a witness of their zeal, censured them all for their heat, for the intemperance of their sentiments, the unreasonable imputations of the one party, and the unwarranted self-justification of the other. At the same time he vindicated, in a becoming manner, the justice of the Divine dispensations towards *Job* ; exhib-

ited in a strong light the greatness and perfection of JEHOVAH ; and urged, irresistibly, the duty of implicit submission to his will.

When *Elihu* had closed his discourse, God manifested himself to this assembly of disputants in a storm, accompanied with thunder and lightning ; and answered *Job* out of the whirlwind, by which they were borne along. In a series of sublime and wonderful observations he displayed his own supreme excellence ; the immeasurable greatness, the incomprehensible multitude, and the unfathomably mysterious nature, of the works of creation and providence. With these observations he interwove, also, strong and overwhelming proofs of the littleness, ignorance, and imbecility, of man ; and shewed, unanswerably, how impossible it was, that such a being should judge, with any propriety, concerning the divine dispensations.

By these discoveries of the true, great, and perfect character of God, *Job*, as we might well expect, was deeply humbled, and led to genuine self-abhorrence, and sincere repentance.

The great evangelical truth, which is contained in this passage, thus illustrated, and on which I mean to insist in the following discourse, is this :

*That clear and just views of the character, and presence, of God naturally produce in the mind abasing and penitential thoughts concerning ourselves.*

This doctrine I shall attempt to illustrate by the following observations.

God is our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor. He formed us out of nothing ; breathed into our nostrils the breath of life ; and caused us to become living souls. He made us wiser than the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven ; and enabled us by the light of reason to discern his character and his agency ; and, by our moral powers, to love, and serve, and glorify, him forever. The being which he gave, he upholds by the word of his power ; and renders desirable by the exercise of his goodness. His mercies to us are *new every morning, and fresh every moment. Life, and breath, and all things* which we enjoy, are among the *good gifts, which come down from the Father of lights, with whom is*



*no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* All these considerations prove, indubitably, that in the highest possible sense we are the property of this great and glorious Being ; in such a sense, as nothing is ours. Indeed, nothing is ours, except what he has given us ; and all the property which Intelligent creatures possess or can possess, in any thing, is created solely by the gift of God.

From these considerations, it is evident, God has an absolute right to dispose of us in whatever manner seems good in his sight : Particularly, he has an unquestionable right to prescribe for us such laws, and require of us such services, as he pleases. Whatever he prescribes we are bound by the highest possible obligation to obey : whatever he requires, we are by the same obligation bound to perform.

This unlimited right God is infinitely able to vindicate. His power is immeasurable. Disobedience to his commands he can punish without bounds, and without end. He knows every avenue to the heart ; and can make every thought and every nerve, a channel of suffering. To escape from his eye or his hand, is alike impossible. Every element, every faculty, and even every enjoyment, he can convert into a minister of vengeance. He needs not the famine nor the pestilence, the storm nor the thunder-bolt, the volcano nor the earthquake, the sword nor the sceptre of tyranny ; to execute his wrath upon his rebellious creatures. He needs no *lake of fire and brimstone* to torment the workers of iniquity. He can arm an insect, he can commission an atom, to be the minister of his anger. He can make the body its own tormentor. He can convert the mind itself into a world of perdition, where the gloom of despair shall overcast all the faculties ; the sigh of anguish heave, and the stream of sorrow flow forever.

In the possession of this mighty power he is still just. No intelligent creature will ever find a solid reason for complaining of God. His *commandments concerning all things* are absolutely *right*. I do not intend, that they are right, because they are *his* commandments : they are right in themselves. The things

which they require, are the very things which wisdom sufficiently informed, and virtue sufficiently pure, would choose to do in preference to all others. In themselves therefore, they contain ample reasons why they should be done by us.

At the same time he is infinitely good. "*Thou art good,*" says *David*, "*and thou dost good ; and thy tender mercies are over all thy works.*" Even in this rebellious world *he has not left himself without abundant witness, "in that he gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and fills our hearts with food and gladness."* Our health, our food, our raiment, our friends, our hopes ; the nameless and numberless enjoyments which succeed each other without intermission, and flow in an unceasing stream through the period of life ; and peculiarly, the means and proffers of life beyond the grave ; are all daily and divine proofs of the kindness of our great Benefactor. From Him who does these things, to such beings as we are, what blessings would not descend were we better. Were we innocent ; can we doubt, that our thorns and briars would bloom with the beauty of Paradise ? Were we of an angelic disposition ; can we hesitate to believe that earth would be changed into heaven ?

Of the goodness of God his mercy is the consummation and glory. When we had ruined ourselves, and had none to save, or even to pity us ; he sent his Son, his only beloved, to redeem us from our sins, and to rescue us from perdition. He sent him to *endure the contradiction of sinners*, and to undergo the death of the cross. At the tidings of this wonderful work heaven opened its gates to receive mankind ; and thousands and millions of repenting sinners entered the path, which leads to immortal life ; and found themselves welcomed in that happy world, with a *joy*, never exercised *over just persons who need no repentance*.

He is also our Ruler, our Judge, and our Rewarder. The universe which he has made, is his own empire. All the beings by which it is inhabited, are his subjects. The dominion which he exercises over them, is dictated by the glorious perfections which I have mentioned. To rebel against it, is to oppose the excellence and authority of the Ruler, and the interests of his immense

and eternal kingdom. Those, who rebel, he will therefore summon to judgment ; and demand from them an account of *all the deeds, done in the body*. According to these deeds they will be judged and rewarded.

From these considerations, he, who realizes them, will perceive in the clearest light that in every sin, he is guilty of gross injustice to his Maker, in refusing him that which is his by the highest and most unquestionable right ; an injustice, at which he would start, were it practised upon his neighbour ; of bold and impious rebellion against his righteous government ; of gross and dreadful ingratitude to his goodness and mercy ; and of an impious disregard to his perfect and glorious character.

The guilt, inherent in all this wickedness, will be mightily enhanced by distinct perceptions of the *purity* of God. *Behold, the heavens are not clean in his sight ; and his Angels are charged with folly !* How abominable then, ought every sinner to exclaim, how *filthy* am I, *who drink iniquity like water*. That every Intelligent creature ought, in some good measure, to resemble his Maker in this attribute, will not be questioned, except by a mind peculiarly gross and guilty. It cannot be soberly doubted, that both our thoughts and our lives ought to be clean. Accordingly, we are taught that good men, of course, aim assiduously at this character. “*Every man that hath this hope in him,*” saith *St. John*, “*purifieth himself, even as God is pure.*” But nothing can more strongly enhance the sense of our impurity, than a comparison of our own character with that of God. We cannot but discern that the all-perfect Mind, infinitely distant from every stain, must demand an absolute freedom from pollution in those who are to dwell with him, and obtain an interest in his everlasting love. What abasing views of himself must this consideration, strongly realized, awaken in the mind of every sinful being ?

The same effect will be exceedingly increased by just apprehensions of the transcendent *Greatness* of God. The importance which a sinner attributes to himself has no existence, except to the jaundiced eye of pride. Yesterday we were formed of the dust : to-morrow we go down to the grave. From our birth to

our death we are frail, dependant, helpless, little, ignorant, and polluted *from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot*. Still we are proud of ourselves, and of our circumstances. How strange is this conduct ! How weak ; how sinful ; how unhappy ! There is no method in which this miserable spirit can be extinguished, or even lessened, so effectually, as by bringing God before our eyes. To the view of solemn thought what a being must He be, who called the Universe out of darkness ; who spoke, and it was filled with inhabitants ; who himself fills immensity ; who inhabits eternity ; whose smile makes heaven ; whose frown makes hell ? Who can be profitable to such a Being ? Who can be necessary ? Were heaven to be emptied of its Angels at once ; his word would replenish it again with others equally wise, great, and good. What then must we be ? *Nothing, less than nothing, and vanity.*

As it is impossible, that he should need us or our services, it is certain that he requires nothing of us for himself ; and that all his commands are given for *our* good, and not *his*. Of course, all the advantages, derived from our obedience, must be our own. He will not be benefited. We shall be better, and of course happier.

But from his hand we need all things. We are of yesterday, and know nothing. If our mental darkness is illumined, the light must come from heaven. Our strength is weakness ; and of ourselves we can do nothing. All our sufficiency is from God. His breath animated our lifeless forms. His power quickened our souls into thought, and action. We breathe his air ; we live upon his food. His arm guides us ; his hand sustains us ; his mercy calls us to the possession of eternal life. We *are* nothing, we *have* nothing, we *hope for* nothing, but what he is pleased to give. With these considerations in view, our importance and our pride sink in the dust. In this manner good men have, in all ages, learned and loved to abase themselves. Thus *David*, in the eighth Psalm, strongly affected with a sense of the greatness of God as displayed in the works of his hands, cries out with the deepest humility : “ *When I consider the heavens, the work of thy*

*fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained ; what is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him !*" Thus, also, Job exclaims in the text : "*I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*"

All these considerations will be mightily enhanced, and their efficacy powerfully increased, by the recollection of the *Omnipresence*, and *Omniscience*, of God. The consciousness, that this great and awful Being is wherever we are ; accompanies us wheresoever we go ; and surrounds us in crowds, and in solitude ; gives a solemnity to our existence, and an importance to all our conduct, which can be derived from nothing else. What an eye is that which is employed in searching the hearts, and trying the reins, of the children of men ; which is always looking directly on *our* hearts ; which, as a flame of fire, shines into the recesses of the soul, and changes the darkness into day ; which has watched all our sins from the beginning, and has seen every impious and profane, every ungrateful and impure thought, word, and action ! What a hand is that, which has recorded all these things in the book out of which we shall be judged ; and will open to us the dark and melancholy pages, at the final day ! How must the presence of such an eye and such a hand make every sinner turn pale with conscious guilt, and tremble at an approaching judgment ; if he be not blind, and deaf, and *dead, in trespasses and sins !*

When we call to mind what an appearance we must make before *Him, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon sinners ;* how can we fail of seeing ourselves in some measure as God sees us ? of thinking concerning sin as he thinks ? and of feeling in our hearts, that, as our guilt is of the deepest die, our punishment must be dreadful ?

Were all these considerations regularly present to the mind ; were they daily and deeply realized ; they must, one would believe, almost necessarily make a thinking man sober ; a sober man serious ; a serious man awakened ; an awakened man pen-

itent; and a penitent man watchful, prayerful, diligent and vigorous, in the performance of his duty. Particularly, if we have any just views of sin; it is scarcely possible that they should not become more just, more solemn, more intense, and more efficacious, in persuading us to confess and to renounce our transgressions. The more just these views are, the more powerful must be their efficacy. In the mind of an enlightened christian, especially, they cannot fail to produce the happiest consequences. Such a Christian will feel as *Job* felt; and exclaim as he exclaimed, “*I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*”

### REMARKS.

From these observations we learn,

1. *The Reason, why the great body of mankind have so imperfect a sense of their sins; viz. they have no just, solemn, constant apprehensions of the character and presence of God.*

They have very few and very feeble apprehensions of *the Character* of God. Let me address this consideration directly to this assembly. When most of you, like most of your fellow-creatures, think of God at all; is it not true that you think of him only as a Being, who, although in various attributes superior to yourselves, very much resembles you in other respects? Do you not feel that he made you solely, or at least supremely, to promote your own enjoyment, or in plainer English, the gratification of your passions and appetites? Do you not feel, that as he has created, so he is bound to provide for you, and that chiefly, as your own pleasure dictates? and that all the obligation lies on him to bestow, while *your* whole concern is to receive and enjoy? Whenever you perceive or mistrust any defect, or any fault, in your conduct, is it not the habitual course of your thoughts to charge it upon *him*, and to clear *yourselves*?

Do you realize that he made you, that he preserves you, that you live solely on his bounty, that he is your Lord, that he is

your Judge, that he will be your Rewarder beyond the grave? All these things you may, I acknowledge admit as a conclusion from premises which you cannot deny. The great question, here intended, is; do they come home to your hearts, with a solemn conviction of their reality? If you realized them, could you live as you have lived? Do you not, on the contrary, habitually feel that you are your own property; made for yourselves, and not for his service? that, when he does not satisfy the demands of your passions and appetites, he is unjust; that, when he interferes with your concerns, he is arbitrary; and, that when he afflicts you, he is odious? And do not all these wretched conclusions flow from false, loose, and solitary apprehensions of his character?

Are you not equally destitute of any just apprehensions concerning his *Presence*? When you lie down, do you remember, that he only keeps your habitations from the flames, or preserves you from death? When you awake, do you call to mind that, if God had not awaked you, you would have slept the final sleep, and your eyes never have opened again upon the light of the living? When you eat, do you perceive whose hand spreads your table, and fills your hearts with food and gladness? When you profane his name, do you remember that he hears? When your imagination loosely roves after impure and gross objects, do you mistrust that he sees? Have you even dreamed that God entered at first the secret chambers of your souls; and that he dwells there, beholding with an awful survey all your forgetfulness of him, your violations of his law, your abuse of his grace, your devotion to *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*? He has numbered your prayers. What, think you, will be the amount, when that number is rehearsed at the final day? He has inhabited your closets. How many times has he seen you visit those sacred recesses, to converse with *him*? He has met you in his house. Have you found him there? Had you truly seen his presence, could you have sent your thoughts on vain and sinful excursions to the ends of the earth? Could you have laughed, and whispered, and wantoned, away the golden

hours of salvation? Could you have slept before the mercy-seat; and dozed away your accepted time at the foot of the cross? The Sabbath is the day, the Sanctuary is the house, of God. Both were instituted, to bring you directly into his presence. Has this ever been their effect? Have you not even here felt, that God was afar off, in an unknown and distant country called heaven; where he was wholly occupied with his own concerns, and had neither leisure nor inclination, to attend to you? Upon how many Sabbaths can you look back with comfort, or even with hope? Is there one, the transactions of which you would be willing to have rehearsed at the day of judgment, or made the ground of your future reward?

Could you daily and hourly say, "*Thou God seest me,*" and feel what you said, would it be possible for you to be so quiet; so hardened; so stupid in your sins? Could you go on so quietly towards the miseries of perdition? Could you so gaily, so sportively, see the distance between you and heaven become every day greater and greater? Would you not tremble at the thought of provoking afresh the anger of this great and terrible Being? Would not your instinctive language, at the sight of every temptation, at the approach of every sin, be: "*How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*"

Remember, that in all this conduct you are inexcusable. To realize the presence of God is absolutely in your power. It demands no supernatural assistance, any more than to think or to feel, to study or to labour.

2. *Let me urge upon the sinners in this house the great duty of bringing home to their hearts the character, and presence, of God.*

If you are ever to have a just sense of your sins; you must derive it from this source. All our obligations to obey God arise from his character, as a Being of supreme perfection; and from the fact, that we are indebted to him for our existence, and for all its blessings and hopes; from the perfect nature of his law, and its absolute tendency to glorify him, and to produce the complete happiness of his immense and eternal kingdom. Of such importance is this tendency, as to justify the declaration on his



part, that *heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than one jot, or one tittle, of the law shall fail, until all shall be fulfilled.* In proportion to these things is the guilt of sin great and terrible.

But this truth cannot be felt, unless you bring home to your hearts the character and presence of your Creator. Were this duty done, you could no longer be *at ease in Zion*; no longer secure and light minded in your iniquity, and gay on the brink of destruction. It is because *God is not in all your thoughts*, that you do not *flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life.*

When the *Israelites*, at the foot of Mount *Sinai*, beheld the presence of God in clear view, *all the people that were in the camp trembled*; and earnestly besought him, that he would speak to them no more, except by the mouth of *Moses*. But a few days afterwards, they made a molten calf, and worshipped it; and sacrificed thereunto; and said, "*These are thy Gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.*" The reason of this otherwise inexplicable conduct was nothing else, but that they had forgotten God their Saviour, who had done such great things in *Egypt*. All other sinners are, in these respects, exact copies of the *Israelites*. Whenever they bring the Divine character and presence to their hearts, they begin to see their sins in some measure as they are; they learn their true character; they open their eyes upon their guilt; they tremble at their danger. But when, as is the usual fact, *God is not in all their thoughts*, they become secure; bold; strong; impious; regardless of sin and hell, of holiness and salvation, of God and their own souls. The language of their hearts, if not of their lips, is, "*To morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.*" "*Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? or what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him?*" All the difference, between the most hopeful thoughts and emotions, in the mind of a convinced sinner, and the most hopeless circumstances of a stupid impenitent, may be explained, by the existence, and the want of, a solemn, proper, and affecting sense of the character and presence of God. What a mad man is he, then,

who forces this awful but immensely profitable subject out of his mind ; and who is satisfied to go to perdition, if he may only have a smooth and quiet passage !

3. *Let me urge this great duty, also, upon the Christians in this assembly.*

You, my brethren, are no less bound to advance in holiness, than sinners are to become holy : for both these duties are enjoined by the same authority. At the same time, there is *a law in your members, warring continually against the law in your minds, and bringing you under captivity to the law of sin, which is in your members.* You, like all other Christians, are perpetually prone to forget God, your duty, and your salvation. All these, let me exhort you to remember, are forgotten together. The world takes their place. Sin resumes its power. Temptations crowd upon the soul ; transgression succeeds ; our duty is feebly done, or left undone ; and the door is opened wide for repentance and sorrow.

Purity of life is maintained, and improvement in holiness acquired, only by a constant and lively sense of the presence of God. He is the sovereign, who demands this character of us. No other being is lord of the conscience : no other being can direct the faith, or enjoin the duty, of Intelligent creatures.

He is always present to see whether we obey, or refuse to obey, this solemn requisition. What he sees, he records ; whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

By what solemn obligations, then, by what amazing interests, are you bound to realize his presence ; and to remember that his all-searching *eye is open, day and night*, with an awful survey upon your hearts, and upon your lives. A clear apprehension of this truth cannot fail deeply to affect your minds ; to take strong hold on your hearts ; to prevent, or drive away, temptation ; to rouse you from sloth, and sleep ; and to awaken you to the dangers of this seducing world. When God is before your eyes, can you fail to remember *the riches of his grace ?* the wonders of redeeming, forgiving, and sanctifying love ? the solemnity of the Covenant, in which you have consecrated yourselves to his ser-

vice? and your mighty, as well as endearing, obligations to *purify yourselves, even as he is pure?* When God is before your eyes, can you fail to remember how delightful it is to please him; how odious to dishonour him; how mischievous, how painful, to wound Religion, and pierce the hearts of your fellow Christians? In the presence of this awful Being how can your sins fail to appear in their black and proper colours? How can they fail of being detested, renounced, and, in a good degree, forsaken? A constant dread of sinning will, therefore, seize upon your hearts, and become a governing principle of your moral conduct.

To forget, or to be insensible of, the presence of God, is to lose sight of your best good; to weaken your sense of duty; and to expose yourselves to every temptation. Had *David* remembered this glorious and awful Being; had he called to mind the just and sublime thoughts, which he has uttered in the CXXXIX Psalm: when he commenced the career of his iniquity with *Bathsheba*; what a long train of dreadful crimes, what a long course of bitter repentance, what a melancholy series of excruciating distresses, would have been prevented! Had *Peter* remembered the inspection of the all-seeing eye, he would not have denied his Lord; the pages of the Gospel would not have been stained by the record of his fall; and his own soul would have been saved from the anguish of many sorrows. The nature of *these* is the nature of all good men. In themselves weak, frail, and back-sliding, they have no safety but in God. But where shall we find a promise, that this Divine Protector will extend his guardianship to any man, at seasons, in which He is forgotten. Were it possible for the inhabitants of heaven to cease from a consciousness of the presence of God, there is reason to fear that they would cease, also, from their unspotted virtue.

To prompt and to aid mankind to the performance of the duty, enjoined in this discourse, is one of the great benefits, intended by the worship instituted in the Gospel. The sanctuary derives its importance, its solemnity, its sacred character, not from the splendour with which it may be built, nor from the rites with which it may be consecrated, but from its Divine Inhabitant. On

the door-posts, on the altar, of every temple, every Christian should read the name of the city, seen in vision by *Ezekiel*, "*Jehovah is here.*" "Surely," said *Jacob*, "*Jehovah is in this place; and I knew it not. How awful is this place! It is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven.*" Hither we come to see his face, and seek his favour; to confess our sins, and supplicate his mercy. Here he meets us to pity, to forgive, to bless, and to save. All our transactions, here, are with God; and irresistibly bring this glorious Being immediately before our eyes. Every good man, every man in whom piety is alive, will feel, therefore, as a pious *Israelite* felt when he stood before the cloud in the Temple, from the bosom of which the awful voice of *JEHOVAH* answered the prayers of his people, and uttered the oracles of life.

From the house of God these solemn apprehensions are carried with us to our own habitations. They revive, they are invigorated, in the morning and evening sacrifice. But they are especially quickened in the closet. From this sacred retreat the world is shut out. No earthly eye looks on: no earthly object intrudes. Here we bow before our Maker, and converse with him face to face. Our souls are naked before him. Our lives pass in review; our sins are *set in the light of his countenance*; our penitence, our faith, our love, our comforts, and our hopes. God, thus intimately seen in this private temple, is seen through the day, till we revisit the same solemn recess, and again converse with our maker. Thus, a sense of the divine presence becomes the habitual and controlling state of our minds.

Thus aided, thus cultivated, the good man learns to find God in all places, and in all things. This great Being becomes present to him in every enjoyment, which he shares; in every affliction, which he suffers; in every hope, which he indulges; and in every advancement, which he makes in the Christian life. To the eye of such a man *JEHOVAH* is present, lives, and acts, in all the works of his hands. His smile is the beauty of the spring; his breath its fragrance. His hand pours out the riches of the summer, and the bounty of autumn. The thunder is his voice:

lightnings are his arrows. *He makes the clouds his chariot ; he rides upon the whirlwind. The earth is his footstool : the heavens are his throne.* In the sun, the brightest material image of his exaltation, immutability, and glory, he gives light, and life, and comfort, to the unnumbered millions of animated creatures ; and holds out to the eye of the mind a magnificent symbol of heaven's everlasting day. Thus, every where, he lives, controls, and smiles in all the works of his hand.

In his Word he is seen in diviner forms. *There* his goodness and mercy, beam with a mild and soft, but immeasurable glory, in the face of the Redeemer. *There* his voice is heard in the awful threatenings of his law, and the delightful promises of his Gospel. *There* he shines, a moral sun, into the soul ; and awakens in it the life, which shall never die. Animated, comforted, invigorated with hope and joy, the Christian draws nearer and nearer to God, and beholds him in clearer and brighter view, until his soul, entering the regions of eternal rest, opens its eyes upon the glories of heaven, and is admitted to *behold his face in righteousness* forever and ever.—Amen.

## SERMON II.

THE YOUNG EXHORTED TO SOBRIETY OF MIND.



TITUS ii. 6.

*Young men, likewise, exhort to be sober-minded.*

IN the first verse of this chapter, *Titus* is directed by *St. Paul* to speak, while performing the duties of his ministry, *the things, which become sound doctrine*. Of such things there is given in the following verses a catalogue; distributed into several divisions, and directed to several classes of mankind. The duties of the aged, and of the young, are summarily pointed out; as are also the obligations of *Titus* to enforce them by his own authoritative injunctions.

The particular character, which he is required to urge upon young men, is *Sobriety of mind*.

The original word, σωφροεῖν, denotes, in its primitive sense, *soundness of mind, in opposition to madness, or distraction*. In this manner it is extensively used by *Greek* classical writers, as the proper contrast to μαίνεσθαι, which signifies *to be mad, or delirious*; and to this sense we are directed by the original words, of which the term is compounded.

But, as soundness of mind, thus understood, and madness, are not at all dependent on our moral efforts, they cannot be the subjects of commands, or exhortations. The word, σωφροεῖν, therefore, is, here, undoubtedly used figuratively: the only manner, in which, so far as I have observed, it is ever used in the Scriptures.

In selecting this passage of Scripture as the theme of discourse, it is my design,

I. *To enquire what is meant by being Sober-minded;*

II. *To suggest some Reasons for the adoption of this character by the Youth, who are before me.*

I. *I shall enquire what is meant by being Sober-minded.*

In answer to this enquiry I observe in the

1st place, *Sobriety of mind denotes that habitual state, in which we are prone to estimate things according to their real Value.*

The members of the *Corinthian* church were very desirous of those miraculous gifts, which, during the Apostolic age, so much engrossed the attention, and awakened the astonishment of mankind. Particularly, they coveted the gift of *speaking with tongues*; because it engaged this attention, and produced this astonishment, in a peculiar degree; and rendered those, who possessed it, objects of distinguished admiration and applause. Yet *St. Paul* solemnly declares to these Christians, that *he would rather speak five words in the church with his understanding, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.* What was the ground of this decision? *St. Paul* himself has told us. "*In the church,*" he says, "*I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue :*" as it is rendered by *Dr. Macknight*, "*I would rather speak five words with my meaning understood, that I might instruct others also.*" Nothing could with more force teach us, that *St. Paul*, under the direction of God, felt himself bound to *estimate every thing*, whether natural, supernatural, or moral, according to its *Utility*; or, in other words, according to its *real Value.*

To this complete decision of the Scriptures, Common sense joins her strongest attestation. No man is ever pronounced wise by the dispassionate voice of his fellow men, who does not estimate things in this manner, and who does not regularly prove by his conduct, that this is his habitual mode of judging.

I will illustrate the subject by examples.

The value of *Business*, that is, of such as is honest and useful, is incomparably greater than that of *Amusements*, or what is appropriately styled *Pleasure.* Business, wisely followed, procures for us property, knowledge, the capacity of being useful to our-

selves and others, reputation, comfort, and many other blessings. Amusements procure none of these blessings; but either prevent, or destroy, them all; and have no other value, even when innocent, and confined within rational bounds, except as they yield us a trifling degree of enjoyment, or as they invigorate us for future business. When they are immoderate, or in their nature sinful; they are only pernicious.

Still we find a multitude of youths, and among them many of those who are present, consider their amusements as of very great value; and their business as of very little. The appropriate business of these youths is the acquisition of knowledge; of knowledge highly valuable in itself, and invaluable as the means of future usefulness to themselves and others. This preference does not spring from sobriety of mind. It does not accord with the dictates of a sound, uncorrupted understanding. It is hostile to the true interests of the man, by whom it is made; and has cut off thousands and millions of youths from knowledge, property, reputation, comfort, and hope; and plunged them in disgrace, beggary, and ruin. Surely such a mode of estimating things is not the result of soundness of mind. The judgment, here exercised, is that of a mind, whose faculties are disordered, whose optics are bedimmed, whose vision is disturbed or obscured.

The *preparation for business, and all the means of accomplishing it*, being indispensable to its existence, have exactly the same value. Study is the preparation for knowledge, and knowledge is the indispensable means of useful business, to the youths in this assembly. To prefer amusement to study is a proof, that the mind is disordered, which is exactly of the same nature. Not indeed, that it is disordered by that kind of delirium, in which the violent passions predominate, and the miserable subject of it is tossed by wrath, revenge, and fury; but of the kind, which is gay and sportive, engrossed by trifles and gewgaws, and blown about by a spirit of frivolity. Happy would it be for mankind, if this species of madness were never found without the walls of bedlam. Happy would it probably be for some of those who are before me, if it were not found within the walls of this seminary.



*Eternal things are of more value than temporal things.* The soul is more valuable than the body ; as an immortal being capable of endless knowledge, virtue, and enjoyment, is of more value than a mass of dirt. Heaven is better than this miserable world. The sufferings of perdition are more numerous, and more distressing, than any, which are undergone by piety, in its struggles to secure the everlasting love of God. Eternity is more enduring than time ; and our future being, for all these reasons, of higher importance than our present existence. To realize these truths, according to their solemnity and importance, is in this respect to have a sober mind. But to prefer this world to that which is to come, and our present enjoyments to those which are future ; or to esteem the sufferings of this life of more consequence than those which lie beyond the grave ; is the strongest proof, which can be given, of a mind unsound, possessing a perverted judgment, deciding without evidence or in opposition to it, and bewildered by false lights, and a diseased vision.

*The performance of our duty is the true preparation for eternal life, and the indispensable means of obtaining it.* Its value therefore to us, is the same, as that of the life itself. Yet how many of those, who are before me, in all probability prefer to the performance of their own duty what they, and others like them, call *pleasure* : a thing, which hitherto, instead of doing them real good, has only done them harm : a poison, swallowed because it has been sugared. How unsound, how remote from sobriety, will this preference seem, when we enter the world of spirits.

2. *Sobriety of mind includes an exact, and habitual control of our affections ; particularly of those, which are customarily denominated passions, and appetites.*

All persons, who have arrived at adult years, and have observed the characters of men with any attention, have seen, and often with astonishment, different individuals, judging not only differently from each other, but in modes directly opposite ; where the subjects, and the evidence, were exactly the same, and equally in the possession of all. This diversity cannot be the result of mere understanding. Among the proofs, which are abundant-

ly furnished of this truth, a decisive one is, that, where we have exactly the same means of judging, and are entirely uninterested, or have exactly the same interest, we judge in the same manner. The cases, in which we judge differently, (the same evidence being in our possession,) are those, in which *we are interested to judge differently*. Our passions and appetites in such cases influence, and often absolutely control, our judgment. This influence is the great evil, under which we labour in all those intellectual decisions, which respect subjects, of any serious importance to what we think our own good. We judge in modes, directly opposite to each other; with slender evidence, with no evidence; and in direct opposition to all evidence. Of this truth he, who looks even with slight attention at the political and religious divisions of mankind, existing every where, and in every age, will ask for no additional proof. All doctrines have had their partizans; and the worst doctrines, and the grossest absurdities, have had more numerous supporters than truth and righteousness could ever boast. Mankind have arrayed themselves in great numbers, not only on the side of *the calves in Bethel and Dan*, and the bull of *Egypt*, but of cats also, and frogs, and flies, blocks of wood, and images of stone. They have worshipped *Moloch*, and *Juggernaut*; the worst of men; and even demons.

The most abandoned profligates of the human race have multiplied their trains of devotees. Crowds have attached themselves to *Jeroboam*, *Nero*, *Charles the second*, and *Napoleon*. More than three fourths of the human race are now, and ever have been, either Heathen, or *Mahommedans*. A few of the leaders, in each case, have probably seen the absurdity of the opinions, adopted by the train of their followers. The great mass, and among them many persons of understanding, have judged, as well as acted in accordance with their professed opinions. But no errors can be more monstrous, or more mischievous, than these. Passion and appetite, therefore, influence men to judge, and conclude, and that every where, in favour of the worst of errors.

*All our passions and appetites have this influence : pride, vanity, ambition, avarice, voluptuousness, prodigality, sloth together with those, which are appropriately called affections of the mind, such as love and hatred, hope and fear, joy and sorrow. These causes of our unhappy judgments are very numerous and powerful ; are always at hand ; and exert their efficacy with respect to every subject, in which we are interested.*

*That this efficacy is most malignant, with regard to our real interests, is sufficiently evident from what has been already said. If it can persuade mankind, that calves and carts, frogs and flies, stocks and demons, are gods ; if it can persuade men to sacrifice their fellow men, parents their children, and husbands their wives, to their deities ; if it can induce them to renounce all connexion with their Maker, and all hope of his favour ; there is no absurdity, which it cannot persuade them to receive ; no crime, which it cannot induce them to perpetrate. From reasonable beings it can convert them into lunatics and fiends.*

By this time my audience are probably convinced, that passion and appetite exert a real, extensive, powerful, dangerous, and malignant domination over our judgment. The consequence follows irresistibly. If we would escape from all these mischiefs ; we must establish an exact, and habitual control over our passions and appetites. So long as they govern our judgments, we shall regularly judge falsely, and be led to the commission of innumerable sins. In this case we shall have no soundness of mind. Our understandings will be disordered, as well as our dispositions ; our opinions will be false ; our affections polluted ; and our conduct odious in the sight of God. In a word, all these things, will be, as we actually find them. Our judgments will be false, our opinions absurd, and our actions criminal, just as we see those of others, and just as ours have been heretofore.

3. *Sobriety of mind includes, or perhaps more properly infers, that Conduct which springs of course from the character, already described.*

Whatever we highly value, when it is within our reach, we diligently pursue. Useful business, and real religion, are always

within our reach, in such a sense that they may be hopefully pursued. Every man of this character will be regularly found acting diligently in useful business. To religion he will give the place, and importance in his pursuits, which it holds in his judgment. He, who possesses sobriety of mind in such a manner, as it can be possessed by one, who is not a Christian, will be awake, and alive, to the attainment of Christianity. To all the means of instruction, and impression, which he thinks will enlighten his understanding, or affect his heart, he will betake himself with anxiety, diligence and perseverance. If the subject of this character be already a Christian; he will labour with all earnestness *to make his calling and election sure*. His efforts no length of time will lessen, no arguments delay, no difficulties discourage, and no obstacles overcome. His face will be *set as a flint*, in the pursuit of this great object; and when death arrives, he will be found vigorously engaged in the solemn employment.

This, if I mistake not, is peculiarly the character, here intended by St. Paul; as being the end for which sobriety of mind is chiefly valuable. In whatever form it exists, it is no other than such a temperament of the soul, as leads us to regard the various things, with which we are conversant, agreeably to their importance; and to act accordingly: a temperament, resulting more from the disposition than from the understanding; and existing therefore as perfectly, and as often, where the intellect is limited, as where it is great. The man, in whom it exists, gives the business of life, as I have observed, a higher place in his estimation than its amusements; and the great interests of mankind, than their ordinary ones; those of the soul, than those of the body; and those of the future, than those of the present world. This regard is not mere, cold, uninterested speculations; but a combination of thought and reflection, influencing the heart and the life. The sober minded man does not think, and reason, only; but feels also, and acts; as the comparative importance of the objects with which he is concerned, demands.

As the soul is infinitely more valuable than the body ; as eternity is immeasurably more important than time ; the sober minded man will bend all his attention to the concerns of the soul, and all his efforts to the attainment of a happy eternity. Nothing will stand between him and the exertions, necessary to secure an interest in the everlasting love of God.

In this amazing pursuit Sobriety of mind is peculiarly manifested. Useful and commendable in all cases, it is here peculiarly useful and honourable.

The man, who possesses this character in the happy and Evangelical degree, here specified, will never be contented to stop short of the highest attainments, and the richest consolations, which can be acquired by a life of piety. Originally, when he betook himself to a just and solemn consideration of *the things, which belonged to his peace*, he discovered a rational, stedfast concern for his salvation ; a realizing sense of his guilt, and danger ; a high value for an interest in the Saviour ; a supreme regard to the favour of God ; an earnest desire to *flee from the wrath to come* ; and a settled determination to *lay hold on eternal life*. All these things appeared in him, not as the impulse of sudden passions, but as the steady, vigorous energy of the mind ; directed in this manner, from solid conviction, that thus to act was wise, and right. Accordingly, he did not, like a false blossom, make a fair show for a few days in the spring, and then fall, and wither, without yielding any fruit. Far from this, he appeared more and more beautiful, and promising, until the fruits of righteousness succeeded, and clustered, in abundance. After his entrance into the kingdom of God, such a man keeps the great subjects of resisting temptation, avoiding sin, and advancing in holiness, ever in view. In the pursuit of them he neglects no means, and spares no endeavours. In his closet, at his bible, in the house of God, in the company of the wise and good, in his solitary walks, and even in the crowded haunts of business, he labours faithfully, and diligently, to *grow in wisdom and in grace*, and to advance daily towards the heavenly world, and the heavenly character. Religion, with him, does not pro-

ceed by fits and starts ; now bursting with the violence of a torrent, and now stagnant with the sluggishness of a pool ; at sometimes full of earnestness and zeal, and at others absorbed, and lifeless, in the concerns of time and sense. It is a flame, kindled, to burn steadily ; to shine always ; to grow brighter, the longer it continues ; until it shall apparently expire in death, to be lighted up again with superior and immortal splendour. I do not mean, that all Christians are alike possessed of this uniform, and evenly improving, character ; nor that unequal professors, whose passions are suddenly heated, and cooled, are not often Christians ; nor that the most uniform Christians do not, at times shine feebly, and obscurely. What I intend is, that the sobriety of mind, enjoined in the text, is in its nature such, as I have represented ; and that those, in whom it most prevails, exhibit most a fair resemblance to this representation. I will now proceed,

II. *To suggest several Reasons for the adoption of this character by the Youths, who are now before me.*

In the 1st place, *One of these Reasons, of vast importance is ; their situation demands it.*

The youths, before me, have entered upon the beginning of eternal existence ; and will be holy or sinful, happy or miserable, forever. Each has a soul, committed to his own peculiar care. The value of that soul is inconceivable. It is infinite. The world, nay the universe, weighed against it, is nothing. To each, also, it is his all. It claims therefore, it deserves, all your attention, all your labours, all your prayers. If it is lost ; you are undone forever. If it is saved ; you are made rich, happy, and glorious, throughout ages which will know no end. What situation can be more solemn than this ; or can more imperiously demand the combined exertion of all your powers ?

At the same time your earthly concerns are not to be forgotten. They, too, have their importance. To neglect them is neither your interest, nor your duty. Happily for you, the attention, which they really demand, is in no degree inconsistent with the effectual promotion of your eternal welfare. The same

sobriety of mind, which is so useful to the advancement of your heavenly interests, is the direct means of your earthly prosperity. To the acquisition of knowledge, property, reputation, and influence, it is as auspicious as to your holiness, and happiness, beyond the grave.

2. *Without Sobriety of mind, your Interests of both time and eternity, will be neglected and lost.*

*Levity of disposition* is the certain road to poverty, trouble, and disgrace. He, who makes amusement his business, will become a beggar of course; and be compelled to creep through life in want, insignificance, and contempt. It is impossible, that he should acquire reputation, or be useful to mankind, or even to himself. If property be thrown into his hands by his parents, or by the events of Providence, it will be squandered by him; if not, it will never be acquired. Steadiness of thought, and constancy of exertion, are indispensable to the acquisition, and still more to the preservation, of wealth; and, equally to the attainment of all other earthly good. “*Seest thou a man diligent in his business?*” said the most exact observer of human life, whom the world has ever seen, “*he shall stand before kings: he shall not stand before mean men.*”

To your immortal concerns these observations are applicable with equal force. To the very nature of these concerns lightness of mind is a direct, and unchanging enemy. He, who will not be serious, will never be virtuous. Every thing, relating to your eternal interests, is in the highest degree solemn, nay awful, and amazing. Heaven and hell, the great Being, who made us, provoked by our sins, and denouncing against us the vengeance of eternal fire; the glorious Redeemer of mankind, descending with infinite love, to die for us; our own character, as fallen, condemned creatures, who are yet invited to return to God, and obtain an inheritance in his everlasting love; are subjects, solemn and impressive beyond expression. They repel all inconsideration; claim irresistibly the deepest concern; and demand the most ardent pursuit. To a light minded man they say

at a great distance, and with awful authority, "*Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.*"

3. *The present is the best Time to secure this disposition ; especially, as it respects your immortal interests.*

You are *now* disinclined to pay any serious attention to your eternal well being. *Every day you live*, you will be more disinclined. The difficulties in your way to salvation are *now* such, as prevent you from beginning this mighty work. *Every future day*, they will be greater. *Now* the subject is unwelcome to you, *to-morrow* it will be disgusting.

Look back upon your past lives. Has religion become more agreeable to you by the flight of time ? Has the past year rendered it more pleasing ? Are you more sober minded ? Is the character of God more interesting to you ? Is Christ more desirable ? Do you regard your souls with more affection ? Are you more willing to ask for blessings ? Are you more constant, or more fervent, in your prayers ? Does the eye of God see, does his ear hear, proofs of any such reformation ? Does he not, on the contrary, behold you still seriously engaged about nothing, but pleasure ; and still trifling away your day of probation ?

But, if during the year past, you have not advanced a single step towards heaven, is it not plain, that, so long as your present disposition continues, you will never advance a single step ? Do not you yourselves believe, that your character must be changed ; that your lightness of mind must give place to the sobriety, enjoined in the text ; that you must no longer be fascinated by amusements ; that you must turn your eyes, and summon your affections, to the interests of the soul ; must weigh time against eternity, and earth against heaven and hell ? All the aged, and middle aged, around you were once young, as you now are. They were as hopeful ; and gave as fair a promise of future good. Every advantage, which you possess, they enjoyed : and God encircled them with privileges, and blessings. But how many, whom you knew, have neglected all their privileges, and but too probably lost them forever ? How many have become fixed in evil habits, and evil pursuits ; and have yielded themselves finally



up to sense, to the world and to perdition? Of how many it has become difficult for you to entertain a feeble hope, that they will not ultimately perish! Have you not often found a reluctance to think on this subject with attention, and to inquire what would become of them in the end? Have you not, in spite of all your wishes, been forced, at times, to conclude, that there was not even a doubtful prospect of their becoming better, or being happy beyond the grave?

Shall, then, this melancholy case be your own? Can you willingly take this character; and terminate life with these prospects? Would you be willing to enter eternity, as you now are? Does your present conduct furnish any reason to believe, that you will enter it with a better character, or with better hopes?

Youth is an invaluable season. The heart is then comparatively tender, and the soul open to instruction. All interesting things easily make deep impressions on the thoughts. God may then be regarded as being peculiarly reconcilable. The great body of those, who are saved, are apparently turned to righteousness in this happy period. Were it not, that the young are so prone to levity of thought, and so enchanted with pleasure; this season would be still more hopeful. Sobriety of mind would in all probability save many a youth from destruction; and mightily enlarge the kingdom of heaven.

4. *You ought immediately to assume this character, because you have no security of years to come.*

Within twelve months some of you may be in the grave. Should God with an audible voice declare concerning one, or another, of your number, that within this period he would be summoned to the judgment; what would be his emotions? What would be his condition? But if the same person goes on in his present course, the only difference will be, that his condemnation will be delayed a few short years; and that this delay will make *him* more guilty, and his perdition more dreadful.

Think then, I beseech you, with the deep anxiety, which the case demands, of your present situation; of your lightness of mind; of your miserable subjection to your passions and appe-

tites; your sottish devotion to amusement and pleasure. What is to be the end of this career? Will it prepare you for death? Will it enable you to leave the world with hope; and to give up your account with joy? Will it become the foundation of your acquittal in the judgment; or open for you the gates of heaven; or fit you for the blessings of immortality? How deplorable will it be to die at the end of such a life! How dreadful, to recite before your Judge an account, made up of amusements! How melancholy, to remember in the future world, that for amusements the soul was lost forever!

He, who must die, ought certainly to be always ready for death. As he cannot foresee the hour, in which he must leave the world, common prudence, as well as the command of God, requires him to be prepared for this event at every hour. "Am I ready?" is a question, which you are bound to ask, every day you live. Are your sins forgiven? Have you *besought the Lord with strong crying, and many tears*, to forgive them, and to save you from endless woe? Are you penitent, believing and prayerful? Have you chosen God as your God; Christ as your Saviour; and the Spirit of truth as your Sanctifier? Have you confessed Christ before men? Or, if not, are you now prepared to make this confession?

Or, on the contrary, are you still sinners; strangers to the covenant of promise; *without God, and therefore without hope in the world?* Are you prayerless; thankless; impenitent; unbelieving; possessed of hard hearts and blind minds? Is the world your God; your portion; your all? Is it true, that you have never even asked God to save you; and that heaven has never known a single petition from your lips enter its delightful walls for your eternal life?

When the great curtain, which hides the invisible world from your sight, shall be drawn, will you behold, unveiled to your eyes, the gates of glory, opening to receive you; a smiling Judge, ready to acquit you; and *the spirits of just men, made perfect*, waiting to hail your arrival? Or will you meet an angry Judge; a dreadful condemnation; a world of sorrow; and a host of miserable companions, hailing your approach to their own melancholy doom?

Look forward to the events of a year to come ; and tell me what emotions it must excite in your minds to remember at the close of it, that during this period you began to renounce your sins ; to trust in your Redeemer ; to obey your God ; and to commence your journey towards the regions of immortal life ? What transports would spring up in the hearts of your parents, to know that all *their* fears, and all *your* dangers, were terminated, because you had chosen *the one thing needful, the good part, which will never be taken from you?* How delightful would it then be to find your conflict ended, and your victory won ; to see yourselves fairly entered into *the straight and narrow way* ; and nothing remaining, but to continue your progress ? Think what it must be to possess the hope, and joy, of sanctified minds ; to become children of God, and followers of the Redeemer ; to make all virtuous beings your friends ; and to commence the divine career of glorifying your Creator, and doing good to the universe, throughout an interminable existence ? What a period would such a year be ! How long to be remembered on earth ! How rapturously to be celebrated in the ages of heaven !

To encourage yourselves in this noble and evangelical pursuit, call to mind that God, *to you*, is now a *God at hand, and not a God afar off*. *Behold his hand is not shortened that it cannot save ; nor is his ear heavy that it cannot hear*. He is now ready to receive, and welcome, you to his kingdom, his forgiveness, and his everlasting love. “*Come unto me,*” says the merciful Saviour of mankind, “*all ye that labour, and are heavy laden ; and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you ; and learn of me : for I am meek, and lowly of heart : and ye shall find rest to your souls : for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*”

On the other hand, how distressing will it be, if a season so inviting, so plainly the best which you will ever enjoy, should roll on all its days, and weeks, and months, in vain. How distressing, that fifty two sabbaths should shine with their benevolent beams upon your heads, and illumine your paths to the house of God, only to increase your condemnation ? How painful is the reflection, that all these golden days will be lost ! that they will

be wasted in gratifying passions which warp, and in pursuing pleasures which steal, your affections from God. How melancholy is the thought, that the last of these sabbaths may find you in the grave; the house of God see your seat empty, to be filled by you no more; and those, whom you leave behind, follow your departed spirits with fears, and sighs, and sorrows, and mourn over your unhappy end without consolation and without hope. *Oh that ye were wise! that ye understood these things! that ye would consider your latter end!*

## SERMON III.

THE DANGER OF LOSING CONVICTIONS OF CONSCIENCE.



MATTHEW xii. 43—45.

*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.*

*Then he saith, "I will return into my house, from whence I came out," and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.*

*Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits, more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be, also, unto this wicked generation.*

THESE words are a part of a discourse, addressed by Christ to certain of the Scribes and Pharisees. In consequence of the pungent sermon which he had uttered, after they had charged him with *casting out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons*, they demanded of him *a sign from heaven*: i. e. a proof of his Messiahship. Their application for this sign seems to have been made, partly with a design of putting a stop to the distressing reproofs of Christ, and partly with the hope of confounding him by disproving his pretensions. In his reply, Christ refuses them any other sign, beside that of *Jonas*, the prophet; whose temporary burial in the fish strongly typified that of Christ in the earth. Then, resuming the same forcible strain of rebuke, he uttered several very solemn and awful threatenings, and concluded his remarks with the text. A more dreadful picture of the guilt and danger of these men, and of all who are like them, was never drawn.

This passage of Scripture is apparently a parable. It may be a literal representation of facts. But there is nothing in the phraseology, which requires us to understand it in this sense. Whether considered as a simple, or symbolical, representation, it conveys to us, in substance, the same truths. Our sole concern lies with the things, which the Saviour designed to communicate, whether the facts or the persons were real or parabolical, is to us of no importance.

There is scarcely a more extraordinary paragraph in the Scriptures than this. Interpreters have extensively, and as I believe justly, considered it as a representation of the state of a sinner, in some degree affected with a sense of his guilt, forming resolutions of amendment, and making some attempts towards Evangelical reformation; but finally relinquishing them all, and returning again, *like the dog to his vomit, and like the sow, that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.* Our Saviour subjoins, "*So shall it be, also, unto this wicked generation.*"

Plainly, therefore, this parable is a description of the moral state of the *Jews*, to a considerable extent, at the time when it was spoken. In every age, and every country, where the Scriptures are known, there are persons, whose moral condition is the same with that of these *Jews*; persons of a hard heart, and a guilty life; who yet feel at times, and in some degree, their guilt and their danger. These persons usually form some designs, and even some resolutions, to repent. In many instances, however, they return to their former, sinful life with new, more guilty, and more hopeless dispositions. Of all such persons this parable is no less a just description, than of those *Jews*, whom they so strongly resemble. To these (for it is believed, that some of them may be found in this assembly) it is now solemnly addressed.

It is hardly necessary to say, that the representation is forcible and affecting, beyond example; and demands, not merely the solemn and profound, but the alarmed and eager attention of all men; especially of those, who either are, or are in danger of being in the situation, here described. I think of no method, in which I may unfold, or impress, the things, contained in it, more

clearly and more effectually, than by following the order of the parable itself, and marking, as I pass, such particulars, as are of peculiar importance to the general design. This course I shall therefore pursue. I shall consider then,

1. *The miserable condition of an impenitent sinner, before he is awakened to a serious conviction of his guilt.*

“*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man*”—From this clause we learn, that, to the eye of God, the soul of such a man is the habitation of a foul and wicked spirit, who there fixes his abode. Nay he appropriates this abode to himself as his own property. *Then he saith “I will return to my house from whence I came out ;” “my house ;”* language, plainly adopted because he regards it as his settled proper residence ; the dwelling, where he steadily lives, and is literally at home.

Think, I beseech you, of the import of these extraordinary words. What would be the condition of the poor wretch, of whom a fiend from the bottomless pit should take entire possession ; so as to render the soul of the man his property, his house, the place where he always dwelt, and where he had an undisputed control. Think what an inhabitant is here pourtrayed. Of what an inmate has such a soul become the tenement ? What employments must such a being pursue in its secret chambers ? How plainly must it be his prime business to seduce, to corrupt, and to destroy ; to rouse its evil passions and evil appetites, and to goad it into opposition to truth and righteousness. *Against man* it must be his delight to inspire it with injustice, fraud, and revenge ; *against God* to arm it with impiety, unbelief, ingratitude and rebellion ; and *against itself* to direct its hostility in all the snaky paths of pollution. These must be the peculiar and incessant employments of such an impure and malignant being. Of these employments what is the end. It is no other than to withdraw it from truth, duty, religion, hope and heaven ; and to hurry it onward to perdition.

What in this case must be the character of the soul itself ? The whole influence of such a spirit must arise from the fact, that the soul, which he inhabits, voluntarily yields to his suggestions. He

resides there, only because he is a welcome guest. He works there, only because the man *loves to have it so*. He prevails, because the man chooses to submit. He rules, because the man is pleased to be under his dominion. He corrupts and destroys, because the man loves to be corrupted and destroyed. "*Whoso sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; all they, that hate me, love death.*"

But such, in substance, is the real state of the man in question. There may, indeed, be no such spirit, no impure, foreign being, residing, controlling, and triumphing. Still the affections, the purposes and the character, are such, as to be justly described by this strong symbolical language. The soul is such, as if inhabited and corrupted by this destroyer. How dangerous, how miserable, a condition is that of a stupid, hardened sinner, sold to sin, and devoted by himself to destruction?

It is not improbable, that there are many persons present, who will hardly be induced to believe this representation. Let me request every one of them to remember, that these things are all said by the Saviour of men, the final Judge of the quick and the dead; that it is declared of him by the voice of inspiration, that *he knows what is in man*; that he declares of himself, that *he searches the hearts, and the reins*; and that on this knowledge will be founded his final sentence concerning every child of *Adam* at the great day. Let it also be remembered, that he can no more deceive, than be deceived; and that these are *his* words. Must not every sinner in this house, who has sufficient sobriety to make an application of them to his own case, and to learn his real situation, tremble at these awful declarations of Christ, and shudder to think what he himself is.

2. *Convictions of sin constitute in the eye of God an important change in the state of man.*

"*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man*"

The change, of which I have spoken, is so great, as to be justly represented by this imagery. Before, the unclean spirit dwelt in the soul without disturbance. Now, he finds himself so strenuously resisted, that, in despair of future success, he quits a habita-



tion which has become so uncomfortable, because it promises so little opportunity of doing mischief. Of course he hastens to some other place, where the same dreadful employment may be more hopefully pursued. "*The fiend*," in the language of the great English Poet, "*The fiend murmuring flies; and with him fly the shades of night:*" of that deep and dreadful night, which he himself shed over the world within. In a sense, the man has once more become his own; and is partially delivered from the deplorable thralldom under which he had so long laboured.

Certainly this is a great and desirable change. The subtlety, malice, and domination, of a fiend, of passions and appetites strongly resembling the character of a fiend, have in some good measure been overcome. The captive is in a good degree at liberty to understand, and pursue, his own salvation. Many of his incumbrances are shaken off; many of his discouragements removed. The victory, indeed, is not of course final. Yet it is a victory of vast importance; and is often followed if perseveringly pursued, perhaps always, by consequences interesting beyond conception. How fervently, then, ought every person in this situation to labour, that he may secure all which he has gained, and take advantage of his present, commanding ground to acquire all which remains. How diligently ought every such person to watch against every danger, the approach of every temptation, the assaults of every enemy, and especially the dreadful possession from which he has just escaped? How ardently ought he to strive against the returns of stupidity, backsliding, and corruption? How fervently to pray, that God would enable him to persevere, advance, overcome every obstacle, and finally win the prize of immortal life. If such persons forsake themselves; God will forsake them. If they forget their souls; they ought to expect that they will be forgotten by their Maker. If they despise their own eternal well-being; they cannot hope to escape from the ruin, which is before them.

3. *We are here taught, that beings absolutely sinful find neither rest, nor enjoyment, but in doing evil.*

"*He walketh through dry i. e. desert places, seeking rest and findeth none.*"

While the unclean spirit resided in his former dwelling, he was in a sense settled in ease and quiet; because he was corrupting and destroying the man. The business of corrupting and destroying was all, in which he found any ease. The moment his hopes of success in this diabolical business began to fail, he quit- ted his mansion; and wandered into a desert. Here he roamed alone, restless and wretched; and peculiarly wretched because he could no longer successfully pursue the work of destruction.

*Wickedness is a spirit absolutely solitary.* All its social character, all its sympathy, is nothing, but the disposition which unites banditti in the fell purpose of plundering, pollution, and murder. With others it joins, solely because it cannot accomplish its foul ends alone. Even with these it has no union of heart, no fellow feeling, no real sociality. It attracts nothing, and nobody. Every thing it repels. Hell, with all its millions, is a perfect solitude to each of its inhabitants. They unite only to destroy each other, or to accomplish elsewhere the same work of ruin. Not one of them can find a single friend in all the vast multitude around him. Nay, this immense multitude serves only to make him feel, that he is more entirely alone; more perfectly friendless; more absolutely destitute of confidence, affection, and hope. Such is the true nature of sin, or selfishness, in every human breast: and, although its tendencies are strongly resisted by natural affection in the present world, it bursts, in innumerable instances, this bond; and discovers its fiend-like character in the terrible crimes to which it goads our miserable race. Intense ambition, avarice, and voluptuousness, rage, even here, without control; and diffuse around them misery, not a little resembling that of the damned. What an endless multitude have they sacrificed with the sword. What a multitude of victims have they brought to the cross and to the stake. What is this, but the temper and the conduct of hell?

Even when this spirit appears in a milder form, and assumes no violence, nor any apparent malice; still, both its character, and its employments, are substantially the same. To corrupt is to destroy. The process is indeed slower; but it is equally sure.

The aspect, exhibited by the spirit of corruption, is indeed less forbidding: but the mischiefs, which it does, are not in the end less dreadful. Every seducer, every tempter, is at the bottom an enemy, and a villain: and nothing can be more false than the professions, made by men of this character.

4. *Persons, under conviction, are always in danger of falling anew into hardness of heart.*

“*He saith ‘I will return into my house, from whence I came out.’”*

At first, and for a time, he despaired of gaining a final victory over the man whose soul he inhabited; and in this despair, leaving him to himself, wandered into the desert. But, after looking in vain for a new victim, he began to indulge fresh hopes of re-occupying his former residence. Accordingly he determined to return and make it his permanent abode.

The first victory, which is gained when the soul becomes convinced of its sins, is far from being final. It is a happy beginning; and if followed by vigorous and unremitted efforts, is a propitious prelude to future success. But he who rests here, and feels as if he had already attained, or were already safe, is ruined of course. He is become convinced of his guilt, and has thus advanced a necessary step towards eternal life. But he has not turned to GOD; and without this conversion all, which is done, will be nothing.

Probably every person, who is under a strong conviction of his guilt, is assailed by many temptations. Either he will distrust, and despair of, the divine mercy; or he will be induced to trust presumptuously in his own righteousness, or to feel satisfied of his ability to save himself; or he will settle down in a state of sloth; or he will be persuaded to procrastinate the work of repentance; or he will yield himself up to the guidance of erroneous teachers, or search out for himself erroneous doctrines; or he will depend on impulses, and other vain dictates of a wild imagination. In these circumstances some individuals strenuously resist both the allurements and the terrors. Others become victims to them. The former overcome; the latter fall and often irrevocably.

Of the truth of the observations which I have here made, the conversation of persons in a state of conviction furnishes evidence but too decisive. A minister of the Gospel is by his office made a witness, to a great extent, of the secret feelings of the heart in persons thus situated. The very things, which have been here mentioned, I have myself heard in such conversation; and have seen the subsequent conduct. Without hesitation, therefore, I pronounce the observations to be true.

How important, then, is it, that every individual in such a state should be aware of his danger; watch incessantly against his enemies; and resist them without intermission. How indispensable is it, that he should *pray always with all prayer* for the grace of God, to save him from temptation, and rescue him from utter ruin. Let every such person, present, be awake, alive, and alarmed by a sense of his exposure, and tremble at the thought of being overcome by his destroyers.

5. *The soul, from which convictions of sin have been finally banished, is more perfectly prepared to become the seat of absolute wickedness, than before these convictions began.*

*“And, when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.”*

An *empty* house is vacant for the reception of a new inhabitant. A house, *swept*, is rendered clean, to make his residence agreeable. A house, *garnished*, is with pleasure prepared to welcome such an inhabitant; and designed to exhibit the respect with which the original tenant regards his new guest, and the open testimonies of honour which he is disposed to render to him. It will be remembered, that all this preparation is voluntary on the part of the owner; and is all designed for the convenience, and pleasure of the new occupant. It proves therefore, that such an occupant was expected, and intended to reside where all these preparations had been made.

Thus, after the conflict with sin, and the fears of danger, are over, the soul becomes quieted of all its former apprehensions, and inactive as to all future resistance. The work, though not done, is ended; and the struggles, though they have failed of

their purpose, are given over. The soul has ceased from its opposition; and, considering the effort as too laborious, and the self-denial as too great, relinquishes the conflict, with scarcely a hope of resuming it at any future period. Satisfied, that *with ten thousand, it is unable to meet him, that cometh against it with twenty thousand.* it languishes away its energy, and settles down into a state of hopeless torpidity. *It began to build, but was not able to finish.*

From this time it recedes visibly from the solemnity and concern, which it before manifested about its sins and its salvation; and becomes gradually hardened in iniquity, and alienated from God. Ordinarily, this progress is not without its interruptions; without checks of conscience; without restraints of the Spirit of Grace. With some irregularities it is, however, continual. It is too constant, too rapid, and too hopeless; and but too often does the man conclude to make no further efforts, and to bid adieu to every prospect of eternal life.

6. *The soul, from which convictions are finally banished, becomes far more sinful, than before its convictions began.*

*“Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”*

Seven is here but for an indefinite number; and may be considered as standing for many. It was, also, regarded by the Jews as a perfect number; and may therefore denote, in the present case, the worst; or the number, the most fitted to complete the wickedness and ruin of the man. At the least, it denotes a greater number than one; and, in proportion, a greater series of temptations and dangers. These seven, are also, universally more wicked than the original tenant of this impure habitation; more absolutely possessed of the fiend-like character, than himself. From each his danger is of course greater: from all, how great, how dreadful! What a house has this become! With what inhabitants is it filled! To what purposes is it destined! In what uses is it employed! Such, however, is the real state of the man in question.

The soul, in this case, has overcome with many struggles, and against many motives, its strong sense of guilt, and its distressing apprehensions of danger. In this conflict the man has hardened his heart, and blinded his eyes. He has been exposed, perhaps, to the ridicule of his companions, to the deceitfulness of their sophistry, and to the baleful influence of their example. The calm, contemplative, safe, fireside he has left for the haunts of sense and sin; his sober, virtuous friends for the company of seducers; and the instructions of piety for the snares of pleasure. From the remonstrances of conscience he has retreated to the noise and gaiety of licentious sport; from the house of God to the theatre and the gaming table; and from the path of life to the broad and crooked road, which leads him to destruction. The fears and distresses, which a little while since compelled him to solemn thought, and temporary external reformation, he forces away by joining with others in their contempt and derision.

Of the *praise*, or approbation, of God he now becomes regardless; but of that of his companions in iniquity he is more and more ambitious. A little while since, their commendation would have awakened in his mind nothing but alarm. Now he dreads nothing so much as their censure. They are at once, his instructors, his rulers, and his example. Once he hoped, that he should resemble the Redeemer; *have the same mind, which was in him, and walk as he walked.* Now his sole wish is to be like *them.* Henceforth his progress is only downward! From the commission of one sin he is of course led to another; and from those, which are less, to those, which are greater. If life lasts, he becomes in the end a profligate here, and an heir of distinguished wretchedness beyond the grave. If he does not go to the most horrid and abandoned lengths; it is because God exercises more kindness to him, than he to himself.

Often a person of this description becomes ambitious to be, and to shew himself, the first in every proposal, device and career of sin; and in every band of sinners. In the indulgence of this spirit he usually makes it his prime business to appear as

an open opposer of religion, a despiser of good men, a reviler of the Scriptures, a contemner of the Sabbath, a ridiculer of the Sanctuary. Not unfrequently might he with justice be addressed, as *Elymas*, the sorcerer, was by *St. Paul*: “*O full of all subtlety and all mischief; thou child of the devil; thou enemy of all righteousness! wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*” His station he voluntarily takes in the front of the host; and ventures into the thickest of the battle. Too far, therefore, does he advance, to think of retreating. His pride, his self-consistency, make him regard this subject only with disdain; and push him on to every hostile effort against his Maker. After some time spent in this manner, he learns habitually to feel, as if embarked in a continual warfare, and as if always in arms.

Thus, instead of being influenced, deceived, and controlled, by one fiend, he is spurred and goaded on by a band of fiends; is kept always vigorously active in iniquity, violently at war with God, and in a steady direction of all his energy against truth and salvation.

Last, and most dreadful of all, as he has finally resisted with gross insult the most benevolent efforts of the Holy Spirit to win him from guilt, to restore him to holiness, and to entitle him to endless life; as he has *crucified afresh the Son of God, accounted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and put him to open shame*; as he has *despised the riches of the goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, of God, and after his hardness, and impenitent heart has treasured up wrath against the day of wrath*; he is forsaken by that Spirit, to whom he has *done this despite*, forgotten by that Redeemer, whom he has thus requited, and given up by that *Father of all mercies*, against whom he has thus finally rebelled, to a reprobate mind. Henceforth he is only *endured as a vessel of wrath, fitted for destruction*. At first a partial, then an open Infidel, exiled from the Sanctuary, scorning the Scriptures, and making a mock of sin and holiness alike, it becomes *impossible, that he should be renewed to repentance*. *No more sacrifice for sin remaineth for him; but a fearful looking for of judgment,*

*and fiery indignation. Accordingly, God sends upon him strong delusion, that he should believe a lie, and be damned, because he believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. The Saviour only weeps over him, as over Jerusalem; crying with a tenderness inexpressible, "How often would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but thou wouldst not. Oh that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things, which belong to thy peace! but now they are hidden from thine eyes." Woe unto thee, miserable apostate; it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for thee.*

### REMARKS.

From this passage of Scripture, thus explained, we learn,

1. *The immeasurable importance of cherishing in the heart Convictions of sin.*

The state of mind, denoted by this phraseology, is, I acknowledge, often wearisome and distressing. To have a realizing consciousness of our guilt; to have vivid apprehensions of the danger which it involves; to look back on a life spent only in rebellion against God, and forward, with a fearful expectation of suffering the effects of his anger against impenitence: is unquestionably terrifying to an awakened mind; and but for the aid given us by the tender mercy of our Creator, would easily overwhelm us with agony and despair. That we should earnestly wish for deliverance from such a condition is inwoven in our nature; and that we should feel desirous of a deliverance from it by almost any means, especially when labouring under peculiar anguish, and still more especially when that anguish has been long continued, may not unnaturally be expected from the frailty and feebleness of our character. Hence multitudes have in all ages of Christianity been found, who under the pressure of painful truths, and distressing apprehensions, have, like some of our Saviour's hearers, *turned back, and refused any more to walk with Christ.*



In the text the danger of this conduct is exhibited in the most terrible manner. Let me beseech you solemnly to ponder this awful representation. Ponder it deeply. Ponder it often. Let it lie near your hearts. Let it awaken all your fears.

You may possibly reply, that this is a figurative representation ; a parable ; an allegory. Be it so. Construe it as favourably for yourselves, as you can. Soften its terrible declarations as much as you can. There will still remain in it sufficient alarms to make the *ears of every one of you*, who is not deaf, to *tingle* ; and the heart of every one of you, who is not torpid, to shrink with dismay.

From a state of conviction, however distressing it may seem, there are but two ways of escape. One of them leads to endless life ; the other, to endless death. The former is the way of repentance, faith and holiness ; the latter, that of stupidity, hardness of heart, the resumption of sin, and the abandonment of Religion. Of those, who terminate their convictions, how different is the disposition, the progress, and the end. Who would not chuse the former ? Who would not tremble to assume the latter ?

Cherish, then, if you possess them, these convictions, however painful they may seem, however long they may continue. Keep your eyes open upon your guilt, upon your danger, and upon the only way of escape from both. Search the Scriptures diligently for those instructions and warnings, which on the one hand will teach you your duty and your danger, and on the other will keep your minds vigorously alive to the importance of both. The threatenings, found in that sacred book, meet with awe and apprehension : the invitations, and the promises, welcome with gratitude, wonder, and delight. Mark the gracious terms, in which they are given ; and adore the divine Spirit of condescension and mercy, by which they are dictated. Regard the distresses, which you feel at this period, as a wise man regards the probe, by which his wounds are searched and healed. To yourselves you may seem as losing *a right hand, or a right eye* : but remember that *it is better to enter into life, maimed, than with two eyes, and*

*two hands, to be cast into the fire of hell. Bow your knees daily to the Father of all mercies, with the language and spirit of the publican; and cry, each of you, to him in anguish of heart, "God be merciful unto me, a sinner." Seize every opportunity to converse with that frankness, which opens all the heart, with good men; whose affectionate instructions may enlighten, quicken, and strengthen you; may give you consolation and hope; and persuade you to endure to the end.*

2. *We learn from these observations the high interest, which persons in this situation have in being directed in their duty by sound wisdom.*

Such persons betake themselves, of course, to some or other of those around them for instruction and comfort, especially, when, as is often the case, they themselves are imperfectly acquainted with subjects of this nature. Multitudes in such cases are, usually, willing enough to take into their hands the business of instructing them; and not unfrequently volunteer their services. Let me exhort you to remember, that many of these are totally unfit for the office which they assume. If you commit yourselves to the guidance of ignorant persons; they will be unable to point out to you your duty, or your safety: if to that of philosophical Christians; they will perplex you with distinctions, and refinements in speculation, by which you will be only bewildered. If you fall into the hands of bigotry; you will be told, that your safety is found alone in the adoption of those opinions, and those practices, about which this spirit is so unreasonably employed: opinions and practices, usually wrong in their nature, and always in the degree of importance attached to them. If you go to enthusiasts; they will teach you, that Religion consists in fervours, in impulses, in immediate revelations from Heaven: things unknown to the Scriptures, and estranged from piety. They will also tell you, that its existence is evidenced by the sudden arrival of Scriptural texts to your minds, of which you had no expectation, and for the coming of which you were absolutely unprepared; by the violence of your zeal; by the abundance of your conversation about religious subjects; by high pretensions; and by that spirit

of censoriousness, which denies the character of piety to sober Christians. The superstitious man will inform you, that you must *tithe mint, anise, and cummin*; and will be perfectly satisfied, that you should *neglect the weightier matters of the law: judgment, mercy, and faith*. The frozen-hearted moralist will persuade you, that, if you speak truth, pay your debts, and occasionally administer to the necessities of the poor, you will find yourselves in the path to heaven; and have nothing to fear from the anger of God, although your *hearts* will still remain *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. All these are *blind guides*: and *if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch*.

In every case of this nature apply yourselves directly, and only, to sober, enlightened, and pious men, whose lives prove their piety, whose conversation carries irresistible evidence of their wisdom. Especially betake yourselves to Ministers of the Gospel, who clearly, and evangelically, sustain this character. If you *walk with these men, you will become wise*. They will shew you the path of life: they will persuade you to enter it. Pour forth to them all your hearts, your sins, your temptations, your difficulties, your fears, and your hopes. The instructions, which they will be able to give you will be safe, comforting, full of hope, and full of peace. Their counsels will be a *light to your feet*, and a balm to your wounds. They will take you by the hand, lead you in the path of righteousness, and guide you towards Heaven.

3. *We also learn from this parable the miserable situation of Unawakened sinners.*

These persons have not, indeed, incurred all the guilt, and all the danger, of those, who have been the principal subjects of this discourse. Still, their condition is, and is here exhibited as being, deplorable. "*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man,*" says our Saviour. The departure of the unclean spirit, if the commentators, to whom I have referred, have construed the passage aright, is the era, at which convictions begin in the soul. Of course, till this time he resided there in quiet. Think what

it is for the soul to be possessed by this foul and dreadful inhabitant; and remember, that the representation is that of Christ himself. It is therefore just. Sin is an unclean spirit, of sufficient subtilty, foulness, power and malignity, to corrupt any mind beyond the hope of restoration. In the case supposed; the case, as there is but too much reason to fear, of not a small number in this house; the excessive danger lies in this: *every such person is at ease concerning his moral condition.*

This unclean spirit has acquired an entire ascendancy over him; and dwells, and reigns, in his heart without a rival, and without an attempt to resist his influence or to escape from his dominion. All is quiet, and silent, within: but it is the stillness of death, and the repose of the grave.

Be roused then, to a sense of your condition. Open your eyes to your sins, your guilt, your approaching ruin. Feel, that you are in greater danger, because you suppose yourselves safe. Your insensibility is the torpor of the apoplexy. You sleep on the top of a mast; and the waves of perdition roll beneath you. How can you hope to escape, if you will not so much as open your eyes to see your danger? Remember how often the alarm has been rung in your ears, and has left you as it found you, crying in half-articulated sounds "*A little more sleep; a little more slumber; a little more folding of the hands to sleep.*" You have been tenants of the tomb; and have slumbered over the pit of destruction. If you are not lifeless; if you are not hopeless; listen. The voice of Inspiration calls to you; "Awake, or sleep, to wake no more."

## SERMON IV.

THE FOLLY OF TRUSTING OUR OWN HEARTS.



PROVERBS XXVIII. 26.

*He, that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool.*

IN the examination, which I propose to make of this passage of Scripture, I shall consider,

- I. *What is meant by trusting in our own hearts.*
- II. *The folly of this conduct.*

I. What is meant by trusting in our own hearts.

The heart is phraseology, often used in the Scriptures to denote all the powers of the soul; the imagination, the understanding, and the affections. The propriety of using the word in this manner is sufficiently evident from the consideration, that in most exercises of the soul all these powers are unitedly employed. If cases exist, in which one of these powers is exercised without the others; they are certainly solitary cases. Usually, at least, they are exerted together; and we imagine, reason, and feel, at the same time. In this extensive sense the word appears to be used in the text.

To trust in our hearts is obviously *to be assured, or at least to be confident, of the wisdom and rectitude, of the various plans which we devise for our conduct; and to feel that their dictates may be safely followed.* Whatever may be the object in view; the man in the case supposed, commits himself and his interests to the direction of his heart; and is satisfied, that it will conduct him safely and successfully to that which is good. In the same manner a dutiful child confidently commits himself and all his concerns, to the parent whom he loves. The parent is to plan.

and to control, both his business and his pleasure. The child is only to conform to what the parent prescribes. In the same manner, also, a pious man confides in his Maker.

But, to understand this subject correctly,\* as well as comprehensively, it is necessary, that we should examine it somewhat more minutely, I observe therefore,

1. *That to trust in our own hearts is to rely on our wisdom and prudence in the common concerns of life.*

God has taught us, that *in the multitude of counsellors there is safety; that, where no counsel is, the people fall; that without counsel purposes are disappointed, and that by counsel every purpose is established; that the way of a fool is right in his own eyes; and that he, who hearkeneth unto counsel, is wise.*

But in defiance of all these declarations of the Infinite mind, *he, who trusteth in his own heart*, feels, in the common concerns of life, assured that he possesses sufficient wisdom to direct his business, without any need of advice from others. Mark him with a little attention; and you will easily discern, that, in his own view, his plans are laid with sufficient skill to furnish every necessary promise of success. Persons of this character often have friends, distinguished for knowledge, experience and wisdom; friends, who, if applied to, would kindly and cheerfully assist them with their best advice, and with the highest probability direct them in the happiest way for the attainment of their purposes. But, however young, inexperienced or ignorant, themselves are; and however satisfied of the wisdom of their friends; they are often wholly indisposed to ask advice at their hands. Nay the younger, the more inexperienced, the more ignorant, they are, the less are they usually disposed either to ask or receive advice, and the more inclined to rely upon their own wisdom. Thus, we see, children in the early stages of childhood hardly ever suspect, that they need any direction beside their own. Youths *begin* to learn their incompetency to guide themselves. In manhood this persuasion very evidently increases in strength; and, in middle age, ordinarily prompts us to believe, that *by counsel every purpose is established.* Thus, the more

able we become to direct ourselves, the more unwilling we are to confide in this direction, and the more inclined to seek the aid of others. Thus our self sufficiency declines, as our experience and our consequent wisdom increase.

Those, who are young, almost always know better than their parents how to avoid danger; to preserve their health; to direct their own education; and to pursue the best and safest road to real happiness. They are more competent to choose for themselves a profession; to form useful plans of business; and to pursue them with skill and success.

But this spirit is not found in the young only. The number is not small of those, whom it accompanies through life; and who are, thus, children until they leave the world. However often they are deceived, and however greatly disappointed, they still go on with an uninterrupted complacency in their own wisdom. They have failed, it is true, of the success, which they promised themselves in their past plans; but they are not less sure of succeeding in their future enterprizes. Misfortune, hitherto, has been owing not to their own want of prudence, nor to any imperfection in their plans; but to a series of unlucky accidents, or to the blunders of those to whom the execution of them was unhappily entrusted. But this plainly infers no reason, why they should be at all less willing to confide in their future schemes. Thus they trust in themselves just in the same manner, as if all their former measures had been only prosperous.

2. *To trust in our hearts is to trust in our own Schemes of religion.*

Persons of this character may be arranged into two classes.

*The first of these consists of men, who form religious systems, independently of the Scriptures.* By these I intend *Infidels*, of every description. Infidels, as you know, determine that the Scriptures are not a Revelation from God. From the peremptoriness with which this determination is made, the confidence which they appear to place in their decisions, and the pretensions which some of them make to talents and learning; it is very frequently supposed that this important question has often passed

in review before them, and undergone a very serious and thorough examination. Nothing, however, is in most cases farther from the truth. Very few even of those who are professed champions in this cause, have investigated the subject with an attention, remotely approximating to that which it deserves. When the question is concerning the existence of a Revelation, professedly disclosing the will of God concerning the future destiny of man ; its very nature demands of all men the most solemn care, and the most critical inquiry. As all our interests are suspended on the decision ; as annihilation and immortal existence form the first alternative, and the glories of heaven and the miseries of hell, the second, in our answer to this question, common sense imperiously demands that we approach it with feelings of the highest solemnity, examine it with the most vigilant inquisition, and decide it with unimpeachable impartiality. Were we able, indeed, to change the state of things by our determinations ; could we exist or be annihilated, could we be happy or miserable, at our pleasure ; it would be sufficient, that our decision should be peremptory. But, since the change, actually wrought, is only made in ourselves, and not in the purposes of God ; since we shall exist, or not exist, the heirs of endless glory, or endless perdition, as he pleases ; it is evident, that, if we answer the question lightly, falsely, or without sufficient proof, we answer it at our peril. How plainly, then, ought it to be answered by every man, as one *who shall give an account*.

In violent opposition to all this, however, it has been customarily answered by confident assertions ; by a sarcasm, a sneer, a laugh, a profane oath, or even a curse. Men of the world, men of business, devotees to pleasure, persons uneducated, striplings, nay even children, decide this tremendous question in the same categorical manner, as if their answer were the result of demonstration. Have they examined it ? No. Have they read ? No. Have they thought ? No. Whence, then, do they boldly determine on a question so momentous ? They *trust in their own hearts*. They were born with such capacities ; their qualities are of a cast, so superior to the common attributes of men ; that without



reading, conversation, or reflection, they can solve a question which demands more thought, learning and knowledge, than they can comprehend. All wise men, who are acquainted with them, see, that they are totally incompetent for the task which they have undertaken. But in their own view there are no abler judges. Ask them; and they are giants in intellect. Ask others; and they are embryos.

Secondly. *In this class are those arranged also, who profess to believe, that the Scriptures are a divine revelation, and yet, instead of making them the rule of their faith, invent and adopt a philosophical system of religion; and in pretence support it by the Scriptures.*

These persons professedly believe, and some of them, I doubt not, persuade themselves that they actually believe, the scriptures to be the word of God, and to contain his pleasure concerning the duty and salvation of men. Of course, it would be naturally supposed, they resort daily and diligently to this fountain of truth, in order to learn their duty, and the way of life. Nothing can be farther from the fact. Instead of betaking themselves to their Maker, to learn the Religion which he has revealed, they form a system of doctrines and precepts for themselves; and then resort to the Scriptures for texts, to support it. Instead of coming to God, to learn his pleasure, they first determine what his pleasure ought to be, and then compel his word, by perverting its meaning, to speak whatever they themselves please. Instead of receiving their religion from their Creator they make a religion for him; and expect that he will conform to its dictates.

The true explanation, the real cause, of this conduct is that these men *trust in their own hearts*; that they rely on their own ingenuity, their knowledge of moral subjects, their capacity to devise a system of moral truth; no less than professed Infidels.

If we profess to believe the Scriptures, as a Revelation from God; there can be no greater absurdity, there can be no greater indecency, than not to receive his declarations just as we find them. *Who hath known the mind of Jehovah? or who hath been his Counsellor?* Shall a worm of the dust instruct his Ma-

ker ; pervert his truth ; substitute for it his own errors ; and by annexing to it meanings, which *He* never intended, change it, as did the philosophers of old, into a lie ?

A system of Religion involves in it the Character, Government, and Designs, of God ; the nature, interests, and duty, of man ; a future existence, and its mighty concerns ; the means of pardon, justification, and final acceptance ; and the means, also, of perseverance in our duty unto the end. How plain is it, that no mind, less than infinite, is able to comprehend these immeasurable subjects. Who, beside God, can understand his nature ? Whose eye can penetrate into the recesses of the Un-created mind, and discern his views of moral objects ? The manner, in which he regards holiness, and sin ? the reward, which he will render to those, who are the subjects of the opposite attributes. The terms on which he will accept, and the manner in which he will restore, sinners ? Or whether he will accept, or restore, them at all ? Who can determine whether God will accept any worship from sinners ? Who, independantly of his declarations, can tell whether there is any future reward, or even any future being ?

How obvious is it, that, after all the expectations, labours, and boasts, of man on these mighty subjects of investigation, the utmost which he has hitherto done, and therefore certainly the utmost which he ever will do, is merely to form ingenious conjectures ? But is the soul of man to be set afloat upon a guess ? Who, that was not a fair candidate for bedlam, would hazard even his property, nay his pleasure, upon an absolute uncertainty ? Who, bound upon a voyage, in which he was to venture himself and all his interests, would launch into an illimitable ocean upon a plank ?

But, were all this less obvious, it should seem impossible for mankind not to learn the truth, for which I contend, from the voice of experience. Innumerable attempts have been continually made both by those who professedly believe, and those who openly disbelieve, the Scriptures. Hitherto they have only made shipwreck of the moral system. In all the schemes of doctrine

which they have contrived, they have furnished nothing on which a sober man could for a moment venture his salvation. Not one of them has discovered any means of expiating sin, obtaining justification for sinners, or securing, or even rendering probable, their admission into the favour of God. All the reliance of these men has been placed on undefined, unsupported, and absolutely uncertain, hopes of mercy, of which neither experience, reason nor analogy, has hitherto been able to produce the least evidence. To commit the soul to such a refuge, to lean for safety on such a reed, is to put our all at hazard with a spirit of desperation.

But what men, so numerous, ingenious, laborious, and persevering, have never been able to do, will never be done by any man. He, who will not admit this conclusion, from premises which so obviously involve it, rejects it not from conviction, nor even from plausible arguments, but from mere self sufficiency. Nothing else will persuade him, that he is able to accomplish a work, to which the powers of all his fellow men have been unequal. Nothing else, indeed, could induce him even to enter upon an employment, so absolutely and so evidently hopeless.

3. *Another specimen of trusting in our own hearts is confiding in the goodness of our moral character.*

This exercise of self sufficiency is manifested in many forms, and varieties. Of these the

*First, which I shall mention, is believing more favourably concerning ourselves than truth will warrant.*

This unhappy error is not confined to sinners: it is found but too frequently in men, who present us many reasons to acknowledge them as Christians.

Wicked men often believe themselves to be virtuous, not only without, but against evidence; and from mere self sufficiency. Were they to examine themselves with either care or candour; they would find nothing, on which, in their own view, this opinion could rest even with plausibility. Reason demands, the Scriptures demand, their own eternal interests loudly demand, that they should search both their hearts, and their lives, with unceasing diligence, deep solicitude, and entire impartiality;

that they should anxiously consult others, especially men of acknowledged wisdom and goodness, concerning their moral condition; and above all, that they should bring their character for trial to the Gospel; the great touchstone of righteousness. Whatever they do, or can do, short of this, is merely the result of confidence in their own hearts. Until this is done, they will only deceive themselves. Until this is done, they may indeed, in their own view, *have a name to live*, but they will be really *dead*. Were it effectually done; the delusion would vanish; and one ground of hope would be actually gained, that they might hereafter change both their condition, and their character, for the better.

With the same conduct good men, to an extent which is not small, are chargeable also. I wish, it were in our power to deny this humiliating position. But, if we adhere to truth, we shall be obliged to confess, that even such men often believe themselves to be much better than they really are.

Young converts, true converts, possessing real and evangelical worth, are in this respect frequently unhappy. Their feelings are warm and vigorous; their imaginations active; and their religious experience almost nothing. The dictates of their imagination they easily and not unwillingly mistake for the decisions of sound judgment; and the impulse of their passions, for the glow of evangelical love. On these sands they build their hopes and estimates of their religious character. Of such dictates and impulses, they indeed have many: and were they sound evidence of this great point, the true character of the persons in question would, in a less degree, be misapprehended by themselves. But alas! these things have nothing to do with religion. They are pressed into the service; and are made to evince that, to which they have no reference, and can have no application.

What is true of these converts is true of multitudes of religious men, who possess the same vigor of fancy, and the same warmth of feeling. Particularly is it the case with ignorant Christians. In them often, feeling is neither balanced nor regulated by those sound, rational views of the evangelical system, which more knowledge of it, and a superior capacity of judging, would fur-

nish. The real evidences of piety they imperfectly collect, imperfectly compare, and of course imperfectly understand. Thus situated, they remain in a sense young converts while they live. Yet in numerous instances they prove by their conversation and behaviour, that they think themselves strong men in Christ; while all the discerning Christians around them clearly perceive, that they are mere babes. Often they discuss, and decide upon, subjects of high import, which lie beyond their reach. Often they dictate religious measures to those, who are greatly their superiours in every evangelical attainment. Sometimes they undertake to lead the devotions of public assemblies, from a persuasion, not unfrequently awakened and cherished by other ignorant men, that they are endowed with extraordinary gifts, and have acquired an eminent degree of holiness. Nay numbers of such men enter the desk, without any preparation for an office so solemn and so difficult as that of a minister of the Gospel. Here, *unlearned and unstable* as they are, they frequently *wrest the Scriptures* to the very serious injury of themselves, and the destruction of others. “*I command every man among you,*” says *St. Paul*, “*not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly,*” (or with a sound judgment,) “*according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*” “*Love vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up.*” “*If a man thinketh himself something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work;* (that is examine what he has done; and from that trial, not from his feelings, learn his true character) “*and then,*” says the Apostle, “*he shall have rejoicing in himself, and not in another.*”

“*My brethren,*” says *St. James*, “*be not many teachers; knowing, that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*” In other words, this is the way to expose ourselves to that greater condemnation.

It deserves to be remarked, that all superstitious persons, and all enthusiasts, have ever been of this character, and pursued this unhappy conduct. This, certainly, ought to be enough, and more than enough, to warn every Christian of his danger

from this source ; especially, when it is remembered on the other hand, that the best and wisest Christians, who have lived, have uniformly been the most humble and self denying.

Secondly. *To expect justification before God on account of our own righteousness is another specimen of the same character.*

Such an expectation cannot be derived either from reason, or revelation. Revelation declares such a justification to be impossible ; and as if aware, that we should hardly be satisfied with the bare testimony even of God himself, condescends to prove the point by arguments, which are irresistible. We are there shown to have violated the law of God, and to be condemned by its irreversible sentence to suffer its penalty. With equal clearness is it proved, that no means of expiation are in our power. The very services, to which we should naturally resort as such means, are declared to be so far from constituting an expiation, that they are in themselves sinful, and therefore need to be expiated. Instead of becoming means of our deliverance, therefore, they only plunge us deeper in guilt.

To this unanswerable proof Reason subjoins her testimony. She acknowledges both the sin, and the condemnation ; and confesses, that the way for our escape is forever barred. With sighs, and tears, she mourns over our miserable apostacy ; and exclaims “ *We are all as an unclean thing ; and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags : and we all do fade as a leaf : and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away !*”

But self sufficiency sees the way clear, to the attainment of this mighty object ; and the proofs, which she summons to her aid, miserable as they are, are yet strong enough to satisfy her wishes, to minister to the soul comfort and hope, and to prevent it from seeking the justification, disclosed in the Gospel.

Thirdly. *Another example of the same character is exhibited in the Confidence, with which we feel ourselves to be secure against such Temptations, as have usually overcome others.*

This confidence, extensively as it is cherished, is a violation of all good sense, and a contradiction to all experience. On what is it founded ! On the apprehension which we entertain, that

we possess more prudence, firmness, and worth, than any, or all of those who have become victims to such temptations. What proofs have we that we possess this character? None. What is the sentence of Reason? That self-confident men are always in danger, and most easily overcome. What is that of scripture? "*Let him, that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*"

Fourthly. *Another example of confiding in the goodness of our moral character is exhibited in the postponement of Repentance to a future day.*

There are two principal causes of this procrastination. *We dislike the business to be done; and feel secure, that we shall be both able and willing to do it hereafter.* Both shew in a strong light the miserable overweening of the procrastinator. Were he not blind; he would discern that these reasons will exist at every future period. We dislike repentance because we love sin. But we shall love sin to-morrow, and every succeeding day; and love it with continually increasing strength. It will therefore prevent us from repenting to-morrow, as it has done to-day. All human experience proves this, beyond every reasonable doubt. Yet in defiance of this experience in himself, and in all other men, the procrastinator secretly believes that to-morrow he shall love sin less, and be more willing to become a penitent. What is to produce this change in his character? The mere flux of time; the revolutions of the sun; the circuits of the minute hand on the face of a clock. But when, and where, have men become more prepared to repent by merely growing older? The procrastinator himself may not improbably answer, "Never." Whence, then, does *he* expect to become a penitent on some future day? From his own peculiar wisdom, and forecast; perfectly inefficacious to accomplish the end now, but by some magical process to be made completely efficacious at that happy period. How plainly is this expectation an abuse of all the dictates of common sense, and common experience. What an insult is it on the word of God! It is to trust, as the drunkard trusts, that the present cup will lead him back to sobriety; or, as the thief, that stealing will make him an honest man.

II. *I will now endeavour to shew the Folly of trusting in our own hearts.*

1. In the common business of life it is certainly not true, that our measures discover the superiour wisdom and prudence, which we challenge in our religious concerns. Were we to make the attempt, we should be greatly at a loss for evidence that we rise above the average character of man. By those around us it will certainly not be acknowledged. Nor is it evidenced by any peculiar success in the execution of our plans. What then is the proof that it is just? The only answer is, "Our own opinion." By whom do we see this opinion most frequently and most forcibly manifested? The proverbial answer of common sense is, "By children and fools." Do those, who by the public opinion, and their own success, are proved wise, exhibit it more, or less, than others. Every one of us will be obliged to answer, "The least, of all men." In our self-sufficiency, then, we are contrasted to the wise, and resemble children and fools.

What say the Scriptures? The text gives the answer. If that is not sufficient, they add with still more pungency, "*Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him.*" The only argument, which can be alledged in the case, is that with which enthusiasts bolster themselves. They are possessed of divine communications, because they know it; and they know it, because they possess them. Deplorable proof of a deplorable opinion!

To trust in religious systems, devised by ourselves, is to contradict Common sense. It is impossible, that these systems should be true. We do not, and cannot, possess the knowledge which is indispensable to the formation of a system of religion. We cannot know the things, out of which the system must be composed. We know neither the character of God; nor his will; nor his designs; nor the rules, by which he is to be worshipped; nor the rules of our conduct; nor the means of salvation; nor the attainableness of it by any means whatever. Without these materials a religious system is nothing. But to attempt to form such a system, without possessing the materials of which it



is to be constituted, is to build a house, without timber, brick, or stone. Fools only can be thus employed. Nor are those, who, *professing to believe the Scriptures, pervert their declarations, in order to support schemes of religion, devised by themselves,* less openly at war with common sense, than Infidels themselves. In this case, a being of yesterday rejects the counsels of the Eternal God; acknowledges them to be his, and substitutes in their place his own imaginations. A worm lifts up his crest, and declares himself wiser than his Maker.

Equally evident is the folly of those, *who confide in the goodness of their moral character.* We are not thus good. Sinners are sinners only. Righteous men are far less excellent than they are prone to think themselves; and ought always, when pondering their own character, to let their remaining corruptions hold a prominent place in their thoughts. "*I am unworthy of the least of all thy mercies,*" said Jacob. "*Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee?*" said Job to his Maker. "*Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me,*" said David. "*To me belongeth shame, and confusion of face because I have sinned,*" said Daniel. "*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*" said St. Paul. So have said all the pious of every age: and, the the more pious, the more have they adopted the language of this humility.

2dly. *It is folly because it is ruinous.*

"*Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit, before a fall.*" This inscription may with exact propriety be written upon every determination, and every effort, of self confidence: For it is the general sentence of God on the spirit itself, and on all its undertakings. Evils ever present, and by a self-sufficient spirit ever unforeseen, arrest the proud, vain man in all the common business of life: and against them he has made no provision. When warned of his danger, he only replies with the Pharisees, "*Am I blind also?*" Hence he falls into a pit, which, if he would have opened his eyes, he might have shunned; and is entangled in snares, which men more modest and cautious easily escape.

In all the religious cases, which I have specified the evil is still more certain, as well as more dreadful. False schemes of religion are of course fatal schemes. To trust in them is to *trust in refuges of lies*, which *the hail shall sweep away*. Truth, only, can conduct us to heaven, or to God; and human schemes of religion are of course not true. God will accept us on his own terms only, if at all: and these terms man cannot discover.

Besides, *a self sufficient proud spirit is pre-eminently odious to God*. Pride was the sin of the fallen angels. It was the sin of our first parents. It is the sin of us, their children. It turned those angels out of heaven. It ruined *Adam*, and his posterity. It will not, therefore, restore *us* to the favour of God.

#### REMARKS.

1st. *From these observations we learn that Humility is a prime duty, and interest, of man.*

Humility is merely *a just sense of our character and circumstances, and a disposition conformed to it*: a willingness to believe and to feel, that we are what we really are. Think then, I beseech you, what we are. We sprang from the dust yesterday: to-morrow we go to the grave. Our knowledge is limited to a few, a very few objects; and bounded by a span. At the same time it is mingled with a multitude of errors; always mischievous, and very often fatal. Truth is invariably one and the same thing. But how widely diverse from one another are human opinions; and how widely diverse, of course, except a single system of opinions from truth. That all, but this system, are erroneous is mathematically certain. Whether that system is true, is yet to be determined. Such is the state of our boasted reason. Our disposition is even more unhappy than our intellect. Ourselves we abuse, corrupt, and destroy. Our fellow men we envy, hate, deceive, defraud, and oppress. God we either absolutely forget, or insult with impiety, ingratitude, and rebellion. Thus our character is odious, shameful and sinful, in his sight, and in our own. He has most mercifully offered to re-

store us to piety, and to endless life, through the redemption of his Son, and the benevolent agency of his holy Spirit. But we reject the offer, disbelieve his Son, and resist the influence of his spirit. Our life, in the mean time, is a course of frailty, disease, pain, sorrow, and disappointment. The world is a vale of tears, leading to the grave, to the judgment, and to everlasting woe. Of what, then, shall man be proud? Of his origin; his ignorance; his errors; his guilt; his misery; or his end? What greater folly can be conceived than this? How plainly ought such beings to be humble? How loudly do their character, and their circumstances, demand of them humility?

*Humility renders us lovely.* It recommends us to God: it secures us the esteem of our fellow men: it reconciles us to ourselves. Every eye, which looks on, perceives its beauty: every heart responds to its excellence.

At the same time, *it is immeasurably profitable.* It prepares us to perceive and welcome truth; evangelical truth; truth, of infinite importance to us; breaks down our most obstinate and dangerous prejudices; makes us willing to perform our duty; and fits us for endless life. Humility, therefore, is true wisdom; indispensable to our well-being, in time and eternity.

2dly. *These observations teach us the chief origin of infidelity, and heresy.*

*St. Paul* long since styled infidelity "*philosophy and vain deceit*:" a Hebraism to express *a vain and deceitful philosophy.* Arrogance began this scheme of thinking; and arrogance has brought it down to the present time. The whole body of infidels have ever been distinguished by their self conceit from all other classes of men. Pride rises, as a scum, on all their books, and on all their conversation. The vanity, which they discover in their treatment of the Scriptures, and of their fellow men, is rank and fetid. Contempt, insolence, ridicule, and sneers, are the weapons, with which they attack truth and christianity, and with which they arm themselves against God. Who would suspect that beings, who lift so lofty a crest, were worms, just ushered into existence, creeping through their little day of life, and

returning at night to the dust from which they sprang. Who would suspect that they were poor, and miserable, and naked, and blind, and in want of all things. Who would mistrust, that all this loftiness of character, these boasts of self conceit, belong to creatures putrid with sin, loathsome in the sight of God, and destined to perdition.

Almost all the ancient heretics, says *Dr. Lardner*, were philosophers. Such, to an equal extent, have been those of modern times. These men, now, as in all preceding periods, professedly receive the Scriptures, and then set them aside; make a system of religion, and then attribute it to God. Deplorable impiety! Wonderful lunacy! How few of the scenes of bedlam exhibit so entire a destitution of reason, or so bewildered a domination of the passions of the human heart.

3dly. *We learn from these observations, one of the principal sources of the practical unbelief, and the final ruin, of sinners who speculatively believe the Gospel.*

All these men trust in their own hearts; and are fools in this confidence. Most of them, perhaps every one, intend ultimately to obey the Scriptures, and turn to God. Now, however, they are not ready: but the golden season is on the wing, is in full view, and is daily approaching, in which all things will be perfectly prepared for the accomplishment of this great purpose, acknowledged even by them to be indispensable. It is a day, formed in the womb of time with auspices peculiarly happy: the very contrast to the day of *Job's* birth, as it appeared to his dis-tempered imagination. It has been named by God himself, as they would fondly believe, *the accepted time, and the day of salvation*. Every sinner has such a day, which his Maker has especially destined to his own use: a day, in which all the obstacles to his repentance will be removed. To this delightful, Paradisiacal period he refers, and feels that he may safely refer, the momentous concern of providing for the immortal life of his own soul. How melancholy is it, that this *Elysian* season never arrives; that no sinner ever finds it; that on it no sinner ever repented; that, if his repentance be delayed in expectation of it, it is de-

layed forever, unless God should arrest him in his progress, and awake him out of the delirious slumbers of procrastination.

This conduct has been the ruin of millions of our race ; and will but too probably be the ruin of millions more, who might otherwise be saved. *The broad and crooked path, which leadeth to destruction*, groans under the crowd of procrastinators. The confidence, which they feel in their future sufficiency to repent, has destroyed more than the sword, the famine, or the pestilence. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil ; and madness is in their hearts while they live ; and after that they go to the dead.*

## SERMON V.

THE PRODIGAL SON.—SERMON I



LUKE XV. 11—17.

*And he said, A certain man had two sons.*

*And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods, that falleth to me." And he divided unto them his living.*

*And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country; and there wasted his substance with riotous living.*

*And, when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.*

*And he went, and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

*And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks, that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him.*

*And, when he came to himself, he said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare; and I perish with hunger!"*

THIS parable is naturally capable of a twofold construction. The first, and probably that which it was intended especially to have, is, *that it is an exhibition of the comparative state of the Jews and the Gentiles, and of the dispensations of GOD to both.* The second supposes it to be an account of persons, *externally and regularly obedient to the law of GOD, and therefore righteous in their own eyes, and of those, who from a state of shame, sin, and ruin, return with a godly sorrow for their guilt, to a state of obedience and reconciliation to GOD.* As this was speedily to be illustrated in the conversion of the Gentiles; as *their*

sinful condition was essentially the same with *that of every sinner*; and their conversion, that of every convert; the latter of these constructions becomes entirely parallel with the former; and may with strict propriety be assumed as true. I shall, therefore, adopt it on the present occasion.

This parable is, upon the whole, the best prosaic composition in the Scriptures. The subject is interesting beyond expression. The narrative is told with the simplicity of a child, and with a skill which answers to the highest wish of criticism. The facts are selected with extreme felicity, and arranged in the happiest order. The language is so concise, that there is not a word to spare; and so perspicuous, that not another word is necessary. No story, of the same length, is equally important to man, or equally pathetic. It ends also precisely where it ought, with a complete annunciation of the catastrophe, and at the interesting moment when the feelings are raised to the highest pitch. It contains almost as many truths, as words; and all these are fraught with instruction, of the most momentous nature: while the moral, if I may call it such, deeply interests the inhabitants of heaven, and awakens hope and transport in the whole family of *Adam*.

In explaining a parable we are ever to remember the danger, into which some critics have fallen, of endeavoring to adapt every fact and word to the principal meaning of the allegory. The nature of allegorical writing demands of course, that some things should be said, in order to make the composition complete; in order to give meaning and force, grace and beauty, to the story; so that it may be read with pleasure, and may make happy impressions. In these it is folly to hunt for any further meaning. The greatest justice will ever be done to compositions of this nature, when those instructions, and those only, are found in them, which they obviously contain, or can clearly be shewn to contain. Such will be the plan of explanation, intentionally pursued in the following discourse.

In this parable, the Father represents GOD; the elder son, the Jews; and the younger, the Gentiles. Or the former may denote

a moral, self righteous man ; and the latter, a very sinful one, becoming a penitent. Of the many evangelical doctrines, which, understood in the last sense, it conveys to us, I select the following.

1st. *Sinners regard God no farther, than to gain from him whatever they can.*

This truth is forcibly exhibited in the parable. *And the younger son said unto his Father, "Father, give me the portion of goods, that falleth to me." "And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country." This youth was obviously disposed to be no farther connected with his parent, than was necessary, in order to obtain from him the property which his bounty might induce him to bestow. It was evidently his design, when he asked for this portion, to leave his benevolent parent as soon as he conveniently could. Within a few days he executed this design ; and not only left him, but in his intentions left him finally ; for he went into a far country, from which he evidently intended never to return. It was for this reason, that he gathered all together ; and that he asked for his whole portion. This voluntary estrangement, also, was I think the peculiar subject of his sorrow and contrition, when he came to himself : the crime, which he most deeply lamented, and which in his view rendered him peculiarly unworthy to be regarded as a son.*

No words could more successfully exhibit this part of a sinful character. All sinners are willing to be connected with their Maker, so long and so far, as they think they can gain any thing from his hands. Men, of this description, have a loose and indefinite apprehension, that their blessings are derived from God ; without knowing, perhaps, or even thinking, how much they are indebted to *Him*, how much to what they call Nature, and how much to themselves. Generally, and in this country perhaps always, they believe that they derive from him their existence, and, in a remote and subordinate sense, their enjoyments. As he made them ; they believe, that he is bound to provide for them ; and that with no very sparing or illiberal hand. *What he gives, they gather ;* and, during the period of enjoyment, think of him no more.



This spirit is expressed with the utmost precision and beauty, in the address of the prodigal to his parent: "Father give me the portion of goods, that falleth to me;" not such a portion, as the bounty of his Father might induce him kindly to bestow; but that, *which fell to him in the course of things*; to which he had a right; and which, therefore, he now claimed at his hands.

In exact accordance with the disposition here manifested, sinners feel no gratitude to GOD for the blessings which they receive; and never regard them as gifts of his bounty, but as enjoyments to which they have a claim, and on which, therefore, they riot without even an acknowledgment. That they deserve nothing at his hands, and that he still continues to give them innumerable blessings, are considerations, which, although apparently fitted to overcome any obstinacy, and break down any self-dependence, awaken in them neither gratitude nor humility, neither faith nor repentance.

The prodigal was impatient of living with his Father. He loved not his character, nor his mode of life; the order of his house, nor the employments of his family. All these things were of such a nature, as to counteract his ruling propensities, and violate his favourite views, wishes, and hopes. In the same manner the character and ways of GOD, as they are holy, pure, and perfect, are only painful to a sinful heart. Hence they reject both him and them, as much as possible, from their thoughts. The moral distance, to which they remove from him is exactly imaged by the prodigal's journey into a far country. They betake themselves to a world of sin and sinners; a region, where all the pursuits are opposed to GOD, and all the inhabitants are strangers. Here religion, GOD its object, and Heaven its end, are disregarded and forgotten; and other objects, of a nature wholly opposite, engross the heart and the life. This region is not our Father's house. Heaven is the soul's home. Every where else it is a stranger, and finds no abiding place; a wanderer, lost, bewildered, and forgotten.

2dly. *Sinners waste their blessings, and reduce themselves to absolute want.*

In the far country to which the prodigal took his journey, *he wasted his substance with riotous living*; in the Greek, *living profligately, he entirely scattered his substance*. To show his absolute poverty, Christ adds, "and when he had spent all." The portion, distributed to him, was amply sufficient, had he exercised common prudence, to have carried him comfortably through life. But nothing will supply the demands of prodigality.

The blessings communicated to sinners, were given for noble ends; and are means abundantly sufficient for their accomplishment. This is true of all their blessings, and peculiarly true of their powers of soul and body. With these it was intended, that they should know, love, serve, and enjoy, God; promote the well-being of their fellow men; and secure to themselves comfort here, and immortal life hereafter. But to all these every sinner is steadily opposed, and vigorously hostile. His views, his wishes, his designs, terminate in himself; and of course are not only useless to every really valuable purpose, but directly frustrate the benevolent designs of God towards him. "Israel," says the prophet *Hosea* with exact precision, "is an empty vine. He bringeth forth fruit unto himself." Selfishness is abundantly fruitful, in its own view; and the soul is perpetually looking for the enjoyment, which its produce is constantly expected to yield. But its fruits are those, which are fabulously said to grow on the borders of the Red Sea; beautiful apples without, but within nothing but bitter ashes.

*Riotous living*, in the moral, as well the natural, sense, brings on absolute poverty. All the pursuits of avarice, ambition, and voluptuousness, are as injurious to the soul, as prodigality and luxury to the body; and leave it, in the end, poor indeed. How little do the miserable wretches, who give up life, conscience, and hope, to these objects, think of the views which God forms of their conduct, or what will be its end.

3dly. *Afflictions are very often the first means of bringing sinners to a sense of their condition.*

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want." So long as there was

food in the country, the prodigal felt, in some measure, safe. When the famine commenced, he began then to be destitute, and to feel that he was destitute : and this consciousness of suffering, derived from the famine spread around him, was the first rational apprehension, which he entertained of himself or his condition, and the first step towards his relief.

Could sinners open their eyes ; they would distinctly perceive, that this world is destitute of the good which they so ardently covet, and so eagerly pursue ; that a famine absolutely prevails in it of such enjoyments as are necessary to sustain the soul. Nay, if they would open their ears, and believe what they hear, they would want no farther means of conviction. History is almost only a tale of sins and sorrows. The stream of tears has flowed down from the apostacy to the present hour. Sighs have been breathed in every wind : and there is hardly a mountain, or a hill, which has not echoed to the groans of human anguish. Were a man, says Bishop *Berkeley*, to escape from this world, and to gain admission into a world, unpolluted with sin ; he would probably return with much the same reluctance, as a prisoner liberated from his chains, would go back to a dungeon.

Insensible as sinners usually are to the whole import of these truths, and confidently as they expect to find, somewhere, the happiness for which their souls so ardently long ; there are seasons, at which many of them awake to their real condition. Some severe suffering may lay hold even on a hard heart ; and force the mind to realize its condition. Before, it said to itself, " I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." Now it perceives that it is " wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

4thly. *When sinners first acquire such a sense of their condition ; they betake themselves to false measures for relief.*

The prodigal, in his distress, *went, and joined himself to a citizen of that country. And he sent him into his fields to feed swine.* This citizen himself lived in that land of famine ; and therefore had, in all probability, little or nothing to give to the suffering wretch, had he been ever so well disposed. We know,

that he actually gave him nothing. At the same time *he sent him into his fields to feed swine*: an employment every where low and debasing; but in the eye of a Jew, such as those were to whom this parable was addressed, supremely debasing, and held in religious abhorrence. Nothing could less correspond with the real interest of this unhappy man. He needed food, clothes, comfort, encouragement, hope, better friends, and more desirable employments. Thus the measures, to which he betook himself, were all false, fruitless, and fitted to increase, not to lessen, both the calamities which he suffered, and the distresses which futurity presented to him in a long and dismal train.

He ought immediately to have returned to his Father's house. There, if any where, he might reasonably have expected to find friends. Parents love their children long after they have ceased either to be dutiful, or hopeful. There, also, he had reason to believe, means might be found both of support and comfort. There, finally, his profligacy might have been terminated; and he, by the happy efficacy of repentance and reformation, have been restored to an approving conscience and a virtuous life.

When sinners begin to feel, that they are alienated from God, and that God is alienated from them, their first efforts for their deliverance from this miserable situation are attempts to quiet their consciences, either by mixing with companions, whose conversation and pursuits may enable them to forget their alarms, turn their eyes from their character, and follow quietly their former courses; or to persuade themselves that the doctrines and denunciations of the Scriptures are to be understood with many qualifications and softenings, and that their case, is therefore not so bad, as they had been accustomed to suppose it. If neither of these schemes will succeed, they attempt to make their condition better by leaving off one sin, and performing one duty and another; particularly those, which are of an external nature. In all this there is not a single attempt to amend the heart; where the whole evil lies. In the first and second of these methods, their lives will become more, in the third commonly less, gross than before. But even in this case there is no radical change for

the better. If they attach themselves to such as they are; they will only conduct them to base employments, to greater guilt, and to more absolute degradation.

In the mean time, not a step is taken towards the sinner's home. The fewer sins he commits, the less he may suffer in the future world; still, while he loves sin, he will steadily go onward towards perdition. All his efforts of this nature will therefore avail him nothing. His first duty is to repent of his sins, and turn to God. Every measure, short of this, is a false measure. His companions can never purify his mind from sin; and neither he, nor they can save him from destruction.

5thly. *This situation of a sinner is eminently unhappy.*

The prodigal had spent his estate; was in a land of famine; had become a servant to a neighboring citizen; was sent into his fields, to feed swine; and was on the point of starving for want of food. So low was he reduced, that "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks, which the swine did eat." So low was he reduced, that, in the language of the original, *he was earnestly desirous* to feed with the swine, upon the pods of leguminous plants; such as beans and peas; or the pods of the Carob tree, which not a little resemble them. What must have been the situation of him, to whom these things were objects of earnest desire.

But this was not all. We are further informed that *no man gave unto him*. In this miserable situation he was absolutely destitute of friends, hopeless of relief, and a stranger even to pity.

Neither was this all. To these ingredients of wretchedness was added *a species of distraction*. For the parable subjoins, "when he came to himself." Before this, therefore, he was not in his right mind. It is not, indeed, to be supposed, that he was in the proper sense delirious; but that by means of his profligacy and his distresses, his thoughts had become so disordered, as to be incapable of controlling his conduct with advantage, or directing him to safety and happiness.

Strong as this picture is; it is an exactly just representation of the sinner's miserable state, in the circumstances which are

specified. In this state, his soul, instead of betaking itself for sustenance to the bread of life, labours to satisfy itself upon husks. Nay, it is said, in the Scriptures, "to feed upon wind, and to follow the East wind;" and even to eat only in imagination; "as when an hungry man dreameth, and behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty." All the objects, to which the sinner resorts, are mere husks; mere wind; visionary food; such as can never satisfy his mental hunger, the longing of his soul for good.

At the same time, no one gives to him. There is but one, who can give; and to him he does not apply. Other beings, however disposed, could not give him if they would; and those, to whom he actually applies, would not if they could.

At the same time also, he is beside himself. Madness is justly defined to be that state of mind, in which, although it is able to reason, the principles with which it sets out, and of course the conclusions with which it ends, are false and deceiving. Hence it pursues little good, and neglects that which is great; is intent on trifles, and forgets objects of the highest importance. Such is the true character of sinners. Their real interests they neglect; and look for happiness to things of no value. The favour of God, the forgiveness of their sins, and the immortal interests of their souls, are all forgotten by them: while yet they struggle hard to find a substitute for these inestimable blessings in the toys of ambition, the dross of avarice and the riot of sensuality. To lose these blessings for any reason whatever is to be delirious. It is madness to love sin at all, to be an enemy of God, or to hazard the loss of the soul, for a day, an hour, or a moment; to trust to a future reformation, and peculiarly to a death-bed repentance: madness, compared with which, the extravagances of Bedlam are the effusions of sober reason.

6thly. *The repentance of the Gospel is the resumption of a right mind.*

"When he came to himself," says our Saviour. "God," says St. Paul, "has given us the spirit of a sound mind." 2. Tim. i. 7.

No person, who reads this parable, will hesitate a moment to admit, that the prodigal now first resumed his reason; or that, before, he thought and acted like a madman. Truth passes the same sentence concerning a sinner, in both situations.

When a sinner first begins to entertain thoughts, which are sincerely penitent; he first begins to see moral subjects as they really are. Accordingly, men in a state of impenitence are, throughout the Scriptures, styled *blind*; and the manner, in which they regard spiritual subjects, is styled *blindness*. Thus in Isaiah xlii. 16. GOD says "I will bring the blind by a way, which they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known." And again in verse 18. "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see." Of wicked ministers he says, chapter, lvi. 10. "His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant." In the same manner, Christ addresses the Pharisees, Matthew xxiii. "Woe unto you ye blind guides;" "Ye fools, and blind;" and, "Thou blind Pharisee."

Of our Saviour it is said, Mark iii. 5. that he looked around upon the sinful *Jews*, who opposed his design of healing the man with a withered hand, being grieved for the blindness of their hearts. "He that hateth his brother," says St. John, "is in darkness, and walketh in darkness; and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." 1. John ii. 11. "If our Gospel be hid," says St. Paul, "it is hid to them, that are lost: In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." 2. Cor. iv. 3. 4.

When a sinner begins to exercise a spirit of repentance; he begins first to see moral objects, as they are; and to feel towards them emotions accordant with their real nature. Sin itself, in which before he so much delighted, he perceives, for the first time, to be *an evil and bitter thing*. His own moral character, which before he thought in many respects good, and in none very bad, he now discerns to be deformed and loathsome. God he he now readily pronounces to be just; his law, holy, righteous,

and reasonable; and his own violations of it, deserving of the divine anger. Christ, for the first time, he sees to be divinely excellent and lovely; and an interest in his atonement to be infinitely desirable. His *heart* he willingly acknowledges to be “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; and all his righteousnesses as filthy rags.”

This world he begins to consider merely as a stage of probation; its blessings as means of his support during his pilgrimage, and of his beneficence to his fellow men; the pleasures of sin as momentary, deceitful, and ruinous; and *godliness as profitable to all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.*

Among the things, which the sinner realizes, when he first comes to himself, are the following.

First, *His own miserable condition.*

“I,” said the prodigal, “perish with hunger.” When the sinner looks round upon his circumstances and into his soul, he sees that he is *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.* In the moral sense, he has nothing. He is destitute alike of happiness and safety, of righteousness and hope. These are not the conclusions of despondency; the views of a disturbed mind; the suggestions of terror. They are the sober conclusions of rational thought; and are founded on the most solid evidence. Of this the proof is complete: for every sanctified man entertains the same views concerning his former sinful condition, to his dying day: and they continually become clearer and more satisfactory, while he lives. They are, therefore, the decisions of the soundest reflection, and the most rational apprehensions concerning ourselves. There is not a child of God in the world, who does not with the strongest feelings often, very often, say with *David*, “If thou Lord shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?”

There is nothing in ourselves, which God can accept; nothing, which can contribute towards the expiation of our guilt; nothing, which can at all become the ground of our justification. To this state of man all the invitations of the Gospel are con-



formed. "Ho every one that thirsteth;" saith God by the prophet Isaiah, "come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money; Come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price." "Come unto me," saith our Saviour, "all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Whosoever will, let him come, and take the water of life freely." All these invitations, and many others like them, are obviously directed to those, who have nothing of their own, and are literally in want of all things. The proper, the instinctive, language of every penitent is, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

As these views are just; it is evident that he, who has them not, has no just apprehensions of his condition, and has not yet begun to regard himself, as he is regarded by his Maker. Whoever, therefore, supposes himself to be a penitent, and has yet not discerned that this is his real situation, is only deceiving himself, and building upon the sand. These views enter into the nature and essence of repentance; and, where they do not exist, repentance has not begun to exist. But without repentance there can be no forgiveness, safety nor hope.

On the other hand, he, who entertains such apprehensions concerning himself, has solid reasons to believe, that *some good thing is found in him toward the Lord GOD of Israel*. This state of mind, which I have described, is in itself good; and the foundation of more extensive good. It is to be understood, however, that mere speculative views are not here intended. It is essential, that all these things be deeply and ingenuously felt in the heart, and cheerfully acknowledged; and that they be so felt, as to become a living principle of future action.

Secondly, *Another thing, realized by the sinner in this state, is, that in the house of his heavenly Father there is an abundance of good.*

"How many hired servants in my father's house," said the prodigal, "have bread enough, and to spare!" There is enough and more than enough, for all who dwell in that happy mansion. The plenty, which abounded here, was exactly fitted to supply

the necessities of this famishing wretch. He was perishing with hunger. In his father's house there was *bread*; not husks; but the food which would satisfy hunger, and preserve life.

In the house of our Heavenly Father good abounds, which is exactly fitted to supply the wants of perishing sinners. The soul needs sustenance equally with the body; and for the want of it will be famished. The food, on which alone it can be sustained, is *the living bread, which came down from heaven, and the water, which is given by Christ*. "He, who drinketh of the water, which Christ gives, shall never thirst; he, who eateth of this bread, shall live forever." In this divine mansion the bread of life is found. There flows *the pure river of the water of life*. On its banks ascends "the tree of life; which bears twelve manner of fruits, and yields its fruits every month." Those, who are admitted into this happy place, "hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. But the Lamb shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

The enjoyments, yielded by this delightful place, are the proper food of a rational, immortal mind; and entirely suited to the demands of its original, exalted nature. They are pure, sublime, eternal, and ever increasing; *fullness of joy, and pleasures forever more*.

For this good, we are here taught, the sinner has in this situation begun to entertain a relish. The prodigal no longer "would fain fill his belly with the husks, which the swine did eat." His palate began to relish the bread of his father's house; and turned a longing eye toward the solid sustenance, which was there so amply furnished. The sinner, in the case supposed, begins to *hunger and thirst after righteousness*.

Thirdly, *The sinner in this situation begins, also, to cherish a realizing hope that this good may be his*.

Such a hope the prodigal plainly cherished. The remembrance, that even *the hired servants* in his father's house *had bread enough and to spare*, was accompanied with a prevailing hope, that upon his return the same blessing would be imparted

to him. Accordingly, he determines immediately to *arise, and go to his father*. Without such a hope he would have continued where he was ; and perished on the spot.

The promises of the Gospel contain and proffer to returning sinners, all the blessings which they need. In this situation the sinner begins to make the case his own ; and to hope, and in some degree to believe, that these promises are addressed to *him*. His hopes are well founded and Evangelical. The promises of the Gospel are directed to just such persons as he is. They were intended to encourage, allure, and support, sinners in this very situation ; to keep them from despair ; and to strengthen and uphold them in the mighty concern of turning to God. Every such sinner will find every such promise fulfilled to himself.

Thus have I followed the progress of a sinner through the several stages of his corruption and ruin, to the commencement of his return to God ; exhibited, in so interesting a manner, in this most instructive and beautiful parable. I will now conclude the discourse with a single *Remark*. It is this. *How happily adapted is the salvation of the Gospel to the circumstances of sinners.*

Had this salvation not been offered freely, it would have been offered in vain. We owe ten thousand talents, and have nothing to pay. Unless therefore, the debt be forgiven ; we must be sent to the prison of punishment. But this forgiveness is in its nature free and sovereign.

In plainer language, we are sinners, have broken the law of God, and are rebels against his government. But the Law, of which not a single *jot or tittle can possibly fail*, has said, “The soul, that sinneth, shall die ;” and “Cursed is every one, who continueth not in all things, written in the book of the law, to do them.” Every sinner, therefore, is absolutely condemned by this most holy law ; and, if left to himself, must perish.

In this miserable situation, Christ with wonderful love, with divine compassion, has interposed on behalf of our race ; *made an end of sin* ; “finished transgression ; made reconciliation for iniquity ; and brought in everlasting righteousness.” The expiation, which he has accomplished, may become ours by faith

in him, and repentance towards God. Thus we are introduced to the glorious hope of immortal life ; and are called upon by a voice from heaven to return, repent and live. Here every reason is furnished for comfort which in such a state can exist ; every reason to bless God ; every inducement to seek salvation.

But no hope is here presented to him, who is quiet in his sins, and satisfied with his own righteousness. He is the prodigal in the text, in his most forlorn situation. He may be, and often is, not less at his ease ; not less gay ; not less riotous ; not less unconscious of his situation. He may say, as others before him have said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Still he is not the less wretched, and miserable, and in want of all things. All within him is beggary ; all without is famine. His only food is husks, and his only destiny, to perish with hunger ; and that while "bread enough, and to spare," is prepared for his enjoyment, and ready for his acceptance. God is waiting to be gracious to him. Christ holds out to him the bread of life. Heaven opens its gates for his reception. Angels are prepared to welcome the forsaken wanderer to its immortal blessings ; and saints, to see him added to their number, increasing their happiness, and mingling in their praise ; while he, poor, starving, famishing wretch, clings to his misery ; hugs his ruin ; and, wiser in his own eyes than the God who made him, glories in the wisdom which plans and executes the eternal destruction of his soul.

## SERMON VI.

THE PRODIGAL SON.—SERMON II.



LUKE XV. 18—24.

*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: make me as one of thy hired servants."*

*And he arose, and came to his father. But, when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

*And the son said unto him, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."*

*But the father said to his servants, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet;*

*And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:*

*For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."*

IN the preceding discourse from the former part of this parable, after explaining its general nature, I observed, that we were taught by it the following doctrines.

1st. *Sinners regard GOD no farther than to gain from him whatever they can.*

2nd. *Sinners waste the blessings, which they receive from his hands, and reduce themselves to absolute want.*

3rd. *Afflictions are very often the first means of bringing them to a sense of their condition.*

4th. *When they first acquire this sense, they usually betake themselves to false measures for relief.*

5th. *This situation of a sinner is eminently unhappy.*

6th. *The repentance of the Gospel is the resumption of a right mind.*

Under this head I observed, that among the things which the sinner realizes, when he first comes to himself, are the following.

First, *His own miserable condition:*

Secondly, *That in the house of his Heavenly Father there is an abundance of good:*

Thirdly, *A hope, that this good may be his.*

I shall now proceed in the consideration of the progress of a sinner towards his final acceptance with God, as it is exhibited in the text. With this design, I observe

1st. *True repentance is a voluntary exercise of the mind.*

“I will arise,” said the prodigal, “and go to my father.”

The determination expressed in this language, was spontaneous; and flowed from the present state of his heart as naturally, as any effect from any cause: for example, as his former determination to leave his father, flowed from the disposition, which he possessed at that time.

There are those, who believe that God creates, immediately, all the volitions of the mind. There are others, who reject this doctrine, and who nevertheless appear at least to admit, that he creates all its virtuous volitions. Both are, in my view, erroneous. The Scriptures appear to me every where to speak of man as an agent, in the true and proper sense. When angels were created; they were furnished with all the powers of such an agent, and with a disposition, propensity, (or what in the Scriptures is called *heart*;) to use them in a virtuous manner. Such a disposition is communicated to the human soul, by the Holy Ghost, when it is renewed unto repentance. This disposition; unknown, I confess, and mysterious, in the metaphysical sense, as all other causes are as to their nature, but by its effects as clearly proved to exist, as any other cause whatever; is the real source of all virtuous volitions and conduct, in every virtuous being. It now became the

disposition of the prodigal; and is the distinguishing characteristic of every penitent. His determination to arise, and go to his father, sprang from a solid conviction of the propriety of this conduct, and a real change in his disposition: a complete persuasion, that it was alike his duty and his interest. The state of his mind was new; but its agency was entire, and its actions perfectly voluntary. The determination was freely and cheerfully made; and made at all hazards; without even the knowledge, that he would be accepted. It was, therefore, certainly sincere.

This is an exact description of the state of mind, which prevails in every penitent. A sense of danger and of suffering, as was remarked in the former discourse, is very often employed by GOD as a mean of bringing a sinner to repentance. But, were the sinner to stop here, he never would become a penitent. To this sense must be added, a realizing conviction of the evil nature of his past conduct, felt in such a manner, as to make it exceedingly desirable in the sinner's view to forsake his former, guilty, pursuits, and renounce his former, sinful character.

2dly. *True repentance is a filial temper; disposing us to regard GOD as our parent, and ourselves as his children.*

“I will arise, and go to my father.”

Originally the prodigal used this compellation with a design to obtain *the portion of goods*, which, as he said, *fell to him*, and then to separate himself from him forever. Now he adopted the same language with the proper temper of a child. Now he designs to return to him; and, if it may be permitted, to live with him, to honour him, to love him, and to serve him even in the humble station of a hireling.

Such is the spirit of the penitent. Willing as he was in his former state of sin to forget GOD, and little as he thought of his character, of his presence, or even of his existence; rarely as he felt a sense of duty, or realized that there was any relation or connection, between himself and his Maker; he now remembers all these things with delight, and esteems them his only honour, comfort, and hope.

This is infinitely the most important relation, which intelligent creatures can sustain. To be the child of God; to have him for our Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; is to be blessed indeed. What creature would dare, unless expressly permitted by his Creator, to challenge this relation, and adopt this language? How much less would *sinner*s, if possessed of sober thought, presume, without a direct license from heaven, to change the awful name Creator for the venerable, endearing, and delightful epithet of Father; or to convert the humble title of creature, into the elevated appellation of child? Who, of a servant, of a slothful servant, a rebellious servant, would expect to become an heir; to be acknowledged as a child; and to be put in possession of *the inheritance which is undefiled, and fadeth not away*? Yet this is the language, which we are commanded to adopt; this the character, which we are required to assume; and these the blessings, which we are destined to enjoy; whenever we become the subjects of a penitent spirit.

3dly. *True repentance is followed of course by the confession of sin.*

“Father, I have sinned,” was the language of the penitent prodigal. He was ready of himself; while yet unassured of acceptance, and before his parent had demanded such an acknowledgment. It was the spontaneous dictate, the instinctive language, of his heart; produced as naturally by his present disposition, as the fruit springs from its native tree.

This, also, is the conduct of every penitent. While his original spirit remained; while he was *stout hearted, and therefore far from righteousness*; nothing was farther from his thoughts, than a confession of his guilt. But whenever he becomes the subject of evangelical contrition, he hates the sin which he so intensely loved before and abhors himself for having committed it; sorrows for that, in which he delighted, and is deeply ashamed for that, in which he gloried. This sense of his guilt is a burden upon his heart, with which he *labours, and is heavy laden*; and to confess it to God is the first method of lightening the burden. At the same time, it is the most natural, the most obvious,



and therefore the first, mode of endeavouring to make some amends for the injustice which he has done to his Maker. In addition to this, he is, also, earnestly desirous to declare solemnly the new views which he entertains concerning his conduct; the change, which his disposition has undergone; and the determinations, which he has formed to obey hereafter. A prime difference between the true and false penitent lies in this: the false penitent hates the confession, and loves the sin: the true penitent hates the sin, and loves the confession.

4thly. *A real penitent feels, that all his sins are committed against God.*

“I have sinned against Heaven.”

The crime of the prodigal was immediately committed against his earthly parent; yet, we see, he felt it to have been supremely committed against Heaven. Accordingly, his confession is, “I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee.” The consideration, that he had sinned against God, was that, which plainly distressed him more than any other. Sinners, during their impenitence, have very commonly most erroneous apprehensions concerning this subject. Some of them feel, as if their sins were never committed against God, because they are unable to do him any harm; because they cannot lessen his glory or happiness nor prevent the accomplishment of his designs. Were this opinion just; all the guilt of man would lie in the *power* to do evil, and not in the *inclination*. Others suppose sins against God to be only those, which are directed to him immediately; such as blasphemy; perjury; profaneness, and other exertions of impiety. Those, directed immediately to men, they consider as sins against men only; not remembering, that God has forbidden transgressions of this sort equally with such as respect himself; and that, therefore, his law is violated in the one case in the same manner as in the other.

That these views are false and groundless, can hardly need proof. The divine law is that, which is broken in all sin; and God is the Being, who is supremely offended. In this fact consists the heinousness of sin, wherever it exists. It is true, that

in the crimes which immediately respect men, we sin against them also, and equally true, that even then our principal guilt lies in sinning against God.

In this manner all good men have regarded their own transgressions. In this manner *David* regarded his crime against *Uriah* ; whom yet he had injured in a most shameful and abominable manner. In the 51st Psalm, referring to this transaction, he says, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." With the same views, *Joseph*, when solicited by *Potiphar's* wife, replied, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" The crime, if it had been perpetrated, would have been committed immediately against his Master. Yet *Joseph* dreaded it supremely, as an offence against his Maker. Such, everywhere, are the views of penitence and piety.

Hence it is evident, that he, who refers his sins principally to men ; even those which are committed immediately against them ; who feels regret, when they are offended, and is at ease when they forgive ; whose conscience looks not beyond the immediate objects of his crimes, and is unsolicitous about the evil, which he has done against God ; is destitute of the repentance of the Gospel.

5thly. *A real penitent is of course humble.*

"Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee ; and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants."

Sin is the most disgraceful character in the Universe ; the most odious, debasing, and unworthy. In better language, it is the only debasement, and the only disgrace. When the sinner comes to himself, and begins to see things as they are ; he perceives this truth, among many others, in a clear and convincing light. Then there is no character too humble for him to assume ; no station too lowly for him to take. "I have heard of thee," said *Job* to his Maker, "by the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." "But we are all," says the church in *Isaiah* lxiv, "as an unclean thing ; and our righteousnesses are as filthy rags :

and we all do fade, as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." "This is a faithful saying," said *St. Paul* to *Timothy*, "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." And again, "I am the least of the Apostles, and am not worthy to be called an Apostle." "I am a worm," said *David*, "and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. Mine iniquities are gone over my head, as an heavy burden: they are too heavy for me." In this manner have all the sacred writers felt and spoken, whenever the subject has been brought up to view: and in this manner has every penitent felt and spoken, from the beginning of time. Every penitent knows, that he has been an apostate; and that, therefore, he is odious, debased, and polluted, in the sight of his Maker; that he has nothing of his own; and that he can claim nothing at the hand of God. If he is forgiven; if he is sanctified; if he is adopted; if he escapes perdition; if he has a single hope, a virtuous affection, or a good thought: all these are mere gifts from the free sovereign love of God. When, therefore, he considers either what he was or what he is, the instinctive language of his heart will be, "Not unto me, not unto me, but unto thy name, be the glory."

6thly. *A real penitent brings nothing to God, but his want, shame, and sorrow.*

The prodigal brought nothing to his father, but his rags, and wretchedness. He came as a beggar, possessing nothing; pretending to nothing; soliciting alms; and asking for a very humble and menial employment in his father's family.

A sinner, when he returns to God, has in the same manner nothing which he can offer to his Heavenly Father, beside his wants and woes, his broken heart and contrite spirit. He has no works of righteousness to recount; no merit to present; and no claims to allege for acceptance. His hope, therefore, instead of being placed on himself, rests wholly on his father's sovereign and undeserved goodness. "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." This humiliating truth he not only acknowledges, but acknowledges cheerfully; with ardent gratitude; with high exultation.

His sense of total want and extreme guilt, is the very cause, which prompts him to return: and his only address to his Maker is, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee; and am no more worthy to be called thy son." *A broken heart* is the *sacrifice*, which God accepts through the Redeemer; but he will accept no other sacrifice. *To this man will he look; even to him, who is of a humble and contrite spirit*; but he will look to no other. The hope of obtaining forgiveness by means of our own righteousness is a direct contradiction to the repentance of the Gospel; and is entirely opposed to the Scriptural scheme of coming to God. The prodigal thought it a very great favour *to be made as one of his father's hired servants*; a favour, to which he makes not the least claim; but humbly hopes, that he may derive it from the bounty of his parent.

7thly. *A true penitent executes his resolutions of obedience.*

"And he arose, and came to his Father."

The prodigal not only resolved, that he would go, and confess his sins; but he actually arose, and went, and confessed.

Sinners, who enjoy the light of the Gospel, usually, perhaps universally, with more or less strength, and more or less frequently, resolve that they will *amend their ways and their doings, and obey the voice of the Lord, their God*. In most cases, however, their resolutions die, as an untimely birth.

Look back at the past state of your own lives. When solemn occasions have occurred; when you have heard discourses from the desk, of a tenour peculiarly affecting; when you have been brought by disease near to the grave; when your companions have fallen suddenly around you: have not you yourselves been alarmed on account of your sins; trembled under a sense of your danger; and formed serious resolutions to repent, and turn to God? But what has been the effect of these resolutions? Have they not been mere blossoms; which, though fair indeed to the eye, and promising good fruit, have fallen prematurely, and perished forever?

Such is not the conduct of a penitent. He resolves, as you have done; but never rests, till the object of his resolutions is accomplished. The purpose of returning to God is the favorite

concern of his heart ; and becomes, therefore, the prime business of his life. Without it he considers himself as undone. His present condition is full of alarm, and distress ; and his destiny is absolute ruin. Whatever, therefore, can consist with his continuance in sin he regards as vain, useless, dangerous, and dreadful ; and, however soothing, quieting, and comforting, as an opiate which will bring on the sleep of death.

At the same time he considers a reconciliation to God, the forgiveness of his sins, his justification, adoption, and sanctification, as the best of all blessings ; as the sources of all real worth, and the basis of all well founded hope. Without them he can neither be approved by himself, nor loved by God ; neither comfortable here, nor happy hereafter. With these views, it cannot be wondered at, that he should never rest, until he has renounced his sins, confessed them to his Maker, and commenced a life of new and faithful obedience.

8thly. *God is entirely disposed to receive the sincere penitent.*

“ But, when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion ; and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

Never was a spirit of tenderness, and reconciliation, exhibited with equal force and beauty. The moment, he saw him, his compassion was kindled. Instead of waiting to permit the ungrateful wretch to come, and propose terms of reconciliation, he ran immediately to him. Instead of reproaching, or even reproofing, him for his filial impiety ; instead of upbraiding him for his profligacy ; instead of reminding him of his folly, and of its miserable consequences ; instead of delaying, to hear his excuses for the transgressions of his past life, or his promises of amendment for the future : he fell upon his neck, and kissed him. Nor was even this all. He interrupted the very confession, which his miserable son had begun to make. And how did he interrupt it ? Not with reproofs ; not even with a welcome. The deplorable condition, the famished frame, the meagre countenance, the haggard eyes, the quivering voice, of the perishing suppliant would not admit, in the mind of such a parent of a protracting thought, which might prevent the necessary relief from being immediate.

He, therefore, ordered his servants to furnish in an instant, the means of comfort, which he felt to be so affectingly demanded: and these were such, as to place his father's willingness to receive him beyond the doubts even of scepticism itself.

All these, it is to be remembered, are the language of Christ himself; who certainly knew the real disposition of GOD towards returning sinners: and surely he, who laid down his life, that sinners might return, cannot be supposed to have deceived them of design. GOD is, therefore, just as kindly disposed, as in this parable he is represented to be. The calls, invitations, and promises, which he has given us in the Gospel, mean the utmost of what they express; and GOD is as earnestly desirous, that sinners should return to him, and as much pleased when they actually return, as the strongest language of the Gospel declares. *He is long suffering to us-ward; not willing, that any should perish, but that they should come to repentance.* "Have I any pleasure at all, that the wicked should die," saith the Lord GOD, "and not that he should return from his ways, and live? Therefore, O Son of man, speak unto the house of Israel," *Thus ye speak,* "If our transgressions, and our sins, be upon us, and we pine away in them; how shall we then live?" *Say unto them,* "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

But the proof, which is better fitted to affect the mind, than any other, with strong conviction of this great truth, is found in the wonderful things, which have been done for the salvation of sinners. If GOD was reluctant to save sinners; if he was indifferent concerning their salvation; if he was not earnestly desirous, that they should be saved: why did he send his Son to die for them, and his spirit to sanctify them? Why did Christ live a life of poverty, persecution, and sorrow? Why did he agonize in the garden; ascend the cross; and go down into the grave? Why was the Word of GOD published to mankind? Why was the Sabbath sequestered; but that mankind might enjoy a peaceful, happy, heavenly season for the attainment of endless life?

Why were the doors of the Sanctuary opened; but that we might *enter in, and be saved*. Why were these solemn ordinances established; and ministers commissioned to *teach all nations* the Gospel of grace, and to *baptize them into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*? Why are you, week by week, summoned on this solemn day, and in this holy place, to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. Certainly, if God had been pleased that sinners should perish, they might have perished without these wonderful efforts for their salvation. Nay they would have perished of course: and you would have perished among them. Not an effort would you have made for your salvation; not a hope would you have entertained; but for this compassionate interference of your Maker.

The very threatenings of the Gospel are a proof of his earnest desire, that you should obtain eternal life. *They* compel, as the promises allure, you to the divine attainment; and, laying hold on the strongest principles of action, rouse your fears, where your attachments and your hopes would have slept over the burnings of devouring fire. Remember that all the evils, which these threatenings denounce, might with perfect ease have been executed to the full; without a single warning given to you, that you were even in danger. Why, then, were you warned to *flee from the wrath to come*, but that you might *lay hold on eternal life*?

These tidings are the best which were ever published in this melancholy world. They have astonished heaven; and ought to awaken an universal transport upon earth. They are tidings cordially announced. The good, which they convey, is real, and may be yours. Renounce your unbelief. It is your ruin. Remember, and believe while you remember, that, at the first indication of your willingness to return, God is ready to *meet you, while a great way off*; and will freely pardon, justify, and accept you, will receive you to himself, and give you the blessings of a glorious immortality.

9thly. *The richest provision is made for the enjoyment of the sincere penitent.*

“ But the Father said to the servants, ‘ Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet ; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it.’ ”

All these are the entertainment of him, whose utmost hope was to have been *made as one of his father's hired servants*, and who doubted whether even this boon might be granted. What a contrast is here presented to the rags, hunger, and shame, of the miserable beggar upon whom they were bestowed ?

All these are the strongest proofs of kindness in earthly parents ; and are of course the most proper symbols of the kindness with which *our Father who is in Heaven*, receives his penitent children. At the same time, they are forcible proofs that *they* are in want of all necessary good. The robe, the ring, the shoes, and the fatted calf, are gifts to him who has neither ornaments, nor necessaries ; who is hungry, naked, and in want of all things.

The very best gifts in the divine kingdom will be bestowed on the returning sinner ; the forgiveness of his sins ; the justification, and adoption, of his person, the sanctification of his soul ; direction, support, and comfort in his way to endless life ; admission into heaven, the sight of God ; the supreme love of his character ; the knowledge of his dispensations ; the enjoyment of his favour ; and the friendship of his glorious family. These are blessings, for which the Universe would be a cheap price ; and which all its inhabitants would be unable to purchase.

10thly. *There is peculiar joy in Heaven over the repentance of returning sinners.*

“ Let us eat, and be merry ; for this my son was dead, and is alive again : he was lost, and is found.”

“ There is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.” Feasting, music, and dancing, the highest testimonies of earthly pleasure, welcomed the prodigal to his Father's house ; and were chosen by our Saviour, to exhibit the feelings excited in the Heavenly world by the return of the spiritual prodigal. This truth, may indeed, be considered as the burden or moral of the whole parable ; as it is expressly, of the two, which immediately



precede it. The work of redemption is exhibited in the Scriptures as the greatest and most signal work of GOD ; as the prime object of his creation, and providence ; and as the chief means of manifesting his *wisdom to principalities and powers in heavenly places*. That these illustrious beings should rejoice with peculiar joy in a work, which sustains all these characters, is to be believed of course.

At the same time, the nature of the case itself furnishes the most solid foundation for intense and peculiar joy. The soul is of infinite value. In this case, it has been *lost* to the Universe. Now it is found again. It has been *dead in trespasses and sin*. Now it is quickened with the principles of immortal life. Another trophy is added to the victories of Christ ; another gem, to his crown of glory. A deathless mind has secured a title to the never ending happiness of heaven. A new and eternal inhabitant is introduced into that happy world. The glory of JEHOVAH is seen, and will forever be seen, with new splendour ; and a new theme of transport is added to the everlasting song "Unto Him, that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings, and priests, unto GOD, even his father ; to Him be glory, and dominion, forever and ever.— Amen."

#### REMARK.

*What inducements are here presented to sinners, to return to GOD ?*

The Scriptures invite, entreat and command you to forsake your sins and become reconciled to your Maker. How affecting is the manner in which all this is done ! Do you need conviction of your necessities, your guilt, and the wretchedness of your present condition ? How strongly have they painted it to your eyes ? How truly ? With what irresistible proof ! How plainly is the story of the prodigal your own story ! Like him you have been furnished by your Heavenly Father with many, and those the most valuable, powers, enjoyments and blessings, in themselves ; and when used aright, the effectual means of glorious

and immortal good. But your privileges you have prostituted ; your blessings you have wasted on objects which were of no solid or enduring value.

Your *situation* is that of the prodigal. In a far country, removed from God, his house, and his family, you are voluntary exiles from your friends, and your home ; are alone ; friendless ; in want ; and in rags ; and are enlisted in the service of Satan, of sin, and of evil men ; not one of whom has any real good to give, or, if he had, would give it to you. All are in the same desolate and barren region ; are themselves perishing with famine ; and are destitute of friendship to you, and to each other.

In this forlorn situation, if ever you open your eyes, and look around ; you will see neither comfort, nor hope, to vary the eternal prospect of want, shame, and woe.

Is it not then infinitely desirable to know, that you have a home to which you may go ; plenty to which you may betake yourselves ; friends from whom you may derive kindness and consolation ; and a father yet remaining, who, though so long forsaken, is still willing to acknowledge this relation to you ? In his tenderness you may find an asylum ; to his arms you may be welcomed ; in his house you may find an everlasting residence. There all good things abound, are treasured up, and bestowed with unwearied, as well as unlimited, bounty.

Behold that father advancing to meet you on your way ! Hear him calling to you with infinite compassion, Ho ! thou starving, perishing prodigal. Return to me, and to mine. Art thou hungry ? I will feed thee with living bread. Art thou thirsty ? I will lead thee to fountains of living waters. Art thou naked ? I will clothe thee with the robe of righteousness. Art thou weary ? I will guide thee to eternal rest. Art thou friendless ? I will be to thee a Father, and an everlasting friend. Dead, thou shalt live again. Lost, I will restore thee to a Universe of joy. Come ; all things are ready. See, heaven is opened. Behold *angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect*, waiting for thy arrival ! See the golden sceptre of forgiveness extended before thee ! Approach, and touch, and live forever.

## SERMON VII.

THOSE WHO BELIEVE NOT THE SCRIPTURES, WOULD NOT BE  
PERSUADED, THOUGH ONE ROSE FROM THE DEAD.



LUKE xvi. 31.

*And he said unto him, "If they hear not Moses, and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."*

THESE words are the close of the parable, uttered by our Saviour concerning the *Rich man* and *Lazarus*. The rich man had solicited of *Abraham*, that *Lazarus* might come to his relief, in the place where he was tormented. When he found this request could not be granted; he besought *Abraham*, that he would send *Lazarus* to his father's house: "for, said he, I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them lest they, also, come into this place of torment." *Abraham* replied, "They have Moses, and the prophets: let them hear them." *And he said*, "Nay, Father *Abraham*: but, if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." *Abraham* replied, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets; neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." This, certainly, is a very strong assertion. Multitudes have probably discredited the truth of it without hesitation. Others have undoubtedly thought it a hard saying: and others still, unwilling to treat the Scriptures with irreverence, have indeed admitted it to be true, but in a manner, which they did not perceive; and were ready to suppose, that they could not comprehend it.

As *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God*; it must all be true, whether believed by us, or not; or, if believed, whether the manner, in which it is true, be understood by us, or not. Still it is always desirable to know the manner, in which any

thing is true, so far as we may. There are many mysterious truths, which we are necessitated to believe by the soundest philosophy; and many others, which we are required to admit, implicitly, by the authority of God. Yet it is our duty to understand, wherever we can, not only the truth itself, but the evidence also, by which it is supported. Wherever this can be done to our own satisfaction, it will enable us, often, to confute gainsayers; to remove plausible objections against the Word of God; and to convince those, who are not unwilling to be convinced.

In the text it is declared, that those, who believe not *Moses* and the prophets; or the Scriptures of the Old Testament; would not be persuaded to repentance and reformation, although one should rise from the dead, and testify the indispensable importance, and supreme necessity, of both. The Scriptures of the New Testament were at that time not written. This appeal, therefore, could not be made to them. As it stands in the text, I believe it to be exactly true. Still, I shall extend it in the following discourse to the whole Sacred Canon; because our own concern with the doctrine lies in applying it to both Testaments united. To a Jew the words of Christ, here put into the mouth of *Abraham*, were addressed with absolute propriety, and irresistible force. To us the case scarcely becomes a practical one, without involving in the doctrine the whole body of Revelation.

In canvassing this subject at the present time, I will,

I. *Consider the evidence of Divine Truth, presented by one, risen from the dead.*

II. *I will examine the evidence of the same truth, furnished by the Scriptures; and the advantages of that evidence for convincing and persuading the mind.*

III. *I shall attempt to show, that the doctrine, illustrated by this comparison, is true.*

I. *I shall consider the evidence of Divine Truth, presented by a person, risen from the dead, and its probable effects upon mankind.*

Here it will be necessary to confine the case to such, as actually saw, and conversed with the person who had risen. This plainly, is the very case, supposed in the text. The Rich man wishes, that *Lazarus* may be sent in person to his brethren. It is to this request, that the answer of *Abraham* is directed: and this is the case, included in the declaration, which is now the subject of enquiry. A person, whom we saw rising from the dead would affect us deeply. A person, of whose resurrection we had only heard, would comparatively affect us very little. Our inquiries, therefore, ought to be confined to the former of these cases, if we would even appear to do justice to the subject. With this scheme of investigation before me, I proceed to observe,

1stly. *That the impressions, made by One who was seen to rise from the grave, and gave to the Spectators his testimony concerning a future state, would undoubtedly be great and solemn.*

This truth is enforced upon the conviction of every man by the mere impulse of his own feelings. We see all men listen: nay, we ourselves have often listened; to stories concerning the appearance of the inhabitants of the invisible world, with an attention singular, and with emotions appalling the imagination, and engrossing the heart. A person, known to have come from that world; a person, seen to ascend from the grave; would, therefore, exceedingly engross and alarm the minds of men. The apprehension, that he had come from the unknown, unvisited region, to which the soul is summoned, when it bids adieu to the body; that he dwelt there, and knew whatever existed, or was transacted, there; would be among the most solemn of all apprehensions. Whatever he said, he would be justly considered as speaking from his own experience. He would be regarded as uttering, not doctrines, but facts. His discourses would not be cold dissertations concerning abstract subjects, apt in their nature to be uninteresting, and addressed only to the intellect; but histories of events, which had actually taken place, and brought directly home to the soul. The miseries which he had suffered, or the happiness which he had enjoyed, would flow from

his tongue in the living language of the heart. His views would be the sun-bright views of experience. His emotions would be awakened by intense woe, or kindled by the flame of immortal life. "His thoughts would breathe: his words would burn." He, who was not moved by them, would be justly pronounced to have a heart, formed of the nether mill-stone.

2dly. *The evidence, which would attend every thing said by such a person, would be irresistible.*

The miracle of his resurrection would furnish unanswerable proofs, that he was sent by God: evidence, which every man could understand, and which no man without absolute sottishness could fail to feel. But he, who is sent by God, will, of course, speak that which is true. Even *Balaam* hardened as he was in sin, has taught this truth in the most forcible manner. "Lo," said he unto *Balak*, "I am now come unto thee. Have I now any power at all to say any thing? The word, that God putteth into my mouth, that shall I speak. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed; or how shall I defy, whom JEHOVAH hath not defied? Behold, I have received commandment to bless, and he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it." As, therefore, the mission of this person would be certainly known to be from God; whatever he said would be attended with invincible evidence of its certainty. At the same time, both from the nature of the subjects, concerning which his testimony was given; and the high authority of his mission, from the fact that he was an inhabitant of the eternal world, and from the miracle of his resurrection; it would be equally evident, that whatever he said was of the highest importance to mankind. To those, who were witnesses of his resurrection, therefore, his whole message would come, fraught with all the proof which could be desired.

Still I am apprehensive, that his power to persuade men to repentance and reformation would be much less, than at first thought would be naturally imagined; and that those, who resist the various appeals of the Scriptures to the conscience and the heart, would find means, also, of resisting him. To satisfy ourselves, let us now

II. *Examine the evidence of Divine Truth, furnished by the the Scriptures ; and the advantages which they possess for convincing, and persuading the mind.*

In this examination the

1st *Thing that meets us is, that the Scriptures were written by GOD ; and were, therefore, written in the best manner, that was possible, to accomplish their end.*

It will, I suppose, be admitted without a question, that the end, for which the Scriptures were written, is to persuade mankind to repentance and reformation. Much less can it be questioned, that the wisdom of GOD enabled him to discern the best manner of promoting this end, or that his goodness induced him to adopt it. The Scriptures, therefore, are actually written in this manner ; and are in the highest degree fitted to effectuate this persuasion.

2dly. *The things which are communicated in the Scriptures concerning our future existence, are in their nature the most solemn and impressive which can be conceived.*

They are such, as GOD thought it wisest and best to communicate ; and are therefore, certainly, the wisest and best possible. In their own nature also, and as they appear in themselves to our eyes, they possess an immeasurable solemnity and importance. The account which is there given of the judgment, of the final sentence, and the grounds on which it is uttered, of the glories of Heaven, and the miseries of Hell, is fraught with an awful and amazing grandeur, and a superlative interest, which overwhelm the imagination, and spread far beyond the utmost comprehension of the understanding. No objects can affect the mind equally with these ; and no method of communicating them, equally with that contained in the Scriptures.

A person risen from the dead, might, I acknowledge, disclose a variety of particulars concerning this subject ; and inform us of many things, which GOD has not thought proper to unfold in the Scriptures. I will readily admit, that in all probability they would be universally interesting. But, when the Scriptures assert, that they contain *all things necessary for life, and for god-*

liness, I cannot admit, that these communications, made by an inhabitant of the unseen world, would, upon the whole, be profitable to us. *The secret things, we are told, belong to GOD; but those things, which are revealed, belong unto us, and to our children, forever; that we may do all the words of his law.* *The secret things* are those, which God has hidden from us, or chosen not to reveal to us: and these he has kept secret for the same benevolent purpose, for which he has revealed others: to wit. that he might enable and incline us *to do all the words of his law.* Had more been revealed; we should be less able and less inclined to perform this duty, as truly, as if he had revealed fewer. In other words, Revelation has stopped at the point, which, if we were competent judges, we should pronounce the best.

The communications, made by a person, risen from the dead; those, I mean, of which I have been speaking; would undoubtedly gratify in a high degree our curiosity; and might in an equal degree affect our hearts. But it can scarcely be doubted, that they would also awaken in us a thousand perplexities concerning a state of existence, so little like our own; and the particulars of which it must be so difficult to reconcile to our apprehensions of what is wise and proper, and to explain to our entire satisfaction. That, which was disclosed, would demand another disclosure, to unfold its nature and propriety: and that, another, and another, without end. The mysteries even of the present world are innumerable: and the efforts of Philosophy, after all its labours, have left most of them as it found them. They are mysteries still. In almost every science we find, after advancing a little way, scarcely any thing but perplexity, doubt, and despair. If this is the case in a world, in which we, and those who have gone before us, have lived so long, and laboured so much; what must be the case with regard to the disclosures of a single individual concerning the future world; a world so unlike our own; where all must be new, wonderful, and to such beings as we are chiefly inexplicable? Information, like this, could scarcely be favorable to the faith or reformation of mankind.



At the same time, there is no small reason to believe, that such amazing scenes, as those of futurity, when disclosed by one of its inhabitants, would in the proper sense, overwhelm our minds; and leave us utterly unqualified for rational thought, and useful exertion. When the mind is wrought up to a very high pitch of feeling; neither its views, nor its determinations, are usually of much value. As these things are presented in the Scriptures; they are certainly sufficiently awful. Few persons can meet them with a steady eye, or hear them without a tingling ear. Most attend to them, only when they are compelled; and turn away their attention from them as soon as it is in their power. Upon the whole, it may well be questioned, whether any thing would be gained towards the reformation of mankind by a further disclosure of these subjects, either more extended, or more minute.

3dly. *Beside the things, which a person, risen from the dead, could unfold, the Scriptures afford many others pre-eminently important, and affecting.*

In the Scriptures we are taught innumerable doctrines concerning the character, works, and government, of God; the character, mission, and mediation, of the Redeemer; the character, and offices, of the Holy Spirit; the ruin and recovery of man, the renovation of his soul, the justification and adoption of his person, and the purification of his life; concerning the dangers and duties, the hopes, comforts, and joys, of the Christian; his access to God by prayer for all blessings; and the communion with him, which it is so much the duty and the privilege of the Christian to maintain. All these doctrines are at once instructive, endearing, and persuasive; and have proved the means of salvation to many a sinner. To these must be added a long train of precepts and ordinances, naturally conspiring to promote, and actually promoting, the same important end. All these are advantages, of pre-eminent consequence towards the accomplishment of this great purpose, which are peculiar to the Scriptures; and could not be challenged by a person, risen from the dead.

4thly. *All these things come directly from God himself, and are invested with his authority.*

It will not be believed, that a person, risen from the dead, would, in any sense be an object, equally interesting with our Maker. Every thing, which is said in the Scriptures, is either expressly, or implicitly, prefaced with "Thus saith JEHOVAH." GOD, the Maker, and Disposer, of all beings; the Giver of life and death; the Ruler of Heaven, Earth, and Hell; the Judge, and Rewarder, of the good and the evil; has spoken to us every thing which is contained in the Scriptures. The Son of GOD, the Maker of men, himself the Judge and the Rewarder, actually spoke in person a great part of the doctrines and precepts contained in the Scriptures. All the instructions of this wonderful person were fraught with supreme wisdom and goodness; were delivered with unrivalled meekness and gentleness, with unlimited tenderness and condescension; and were enforced by an example, of transcendent beauty and glory. Surely, if the character of the teacher, the spirit displayed in his instructions, and the manner in which they were delivered, could persuade; persuasion would here be irresistible.

5thly. *The Scriptures were attested by miracles, very numerous, and certainly not less solemn, and impressive than the resurrection of a man from the dead.*

The Scriptures are sustained by a mass of evidence, wonderfully various, complicated, and affecting. A great multitude of its Doctrines and precepts, and all, which we are able to examine, *are seen to be true in their own nature*: and these lend a powerful support to the truth of those, which lie beyond our reach. History strongly sustains the whole. Another stable column is furnished to this great building by prophecy. It is also immoveably cemented, and strengthened, by the Harmony of its innumerable parts. Its superlative grandeur and sublimity compel us to refer it to a divine Architect. To the same reference we are still further directed by the purity of its materials. The portrait of the Saviour, and even those of his Apostles, and prophets, which adorn the walls of this magnificent temple, were also plainly drawn by a divine pencil, dipped in the colours of Heaven.

To all these, and many other, proofs of the divine origin of the Scriptures, Miracles add their peculiar strength. These as you know are almost endless in their multitude, and in their nature of supreme force and solemnity. Such are the Deluge; the confusion of Languages; the destruction of *Sodom*; and the wonders of *Egypt*, the Wilderness, and *Canaan*. Such, also, in an eminent degree were the Miracles wrought by Christ, and his Apostles.

Of this list not a small number were more solemn and more affecting, than the resurrection of a man from the dead. Such was the giving of the law from Mount *Sinai*; the appearance of the Angels to the Shepherds of *Bethlehem*; the descent of the Spirit, and the voice of God, at the baptism of our Saviour; and the awful events, which attended his crucifixion. Not a small number also were repetitions of the very miracle in question. Such, particularly, was the resurrection of the children of the widow of *Zarephath* and the *Shunamite*, of the daughter of *Jairus*, of the son of the widow of *Nain*, of *Lazurus*, and of *Tabitha*. Such in a still more affecting manner was the resurrection of the numerous saints, whose bodies ascended from the grave, to glorify him who *is the Resurrection and the Life*. Such finally, with a superlative solemnity and force, was the resurrection of Christ; attended by circumstances, awful and sublime without a parallel.

All these miracles, it is to be remembered, were events, accompanied with the highest evidence; were acknowledged without a question by those, who were witnesses of them; and have been evinced to be true, beyond every reasonable doubt, to the minds of those who have lived in succeeding ages; particularly of the great body of the wise and good, since the commencement of the Christian era.

Such, summarily, is the evidence of Divine Truth, furnished by the Scriptures: and such are their advantages for convincing and persuading the mind. We are now prepared for a fair examination of the doctrine, declared in the text. I shall, therefore,

III. *Attempt to show, that the doctrine is true.*

On this subject I observe.

1st. *That we ourselves do not, ordinarily, dispute the truth of the Scriptural declarations, nor the sufficiency of the evidence by which they are supported; and yet are in very few instances persuaded to repent.*

Neither part of this assertion will be questioned. The number of Infidels, here, is certainly very small. I am not warranted to say, that there is one. Comparatively, it is small throughout this part of our country: yet how few in comparison are the penitents? Of course, our belief of divine truth has little influence on our hearts.

2dly. *Those, who were witnesses of these very miracles, generally did not repent.*

The *Jews*, who saw the miracles of Christ, retained still their hardness of heart; and, although they were so much influenced by them, as to be willing to make him a King, they still preserved all their sinfulness of character; and, a short time after, nailed him to the cross. Even those who saw *Lazarus* come out of his grave, in many instances did not believe on him, but went away, and told the story to the Pharisees. The Pharisees, although in the Sanhedrim they openly admitted the reality of *Lazarus'* resurrection and of many other miracles, wrought by Christ, yet, instead of being persuaded, were only roused to more violent hatred against him; and *immediately took counsel, how they might put him to death.*

We, perhaps, may be ready to believe, and not improbably may actually believe, that our own hearts may be less hard, and our eyes less blind. In a qualified sense this may be true. We may not be, to the full extent, Scribes and Pharisees. Our obstinacy may, perhaps, not rise so high, as that of many other *Jews*, who lived at the time of our Saviour. Yet it is hardly probable, that we possess more candour and moderation, or a disposition more easily persuaded than many among the numerous thousands, who saw the miracles of Christ and believed him to be the Messiah. These, nevertheless, did not yield their hearts to him; receive him as their Saviour; nor possess *a broken and contrite spirit.*

The cities of *Capernaum*, *Chorazin*, and *Bethsaida*, often heard the Saviour preach; and saw in great numbers his mighty works wrought before their eyes. These cities contained a multitude of youths, and a multitude of women; the most hopeful objects of preaching; and, if we may judge from facts, the most susceptible of repentance. Yet we are taught, that few, even of these, repented. Our Saviour, after all his instructions and miracles, was compelled to exclaim, "Woe unto thee, Capernaum! Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida!" and to declare, that it would "be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, and even for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of Judgment," than for those cities.

Few of us can pretend to more seriousness, a purer morality, or greater sweetness of disposition, than *the young Ruler*, who came to Christ, to know what he should do to gain eternal life. Yet even he, notwithstanding he believed Christ to have the words of eternal life, could not be persuaded to obey his voice: although Heaven itself would have been his certain reward.

Let us not flatter ourselves, that we have not the same common character, and that we are not *by nature children of disobedience*, even as they. The differences between them and us are merely circumstantial: and even these are not always in our favour. We as readily, perhaps, and as entirely, acknowledge the reality of Christ's resurrection. Yet how little are we interested by this most stupendous of all miracles? How plainly is the story of it, when recited either in the word of God, or in the desk, an idle tale to most of those who hear me; as it was at first to the disciples, when told by their female companions to whom he had re-appeared.

3dly. *Among all the persons with whom, while they were anxiously solicitous about their salvation, I have had opportunity to converse, I do not remember even one who ever mentioned his own indisposition to repent, as in any degree derived from the want of evidence to support the truth of the Scriptures.*

The number of these has been so great, that if this were a common, or even a frequent, case, some one, and probably ma-

ny more, must have been found among them, who had been embarrassed by this difficulty. At the same time, if the case had really occurred, it would be hardly possible, that it should not have been mentioned. Conversation of this nature is ordinarily in a pre-eminent degree open, undisguised, and the means of pouring forth all the heart. It is peculiarly employed, also, about the past and present state of the mind; its views, and affections; its obstructions in the way to faith, repentance, and holiness; its errors; its sins; and its perplexities. How obviously would such a fact find a place in conversation of such a nature. Yet, as has been already observed, no such instance is within my remembrance. It may therefore be concluded without hesitation, that very few, if any, such instances can be found.

With these things in view, we are, I think compelled to admit the doctrine.

I will now conclude the discourse with a few

#### REMARKS.

*1st. It is manifest from these considerations, that the reason, why mankind do not embrace the Gospel, is not the want of Evidence.*

No evidence is more conclusive than that, which is furnished by miracles. Every man, who does not force himself, into a state of doubt, believes, and knows, that a miracle is the work of God only. When performed to prove a declaration, it is with equal certainty known to be a testimony from God to the truth of that declaration. The declaration itself is, therefore, true; and is seen to be true by means of evidence, which cannot be questioned.

At the same time, a miracle is evidence of the most impressive kind. As it is a fact, it has that peculiar force and vividness, which always attends the impressions of images made by objects upon our senses. A miracle is always a fact, also, of importance and solemnity. Beyond this, it is a singular, or at least a very extraordinary fact. It is therefore accompanied by

all the force, derived from both these considerations. Finally, a miracle is deeply affecting to all men ; because, as has been observed, it is a testimony from GOD to the truth of a doctrine, or to the rectitude and obligation of a precept. Every man knows, that GOD will not give his testimony to a doctrine or precept of little moment, however just and true ; much less to one which is false. This testimony was never given ; it cannot with decency be supposed ever to be given ; to a doctrine or precept, which is not of high importance, and deeply interesting to the government of GOD, and the welfare of mankind. At the thought, and much more at the sight, of such a testimony, therefore, the mind is awakened, and solemnized, not only into the deepest attention, but the most profound awe.

All these advantages to produce conviction are eminently attributable to the miracle involved in a resurrection from the dead. The return of a departed man from the invisible world to those, with whom he had heretofore lived and conversed, is, and ever has been, one of the most solemn objects of human contemplation. The appearance of departed spirits has in every age, and in every nation, awakened, in spite of improbability, contempt, and ridicule, vivid and alarming apprehensions in the great body of our race. Not only has it been felt by those, who believed it as a fact, but by those also, who have considered it as a mere dream of imagination. A secret shuddering, an involuntary chill, has regularly attended the very thought of such a scene, when fairly brought home to the mind. What, then, would be the feelings, were such a man actually to re-appear ; to converse, to live, for a destined season with his former acquaintance ? What emotions would spring up in the soul, while he unfolded his own experimental knowledge of the invisible world ; the joys of heaven ; or the sufferings of perdition ? Who would not run to see this wonderful stranger ? Who would not eagerly listen to his recitals ? Who would not awake, and tremble, and shudder, at his warnings and exhortations ?

But the text declares, that even the appearance and testimony, of such a person would not persuade us to believe, and repent :

and the illustrations, furnished in this discourse, have, if I mistake not, proved the declaration to be true. Why should we not repent? Certainly not because the evidence accompanying his testimony would be insufficient to command conviction. No evidence could be more complete. Most clearly the difficulty lies not in the understanding but in the heart. The disposition is opposed to the reception of divine truth; and overcomes all the dictates of the understanding. Here lies the great secret. The heart is opposed to God, to his truth, to conviction, to obedience. It is easy to prove to any man, who will listen with candour, the truth of the Scriptures; the desirableness of repentance, faith, and obedience to God; the importance of renouncing sin, and returning to our duty. But he will not, therefore, believe, nor repent, nor obey. Convinced as he may be, he will still continue to sin. It is easy to shew; indeed, it does not need to be shewn; that it is wise to secure Heaven, and escape from Hell. But he, to whom this is shewn, will not therefore seek Heaven, nor attempt to escape from Hell.

This certainly is a most unhappy trait in the human character. It is conduct, which is contrary to our boasted reason, our professed dignity of nature; and is plainly inexcusable to our consciences, as well as to God. What can be said in behalf of him, who knows his duty, and refuses to do it? What can he say for himself? What will he say, when he comes before the bar of his Maker? How plainly must he be overwhelmed by a conviction of his guilt, which then he will be unable to force away.

But that, of which we shall then be convinced, it cannot but be wise to feel at the present time. If we would either please God, or save our own souls; we ought now to see, and acknowledge with the heart, the obstinacy which we cherish against the truth and will of God. We ought now to see how foolishly, as well as how sinfully, we are resisting our salvation. We have *Moses and the prophets, and Christ and the Apostles*. The brethren of the Rich man had the former only. If they resisted these, their case was hopeless; and their souls were undone. What, then, if we resist both, will be our case?



2dly. *From these observations it is clear, that no evidence will persuade a sinful heart.*

*The Devils*, we are told, *believe, and tremble*. The Rich man, in the parable, saw with absolute certainty, and saw in his own experience too, that the impenitent are miserable beyond the grave. Yet the devils do not repent. The Rich man did not repent. He hoped, that his brethren would repent, if *Lazarus* should be permitted to testify to them the sufferings which he endured. But he exhibits not a single hope of his own repentance, although he was now experiencing the very woes concerning which the testimony of *Lazarus* was to be given.

In the same manner multitudes of mankind in Christian countries, and among them not a small number in this house, who acknowledge the Scriptures to be the word of GOD, and believe, without a doubt, that all the solemn things, which they contain, are true, are yet not persuaded.

There is no instance, recorded in the history of man, in which the heart has yielded itself to the mere influence of truth; even of the truth of GOD; and become converted, merely because it was convinced. Sin in its very nature appears to be immoveable by any effort of the sinner. If I am asked, whether he is not possessed of physical power to effect this removal; I answer, "yes: but he will never exert it in such a manner, as to accomplish the end." Man, in my view, has all the physical power, *before*, that he has *at*, or *after*, his regeneration. The only change, wrought in him at that time, is in his disposition; and, to accomplish this change, something, beside the mere power of truth and evidence, is indispensable. The grace of GOD, alone, the power of the divine Spirit, is the only cause, from which this wonderful effect can spring; the only balm for the leprosy of the heart.

You may, perhaps, ask what, then, is the use of divine Truth? What is its efficacy? What is the value of the means of grace? And why do I urge you so earnestly to use them; and to use them with all diligence, and anxiety; for the purpose of attaining salvation? To these reasonable questions my answer is ready.

This is the way, in which God has thought proper to communicate this blessing ; and unquestionably the way, which is most wise and proper in itself. He could easily accomplish the whole work of your regeneration without even a remote reference to any means whatever. But he has determined otherwise : and such is the importance of the Scriptures to this mighty concern, that they are declared, expressly, to be *able to make us wise unto salvation*. As he has ordered his providence ; they are absolutely necessary to teach you his character and pleasure ; your own ruin, and recovery ; the dangers to which you are exposed, and the way to escape them ; the blessings which you may acquire, and the means by which they may be obtained. Scarcely less necessary are they to bring you to that soberness of mind, which is indispensable to thinking usefully on any subjects ; especially on those, which are involved in Religion ; and to that solemn concern for your immortal interests, without which you will not even wish to be saved. The means of grace universally form, when employed in earnest, a preparation of the man, both with respect to the understanding and the affections, for the proper commencement of the agency of the Holy Spirit in renewing his heart. This is not a preparation of *merit* but of *fitness*. It involves no desert of this blessing. It infers no obligation on God to communicate it. But it is the way, which God in his wisdom and mercy has been pleased to select ; and which therefore he has been pleased to bless. It would be easy to shew, that it is both wise and good : but this the time will not permit ; and on the present occasion it is unnecessary.

Agreeably to these observations, all persons, who are finally regenerated, date the commencement of seriousness in their minds, of their conviction of sin, and therefore, of the conversion which followed it ; from something, which is contained in the Scriptures : some truth ; some precept ; some ordinance ; some threatening ; some invitation ; some promise. Ask as many, as you please ; and you will find, that one dates the commencement of this work in his soul from some passage of Scripture ; another, from an expression in a prayer, or a psalm ; and

another, from an affecting sermon. One finds it in religious conversation; another, in religious example. One began to be affected by his own sickness, or his recovery; another, by his exposure to an alarming danger, or his merciful deliverance; and another still, by the death of a friend, or some other solemn dispensation of Providence. You will never hear this great event spoken of, as commencing without something, by which it was begun: and that something is always divine truth, either brought to the mind simple and alone, or accompanied with circumstances, by which it was powerfully impressed. And let it be remembered that all the things, which I have here mentioned, are only Scriptural truth, presented in various forms, or accompanied by different means of impressing it powerfully on the heart.

But, were we unable to explain this subject at all, it would be sufficient to recur to the mere state of facts, to recommend it in the strongest manner to the attention of mankind. It is certainly enough for us, that all, who are saved, are saved in this manner.

Flatter not yourselves, then, that your hearts will ever be changed by the mere force of evidence; nor that you can ever be renewed, but by the grace of God, and the agency of his Spirit; nor that you have a rational hope of salvation, without an earnest, anxious, use of the means of grace; nor that in such an use of these means you can merit salvation; nor that God is under any obligation to save you; nor that you are in any sense safe, until you shall have been created anew by the power of the divine Spirit. Leave these dreams to those, who are willing to spend life in dreaming. But do you in the mean time rejoice, that there is a divine Spirit to renew you; and that there are means, by which multitudes have been conducted to this renovation. Lay hold on them with all your hearts: and, while you follow the glorious company, who in the use of them have been divinely blessed, may you find the same blessing in this world, and the innumerable and immortal, blessings which flow from it in the world to come!

## SERMON VIII.

### ON SLOTH.



PROVERBS XXIV. 30—32.

*I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding :*

*And lo, it was all grown over with thorns ! and nettles had covered the face thereof : and the stone-wall thereof was broken down.*

*Then I saw, and considered it well. I looked upon it ; and received instruction.*

No writer in the Scriptures has given us so many lessons on the subject of *sloth*, as *Solomon* ; and on no subject has he exhibited more pungent phraseology, or striking imagery. There is a pithiness, a vigour of thought, and a strength of expression, in the compositions of this great man, which are singular ; and which are all exhibited in the most vivid manner in his observations concerning sloth. This fact is a forcible proof of his superiour wisdom ; and might be fairly expected from the distinguished degree, in which he possessed this attribute.

The text is a beautiful specimen of this nature. “I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man, void of understanding : And lo, it was all grown over with thorns ! and nettles covered the face thereof : and the stone-wall thereof was broken down.”

Fields and vineyards, where vineyards exist, have ever been the chief objects of human cultivation. Both are destined not only to supply important necessities of life, but to furnish man with those supplies of food, and drink, and with many of those objects of mental taste, which have always been regarded by mankind as eminently delightful. In truth, these, together with gardens,

have been in all ages primary objects of secular attention to the great body of the human race, in every country where the soil and climate would admit an employment of this nature. A garden was assigned to our first parents, as the place of their abode in a state of innocence. *Adam* was the first husbandman; and *Eden* was the first scene of agriculture. When, therefore, fields and vineyards are neglected by the proprietor; we may easily believe, that all other objects of his industry will be forgotten: for here very obviously lies his chief secular interest; and here might plainly and easily be found his first pleasure.

But the field and the vineyard were not merely neglected. They were forgotten; and had long been forgotten. *They were all grown over with thorns; and nettles had covered their surface: the stone-wall* with which the vineyard had been formerly enclosed by a more industrious hand, was also *broken down*: probably, because the proprietor was too lazy to put it up himself, or even to employ others for this purpose.

This scene struck the eye of the wisest of men with very great force; as he has taught us by the emphatical language in which he has expressed his feelings. "Then I saw, and considered it well. I looked upon it; and received instruction." In this state of deep contemplation, this solemn pondering on the miserable case before him, the emotions of *Solomon* were excited to such a pitch, that, turning his thoughts to the wretched proprietor, he entered, in imagination, the house where the man lived; and there beheld him stretched upon his bed, at that very time of day, when himself was examining so attentively the deplorable consequences of his sloth. Here, as he fancied, he heard the sottish being exclaim, "Yet a little sleep; a little slumber; a little folding of the hands to sleep." Roused by this effusion; the most striking, which was ever uttered by a mind torpid with indolence; *Solomon* exclaimed by way of response, "So shall thy poverty come, as one that travelleth; and thy want, as an armed man." From this humiliating view of the conduct and consequences of sloth we cannot fail to learn some useful lessons, unless the fault should be our own. Among these the following observations well merit the attention of this assembly.

1. *A slothful man is useless to himself.*

The first utility of man to himself, the most natural, and that, to which we are led by the strongest and most universal propensity of our nature, is the acquisition of our subsistence. To this we are called by the most absolute necessity; our exposure to hunger, thirst, and nakedness, to all the sufferings of beggary, and the still keener sufferings of contempt. On the other hand, comfort, reputation, usefulness, duty, and even ambition and avarice, powerfully urge us to industry. These loud calls are heard, accordingly, by almost all men. Even those, who are born in poverty, feel their influence in such a degree, that in ordinary circumstances they struggle vigorously for a comfortable support; and usually with success. *The diligent hand* even of these persons *makes* them in many instances *rich*; and in most ensures to them a comfortable subsistence. But the man in the text was plainly born the heir of a patrimonial estate. He had a field and a vineyard, and not improbably many fields; but neither produced any thing beside nettles and thorns. Had any thing better grown in either; it would have been destroyed by cattle: for the enclosure, by which it should have been defended, *was broken down*. The proprietor, in the mean time, was at home, and not in his field; stretched on his bed in the day-time, and not at his plough, or his pruning-hook. Instead of cultivating corn and grapes, his proper employment; instead of providing food for himself, and his household; he was crying out beneath the noon-day sun, with the feelings of a mere animal, "Yet a little sleep; a little slumber; a little folding of the hands to sleep."

A more useless being than this, even to himself, cannot be imagined by the human mind. In defiance of all the powerful motives, which I have mentioned, he was contented to be hungry and naked, despised and forgotten, if he might only be permitted to dissolve in sloth and lose himself in sleep.

This is an exact as well a strong picture of every lazy man. Every such man is of the same useless character: useless I mean to himself. Every one has not indeed fields and vineyards, to cultivate or neglect: but all manage whatever possessions they have in a similar manner.

This however is not the worst of the case. He is not merely useless to himself; but *is his own enemy*. The whole character of an enemy is exhibited in destroying or preventing the happiness of him, whom he hates. The slothful man is his own enemy, because he both destroys and prevents his own happiness. This truth, if it needs proof, will be abundantly evident from a few observations.

He prevents his own happiness by *wasting his property*. This effect of indolence is so inseparably connected with it, and so universally seen to flow from it, that no words are necessary to establish the position in the most incredulous mind.

The same evil he produces also by *wasting his time*. God thought it necessary, and gave it as a law to mankind, that they should labour six days every week, and in this manner do all their work. Experience has abundantly shown the wisdom and the goodness of this law. But, every week, the slothful man spends six days in idleness; and does not labour even one. All these, therefore, are by him voluntarily lost; and all the blessings, which would spring from using them wisely, and diligently. Thus *the desire of the slothful killeth him: for his hands refuse to labour*. I need not observe that he, that he who wastes six days in the week, will certainly squander the seventh.

Equally does he *waste his talents*. The employment of our faculties is in itself, probably, the greatest secular pleasure which we enjoy. Neither health, nor property, nor reputation, nor all of them, nor, as I believe, even Religion itself, so far as its existence is possible on such a supposition, will make men happy or keep them from being wretched, without the employment of their faculties. Accordingly, all the miserable beings who are without useful business or refuse to perform it, are driven for the mere purpose of killing time to the card-table, the dram-shop, the horse-race, the corners of streets, or some other miserable haunt of those who do nothing, and who seek here to while away their heavy hours.

But, should it be said, that the slothful man thinks himself as happy as other persons, and is therefore to be accounted so; I ask,

“What is this happiness !” The answer plainly is, “that of an oyster,” found in a mere exemption from insensibility.

The employment of our faculties produces enjoyment also, in a rich train of consequences. Property, character, influence, consciousness of being useful, provision for the wants of sickness and old age, and the satisfaction of providing for the comfort and usefulness of those who are dependent on us ; all follow in a regular train the employment of our faculties in the business for which they were designed. All these the lazy man relinquishes for the privilege of setting in his chair, lolling on his bed, and lounging in taverns.

Nor is he less an *enemy to his reputation*. Laziness is so contemptible a character, and sinks a man down so near to the verge of nihility, that it is despised by every eye, and reproached by every tongue. Contempt snuffs it as his proper prey ; and infamy follows it unceasingly with her hiss and her sting. But “a good name is better than great riches ; and loving favour than silver and gold.” Disgrace on the other hand is probably felt by mankind as the last evil, usually suffered in the present world.

Equally is he an enemy to his usefulness. To be useful is in every sense a blessing, of high moment. The most melancholy lamentation of an old man is, “I am good for nothing.” But the slothful is *voluntarily* good for nothing throughout life. His usefulness is all given up of design : and he will not suffer himself to be useful, even in his own person, and by his own faculties. Influence, the great source of our usefulness, where others are to be persuaded and engaged, he has not, and cannot have. All influence is acquired by reputation : but of this he has deprived himself. His wishes therefore, and his plans, will only be opposed, and despised, by others.

Finally he is *an enemy to his soul*. “Therefore,” says *St. James*, “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” In this manner the whole life of a lazy man is passed. Much good, which he perfectly well knows, is every day left by him undone. Day by day, therefore, he accumulates sins from morning to night. How vast, then, must be their num-



ber ; how incomprehensible their amount ! It is hardly necessary to observe that these sins are the most fatal enemies of the soul.

2dly. *The slothful man is useless to Mankind.*

My observations on this subject must in a great measure be anticipated by my audience. He, who is not useful to himself, will never be useful to others. He, who is a nuisance to himself, will be a nuisance to mankind. The lazy man must, if he lives, be indebted to the labour of others for the food and raiment, the fuel and lodging, on which he lives. Others must toil for every enjoyment, which he partakes : and he is a mere load upon their shoulders. At the same time he is a nuisance by his example, and by his wickedness. A lazy man makes others lazy ; as a drunken man makes others drunkards. Around him gather, of course, those who are like him ; or those who speedily assume the same character. Talkers, drones, incapable of managing their own business, and meddling perpetually with that of others ; loungers in shops, and market places ; politicians, perfectly capable of guiding the wheels of government : each *wiser, in his own conceit, than seven men, who can render a reason* : stains upon the character of man, and a *smoke* in the *nostrils* of JEHOVAH.

On each of these *poverty shall come*, with the speed of *one that travelleth* ; and *want as an armed man*. His end in this world is commonly the Alms-house or Bridewell, the jail or the gibbet ; and in the world to come that *outer darkness*, into which every *unprofitable servant* will be cast, and in which *there is perpetual weeping, and gnashing of teeth*.

I will now proceed, my young friends, to apply this subject to your own circumstances.

The general nature of sloth I have unfolded to you succinctly ; but your circumstances differ so widely from those of most others, that, in order to make my observations of any material use to you, it will be desirable, if not absolutely necessary, that the case should be directly and particularly made your own. This, therefore, I will now attempt.

Sloth in this Seminary of learning is directed, as it is elsewhere, into different channels. I will attempt briefly to follow it in some of its most obvious and distinguished courses.

A number of those, who find admission into these walls, in some degree varying at different times, *have an original disrelish to study, and a ruling propensity to the active business of life.* These youths take up their books originally and solely, in obedience to the wishes and injunctions of their parents, and in opposition to the strong bent of their own nature. Those parental wishes, which send them hither, are in my view unwise and unhappy. Few, very few of the children who possess this character, will ever become scholars. The strength of natural propensity in this case almost always prevails. The intentions of the parents, indeed, are in the highest degree commendable: for they evidently design to dispose of their children in the manner most beneficial to *them.* Their disrelish to study, and their attachment to active life, they hope by persevering opposition to overcome. But they almost always hope in vain: for after all their labours the child passes through the successive periods of his education, with no more of learning or of science, than that which adheres to him, merely because he is where it is; because he has eyes and ears, and is compelled by irresistible necessity to see and hear something of what is passing before these senses.

Those of you, who possess this character, I consider as the least censurable among the idle members of this institution. In some measure you are certainly to be pitied; because your continuance here is a struggle against the stiff bent of nature; a violence done to your constitutional inclinations. Were my own advice to be followed; every such person would speedily take a dismissal, if his parents' consent could be obtained; betake himself to business, better suited to his inclinations; and no longer struggle in vain against a propensity plainly too powerful to be overcome.

But let me remind all persons of this character, that they are not merely to be pitied, but are also to be severely censured. Such of you, as have been sent hither in these circumstances, ought ever to remember that you were sent hither by your parents; that they had an absolute right to dispose of you in this manner, that you are bound by the authority of God to submit

your own inclinations to their pleasure ; and that he at the final day will require this at your hands. You are bound also to remember, that the course which they have prescribed for you, though unhappily contrary to the strong bias of your inclinations, is in itself the wisest and best which is possible ; and that the knowledge which they intended you should acquire, will, if actually acquired, be the greatest of all earthly blessings, which you can obtain. By the command of GOD you are bound to *obey your parents in all things*. If you revered your Maker ; you would certainly obey them in this : for they are here eminently seeking your best good, and labouring most benevolently to raise you to usefulness and honour. Gratitude, therefore, adds all its strong claims to filial piety, and piety to GOD ; and powerfully urges you to overcome with a manly struggle your reluctance to study. You may lawfully wish that your destination had been different. But nothing can vindicate your present neglect of your duty.

Another class of idlers in this Seminary is formed of *those, who in their dispositions exactly resemble the miserable being whom Solomon saw, and whom he has made the subject of his reflections in the text*. These are *naturally lazy* ; just as others of our race are naturally passionate. The indulgence of sloth, so far as we are able to judge, is their supreme good : and exertion of every kind, the evil which they supremely dread. Address to them whatever arguments you please, for the purpose of rousing them to activity : rehearse to them the commands of GOD : repeat before them the loud calls of their own interest ; of property, reputation, influence, and usefulness, ever attendant upon vigorous efforts, especially those for the attainment of valuable knowledge ; and the worthlessness, insignificance, disgrace, and beggary, which follow hard on the heels of sloth : recall to their view the wounds which their parents will receive from the disappointment of all their hopes, and from the disgrace, wretchedness, and ruin, of their children : point to them their companions, honourably contending in the race of learning, worth and usefulness : the only answer which you will receive, is, “ Yet a little sleep ; a little slumber ; a little folding of the hands to sleep.”

To those of you, who sustain this deplorable character, if such there are, arguments can be addressed, only with emotions bordering on despair. What can be expected of those who have no ears to hear, nor hearts to understand; whose minds are diseased and torpid: and to whom the considerations of time and eternity are alike presented in vain? These persons do not walk, but slide, down the broad and crooked road. They do not go, but slumber, onward to perdition. Yet I will try once more, to discharge my own duty to them; however hopeless, however vain, may be the attempt. Remember then the sentence, which God has passed upon persons who sustain this miserable character. "If any will not work neither shall he eat," i. e. if any person will not do some useful business, allotted to him by Providence, he shall not eat. Whenever he receives his daily food, he violates the express command of God. Here every lazy man is expressly doomed by his Maker to starving, and death; and the very continuance of his life, and the reception of the food by which it is supported, are downright rebellion against his Maker. Of what other class of sinners are these terrible things said in the Scriptures? and what must be the views, what the detestation, of Him, by whom they are said concerning this character?

Remember also, that you are daily increasing the strength of this propensity. Every hour, in which you indulge it, it becomes a more and more powerful habit; and chains you down in a more and more hopeless bondage. Your efforts against it, your attempts at exertion, already so feeble and fruitless, will soon become the mere unmeaning struggles of a paralytic; a trembling of the limbs, instead of an effort; involuntary struggles of the system, made without the energy of the muscles, or the guidance of the mind; and only proofs that life is not entirely extinct. What then are you to become in the future periods of your earthly residence. Like the paralytic to whom I have alluded, you will become mere dependents on the bounty and protection of those around you: if any can be found, whom nature will compel to assume this care. In the same helpless state of imbecility you will need to be watched, and nursed, and fed, by

others ; will be mere burdens on the industry and humanity of your connections ; will be mere burdens to yourselves ; will drag life onward as a load ; and will ultimately expire under the pressure.

Another class of idlers in this Institution, and that much larger than both the former, is composed of *those, who are votaries to pleasure*. These are not in the absolute sense slothful. It is not true that they do nothing. It is only true, that they do nothing to any valuable purpose ; nothing which is of any use to themselves, their fellow men, or their God. They do much ; but all which they do, is mischievous to themselves and to others ; often, very often it is fatal to both. In describing them it would be neither proper nor possible for me to point out either particular persons, or facts, I shall therefore exhibit them, as they have always existed in such institutions ; and shall leave it to those who are present, and are involved in the description, however few or many they may be, to apply it to themselves.

One subordinate class of these persons is made up of *those, who are devotees to dress and appearance*. They were sent hither to adorn their minds with learning, science, and virtue. They spend their time in adorning their persons with fine clothes. Not books, but fashions, are the objects of their study : and their lessons of instruction are all taken from the tailor. The human mind is, of course, under the government of one controlling object. By him, to whom dress is this object, knowledge is of course forgotten. In vain does a teacher labour to pour instruction into this vessel of the Danaides. It is every where pierced with holes ; and whatever it receives merely passes through. How miserably do parents err, how deplorably must parents be disappointed, who send such children to a seminary of learning. How much less expensive, how much less mortifying, would it have been to dress them at home. They are sent hither to become men ; and they leave the place of their education fops and beaux. No human character is, perhaps, more diminutive ; no resemblance to an insect more impressive. The minds of all such persons are uncultivated, and desolate : the field of the

slothful, grown over with briars and thorns ; in which not one thing of use is permitted to spring.

In this class is found, to a great extent, *a subordinate one, who spend a great part of their collegiate life in visiting.* These waste their time in displaying their persons and dress to others ; and in trifling conversation about subjects of no value ; apparently believing, that their souls were formed only to trifle ; and that their final account, although made up of nothing but trifling, will be accepted by the Judge of the quick and the dead. How distant an approximation is this towards the character of a rational being : a being, formed to know, and love, and serve God ; a being, fitted to become a blessing to mankind ; and destined, during this period of probation, to secure immortal glory beyond the grave !

But all idlers in this and other seminaries of the same nature, do not spend life in mere trifling. There are those, and the proportion is not small, who employ a great part of their collegiate existence *in keeping company with each other.* Most of these aim at vice in more solid forms, and on a more significant scale. All do not indeed commence their career with direct designs of this nature. Some are drawn to such scenes merely by social propensities : Others, by indisposition to study, and the consequent necessity of finding some employment in which they may spend their time less heavily and less gloomily than in absolute inaction. The mind is in its nature incapable of being totally stagnant ; and instinctively demands some engagement, by which its faculties may in some degree at least be occupied. Those, who in the literal sense are willing to do nothing, are few ; are perhaps always diseased ; and usually may be regarded as inhabiting diseased bodies. The rest, particularly those of the class now under consideration, although idle with respect to every thing which is good are sufficiently active in doing evil. First or last this becomes the great object of their association. The cluster is originally gathered, perhaps, in the hours of relaxation ; but afterwards and at no distant periods, in those of study ; and, ultimately, at late and untimely seasons of the night. At first it

is assembled in the Collegiate rooms : ultimately, it is collected in rooms abroad ; particularly in those buildings which are unoccupied by families ; buildings which in the night become solitudes, where no witnesses of what is passing within approach nearer than the street. In these meetings youths are trained up to sin, in form ; with the combined efforts of a multitude sedulously helping each other onward with their united ingenuity, arts, and labours, to corruption and disgrace, beggary and ruin, in this life, and to perdition in that which is to come.

Here *profaneness* runs speedily through all its changes, from the half formed language of irreverence, babbled by the young adventurer in licentiousness, whose conscience has not yet been stupified, and who still hesitates under the impressions of a religious education, to the rank oath ; the curse, which invokes damnation on himself, and his companions ; and the outrageous blasphemy, which deliriously assaults the throne of God. In these dark retreats, also, *pollution* is generated in all its malignant forms. Here the tongue learns to vibrate through every degree on the rank scale of licentiousness, from the obscure innuendo to gross, bald, sickening, obscenity. The imagination, at the same time, is here *set on fire of hell* : and the soul, tainted and rendered putrid with impurity, becomes a lazar-house of corruption, and sends up rank and poisonous fumes to heaven. Here, also, purposes and habits of pollution are formed, which fix the miserable wretch who is the subject of them, beyond the hope of reformation or recall ; and invoking on his head a judicial sentence of reprobation, begin his perdition on this side of the grave.

In these cells of sin, also, is begun and carried on a *regular course of Gaming*. Books, learning and science, character and virtue, are here bartered for cards and dice. The money, given by the parent as the means of supporting the honourable education of his child, earned with his own toil, and often spared from his own comfort, is ungratefully hazarded, fraudulently won, and foolishly lost. Here the spirit of sharpening and dishonesty commences : and the fair mind is darkened with the stains of hell.

The thoughts become gloomy ; the temper morose ; the purposes base ; the character despicable ; the life gross with turpitude ; the man hostile to every thing which is good ; and the hope of immortality lost in eternal night.

Finally. In these chambers of death commence habits of *intoxication*. Strong drink here becomes, in a sense, necessary to sustain the riot ; to restore the decaying spirits ; to drown the remembrance of his loss ; to renew the oath and the curse ; to invigorate licentiousness ; and universally to keep up the tone of sin. Example, in this case as in others, the serpent, which charms its miserable victim to the jaws of ruin ; the magician, which enchants all the rational powers, and benumbs the conscience with eternal sleep ; draws the wretched culprit onward from sin to sin, until he crosses the irremediable limit of hopeless transgression, and is lost forever. Fixed beyond recall in iniquity ; judicially hardened ; he henceforth reels onward to the grave and to the judgment. Such are the characteristics, such the pursuits and such the end, of sloth in a Seminary of Learning.

All these persons by the courses of vice, which they voluntarily pursue, are driven also to others. These courses, in many ways, in a sense compel them to be disorderly in their attendance upon their collegiate duties. They are absent from their recitations, from prayers, and from public worship. For these transgressions they are obliged to invent excuses ; true, perhaps at first, in some respects, and as they are capable of being understood ; but certainly false, as they are *intended* to be understood. Here the youth sometimes begins, and, if he has already begun, always strengthens, the spirit of prevarication. Here he loses the high reverence for truth which this eminently sacred object demands of every child of *Adam*. Here he chills the susceptibility of conscience ; that apprehensiveness of guilt, under which the soul thrills with an electrical alarm, whenever temptation and sin are presented to its eye, and which is the first and chief security against transgression, inwoven into the constitution of our nature. Here he learns to look at falsehood with an eye



less and less trembling, until it becomes cool, steady, and satisfied. Finally, here the *habit* of falshood is often riveted; and the melancholy career begun, which ends only in perdition.

At the same time, the idleness, the profaneness, the riot, and the gambling, compel the Instructors, if they have sufficient integrity to discharge the duties of their office faithfully, to animadvert in various modes upon his conduct. He is reprov'd, warn'd, and rebuked. This rouses his resentment; awakens a spirit of revenge; and prompts him to new and more violent perpetrations. He is then formally and solemnly *censured*. The same spirit, stung into new hostility, endeavours to reek its resentment in new crimes. Detected again, he is finally sent away, with disgrace to himself, and extreme mortification to his parents.

Into the world he carries nothing, but wasted time; abused talents; an empty mind, shrunk by sloth and polluted with vice; and a life, in which conscience finds nothing to approve, and God sees every thing to condemn. His habits have now become too fixed to permit any reasonable hope of a change for the better. Knowledge he has none, to qualify him for those kinds of business, for which learning and science are the indispensable preparation. Study he cannot; because his idleness in these walls has rendered the employment loathsome. For active business of every kind, he is unfitted, both by his ignorance and his inclination. He, who has been idle here, will ordinarily be idle wherever he is: and he, who has spent so much of life in sedentary idleness, is peculiarly disqualified for the exertions of activity. Besides, he leaves this place under a cloud. He has acted in such a manner, as to be driven from these walls. The reason, whatever it may be, will always be believed to have been an unhappy one for him; and usually will be the true one. The subject has been so long under the eye of the public, and has been so often illustrated in the experience of ages, that it is well understood by the community at large. All men know that vice is the regular object of collegiate censures: and most men entirely believe, what thirty years experience enables me to know, that idleness is that bitter and prolific stem, of which all rank and poison-

ous vices are the fruits. Of twenty students who leave this Seminary in disgrace, nineteen are ruined by sloth. So long, and so regularly has this been the fact, that it is in a sense proverbially as well as generally known.

With these stains upon his character the miserable youth enters the world. The course, by which alone he can recover a decent reputation, is all ascending, steep, and difficult. Who can wonder, that to him habitually slothful and vicious it should seem too long and too hard, to be resolutely encountered. Sloth, according to ancient fable, had charms even for *Hercules*. What must be its power over a youth, who was fascinated by it at first, and has regularly chosen for a succession of years to bow himself under the yoke, without opposition or reluctance. Hardly ever are the exertions made, which, in the case before us, are indispensable to success. Idle here, he is idle every where. Vicious here, he is vicious through life. Without reputation here, disgrace accompanies him to the grave.

As he is useless to mankind; it cannot be supposed, that they will regard him either with esteem or affection; or that they will take any measures to render his life pleasant. But he is not merely useless. He is a common nuisance. Too indolent to provide for himself an honest subsistence, he is obliged, if he subsist at all, to derive the means from a succession of tricks and frauds; or to receive them from the hand of charity. His character at the same time is contemptible, and his example contagious and baleful. Of course, he becomes an object on the one hand of contempt, on the other of loathing. Want, with shrivelled cheeks, and haggard eyes stares him in the face wherever he goes. Wherever he goes, he is followed by the finger of scorn, the jeer of derision, and the hiss of infamy.

In the mean time he has a soul; and, in spite of his sloth and his wishes, is accountable and immortal. He, who is idle in his temporal concerns, will be lazy in those which are spiritual. In the case before us, vice, of many kinds and in gross degrees, combines with riveted sloth, to render the work of salvation doubly difficult. To a slothful mind the way to eternal life is

full of obstacles ; steep ; rough ; hard of ascent ; immeasurably long ; solitary ; and doubtful in its termination. On all these accounts it is forbidding ; full of discouragements ; full of toil ; devoid of comfort ; devoid of hope. To a vicious mind it is disgusting in itself. Such a mind regards the business of obtaining salvation as an odious, painful employment ; all the parts of which it considers only with disgust. Equally disagreeable to such a mind is the salvation itself. It sees nothing in eternal life worth the possession ; much less worth the labour of attainment. All the disadvantages, therefore, under which man labours with respect to this mighty concern, combine their influence to prevent this man from securing the glorious acquisition, and to shut him out of heaven.

On such a man it cannot be expected that God will smile. He, who will do nothing for himself or his fellowmen ; who only devours what they earn ; and who lives to no end, but to sin, and to make others sin ; he who does nothing for the Author of his being ; but violates his precepts, abuses his grace, and dishonours his name, through life : can certainly expect no favour from God. We know the end, as well as the character, of *the servant who wrapped his talent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth*. How much less guilty was he, than most of those whose character has been described in this discourse. What then can these persons expect, but to be given over to premature hardness of heart, and blindness of mind ? Useless and noxious only, while they live in the present world, what can they hope, but to be miserable in that which is to come. *Wicked and slothful* here, they will of course, with all the other wicked and slothful, be there *bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth*.

It is remarkable, that this useless, worthless, wretched being, throughout all the parts of this deplorable progress, hugs himself upon his superiour wisdom. This strange union of self-complacency with folly and vice, has not escaped the observation of that profound investigator of the human character ; *the author of the Book of Proverbs*. “The sluggard,” says he,

“is wiser in his own conceit, than seven men who can render a reason.” In *this* Seminary, and probably in others, he always pronounces himself *a genius* ; vain of his talents, priding himself particularly in his sagacity, and looking with contempt on his industrious companions, although commonly superiour to him in every valuable endowment as well as attainment. This silly dream of his own shrewdness passes with him through life ; and, with all his rags, and shame, and sin, he thinks himself wiser than any of those around him.

We are now prepared to sum up the account. The idle member of this Seminary enjoys what pleasure he can, in sloth, in dress, in visiting, in vicious company ; in profaneness, gaming, drinking, and riot. On the other hand, he is ignorant, pitied, despised, and punished. At the same time he imbibes and rivets habits of vice, which cling to him through life. Into the world he enters with the same pleasures, continually lessening indeed, together with the means of them ; until at a period not very distant, he can enjoy them no more. Thither vice and shame follow him. His character, *here* broken, is *there* lost. Poverty, contempt, and disgrace, seize upon him as their prey. By good men he is pitied ; by bad men despised ; and by both regarded with reprobation. Parents point him out to their children, as a warning against sloth and sin : and the Providence of God holds him out to mankind for general instruction as a wretched monument of abused talents and neglected privileges. He lives undesired. He dies unlamented. For eternity he makes no preparation ; and enters it with no hope. “He, that hath an ear to hear, let him hear.”

## SERMON IX.

THE DANGER OF FREQUENTING EVIL COMPANY.—SERMON I.



PROVERBS xiii. 20.

*But a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*

THE writer of this book particularly, and the Scriptural writers generally, teach us, that by *folly* they mean *sin*. Thus *Solomon* observes, that *the thought of foolishness is sin*. “Fools,” he also says, “despise wisdom;” that is, religion; “and make a mock at sin:” a character, which with particular propriety belongs to gross sinners. Such sinners seem, also, to be especially intended in the following declaration; “It is an abomination to fools to depart from evil.” It is hardly necessary to observe, that all these passages clearly teach us, as indeed do many others, that the writer of them by folly intended sin, and by fools those who practise it.

The propriety of this use of these terms is obvious. Sin is folly by way of eminence, and those, who practise it, are fools in a higher degree, than any other men.

With this explanation, the text may be easily seen to contain the following Doctrine: *He, who frequents the company of sinners, is in danger of eternal destruction.*

The declaration of the text is absolute; but, like other absolute declarations, of which the Scriptures, particularly this book, contain a very great number, is intended to be understood with some qualifications. It is not true, that every one, who frequents the company of sinners is destroyed in any sense. Some persons keep company with men of this description for a considerable period; and then renounce it, from a conviction of their

danger. Of these, undoubtedly some become pious ; and escape the destruction intended in the text. Others, also, are compelled to frequent such company by their own proper, lawful business ; and instead of being corrupted, regard their companions with loathing and dread ; and derive from them little else, beside warning and amendment. The case, however, considered in the general manner, which is here supposed, is far otherwise. The greater number, and all, who voluntarily choose such company through life, are ruined. Every one, therefore, ought to believe himself to be in the most serious danger.

That eternal destruction is here designed is too clear to admit of a question. Otherwise the observation is so evidently untrue, that it could never have been written by a sober man. Many of the persons, spoken of, undoubtedly come, from this very cause, to an untimely death. Some are killed in duels. Some sink under the pressure of infamy. Some become suicides. Multitudes are victims to intemperance ; and not a small number are swept away by the hand of public justice. Still, it is not generally true, that such persons do not, very commonly, reach the usual limit of human life. Evidently, therefore, the destruction here specified cannot have been of a temporal nature ; but lies undoubtedly, beyond the grave.

This sentence was uttered by the wisest man who has hitherto been found in the present world ; a man, pecuniary versed in the affairs of his fellow men ; a man, who watched human conduct with a more critical attention, than any other, and with a more piercing eye ; whose observations concerning it are more just, various, and profound, than any, which are left upon record. It was uttered, after he had lived long, and seen its truth proved by abundant experience. It was uttered by the Spirit of God, who had surveyed all the conduct of *men* from the beginning, and had seen this truth verified in innumerable instances, in every nation, and in every preceding age, of the world. It was uttered by the judge of all the earth ; *who both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth the transgressor*, with the very destruction, denounced in this solemn and benevolent warning. The truth of the declaration is, therefore, established beyond every doubt.

Still, it may be useful to examine the subject, as it is presented to us by experience. Illustrations from this source may always be advantageously subjoined to Scriptural declarations. What we see we are apt peculiarly to feel. Our conviction may not, perhaps, be more complete; but our impressions cannot fail of being enhanced.

In illustration of this doctrine, I observe, therefore,

1st. *Sinners, when they become Companions, devise wickedness for each other.*

Different persons see the same subjects in different lights, and on different sides. Some sinners turn their thoughts to wickedness in one form. Others survey it in another. The views of the whole number, found in any collection of such men, are much more extensive, various, and complete, than the views of an individual. All these by communication become, in the end, the views of all. Thus in the unhappily managed State prisons of this country the youngest criminal, after a short confinement, acquires all the knowledge, art, and skill, of all the hackneyed villains who are his fellow prisoners; and is turned out upon the world a veteran in adroitness, in determination, and in hopeless obduracy.

So at the gaming table all the tricks of play, all the arts of sharpening and defrauding, are soon learned even by the youngest adventurer. In the same manner the companions of thieves, highwaymen, forgers, and coiners of false money, soon imbibe all the arts of the oldest transgressors. In a similar manner also, those, who frequent the haunts of lewdness, and intemperance, become practised votaries to these sins; and, as guides, direct the unhappy novice to the successful perpetration of their respective crimes, and to the scenes of guilt and pollution, in which they are ensnared and destroyed.

Nor is even this all. In a great multitude of cases they invent new kinds of wickedness; new ways, in which that, which has been long pursued, may be safely and advantageously practised; new modes of providing against the evils of detection; and new

barriers against the intrusion or the resentment of parents, magistrates, and others who may be especially dreaded.

Thus multitudes of crimes are devised and perpetrated, which owe their existence solely to the fact that the criminals kept company with each other.

Hence it is often said by the wretch, who has been discovered in the commission of gross sins, "I should never have thought of doing such a thing, had I not been in that place, or in that company."

2dly. *Sinners by being companions encourage each other to sin.* In the first place, *by Example.*

Mankind are creatures of imitation. The propensity to imitate is conspicuous even in infancy, but much more in early childhood. Children then scarcely do any thing, but what they see others do; and attempt to do almost every thing, which they see done by others. This original characteristic of our nature is never lost. All men imitate much through life: and many do little else. Not a small portion even of virtuous conduct owes its existence to this cause, while sins are multiplied by it without end.

To sin we are prone by nature. The sight of sin, therefore, in the example of others leads us by mere social impulse to the commission. Nor is this all. The example emboldens, nay it prompts, us to follow. We feel an ambition to resemble our companions, and to rival them in whatever they do. At the same time, the guilt and the danger gradually lessen in our apprehension. On the one hand, they become familiar by being frequently presented to our view; and, on the other, are little felt by the hardened beings, who sin continually before our eyes. Thus both become less, and less; until they are finally forgotten.

Secondly. *Sinful companions encourage each other to sin by Arguments.*

Older and more shrewd, perpetrators have long been obliged to consider, extensively, the means of quieting the soul under the consciousness of guilt, and the apprehensions of danger. All the arts of self justification, and self flattery, and all the



means of resisting the force of arguments against their practices, they have been compelled to explore and adopt. To these refuges they have been often driven, and have thus rendered them familiar. They have found them necessary to themselves; and therefore know that they will be useful to others. Hence they bring them out on every occasion, to quiet the scruples, and sustain the trembling hearts, of young beginners.

To these adepts in iniquity, also, every advantage, arising from the commission of the sin in question, is at hand; and such advantages they fail not to exhibit in the fairest colours. The disadvantages, at the same time, whether real or pretended, which may spring from not committing the crime, and losing the favorable opportunity, and from obeying the dictates of conscience, they know how to set forth in lights equally strong and affecting; and thus place the unskilful adventurer on enchanted ground; where every thing wears a false form, and deceitful hue.

Thirdly. *Such companions encourage others to sin by Exhortations.*

Every passion is addressed by these men, from which they expect any aid. The fears of novices are attacked on the one hand; their resolution, on the other. Their sympathy is awakened. The obligation of being faithful to the fraternity is urged. Their cowardice is censured. Their courage is praised. Their hopes are stimulated. They are promised esteem, honour, and rewards. They are threatened with contempt, desertion, discovery, and punishment. Like the Philistines, when they fought against the ark of God, these modern enemies of his cross and kingdom, mutually cry, "Be strong, and quit yourselves like men."

Fourthly. *Such sinners encourage each other to sin by Flattery.*

No persons so industriously labour to find out the weak side of others as hardened sinners: and none more usually succeed. To this they address themselves with a power, not easily resisted. All the qualities, for which they see their young companions value themselves, they enhance. Those, of which they are ashamed, they either soften, or annihilate. To their persons

they profess an ardent friendship ; to their interests, a fixed attachment. They stimulate their hopes ; commend their efforts ; prefer them to their rivals ; and praise the spirit and ingenuity, which they discover in the commission of crimes.

To these persons, in the character of friends, the novice has united himself as a companion. Their esteem, therefore, and their good will, are by this very union invested with high importance. To stand well with them, is often thought to be an enviable distinction : and whatever they say makes of course a dangerous impression on the inexperienced heart. To their example, their arguments, their exhortations, and their flatteries, the novice in iniquity submits at first with little resistance ; and ultimately yields himself up without a struggle.

Fifthly. *Sinners encourage their companions to sin by Ridicule.*

*Fools*, we are informed, *make a mock at sin* ; and, it may be added with truth, at virtue also. Against both these great objects, and every thing connected with them, is the ridicule of such men assiduously directed. As far as is in their power, they laugh religion, duty, the Christian character, parental authority, parental tenderness, filial piety and conscientiousness, the denunciations of the Scriptures, a future retribution, and, in a word, all serious thoughts, persons, and things, out of countenance. To overcome the stripling's reluctance to any sin, they tell him, that he has done other things which were as bad, or worse ; and that it is contemptible to stagger at small things after he has perpetrated greater. At his scruples they sneer. At his apprehensions they smile. Detection, they assure him, is impossible ; or, at least, incredible ; and punishment and perdition, mere tales of wonder, repeated with no other design, than to frighten children away from pleasure. They further inform him, that, whatever may be true of some sins, that, which is proposed by them in any given case, is either no sin at all, or a mere trifle undeserving of the least serious regard. At the same time they hiss at all the cautions, warnings and injunctions, of parents, ministers and magistrates, as mere bugbears ; believed by none of those who utter them, and employed merely to compel the obedience of the

young and ignorant, and make the task of governing easy to themselves. All things of this nature they declare have never been believed, except by children and fools: while all wise and sagacious men have derided them from the beginning. Weak and silly people, they observe, have always been priest-ridden, and conscience-ridden: just as they have believed in dreams, and trembled at ghosts and spectres: while men of sense have laughed at them all; and, boldly challenging their own rights, have with a noble independence of mind turned all these goblins out of doors, and seized resolutely upon the genuine pleasures of life. These and the like things, uttered in the language of sneer, and with airs of contempt and derision, are usually taught with a sure and controlling efficacy. Few, even among *men*, are proof against the shafts of ridicule. We cannot wonder, that *youths* should become an easy prey.

3dly. *Sinners communicate the Spirit of sinning to each other.*

The love of sin exists in every child of *Adam* as a powerful propensity; and by means of the social, sympathetic spirit of man is easily set on fire. Whatever things are thus told, the heart is prepared to believe, because it wishes to believe them. The snare is ventured upon, because it is pleasant. The temptation is the apple of the Manchineel; beautiful to the eye, fragrant to the smell, and delightful to the taste; but conveying a deadly poison to the veins. It is the song of the Sirens; charming the heedless mariner to shipwreck, on the fatal shore. It is the cup of Circe; delighting the palate with its sweets; but changing him who drinks of it, into a brute. In the midst of companions; amid gaiety, sport, mutual encouragements, and mutual solicitations, it becomes a spell; enchants the eye; and fascinates the heart. Cast your eyes upon a mob. What has called them together? What has roused their passions? What has generated their violences? Not one in a hundred can answer these questions. Some trifling cause of no moment gathered, perhaps, a little cluster at first. Others joined them, merely because they saw this collection. Then others, and others still, till, finally, we see them become a multitude. Some then

cry one thing, and some another ; as at Ephesus in the time of the Apostles ; “ for the assembly is confused, and the greater part know not wherefore they have come together.” Yet the passions rage ; the soul is set on fire ; and acts of violence, which none of them, separately, would have perpetrated or even devised, are done, merely because the spark in one bosom was caught by another, and another ; and the flame broke out with the fury of a conflagration.

In a manner, generally corresponding with this, the sympathetic spirit in evil companions spreads from breast to breast ; and becomes more vigorous by every interchange. Under its influence all help each other to sin ; and, taking each other by the hand, are mutually led onward to perdition.

4thly. *While sinners are employed in the company of each other, they lose all the benefit, which they might have derived from better instructions, examples, and motives.*

This at the first glance may seem a trifling loss. A little reflection will prove it to be incalculable. A youth in this seminary would hardly think himself censurable, much less believe himself in danger of suffering any serious evil, from spending *one hour of the twenty-four* in what he, perhaps, would call agreeable company, but what is, in truth, too often the very company, which I have described. Yet this would amount to at least *a twelfth part* of the whole time, customarily devoted to the business of life by very industrious men ; and probably to at least *a sixth* of what such a youth would employ in this manner. Of his proper time for business therefore, it would occupy *two months* every year. But if he spend *one hour* at the beginning, he will soon consume *three* ; or *half* the busy time of the year ; and by obvious consequence *half* of the busy period of his own life. When we subduct the seasons of sleep, of our meals, of our exercise, of our occupation in nameless, trifling pursuits, the remainder will be found much less than any man, who has not calculated with exactness, would be persuaded to believe. The portion of time, devoted to such company, therefore, soon becomes a formidable consideration by its amount.

But, when such company has been frequented for a season, it is often, and in the ordinary course of things usually, frequented with little intermission. Look at those people, who resort to *Smiths' shops*, hang about corners, and lounge in markets; and you will find them almost always at their post, wasting away life in laziness and sin. There is scarcely a habit, which is more powerful, or more absolutely immoveable.

From this source there is always much time, often the greatest part, and sometimes the whole, of that which we can devote to the great concerns of life, lost either in the company itself, or in anticipating, or remembering, the conversation, the conduct, and the sin. By a wise employment of these seasons, the useful business of life might be effectually accomplished; ample provision made for its comfort; an honourable reputation acquired; the Bible read; the closet frequented; the moral state of the man explored and understood, by a faithful employment of the great duty of self-examination; the best resolutions formed; the best courses of life pursued; and the soul secured in a title to eternal life. What a difference in the modes of life, in the character, and in the destiny of the man?

5thly. *In this manner sinners exclude themselves from better company.*

Men of worth, who are of course men of reputation, are, from mere self-defence, obliged to refuse the company of those, who are often found with the gross and profligate. At the same time, they reject all familiar intercourse with such men from disgust; from the mere influence of taste; and shun it from a sense of duty, and from a prudent regard to their own safety. Every person may unite himself to the society of the wise and good, if he pleases; but he must resort to no other. If he betakes himself to evil companions; they will soon be of necessity his only companions.

The first clause in the verse, from which the text is taken, is; "He, that walketh with wise men, shall be wise." Consider for a moment the nature, the value, and the extent, of this declaration. Think what it is to be wise in the sense of the Scriptures:

to be approved by GOD ; and to be accepted by him beyond the grave. Then, ponder the loss incurred by those, who either cannot, or will not, walk with wise men.

But this immense benefit is voluntarily renounced, and finally lost, by *the companion of fools*. Their instructions, their admonitions, their reproofs, their example, the wisdom which they utter, and the virtue which they exhibit, he relinquishes for the profaneness, the sophistry, the falsehood, and the profligacy, of his companions in sin. In a word, he loses all the good, and suffers all the evil, which men usually do to each other.

In these several ways, sinners by frequenting each others company advance faster, than they otherwise could advance, in iniquity of every kind. Each encourages his companion in sin ; and strengthens the heart and the hands to every guilty perpetration.

From their first introduction to evil companions, and their first resort to the places where they are found, endless multitudes date all their predominant sinful desires, all their gross crimes, and all their fatal habits. In such resorts *drunkenness* almost invariably begins to form and rivet its dominion over man ; and commences the Circean process of changing him into a brute. No man becomes a drunkard in his closet. Companions are necessary to begin this sin in all men. At the social board, and amidst gay and festive companions, is the taste for strong drink created ; and here only is it converted from a relish into a habit. The sight of others, the example of others, the sympathy roused by the company of others, only, can persuade men to drown property, health, reason, reputation, and life, in a cup ; or to bury conscience, duty, hope, and salvation, in the mire of swine.

Here the young, unguarded victim first begins the thought, the admission, the course and the habit of *fraud* ; and the pursuit of those gratifications, which in his view render the fraud necessary. Here the frequency of fraud becomes the means of subduing the reproofs of conscience. Here in the progress of sin, the miserable wretch of a cheat becomes a thief ; and prepares himself alike for the jail, the gibbet, and the world of perdition.

In these retreats *profaneness* establishes her malignant dominion, and reigns with a fatal control, over all her slaves. Here they learn with trembling lips, and an aching heart, the lisping, infantine oath; the babbling curse; and the stammering profanation of *that glorious and fearful name, JEHOVAH OUR GOD*. No man ever began to swear profanely, alone. The language would be senseless; and destitute even of that little pleasure, which is found in being profane before others. Like the small pox, or the plague, this disease of the soul is derived from contagion; and is caught only by approaching those who are infected.

In the same dangerous recesses, also, is commenced and established the deplorable sin of *lewdness*. Here pollution holds her revels; and sees before her Paphian shrine the young, the unthinking, the comparatively innocent, led *like the filleted Ox to the slaughter*. Here the rude jest, the impure innuendo, the artful argument, the sly sneer, the strong temptation, safety from the danger of detection, and a host of crimes, are contrived, provided, encouraged and accomplished, amid the countenance and with the example of numbers, in the sequestered retirements of darkness and sin. Here *the simple, the young men void of understanding*, enter the by-way to hell; and *go down to the chambers of death*. *None, that go in hither, return again; neither take they hold of the paths of life*.

Amongst such companions, in a word, every sacred consideration is set at naught, the Scriptures are laughed to scorn; and Heaven is with supreme contempt bartered for a jest. Hell at the same time, is here hazarded for a momentary gratification of sense; and God formally defied to do the worst in his power. By such companions all the influence of a religious education, the force of reproof, the supreme tenderness of parental exhortation, the power of preaching, the cogency of argument, the friendly admonitions and awful alarms of conscience, and the infinite motives presented to the mind in the Word of God; are annihilated. Here, serious reflections are gradually and finally withdrawn; resolutions of amendment are palsied, and die; and every intention,

and every hope, of returning to God, escaping perdition, and obtaining everlasting life, is buried in the grave.

The poor, unhappy wretches, like the infatuated *Trojans* on the evening preceding the day of their final destruction, assemble with all the cheerfulness of hope, the gaiety of triumph, and the songs and garlands of a festival, around the engines of their ruin; and dance, and revel and riot, on the brink of the eternal grave. Daily *waxing worse and worse*, they soon bid adieu to conscience, to remorse and to hope, and become more and more tainted, diseased and putrid, till death knocks at the door, and summons them to the judgment. Loaded with sin; without an interest in the Redeemer; without a prayer offered, or a wish exercised, for the mercy of a forgiving God; their *spirits ascend to Him, who gave them, to have every work, and every secret thing, brought into judgment*. Then all the enormous crimes, perpetrated in these hidden retreats of iniquity, will be exposed in open day; *and set in order before their eyes. That, which has been spoken in the ear, will then be proclaimed on the house top*; and that which has been perpetrated in solitude and darkness, rehearsed in the great congregation. *The Judge of the quick and the dead* will then uncover all these recesses of sin; and their profaneness, falsehood, fraud, drunkenness and lewdness, pass in review before the assembled Universe.

How mightily will the scene then be changed! When their efforts at mutual corruption, when the crimes to which they have seduced each other, are *set in the light of God's countenance*; far other views will be formed by them concerning their conduct than those which they so eagerly cherished here. When, in their last account, they come to recite the contrivances, deceits, encouragements and examples, with which they have become mutual corrupters; and when these things become the foundation of their final sentence; how will they tremble and shrink at the tremendous prospect of the very things, in which they gloried amid the gaiety, the riot, the tempest, of their perpetrations here below! But all these things will rise up before them in judgment. On *them*, the final sentence will be founded; and for *them* they will be hurried away to *the blackness of darkness forever*.



## SERMON X.

THE DANGER OF FREQUENTING EVIL COMPANY.—SERMON II.



PROVERBS XIII. 30.

*But a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*

IN the preceding discourse, after explaining the text, I derived from it the following Doctrine :

*He, who frequents the company of Sinners, is in danger of eternal destruction.*

This doctrine I then illustrated by various considerations.

I will now conclude the discourse with some practical

### REMARKS.

1st. *From these observations we learn, that sinful companions are real and dangerous enemies.*

They profess, indeed, and often with fair pretences, strong declarations, and many seeming acts of goodwill, to be sincere and ardent friends to those, whom they corrupt and destroy. Nay they are frequently, and in an advanced stage of degeneracy always, believed to be the faithful and the only friends of the victim. Their efforts to please are often more direct, open, active and persuasive, than those of real friends. A studied and specious accordance with the passions, wishes and purposes, of those, whom they ensnare, invests them with a peculiarly pleasing and desirable character, to the inexperienced and ignorant eye of every youth. Where real friends advise, *they* only accord. Where real friends alarm, *they* sooth. Where real friends reprove, *they* flatter. And thus, where real friends become dread-

ed, and in the end hated, they become endeared, delightful, and at last necessary to the apprehended good of those, whom they destroy.

All this, however strange it may seem at the first view, is easily explicable. Every vicious person, however proud and vain he may be, is secretly conscious that he is destitute of any real worth; and feels, that his claims either to respect or affection, are at the best doubtful, and will be questioned. To these claims, therefore, he is unwilling to trust, for reputation, good will, or good offices. If he is to have friends, therefore, or admirers; he knows, that he must make them. Satisfied, that they will not follow *him*, he determines to follow *them*. The esteem and attachment, which he cannot command, he resolves to allure. The kind offices, which he cannot claim, he labours to win. For worth, which he has not, he endeavors to substitute assiduous civility; for amiableness, a pleasing deportment; and for usefulness, flattery. Thus, although he cannot become estimable, he supplies, and often more than supplies, the deficiency by the diligence with which he seeks to promote the pleasure, encourage the hopes, awaken the vanity, foster the wishes, and promote the purposes, of those to whom he attaches himself. In this manner he is but too commonly successful; and finds the subject of his imposition willing to mistake agreeableness for worth, and sedulity for friendship. Men of real worth, on the contrary, usually expect that their friendship will be coveted, and their good offices sought. They know the value of these things; and naturally expect that it will be known by others. Their friendship is therefore rarely offered; and, if obtained at all, is almost always solicited.

Let it not be supposed, that, because I mention this fact, I therefore approve of the conduct. In many cases it is certainly unhappy. Not a small number of youths have in all probability been ruined, who might have been saved, had wisdom and virtue taken them seasonably by the hand, and not left them to be practised upon by the arts of cunning, and profligacy.

But real friends are those, who, whether pleasing or unpleasing, design, and do, us real good. Let me exhort the youths in

this congregation to remember, and to feel, this interesting truth. Who else can deserve the name of friends? What else can be the value of friendship? But these wicked companions, instead of seeking your good, aim at your ruin. When, therefore, they profess themselves your friends; the profession is false and hollow. It is true indeed, that they are destroying *themselves*, at the same time. But in what respect will *their* destruction benefit you? Will *their* sins render *yours* less guilty? Will *their* perdition render *yours* less dreadful? Will it be any consolation to you in the regions of despair, that those, who were here your companions in crimes, are there your companions in misery?

The man, who in this world voluntarily destroys, or even injures, any valuable interest of his neighbour, is esteemed by mankind, and by you as truly as by others, an enemy. These persons aim at a far more comprehensive injury; and accomplish an infinitely wider ruin; with the scythe of death they cut down soul and body, life and immortality; and leave nothing behind.

2dly. *What an image does a company of sinners, thus resorting together, present to a sober mind!*

Were prophets of God, were even honest historians, to describe with a faithful hand the scenes of iniquity; were they faithfully to pourtray the characters, and relate the actions, which take place in the dark retreats, in which these persons customarily assemble; what, think you, would be the appearance of the portrait? Unfortunately for the young, the gay, the giddy, no such historians are found, to present to them this dreadful picture, as a solemn annunciation of what they will one day become by frequenting evil company; as a powerful antidote to all the communications and examples, the arts and treacheries, by which they are so often seduced. From analogy and conjecture only, can sober men, in ordinary circumstances, learn the nature of those transactions, which in many instances take place in these recesses of iniquity.

But even analogy and conjecture, when joined with such facts, as could not escape detection, furnish sufficient information concerning the character and conduct of these men to alarm the

stoutest heart, and daunt the firmest eye, of the young adventurer in sin ; if he has not already swallowed the bait, and been so effectually fastened by the barb, as to be beyond the hope of escaping.

Who are *the persons*, that thus consort together ? They are enemies to God, enemies to mankind, enemies to each other, and enemies to themselves. It is true, they profess to be mutual friends. But *Judas* was not less an enemy to Christ, because he approached him with a kiss. Their real character is seen in the fact, that they seek each others ruin. They are all gross sinners, except such young, new, unpractised victims, as they have seduced to their company for the purpose of destroying them forever. They have renounced virtue, principle, conscience and reputation ; and have given themselves up to passion and appetite, to sense and sin.

What is *the place*, in which they have assembled ? It is a solitude, from which every human foot is excluded, beside that of themselves, and that of the pander by whom all the conveniences of iniquity are provided to their hand : a cell, from which the eye of their own parents, of all virtuous, of all sober, nay of all decent, men is shut out : an outer chamber of perdition ; where themselves train up each other for final ruin, and where, if they could open their eyes, they would see a collection of fiends hovering over them, and hailing with a malignant smile their profligacy, and their approaching destruction.

What is *the season*, at which they are assembled ? It is the dark and silent hour of temptation : the season, when midnight veils their crimes from all but the eye of God ; when imagination is on fire ; when passion is excited to delirium ; when conscience is asleep ; and when the sense of safety from detection emboldens even the timid heart of the novice to every perpetration.

What are *the purposes*, for which they are gathered ? To give temptation its most alluring form, its most seductive language, and its most fatal efficacy ; to perpetrate crimes, which shrink from the eye of day ; to make rebellion against their Maker convenient, safe and pleasant ; to blot out of remembrance all mo-

tives to repentance and reformation ; to extinguish mutually, and finally, the hope of heaven ; and to help each other onward towards hell.

What is *the language*, which is here uttered ? It is the obscene jest ; the tainted narrative of pollution ; the lewd song ; the false recital ; the hypocritical profession ; the treacherous promise ; the impious oath ; the malignant curse ; and the tremendous blasphemy. In a word, it is the language of hell ; learned, and practised, against their arrival at that world of sin.

What are *the practices*, which are found in these strong holds of Satan ? These are endlessly various, as well as enormously guilty : for here *iniquity is drunk like water*. Here are practised all the frauds of the gaming-table, amid that host of vices by which it is regularly surrounded : and art and trick here rob the silly novice of his property as effectually, as the pistol or the dagger. Here the theft and the robbery are projected, and matured. Here the swindler is formed, and educated ; the forgery nicely finished, so as to escape the most critical eye ; the coin falsified ; the man changed into a brute by drunkenness ; and the soul by a course of impurity converted into a *Sodom*.

What is *their end* ? Poverty, shame and ruin, in this world ; death without hope, judgment without mercy, and misery without mixture or termination, in that which is to come.

3dly. *Let me urge those, who hear me, to shun evil companions.*

If God is true ; they will ruin you forever. That good should be derived from them is impossible. That immense evil will be, is certain. Every injury is to be regularly expected from them ; and every means of perdition is continually employed by them with a sure and dreadful efficacy. In their company temptations are contrived and presented, which the young, ignorant and inexperienced, victims of their influence would elsewhere never have found ; and sins proposed and committed, of which elsewhere they never would have formed a conception. Hence they contract, here, a pollution, a debasement, a degeneracy, a preparation for eternal death, which elsewhere they would finally have escaped.

To Youths, let it be remembered, these observations are peculiarly applicable. Youth is the most innocent, comparatively the safest, and clearly the best, season of human life for all religious purposes ; and for the consummation of them all, the attainment of endless glory. But youths are more inexperienced, more unguarded, more thoughtless of danger, and of course more naturally exposed to corruption from without, than men of superiour years and discretion. Youths discern less readily, less clearly, and less perfectly, the character and the designs of those with whom they consort. To the arts of seduction they are chiefly strangers. Rarely do they suspect those around them, particularly those who wear a plausible appearance, and make a fair profession. They naturally believe in the sincerity of others, because they are themselves sincere : and, as they design nothing but what is kind and well-meant, they easily believe the designs of others to be of the same nature. Particularly the pleasantness, civility, apparent good-will, and agreeable flattery, of their companions are readily admitted by them as proofs of friendly and upright intentions.

Accordingly, *Solomon* in choosing his example, to prove the easiness, power and certain success, of seduction, points us to a Youth. "I beheld," says he, "among the simple ones, I discovered among the youths, a young man void of understanding, passing the street by the corner ; and he went the way to her house. And behold, there met him a woman, with the attire of an harlot, and subtle of heart. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield : with the flattery of her lips, she forced him. He goeth after her, straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or a fool to the correction of the stocks. Till a dart strike through his liver : as a bird hasteth to the snare of the fowler, and knoweth not that it is for his life."

To this scheme his instructions are generally and intentionally conformed throughout the book of Proverbs ; which he says was written, *to give subtlety to the simple, and to the young man knowledge and discretion.*

Youths, then, are in the sight of God thus in danger from evil companions. To this congregation, so generally composed of such as are young, these considerations come home with supreme energy ; and by every youth present, ought to be regarded as of all possible importance.

In these discourses you have heard the dangers of evil company briefly explained, and the miserable consequences of frequenting the retreats where they are found. By the mouth of God himself, you have been taught, that *The companion of fools shall be destroyed.* He is the best of all friends ; the wisest, the most sincere, the most affectionate, the most faithful. With infinite tenderness he loves your souls, and seeks your eternal well-being. Prompted by his unlimited benevolence, and to promote this inestimable object, he wrote for you the salutary, the indispensable, admonition in the text. He cannot but know, he cannot but declare, that, and that only, which is true. His omniscient eye, glancing at once with an intuitive survey over all the nations of the earth, and discerning the nature of all human conduct, saw with perfect certainty the tendency of frequenting evil company ; its malignant influence ; and its dreadful consequences. To warn and to save you, he has caused this affecting declaration to be written in the Scriptures of truth ; and to be brought out this day, in his holy place for your instruction and safety. Hear his voice, I beseech you ; and, while you hear, obey.

To this awful voice Experience joins her suffrage ; and Reason, hers. All mankind, who have spoken on this subject, have spoken only in the same manner. The danger, the ruin, of evil companions have engaged the attention of thinking men in every country, and in every age. "Evil communications," said a Heathen poet and philosopher, "corrupt good manners." "Evil communications corrupt good manners," says the eternal God ; condescending for wise reasons to adopt this just and interesting declaration into the Canon of his word ; with an especial design, perhaps, to show how perfectly accordant the dictates of sober experience and rectified reason are with his own truth.

Can a truth so uttered, so evidenced, fail of being embraced by you? Can you hesitate for a moment to shun a danger so great, an evil so pernicious? Why would you shun a viper? You reply, "because his bite is poisonous and fatal." A sinful companion is infinitely more venomous and deadly. Why would you avoid a precipice? "Because," you answer, "a single heedless step might hurry me to destruction." To a destruction more sure, as being less dreaded, and infinitely more complete, you will be hurried by evil companions. Fly them, therefore, with more anxiety, than you would fly from a viper. Tremble, whenever you approach them, with more dread than you experience, when you approach a precipice. These enemies can destroy your bodies only: those will destroy your souls. Flee from them, therefore, not as you would flee from a temporal enemy, but as you would flee from perdition, and escape from hell. To hell, to perdition, evil companions, if you leave them not, will soon conduct you.

Let me especially warn you of a danger from this source, of which nothing, hitherto said in these discourses, will make you aware, and which, nevertheless, you ought peculiarly to dread. The persons, who will become your first tempters, will very imperfectly sustain the character which I have given of evil companions. Generally, they will be like yourselves; so far, at least, as you will perceive; will sustain a fair reputation; will be free from any gross faults; and will intend, perhaps as little as yourselves, to accomplish any part of this work of temptation and ruin. They will only love pleasure, better than business; and sin, better than duty; as you, possibly, may do even more than they. From such persons you will apprehend no evil; and they probably will intend none. Perhaps *they* may have more to apprehend from *you*, than *you* from *them*. But, wherever this character exists, all, in whom it is found, are in danger; and that the more, because the danger is wholly unsuspected. The beginnings of sin are peculiarly to be dreaded, because the evil is then unseen; and peculiarly to be watched, because it may be easily and certainly avoided. The first thing, commonly done in this case, is to neglect the proper studies of the day; and yield it up,



or a part of it to idleness, sport, and useless conversation. Even this is ordinarily done, at first, with some sincere intentions not to do it again. But the interview is too pleasant, not to be repeated; and at every repetition becomes more pleasant. At every repetition, also, the resolutions of not repeating it again become weaker; till they cease to be formed at all: and the disposition to study declines, till it finally vanishes. Idleness, amusement and dissipation, have now taken possession of the mind; and by insensible degrees established their dominion. The twinges of conscience have become less and less painful, and more and more easily resisted. The reproofs of parents and instructors, having been sustained a few times, become more easily sustained. Excuses, in the mean time, are so often necessary, and so often devised, that the mind becomes ingenious and hackneyed in the business of devising them; and, although often suspected, have been so frequently admitted, that they are considered as a sufficient source of safety in future difficulties and dangers. The loss of reputation, in the mean time, is so gradual, as at no particular period to awaken any serious pain; or to excite even a distant apprehension that it may ever be finally lost. In this manner such companions proceed, and have always proceeded, from idleness, trifling conversation, a waste of time, the abuse of talents, and the sacrifice of privileges, to obscenity; gaming; profaneness; a general course of irreligion; a general desertion of their proper business, and duty; frequently, to excessive drinking; always, to the ruin of their character; and, almost always, to the ruin of their souls.

The commencement of this course is, therefore, the thing, which is to be peculiarly shunned by the youths in this house. Their danger chiefly lies where they apprehend no danger. Their ruin commences, where they feel themselves safe. Neither intends to corrupt, nor to be corrupted; yet both, yet all, are corrupted, and corruptors. Dread, therefore, the first approaches of idleness; of keeping company with the idle; of losing the hours of study; of trifling, and dissipation; as a gulf to which there is no bottom, and out of which, if you fall, you will never rise again.

Almost every youth, who has been ruined in this seminary, within my knowledge, has been ruined in this manner. I speak not of those, who were ruined at home; who entered these walls, tainted with vice; and, spreading their infection through the better and healthier minds of those around them, became nuisances to the institution; a blast to the hopes of parents; and a curse to their children. These persons have at times brought with them, in different gradations, the character, the arts and the corruptions, mentioned in the preceding discourse; and, settling here in unsuspected silence, blighted the harvest of worth, apparently advancing towards full maturity. I speak of such youths, as have come hither with no peculiar corruption; with a reputable freedom from vice; with fair hopes; and with honourable designs. Of these, some have found, here, means and motives, which have operated to their ruin. But probably not more than one, in one hundred of those who have been destroyed, has accomplished the destruction for himself. Left to themselves, unsolicited and unseduced by others, the ninety-nine would, at their return home, have in all probability become the joy of their parents, and blessings to mankind. But here, where so many youths assemble, and where some of course will be of a vicious character, they became the prey of evil companions; and of the sophistry, the arts, and the tricks, which I have described. Let it be remembered, that I have been almost thirty years a resident in this seminary; that I entered it, when a child; and that I continued in it without interruption twelve years; and that a great part of the modes of corruption, mentioned in these discourses, I have personally seen and heard. Nay, not a small number of them have been practised upon *me*. I can, therefore, speak with certainty, as well as with strong feelings, on this subject. Every one of you may rest assured, that I have not mistaken the case, nor any part of it; and that the representation, which I have made, is exactly true, as well as infinitely important.

Shun therefore, every one of you, this course of danger and mischief. Especially shun, because you are in peculiar danger from them, and because resistance here will usually prove a final victory, the first approaches of temptation; the first appearances

of sin ; the first obtrusions of evil companions ; the first sacrifice of your own time ; the first neglect of your daily studies ; the first solicitations to any improper conduct ; and the civilities, flatteries and persuasion, with which they will be attended. Keep *your hours of study* sacred to yourselves : and with invincible firmness preclude every stranger from intruding upon you in *those hours, which God has made sacred.*

Should you be solicited to visit the haunts of sinful pleasure ; of gaming, profaneness, drinking, and obscenity ; consider the solicitor as the enemy of your peace ; who, if not decisively resisted, will rob you of your reputation, blast your hopes of improvement, wound your conscience, pollute your souls, and shut you out of heaven. With persons of this character keep no terms. Their company is baleful : their solicitations are the poison of asps : and every accommodation with them, is only a compromise for your destruction.

4thly. *How anxiously ought parents to prevent their children from frequenting evil company !*

Parents are guardians of their children, appointed by God himself. The trust is supremely solemn and important ; and the thing entrusted of pre-eminent value. What earthly object is more precious than children ? How willingly, how patiently, how perseveringly, with what unbroken, unwearied affection, care and anxiety, do parents labour to promote the safety and prosperity of their beloved offspring ! How cheerfully do they give up their own gratifications, and sacrifice their ease, convenience and comfort ? What does all this prove ? Their intense love to this favourite object. For what is all this done and suffered ? That the well-being of their children may be secured.

But, if this be the great end, aimed at in all these exertions ; they ought certainly to be directed to their true well-being, their everlasting good. To provide for them the pleasures of this world ; to gratify their pride, avarice and sensuality ; to heap up for them enjoyments, which at the end of an idle, empty, momentary life will vanish forever ; and to make no efforts for their endless happiness in the future world ; to take such vast pains to

pamper their bodies, and to neglect their souls, as aliens and outcasts : is folly supreme and immeasurable.

But this endless happiness evil companions will prevent. The very hope of immortal life they will destroy forever. From this incomprehensible danger, then, this final ruin, let these affectionate, these divinely appointed, guardians secure their beloved offspring ; whatever efforts or anxiety it may cost. Let no parent say, that he cannot prevent his children from consorting with such companions. Unquestionably they may be powerfully allured by them ; nay, they may have already become strongly attached to them. They may be deaf to parental remonstrance. They may artfully elude inspection. They may obstinately resist authority. But would any, would all these difficulties persuade a parent to yield them up to *temporal* destruction ? Were it in his power, would he not preserve them from suicide ; whatever exertions, whatever sacrifices, it might cost ? How much more willingly, and perseveringly, ought he to undergo any labour, and make any sacrifice, to save a child from perdition ?

Ordinarily, however, the case is far from being attended with the difficulties here supposed. Let the parents begin their active government of their children with an universal determination to know, at all times where, and with whom, their children are ; and suffer them to frequent no places, and consort with no company, which they themselves do not approve, nor without their permission. Let them warn their children affectionately, and from the beginning, of the immense danger always found, and the fatal evils regularly suffered, by those who are companions of the wicked. Let them allure to their own houses such companions for their children, as will be at once agreeable and safe. Let them make their own company and conversation easy and inviting ; and their fireside cheerful and pleasant ; and let them daily ask God to preserve their children, and crown their own labours in educating them for his service with success. If they faithfully perform these duties ; they will ordinarily find their task easy ; their children safe ; their consciences satisfied ; and their hopes continually brighter, and brighter, of seeing their family united forever in the enjoyment of immortal life.

## SERMON XI.

THE DUTY OF REMEMBERING THE CREATOR IN YOUTH.—SERMON I.



ECCLESIASTES xii. 1.

*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth : while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, " I have no pleasure in them."*

THE writer of this book was, as you know, distinguished above all men for his wisdom, and peculiarly for his knowledge of the character, and business, of men. At the time when it was written, he was advanced in years ; and from his youth had with a keen and scrutinizing eye, watched the character of mankind, and marked carefully the advantages, which accompany a virtuous life, and the evils, which attend a sinful one ; and had derived from this course of observation a collection of the best maxims for the regulation of human conduct, of which mankind have ever heard. The attention of this great man was especially directed to youth ; probably because he knew the importance of that period. He had seen in innumerable instances, that the future character chiefly depended on the instructions given, and the habits established, in the morning of life. His views of this subject he has completely expressed in a single sentence : "Train up a child in the way he should go ; and when he is old he will not depart from it." Hence, he directed his efforts peculiarly to the reformation of youth ; and, as he informs us, wrote the book of Proverbs, or important and pithy moral precepts, to *give the young man knowledge and discretion*. The wisdom and benevolence of such a design need no illustration ; and the book, in which it is here executed, is without a rival.

To the instructions of such a man thus employed, every youth is bound by every obligation to listen with gratitude, veneration, and faithful obedience. To these high and solemn sanctions, furnished by the character of the writer, and to the inestimable value of the instructions themselves, is added the seal of inspiration ; the decision of God, the only wise, and the only good.

In the book of Ecclesiastes this great man forgot not his favorite object ; but, while investigating subjects, mysterious in their nature, incomprehensible in their extent, and immeasurable in their importance, he turned aside, not unfrequently, to resume the direct instruction of youth, and to promote in the most efficacious manner their wisdom and piety. In this chapter particularly, he shows us, that the book of Ecclesiastes, as well as that of Proverbs, was written, primarily, for the young. This chapter is what, in the language of writers of sermons, would be called the practical application, or improvement, of the whole discourse. It commences with the text ; and in this manner shews, that the writer had all along aimed at the benefit of this class of mankind, as a primary object in this book, as well as that of Proverbs. While he has here left a noble example to other moral instructors, and taught them to direct their own labours, extensively, towards the same object, he has also laid the foundation of the strongest claims upon the affection, and respect, of those, whom he has thus made his pupils. There is something peculiarly edifying as well as delightful, in seeing a man so pre-eminent in wisdom, power, splendour and fame, as *Solomon*, and so occupied by the complicated business of a great empire, making the instruction, virtue and happiness, of the young a primary object of his thoughts, and the primary purpose of his writings. It is, still, a much more interesting theme of our recollection, that *the God of the spirits of all flesh* has been pleased, in his own most holy Word, to pursue the same purpose ; to make youth a peculiar object of his gracious attention ; to raise up for them in his Providence so able an Instructor ; and, agreeably to his perfect wisdom, to employ him in communicating these invaluable lessons.

In the text young persons are required to *remember their Creator in the days of their youth*; and before the arrival of those future periods of life, which are here justly styled *evil days*, both because the enjoyments of this life are greatly diminished, and because they are peculiarly unfavourable seasons for securing the enjoyments of a better life. It is my intention in discoursing upon these words,

I. *To explain the Duty, which is here enjoined :*

II. *To suggest several Inducements to the performance of it : and*

III. *To mention several Reasons, which usually prevent it from being performed.*

I. *I shall endeavour summarily to explain this Duty.*

*To remember our Creator is,*

1st. *To make him frequently an object of our thoughts.*

“The wicked,” says *David*, “through the pride of his countenance will not seek after GOD : GOD is not in all his thoughts.” The character of the righteous is, in this respect, of a directly contrary nature ; and is happily expressed by the same excellent man, when he says of himself, “I have set the Lord always before me.” Every day, on every important occasion, and on very many occasions which are not important ; every good man will make GOD the object of his thoughts, and call to mind his character, and his presence. He, who does not this in some good degree, can hardly be said to remember GOD at all.

2dly. *To remember GOD, denotes, that our thoughts concerning him be true, and just ; or, in other words, such as are communicated by his Word and Works.*

To attribute to GOD, when we think of him, qualities, which are not his, and to forget his real character, is not to remember him, but a Being, whom we substitute for him. It may be an idol, *Jupiter, Baal, or Moloch* ; or a being altogether such an one as ourselves ; but certainly it is not JEHOVAH. To remember him is, in the sense of the text, to remember him as he is.

But it is the true character of GOD, to be self-existent, independent, immutable, and eternal, to be present in every place, and to know every thing.

It is the true character of GOD to possess unlimited holiness, justice, wisdom, power, goodness, faithfulness and truth.

It is the character of GOD to be the Creator, Preserver, Proprietor, Ruler, and final cause, of all things.

It is the character of GOD to be the Benefactor, Rewarder, and Judge, of the intelligent universe.

It is the true character of GOD to be the Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, of mankind.

If, therefore, we would perform the duty enjoined in the text : we must ascribe to him in our thoughts all these great and glorious attributes ; must consider him as existing alone, without a rival, without a second ; and we must be able to say, " This GOD is our GOD ;" the object, on which our thoughts dwell *forever and ever*.

3dly. *To remember GOD, in the sense of the text, is to remember him Cordially.*

It is not enough, that GOD should be in our thoughts ; and that our thoughts concerning him should be just and true. These things cannot exist alone. In order to entertain these modes of contemplation concerning GOD in the manner, which has been already directed, it is indispensable, *that our affections harmonize with our thoughts* ; and be intertwined with them, so as to form a part of their very contexture.

Nothing is more plain, than that the Being, who possesses these exalted attributes, ought always to be remembered by us with *supreme Love, Complacency, and Gratitude*. His excellence demands this of us with an obligation, which no virtuous being can resist, and no sinful being deny.

Nor are we less under obligation to remember him with *Reverence*. This affection is demanded of us irresistibly by that union of majesty, purity, and kindness, in which he so extensively manifests himself to the view of his Intelligent creatures.



Equally are we required to remember him with *Admiration*. This religious emotion is every where called for by the wonderful works of his Power and Wisdom, both in Creation and Providence, and peculiarly by the wonders of Redemption. It is an emotion, continually exercised by every good man, when contemplating these marvellous objects ; and appears to have occupied no small part of the time, as well as the thoughts, of *David* : as is abundantly manifested in the Psalms.

4thly. *To remember GOD, in the sense of the text, is also to remember him Practically.*

Every person, inclined, or even willing, to perform this duty, will keep before his eyes the absolute sufficiency of GOD for every great and good purpose ; and his perfect disposition to accomplish that, and that only, which is desirable. What he understands of the divine dispensations he will approve. Where he does not understand he will confide. In this manner he will cherish perpetually a spirit of *Acquiescence* and *Resignation*.

At the same time, he will solemnly call to mind on every occasion that to this universal Creator, Ruler, and Judge, he is entirely accountable for all his moral conduct ; and will keep before his eyes the authority, wisdom, and excellence of his precepts, with a sincere intention cheerfully and faithfully to obey them. This, especially, is what Solomon intended in the text ; and is the end, for which all, that is mentioned above, is to be done. GOD is remembered by us to no valuable purpose, unless we consecrate ourselves to his service, faithfully obey his most holy will, and thus live to the glory of his name.

To remember GOD is the indispensable duty of all men. Still, it is here peculiarly enjoined upon those, who are Young. I will now, therefore,

II. *Suggest to the Young persons in this assembly several Inducements to the performance of it.*

1st. *All the obligations, which require this duty of others, require it of you.*

The duty of remembering GOD commences with our moral agency ; at the moment, when we begin to discern between good

and evil, and are capable of choosing the one, and refusing the other. That GOD has an absolute right to us, and to our services, has been already seen. You will not question, that this right commences with your existence. As little will you doubt the reasonableness of his requiring your services, your absolute need of his favour, or the supreme importance of living to his praise. All these things began with your capacity of understanding them. As soon as you were able to love, fear, and serve GOD, they all became your indispensable duty. In neglecting them you commit many sins ; and fail, so long at least, of performing your duty, and obtaining an interest in his mercy. So long you will be destitute of the blessings, furnished by a pious mind, and of a title to eternal life.

2dly. *Youth is the best season for performing this duty.*

It is the best, *because it is in your possession.* Other seasons may, or may not, arrive. *The accepted time, to every man, is now.* The present day is *the day of salvation.*

It is the best, *because your hearts are more tender, and more susceptible of religious impressions, than they will probably be at any season hereafter.* The susceptibility of the youthful heart is proverbial. Your affections have not, hitherto, been rendered callous by the enervating influence of sensuality ; nor by the numbing power of avarice and ambition. Your sensibility is easily awakened. Your fears are easily roused. Your hopes are naturally vigorous, and your attachments strong. You are much more prone to feel a grateful sense of benefits, than persons, who have long been active in the sordid business of this world ; who have long been accustomed to absorb their thoughts in plans for heaping up money, in making hard bargains, in the intrigues of cunning and mischief, in contending against rivals for place and power, and in hunting after popular applause. The vigour of your minds has not been wasted by a long continued exposure to the infection of voluptuousness. Your hearts in a comparative view have not been hardened by the sophistry of self-justification, and self-flattery. You have not palsied your fears by venturing often to the verge of crimes, by passing over to forbidden ground,

and by finding yourselves still safe, although you have boldly perpetrated iniquity. These are evils, the full effects of which are felt only in later life. They exist, indeed, in you; but with a far less efficacious and triumphant energy, than at more advanced periods. At this time, therefore, and for this reason, you enjoy the most favorable opportunity for turning to GOD, renouncing sin, resisting the influence of temptation, and entering the path to heaven.

It is the best season *because it is, comparatively, unoccupied by other objects*. The cares of this world have hardly begun to engage your attention. The business, to which you are here destined, is all marked out, and methodised to your hands; and can all be done without any intrusion upon those seasons, which are necessary for the purposes of religion. All men have, indeed, at every period of life leisure, really sufficient for these purposes; but, to most, *the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, honours, and pleasures, choke the word*, which might make them wise to salvation, *and render it unfruitful*. But you have ample, known, acknowledged opportunities for reading the word of GOD; religious meditation; learning the state of your own hearts; conversing with persons of piety; frequenting your closets; celebrating the ordinances of the sanctuary; consecrating yourselves to the service of GOD; and performing the various, active duties of Christianity.

At the same time, you are in a great measure safe from a perplexing and mischievous intrusion of another kind. Men, who have entered into the bustle of this world, are exposed, whenever they turn their attention to religious subjects, and commence attempts to become Christians, to the continual intrusion of worldly thoughts, and worldly feelings. These thoughts and feelings, even when most unwelcome, and when serious efforts are made to exclude them, still force themselves into the mind; and continually mingle with all its thoughts and emotions, of a religious nature. The habit of dwelling upon worldly objects is so strong, that the current of thinking and affection is continually returning to this channel; and the difficulty of diverting it into that, in which

it ought to flow, becomes almost insurmountable. In this manner the suppliant finds the world intruding into his *prayers* ; and, when his petitions are ascending to heaven, often perceives his thoughts lagging behind them upon earth. In this manner the sacred season of the *Sabbath*, even to those who intend *to keep it holy*, and *to turn away their feet from finding their own pleasure*, becomes a day half religious, and half secular : the soul now struggling to lift its thoughts to God, and to seek eternal life ; and now busily employed in reviewing its bargains, counting its gains, lamenting its losses, planning its business, or projecting its amusements. In *the house of God*, the prayer and the psalm, are by the mind, in this state, taken up by fragments ; while many, and those often long, parentheses intervene, in which it wanders to *the ends of the earth* after worldly objects. The sermon, also, is half heard, and half unnoticed ; and very commonly all forgotten. In this manner even Christians themselves carry much of the week into the Sabbath, and but little of the Sabbath into the week.

The effect of this state of things is only unhappy. The interests of the soul are rarely remembered, and scarcely felt. The impressions, made by religious objects are few, feeble, and transient. The precepts and doctrines, the warnings and reproofs, of the Scriptures barely touch the mind ; and, instead of entering deep into its affections, only skim over its surface. For a person, thus situated, how little hope can be rationally indulged ? Hardly can he be said even *to have an ear to hear*, or *a heart to understand*. Instead of striving to *enter in* at the straight gate, he can scarcely be supposed to know where it is.

From these evils, unless you choose to encounter them, you are in a great measure exempted. Your proper business is attended with no uncertainty ; and demands no contrivance on your part, no solicitude concerning the means of performing it, or the success with which it may be attended. It returns with perfect regularity ; is always done in a stated manner ; and, when thus done, is of course successful. Thus you have not only leisure *hours*, returning daily, which you may devote to religious attain-

ments, but also *minds*, at leisure for every religious pursuit; *thoughts* which may be easily occupied; *affections* which may be easily engaged, about your eternal welfare.

Youth is also the best season for the performance of this duty, *because it is the season, at which it will be most acceptably performed.* The fact, that these books of *Solomon* were written peculiarly for the benefit of those, who are Young, is itself ample proof of this position. We know also, that youth is, in the ordinary course of nature, as much less corrupted than middle age, as that age, than declining years. The beauty of early piety is often acknowledged even by sinners; and is regarded with peculiar delight by good men. From the manner, in which the Scriptures speak of *Joseph, Samuel, Abijah, Jabez, Josiah* and *Timothy*, there is abundant reason to believe, that it is an object of peculiar complacency to the eye of *God*.

At the same time the greatest possible opportunity will in this manner be enjoyed for serving *God* extensively; if we live to the utmost date of human life, of serving him long; if not, of serving him through the utmost period, which will be in our power.

All men will hereafter *be rewarded according to their works.* The servant, who in the parable, with *his pound gained ten pounds*, was made *ruler over ten cities*; while he, who *gained five*, was made *ruler only of five cities.* The person, who remembers his Creator in the days of his youth, and who thus possesses the greatest opportunity of serving him, will of course entitle himself to a superiour and very glorious reward, because he has served *God* more than other men. This, however, is far from being his whole advantage. He will serve him better, as well as longer. He will have fewer sins of which he must repent, and for which he must answer at the final day; weaker passions and appetites to overcome; feebler temptations to resist; and fewer obstinate habits to break down: Hence, he will backslide more rarely; and make a more regular progress in the Christian life. He will have less to lament on a dying bed; and more to rehearse with comfort, and hope, in his final account.

3dly. *Future seasons will be comparatively unfavorable to this duty.*

Every day, you neglect this duty, you will advance in sin. You began to sin against God, when you began to exert moral agency. From that time, your sins have increased both in number and degree. The mass must, therefore, have been sufficiently accumulated to alarm any eye, not already blinded by profligacy. Think, then, I beseech you, to what a size it will spread, and to what a height it will grow, if you continue to heap up iniquity to old age; and what will be the record of your lives, when *the books shall be opened, out of which you will be judged.*

At the same time, by continuing to sin you regularly harden your hearts against reformation. The very gratifications, by which you have been tempted to evil, become more and more loved, because they have been loved long, and enjoyed often. Thus the sot relishes ardent spirits much more intensely, than he did in the early stages of his career of intemperance; and is with far more difficulty, withdrawn, if indeed he can be at all withdrawn, from this fatal indulgence of his taste.

But this is not all. We love *practices* as truly as the *objects, for which they are adopted.* The thief loves to steal, as truly as he loves the object, which he has stolen. The gambler loves to game, as truly as the stake, for which he games. The employment, in each case is as truly relished, as the expected gain; and is the more relished, the longer it is continued, and the oftener it is repeated. Thus the profane person loves to swear and curse, though he gains nothing by it. Thus the liar loves to lie, though he is sure of being a loser; and the sabbath breaker, to violate the sabbath at the expense of his character, and his soul. In this manner are formed those, which we call *evil habits*; the effect of which is, universally, to harden the heart, to fix the soul in a course of sin, and to hurry it onwards towards perdition.

Even this is not all. You will also harden your hearts by *self-justification.* It is impossible for the mind to fail of being uneasy, when the conscience reproaches it with its sins. At first, this uneasiness is great, and distressing, because the conscience is

then tender, and strongly susceptible of moral impressions. From the sufferings, which it is thus compelled to endure, the mind naturally seeks for relief; and gradually finds it in arguments, employed to annihilate, or at least to lessen, its guilt; in sport and ridicule, summoned to fritter it away; and in examples, which quiet its fears, and strengthen it for future perpetrations. That, which can be defended, or even palliated always appears less alarming, than when it was thought absolutely indefensible. That, which can be laughed at, ceases to alarm at all; and that, which is done by others, it is readily believed, may be done by one's self with some degree of safety. To be no worse than others, is, in the view of most persons, to be in no very dangerous or distressing circumstances.

Thus, although the soul was terrified by the first sin, yet with these sources of justification in its possession it becomes quiet under the second; proceeds familiarly to the third; and cheerfully commits the fourth.

While all these causes thus contribute to harden the heart; it derives, also, not a little consolation and support from the consideration, that neither its own sins, nor those of others around it, are either generally or obviously punished. *All things in this world substantially come alike to all; and there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.* For this reason *no man knoweth love, or hatred, by all that is before him.* This, indeed, furnishes no solid reason, why any man should encourage himself in sin. *For, though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet shall it not be well with the wicked; nor with him, any more than with the rest of the wicked.* Yet it is true at the present day, no less than in the time of *Solomon*, that "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." To most persons the consciousness of safety, even *now*, becomes the foundation of a strong and supporting hope, that they shall be safe hereafter.

On all these accounts the periods of life which succeed youth, and that of old age especially, are, as they are styled in the text,

*evil days* : not only uncomfortable, but peculiarly unfavourable to the duty of remembering God, and the attainment of salvation.

4thly. *These Seasons may never arrive.*

You have already seen, that, if they should actually arrive, and you should live to old age, your prospects of performing this duty would continually lessen. The danger is not only real, but great, that your views of all spiritual objects would become more erroneous ; your meditations on them more unfrequent, and uninteresting ; your affections more obtuse, and worldly ; your hearts more callous to religious impressions ; your consciences more enervated ; your thoughts more distracted both by business, and pleasure ; and your hopes more dim, distant, and fading.

But what right have you to satisfy yourselves, that such seasons will ever arrive to *you* ? The uncertainty of human life is so palpable, that, independently of the immense importance of the subject, all observations concerning it would long since have ceased to interest the mind, and become as dull and tedious, as a string of vulgar proverbs. It is written in almost every chapter of the Bible. It is inscribed by the finger of God on almost every page of his providence.

Nor is life less uncertain to youth, than to manhood ; nor to the most promising youths, than to the dullest ; nor to the gayest, than to the most gloomy ; nor to those, who assure themselves of the most days, and the best, than to the disconsolate and desponding.

Go to yonder burying-ground ; and read the inscriptions, engraved on the monuments of the dead. How often will you find them announcing, that those who sleep beneath, entered these solitary chambers in the morning of life ? How often have you yourselves already followed to the tomb the young, the sprightly, the sportive ; your own companions in life ; nay, your own friends, and seen them lodged in the dark and narrow house ! How often have you seen them in the midst of cheerfulness, and activity, in the full possession of health and vigor, full of hopes and gay with brilliant prospects, promising themselves long life in the sprightliest career of pleasure, and forming many coloured visions of



paradisiacal happiness in this world ; arrested by disease, stretched upon the bed of death, bidding a melancholy farewell to all things here below, and summoned to their final account before the bar of God ! How solemnly do these things admonish *you*, that *man knoweth not his time !* How affectingly do they prove, “ that as fishes are taken in an evil net, and as birds are caught in a snare ; so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them !”

But in so mighty a concern, in a duty of such immeasurable importance, nothing ought to be left to hazard ; and especially to a hazard so alarming. Where your all may be lost in a day, an hour, or a moment, what folly, what madness, must it be to postpone, even for the best reasons, the performance of a duty on which that all depends ! But here you can allege no reasons. The very sins, which you are here required to forsake, are themselves the only causes, why you do not forsake them. The very sins, of which you are required to repent, are the preventives of your repentance. The very dangers, which you are summoned to shun, are themselves the reasons why you do not escape. Miserable choice ! Deplorable determination ! Who, but for the irresistible proof from experience, would believe, that rational beings could refuse their own salvation, and be in love with ruin. Think, I beseech you, what has become of your gay, deceased companions : ponder with alarm and terror what is to become of you.

## SERMON XII.

THE DUTY OF REMEMBERING THE CREATOR IN YOUTH.—SERMON II.



ECCLESIASTES xii. 1.

*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth: while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, "I have no pleasure in them."*

In the preceding discourse, from this passage, I proposed,

- I. *To explain the Duty, which is here enjoined;*
- II. *To suggest several Inducements to the performance of it;*  
*and*
- III. *To mention several Reasons, which usually prevent it from being performed.*

Under the first of these heads I observed,

1st. *That to remember our Creator is to make him frequently, an object of our thoughts.*

2dly. *To possess thoughts concerning him, which are true, and just; or such as are communicated by his Word and Works.*

3dly. *To remember him cordially; or with supreme love, complacency, gratitude, reverence, and admiration.*

4thly. *To remember him practically; or with universal confidence, and obedience.*

Under the second head, as Inducements to perform this duty in Youth, I observed,

1st. *That all the obligations, which require it of others, require it of those who are Young:*

2dly. *That Youth is the best season for performing this duty: Because it is in their possession; Because their hearts are*

more tender, and susceptible of religious impressions, than they will probably be at any future period ;

Because it is comparatively unoccupied by other objects ; and

Because it is the season, at which the duty will be most acceptably performed :

3dly. *That future seasons will be comparatively unfavourable to the performance ;* and

4thly. *That future seasons may never arrive.*

I shall now proceed to the consideration of the third head of discourse, proposed at that time ; viz.

*To mention several Reasons, which usually prevent this duty from being performed.*

Notwithstanding these solemn and powerful reasons for remembering our Creator in the days of our youth, we cannot avoid perceiving, that multitudes, (the greater part by far,) appear not to remember him at that time, nor at any other. This fact, like every other, has its causes. These operate in much the same manner, wherever they exist : the nature of the mind, on which they operate being substantially the same. They will, of course, naturally prevent those, who are present, as well as others, from performing this duty. It is, therefore, of no small importance, that *they* should know, remember, and feel, the moral causes, or reasons, which have this malignant influence ; that they may be upon their guard, and as much as may be, overcome their pernicious efficacy.

Of these reasons the

1st. *Which I shall mention, is a bad Education.*

Children are justly said to have a bad education, when they are not taught early, often, and affectionately, to know and fear, to remember and serve, GOD. The first impressions are proverbially regarded as the best, which are ever made. Impressions, favourable to piety, cannot be effectually made without great care, pains, and perseverance ; without frequent, solemn, affectionate instruction, counsel, exhortation, rebuke, reproof, alarms, and injunctions. *Line* must be given to children *upon line, and precept upon precept ; here a little, and there a little.* Parents will in

vain expect from their children the proper effects of instruction, when communicated only in a single instance. Persons of mature age, in the full possession of their understanding, and at the very best period for improvement, are not often very happily affected by moral instruction, when only once communicated. How much less can this be expected from children, who are so much less capable of consideration; who often misunderstand what they are taught, and oftener understand it very imperfectly; whose thoughts are instinctively volatile, and wander away from the instruction even at the very moment, when it is given, to almost every object by which they are surrounded; and who must be moulded into habits of *receiving*, almost as much as of *obeying*, what they are taught. The parent, who has but once explained to his children their duty, has done but a very little part of his own.

Children must be instructed, as our Saviour instructed his disciples, by degrees, and as they are able to receive and bear it, patiently; with a continual regard, and not a small one, to their prejudices; affectionately; with many repetitions of the same instruction in many forms; without fretfulness, imperiousness, moroseness, or even austerity. Their instructions also, like those of Christ, should be communicated in the plainest, simplest language; and continued unto the end. So far as education falls short of an accordance with these characteristics, it is, either in the positive or negative sense, bad.

At the same time, like the instructions of Christ, all the precepts given to children should be seen to have their proper influence on the life of the Teacher himself. He must shew, that he believes what he wishes the child to believe, and that he does what he commands the child to do. In this manner the teacher will prove himself to be in earnest. Otherwise, whatever labour, and care, he may employ, his instructions will be in vain. Had the apostles seen their Masters life contradict his precepts; they would never have become his disciples, nor hazarded their lives by preaching the Gospel to mankind.

To these things should always be added, also, humble, fervent prayer for the blessing of God on the instructions, which are actually given. Without this blessing, all human efforts will be to no purpose. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain, that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh in vain." It will be in vain "to rise up early and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows," with the hope of training up children for God, without his blessing to render the exertions which are made for this end efficacious. But this blessing will not be given, unless we ask for it. In this case, only, will our *children* be truly *an heritage from the Lord*.

Wherever these things are neglected, either partially or wholly, children are so far badly educated: and parents, in this case, will be obliged to remember with extreme regret, when they see their children "forget the God that made them, and lightly esteem the Rock of their salvation," that their own misconduct, their own unfaithfulness, has been, extensively, the cause of their children's ruin.

I have observed above, that, susceptible as the mind is of strong impressions in childhood, those, that are of a religious nature cannot be made without great care, and pains. Good seed can be sown with success, only by means of laborious cultivation. With weeds the case is far otherwise. They spring up without any culture, and become more vigorous, the more the soil is neglected. *The enemy, that sowed tares in the field*, accomplished this business, *while men slept*. When parents sleep over their task, Satan always performs his. Neglected children always receive evil impressions of every kind, without number, and with a power which it is not easy to limit. Such impressions, their own propensities prepare them strongly to receive. Such impressions, every thing around them, every thing with which they correspond, will continually make. Their commerce with the world, will fill them with evil thoughts, and desires; will form them to evil habits; and will conduct them to evil practices. Neglected children grow up to sin, of course; just as uncultivated ground is covered with thorns and briars.

But neglect is not the only mode of bad education. Children are sometimes directly taught to sin both by precept and example. By the example, even of parents themselves, they are often taught to be profane; and that in many forms; to jest with things of a sacred nature; to ridicule them, and, universally, to treat them with contempt; to violate the sabbath; to forget the sanctuary; to be lewd; to become sots; to lie; to cheat; and to steal. All these evils, and many others, are at times, so prominent in the conversation and conduct of parents, so continually exhibited, and so gross in their appearance; that a child, without a miracle, can hardly fail of contamination. I need not tell you how far such children must be from remembering their Creator.

There are, however, other modes, in which children are directly educated to sin, with respect to which a greater number of parents are guilty, and from which far greater numbers of children are in danger. These, being much less gross, and much less obvious to the eye, and particularly having been long and very extensively pursued by persons of reputation; have acquired a kind of sanction from custom, and a kind of ratification from the common agreement of decent society. All these may be involved in one short description, viz. *an education for this world*.

Under this broad character, however, are to be ranged many distinct and widely separated modes of procedure. Of these two or three, only, can be mentioned at the present time.

Parents often teach their children *that the acquisition of wealth is the proper and commanding object of all their pursuits*. This they do, never perhaps, in express terms; but in the general tenor of their conversation, and conduct. Whenever they talk seriously, they talk almost only about wealth, and the acquisition of wealth. They exult before them in the good bargains, which they have made, and lament the bad ones; disclose their schemes for making better; mourn over the bad state of markets; pride themselves in their property, particularly in the superiority of their circumstances to those of others; speak contemptuously of the poor; panegyryze the rich; and irresistibly as well as universally show, that in their view *money*, literally and absolutely, *an-*

*swere*th all things. How can children, before whom all this is perpetually done, who see wealth thus idolized by their parents, and nothing else considered as of any importance, fail of imbibing from so venerable a source the same idolatry. When they are thus early, and thus efficaciously, taught to *serve Mammon* ; how can they be expected to *serve*, or even to remember God.

All these instructions, also, are enhanced by the conduct of the parents. Often they expend their property with extreme reluctance, even for purposes plainly useful ; give with a grudging hand, when they give at all, to the public, the stranger, and the poor ; decry every liberal or charitable proposal ; and sneer contemptuously, and predict speedy beggary and ruin, concerning every liberal and charitable man. On the other hand, they *rise early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of toil* and care, to increase their own possessions ; and in the language of their practice cry, “ *give, give ;*” while neither their hearts, nor their tongues, ever say, “ *It is enough.*” How can the children of such parents feel, as if they had any concern with death or eternity, with heaven or hell ? How can they remember God, when from the first commencement of their understanding they see him totally forgotten by those, whom they most reverence and love ?

There are other parents, who in educating their children give the same place to the objects of ambition, which those, whom I have mentioned, allot to wealth. These destine their children to popularity, fame, place, and power. These children are taught perpetually, that their supreme good lies in outstripping others, and acquiring in this manner the wreath of reputation. Genius, talents, eloquence, are rung continually in their ears, as the great instruments of achieving the coveted prize, and as possessions, therefore, of inestimable value. The children, on the one hand, learn to idolize these objects ; and under the influence of parental dotage are easily persuaded, on the other, that themselves are the very caskets, in which these jewels are treasured up by the hand of nature. Hence they become lamentably, and often insupportably, vain ; like the fabled Narcissus, they sicken with the love of their own beauty ; and, like the more sottish national

assembly of *France*, dethrone JEHOVAH, and, making a Goddess of their own reason, worship it in his stead.

Should the children of the former class of parents become rich, beyond their most sanguine hopes; what part of their wealth would they carry with them into eternity; and what difference would there be in the grave between *them*, and the beggar, who died under a hedge? Should the children of the latter class reach the pinnacle of fame, and the summit of power; of what use would their talents be, when they were summoned to their final account; and what sort of distinction would they procure them in the future world? Before *the Judge of the quick and the dead*, how melancholy must be the recital of talents wrapped in a napkin, and buried in the earth?

There are parents also, and, I am afraid, not less numerous than either of the classes mentioned, who educate their children to fashionable opinions, and practices. The supreme object of these parents, and the object which their children are taught to consider as supreme, is to have the children make *an advantageous appearance in the world*. For this end they are taught, with great care, and expense, what are called *accomplishments*: such as fashionable manners, dancing, dressing, drawing, music, and many other things of a similar nature. Their minds, in the mean time, are furnished with little useful knowledge, with few useful habits, and with no sound moral principles: for, unhappily, such principles have rarely been fashionable. Of God, and religion, indeed, they must have heard; but they have heard of them as subjects of antiquated tales; and never as objects of fashion, nor as means of enabling themselves to make a graceful and brilliant appearance. The conversation of both the parents, and the children, turns chiefly, or wholly, upon the newest fashion of dress, furniture, equipage, and manners, and upon the happy beings, who by these things have acquired peculiar distinction in the gay world: upon the last, or the next, amusement or party, and the appearance, dresses, and accomplishments, of those who were, or will be, present; upon the last, or the next, play, the scenery, and the actors; and upon innumerable other trifles of



the same frivolous nature. The business of their life is to visit the theatre, the drawing-room, and the card-table; to dress; to dance; to ride; to frequent watering places; to see shows; and to fritter away time in conversation upon these insignificant objects. Infatuated parents! who thus train up those, whom they professedly love, to objects of absolute insignificance; who teach them to cull straws, and feathers, and never think of conducting them to any solid or enduring good. Unhappy children! converted by their own parents into intellectual butterflies; and taught to spend the summer of life in displaying their pinions to the sun, and sporting from one flower and sweet to another; till the melancholy day arrives, when they can sport no more. Happy would it be, could they know that there is a dismal winter approaching; a frost, which will terminate their sport and splendour forever.

How hopeless must children educated in this manner, be of performing or even thinking of the duty enjoined in the text! We may wish with any degree of ardency, but can never expect, that a mind, thus formed, should remember its Creator; or that God would take up his residence in a temple, consecrated to amusement and trifling, and filled with this senseless idolatry.

Children are to be educated to industry, and taught to make the most of their talents. When it is in our power, they should be educated to graceful manners, and pleasing accomplishments. But, whatever else we do, we should "train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The evil of these modes of education lies supremely in *the degree of importance, which we attach, and teach them to attach, to these objects*: objects in an absolute sense of little value, and in a comparative sense of none. In this manner we educate them either to sordid avarice, and equally sordid ambition; or to a despicable, and sinful, frivolity of mind. In all these cases we harden their hearts against Religion, and against God. We teach and help them to provide, indeed, for a life, that is bounded by a day; for a character, which will expire in the grave; and for a body, soon to be devoured by worms: but we give up their souls to endless beggary, shame,

and woe. GOD, whom we thus teach them to forget, will not "remember them in the day, when he maketh up his jewels." In that day, how deplorable will be the sight of parents who have thus ruined their children, and children thus ruined by their parents, going down together without consolation, and without hope, to one common perdition.

2dly. *Another cause, which very extensively prevents the performance of this duty, is Evil Company.*

After having discoursed so lately, and so extensively, upon this subject, it would be tedious, as well as unnecessary, particularly to consider it at the present time. I shall dismiss it, therefore, with a few, brief observations.

Evil companions are found every where ; are always at hand ; and are always at leisure for sin. At the same time, they love *company in iniquity*. Nay, it is absolutely necessary to their comfortable existence. Solitude renders them wretched : for it obliges them to look into their own hearts, and to read over those dark and dismal records of their lives, which Memory has written down, and which at times she opens to the terrified eye of the shrinking culprit. Such company, therefore, they seek with anxious diligence, allure with every persuasive, and seduce with every art. These companions root out every good, and implant every evil, principle ; laugh and mock at every serious thought, and thing ; recommend by argument, exhortation, and example, every wicked practice ; ensnare the soul, before its apprehensions are awake ; and harden the heart beyond the power of every virtuous motive. The haunt, where they assemble, *is the way to hell ; going down to the chambers of death.*

But the performance of this duty is not always prevented by *others*. Those, who finally forget GOD, often owe this ruinous sin chiefly to themselves. Indeed, they always owe much of it to themselves ; for, were they faithful to themselves, it would be beyond the power of others to accomplish their ruin. Many causes of this class have a powerful efficacy to prevent the mind from remembering its Creator. I observe, therefore,

3dly. *That Profaneness is another powerful cause of this evil.*

Profaneness, beyond almost any thing else, hardens the soul against reverence towards God, and the recollection of his character. When *that glorious and fearful name, the LORD our God*, has been frequently profaned by us; we acquire, of course, a habit of thinking concerning this great and awful Being with impious familiarity, and gross irreverence. All just and becoming ideas concerning his solemn and tremendous character we exclude from our minds. All loose and monstrous ones we admit, and cherish. From the infinite height, at which he sits enthroned above all beings, we bring him down to our own level; and easily realize, that he is *altogether such an one as ourselves*. In this manner we think of him so habitually, and so long, that we forget to think of him in any other manner. God thus becomes, when we think of him at all, an object of sport, and a butt of insult; and is summoned into our thoughts only to be treated with abuse, and contempt. No profane person remembers his Creator according to the meaning of the text. No profane person can remember his Creator. No profane person will ever perform this duty, until his own character is radically changed; and this black and dreadful stain is washed out of his soul.

4thly. *Another cause of this evil, is Licentiousness of thought, and conversation.*

It is but too natural for the mind of man to indulge a licentious imagination; to roam in thought after the objects, by which it is gratified; to recollect the scenes, in which desires of this nature have been let loose; and to paint to itself imaginary scenes, still more sensual and voluptuous. In this manner it is employed, like an idiot, entering a city infected with the plague, and wandering from house to house, to hunt after contagion.

Such a mind, however, is never satisfied with *mere thought*. It betakes itself, of course, to the company of others, who love the same employment. Here the children of perdition mutually communicate their thoughts in obscene and pestilential conversation. Here they become mutually infected, tainted, and putrid, with a moral plague. Here, every principle from which moral life might

spring, sickens, and dies. Reproof, instruction, alarms, promises, and all other means of religious impression, addressed to such a mind, are addressed to the dead.

Even this is not felt to be sufficient. To pamper this rank disposition still more, it wanders after *obscene books*, and obscene pictures; engines, by which the enemies of God and man have contrived extensively to people the regions of perdition.

Such a soul is a vault of death; a receptacle of rottenness and pollution. How evidently impossible is it, that "HE, in whose sight the Heavens are not clean," should dwell in such a mansion; or that every thought concerning him should not instantaneously expire.

5thly. *Another cause of this evil, furnished to the mind by itself, is Levity.*

Lightness of thought always gives birth to light and vain conversation: and such conversation in its turn begets and cherishes lightness of thought. Idle words of every kind, produce in the soul an idle, vain, and in the moral sense frivolous, state of thought and affection. They make it less serious, less attentive to its immortal concerns, and less reverential to God. This is pre-eminently true of all jesting with moral and sacred subjects. He who can make sport of the Bible, the Sabbath, the house of God, religious worship, the duties of Christianity, and persons of piety; will soon sport with God himself. Soon will he forget, that he is a sinner, and infinitely needs forgiveness. Soon will he forget, that he has a soul to be saved; and that, if it be not saved, it must perish forever. Soon will he make a mock at sin; lessen his guilt; and laugh out of his remembrance all his own obligations to become holy, and all his need of eternal life. The soul of such a man is as effectually intoxicated by sport, as a drunkard by ardent spirits; and loses as effectually all its powers of rational thought and affection. More and more insensible both to his duty and his interest, he finally becomes in the spiritual sense a mere sot; on whom arguments, exhortations, and motives, however earnestly urged, are employed in vain.

I have now finished the observations, which I proposed to make under the three heads, mentioned at the beginning of this discourse; and will conclude with some solemn considerations, addressed to young persons in this assembly.

God, my young friends, has, at the present time, committed you to my care and instruction, as your minister. His language to me, and to every other minister of the Gospel, is, "Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel. Therefore, thou shalt hear the word at my mouth; and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, 'O wicked man, thou shalt surely die;' if thou dost not speak, to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way, that he turn from it, if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Say unto them, 'As I live, saith the LORD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways: for why will ye die, O house of Israel.'"

Let me now in obedience to these awful injunctions, sufficiently awful to make every minister tremble when he enters the desk, warn the wicked in this house from their way, that they may turn from it, and save their souls alive. But, however this event may be, let me be faithful, and deliver my own soul: and, whether you hear, or whether you forbear, let not your blood be required at my hand.

In these discourses you have heard the duty of remembering your Creator in the days of your youth explained; solemn reasons alleged for your faithful performance of it; and several unhappy causes illustrated, which very often prevent it from being performed. Let me now endeavour to impress all these things upon your consciences; and, if possible, persuade you, that they are directed personally to *you*.

I ask you, then, Have you remembered your Creator in the days of your youth? If you answer this solemn question with the frankness, which it demands, most of you will tell me, that

you have remembered the world, pleasure, and sin ; but “ have forgotten the GOD, that made you, and lightly esteemed the Rock of your Salvation.” Many of you prove, that this must be your true answer by the eagerness, and constancy, with which you trifle away this golden period of life in pleasure, folly, and sin ; some of you, by a stupid, shameful inattention to your salvation, and your ruin, in the house of GOD ; and some of you by sleeping the sleep of death at the foot of the cross. This is language, which a child cannot misconstrue.

I ask again, When do you design to perform this duty ? You will probably reply, “ At some future season, which, you intend, shall be more convenient ; when you shall be less engrossed by the objects of the present life ; when your relish for pleasure shall be blunted ; and when your minds shall be more at leisure for the concerns of eternity.” Are you sure that such a time will come ? Are you sure that death will not first come, and blast every hope of this nature ? Are you sure that GOD will not say to you, as he said to Hananiah by the mouth of his prophet, “ This year thou shalt die !” Nay, that he will not say to you, as to the Rich man in the parable, “ This night thy soul shall be required of thee !” Should this be done ; what will be your condition ?

But, should you be permitted to live, have you any solid reasons to believe, that the day of reformation will ever be nearer, than it is now ; particularly, that it will be brought nearer by your *procrastination* : that thief, which steals away not only your time, but your conscientiousness, your serious impressions, your resolutions ; nay even your thoughts of amendment, and your hopes of salvation. Will you not then be absorbed by avarice and ambition, as you are now by pleasure ? Be not deceived : old age, nay, middle age ; is an inauspicious, unhappy day for repentance.

What are the reasons, why you do not now remember your Creator ? Your own lusts ; the enjoyments of this world ; the temptations, which you spread before yourselves ; the snares, set for you by others ; evil communications, and evil examples. Will not these have the same influence upon you, hereafter, which they

now have? Will not their dominion over you be even more entire? Will you not become more and more absolutely the bond-slaves of sin, and of Satan?

Look at those, who have gone before you. How evidently are most of them swallowed up in care, toil, and anxiety; the fear of poverty; the love of place and power; sordid covetousness; and the gross indulgence of sensuality. Examine them, man by man. Which of them do you see moved by religious considerations; deserting his pleasures; and renouncing his sins? Who among them remembers GOD; seeks his face; or strives to *enter in at the strait gate*? Who among them, while Death is advancing to his door, takes the alarm? Mark the miser, with one foot in the grave; and you will see, that, instead of shuddering at the sight of this melancholy mansion, his mind is wholly engrossed by new bargains, and new gains. Mark the whole host of veterans in the service of iniquity. Do they not become daily more stupid, hardened, and wicked. What one of them remembers GOD? Is not their day *an evil day* to them? Do not you discern it to be an evil day? Believe me, my young friends, grey haired sin is most obstinate sin; and grey haired repentance is a strange and solitary repentance. Who would hazard his soul upon such a plank? Who would venture upon a gulf, where, ordinarily, nothing is found but shipwreck; and where the shores have long been whitened by the bones of those, who were lost?

Some of you have, not improbably, grown up with few, or no, religious instructions. Your parents, in several instances perhaps, have been so busied in acquiring wealth, that they could not find time to provide for your salvation; nor even to ask it at the hands of GOD. This is, indeed, a melancholy case. Your parents have failed of their first duty; and you have lost your best privileges. If good impressions have not, bad impressions have, been made upon your hearts, while they were most tender and susceptible. Probably you have not been driven, but weaned, from heaven; have been taught to sin by example, and been left to it by negligence; have never learned to remember GOD; but by the sight of business, bustle, and pleasure, have been persuaded to say to him.

“Depart from us : for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” In a word, you are now suffering the very evils, which have been mentioned in this discourse, as flowing from a bad education.

But, unhappy as this case is, it is not of course desperate. The ways of GOD “are not our ways ; neither are his thoughts our thoughts.” He may look upon your calamities with an eye of peculiar compassion ; may exert towards you peculiar long suffering ; and may spread before you in his Providence peculiar motives to repentance. He took *Abijah* to himself from the palace of *Jeroboam*, from the side of the golden calf in *Bethel*, and from the foot of its altar. Surely, then, there is hope for you. Awake from the sleep of sin, and death ; and “lay hold on eternal life.” Feel all the dangers of your situation ; the inestimable worth of your souls ; the incomprehensible importance of the means of grace, and the day of repentance. Remember, that GOD is more angry with you, every day, for every sin ; and that at no distant time, if you continue to harden your hearts, he will “swear in his wrath, that you shall not see his rest.”

Others of you have had a happier lot ; have had religious parents ; and have been instructed by them in the fear of GOD, and the knowledge of your duty. You have also seen, in the undeceiving evidence of their lives, that they believed the doctrines which they taught, and loved the precepts which they enjoined. What has been the issue of these privileges ? GOD has “put into your hands a price, to get wisdom.” How plainly have you been destitute of *a heart* to the divine attainment ! How obviously have you devoted yourselves to worldly pleasure ; forgotten GOD ; lightly esteemed Christ ; trifled with your duty ; and disregarded your souls ! How often have you profaned the Sabbath ; idled, and slept, away the solemn season, consecrated to the worship of GOD ; and turned a deaf ear to the thunders of the law, and the invitations of the Gospel ! How regularly have you hardened your hearts against the reproofs of your parents ; the solemn warnings of the desk ; the threatenings of the Scriptures ; the alarms of Providence ; the invasions of disease ; and the knell of death ! How foolishly have you flattered yourselves, that you



could "hide in secret places," so that God could not see you ; and said, that "the darkness should cover" your sins from his sight ; voluntarily forgetting, that he "fills heaven and earth" with his presence, and that "the darkness and the light are both alike to him."

Look back on all your past life ; and see whether there is any thing which your consciences can remember with comfort, or even with hope. Is not the whole volume a blank of good ; and filled up with evil ? A cumbrous record, written out only in melancholy lines of sin and shame : a story of guilt ; of hatred, and forgetfulness, of your Maker ; of crimes perpetrated, and duties left undone ; of sabbaths wasted, and a sanctuary profaned ; of heaven refused, and souls cast away ? This volume must be read before God. All these things will be rehearsed to you, and confessed by you, in the judgment ; and will constitute a part of *those works, according to which you will be judged.*

If this be your situation ; your peculiar privileges will only aggravate your guilt, and your condemnation. You will have *known your Lord's will, and done it not ; and will, therefore, be beaten with many stripes.*

Awake, then, to a sense of your danger. See Satan, the world, evil companions, and many temptations, all labouring to destroy you ; God labouring to prevent your destruction ; and yourselves uniting with his enemies, to accomplish your ruin. How long do you believe he will permit this controversy to be carried on ? How long will it be before he will say of you, "Ephraim is joined to idols : let him alone ?"

## SERMON XIII.

### THE YOUTH OF NAIN.



LUKE vii. 11—15.

*And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.*

*Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow; and much people of the city was with her.*

*And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, "Weep not."*

*And he came, and touched the bier; and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, "I say unto thee Arise."*

*And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.*

IN the preceding part of this chapter we are informed, that our Saviour, entering into *Capernaum*, was intreated by a Centurion, distinguished for his unrivalled faith and piety, to heal his sick servant. He accordingly healed him. The next day he left *Capernaum*, to perform the duties of his ministry in other places. In his progress he passed through *Nain*, a city near to *Mount Tabor*, and six miles from *Nazareth*. As he came nigh to the gate, he met a funeral procession, following a youth to his burial. This youth was an only son; and his mother was a widow. The family, it would seem, was greatly respected by the citizens; and the event excited an uncommon degree of sympathy: for we are told, that much people of the city accompanied the mourning parent to the grave of her son.

Our Lord, whose tenderness was supreme, and whose benevolence was manifested on every proper occasion, was moved with compassion at the sight of this afflicted mother; and directed her to weep no more. Having said this, he came, and touched the bier; upon which the bearers stood still. Then, with a solemnity, and authority, suited to his own character, and exhibited by him on every important occasion, he said, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." Accordingly he arose, and sat up, and began to speak. Our Lord then delivered him to his mother.

We cannot wonder, that a miracle of such a nature, performed before such a concourse, should be followed by *great fear in all those* who were witnesses of it; that they should *glorify* God; that they should *cry out*, "A great prophet has arisen up among us, and God has visited his people;" or that *the fame* of this glorious transaction, and its divine author, should suddenly "spread throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about."

This is the first instance, in which Christ exhibited to the world the life-giving power, challenged by him in the 5th chapter of *John* as his personal prerogative. "As the father," saith he, "raiseth up, and quickeneth, even so the Son quickeneth," that is, giveth life to, "whomsoever he will." This stupendous power he afterwards exercised in various instances; particularly on the daughter of *Jairus*, on *Lazarus*, and on himself.

This story is in many respects interesting and instructive. The very manner, in which it is related, is remarkably beautiful and affecting. It is told with the utmost degree of that simplicity, which is a prime ingredient in all fine narration. The circumstances are selected with singular felicity, and are pre-eminently fitted to touch the heart. The miracle itself was of the most glorious kind conceivable. It was equally wonderful and benevolent. It was the first fruit of that divine power, which will hereafter be displayed in a manner still more awful and amazing at the final day: "when all, that are in their graves, shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth; they, that have done good, to the resurrection of life; and they, that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation." It was a

miracle, clear of all objections. The occasion was casual. No concert between Christ and the people can be supposed. No harmony of designs, or wishes, can be suspected. The miracle was performed in the most public manner, before a great assembly, composed of those, who were either indifferent, or hostile, to the character of the Redeemer. The event was *unexceptionably miraculous*. The youth was dead; and was summoned back to life by a command. The facts were seen by this great multitude; and were acknowledged by them in a manner solemn, religious, and unequivocal. One would think, therefore, that the transaction would be received at once as a proof of the mission, and the divinity of our Saviour.

My intention, however, is, to derive from this narrative a train of considerations, widely different from all these. I propose in this discourse to consider the miracle in question as a work of Christ, strongly symbolical of one much more interesting, which by his Spirit he performs on various persons, generally in the same circumstances, as this young man.

There is a death, which all young men die in the present world; a state of the soul, which God himself has thought it proper to call by this name. He declares mankind to be "dead in trespasses and sins." There is a life, which some of them obtain; *a spiritual life*; the beginning, and the security, of life immortal. To all these Christ is the source of life as truly, as to the youth of *Nain*. From him must they receive it, if they receive it at all; from the same compassionate Saviour, who, passing by, sees them spiritually dead, and says to each of them, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." With this design I shall address to the assembly before me the following considerations.

1st. *Every youth, who is thus raised to life, is, before this resurrection, spiritually dead.*

By this I intend, that *all such youths are impenitent, unbelieving, sinners*. This is the true character, the real condition, of every youth in this assembly, who has not been raised to spiritual life. It is not here intended, merely, that you are impenitent and unbelieving. It is further intended, that *you are permanently of*

*this character* ; that you are fixed, and obstinate ; that you have a hard heart, and a blind mind ; a heart hard, a mind blind, in its very nature. The universal state of your views, affections, and conduct, is a steady alienation from GOD, an immoveable opposition to his pleasure. You are not *casually sinners* ; yielding to sudden and powerful temptation, in the weak, unguarded hour, and in circumstances peculiarly dangerous. You are *sinners of design* ; of contrivance ; with premeditation ; from habit ; and without mixture.

Do you receive this charge as untrue, as unkind, or even as doubtful ? Look back, I beseech you, upon the whole course of your lives ; and tell me, if you can remember a single day, in which you have faithfully obeyed GOD, believed in the Redeemer, or repented of your sins. If you answer honestly, you will confess, in spite of all your wishes to the contrary, that there has been no such day in your lives. Let me ask you further, can you remember a single instance, in which you have performed either of these duties ? Has there been a single hour in your lives, in which you have experienced such views and affections, as the Scriptures declare to be the true characteristics of the children of GOD ? Have you ever for a moment loved GOD with all the heart ? Have you ever chosen Christ as your Saviour, and with cheerful confidence given yourselves to him as his disciples. Have you ever loved to hear his voice, to walk faithfully in his ordinances, and humbly to follow his example. Have you ever hated sin, mourned for it, confessed it before GOD, and resolved to forsake it ? Have you actually and intentionally forsaken it for a single hour ?

Have you ever *esteemed the Sabbath a delight, and the Sanctuary honourable* ? Have you ever, even once, entered *your closets, shut the door, and prayed to your Father, who is in secret* ? Is there in the book, out of which you will be judged, a single faithful, fervent prayer of yours recorded ; a prayer, which you will be able to rehearse, and GOD to acknowledge, at the final day ?

If these things have ever been true of you, even for a single hour; they are true of you now. You are now sincere penitents, sincere believers, and real children of God. Were God, by an audible voice from heaven to answer these questions; what, think you, would be his testimony? How will they be answered at that judgment, which will determine the state of your souls forever? Should that judgment begin this day; would not these very considerations fill your minds with amazement and horror?

You have *been often reprov'd*. In what manner have you received this reproof? Have you received it with tenderness and submission, with sorrow for your transgressions and serious determinations to sin no more? Or have you been indifferent; stupid; your heads laid down to sleep; and your minds destitute of all concern about your salvation, and all regard to your Maker, and Redeemer? Have you not in your own view "hardened your necks, and deserved to be suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy?"

I am not proposing the case of *strangers*. The character belongs eminently to *you*. No assembly of youths probably contains and exhibits higher proofs of these truths, than this. Your advantages for attaining spiritual life have been exceeded by none. The instructions, calls, warnings and reproofs, of the Scriptures have been often, and most solemnly, repeated to you. You have had "line upon line, and precept upon precept." What has been their effect? What has God seen it to be?

I am neither disposed to deny, nor to doubt, that some of you may, at times, have been solemnized; or that some of you may in a slight degree, and for a short period, have meditated on a change of life. You may in such cases have wondered at your former stupidity; and seriously thought, perhaps resolved, to begin the work of salvation. All this, however, you have soon forgotten. Again you have betaken yourselves to the same courses of sin; cherished the same lusts; yielded to the same temptations; and given yourselves up to the same hardness of heart.

Some of you, probably, have not advanced even so far as this; but in an uniform, quiet course of wickedness have heard, but not

attended ; have thought but without emotion ; and have pursued sin, without an alarm, a resolve, or even a solemn reflection. Almost all of you, (and to your own consciences be the appeal for the truth of the charge) are mere children of this world. Instead of being seriously concerned for your salvation, you are not even thoughtful : instead of repenting, you sin with new eagerness : instead of believing in Christ, you treat him with contempt : instead of yielding to the life-giving influence of the Spirit of grace, “ you always,” like the *Jews* of old, “ resist the Holy Ghost :” instead of “ loving GOD with all the heart, and soul, and strength, and mind,” you say to him daily, “ Depart from us : for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” In the house of GOD your true character is discovered, with an evidence which cannot be questioned. The holy, heavenly, season, which GOD has mercifully appointed for the attainment of eternal life, you spend in a manner, which unanswerably proves your ignorance, your voluntary forgetfulness, that “ GOD is in very deed in this place.” Immediately beneath the all-searching eye of Him, who has commanded you to keep the Sabbath holy, and to reverence the sanctuary, you quietly lie down to sleep ; or wake, only to loll, to sport, to stare, to whisper, and to *wander* in your thoughts and affections, with “ the fool’s eyes, to the ends of the earth.” In all these ways you proclaim to every observing eye your absolute disregard to GOD and your own souls, to life and death, to heaven and hell. Nor is this your conduct at times only ; under the pressure of peculiar temptation ; or in seasons of peculiar languor and stupidity. It is repeated from week to week, and from the beginning of the year to its end. The Sabbath has always found you thus stupid and worldly. These walls have always witnessed this wretched course of sin, from the time when you first entered them. The GOD, who inhabits them, will be a tremendous witness, that these declarations are true, at the final day. How evidently, while continuing in this deplorable state, are you “ without GOD, and without hope, in the world.”

Among the evils, which attend your miserable condition, none is immediately more dreadful than this ; You know neither your

guilt, nor your danger. Nay, you are utterly unwilling to be informed of your situation; or to believe the information, when it is given. You say daily in your hearts, with the church of *Laodicea*, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing:" and, like the members of that church also, "know not, that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Christ with infinite compassion has called you, from the morning of life, to faith and repentance. He is even now saying, "How often would I have gathered you, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but ye would not." The day is hastening, when you will hear him proclaim with a voice of thunder, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD." The day is coming, when you will sleep beneath the eye of GOD no more. The day is coming, in which you will neither sport, nor whisper, in his presence. Then you will listen, but not to the calls of mercy. Then you will "call to the rocks, and to the mountains, to fall on you, and hide you from the wrath of the Lamb."

In the spiritual death, with which you are afflicted, there is, in many particulars, a strong resemblance to what is termed natural death. Of all those, who labour under incurable diseases, which mock the utmost skill of the physician, and defy the power of the most balsamic remedies, we customarily say, *that they are gone*. This we often say, while life yet remains; and while, perhaps, there are some means, unknown to us, by which, if administered in season, they might still live. There are also cases, in which, by swooning or by fits, life appears to have vanished, but in which by means of skilful applications it may nevertheless be restored. There are other cases still,



in which it has finally departed ; and has left nothing behind, but a corpse ; to which the animating principle will return no more.

All these diversities exist in spiritual death. Among those, who are thus dead, there are some, who may be restored, if the balsam of life should be administered in time by the great Physician. Of these it cannot be truly said, that all hopes of their restoration are gone forever. Of some there are hopes, that life may yet return, and reanimate their souls. The remedy, however, lies not within the skill of man. Christ alone can save them from dying forever.

But there are others, who are not only apparently, but finally, dead. These, indeed, we are unable to distinguish from others, who are in a state less desperate. Nor was it intended, nor is it necessary, that we should thus distinguish them. Every one may know, and if he open his eyes cannot but know, that, so long as he exhibits no signs of returning life, he is now dead. His soul is a corpse. Life has gone from it. It has become putrid ; loathsome ; and, to the eye of GOD, “ an abomination, which he cannot away with.” Should this continue to be its condition ; it will soon be buried in the eternal grave ; the seat of endless darkness, solitude and corruption. Who, let me ask, of the present assembly is in this dreadful condition ?

You cannot say, you cannot believe, that you have not been warned of your danger. Sabbath by sabbath you have been admonished, in the presence of GOD, to *awake from your sleep, and arise from the dead* that you might receive from the hands of *Christ the light* of life. But you can say, and will one day be forced to say, that “ you have set at naught all this counsel of GOD, and despised his reproof.” In the presence of that awful Being you loudly declare, that “ you will not have him to reign over you.” “ Who,” you boldly ask, “ is the Almighty, that we should serve him ?” Of all this your conduct furnishes flaming proof ; proof, which cannot be unseen, which cannot be mistaken. Who, that sees you sleep, and whisper, and nod, and point to others ; and laugh, and loll, and read books of diversion ; and do any thing, and every thing, rather than spend your time in wor-

shipping GOD, and seeking salvation, could imagine, that your Creator, Preserver, and Judge, was present to see himself, his Son, his Spirit, his Word, his Ordinances, thus insulted? Who could believe, that these were creatures, now in a state of probation; soon to die; soon to be judged by that GOD; and soon to enter on a state of everlasting reward for this very conduct? Who, much more, could imagine, that every one of them perfectly knew all these awful truths?

Who could believe, that every one of them had been taught the doctrines and duties of Religion by the tenderest, and most affectionate, of all human instructors; their own beloved parents? Who could believe, that they began to be taught the existence, character and presence, of GOD; their own sin, danger and duty; the way of salvation by Christ; the glory of heaven, and the miseries of hell; from the cradle; and that, ever since they could understand any thing of a moral nature, they have heard them all repeated weekly in the house of their Maker? Such, however, has been the fact. They have all been thus taught, and repeated; and your stupidity has long overcome them all. It is therefore, deep, fixed, and dreadful. It has been assumed also, and cherished, in spite of all the blessings, in defiance of all the warnings, of GOD's providence; of your own dangers, distresses and deliverances. You have been cultivated with no common care; and have been reasonably expected to bring forth good and abundant fruit. What reason have you to tremble, lest GOD should speedily say; nay lest he should now say; "Behold these three years I come, seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none. Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?"

II. *There is still room to hope that among you there may in the end be found some youths of Nain; some, who, though now dead, and to the human eye lost and gone forever, may yet be restored to life.*

Christ is always passing by, always pursuing the glorious purposes of his mercy. It cannot, I trust, be a presumptuous hope, that towards some, towards at least a few of this assembly, he may exercise his boundless compassion; and before they go

hence, to be no more seen, and no more invited to embrace eternal life, may say unto each of this little number, "Young man, arise." It is true, you have long "denied him," and are now "ashamed to confess him, before men." It is true, that you despise his character, disregard his mission, reject his instructions, disobey his precepts, and contemn his ordinances. It is true, that you insult his goodness and mercy, trample on his cross, and renew his agonies. But "the ways of Christ are not your ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than your ways, and his thoughts than your thoughts." Hence, notwithstanding all your rebellion, and all your stupidity he has cried from the beginning, and still cries, "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found, call ye upon him, while he is near. Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the LORD; for he will have mercy upon him, and to our GOD; for he will abundantly pardon." He died, with the complete foreknowledge of all the guilt and grossness which I have rehearsed: yet he died. The Spirit of Grace began to strive, with the same foreknowledge of the same guilt. Still he strives with you. Still with a voice, sweeter than that of angels, he whispers to you daily, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" It is, therefore, no unreasonable thing to hope, that, notwithstanding the blessings which you have abused, have been very great, notwithstanding your sins are of no common dye, Christ may still extend mercy to some of your number; and may say to one, and another, "Young man, arise."

But who shall these be? Who shall be those, to whom he will *not* say this? Which of you is prepared to have him leave you entirely? During the ministry of Christ there were in *Judea* many youths, who died. Of these possibly not one was recalled to life. Their *dust* was left by him to "return to the earth as it was, and their spirits to ascend to God, who gave them." The allusion needs no comment.

Suppose this glorious person, this divine Redeemer, to be once more present in the world; and to come into this assembly; to pass through yonder aisle; and to say to one, and another, of

the youths before me, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise," What emotions would spring up in the minds of those, who were neglected and forgotten? Would you then loll in stupid inattention; lay down your heads, as if benumbed with the torpor of an opiate; and sleep the sleep of Death? Would you then turn the house of God into a chamber of amusement; cast a rolling stare around the assembly; whisper to one of your companions; laugh with another; and play tricks with a third. Or would you take out of your pockets a sportive book; and waste the golden hours of life over a play, or a novel?

On the contrary, would not all the powers of your souls be awake? Would you not sit in dreadful suspense, till the solemn calls were finished; and in more dreadful agitation, when they were over: while Christ and hope withdrew together, to return no more? What an awful alarm would the very news, that he was thus coming, sound in your ears? How strongly would the tidings resemble the sound of the last trumpet, calling to the dead to awake to the final judgment. At his entrance, how would every eye be fixed on him in solemn amazement, and bewildered terror? How would the ear listen, and labour, to catch his voice? How would the heart of him, who was passed by, beat, and throb, and heave, with agonizing throes, to behold one, and another, and another, called; and no sweet, life-giving sound addressed to himself? How fearfully would every new name seem to be the last; and leave on the mind no faint image of the despair, awakened by the sentence of reprobation at the final day?

But Christ is now present in this assembly. Hear his own words, "Wherever two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." On this very design is he come. His great business, here, is to call one and another from the dead. He has in this land, he has in this Seminary, actually raised multitudes from spiritual death; and endued them with that life, which is the beginning of immortal life in the heavens. In one place, and another, immense multitudes have heard and obeyed his voice. All these have opened their ears to inhale the enchanting sound; and cried out with ecstasy, "Lord, we will follow thee whithersoever thou goest."

But now no alarms are felt concerning the state of death and ruin, so generally experienced. No voice reanimates, no voice awakens, this assembly. A paralytic torpor has seized on their faculties; and stopped the current of consciousness, motion, and life. In vain the law thunders the terrors of Mount Sinai. In vain it proclaims the more awful terrors of the final day. In vain the Gospel sounds with the spirit of heaven. In vain the inhabitants of that world sing the celestial song, "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people: for unto you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." In vain this divine Saviour becomes incarnate, lives, and acts, heals the sick, cleanses the leper, and raises the dead, before your eyes. In vain he presents his perfect example: a glorious copy of the divine character; a sun, without a spot; a heaven, without a cloud; the splendour of immortal and uncreated light. In vain he utters the wisdom, treasured up from eternity in the Self-existent Mind. In vain he agonizes in the garden of *Gethsemane*, and sweats drops of blood. In vain he ascends the cross, opens his wounds, and yields his spirit into the hands of his Father. In vain he bursts the tomb, rises from the dead, and ascends "to the right hand of the Majesty on high." All this fails, not merely to engross the soul, but even to rouse attention. The soul is asleep; the faculties are benumbed; the senses have lost their power of perception; the heart has forgotten to feel, and the pulse to beat. All around is a charnel house; a place of graves; a region of silence, oblivion, and despair. He, who beholds the scene, is tempted irresistibly to exclaim, "Can these dry bones live?"

The joy of heaven over repenting sinners has ceased to be renewed here. From this Seminary no tidings of faith and repentance, in those who inhabit its walls, reach the world above. In that happy region, where the tidings of a returning sinner awaken a sublime and universal festival, all is solemn silence concerning *us*; accompanied, perhaps, with a despair of seeing their society enlarged by new accessions of sanctified minds, from this once highly favoured place.

A small number of years, only, have passed away since this Seminary was probably more distinguished for its piety, in proportion to its numbers, than any other at that time, in the Christian world. Then this house was the most solemn, as well as most delightful place, and contained the most interesting congregation, which I have been permitted to behold. Then the Word of God, the good seed from heaven, was sown upon "good ground, and sprang up, and bore fruit, thirty, sixty, and an hundred fold." It is now "a way side; a stony ground;" a plat of *thorns* and briers; where the good seed cannot spring; or where, if it springs, it cannot grow.

Still there may be hope even concerning us. Our *wilderness* may yet *become a fruitful field*. The *heavens* may again "drop down from above; the skies pour down righteousness; and the earth open, and bring forth salvation." Therefore, also now saith the Lord, "Turn ye even to me, with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping and with mourning, and rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord, your God: for he is gracious, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." "Who knoweth if he will return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind him?"

III. *For the accomplishment of this great end; this restoration to spiritual life; it is indispensable, that such, as desire to be interested in it, should begin a total change of their conduct.*

Look back upon your past lives; and you will want nothing to convince you, either of the truth, or the importance, of this declaration. You will there see, that you have hitherto taken no measures, no care, no thought, to obtain spiritual life. Were Christ to be present, and to unfold your situation, would he not of course declare, that, hitherto, you generally have not made this mighty concern the subject even of solemn conversation; nay, not even of sober reflection. Recur to your thoughts concerning it; if you have indeed had such thoughts. How few have they been; how rare; how momentary; how fruitless! Recur to your efforts. Can you realize, that any such have been made? Can you tell what they were? Can you remember them?

Can you find them? Recur to your prayers. When were they offered up? Can you recall the times? Can you recollect the places? When has the Bible been searched by you for the words of eternal life? When has God found you in your closets? When has he heard you ask for mercy in his House? When have you adopted solemn meditation; formed serious resolutions; and attempted a real amendment of your lives? When have you renounced the world; quitted your evil companions; relinquished your sins; and cast yourselves upon the mercy of God? When have you trembled at the approach of perdition, and sighed, and cried for deliverance from the wrath to come? When have you turned your backs upon destruction, and your faces towards heaven? Will not the single word, *Never*, be the true but melancholy answer to all these questions? Do not you yourselves see, that you are spiritually dead, "dead in trespasses and sins," and, if you continue your present conduct, without a hope of returning life? "Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

But it is not enough for you to review your past life. Open your eyes in solemn prospect on the scenes before you. Your life will soon hasten to a close. You will soon be arrested by your last sickness, and be laid upon the bed of death. Your hearts will cease to beat; your strength fail; and your eyes be closed in darkness. Your bodies will be carried to the grave; and your *spirits will return to God who gave them*. Think, I beseech you, think what it will be to meet your Judge; to give up your account; and to enter upon your retribution. You will not there meet the helpless babe of *Bethlehem*; the man of sorrows; the buffeted prisoner; the victim of the cross; the tenant of the tomb. You will stand before "the Judge of the quick and the dead, the blessed and only Potentate," seated on the throne of the universe; "from whose face the heavens and the earth will flee away;" whose smile will be heaven; whose frown will be hell. Your account will be the register of your life: your trial will be final: your souls will be suspended on the process: your eternity will tremble on its issue.

Of such a life, as you have actually led, what will, what must, be your account? Of the trial of such souls what must be the issue? When you have recited all your unbelief, your impenitence, your rebellion, your impiety, and all the annals of your guilt; will this glorious person subjoin to the black and dismal rehearsal, "Well done, good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord?" Will he take you to his arms; and present you to his Father, as his beloved friends and faithful disciples, who in this world have obeyed his voice, and *walked in all his commandments and ordinances*? Will he open to you the gates of heaven; and conduct you to endless life, and glory inexpressible? Does it seem even to you, partial and biassed as you are, and judging in your own case, that this will be the reward of such a life, as yours? I know the answer, which your consciences will give. I know, that you yourselves believe the case to be hopeless. It is impossible for you seriously to imagine, that beings, polluted as you are, should be admitted, thus crimsoned with guilt, into the presence of Him, "in whose sight the heavens themselves are not clean." It is impossible for you to believe, that "fulness of joy" should reward your impiety; that "pleasures for evermore" should flow for your enjoyment.

All the measures, which you have hitherto taken, have not advanced you a single step towards eternal life. You have not yet entered "the straight and narrow way, which leads to that life." How can you expect to find the gates of glory, which open at its termination? You have not yet begun to serve God here. How can you expect either to be willing, or permitted, to "serve him day and night in his" eternal "temple." You have not yet begun to assume the temper of angels, or of "the spirits of just men made perfect." How can you expect to become their companions forever.

Alas! you have entered, you have gone far, you are now rapidly hastening onward, in "the broad and crooked road, which leads to destruction." In this progress you are satisfied; stupid; gay; sportive; undisturbed by conscience; and regardless of death, and the judgment. On the brink of perdition you sleep.



The voice of mercy cries to you, "Awake, O sleeper! and call upon thy GOD." Half roused to consciousness, in the middle point between life and death, you feebly exclaim, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." The voice of judgment will soon pronounce, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still." Awake, then, "while it is called to day; Arise; Stand upon your feet;" ply the work of your salvation; repent; believe; escape for your lives: or the night will be upon you, in which you will sleep, to wake no more.

## SERMON XIV.

CONSIDERATIONS IN ADVERSITY.—SERMON I.



ECCLESIASTES vii. 14.

*In the day of adversity consider.*

By the day of adversity is undoubtedly intended, as the phrase most naturally denotes, any season of suffering and sorrow. The loss of property, health, friends, or any other truly valuable enjoyments, constitutes such a season; and calls for the duty, enjoined in the text.

In such a season, we are required to *consider*. This phrase is general in its import and includes a great variety of particulars. Generally it intends, that we should apply our minds soberly, solemnly, and fixedly, to the contemplation of such things, as are naturally offered to our view by the Providence of God; and by such a contemplation that we should make them the means of real and enduring good to our souls.

*In the day of prosperity* we are directed, in the preceding clause, to *be joyful*. It is plain, therefore, that, in the sight of God, a *different conduct* is proper for men in *different seasons and circumstances*; and that such different conduct is useful to *us*, and acceptable to *Him*. In adversity, it is agreeable to his will, that we lay aside the cheerfulness which becomes prosperity, and endeavour to derive from our situation useful instructions and useful impressions; solemn, but profitable; suited to the state of an afflicted mind; and fitted to make such a mind wiser and better. Sobriety, sorrow, and mourning, are all proper states of the human mind; and are no less useful in their place, than joy and gratitude. Each of these, in its own place, is fitted

to produce real good to man. Prosperity naturally leads a good mind to gratitude, and also to repentance. Afflictions as naturally *yield* to such a mind “the peaceable fruits of righteousness.”

That such consideration is, in such a season, our duty, we know, because it is commanded. Our principal concern, then with this subject must be to learn how to perform this duty, and to feel, fully, its high importance. I shall suggest therefore, in this discourse,

I. *Some of the proper subjects of consideration in a day of adversity; and*

II. *The Motives to a faithful performance of this duty.*

I. *I shall mention some of the proper subjects of consideration in the day of adversity.*

Among these I shall notice

1st. *The source of our afflictions: viz. GOD.*

“I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace,” or prosperity, “and create evil,” or adversity. “I the Lord, do all these things.” Isaiah xlv. 7th.

“Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?” Amos iii. 6th.

“Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.” Job v. 6th.

The consideration, that GOD is the source of our afflictions, furnishes us with many useful and affecting lessons. Particularly we are taught by this solemn truth, that *our afflictions are all just, proper, and reasonable*. In mere suffering there can be neither consolation, nor profit. Suffering, inflicted without a solid cause, and a benevolent end, is the result of oppression only. No man is fitted to derive good from this source. On the contrary, he is irresistibly impelled to resistance and hostility; or overwhelmed by depression, and despair. To the very existence of those benefits which afflictions produce, it is absolutely necessary, that we should be convinced of the justice and reasonableness of the infliction. The knowledge, that they come from GOD, is unanswerable proof of the propriety and the equity of the painful dispensation. “The Judge of all the earth,” we know, “doth

right ;” and, therefore, however distressing our sufferings, we are sure that they are not unjust.

Nor are we less assured, that *our afflictions are sent in measure, and in mercy.* “Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. His mercies are greater than our sins ; they are above the heavens, and endure forever. They are,” also, “from generation to generation ;” and are of course experienced by *every generation* of mankind.

*Punishment* is to him a *strange work.* “He hath no pleasure in the death” even “of the wicked ; but would rather, that he would return, and repent, and live.”

Hence, there can be nothing unkind, nothing oppressive, in his dispensations ; however grievous, they may seem for the present. On the contrary, they are the kind chastisements of *the Father of our spirits, for our good.* They are, therefore, to be regarded, as being infinitely different from the cruelties of our fellow creatures ; the wrath, revenge, and bitterness, often manifested by them in fearful expressions of an evil disposition.

From these considerations it is further evident, that *our afflictions are necessary.* We are froward, rebellious, disobedient, children. We need to be chastised, to bring us to a disposition conformed to the commands of our heavenly Father, and indispensable to our well-being ; a disposition, without which we cannot be happy, nor useful ; and without which we are unwilling to suffer others to be happy. As our own children are brought from rebellion and frowardness to obedience and sweetness of temper ; so are the children of our heavenly Father redeemed in the same manner, and by the same means, to a filial and penitent state of mind, and to a virtuous and amiable life.

With these views, *we cannot easily revolt, when we are afflicted ;* unless, like *Ephraim,* of old, we are become incorrigible, and discourage even God himself from chastising us any longer.

2dly. *Another subject of consideration to the afflicted is the Procuring Cause of their afflictions.*

Our Sins are this cause. We merit all that we receive ; and much more. We are exceedingly guilty, wicked beings. Sin is

a dreadful evil ; far more hateful than we are willing to believe, and especially to confess. Our own sins are, also immensely more numerous and aggravated, than we can be persuaded to acknowledge, or admit. We therefore deserve at the hand of God, great and distressing punishment. Of this we receive, here, even in our most unhappy circumstances, a very little part. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide ; nor will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."

Sin is that abominable thing, *which* his soul hates. To remove us from our attachment to it, he uses innumerable methods ; all formed, and adopted, by infinite wisdom and goodness. If we do not, from a most blamable obstinacy, or an equally blamable negligence, prevent their efficacy ; they will prove effectual to the final extirpation of this fatal evil. But whether we yield to Him and his providence, or not, He will never cease to regard both sin and sinners, with abhorrence. Against it he will contend in this world, and in that which is to come, with supreme and unchangeable hatred and opposition. To it he will grant no indulgence : from it he will never withdraw the rod of chastisement. Unblamable virtue was never afflicted by God, except in the person of Christ ; and then it was not afflicted for its own sake ; but for the sake of those miserable sinners for whom he died. All the good are loved by God ; and all are gloriously rewarded throughout his vast kingdom. Such of them, indeed, as are imperfectly good, will be often chastised ; but this is done, only to make them better. "He smites them in his wrath for a small moment ; but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy on them. For the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him : and his righteousness to children's children."

Whenever, therefore, we are afflicted, let us say, with *Daniel*, "Oh Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord, our God, belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him, Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants, the prophets."

3dly. *The afflicted should also consider the End, for which their afflictions are sent.*

This is, generally, to "turn us from the error of our ways, that we may save our souls alive." "The Father of our spirits" always chastises, according to the language of St. Paul, "for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness." This end is evidently the best of all ends; an end eminently divine, and worthy of a God. Who, with a full conviction of this, as the real end, can fail to "be in subjection to the Father of Spirits, that he may live." Must not this consideration produce patience, submission, gratitude, and an universally filial character? One would think it an ample and abundant source of all those "peaceable fruits of Righteousness," which are found by those, who never "despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when they are rebuked of him."

4thly. *The afflicted should also consider the Instructions, which are communicated by their distresses.*

These are very numerous, and all of them are important. A few only can be new mentioned.

First. *Afflictions teach us, that this world was not designed to be a place of happiness.*

This plain lesson is one of the most difficult to be learned by us. We are, indeed, ready enough to acknowledge it to be true; but our acknowledgment, in most instances, comes from our lips only, and not from our hearts. This is unanswerably proved by our daily conduct. When we lose one enjoyment, we betake ourselves to another; and, when disappointed of the expected happiness in one case, we turn speedily to another; proving by all, which we do, our belief, that there is real and sufficient good, to be found somewhere; although we have, hitherto, missed it

in our search. Earth still is the darling object. The old man shews this equally with the youth ; and grasps his bags and his offices as eagerly, as the youth his pleasures and his fame. Even the Christian is but *partly iron* ; the remainder of his composition is still *clay*. Firm at times, he is frail and crumbling at other times. He often lets go his hold on heaven ; and clings closely to earth.

The vanity of all this conduct, and of the things which prompt it, nothing teaches so effectually as Affliction. He, who has lost his wealth, is more ready than ever before to feel, that “riches take to themselves wings, and fly away.” He, who has lost his popularity, power, and fame, is more willing than before to confess, and to believe, that it is unwise to put “trust in princes, or in the sons of men,” in whom there is neither faithfulness, nor *help*. He, who has lost his beloved friends, and the children who were “bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh,” learns, perhaps for the first time, that the very *life*, on which the continuance of these most dear enjoyments depended, “is but a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” He, who has been deprived of his health, becomes easily convinced that himself is but “dust, crushed before the moth ; and born to trouble as” naturally, as “the sparks fly upward.”

Thus we discern by the loss of enjoyment, that the things enjoyed are frail, perishing, and utterly unfitted to be the firm grounds of confidence to an immortal mind ; the objects, on which it can safely and permanently rest ; the sources, whence it can derive the happiness which it needs.

At times, all these truths are strongly impressed by a single affliction. Especially is this the case, when the affliction is very great, sudden and unexpected ; or when it befalls a mind peculiarly tender and susceptible ; or when it comes in an hour of uncommon feeling and solemnity. But more usually it is the result of successive chastisements to such gross, hard, forgetful, sluggish hearts, as ours. When we see one blessing taken away after another ; we naturally begin to realize that this is not a world of enjoyment, but a vale of tears ; that God did not des-

tine us here, to the happiness for which we were made, and for which we feel irresistible desires, and a boundless capacity. Thus are we taught, in that which is the only effectual method of instruction, this indispensable and most profitable lesson; and thus do we become finally convinced, that we are here mere probationers for another and *better country*, and have in this world *no abiding place*. Hence we are led to feel as “pilgrims and strangers on the earth,” and to seek for our permanent residence, “a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.”

On this great lesson is grafted, inseparably, another which is kindred to it; *the folly of our attachment to this world*.

If the world be thus vain, we cannot but discern the folly of placing our affections inordinately upon it. That, which is of little worth, deserves little of our attention and attachment. That which is fleeting and uncertain, however valuable otherwise, must be of little worth; and that, which is of little value in itself, and is also transient and precarious, is scarcely of any worth at all. None but a fool, or a madman, can highly prize the most beautiful and splendid bubble; which, though adorned with hues of enchantment, dissolves at a touch, and is changed in a moment into a mere drop of impure water.

Intimately connected with this truth is another of the same useful nature; *the equal, or rather the enhanced, folly of our anxieties and labours, to gain and secure so poor an inheritance in such a world*. Think not, that I object to an industrious pursuit of the things of this world. Industry in our respective callings is the duty of us all. But industry, to be lawful, or useful, must be pursued as a duty; and not as an indulgence or instrument of avarice, ambition, or sensuality. We must be industrious, solely because God has commanded it; because good will result from it; and because idleness will ruin us both in soul and body; and not because industry will make us rich, great, or possessed of sensual enjoyment. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”



The usual method, in which men are industrious, is a mere obedience to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." This world is to most men the ultimate object. Instead of labouring that they may serve God, obey his commands, and become benefactors to those around them; they labour, solely, to gain an inheritance here; confine all their cares and anxieties to this side of the grave; and think nothing of God, duty, or eternal life. Thus they are *without God in this world, and without hope in the next.*

The first great check, which this wordly, wretched spirit finds, is a conviction, usually produced by mere suffering, that the world itself is a poor, miserable, perishing possession; in which the good, they seek, can never be found. With this conviction they easily learn, that they "labour for that which is not meat, and spend their strength for that which satisfieth not;" that they have during all their preceding life, "been feeding on wind, and snuffing up the east wind."

Hence they, also, naturally learn not to "set their affections on things below," however delightful, and however endeared. Property, power, fame, pleasure, friends, children, parents, husbands, wives, health, and life itself, begin to lose their false value, and deceitful charms. The world universally begins to wear a new and juster appearance. Instead of the Paradise, which it was originally believed to be, fraught with "every thing good for food," beautiful to the eye, and "pleasant to the taste;" it is now discerned to be a mere wilderness, dry and thirsty, barren of real good, perplexed with thorns and briers, and furnishing to the longing soul no springs of life, no refuge, no home.

Secondly. *Afflictions teach us, that our life, as well as our enjoyments, is frail, uncertain and momentary.*

It may seem strange for me to suppose, that any man needs to be taught this truth, after being taught it by every thing which passes before his eyes, and by the testimony of God, and of all his fellow creatures. I do not, indeed, suppose any man ignorant of it; or even doubtful concerning the proposition, as generally stated. Still I believe few men realize this truth, obvious

as it is, with regard to themselves. That they *may* die, all will acknowledge. Most feel, perhaps, in some degree or other, that, at some distant period, they *must* die. But few, I suspect, feel that death is near, and life uncertain, or even short. To most, if we may trust the testimony of our eyes, or ears, a long life appears highly probable, if not absolutely secure. Most of the Young promise themselves old age, and most of the aged, one, or several years to come. In a few instances, solitary and transient, it is probable, that all men may believe death near and life precarious; but, in the usual current of thought they feel secure of future days, and of many such days.

It would also seem, that no reasoning has sufficient power to change this state of the mind; at least none, which is actually employed. We hear arguments; allow their force; and then think, and feel and act, just as if they had never been alleged.

But what arguments cannot do, afflictions can. The sickness of ourselves, when brought to the borders of the grave, or the death of our friends, companions and children, beloved of us, and necessary to our happiness is "a hand writing on the wall" to the stupid, wordly mind; and presents before us in solemn, awful, and irresistible language, "Thou art numbered, and finished." We now begin to *feel*, as well as to *know*; and, for a short time at least, and in the moment of serious pondering, we discern death really at the door; and behold the grave opening to receive us to its lonely and desolate mansions. This is the teaching, of which I speak; and which afflictions almost alone give. Our former convictions had no practical influence. Our present instructions are of higher power, and happier efficacy. From them often springs a change of our thoughts, our affections and our conduct. Our belief becomes practical; and often produces a lasting and saving influence on our lives; and, like *David*, we find it "good for us to have been afflicted."

Thirdly. *Afflictions teach us, that our probation is equally transient.*

Few of those, who believe the Scriptures at all, fail to believe, generally and loosely, that life is a day of probation, on which

all their future being depends. By afflicted persons life begins seriously to be thought to be such a day, when their afflictions begin. In consequence of this new thought, a new *train of thinking* follows. All the work of salvation now first appears to them to be future, and yet to be begun. They discern and feel, that it must, if ever done, be done on this side of the grave. Now they see GOD reconcilable to them. Now they hear the Saviour invite them to lay hold on eternal life. Now "the Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say come; and let him that is athirst come; and, whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Now the Word of life is in their hands. But "in the grave, whither they go, there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom."

Life, therefore, begins now to seem to them of infinite value. In life, if ever, the soul is to be saved. If neglected now, it will be neglected forever. Short and uncertain, as the period is, it is the only period in which salvation is to be secured.

To the mind, in such a state, will naturally recur the thought *how much of life it has already lost*. Salvation is not already secured by those, of whom I especially speak. Of course, all the preceding part of life has been wasted by them. This may be almost the whole of life, and must be much of it; infinitely too much to have been thus lost and squandered, to have been given to the world, the flesh and the devil, to sense and sin, to guilt and perdition.

To such a mind will naturally rise up, in solemn and dreadful remembrance the numerous Sabbaths, which it has lost, profaned and abused: the ordinances, which it has neglected and despised; the calls of mercy, to which it has turned a deaf ear, and a hard heart; the prayers and praises, in which it has steadily refused to unite; and the sermons, which it has neglected and trampled under foot.

It will also remember with deep regret, how often and how long the word of GOD has been left on the shelf, or in the closet, unopened, unread, forgotten, and despised; how many religious instructions it has cast away, ridiculed, and disobeyed;

and how many good resolutions it has formed, only to be violated, and to be left, as mere memorials of its folly and its sin.

At such a time, it is apt to feel how little it has done, and how much it has had to do; how barren a fig tree it has been in its master's vineyard; and how strongly it has provoked him to say, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground."

To the Christian, all these instructions, so far as they are applicable to him, are also given by afflictions. In addition to them, he is most affectingly reminded how cold, stupid and unfruitful, he has been in the service of his Lord; how much of his heart, his labours and his time, he has given to the world, and sin, and folly, and shame; how many opportunities of improving in all Christian graces, and in the divine life, he has either wholly or chiefly lost; how many opportunities of doing good to the souls of men, of honouring Christ, of glorifying God, of adorning Christianity, of proving a blessing to himself and to mankind. Every such opportunity will now naturally recur to him, as of value mightily enhanced; as most diligently and earnestly to be employed: as eagerly to be seized, and carefully to be husbanded. He will see the world, and life, and talents, in a light, which in various respects is new, and of increased importance. The voice of affliction is to him the voice of God, calling upon him for renewed diligence; to consider life as only a time of doing good; and to feel that his duty is all, for which he was sent into the world, and all, for which his residence in it is continued. Hence he will be quickened to greater and greater efforts; to lose no time; to neglect no talent; to pass by no opportunity of doing all the good in his power; and especially of promoting the salvation of his fellow creatures.

Religion, and all the means, instructions, precepts and duties, of it will now appear invested with a character and importance, peculiarly solemn and affecting. Religion he will, with new and enlightened vision, behold to be all, for which life is worth having or enjoying; the end of his creation, preservation and blessings; the source of his happiness, and his worth; and the foundation of all his hopes in the future world. Religion is, therefore, seen

and felt to be his all. The world, to him more empty and worthless than before, appears now almost merely as a stage of action; a scene of duty. In performing this duty he will more than ever intend to find his enjoyment; and will fully realize that it is "more blessed to give than to receive;" to do good than to gain it.

All these instructions affliction also writes with "a pen of iron, and the point of a diamond." They are engraved on the heart; and are therefore long, and often indelibly, legible. They are accordingly read daily and efficaciously. Like the instructions of childhood, which survive all the changes of life, which are remembered and powerful, when all succeeding instructions have vanished, they remain in strong and glowing characters, and produce mighty effects, long after they would be naturally supposed to have been forgotten. Time, which effaces all other images, often makes these brighter and stronger. The soul feels them in every variation of its circumstances; in every change of human events; and, recognising them in their full power on a dying bed, carries them into eternity. There, not improbably they assume new force; are remembered as means, eminently kind and merciful, of its escape from sin, its assumption of holiness, its attainment of a title to endless life, its renewed vigour and faithfulness in the service of God, its increased beneficence to mankind, and its supreme enjoyment of the divine favour and celestial glory, throughout ages which cannot end.

## SERMON XV.



CONSIDERATIONS IN ADVERSITY.—SERMON II.

ECCLESIASTES vii. 14.

*In the day of adversity consider.*

IN the former discourse, I proposed to notice,

I. *Some of the proper Subjects of consideration, in the day of adversity.*

II. *The Motives to a faithful performance of this duty.*

Under the first head, I considered

1st. *The Source of our afflictions.*

2dly. *Their procuring Cause.*

3dly. *The End for which they were sent: and*

4thly. *The Instructions communicated by them.*

Among these I noticed,

First. *That the world was not designed to be a place of happiness.*

Secondly. *That life is frail, uncertain, and momentary.*

Thirdly. *That our Probation is equally transient.*

In pursuing this subject I shall mention, as another important instruction communicated by Afflictions;

Fourthly. *That the day of death, though always near, is still absolutely uncertain.*

This is a most profitable theme of consideration. “Boast not thyself of to-morrow;” says *Solomon*, “for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” No rule of life can be more obviously just, and reasonable, than this; yet no rule is more generally disregarded. We are always boasting of to-morrow; always promising ourselves long life and good days.

How foolish and unreasonable is this overweening! Were an enemy at hand, prepared and determined to attack us, could we justify ourselves in sleeping at our posts under the expectation, that, because the time of assault was unknown to us, a long period would of course intervene? What soldier would be excused by his Commander in such conduct, for such a reason?

In the present case, infinitely more is depending. Our life, our souls, our eternity, are at hazard. The arrival of death determines the destiny of them all, and determines it finally.

Precisely the contrary conduct ought to be pursued by us to that, which we actually pursue. As death is always near; we ought always to feel deeply this amazing concern. As death is always uncertain; we ought always to believe, and to feel, that it is near; that, instead of being more remote, it is nearer than we most naturally believe; that it may arrive to day, to morrow, or the next day; and that we are inexcusable and mad, if we neglect to prepare ourselves for it, a single moment.

To this end it is not necessary, that we should neglect any part of our worldly business, which our duty demands of us. Every day, we waste time enough in unreasonable care about the world, about riches, honours, and pleasures, or in idle, loitering, and useless amusement, to furnish ample opportunity for attending efficaciously to the great business of preparing for death. This wasted time, wasted in that which is of no profit to us, we ought to devote to Religion. Every day furnishes sufficient opportunities for this purpose. The business of religious men is not more apt to be neglected, or to decline, than that of other men; nor are they apparently more hurried, or perplexed; nor are they more uncomfortable, or more destitute of enjoyment. But they husband life better; and aim at more rational and sincere enjoyments. If we comprehended the meaning of that memorable precept, "With all thy getting get understanding," and were willing to obey it; we should see that the salvation of the soul might be easily secured, without neglecting any useful worldly object.

To enforce this great duty upon ourselves, we ought steadily to remember, that as death leaves us, so the judgment will find us: that "it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that" cometh "the judgment." The judgment is immediately beyond death. When "the dust returns to the earth as it was, the spirit shall return to God who gave it." No intervening period will then respite the soul, and allow it to make further preparation for this stupendous event, not made in the present world. How overwhelming, and dreadful, will it be to a dying sinner to see himself still a sinner, when his Lord shall call him to his final reckoning; and to find, that all the terrors of his dying bed are only increased beyond measure, the moment he opens his eyes in the invisible world!

*Fifthly. Afflictions teach us, that a dying bed is a most improper place to begin the work of repentance.*

The body on a dying bed is either wasted with disease, or racked with pain. With the weakness and distress of the body the weakness of the soul usually keeps pace. He, who has lost almost all his bodily strength, is unfitted for solemn, or even clear and just, contemplation. In a languishing body all the thoughts and affections of the soul usually languish; and, if exerted at all, are exerted to no valuable end. How few men are able, on such a bed, wisely and properly to arrange and direct, even their worldly affairs? affairs, which they may be said to have gotten by heart; and all the parts of which are habitually familiar. How much less fitted must they be to enter on the great work of salvation; a new and vast work, to no part of which they have hitherto paid any proper attention. This demands clear and comprehensive thought, strong affections, vigorous resolutions, and complete self possession.

When the body is distressed, and sinking under pain, the soul, besides its weakness, is forced to attend to its sufferings; and is, of course; engrossed by them. It then becomes, in a sense, impossible for it to turn its views, with either strength, or success, to any other object. In the paroxysms of the gout, or cholic, or in the labourings of the asthma, who could properly take care of



the simplest business. But how much more intense, in many instances, are the pains of death, than these? And how often are *these* the very pains of a dying bed?

The terrors also, under which the mind of a sinner must sink on his death bed, cannot fail to prevent him from that steady, firm, serene, and just thinking, indispensable to a due preparation for death. Death is now near; beyond it, immediately, is the judgment; and beyond that the recompense of reward.

Or, if we suppose the sinner unalarmed concerning these things, we must also suppose him stupid and unconcerned about his salvation.

The time, spent on a dying bed, is usually short, and in a sense momentary. This is an unhappy circumstance for him, who has so much to do, and that of such high importance. The continuance of life too, is now felt to be uncertain; and this fact alarms the soul too much, to leave it a full possession of this short period.

There is also dreadful reason to fear, that God, after a life of revolt and impiety, will refuse to be reconciled to the sinner, who has given himself to rebellion throughout all his days, and now, when he can sin no longer, is anxious to be reconciled to his Maker. "Be not deceived," says *St. Paul*, "God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." What is mocking God, if the consecration of a whole life to sin, and making the proffers of repentance and reformation at the last hour, is not? The man has "sown to the flesh" through life: is there not every reason to believe, that "of the flesh he will reap corruption" only? All these solemn things we are affectingly taught by the death of our friends. We see few persons hopefully repent on a death bed. We see them then hurried, enfeebled, alarmed, distressed; unable to command their thoughts and affections, and very rarely accomplishing, or even beginning, the work of salvation. Nay, we see even the good, the religious, often thus embarrassed and distressed; and possessing less bright and comforting views of their good estate, and their reconciliation to God, than at other times. In this there is nothing strange,

nothing discouraging concerning *them*. Their former views and lives furnish us with abundant consolation ; yet even *they* strongly teach us this great truth, in a very affecting manner, *that a dying bed is not the proper place to begin the work of Repentance.*

The same truth is also taught by the deaths of such Christians, as then enjoy abundant peace and consolation. In them we behold how wise and supporting it is, to have begun and finished this mighty work, “ while it ” was “ called to day ; ” to have seized the spring time to cast in the seed, and to have the summer before them, to mature the harvest.

When *sinner*s die quietly, we are not less forcibly taught the same lesson. There is an immense difference between the quiet of a dying sinner, and the peace of an expiring Christian. The latter is the result of clear conviction ; of sweet, resigned, obedient affections ; of divine consolation and support ; and of heavenly anticipations. The former is the offspring of mere stupidity ; of hardness of heart, and blindness of mind ; of wretched self-righteousness ; and of a total insensibility to what the sinner is, and to what he is soon to be. Nothing can more awfully shew how dangerous it is to leave the life of the soul to such a dismal and unprofitable death.

All these facts, and facts too of the most interesting and solemn nature, press this great truth upon the survivors, and especially upon the surviving and afflicted friends, with a force wholly peculiar ; a force, which can be felt, but which cannot be described. Every man, in the full view of them, ought to believe, that, although a death bed repentance is sometimes found, yet, if he postpones this concern to that unsuitable and unhappy place, he will never repent, but go to the judgment with all his sins upon his head.

Sixthly. *Afflictions teach us most important instructions, in the consideration of the characters of our deceased friends ; and of their conduct during their lives, and at their deaths.*

This class of instructions, will greatly vary with the ever varying characters and conduct of men.

In the characters of our deceased friends, if they were Christians, we see most endearing and delightful examples of persons, who have gone through life with true wisdom, and effectually secured the end of their being. To *us* they present a glorious example, brought home to our hearts by a thousand interesting considerations ; of their obedience to God ; of their beneficence to mankind ; of their wise attention to the concerns of the soul ; and of their final victory over every danger, and every enemy. The means which they employed ; the efforts which they made ; the resistance which they manifested to temptation and to sin ; the triumphs which they attained over their spiritual enemies, evil examples, evil communications, powerful lusts, and dangerous snares ; furnish us with a pattern of wisdom and excellence, which God most impressively calls upon us to imitate. To be like them in character is a most honourable distinction : to see, like them, the end of all our labours, is infinite gain.

Beyond this, we are assured, that, if we are in the same manner wise and faithful, we shall be hereafter reunited to them in the world of happiness. Thither they have gone, to receive their divine reward. There they will be found, when we arrive in the same delightful world. They are already beginning to hail the moment, when they shall see us again, and renew the former affection and intimacy with enhanced endearment. Already do they watch for the hastening moment, which will release us from pain, and sin, and temptation ; which will bear us on its wings to the glorious assembly in which they are enrolled ; and which will place us in their company and friendship, beyond the danger, as well as the sufferance, of sin, and sorrow, and fear, and death. There we shall see, and know, and love them, and be loved by them, forever. Whatever counsels they may have given us, while residing in the present world, will now come home to us, with all the efficacy of dying words. They will be counsels, heard from beyond the grave ; monitions from the regions of invisible being.

If, on the contrary, they have lived in sin, and died without hope ; they yet furnish us with instructions of incalculable importance.

From them, we learn the miserable folly of sin, its dreadful tendency, and its wretched end. How solemnly do they warn us, that "her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death?" At the same time they teach us in the same awful manner, the folly of postponing the day of repentance. They most unhappily have postponed it. To them no "convenient season" ever arrived for beginning this great business. Whatever designs they planned, whatever resolutions they formed, on this subject, all of them proved vain and abortive. "As the fishes are caught in an evil net, and as the birds are caught in the snare; so they were snared in an evil time, when it came suddenly upon them."

Their deaths also teach us, what were the means of their ruin: the love of pleasure, of wealth, of honour, of power, of sloth, of self deception, and self justification. Some of these objects have proved fatal to them. We by their deaths see all these things brought up to awful view, as a warning to us, from the world of sorrow; that we prove not miserable victims to the same enemies. If we shun them; we shall escape the ruin, of which they have been the cause. If we follow them; the same will be our end.

Seventhly. *The afflicted are especially reminded how many blessings they have left.*

A serious man can hardly fail, in the hour of sorrow and bereavement, to turn his eye to the blessings, which God has been pleased still to continue for his enjoyment. He will, I think, hardly fail to say, at least within himself, "I have lost property; but still I have bread to eat, and raiment to put on. I am sick; but I am less distressed than many others; and I am surrounded by friends, whose kindness and care daily alleviate the evils of disease. I have also my reason, while others are destitute of this essential blessing, and are groping in the solitude and chains of bedlam. I have lost children; or I have been deprived of friends; but I have long enjoyed their company and kind offices; and interchanged with them a thousand endearments. I have also many friends; I have other children left me by a merciful

GOD. I have still many things given me richly to enjoy. *Of all these mercies, even of the least of them, I am utterly unworthy.* Nothing but the goodness of GOD has betowed, or even devised them. How often have I forfeited them all! How strange is it, that they should be continued to such a being as I am!"

*Eighthly. The afflicted learn from their afflictions, and not unfrequently for the first time, whither they are to look for consolation in great and distressing evils.*

They cannot derive it from the world.

In all the mere inconveniences of life, the world is able to furnish us with consolation, which is felt to be material, and generally sufficient. The pleasures, which we have lost, may be replaced; or, if not, may have their places supplied by some other enjoyments, equally, or perhaps more, agreeable.

But when our distresses become severe and intense, the blessing is gone, and cannot be replaced; and it admits of no substitute. In this case, the world is a barren and miserable comforter.

You have lost a father! Where can another be found? A mother. Who can supply her place? A child. What can fill the vacant heart? A brother, or a sister. Where can you hope to find them again? More distressing still, you have been bereaved of the husband of your youth, or the wife of your bosom. Who can bring them back from the grave? Who can stand in their stead? You are doomed to hopeless sickness and languishing? How can the world release you from the bondage? You are sunk in infamy. Can the world restore your good name; or the happiness which it gave?

Go to the world, full of the confidence, which you are accustomed to place, in it, and ask whether it has blessings to give, which will supply the places of those which you have lost. What will be its answer? It will shew its hands, naked and empty, as full proofs of its poverty; or turn from you, without even deigning to drop the tear of sympathy.

You have a broken spirit. Look round on all things below the sun; and tell me, whether you find in them all that *balm* of

*Gilead*, which alone will allay your anguish, and heal the ulcer of the heart. The world is a wretched empiric, ignorant alike of your disease, and of its cure; and after a long and empty parade of skill and assiduity, will leave you, when you have spent upon it your all, *nothing better, but rather grown worse*. To all your other sufferings will also be added this severe and dreadful one; that you will then find it too late to apply, where alone relief could have been found.

The afflicted the world has always been accustomed to regard with a cold eye, and an icy heart. To the mourner it is a solitude, dreary and desolate; in which he is alone; like one cast on an uninhabited island without a companion, and left to tell his sorrows to the rocks and the waves. To the man, deprived of his property, it is a mere almshouse; where, feeding on his own pittance, he looks abroad and sees plenty flowing around him; but it flows in the cup of *Tantalus*, which he is doomed never to taste. To the man who has lost his good name, however innocent he may be, it is a barred castle, into which he can gain no admission; where he hears nothing but the hiss of contempt, and sees nothing but the finger of derision pointed at himself. To the hopeless victim of disease it is a gloomy lazaret-house, where Sorrow sighs over her unceasing anguish, and Despair in ghastly silence fixes his eye on a neighbouring tomb.

But from *Religion* the afflicted can derive consolation, and sufficient consolation, in every sorrow.

To the poor, afflicted race of man, Religion is a heavenly messenger; who, like the angels sent to the *Bethlehem* shepherds, to announce the birth of the Saviour, while she proclaims unceasingly "Glory to God in the highest," sings, also, "peace on earth, and good will towards men." Towards every sufferer, labouring under heavy sorrows, and in the midst of despondency casting around his eyes in vain to find consolation and relief, she approaches with her own serene and benevolent smile, and proffers herself as a *comforter to mourners*. In her hand she carries the word of God; and opening the wonderful book, points to lines written with the divine finger, and dictated by the voice of infi-

nite compassion. "Behold," she cries, "the testimonies of the Lord are the heritage of the afflicted, forever. They are the rejoicing of the broken heart." In this sacred volume read, and find all the relief, which your sorrows need. Here the infinitely blessed JEHOVAH has pourtrayed himself, in characters of light, as "the Father of all mercies, and the God of all grace and consolation." Here he has disclosed himself as the common, kind, and compassionate parent of men; and has taught them that all his chastisements are inflicted only for the good of the sufferers; that it is their frowardness, which requires them; and their frowardness only, which prevents them from being the choicest blessings. To cure your melancholy diseases, to overcome your dangerous and deadly passions, they have descended on you; that you may *be a partaker of his holiness and live forever*. The boundless love, which contrived the deliverance of this world from sin and ruin, is here seen to watch with infinite tenderness over you. Hear the affectionate language, in which is disclosed to you the glorious and benevolent character of Him who made you. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his names sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Hear his own most wonderful words, and learn that exalted character from his own mouth. "Thus saith the High and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite heart and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls that I have made." In exact accordance

with this character he also declares, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle on thee."

Turn we now to another page. Here behold the Saviour of men, the Messiah of God, "by whom all things were created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible, and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; who is the brightness of his father's glory, and the express image of his person." This transcendent person is here seen "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" sorrows undergone for sinful men, grief voluntarily borne for rebels and enemies. In what manner did he bear his agonies; such as never were borne by any other? "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. He for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God." The whole language of his heart, the whole language of his life, was "Not my will, but thine be done." In the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and many tears, unto him that was able to save him from death; and was heard, in that he feared. Follow his glorious and perfect example; offer up your prayers and supplications in the same manner; fear as he did, and you will be heard. By his own temptations, and sorrows, "he is become a merciful High Priest; who can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities," and those of all the race of *Adam*. Accordingly he has declared, that "the bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory." He has promised, that he "will never leave you nor forsake you. Peace has he left with you, and all his followers; his own Peace hath he given unto you; not as the world giveth doth he give unto you."

Are you distressed and perplexed concerning the nature and end of your afflictions? He has told you that, "although no affliction for the present is joyous, but grievous, nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them



that are exercised thereby;" and that, heavy as it may seem to you, it is in truth comparatively *light*; and worketh for you "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Behold in this book, also, unanswerable proofs, that your afflictions will make you wiser and better, produce in you patience, submission, resignation, and all *that meek and lowly spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price*: that they will dissolve the chains, which bind you to dust and sin; prepare you by spiritual refinement for a better world; and prune and strengthen your wings for a final flight to the regions of immortality.

In these luminous pages see, also, the declarations of the same glorious person, that the friends whom you lament, are, if they have loved and believed him, only gone before you to that happy world. In that world you will find them all; and all others *whom you love in the truth*. In the mean time, see around you those, who have entered that same happy way, *weeping* with you when you weep; taking kindly, and readily, a share in all your burdens; bearing you on their prayers every morning and evening to the throne of mercy; and calling down upon you the best of blessings.

Such are some of the consolations, which Religion brings to the afflicted. How suited are they to the circumstances of sufferers! How numerous; how great; how divine! A balm to that *wounded spirit*, which none can *bear*, and none beside this heavenly physician can heal. To every sufferer who loves her voice, and delights in her conversation, she is a constant and charming companion by night and by day; soothes with *a still, small voice* all his sins and sorrows; spreads the path of life with roses; makes his bed a bed of down; surrounds his head with a mild and steady sunshine; and opens through the clouds of mortality a bright passage, for the eye of Faith, to heavens, clear, serene, and eternal.

II. I shall now close the discourse *with suggesting several motives for this consideration*.

1st. *It is the command of God.*

The path of duty is always the path of safety; and equally so in the present case, as in any other. "The law of the Lord is

perfect, converting the soul : the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart : the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever : the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." *All the openings of his lips are, as he has said they should be, right things.* Consideration is, therefore, to the afflicted, *right.* It will contribute to produce all these divine effects ; " to convert the soul, to make wise the simple, to rejoice the heart, and to enlighten the eyes."

Besides, GOD is always pleased when he obeys. To please him is all, for which we were made, for which we live. To an ingenuous mind *no joy can be compared with serving and pleasing the Lord.* Were there no other motive to this conduct, but this, that GOD hath required it ; this would determine completely the obedience of every good man ; and he would ask, and wish, for no other.

But happily for such beings as we are, so cold, indifferent, and dead to our duty, all other motives unite with this ; all, I mean, which ought to influence a rational mind. For

2dly. *GOD has informed us, that it is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting : for that is the end of all men ; and the living will lay it to heart.*

Even to those, who are mere visiters in the house of mourning, there is, in the eye of GOD, good, furnished by that melancholy mansion ; and good, which even they will naturally find.

The two reasons, here given by the wise man, why such as visit the house of mourning will be profited by going to it, are the nature of the place, and the emotions, which it inspires in their hearts. " That is the end of all men ; and the living will lay it to heart." The end of all men, the most solemn and affecting of all things here below, is found in the house of mourning ; and is not barely taught, but most affectingly taught : It is taught in fact ; in the person of a friend, or neighbour ; one whose death affects us particularly, on a great variety of accounts. Death in such circumstances affects us deeply, solemnly, and permanently.

Beyond this, we are in the midst of the mourning family, and by tender sympathy share in all their sorrows, while they are fresh and powerful. We cannot fail here to “weep with those who weep; and to mourn and be in bitterness” with such, as have lost perhaps “an only son, and are in bitterness for a first born.”

Thus we see here the end of all men in the clearest light; and are in the most advantageous situation to *lay it usefully to heart*. But if this be the case with mere visitors; with friends, neighbours, or even strangers; how much more advantageous must be the situation of the mourners themselves! To them the end of all men is brought far nearer; and their tenderness of mind is far greater, and prepares them much more effectually to *lay it to heart*. Their minds are more affected, more solemn, and better prepared for religious impressions, than those of any other persons; and more than they themselves are in any other circumstances.

But to lay to heart the end of all men is one of our most important duties, and highest interests. It is the way to be prepared for that end; to become religious; to be fitted for heaven.

Thus, then, the afflicted, especially mourners, enjoy the best opportunity, commonly afforded by the Providence of God for securing the end of their being; the salvation of their souls. This opportunity is rendered profitable chiefly, or only, by wise consideration. Of course our highest interest demands this duty at our hands. He, therefore, who does not perform it, is most unwise, and lost alike to his duty, and to his supreme interest.

3dly. *As afflictions are sent to bring us to consideration, God, if he designs good for us, must be expected to go on in his course of chastisement, until the end of them, viz. our reformation, is produced.*

The purposes of God will all be accomplished. “My Counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” “I work; and who shall let it?” Hence we ought rationally to expect affliction to be added to affliction, until the rebellious heart is broken, and the spirit of obstinacy and impenitence subdued. If the first afflic-

tions accomplish the design of GOD in sending them ; he will not make use of others. If not ; there is always reason to fear, that he will continue his chastisements, until he has brought us to submission and repentance. The smart of one stroke naturally leads us to dread another ; and therefore common prudence should prompt us to a faithful performance of this duty.

4thly. *GOD may, on the contrary, and often does, give up those, who are unreformed by afflictions, to hardness of heart.*

This of all evils, on this side of the grave, is undoubtedly the greatest. It is no other than an anticipation of the final sentence of the wicked. Yet this is, unquestionably, often pronounced in the present world ; although we ourselves are not warranted to apply it to individuals. In conformity to this doctrine, GOD said to the ancient Jews, “ Why should ye be stricken any more ? Ye will revolt more and more : ” and, still more dreadfully of *Ephraim*, “ Ephraim is joined unto idols, let him alone. ” “ The earth, which, ” in this sense, “ drinketh in the rain, which cometh oft upon it, and ” still “ beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing. The miry places and marshes, ” which thus prove that they “ cannot be healed, are given to salt. ” If repeated afflictions are to be dreaded by those, who are now suffering ; how much more this rejection, this final desertion of GOD.

In this way we lose the best, and, as the case is supposed, the only, time of repentance and salvation. As our hearts are now more fitted to receive divine impressions, than in any ordinary circumstances ; so, since we do not receive and feel them during this happy period, there is no reason to expect that we shall feel at all.

5thly. *By the performance of this duty the afflicted will obtain incalculable good now, as well as hereafter.*

“ Afflictions, ” of course, if wisely improved, and sanctified by GOD, “ yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. ” If wisely improved by us, there is good reason to hope, that they will be thus sanctified. Great multitudes of mankind are hopefully “ brought out of darkness into marvellous light, ” during seasons of severe

affliction. Then the first views begin, the first affections are cherished, the first resolutions are formed, which introduce all the succeeding happy train of conduct and character of the sanctified man. Eternal life is very often to be dated from the dying bed of our friends. Religion there sits kindly and constantly, to persuade us to admit her as a future friend, a future and eternal inmate of our bosoms. Christ there solemnly and affectingly calls on us, as we dread death, to dread sin, the cause of death; and to be alarmed with the thought of dying forever; to be reconciled to GOD, then waiting to receive us to his arms; and to believe in himself "the resurrection and the life," that he "may raise us up at the last day." Salvation here dawns, like the day-star, rising out of a night of gloom and tempest, and anticipating a perfect and glorious day. The soul, here under a load of hopeless sorrow, finding no other earthly friend or comforter, able and willing to relieve its distresses, bows before its divine Redeemer, and turns to the Spirit of Grace for heavenly and immortal consolations. Here it *seeks*, so as to *find*, them all.

A new disposition now commences in the soul; a lively confidence in Christ; a humble sorrow for sin; a willing submission to GOD. With these, are found "peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" delightful companions; born in the heavens, and springing from a Parent infinite and divine! The mind under their mild and sweet influence becomes at peace with itself; at peace with its fellow creatures; at peace with its Maker. "The North wind awakes" in it; "the South wind blows" upon it; its blossoms all expand; "its spices flow out" in all their fragrance. The spirit of truth finds a residence, in which he is pleased to dwell. Thenceforth all its fruits are pleasant and abundant, acceptable to GOD, useful and delightful to mankind. No more a desolate wilderness, overgrown with briars and thorns, the soul has become "a well watered garden, a fruitful field, which the Lord hath planted." Like Eden it blooms, not with beauty only, but with life: and bear fruits, not only "good for food, and pleasant to the eye," but fraught with the principles and the hopes of immortality.

## SERMON XVI.

SERMON ON THE OLD YEAR.



PSALM XC. 9.

*We spend our years, as a tale that is told.*

THIS Psalm is composed of a series of just, forcible, and melancholy reflections on the shortness and vanity of life ; and of a fervent and most interesting prayer for such blessings, as are especially suited to beings, possessed of such a life. It is styled “ A prayer of Moses, the man of God ;” and is strongly marked with the energetic and sublime spirit, every where visible in the writings of this singular man. The occasion, on which it is supposed to have been written, was the termination of that gradual change in human life, which began immediately after the flood, and reduced the period from a thousand to seventy years. This termination seems to have been accomplished at the time, when the rebellious Israelites, of the generation which went out of Egypt, were condemned to perish in the wilderness. Both of these subjects appear to have been strongly realized by the writer, and directly alluded to in his reflections ; and were therefore, I think, certainly in his mind, when he began to write.

The Psalm is a poem strictly of the elegiac kind ; and is, for its length, excelled by no similar human composition, in the propriety and beauty of thought and description. The Lamentations of Jeremiah are not more perfect ; the images are remarkably strong and happy ; and the thoughts are in several instances pre-eminent specimens of philosophical sublimity.

The great change in human life, from the antediluvian length to its present date, was in the most affecting manner exhibited in

the destruction of this generation of the Israelites. From two to three millions of people accompanied Moses from Egypt into the wilderness of Sin. All these, except Caleb and Joshua, and such as were under twenty years of age, when they passed through the Red Sea, were miserably cut off in the wilderness, and not permitted to enter the promised land. This dreadful dispensation was the punishment of their incorrigible hardness of heart, and their numerous rebellions against God. A more melancholy scene could not, therefore, easily be presented to the human eye. To Moses it must have been singularly affecting. He, commissioned by God himself, had in a most wonderful manner rescued his nation from the iron bondage of Egypt; conducted them with a series of miracles through the Red Sea, and through the wilderness; published to them the law of God; and unfolded to them a long train of glorious and divine promises. In this dignified employment he had presided over all their national concerns, both civil and military; had spent forty years of his life in the most painful labours; indulged the most delightful hopes; offered up unceasingly the most fervent prayers; patiently suffered a train of severe distresses; and wished even to part with his own life for the sake of his people. As these labours and sufferings were drawing near to a close; he beheld those, for whom he had laboured and suffered, cut off in the divine anger, and his own hopes of their present and future happiness shrouded in perpetual darkness. To such a man, in such circumstances, how painful must have been this scene!

Among the reflections, contained in this Psalm a very interesting one is presented to us in the text. The shortness and vanity of life is a subject, in which every man will, in spite of himself, ever find a deep concern. He will not indeed, like Moses, feel that strong interest in it, forced upon the mind by the sight of the continual and regular diminution of a nation, or by the contrast between the existing date of human life, and a known, preceding longevity. Still, however frequently the subject is mentioned to him, in whatever form of expression it is rehearsed, he will always find his mind solemnly arrested; his attention, for a little

time at least, irresistibly engaged ; and, if he is not inclined to serious and useful reflections, his heart disposed to force the subject away from his contemplation, because it is painful. No theme of reflection has been oftener adopted, or, in a greater variety of forms, by Moralists, and others ; no subject has, perhaps, been more frequently pronounced trite and dull ; or more frequently ridiculed, as unfit to engage the understanding, the imagination, or the heart. Observations on it are styled *see-saw morality* ; and discourses about it are spoken of as *mere thrumming*. Yet, in defiance of this and all other opposition, it still finds a way to the heart. We cannot be told, *that we must die, and that we may die to morrow*, without, at the least, a momentary check to pleasure, sense, and sin. We cannot be told of the death of a neighbour without, at the least, a transient solemnity ; a little twinge ; an involuntary apprehension concerning the approach of our own end.

This truth is strikingly manifested in the conversation of men concerning *places, and seasons, in which mortal diseases exist*. Few men willingly acknowledge the place, in which *they* live, to be unhealthy ; and most regard the bare mention of such a fact with resentment. In times of sickness, when inquiries are made concerning this subject, we are told, that it is indeed a sickly season ; but it is confined chiefly to *infants*, or to *children*. When the yellow fever rages, we are told, that only some *poor people* have fallen victims to the pestilence. In this phraseology it is intended to intimate, that *adults* in the one case, and *the rich* in the other, are hitherto safe. Yet nothing would be alleged, as a reason why *both* were not exposed, in such a case except the insidiousness of the fear which persuades us to *put far away the evil day*. In this manner we testify, among other things, the alarm, excited in our minds by the mortality around us ; and the industry, with which we impose on ourselves the persuasion that we are safe ; and thus exhibit unquestionable proof, indirect as it seems, that a sense of the shortness and uncertainty of life has a sufficient influence to make us rely on trivial circumstances, as real evidence that we are secure from danger.



*A tale is usually a momentary, and a trifling, amusement.* When, therefore, our life is compared to this object, we are taught on the one hand, that it is a transient period; and on the other, that it is spent by us in a manner merely amusive, and without any serious or important benefit. How different is this manner of employing life from that, to which it was destined by our Creator? By him it was intended to be to each one of us a day of probation, and of grace; a season, in which we were to renounce our sins, accept of the mercy proffered to us through the Redeemer, and secure a title to a happy immortality. Infinite importance is in this manner stamped on this little season. No mind was, perhaps, ever more feelingly alive to this fact, than that of Moses; and no circumstances could more strongly impress it on any mind, than those by which he was surrounded. We cannot, therefore wonder, at the strong images, by which he has unfolded his views of it to mankind.

*The End of a year* is undoubtedly a time, which presents these truths to the mind, and brings them home to the heart with peculiar force. *There is something melancholy in the end of almost every thing.* The evening is the most solemn period in the day. Saturday is the least cheerful day of the week. The termination of the year is the most melancholy season, which it contains. Students, at an early period of their collegiate residence, usually look forward to the close of it with pleasurable anticipation; but, when it arrives, rarely fail to experience a depression of spirits, a mournful reluctance to part with the place, where they have so long lived. The word, *farewell*, seems to carry sorrow in its very sound. How often do we find friends, when about to separate, scarcely able to pronounce it, and contriving beforehand to avoid a solemn formal adieu. The termination of a ministry, or the resignation of a civil office, long holden, is rarely met by any man, however desirable his judgment may pronounce it, without feelings of irresistible regret. *The close of life* is undoubtedly the most melancholy event, through which we pass in the present world; and requires the brightest hopes of a glorious immortality to reconcile to it, however free it may

be from pain and suffering, either the mind of the dying person, or the minds of those who surround his bed.

The feelings, excited by this consideration, fit us in a peculiar manner to contemplate, with high advantage, many subjects of great importance, and utility. They are all serious feelings; and therefore suited to serious contemplation. They are solemn; they are affecting; and therefore suited to subjects, which are solemn and deeply interesting to the mind. In such a state every subject is regarded with more concern than in any other; and leaves impressions more permanent, and more influential.

*We are now about to bid farewell to another year.* Its last suns are rolling through their circuit, and about to set forever. Its day is spent; its evening is beginning to fade into never-ending darkness. Many important events joyful or melancholy, useful or useless to us, has it brought into being, during its course. Its nature, continuance, advantages, or disadvantages; and the manner in which it has been employed; together with various other things, well deserve to be recalled, and reviewed by us. With the feelings, which I have mentioned, we may profitably survey all these, and many more, objects of instruction, naturally presented by this period; and may make them means of real and lasting good.

Among these objects I shall select the following, as being of serious import to all who hear me.

1st. *The shortness of human life.*

The year, which we have almost finished, is a seventieth part of the life of man. How little does that part now seem! When it commenced, its end appeared to be distant; yet how soon has it arrived! How momentary the space between its commencement and its conclusion! How few, indistinct, and feeble, are the traces of it in our recollection! How faint an image of its varied events are we able to call up before the mind! How much does the flight of its days, weeks, and months, resemble a tale that is told!

Go to the man of grey hairs; and he will tell you, that seventy such years seem to him but little longer than one; and that

his own life, styled long in the customary language of men, is in his view more like a dream than a reality ; that it has fled away before he was aware, and has scarcely left an abiding impression on his memory ; that, since he arrived at the age of twenty, every year has become shorter than the preceding ; and that a month in his youth, or childhood, seemed to him as long, as twelve, in the decline of life. What, according to this unexceptionable testimony, is then the amount of the whole term allotted to man ? How strongly does it resemble "a tale that is told!"

2dly. *The manner, in which life has been spent by us, is, at such a time a most solemn object of consideration.*

How strongly does this also, resemble the allusion in the text ! We tell, and hear, tales, without any serious concern, or thought ; and intend only to be amused by them during the period of the rehearsal. How much is this the manner, in which life is passed by multitudes. Tales are frequently told to excite merriment ; frequently, to awaken wonder ; frequently, to move temporary feelings of sympathy ; frequently, to while away an idle hour ; and frequently, to enjoy the pleasure of telling them. When the recital is finished, the purpose, for which it exists, is also finished. It is followed by no consequence, either useful or entertaining. The emotions, whether serious or sportive, terminate with the story ; and both are speedily lost and forgotten. Life then goes on exactly as it did before ; and all things remain just as they would have been, if the rehearsal had never been made. On futurity it was never designed to have any influence ; not even on a day, or an hour.

In a manner similar to this is life spent by no small part of the human race. The hearers of tales are not more perfectly the mere votaries of amusement, during the periods of listening to them, than multitudes are during the whole progress of life : not more given up to the indulgence of wonder, and other empty and useless emotions ; nor to the killing of time ; nor to the vanity of being listened to by a gaping circle. This amusement, also, terminates in itself ; and is not designed to have any effect upon that which is to come. Its whole end is to produce enjoy-

ment while it lasts ; enjoyment, intended to be found in toying and trifling, without a wish exercised, or an attempt made, to become wise, virtuous, or useful. The pleasures of to day are not intended even to prepare pleasures to morrow ; but those of to morrow are left to the direction of that chance, which is considered as having given birth to those of to day. Mere butterflies, they flutter from field to field, and from flower to flower, heedless that the summer, in which they sport, will be soon succeeded by a season of frost and death.

In the same manner, also, every period of life is by persons of this character chiefly forgotten, and employed to no useful purpose. Instead of reviewing at night the conduct of the day, or at the close of a week, or a year, the events which have existed in its progress ; instead of learning from past errors, and past sins, future wisdom and reformation ; instead of being admonished by the reproofs, alarmed by the judgments, solemnized and softened by the afflictions, and charmed to gratitude and repentance by the mercies, furnished by a holy and gracious Providence ; they hurry from enjoyment to enjoyment, and bustle from sport to sport ; embosomed, and lost, in the present gratification ; forgetful that much good may be hereafter secured, and much evil avoided by prudent forecast, even in the present world ; and that endless happiness must be gained, or endless misery suffered, in the world to come.

This subject we are now solemnly required to apply to ourselves, and to call up to our view the manner, in which life has been spent by *us*. As this is an object far too multiform and complicated, to admit of a particular examination at the present time ; it will be more useful to confine our researches to the past year. The subject, here, will be less perplexed, and more fresh in every one's remembrance. Let me then call upon every person present to look back upon his own life, at this period ; and see whether it has not strongly resembled "a tale that is told."

You have all throughout this period been furnished by the bountiful hand of God, with many privileges. A seventieth part

of human life has been added to your preceding years. To what purpose has it been employed? To any, which you dare mention, even to yourselves; or on which you can turn back the eye of remembrance with comfort? God has put into your hand his holy word; and given you knowledge, to read and understand the truths which it declares, and the duties which it enjoins. Has the gift been regarded by you with gratitude, or used by you with profit? Would it not have been better disposed of, had you given it to some humble, illiterate man, who would have spelled out its contents, and in some measure yielded his heart to their direction. Your closets have stood open round the year, that you might enter in, and "bow your knees to the Father of all mercies." Has his eye beheld your knees bow, or his ear heard your prayers ascend, in that secret place; or has the year rolled round its circuit, and witnessed no solitary petition from your lips; and left you, as it found you, without prayer, and "without God in the world?" Fifty-two Sabbaths have in the same period invited you to the house, and to the ordinances of God. In what manner have you regarded the invitation? Have you loved, and laboured, to worship him "acceptably; with reverence and godly fear?" Has his house been "a house of prayer" to you? Have your hearts united with those around you "in praising the Lord for his goodness" to you, "and for his wonderful works" to your fellow men? Have the solemn discourses, which by his own appointment were there addressed to you, found, or awakened, in you a disposition to hear, to learn, or to obey? Have they awakened in you a sense of guilt and danger; and prompted you to fly to Christ for safety? Have you had, have you now, believing, penitent, and obedient hearts? Are your lives purified from the stains of sin, and adorned with the beauty and excellency of righteousness? Have you begun to hope, that you are the children of God? Have the conversation and example of those, whom you believe to be his children, become desirable and pleasant? Has the light of heaven dawned in your minds, and begun the promises of a future and immortal day?

While these things are passing in review before you, let me exhort you to remember, that all the transactions of this same year you will, there, be called not only to examine, but to recount: the manner, in which you have spent every moment which it contained; the improvement, or abuse, of every privilege; the thoughts and affections which you have cherished; the words which you have uttered; and the works which you have done. Naked to the view of the All-seeing eye, they will all, then, be naked to your view also. Are you prepared for their recital; and satisfied, that the result of it will be comfortable to you? Are you ready to have all your conduct scanned, the recesses of your souls laid open; and your final allotment determined according to the manner, in which God has seen you live?

3dly. *It will be useful, at such a season, to remember how many things have this year been brought to an end.*

The restless mind of man has through this, as through former periods, toiled, and cared, and watched, with its usual anxiety, to gain the objects of sense and sin. In how many instances have this toil and trouble been in vain! Avarice has dug, Ambition has climbed, and Voluptuousness has wantoned, in the eager search for wealth, fame, power, and pleasure. But how often has the bankrupt, the shipwreck, or the fraud, robbed the miser of his pelf; and left him to sigh in poverty and sorrow. How often has a more successful candidate, or a changing populace, or a fickle sovereign, blasted the fond hopes, indulged by the votary of power; and snatched the darling office from his hands, just opened to grasp it! How often has pleasure, like the humming-bird, receded from the silly child of sense, as he was approaching to seize it; and, retiring from flower to flower, always eluded his speed and cunning, till finally it skimmed away, and vanished from his sight! And how uniformly has the good, expected by these worldings, disappeared at the moment, when they had compassed the darling object of their wishes, and left nothing but vacuity and disappointment behind.

How frequently, also, has disease arrested them all, in the midst of their highest hopes, of their most eager pursuit of earth-

ly good! How frequently has the palsy withered the limbs and shrunk the faculties of the mind; and the consumption blasted the hopes even of life; and forced the eye to turn its view from splendour and revelling to the dreary grave! How often has melancholy shrouded the soul in gloom, covered the bright light of heaven, and changed the world into a cavern of darkness and solitude; or Delirium extinguished the lamp of reason, changed the man into a wild beast, and hurried him to the seclusion and chains of a dungeon!

How often has Death called to the unthinking wretch, who forgot that he was not to live here forever; and said with a dreadful voice, "thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!" In obedience to this summons the fond, infatuated worshipper of this world has, amidst the gayest hopes and most confident promises of temporal gratification, quitted the beloved objects of his pursuit; and instead of heaping up gold, glittering in power and splendour, and wallowing in sensuality, gone down to the grave; appeared before the bar of GOD; given up an account of his sins; and been consigned to endless poverty, ruin, and despair.

The number of the inhabitants of this world has been estimated from seven hundred and fifty to nine hundred millions. We will suppose the former number to be correct. The life of man has been, with a good degree of accuracy, supposed to be thirty years. One generation of the human race therefore, or seven hundred and fifty millions of mankind, leave this world and enter into eternity, within this period. Twenty five millions, of course, die in a single year; are summoned to the judgment; and enter upon the recompence of reward. To the probation of so many accountable beings this year has in all probability put a period.

At the same time how many innocent and lawful enjoyments have been also terminated during this period! How many persons have lost their health, property, comforts, and hopes! How many friends and families have been separated by death; whose affection, kind offices, and mutual pleasure, can never be renewed on this side of the grave.

In a multitude of instances, also, the blessings of Providence have been wasted by thoughtless negligence, and giddy profusion. These can never be recalled; nor the opportunity of employing them to the accomplishment of those valuable ends, for which they were given.

In no small number of instances, also, the day of probation, and the means of grace, have been lost with a negligence and prodigality still more thoughtless and dreadful. From some of the wretched prodigals it is neither unnatural, nor uncharitable, to suppose, that God, by giving them up to their own desires, has finally taken away all disposition to a future, wise, and profitable use of these blessings; so that, hereafter, his word will fail of all useful efficacy on them; and sabbaths return, the sanctuary open its doors, prayers ascend, and sermons call to repentance and eternal life, in vain. To these persons Christ has proffered himself for the last time; the last sound of the voice of mercy has died upon the ear; and the evening of hope has terminated in everlasting night. "The vessel of wrath" is now continued only till it shall be "full," and thus completely fitted for destruction.

In many more instances the instructions of parents have *partially* lost their influence: The warnings of God's providence, and the threatenings and promises of his word, have failed of their effect: tenderness of conscience, gradually decaying, has degenerated towards hardness of heart, and apprehensiveness of guilt towards security in sin. In this manner the soul, insensibly to itself, is removed farther from repentance, life, and hope: and the "power of darkness" advanced towards an ascendancy over it, final and fatal.

4thly. *It is peculiarly proper at such a time that we should call to mind what we have done, during the past year.*

Every person present is reasonably required to make to himself an application of the several considerations, which have been already mentioned. With equal propriety is he expected to call up to his view the things which *he* has done. Among these, his sins undoubtedly will hold an important place. Think, I beseech



you, how many sins you have severally committed in a single day ; how many more in a week ; how greatly they have been multiplied in a month ; and to what a vast number they have arisen in the compass of a year. How many evil thoughts and affections ; how many murmurings and repinings against God ; how many lewd, injurious, and base purposes have been formed and cherished in the soul ; how many words of unkindness, falsehood, profaneness, and obscenity, have been uttered ; how many iniquitous, unjust, fraudulent, rebellious, and impious actions have been done ? How often you have hardened your hearts against the threatenings of future wo, the reproofs of sin, and the invitations to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ! How often you have perverted, and ridiculed, the word and worship of God ; profaned the Sabbath ; tempted those around you to sin ; exhibited a baleful example of impiety ; “grieved the Holy Spirit ;” and “crucified afresh the Lord of glory by your unbelief !” How often, also, have you preferred all other conduct to your duty, and all other things to your souls ; devised means to withdraw yourselves and others from repentance and reformation ; voluntarily contributed to your own perdition, and to theirs ; and thus assumed, at the same time, the character of assassins and suicides. At the same time I would charitably hope, that such is not, in the same absolute manner, the character of all who hear me. Will it be too much to be presumed, that tenderness of conscience has in some instances been increased ; that a few persons in this assembly have exercised more solemn and just thoughts, than heretofore, concerning their moral state, and their salvation ; and that some of you seriously intend to obtain eternal life ? How different is the state of this assembly, at the present time, from what the eyes of some, who are present, beheld at a former period ! In the year 1802, about fifty youths, members of this College, gave themselves up to God in the Covenant of grace. This year has seen but one solitary dedication of this nature. How do “the ways of Zion mourn, because few come to her solemn feasts ?”

- 5thly. *At this time, also, we are affectingly required to ask ourselves the following questions.*

First. *What reason can we give for spending our life, as we have, in many instances, actually spent it.*

Can you, my hearers, render to your consciences an excuse, with which they will be satisfied, for the manner in which you have lived during this period; a reason, which they will admit, why you have continued in sin; neglected your salvation; hazarded the eternal welfare of your souls; and put them on the risk of final perdition; a reason, why you have not obeyed God with all the heart; yielded yourselves to Him, as his children, in the covenant of peace; besought him with all humility of mind, with strong crying, and many tears, to pardon your manifold sins; turned to the Lord Jesus Christ with a sincere repentance, and faith in his blood; and consecrated your hearts and your lives to the service of God, and "your generation, according to His will?" Can you find a reason why you have wasted this year, with all the Sabbaths, privileges, and blessings which it contained; a reason, which you will be willing to allege before the bar of God; a reason, which he will admit; a reason, which will stand you in stead in that trying hour?

Second. *Let me ask for you, What have you gained by living this year?*

Are you less sinful? Are you more sober-minded? Are your consciences more tender? Do you think more frequently and solemnly, on death and the judgment; on the immense importance of life, as the day of probation; on the amazing nature of eternity, as the season of reward? Have you formed and retained useful resolutions of speedy repentance and amendment of life? Have you begun to ask God to save you, or to look to Christ for redemption? Have you considered whether you have souls to be saved; or once thought, during the preceding twelve months, that *then* was peculiarly "the accepted time?" Are you wiser, or better, than when the year began? Are you nearer to heaven? Have you gained any thing, which your minds can now recall; and which you will be willing to rehearse beyond the grave?

Third. *Let me further ask you, What you have lost?*

This question let me also answer. If you have not gained the things, which I mentioned under the last question; you have lost a year, with all the hopes and blessings which it brought on its wings. The bounties of God's Providence have been bestowed on you in vain. The proffers of his grace have been made to you in vain. In vain have the glad tidings of the gospel been proclaimed to you. In vain has the Sabbath dawned on you with peace and hope; the sanctuary invited you to the mercy seat; the sun in his successive circuits warned you how fast your days were fleeting away; the bell tolled the knell of those around you, to warn you of your own approaching death; and God and man, earth and heaven, laboured together, that you might live. All these blessings you have lost; and for the loss of none of them can you give an account.

Fourth. *What is now your condition?*

Search your souls, and see. Determine to know the worst of your case. This is the first step towards rendering it better. Probe your wounds to the bottom; lest they ulcerate beyond the hope of a cure. Inquire solemnly into all that you have done, and into all that you have left undone. What do your consciences testify? Can they say of you, as the spirit of grace said of Paul, "Behold he prayeth." Do they testify, "That some good thing is found in you towards the Lord God of Israel?" Or are you yet "without hope, and without God in the world?"

Fifthly. *What are your prospects?*

These will in a great measure depend on your plans. What are those plans? Is there among them a sober, determined scheme of obtaining salvation? Is the time fixed on, at which you will begin the great work of self-examination; at which you intend to ask, "What you must do to be saved?" at which you intend "to arise, and go to your Heavenly father, and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee; and am no more worthy to be called thy son.'" Have you begun to feel, that you are sinners; ruined by your apostacy, condemned by the righteous law of God, and advancing daily towards the

“burnings of devouring fire.” Are you fully satisfied, that “there is salvation in no other, but Christ ;” and that “his blood only can take away sin ?” Have you determined to quit “the broad and crooked road, which leadeth to destruction ;” to desert your evil companions, your dangerous haunts, and your still more dangerous practices ? Has the path to heaven, strait and difficult as it is, begun to seem a desirable road for the journey of your life ? Have you considered the glorious world, to which it leads, and to which it is the only way, as your own future, eternal habitation ; and determined, as an earnest of your arrival there, speedily to renew the joy of angels and saints over your repentance ? Or is the world still your God, your portion, and your all.

Sixthly. *What will be the end of your life ?*

At no distant period, all your years will come to an end. Your “feet will then stumble on the dark mountains,” and your eyes be closed in the iron sleep. Your souls will then leave the bodies, which they here inhabited, and will “return to God who gave them,” to have “every work, with every secret thing, brought into judgment.” When from a dying bed you come to take a retrospect of all you will then have done, suffered and enjoyed, in this world ; what, in your view, will probably be the amount ? Will your whole life, like the year that is now closing, appear *like a tale that is told* ; not only momentary, but vain ; idle ; a mere amusement ; a day, in which you have fluttered and sported in the sunbeams, to no useful end ; without providing for a peaceful death, a comfortable account, or a happy eternity. Will it then appear, that the means of grace have all been squandered by you ; and that the day of salvation, that sweet and accepted time, has been laughed, slept, and sinned away ? “Oh that you were wise ; that you understood these things ; that you would consider your latter end.”

## SERMON XVII.



A SERMON FOR THE NEW YEAR.

PREACHED JANUARY, 1807.

JEREMIAH xxviii. 16.

*Therefore thus saith the Lord, "Behold, I will cast thee off from the face of the earth; this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord."*

HANANIAH, the son of Azur, of Gibeon, a prophet of a false and wicked character, in the days of Zedekiah, king of Judea, thought proper to oppose the prophet Jeremiah. In the course of this opposition he denied the truth of his predictions; and declared, that God had revealed to him the disappointment and overthrow of Nebuchadnezar, the ruin of his expedition, and the liberation of the Jews from his yoke. All this he falsely declared. God had not sent him; but he made the people of Jerusalem "to trust in a lie." In consequence of this evil conduct, God sent to him the prophet Jeremiah with this message: "Hear now, Hananiah. The Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore, thus saith the Lord, behold, I will cast thee off from the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die."

There is something peculiarly solemn and affecting in this remarkable prediction; and I cannot help believing, that it may be made a profitable subject of our contemplations. To bring death near to us; to recall our own personal interest in this mighty change, the close of our residence in the present world, and the means of our introduction into another; the termination of

our connection with the body, and the commencement of our separate existence ; the end of time, and the opening of eternity : has ever been a duty solemnly urged by divines and moralists, and is plainly and powerfully commanded in the Scriptures. The indefiniteness of the subject, as thus enjoined, is, probably, one great reason, why the injunction has so little influence. Death is, undoubtedly, and is acknowledged to be, near ; and we as well as others must unquestionably die. But our death may be postponed to a comparatively late period ; and ten, twenty, or fifty years, may intervene. Of all these we feel in the main secure. With this stock before hand, we feel rich, and strong ; consider ourselves as having much time laid up in store ; and conclude, that we may safely, if not lawfully “ take our ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” Hence the solemn warning, which, like a knell, tolls the signal of our departure, is lost in deaf ears ; and the pungent reproof loses its point against hearts, shielded with this adamantine defence.

But were the divine able to come to us in the name of the Lord ; and to tell us, with the dictates of Omniscience, that this year we should die ; his messages would undoubtedly assume a new and impressive character, and claim a regard hitherto unknown. What he cannot thus do, we clearly may in some measure do for ourselves. We cannot determine, indeed, that this year will end our present life, and consign us to the tomb ; that it will finish our probation, and bring us to the judgment ; but we can, with no uncommon effort of thought, suppose these events certainly to happen, during this period. We can behold ourselves laid on the bed of sickness, within the next twelve months ; closing our eyes in death ; separated from the body ; ascending to the bar of God ; giving our final account ; and entering upon the “ recompense of reward.” We can suppose ourselves solemnly warned by a prophet of God, as was Hananiah, that within the year, which is begun, we shall die.

Were some one of this assembly thus certainly to be informed by an undoubted message from heaven, that this was his own future lot ; what would be his views, his emotions, his pursuits, du-

ring the little period before him? Such, I presume, generally, as he following observations describe.

1st. *Worldly objects would then assume a totally new character. The pleasures of the world, particularly, would lose all their charms.*

In our usual circumstances the pleasures of this world engross a large share of our attention. To almost all men they are of much importance; to multitudes they are the only important pleasures. To dress, to dance, to ride, to eat, to drink, to sport, to indulge themselves in gaming, lewdness, sloth, splendour, and gaiety; is all for which multitudes live, and all which they esteem worth pursuing. Mere grasshoppers, they sing and sport away the summer of life in gay and jovial amusement; and when the melancholy and fatal winter arrives, have provided no safe retreat, no means of comfort or subsistence. The unheeded, unexpected frost descends in a moment; and they perish forever.

But on the arrival of this awful message, how changed would be the feelings of him, to whom it was addressed! Could *he* be engaged by the idle ornaments of dress, who within a few days was to be wrapped in a winding sheet? Could *he* dance, who was walking to the grave? Could *he* pamper his body, who needed every moment to feed his famishing soul with "the bread of life?" Could *he* sport, who was speedily to give his final account "of all the deeds, done in the body," before "the Judge of the quick and the dead?" Could *he* game, who beheld the judgment set, and heard the dreadful sentence, "Take ye the unprofitable servant, and cast him into outer darkness, where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth," sounding in his ears? Could he be lewd, who, in full prospect, saw "the whore-mongers, and fornicators, of this world" all condemned to suffer, and actually suffering, the endless wrath of God, and the burnings of devouring fire?

Over all these objects would in his eye be cast a drear and funereal aspect, which would render them merely sources of pain and disgust. They would appear, not only as trifles lighter than air, about which a rational and immortal being cannot, without

gross impropriety and perversion, be seriously occupied ; but as snares, by which he would be entangled before he was aware — as enchantments, by which, if he yielded to them, he would be charmed, benumbed, and destroyed. With the thought of yielding to them he could not fail to associate the death of the soul, and the miseries of damnation. Of course, he would regard them only with astonishment and horror.

*Nor would the Business of this world be much less changed to his eye.*

To him, who, as hé “brought nothing into this world, can carry nothing out of it,” who was about to be laid in the solitary grave, who now found himself to be in real good, “poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked, and literally in want of all things ;” it could certainly be no favourite employment to watch, and care, and toil, that he might lay up an additional heap of dust, however shining, and however coveted by others. Should he enlarge his breadth of land, so as to comprise an additional farm, or manor ; he could not fail to remember how soon six feet of earth would be all which he could occupy.

Nor could he be engaged by the pursuits of *ambition*. The breath of popularity, could have no fragrance to him ; the trumpet of fame, no melody ; the splendour of office, no charms ; the possession of power, no allurements ; when he found himself the speedy victim of death, the prey of worms, and the feast of corruption. He might labour to provide ; but it would be the means of supporting, and adorning his soul. He might be ambitious, but he would aim at “the honour, which cometh from God only.” He might covet dominion ; but it would be the dominion over his own lusts, temptations, and spiritual enemies. All his ardent pursuit of worldly good would be cold and icy ; his pride would sink into the dust ; his rivalry expire ; and the stormy passions, which made his mind a troubled ocean, would have spent their force, and settle into a calm, sluggish and dead.

A stranger ; alone ; directing his course onward to the invisible world ; he would find no interest in the bustle of this : and, regardless of the turmoil around him, or regarding it only with



amazement and terror, he would keep his own eye fixed steadily on the solemn scenes before him, and “turn not aside to the right hand, nor to the left.”

2dly. *Moral and Religious subjects would, also, in the eye of such a man be invested with a new character.*

Among the things, which would peculiarly change their aspect in his view, *the Scriptures* would hold a prominent place. To men on a dying bed the Scriptures often assume a new character. Probably in the eye of most men, in this country, they appear to be the Word of God. Few at least discover any disposition to deny their divine origin. Still they regard them much as Epicurus regarded his gods; as objects, with which they have little or no concern; good enough indeed in themselves, but of very little consequence to them. Accordingly they are laid up on a shelf, or secreted in a book-case; and are brought out to view only on rare and peculiar occasions. When they are read, the solemn and alarming, the bright and glorious truths, which they contain, are read as idle tales; which are faintly believed, and scarcely regarded.

But in the eye of this candidate for eternity, the Scriptures would become, as to men on a dying bed, the real Word of God; containing his holy will concerning our duty and worship, and the news and the means of everlasting life. In them he could not fail to discern, that God spoke, and spoke to *him*. His voice would be invested with a majesty, awfulness, and authority, resembling that with which he spoke from Mount Sinai; and that, with which he will speak at the final day. Every thing, which is said in them, would be regarded as real, and certain; would be felt as addressed to himself; as describing his own case; as unfolding his own guilt, dangers and necessities; and as pointing out hope, relief, and safety, indispensable to *him*. Every doctrine would be acknowledged to enlighten; every ordinance to direct; and every precept to bind, with a sanction infinite. Every threatening, seen to convey the certain, future destiny of all those who came within its reach; would alarm, and arouse. Every promise, seen, with the like certainty, to assure to all, who

embraced it, peace, and light, and hope, the favour of God, and the inheritance of immortal life; would invite, encourage and strengthen. In a word, while searching the sacred volume he would seem to stand before the Shechinah; to present his enquiries in the holy place, and to hear from behind the cloud of glory the answer of JEHOVAH, concerning sin and holiness, life and death, judgment and eternity, heaven and hell.

Among the themes, which would most affect his soul in this interesting condition, his own guilt and ruin, as disclosed in the Scriptures, would hold an eminent place. There, as in a clear, undecieving mirror, he would see himself a sinner, originally depraved; daily corrupted by the indulgence of passion and appetite, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," obedience to temptation, and the imitation of pernicious example; possessing a "heart, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" reprov'd, warn'd, allur'd, and entreat'd, day by day; yet day by day "hardening his neck," and thus deserving to "be suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy." There he would discover, with a clearness next to intuitive, that in himself, his labours, his prayers, his efforts, considered by themselves, there was neither recovery, nor hope; that, however sedulously, or confidently, he "kindled the fire" of self-righteousness, "and compassed himself with its sparks;" and however comfortably he "walked in the light of" that fire, still "his portion" from the hand "of God" must be "to lie down in sorrow."

From this melancholy and benumbing prospect would he not instinctively turn his eye, to find relief from his distresses? On the same sacred page he would find a Saviour, portrayed by an Infinite hand, in colours of immortal beauty and splendour: a Saviour of his own lineage and kindred; "meek and lowly of heart; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; despised and rejected of men;" living in poverty, and persecution; and dying with disgrace and agony: yet a Saviour divinely wise, and great, and good: in the one character proving himself capable of condescending to his own lowly state, pitying his distresses, and expiating his guilt; in the other, of forgiving his sins,

renewing his soul, enabling him to triumph over death and the grave, and conferring on him endless life and glory. To this divine person, who died, that he might live, who rose again from the dead, that he might obtain the resurrection of life; who ascended to heaven, as the forerunner of all his followers "that he might prepare a place for them" in the "mansions" of his "Father's house;" would he not come, "labouring and heavy laden" to "find rest" for his soul? Would he not willingly "take" his "yoke upon him?" Would he not cheerfully assume his "burden"? Would he not think "the yoke easy?" Would he not find the "burden light?" Must not the tidings, that "a Saviour is born in the city of David," be now to him "tidings of great joy?" Must he not join with the Angels in ascribing "Glory to God in the highest, that peace" was proclaimed "on earth, and good will towards men?"

With what reverence, with what amazement, would he hear the Creator of the heavens, and the earth, proclaiming himself "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious; long suffering; slow to anger; abundant in goodness, and truth; forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; and that will by no means clear the" impenitently "guilty!" How would he tremble with astonishment and delight, when he read, "Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, 'I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also, that is of a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. For I will not contend forever; neither will I be always wroth; lest the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.'"

With what joy would he hear the Evangelical messenger proclaim, that "God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; not imputing their trespasses unto them?" and another divinely commissioned herald following after him, and announcing the sum of infinite excellence, in the single and endearing word, "God is love?" Could he fail to give up himself to this God, as a penitent, returning child; and to choose him as his "father and everlasting friend."

The *Sabbath*, also, neglected perhaps, and forgotten, or wantonly violated, profaned, and spent in idleness, sleep, business, and sin; would now claim a high importance, a heavenly distinction. "This is the day," would he naturally exclaim, "which the Lord hath made. I will rejoice and be glad in it; I will take the cup of salvation, and pay my vows. To-day," let me "not harden my heart, lest I perish," as those, "whose carcasses fell in the wilderness. Behold, now is the accepted time! Behold, now is the day of salvation!" Let me now "do what my hand findeth to do, with my might; for there is no work, device, knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither I go."

What would keep this man from the house of God? Would he suffer an ordinary dress, a slight indisposition, a cold or showery day, to stand between him and heaven? What would withdraw his mind from the solemn service of the sanctuary? Would his heart wander after his covetousness, or his pleasures? Would he complain of the style, or the utterance, of the preacher? Would he turn away his ear from the message of God, the warning of destruction, the voice of pardon, or the promise of life; because it was announced by a plain man, and in an ungraceful manner? When the messenger of Christ came to him, with the tidings of peace, reconciliation, the resurrection of life, and eternal glory; would he find leisure, or inclination, to scrutinize his dress, his air, and his accomplishments? Would he not, on the contrary, forgetful of all things else, look to the mercy-seat; to behold a dying and risen Saviour, and an efficacious atonement; and to hear the sound of forgiven sin, and the voice of an approving God? Would he not cry out, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My heart and my flesh cryeth out for the living God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house. Behold, O God, our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. A day, spent in thy courts, is better than a thousand: I would rather be a door-keeper in the house of God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness. The Lord God is a sun, and shield. The Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of Hosts, blessed is the man, that trusteth in thee!"

*Christians*, also, before objects of neglect, perhaps of contempt, and derision, pitied as weak and credulous, and despised as destitute of sense and spirit, would now become possessed of an importance wholly new. To “walk with wise men,” he would learn from God himself, was the way to become wise. As companions, as friends, as instructors, as examples, he would seek their aid, countenance, and direction. To them would he, of course, unbosom all his sins, and fears, and sorrows. From them would he seek and find direction concerning the path, in which he wished to walk; companions, to cheer and encourage his journey; and motives, to persevere to the end. By them would he find his sorrows soothed, his fears allayed, and his hopes brightened; and in them would he find that tenderness, that evangelical sympathy, which “weeps with such as weep, and rejoices with such as rejoice,” blending itself with all his interests, and mingling tears, and smiles and joys, with his.

These men also he would consider as the only rational inhabitants of the present world. He would see and acknowledge, that they, and they only, had lived to good purpose; had fulfilled the end of their being; had secured themselves from disappointment, shame, and ruin, in the future world, and “laid up in store a good foundation for the time to come.” Hence in his eye they would claim a total superiority over all others; and would be regarded with a respect and estimation totally singular.

*Wicked men*, on the contrary, however regarded by him during his former life, would appear of necessity as fools and madmen. All their boasted sagacity and worldly wisdom would in his view be nothing but specious distraction; all their bustle about wealth, fame, office, power, splendour, and sensuality, would appear like the scrambles of bedlam. “What profit,” would he exclaim, “is there in the things, of which” these miserable wretches must one day “be ashamed? for the end of” all “these things,” as pursued by them, “is death.” Of course their arguments, allurements, example, and authority, would all vanish; and themselves, and their works, pursuits, and enjoyments, would be written down by him “vanity and vexation of spirit.” Nor would

their numbers at all increase their weight or their influence. He would naturally remember, that "the way" of destruction "is broad," as well as "crooked, and multitudes have ever gone in thereat:" and he would infinitely rather rest peacefully and safely in the ark, with the little family of Noah, while "the windows of heaven were opened, and the fountains of the great deep were broken up;" than to perish in the general ruin of a world, with all its millions of inhabitants.

In the mean time, with what feelings would he regard *Eternity*? How solemnly would he fix his eyes on a dying bed; and mark the king of terrors in his still and awful approach to summon him away? With what emotions would he cast his view forward beyond the grave, and see the Judge ascending the last tribunal; the judgment in a sense begun; the books opened; and himself called to a final "account of all the deeds done in the body?" Still beyond, would rise in amazing prospect the boundless ocean, upon the shore of which he would feel that he was now standing, ready to launch on its unfathomable waters, bound on a voyage of endless duration, and of importance, which cannot be measured. In eternity all his concerns would lie. Time to him would soon be no more. Its last suns would be rolling through the heavens; and its evening would be preparing to finish the little day of life. With time he would feel but one concern; and that would be to employ its remaining hours in diligent preparation for eternity.

With such views, what would be his conduct? His closet would summon him, with Daniel, "three times a day to bow his knees before the Father of all mercies," to confess his sins; acknowledge the divine goodness to him; and ask humbly for the forgiveness of his sins, and the salvation of his soul. With the Bereans, he would "search the Scriptures" daily for "the words of eternal life." With David, he would be glad when they said unto him, "Come, let us go up to the house of the Lord."

In all his concerns with his fellow men, he would labour "to do justly, and to shew mercy;" and in all his concerns with God, to "walk humbly before him."

In a word, he would strive to become a reasonable being, to act as an intelligent creature; an heir of eternity; a candidate for life everlasting.

I say, he *would* thus act. By this I mean, however, that, if he were not a sot, a fool, a madman, such would be his conduct. That such it ought to be will, I presume be acknowledged by all who hear me.

But, if this would be, and ought to be, the conduct of a man solemnly warned by God, that within a year he should die; let us examine our own situation, and see how far our conduct ought to resemble his. If the resemblance be great and essential, and the difference trifling and insignificant; then it will follow, that what would be his duty and wisdom, must be ours.

We are not, indeed, thus solemnly and directly admonished of the time of our departure by the voice of a Prophet: but we are taught with irresistible certainty, by the Word and Providence of God, that within this year we may, not improbably, die; and that within a little period we shall certainly die. Of the four hundred mortal beings, who are now before me, several will in all probability go to the grave, and to the judgment, before another sun shall have rounded the year. How many we know not: who they will be, we know not. The uncertainty concerning each should make each feel, that the case may be his own. No one is probably more interested in this affecting subject than the preacher himself. It becomes me, therefore; it becomes every one of those who hear me; to bring the case home, to ourselves; to lay strong hold on all the consequences; and "so to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

The first great question, here to be asked, is, Are we ready to die? This is to be answered by asking again, Is our peace made with God? Are our sins forgiven? Are our souls interested in the merits of Christ? Have we embraced him with the faith of the Gospel? Have we repented of our sins; Have we turned to God with all the heart? If we can answer these questions in the af-

firmative, it will be well with us; and we have already secured the great end of our being.

But if not, what ought to be our conduct? Can we look at this subject; can we ponder death and the grave, judgment, and eternity, heaven and hell; with coldness and indifference? Have you ever thought what it is to die; to appear before God; alone, unembodied; to be tried, and judged, and sentenced, and “rewarded, according to your works?” Have you considered the suspended state of an immortal mind; the exposure of eternal interests to final ruin; the immense hazard of a cold and stupid, a worldly and guilty, probationer for eternal life and death? Have you weighed, have you reckoned up, what it is to lose heaven, and to be sent down to hell? Are you prepared to enter eternity with all your sins on your heads? Can you flee from the presence, the power, and the hand, of God? Can you evade the search of his all-seeing eye? Can you “abide in the day of his anger, and stand in the time of his indignation?” When is your preparation to shun the dangers before you, to escape from a guilty, rebellious character, a fearful condemnation, and final perdition, to begin? Have you resolved on the time? Is it at hand? If it is; “go on and prosper;” and may “the Lord lift upon you the light of his countenance, and be gracious to you!”

If not; let me propose to you a time for this solemn purpose. You have just ended a year, which God has given to you, that you might obtain salvation. You are commencing through his mercy and long suffering a new year, allotted, so far as you will be permitted to enjoy it, for the same end. All your preceding years are lost; not *gone* merely, but *wasted* with a dangerous and fatal prodigality. It is time, that you began to husband your day of grace, and to save the remainder of the accepted time.

*This day* let God be a witness of your first determination to renounce iniquity, and turn to him; to repent of your sins; to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to yield yourselves to him as a faithful and free-will offering. Let this new year bring you to a new, humble, obedient, and spiritual life. Let your “old



man" be "put away with his deeds, which are corrupt, and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness."

Remember, that you are creatures of God; dependent on his bounty for life, and all its blessings and hopes; that he is now waiting on you to be gracious, and to save your souls alive; and that he "has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but would rather that he would return, and repent, and live."

This day has he been present in this house; he is now present, with opened arms, to receive and bless you. Will you not meet him, and receive his blessing?

Feel, I beseech you, that you are dying creatures. Feel, that the message in the text, may truly be directed to you. To some or other of you it will in all probability be directed. Act then, as you would act, if the voice of the prophet were still sounding in your ears; "This year thou shalt die." All that would be proper for the man whose case I have proposed, must, essentially, be proper for *you*. You, like him, stand upon the brink of the grave, on the border of eternity. You, like him, are hastening to the judgment, to the recompense of reward. Your life is, like his, "a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." The remaining days and hours ought, therefore, to be anxiously employed in preparing for these amazing events. The world ought to lose its hold on *you*, as on *him*. Its business, its honours, its pleasures, ought to have no place in your hearts; except as your duty is concerned. Your whole business here is plainly to prepare for hereafter. Nothing here ought to stand between you and your duty; between you and your God. Shall time prevent you from acquiring the blessings of eternity? Shall earth withdraw you from heaven? You have the Gospel in your hands; you enjoy the sabbath; you frequent the sanctuary. All things are "given to you richly to enjoy." Every means of grace, every hope of salvation, is placed freely and bountifully in your hands. You hear the calls of mercy; the invitations to faith, repentance, and holiness, the proffers of endless life and glory. The Saviour cries to you, "Come unto me all ye that labour and

are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He is evidently set before you, crucified for your sins. He entreats you daily to be reconciled to God; and points to his own wounds, and to his flowing blood, with infinite compassion, to compel you by motives irresistible. Why will you not comply? Should an enemy, malicious, sagacious, and implacable beyond example, and fraught with the spirit of a fiend, contrive to lull you into security, allure you to sin, harden your hearts, and blind your minds, in such a manner as to ruin your souls, and lead you to final perdition; what would be your views concerning the character of such a being, when you came to the miseries of damnation? Would you not think eternity too short to vent all your resentment against the murderer of your souls? What other part are *you* now acting? Every sin which you commit, every season of grace which you lose, every warning which you cast away, is a proof, that you are suicides; suicides of your souls; destroyers of immortal life. What sentence ought you then to pass on your conduct; on yourselves? Awake from this sleep of stupidity, sottishness, and death. Resume your reason. Return to your God; to repentance, faith, and hope, to holiness and heaven. Retire to your closets, shut your doors, and "pray to your father which is in secret." Let heaven, for the first time, hear a fervent, honest prayer ascend for the forgiveness of your sins. Give to good men here, and to angels there, a hope, that their joy shall be renewed over your repentance. Let God be able to say concerning each of you, "Behold he prayeth."

Betake yourselves to the Word of life. Search the Scriptures. Ponder the descriptions of your character; the threatenings against your sins; the invitations to repentance and reformation; the infinite love of the Saviour; the abounding compassion of God; the glorious mission of the spirit of grace; and the bright and luminous hopes of immortal life. Think what you will be, if impenitent; what you may be, if you please; and what you will be if you repent. Weigh endless life with the loss of the pleasures of sin, and endless death with the enjoyment of those pleasures; and carefully cast up the difference. Think how you

would feel, if a messenger from heaven were to announce to you your certain and final damnation; and then call to mind, that you are daily announcing this tremendous allotment, by your own continuance in sin. Lo! life and death are set before you. "Choose you, therefore, this day, whom you will serve;" God or the World. Choose whether you will go down to perdition, or ascend to everlasting life: and may Infinite Mercy enable you to make a choice, in which you will find peace and consolation throughout eternity. Amen.

## SERMON XVIII.



A SERMON FOR THE NEW YEAR.

PREACHED JANUARY, 1809.

LUKE xiii. 6—9.

*He spake also this parable. "A certain man had a fig-tree, planted in his vineyard: and he came, and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come, seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he, answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."*

THIS parable seems to have been addressed originally to the Jews. They had been long a peculiar object of divine cultivation; and at the time, when the parable was delivered, were eminently unfruitful. A sentence of excision was gone out against them; but was stayed in its execution by the heavenly Vine Dresser: by Him, who said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee!" by Him, who wept over the future miseries of this devoted nation, at the very time when they were preparing to imbrue their hands in his blood. Accordingly, God waited upon them to be gracious; and came many years, seeking fruit, and finding none. At length, however, he destroyed them with a terrible destruction by the Roman armies, under the command of Titus. From the date of this fact, they have been dispersed among all the nations of men; cast out of the Church; and given up to hardness of heart.

But, although this parable has a primary reference to the Jews, it is plainly intended to have a reference much more extensive, and therefore much more important. It was *spoken* for *their* admonition : it was *written* for *ours*. It was originally addressed to the Jews. Through the Gospel it has ever since been addressed to Christians. Every person, who lives under the Gospel, is here exhibited as a tree, planted by the hand of God in a vineyard, in a soil, and in circumstances, naturally rendering it fruitful ; as cultivated with attentive care ; and as reasonably expected to bring forth fruit. The fruit expected, also, is figs ; pleasant, healthful, and useful. Of these trees, however, some are represented as being, notwithstanding all these advantages, absolutely barren ; and as thus disappointing, repeatedly, the expectations formed by the Owner of the Vineyard. After waiting long, and looking frequently, to find fruit on them, he pronounces them to be not only useless, but nuisances ; and directs them to be cut down, and cast out of the Vineyard, as mere “cumberers of the ground.” The Vine Dresser, however, solicits for them a little longer respite, in order to bestow on them a greater measure of care and cultivation : but if, with these peculiar advantages, they should still continue barren ; even *he* consents, that they should be destroyed. The following doctrines are therefore, I think evidently, contained in the Text.

1st. *Mankind, under the Gospel, are placed by GOD in circumstances, peculiarly fitted to make them fruitful in righteousness.*

Fig-trees, planted in a rich soil, and carefully cultivated, will yield fruit, if they will yield it at all.

2dly. *When GOD has waited a reasonable time, and finds them barren, and useless, in the world, he determines to destroy them.*

“Behold these three years I come, seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none : cut it down : why cumbereth it the ground ?”

Three years are certainly a sufficient period to determine whether a tree, of mature growth, will yield fruit, or not. By

this period we are plainly taught, that the time, during which God waits upon sinners, is a sufficient one to decide this point.

3dly. *By the intercession of his servants the patience of God towards sinners is prolonged, until there is no more hope concerning them.*

“And he, answering, said unto him, ‘Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and, if it bear fruit, well; and, if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.’”

4thly. *The means of Divine cultivation furnish important hope for sinners.*

Otherwise the observations in the two last quoted verses would have no meaning.

That all these Doctrines are contained in the text, as well as that they are all true, is so obvious, that efforts to render them more so would be made to no purpose. My proper business, therefore, will be to make a direct application of them to this Assembly.

1st. *This Congregation consists of those, who have been born, and educated, under all the privileges of the Gospel.*

All those, who are before me, have been born in a Christian land. From the morning of Life, you have all received a religious education. You have been taught to read from the beginning; and thus have enjoyed the privilege of an open, and daily, access to the Bible, for divine knowledge. The venerable and affecting instructions of parents have been given you, from the time, when you were first able to receive them. From the same period, you have had the privilege of beholding the life and conversation of good men; and have daily seen them in a manner too evident, and too unexceptionable, to be questioned, “adorn the doctrine of God, their Saviour.” The Sabbath, peculiarly the day of grace, eminently the accepted time; the divine season, in which all good things descend upon this unhappy world; has been made known to you in the amplest manner; and returned, weekly, to shower its blessings upon your heads. Weekly, has the Sanctuary opened its peaceful doors, to invite your feet, and allure your hearts, into the presence of a forgiving God.

The Voice of Mercy has there proclaimed in your ears, "glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, and good will towards men." Here you have been brought to the foot of the Mercy-Seat, to spread your sins before your Maker, and to make known to him your wants, infirmities, and dangers. Here the awful character of this great and glorious Being has been unfolded to your view. You have learned, irresistibly and abundantly, that to the eye of his unspotted purity "the heavens are not clean;" and that Man, therefore, who "drinketh iniquity like water," cannot but be regarded by him with detestation and abhorrence. At the same time, you have been taught, that his name is "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious; slow to anger; abundant in goodness and truth; forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;" although "he will by no means clear the" impenitently "guilty."

In this solemn place, the Law of God, in its nature perfect and divine; supremely delightful to all virtuous beings; and to the great kingdom of JEHOVAH the source of boundless and immortal good; but terrible beyond expression to all the workers of iniquity; has thundered its denunciations against your rebellion. In the same place, also, the Gospel has proclaimed to you from the world of glory, "there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance." "Whosoever will," therefore, "let him come, and take of the water of life freely."

Here the Saviour of Mankind, who, great and exalted as he is, and ever was, has always "rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth and found his delights with the sons of men," has presented himself before your eyes as a Lamb, slain for your sins, "from the foundation of the world." Infinitely rich, he has here shown you, that "for your sakes he became poor, that you through him might become rich." You have seen him descend from heaven, and dwell with the sons of men; become "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," poor, humble, despised, rejected of men, and unpossessed of a place, where to lay his head. You have seen him ascend the cross; and nailed to the accursed tree, His

body has been broken, his blood has been poured out, before your eyes. You have witnessed his expiring agonies; have heard his dying exclamations; and have followed him to the grave. You have seen him rise from the dead, ascend to heaven, and "sit down at the right hand of the majesty on high."

At this very moment this divine person stands before you on Mount Zion, surrounded with his glorious followers, "redeemed from among" men, and the first fruits unto God; singing the new song of forgiving, redeeming, and sanctifying love. This delightful assembly invite you with unspeakable earnestness and affection, and have here weekly invited you, to become partakers of their everlasting joy.

To these invitations "the Spirit of Truth" has here, and everywhere, subjoined his own voice of infinite mercy; and mingled his entreaties with those of the Father and the Son. He dictated the Gospel, and all its invitations. He has accompanied you, wherever you have been; and whispered to you, with a "still, small voice," faith, repentance, and salvation, from the cradle to the present hour. With this glorious person "the bride," the Church of God, has united her own earnest persuasion, and called out to you, "come, and take the water of life freely."

In the mean time, you have not been invited and alarmed, only. You have also been warned, and reproved. Sickness, sorrow, and pain, have checked you in the career of sin, and admonished you to be ready for your final account. Danger has warned you of your near approach to eternity. Death, aiming his fatal dart against one and another of your friends and companions, has made you tremble for yourselves; and awakened in your minds fearful apprehensions of an approaching judgment. The grave, with an awful voice, has summoned you to its secret and melancholy chambers, to behold the "house appointed for all living;" assembled before your eyes the unnumbered millions, who inhabit these dark recesses; and, among them, has selected for your solemn survey those of your own age, circumstances, acquaintance, and friendship, who have gone before you to these mansions of silence and oblivion. All this vast multitude have



cried out to you with one affecting voice, "remember, frail and dying mortals, that this is your last home."

In the mean time, you have been solemnly reprov'd for your sins by the Word of God. Every page of this sacred book, whenever you have read it, has addressed to you plain and pungent reproofs of all your transgressions. Whenever you have not; the very sight of it has silently and powerfully reproach'd you for your spiritual sloth, and guilty negligence. From the desk the same reproofs have been weekly explained, urged, and enforced upon you. To these monitors your parents have added themselves; and in a thousand forms, and on a thousand occasions, have "prick'd you to the heart" with their remonstrances against your sins. To all, your own consciences have answered Amen; and have awakened in your bosoms remorse for your guilt, and the terrors of your future trial.

Seasons at the same time have rolled around you, to shower their bounties upon your heads. Blessings have danced and sported before you in trains innumerable. The hand of your divine Benefactor, working every where, and in every thing, has wrought only kindness for you. With the hand of bounty, with the voice of mercy, he has charmed you to himself in a manner worthy of a God.

All these blessings, both spiritual and temporal; all these instructions, invitations, warnings, and reproofs, have been communicated to you, particularly, throughout the year which has just finished its circuit. No year of your lives has, perhaps, been more illumined by the beams of mercy. No days have, perhaps, more strongly witnessed the goodness, patience, and forbearance, of God. Your life, your health, your presence in this house, your attendance on these solemn ordinances, are all unanswerable testimonies of the divine mercy. Not even a single day, out of the three hundred and sixty five, which this year has contained, has passed by you, without leaving both its blessings, and its admonitions, behind.

2dly. *From persons, thus situated, God has reasonably expected to find fruits of piety and righteousness.*

The observations, made under the former head, are ample proofs, that GOD has been long employed in preparing you to become fruitful. Your present age forcibly declares, that the time has long since arrived, when this character ought to have been found upon you. That GOD has waited long you cannot deny. That he has often come, seeking the fruits of holiness in your hearts and in your lives, you will not dare to question. That he has called you to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to a sincere repentance of your sins, to a diligent reformation of your lives, to the supreme love and reverence of himself, and to an universal beneficence to your fellow men; and that he has called you to these things, times and ways innumerable; you cannot but know. Nor can you allege a reason, why you have not become penitent, believing, and obedient. These things every reason enforces upon you. Every reason enforces his right to demand, as well as to expect, them at your hands. He has given you knowledge to discern, and opportunities to perform, all your duty. Before you he has daily spread motives of the highest import, to induce your obedience: motives infinite, awfully alarming, and immensely endearing.

If then you have not been fruitful in his service; if you have not believed; if you have not obeyed; it is not because you have wanted either the opportunities, the means, or the motives. Your own disobedient, sinful, barren nature has been the real reason; and not any want of attention, care, or culture, from him. The fault is yours; and the charge will rest ultimately upon your own heads.

3dly. *There is much reason to believe, that many of you have, notwithstanding all these advantages, been wholly unfruitful.*

Your life and conversation yield no substantial or satisfactory proofs, that you have ever exercised the faith of the Gospel. There is no visible evidence, that Christ has become a Saviour to you. He has solemnly declared, that those, who "do not confess him before men, he will not confess" at the final day. But you do not confess him before men. He has declared, that those are "his disciples, indeed, who do his commandments." But you do

not his commandments. Where are the proofs, even to the eye of the most affectionate charity, that you sincerely repent of your sins; humble yourselves before GOD; love his Name, his Word, his Law, or his Gospel. Does it seem true, even to yourselves, that you are friends of the Redeemer, children of GOD, and heirs of his everlasting love.

Have you even begun to do well; to seek the favour of GOD; or to ask, in earnest, for the forgiveness of your sins? When has the house of GOD, when have your closets, been witnesses of your prayers? When has GOD been a witness of your humble supplication to him, to remember you with his mercy, blot out your transgressions, and save your souls? Has "the Angel, who offereth the prayers of the saints with much incense," ever been furnished with an opportunity of offering yours? If you have not obeyed GOD in these things; you certainly have not obeyed him in any thing else. If you have not done good to yourselves; you certainly have not, from the heart, done good to others.

Is there not, then, the most fearful reason to believe, that you have not even entered upon that "patient continuance in well-doing," which is the strait and narrow way, to "glory, honour, and immortality?" Is not the love of the world your controlling, and only, principle of action? Are not all your thoughts worldly thoughts? Are not all your wishes worldly wishes? Are not all your plans, plans of pleasure, ambition, and avarice. Is it not evident to yourselves, as well as to the attentive eyes of the religious persons around you, that your hearts are "choked by the cares and pleasures of this life," and are thus rendered wholly unfruitful in the service of GOD. Have you not, at times, had seasons of more than common seriousness and concern, about your moral and your future state? Did you not then feel, that you were sinners; that repentance and reformation were absolutely necessary for you; and, therefore that you were still strangers to GOD, and "to the covenant of promise?"

But whether you have been conscious of these things, or not; others have known them. A fluttering, vain, pleasure-loving life is complete proof of a fluttering, vain, pleasure-loving heart. A

worldly mind is employed and discovered, in the eager pursuit of worldly objects. "This is the love of GOD, that we keep his commandments." He, who does not keep these commandments, does not love their Author. These things being true, *there is,*

4thly. *No small reason to fear, that GOD has said, or will soon say, of some or other of you, "Lo these three years I have come, seeking fruit of these trees and finding none. Cut them down. Why cumber they the ground?"*

The patience and forbearance of GOD extend to every man but a limited time. His own day is allotted to every man; as theirs was to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. "If in this day they know the things of their peace;" it is happy: if not; they are forever "hidden from their eyes."

This period, every man ought to remember, may to him, be shorter than his life. There are transgressions so violent; there is an obstinacy of mind so obdurate; there is a corruption so entire; as to terminate the hope, and the day, of salvation in final and judicial impenitence.

Suffer not yourselves to believe, that reprobation is the consequence of those only, which you are accustomed to consider as gross and scandalous sins. That terrible rejection, so affectingly announced in the first chapter of Proverbs by Christ, the Eternal Wisdom of GOD, is founded upon far other sins, than these; upon sins, which you probably have thought of little consequence; the sins of unbelief, impenitence, and neglect of duty. "Because I have called," says the awful and final Judge, "and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation; and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind: when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me; but I will not answer: they shall seek me early; but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord." Let me beseech you to remember how often Christ has called to you, and how steadily you have refused;

how often, and how earnestly, He has "stretched out his hand" to you, and how uniformly you have disregarded. Let me beseech you to remember, with what constancy of character you "have set at nought all his counsel, and" cast away "his reproof." Ought you not, then, to tremble, lest he also should "laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh." Ought you not to shudder, lest he should say of you, "Then shall they call upon me; but I will not answer; they shall seek me early; but they shall not find me; because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord." Are not the very sins, of which many in this assembly are, and have long been, unquestionably guilty, exactly and terribly declared in this passage? Are you not conscious, that these sins are yours? Whence then can you hope to escape this dreadful denunciation?

There are, God himself assures you that there are, men, "who after their hard and impenitent hearts treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." There are "vessels of wrath, endured" by God "with much long suffering" while they "are fitting for destruction." Are you assured that you are not of this unhappy number! Your hearts, hitherto, have been hard and impenitent. Have not you then, like others of this character, "treasured up," to the present time, "wrath against the day of wrath?" Your ingratitude, impiety, and rebellion, have hitherto been endured, and certainly not, without "much long suffering." Is there not, then, very affecting reason to fear, that you are "vessels of wrath, fitting for destruction."

But you are still *endured*. The invaluable season of *life* is still by the hand of Mercy prolonged to you. Is not this blessing derived to you from a source, similar to that, mentioned in the Text; the intercession of those religious friends, whose character you have perhaps despised, whose instructions you have disregarded, whose reproofs you have resented, and whose example you have disdained to follow? They, with a disposition far different from yours, have pitied your insensibility to your danger; and your regular, and by yourselves unperceived, approach to final ruin. Accordingly, while you

were asleep in your corruption, and "dead in trespasses and sins," they entered heaven with their prayers; and became fervent, importunate, suppliants before the throne of mercy for the prolongation of your lives. The uplifted arm of vengeance has, perhaps in this manner, been stayed; and the shaft of death been stopped on the bow-string. Had the day of your doom not been postponed; where would you have been now? Had you been called to a dying bed, during the past year; what would have been your reflections on the life which you had led? What your feelings, while you stood on the verge of eternity? What your expectations of a reception beyond the grave? Had you been summoned to the Judgment; what must have been your account? Had the sentence of retribution been pronounced on you; what would have been your allotment? Is there not the most dreadful reason to believe, that this world would have been most unhappily exchanged by you for another?

But the voice of intercession itself must one day fail, and fail to *you*. The friends, who have so kindly besought for you the divine mercy, will soon close their eyes in dust; and go to receive the reward of their piety. *You* will then be left behind. Should they live; like Noah, Daniel, and Job, in the case specified by the Prophet Ezekiel, they may be able to "deliver only their own souls." For you God may hear their cries no more. Should *they* live; *you* may die; may be "cut down as cumberers of the ground, and cast out of the vineyard." Should this be your lot during the year which is begun; what, in your own view, will be your probable reception in the future world? Should it be founded on what you have already done; do you believe it could be happy? Would you be willing, were the decision left to yourselves, to be "rewarded according to the deeds," which you have "done in the body?"

Many youths of your own age, many more still younger than you, and some of them numbered among your companions and friends, have during the past year gone down to the land of silence; finished their probation; and entered upon the "recompense of reward." What has become of them? Have not some

of them been cut off in the midst of their sins? Have they not in all probability met that Saviour, as their Judge, whom they disbelieved, denied, and contemned, to the last? Has their retribution, in your view, been probably of such a nature that you would be willing to make it your own? Was their conduct here such, upon the whole, that without apprehension, without trembling, you now dare to follow them in your thoughts to their present habitation? If they, if any of them, have been cut off in the midst of their sins, during the past year; where is your safety, during that which is now begun?

Among the sins, which may contribute largely to your reprobation, and may peculiarly provoke God to destroy you in the midst of your days, your *procrastination* is probably not the least. Few things are more provoking, or less cheerfully forgiven, by mankind to their fellow men, than Procrastination. A fraudulent debtor is scarcely regarded by his creditor with stronger feelings of censure, and rarely with more contempt or hatred, than he, who is continually resolving, and promising, and yet never pays. The workman, who gives you the promise, or the encouragement, of doing a piece of service for you, and from time to time postpones the performance, while he still continues to promise and encourage, soon becomes an object of absolute loathing. A child, who, when reprov'd, and punished, for his frowardness, or treated perhaps with indulgence and tenderness, from the fond hope, that he may amend, engages from time to time, but never begins, to reform his life, becomes an inexpressible weariness to his father, and an insupportable "heaviness to his mother." All these characters *you* unite in one; and, like them all, postpone your duty, your repentance, and your reformation, to a future time. These things you have postponed, from time to time, through life. The past year, given to you for the very purpose of bringing you to repentance and reformation, and thus conducting you to endless life, has rolled all its days and nights over your heads, and seen all these invaluable purposes unaccomplished. What a dark and melancholy chapter must that be, in the history of an immortal being, which, through the best year of his

probation, records not a single effort to gain the blessings of immortality? What an afflicting story must that be concerning such a being, which is made up of impiety, rebellion, ingratitude, unbelief, impenitence, evil thoughts, evil designs, evil conversation, and evil conduct? What a dreadful blank must that volume of life be, in which there is found not "one good thing towards the Lord God of Israel;" which records no service done for God; no voluntary beneficence to mankind; not a solitary attempt to oppose sin; not a single exercise of gratitude, or faith, towards the Redeemer? With what emotions will you see this volume opened, and yourselves about to be "judged out of the things, which are written" on its pages? How guilty, how deplorable, how pernicious, will your procrastination then appear; and how will your hearts die within you, to find it all perfectly known, and perfectly abhorred, by your Judge?

But is there not the most afflicting reason to fear, that the whole year has passed by you, without witnessing even a single attempt to renounce your sins, and turn to God? Are you not now conscious, that not even one solitary prayer has ascended from your lips for the forgiveness of your sins, and the sanctification of your souls; that God has not been even asked to remember you with mercy; that not a single wish has started up in your minds for immortal life? What a melancholy year must this then be, to be remembered by you beyond the grave? .

With all these solemn reflections before your eyes, let me in the 5th place, *exhort you most seriously to consider in what manner the present year ought to be employed.*

The present year may, without any improbability, be your last; and, if not, it may be the last of your accepted time. Should you survive it; as most of you probably will; God may say of you, if another year should find you still hardening your hearts, and postponing your repentance, as he said of such as you are, by the mouth of the Prophet. "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked, that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to



my vineyard. I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down. And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds, that they rain no rain upon it." These things were "written for your admonition." They are indeed awful things: and, however stouthearted, however far from righteousness you may be, they ought to force you not merely to hearken, but to tremble. How dreadful would be your situation, should God execute them upon you?

Fasten your eyes, then, upon this year, as to you the golden season of life. Feel the uncertainty of living to another. Tremble, lest another, if it should arrive, should find you given over to hardness of heart. Awake out of the lethargy, by which you have been so long benumbed. Say no longer "A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep." Mark the progress of your past conduct? What has it produced? Hardness of heart, blindness of mind, and guiltiness of life. What will it hereafter produce? The same blindness, the same hardness, the same guilt. In what will it end? In everlasting "lamentation, mourning, and woe."

Prize then the present year, as of value literally inestimable. Enter upon it with solemn resolutions, formed with an affecting remembrance that God is a witness of them, to consecrate it to his service, your own duty, and the attainment of life eternal. You are now living. There is now hope concerning you. God is now waiting to be gracious. Pardon is still proffered. Christ with infinite tenderness still invites you to repent, and be saved.

How delightful to a benevolent mind is even the thought, how much more delightful the hope, that, induced by these considerations, or by any considerations, some of those, who are now before me, will, during the present year, enter the way to heaven; that some, who never uttered a prayer, will have it truly said of them "Behold they pray!" How charming an object to the eye of compassion, to see the Bible, hitherto left on the shelf, unread and forgotten, seriously and daily opened, to find the words of

eternal life? Who, although an obstinate sinner himself, can fail, from natural tenderness only, to rejoice in the thought, that that sacred Book will solemnize, enlighten, and allure, even a little number of those, to whom it has hitherto spoken in vain? What a glorious prospect must it be in the view of Christians, to see the kingdom of heaven enlarged from this congregation? Realize with me, for a moment, the transporting nature of this mighty change. In the place of stupidity, unbelief, and irreligion, behold a sober mind; a sweet, pure, and heavenly conversation; a sanctified Sabbath; and a Sanctuary solemnized, warmed, and hallowed, with devotion. The miserable sinners of this assembly, so long lost in the sleep of death, awake, stand on their feet, and become living children of God. Here God is feared, loved, and glorified; the Redeemer is trusted, honoured, and blessed; and his Church, no longer a wilderness, blossoms and smiles as the garden of God. Must not those ministering spirits, who are "sent forth to minister to them that are heirs of salvation," delight, peculiarly, to minister here? Nay, must not these very walls rejoice to see immortal minds, in the morning of life, here dedicated to God in the eternal covenant, and mercifully taken into the arms of the Saviour? Hasten, O hasten, ye happy days, when a divine intercourse between this Seat of Learning and the World of Life shall be gloriously enlarged; when, not from the deserted Bethel of Judea, but from this house of God, the Ladder, seen by Jacob, shall ascend to heaven; the prayers of every worshipper daily rise to that benevolent world; and Angels, and Blessings, daily descend. Fly, thou happy period, when the prophetic eye, with a rapturous anticipation, shall behold all those, who here assemble for the worship of God, finally and forever assembled in the glorious worship of heaven, and the supreme enjoyment of the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour.

## SERMON XIX.



LONG LIFE NOT DESIRABLE.

JOB vii. 16.

*I would not live alway.*

THIS Chapter is a most solemn and affecting account of the afflictions, which Job had experienced; and of his own sense of his sufferings. From himself he makes a natural and almost necessary transition to mankind at large; and utters a variety of just but melancholy observations on the frailty, vanity and distresses, of human life. Full of this subject, he expostulates with GOD concerning the littleness and insignificance of man; and enquires with wonder, and perhaps with impatience, concerning the regard, which GOD has been pleased to render to *him*; a being seemingly, and really, undeserving of his attention or remembrance. All these reflections he concludes with a humble confession of his sins; a humble prayer for forgiveness; and a new, and most affecting declaration of the momentary duration of his life, and of the suddenness of his departure into the eternal world.

Among the many declarations, contained in this peculiar passage of Scripture, the text is, perhaps, singular: "I would not live alway." The Hebrew word, here rendered *alway*, is rendered variously; denoting sometimes eternity, and sometimes other long periods; particularly the longest period, of which any thing is capable. It might, therefore, be paraphrased here, "I would not live the whole of that period, of which my life according to the usual course of human affairs is capable." In other words, "Very long life is not desirable to me in the present world."

To this choice, Job was not improbably brought in a greater or less degree by his numerous distresses. Men are apt to love life, even under great sufferings; and much more, when in possession of what they deem valuable enjoyments. Had Job's prosperity continued unbroken; it is highly probable, that he would have been desirous of living to the utmost of human destiny; at least, that he would have felt less willing to part with life. Yet the determination, made by him in this passage, is unqualified; and, as it is expressed and most naturally understood, may be justly regarded as respecting human life at large, whether prosperous or afflicted. In this manner I shall consider it; and shall in this discourse regard *Job* as choosing, although convinced of the truth and justness of the declaration by adversity, to extend it to all human circumstances; and as pronouncing the choice of a life bounded by moderate limits, to be wise and just in the best, as well as in the worst, condition. A declaration made by a wise and good man, demands, when he has had sufficient opportunities, and has exercised sufficient attention, to judge well of the subject in question, a respectful regard and careful investigation; when made in the Scriptures of truth, it requires ready and entire belief, however it may contradict our established opinions. Even in this case, however, as well as in the other, it cannot but be useful to explain the nature of the subject; and see how far the state of things, with which we are acquainted, will elucidate or prove the doctrine asserted. Let us, then, examine how far the nature of the subject will furnish sufficient reason to justify this conclusion.

1st. *Job, so far as a man can be, was a competent Judge.*

*He abounded in the good things of this life;* and, from the actual possession of them, knew better than most other men their real value.

*He was head of his countrymen;* "the greatest of all the men in the land of Uz," and in the neighbouring regions, called, in conjunction with that land, "The East."

*He had a prosperous, and, it would seem, a dutiful and pious family.*

*He had excellent friends* ; men of great wisdom ; sensible of his worth ; and attached to him by the strongest ties of good will.

*He was a man of distinguished piety* ; and piety is the spirit, which, "rejoicing in the truth," conducts us of course to just conclusions. Besides, it mitigates all the sorrows of life ; enhances all its comforts ; and yields many blessings, to which persons destitute of piety are strangers.

*He possessed uncommon wisdom* ; and was thus able to discern with peculiar clearness, and certainty, the true nature of such things, as became objects of his contemplation.

*He enjoyed, also, in an eminent degree the favour of God* ; and was conscious of this invaluable possession.

Finally, *He had enjoyed all these blessings without interruption through a period of life, far longer than now falls to the lot of man* ; and had thus the amplest opportunity for forming a just determination.

Where can we find a more competent judge ?

2dly. *Our own Experience furnishes strong reasons to conclude, that the decision of Job was just.*

This truth will be evident from the following considerations.

First. *The world is full of Temptations.*

These are found in every place, and by every person. The toy and the rattle lay hold on the child in the same manner, as the hope of distinction and the prospect of pleasure, on the youth. Power, office, and fame, corrupt the man of middle age : while riches fascinate the hoary-headed possessor.

*These temptations are most extensively presented to us by ourselves.* Our passions and appetites are ever on the search for their respective gratifications. In these, they declare, lies the only good, which merits our attention. Weakly we listen to the declaration, and foolishly submit to have the eyes of our understanding hoodwinked ; and thus hasten blindfold after the darling objects ; while Conscience and Revelation in vain recall us from the pursuit. When we have obtained and enjoyed them, we wonder that they furnish no higher good ; and then listen again to the same seducers, as if we had never been deceived.

*All around us eagerly unite in rendering the seduction effectual.* The young, the gay, the splendid, declare with persuasive eloquence, that the good destined for man, is certainly and only found in pomp and pleasure. The ambitious proclaim, that it lies in reputation, place, and power. The industrious and frugal assure us, that nothing but solid wealth can yield the envied boon; and that all things else are toys and gewgaws. The Infidel asserts, that no real good consists with the dread of an hereafter. The Atheist, still wiser, laughs at them all; and announces, that himself alone has found the coveted object in the disbelief of a God.

*With the living beings, by which we are encompassed, all others conspire.* The bounties of Providence, good in themselves, and glorious proofs of goodness in their Author, become, under the influence of our appetites, solicitations to gluttony, and drunkenness. Abundance begets sloth, pride, self-confidence, and forgetfulness of God. Indigence awakens fretfulness, murmuring, ingratitude, fraud, theft, and profaneness. Power prompts to arrogance, oppression, a hard heart, iniquitous claims on others, and an universal corruption of ourselves. Ambition produces a miserable thirst for applause, a servile dependence on popular favour, a deplorable venality of mind, a fatal habit of sacrificing conscience to the hope of preferment, and a fatal idolatry to the world. Science engrosses the heart; and steals it away from God. Taste and refinement enervate independence, reason, and conscience; and offer them up as victims to the pleasures of fancy, or the dictates of fashion. Thus, wherever we turn, and whatever we converse with; we turn from allurements to allurements, and converse almost only with temptations. In a world, replete with such dangers, it cannot be desirable "to live always."

Secondly. *The world is full of Sin.*

This is a calamity, from which not an individual is exempted. Ourselves, our dearest relations, our most beloved friends, together with all around us, are involved in the general evil. Nor are we merely sinful; but exceedingly sinful. Our hearts are exhibited by Christ as a treasury of sin; whence evil things only

are continually brought out. A propensity to evil only, universal, and unresisted, is the predominating character of every child of *Adam*. Every one is begotten and born in his likeness ; in the character of apostacy, revolt, and rebellion. Hence our "imagination is full of evil." A leprosy has seized the soul, and corrupted its whole constitution ; to which every physician, beside Christ, attempts in vain the application of a cure.

Accordingly we perpetrate iniquity every day ; conceive it in our hearts ; utter it with our mouths ; and finish it with our hand. In the morning we rise with the unhappy purpose : to complete it we toil through the day ; and, when we close our eyes at night, reluctantly leave it unaccomplished.

In this manner we commit numberless acts of impiety, iniquity, and rebellion. Day by day the mass is heaped up ; the burden rendered more and more insupportable ; and the preparation for our account made more and more dreadful. Of course, "a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to devour us," is, unless we are benumbed with stupidity, and bewildered with frenzy, made more and more the only view which we can form of our future being ; the only prospect of endless reward.

No calamity can be equal to this. Our minds are deformed ; our understanding perverted ; our hearts polluted ; and ourselves debased below the proper level of Intelligent beings. Our lives, also, are stained with guilt ; and rendered odious and dreadful. Whenever we retire into ourselves ; whenever we solemnly explore the recesses of the mind ; whenever we cast a just and melancholy survey, (for melancholy it cannot fail to be,) over the perverse and miserable wanderings of our feet through the journey of life ; we are compelled to sit in judgment on ourselves, to anticipate by the distressing decision of our consciences, the sentence of final reprobation ; and to declare, that in this character we can never see life, but are *condemned already*.

On the contrary, if with happier views and determinations, we have renounced our enmity against God ; if we have laid aside the weapons of our warfare ; if moral darkness has begun to disappear, and holiness to dawn in our minds ; if we have closed

with Christ on his own terms, and can dimly discover and hopefully read our names inscribed "in the Lamb's book of life;" if the Spirit of Grace with a benign and eternal influence has descended, as the showers of heaven, on our hearts; if our souls have begun to be expanded, ennobled, and refined, with love to God and love to man; our state has, indeed, been rendered inestimably more desirable. Yet it is still far from being secured against the intrusion of this dreadful evil. "Oh wretched man, that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" is the natural and necessary exclamation of the best Christian who has ever lived; springing spontaneously from a heart, deeply affected with a sense of his sins, and flowing instinctively from his lips. The suffering is too great to be neglected, or concealed. It returns too often to be forgotten, or to be contemplated without terror and anguish. A languor of mind, strongly resembling the languor of disease, renders every effort to act and to resist, to guard or to overcome, feeble, painful, and discouraging. The struggles really made, are too often the struggles of a sick man: and the soul, distressed on the one hand with a knowledge that they are necessary, and on the other with a conviction of the terrifying probability that they will be ineffectual, frequently sinks in the conflict; and in a great measure ceases to strive, because it feels assured that it will strive in vain. Its views of the Divine promises, which convey grace and strength, are dim and distant: its faith is perplexed by doubt, and enfeebled by fear; its hold on hope, and heaven, and God, in a great measure loosened, its strength "a bruised reed," demanding the careful support of an Almighty hand, to prevent it from being broken off; and its light that of "the dimly burning flax," at times apparently extinguished, and to the eye of hope itself scarcely capable of continuing to shine.

There are indeed brighter and better seasons; and to some of those, who are sanctified, they frequently return; but the best and happiest are often obliged to go mourning all the day. Sin is a poison, which spreads through all the veins and all the faculties. It becomes a part of the constitution of every fibre. Un-



ceasing applications, directed with the highest skill, and adopted with the greatest exactness and care, repeated every day and continued through life; are at the utmost barely sufficient to increase the tendency towards returning health, and to secure the unhappy patient from final dissolution.

To all these evils is inseparably annexed a continual sense of the anger of GOD. Nothing but a paralytic torpor can prevent any man from believing, and feeling, that He, before whom "the heavens are unclean" and whose "angels are charged with folly," must regard, as immensely "more abominable and filthy, man, who drinketh iniquity like water." Every good man feels this distress of course; and says instinctively, "O Lord God of my salvation! I have cried day and night before thee. Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry. For my soul is full of troubles; and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man, that hath no strength; free among the dead, like the slain, that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more, and they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, and in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves."

Every bad man, who is insensible to this incomprehensible calamity, is merely benumbed like the half-frozen wretch; who, on the point of perishing, resolves to fall asleep, and can by no motives be induced to an effort to preserve himself from sleeping; although the very moment he closes his eyes, he closes them in death. So great and dreadful an evil is the anger of GOD, that, beside the sin, which provokes it, nothing, in comparison with it ought to be called an evil.

3dly. *It is a world of Enemies.*

These enemies are found in every place and among persons of every description; among strangers and neighbours; in the list of those who have been our friends; and not unfrequently even in our own households. They exist at all times even when as much as possible we live in peace with all men. When we are

for peace, others will be for war. Childhood, Youth, Manhood, and Old Age are all sufferers by their attacks. In the day of prosperity they envy our blessings: in the day of sorrow they find a malignant pleasure in our distresses. In the week they labour to frustrate our plans, and to prevent the success of our efforts: on the Sabbath, they question the truth of our Bible, laugh at our Religion, insult our worship, and disturb our devotion.

They attack us with every weapon; and assail us in every vulnerable part of our well-being. If they do not beat and wound us; they cheat us out of our property; stain our reputation; hale us before the bar of justice in causeless litigation; alienate from us our beloved friends; frustrate our lawful plans of business; rob us of public and private confidence and challenge us to the field of death. Beyond this they lie in wait for our souls, seduce us to the belief of ruinous errors; obliterate from our minds tenderness of conscience, and apprehensiveness of guilt and danger; varnish crimes, and cover them with beautiful colours; entice us to sin; take us by the hand, and lead us down to the chambers of death; and murder our souls throughout eternity.

At the same time, they are enemies always active and always distressing. From some or other of them we are ever to expect attempts on our welfare; and are obliged to feel ourselves never safe.

4thly. *This world is filled with innumerable other evils.*

Want, hunger, thirst, cold, toil, weariness, anxiety, disappointment, despondency, disease, and death, hedge the path of mankind; and all of them attack many, and some of them all, men. The best health is liable to be lost by disease; and the most secure property by a flaw in a title, by the bankruptcy of others, by accident, by the tempest, or by the conflagration. The best laid schemes are frequently frustrated by unexpected contingencies; and by the ignorance, sloth, and inattention, of those, to whom the execution of them is committed. A voyage is rendered fruitless, or ruinous, by the unskillfulness of the pilot, or the drunkenness of the master, or of the seamen; by the starting of

a plank, or the stroke of a wave. Despondency breaks our efforts; disease enervates our bodies; and delirium destroys our reason. Pain excruciates, the asthma enfeebles, the consumption with a lingering death destroys, the man. Thus the world becomes literally a valley of tears.

A virtuous mind is also, in a sense unceasingly, wounded by the sins of others. The husband is not unfrequently obliged to behold his wife, the partner of his bosom, and the most intimate of all his connections, alienated from GOD and from religion; a votary to show and amusement; wasting her life on trifles; and advancing to eternity without a hope. The wife is compelled to see her husband profane, false, faithless, a cheat, a gambler, a drunkard, and not unfrequently a duellist bathing his murderous hands in the blood of his friend. The child is compelled to behold the parent, who gave him birth, and to whom the only instinctive regard is reverence and love, deformed by vice, and degraded by infamy. The parent is often pierced with agony by the sight of a graceless child, debased by falsehood, undutifulness, unkindness, and impiety; the victim of seduction; a martyr to evil companions, and evil communications; deaf to reproof and admonition, to conscience and to GOD; hopelessly descending in the broad and crooked road; and hastening, in spite of his prayers and tears, to the regions of endless sin and final perdition. The friend is agonized by violated faith, treacherous professions, broken vows, and black ingratitude. The Christian, yearning with benevolence over a world in ruins, is pierced with anguish to see around him a mere place of graves; an immense church-yard, filled with living corruption and moving death; where spiritual life, the beginning of life eternal, is looked for, extensively, by his wearied, longing, lingering eye in vain; where the Son of GOD calls with infinite tenderness and concern, but no *Lazarus* comes forth; where Mercy wanders, and searches, and pries, to find in the endless train of walking corpses a remaining principle of life; but beholds throughout a great part of the habitable world nothing but despair, desolation and death. GOD to an immense extent is forgotten, as if the world had been made by

another Creator, as if suns arose, rain descended, and seasons rolled around their circuit, under the control of another Ruler ; and as if man derived his life, his breath, and all his blessings, from some other Benefactor. To wealth, to pride, to pleasure, mankind continually say, "Deliver us ; for ye are our Gods." Christ is rejected, despised, and trampled under foot ; as if some "other name" beside his were "given under heaven whereby men must be saved ; as if some other lawgiver had prescribed the rules of human worship, and obedience ; as if some other Saviour had disclosed the way to endless life ; as if some other being had become a propitiation for the sins of men ; and as if some other Advocate before the throne of infinite justice were effectually pleading for the divine forbearance, and the final acceptance of sinners. Heaven is shunned, as if it were the final residence of sin and suffering ; and hell sought with eagerness and perseverance, as if the river of life flowed from its desolate caverns, and the tree of life sprang from its parched soil. Who, from the conduct of the great body of the human race, would imagine that they were creatures formed by JEHOVAH ; preserved, sustained, and universally blessed, by the Infinite hand ; endowed with minds destined to the contemplation, love and enjoyment of eternal beauty, excellence, and glory ; and to an everlasting progress in loveliness and virtue ?

- A mind really benevolent is unavoidably distressed by the sight of prevailing degeneracy ; the decline of those, about whom it has entertained hopes ; the deplorable choice made by man, of objects in which he hopes to find good ; the sordid spirit, with which he pursues dross and dirt, as if they were to enrich his mind ; his childish expectations of finding happiness in bubbles, and of gaining distinction from the possession of straws and feathers ; the debasement of his understanding, the prostitution of his energy, and the wanton, causeless sacrifice of his immortal well-being. A world in sin is to a being, truly rational, a forlorn and dreadful object ; a lazarus-house of disease and corruption ; a dungeon of delirium and death.

5thly. *A longer continuance of life would longer deprive good men of a better life.*

So long as good men continue in this world, they are subjected, in a greater or less degree, to all the evils necessarily incident to an imperfect nature, and an imperfect residence. Their wisest designs, firmest resolutions, and most vigorous efforts, will be at least partially blasted. Temptations will spring up where they are unforeseen; sins will creep in through avenues, where they were unexpected; and sorrow, their never failing companion, following hard behind them, will enter where they enter, and dwell where they reside. The best life presents to the retrospective eye a melancholy picture, on which it gazes with reprobation, and regret. As the mind advances in the progress of sanctification; its views of sin, and duty, become continually more clear, just, and scriptural. As the films are thus gradually removed from the mental eye; it discerns more and more perfectly the reality, the number, and the greatness, of its offences; and perceives the difference between what it is, and what it ought to be, continually, and increasingly to be greater than it originally mistrusted. Hence its estimate of its own character is less and less favourable, and more and more humiliating, and painful.

When the good man casts his eyes around him, he finds little to relieve his wearied mind, and wanders over this world in search of brighter objects in vain. Is he imperfectly sanctified? So are others. Is he a mourner in Zion? Others find abundant cause for similar lamentation. Is the presence of God, are the blessings of the Spirit of Grace, withholden from him? Does he search with an anxious and doubtful eye for supporting evidence of divine love to his soul? Does the peace, which Christ gave his disciples, instead of being an inmate, become only a visitor, in his bosom? Does *the joy, which no stranger meddles withal*, descend, like scanty showers in a season of drought? All, even the best, around him feel the same evils; and are ready to unite with him in all his complaints.

But there is a world, where these evils are never found ; a world, to which his own path has been steadily pointed ; a world in which, a stranger here, he has long expected to find his final home. In that world he knows, that the presence of God is unclouded ; his blessing never withholden ; his smile never withdrawn. There temptation and sin are shut out ; and all the foundations of self-reproach, disturbance of mind, repentance, and sorrow, forever excluded. There GOD is loved, trusted, and obeyed, as his glorious excellence and perfect conduct, reasonably demand, with all the heart. There no friends pierce each others hearts with degeneracy ; no eye drops a tear over falling or backsliding virtue ; no bosom is torn with anxiety concerning its own future wanderings from the path of rectitude. "The way of holiness" is there indeed "a high way ;" and none are so unhappy, as to "err therein." Towards that world the good man cannot fail often to turn his thoughts ; and to institute a comparison between the happy state of its inhabitants, and the imperfect, erring, suffering condition of those, who dwell below. In his pilgrimage through the scorching sands and houseless wilds of this *Arabian* waste, he cannot fail in the midst of his hunger and thirst, his weariness, his solitude and danger, to turn a longing wish towards the region, where "there is enough and to spare," of the *bread* of life, and where "fountains of living waters" flow forever.

A longer life is to him a longer exile from his Father's house, and the glorious blessings which it contains ; from the Redeemer, who died for him ; from "the innumerable company of Angels," to whom he is intimately allied ; and from "the church of the first born," who are to be his brethren and friends forever.

Nor would a longer continuance of life be a blessing to impenitent sinners ; to those, I mean, who at the end of the present age of man remain impenitent. He, who has lived seventy years in sin, has in almost every instance outlived the hopes of repentance. A convert at the age of threescore and ten may perhaps be found ; but he is almost a prodigy. Every sinner in advanced age holds out to the eye of observation, not only the

painful picture of long continued rebellion, and deep declension, but also the melancholy image of hopeless obduracy. He has so long walked in "the broad and crooked road," that without a miracle he can scarcely find his way back to life.

But every child of *Adam* is to be "judged, and rewarded, according to the deeds done in the body." To live, therefore, only to accumulate sin, and prepare for heavier condemnation, the only real consequence to the gray-haired impenitent of living beyond the established date of man, would to almost every human being be so far from being desirable, that it would be merely the means of increasing misery throughout eternity. Who would ask to have his life lengthened, with this dreadful prospect before him?

6thly. *A long life would take away from mankind the chief Motives to Repentance and Reformation.*

Were human life to be greatly extended; it is difficult to conceive of any motives, which could be successfully urged, to awaken in sinners a conviction of the necessity of repentance, the danger of delay, and the importance of speedily seeking God. In men, secure of a long protracted existence in this world, what avenue could be found for efficacious access to their hearts? They might be informed, perhaps, that holiness is beautiful and lovely in itself; and that the sanctified mind enjoys, of course, a glorious reward in the exercise of its own amiable affections, and finds sufficient delight, spontaneously arising from the consciousness of performing praiseworthy actions. But how could those know what was meant by the beauty and loveliness of virtue, who knew not what virtue itself was? The very nature of this celestial attribute can be known only by experience. No state, no exercise, of the human heart can be so described, as to be efficaciously understood. We may, indeed, by contemplation conceive, or by description be informed, what is meant by sorrow or joy, by hope or fear, by love or hatred, loosely and generally; but the sensation in such a case can never be thoroughly understood, until it is felt. The practical nature of every thing, which is practical, is incapable of being learned, un-

less when experienced by ourselves. Thus Evangelical love to God and mankind must be exercised, in order to be realized. But this love is the sum of virtue. None therefore, who are not virtuous, can know what virtue is; and none, but they, can discern its amiableness and beauty. The rewards of virtue, also, are furnished only by the exercise of virtue; and, where it is not exercised, cannot be found. Even to understand them in any valuable degree it is absolutely necessary, that we should previously become virtuous.

To address, then, these motives to sinners, in order to persuade them to become holy, would be to address to them that, which they do not know, and cannot feel; or in other words that, which to them is literally nothing. To this hopeless employment the philosophers of *Greece, and Rome*, addicted themselves with great ingenuity and eloquence: but they spoke to deaf ears, and immovable hearts; and among all who listened to their fine sentiments and elegant diction, with admiration and applause, there is not the least reason to believe, that they reformed even a single individual.

In the same fruitless manner would a preacher display to the understanding of sinners the glory, virtue, and happiness, of heaven. Holiness, the well spring of all this happiness and glory, the sinner would neither understand nor feel. A cold assent, that such a place, as heaven is asserted to be in the Scriptures, may be a happy place, would be all which his mind would really give. A heartfelt conviction of the necessity of holiness to real and enduring good, he would still be incapable of feeling; but without such a conviction no desire could be excited in his mind, no persuasion operate, no effort exist. A *Mohammedan* paradise, if he could be assured of inhabiting it beyond the grave, might indeed rouse his wishes, and his labours; but the joys of heaven would be proclaimed to an assembly of sinners with much the same hope of success, as to the inhabitants of the tomb.

Danger, suffering, and death, the terror of being miserable beyond the grave, and the hope of escaping that misery, are the only things, which ever seriously affect a sinning, guilty mind;



and are therefore the only things, which, in ordinary cases, are efficaciously preached to minds of this character. "Knowing the terrors of the Lord," says *St. Paul*, "we persuade men;" and only when knowing these terrors are men usually persuaded.

But how could these motives be addressed with effect, or even with hope, to men, secure of life for a thousand years? To the human eye this period would seem a kind of eternity. Death and judgment, heaven and hell, removed beyond this period, would be removed beyond the utmost verge of care and thought; and recede far from all settled belief, if not from the doubtful assent of fear and hope. Future evil at such a distance would be no longer dreaded; future good no longer desired. Death itself, though certain and undeniable, would at such a distance cease to alarm, or even to solemnize; and would be regarded as a bugbear; the object only of contempt and ridicule. No argument could be founded on it, or enforced by it, which could be brought home to the heart; no motive derived from it, to impress the importance of salvation, or the reality of never ending being. To all inducements to consideration on these subjects, presented to human beings in such a situation, the answer would be short and final: "Where is the promise of his coming? for, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were at the beginning of the creation."

This single fact would change essentially the whole system of Providence, and in some respects the whole character of man. A future state either of rewards or punishments would be triumphantly denied; and all, who believed it, placed on the same level with the advocates for the warnings of the deathwatch, and the existence of witchcraft. "Death an eternal sleep" would be engraved on the gate posts of every churchyard; and become the creed of every tongue. To the wanderings of human opinion there would be neither check, nor end. Whatever philosophical theory could devise; whatever sin could relish; whatever willing credulity could swallow; would be proudly taught, and eagerly believed. Animal enjoyment would be the amount of all ac-

knowledged human good, and the end of every human effort. The favourite maxim by which it is now governed, would, however, be reversed. It would not be as now, "Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die;" for death would be disregarded, and forgotten: but, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."

Should any person question the correctness of this representation; I am furnished with unanswerable proof of its truth. *Noah* preached for one hundred and twenty years to audiences in this very condition. I need not tell you, that he preached in vain; so in absolutely vain, that he made not a single convert to truth and righteousness.

7thly. *Life, greatly extended, would be undesirable to man, because it would produce pernicious Consequences to the world at large.*

From the general tendency of human nature, which is thoroughly known by the experience of ages, we may easily determine with sufficient accuracy the real influence, which a long protraction of life must necessarily have on the general interests of mankind. No person can doubt, that the extension of life would, of course, enlarge proportionally all the plans formed by men for business, or for pleasure. The schemes of accumulating wealth, of acquiring renown, of amassing power, of compassing superiority, would all grow with the extension of years. The design in the mind of every sagacious and enterprising man, instead of being limited by the narrow bounds which now encircle all human efforts, and, like those of the ocean, say to every purpose, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further;" would become a vast outline, to be filled up by the efforts of centuries succeeding centuries. The disappointments of one age would be confidently expected to find a balance in the more auspicious events of another; defeat would be consoled with the sanguine expectation of a future triumph; and loss be firmly borne under the assurance of future gain. No enterprise which did not overstep the bounds of earth, would be thought too great to be formed by the ardent projector, nor to be executed by the hand of courage,

patience, and perseverance. The defects, which time might discover, experience would supply. The errors, into which inattention might be betrayed, caution, improved by succeeding skill, would correct. Ingenuity, sharpened by long continued application, emboldened by frequent success, and ardent in the prospect of vast acquisitions ; would repair every disaster, and remove every obstacle.

With these advantages, to what a height would rise the labours and acquisitions of man ? During the present, limited period of human life, a single individual has often amassed millions. Could the same protection be afforded him, what would be the accumulation of the same individual through a thousand years ? His coffers, like an abyss, would engulf the wealth of empires. Vast riches always spread around their possessor vast and multiplied poverty. With what a desert of want and misery would he, who had engrossed wealth for centuries, and raised it to the height of mountains, environ his dwelling ?

Heroes fight alike for glory, and for power. *Alexander, Cæsar, and Tamerlane*, within a little part of our present life subjugated, successively, a great proportion of the known world. Had the lives of these men been extended to the antediluvian length ; the world must have bowed to their yoke, and trembled to its utmost shores, beneath the iron rod of their power. What armies would they have assembled ? Like that of *Gog*, described by the prophet *Ezekiel*, they would have “ ascended like a storm, and like a cloud ” have “ covered the breadth of the earth. ” What battles would they have fought, when the millions following their standards, met in conflict ! What victories would they have achieved ! How many and how vast regions would they have drenched in blood, covered with the corpses, and whitened with the bones of men ! Within ten years a single man, of obscure origin, reduced one third part of *Europe* under his feet. Had his life been extended through a thousand years ; all the human race would, not improbably, have crouched in iron bondage beneath his sceptre ; and all their blessings been wrenched from them to swell his grandeur, and to gorge his voracious demand for pleasure.

In the mean time, to what a depth of degeneracy, and pollution, would mankind sink in sensuality? Restraint from principle would be removed by the doctrines of Atheism; restraint from fear would vanish before the assurance of living through an immense succession of ages, restraint from shame would expire amid the general hatred of duty, and the universal encouragement of example. All mankind would, therefore, be let loose to revel and to riot. From one end of heaven to the other the soul of man would sink to the level of animal existence; and hail the sloth and the swine, as its companions and brethren. A *Sodom* would rise in every climate, and in every field; and "ten righteous men" would not be found to save a world.

Of all these awful and debasing things we are furnished with the most ample proof from unquestionable fact. The *Antediluvians* thus lived, and thus acted. "The sons of God," we are told, "saw the daughters of men, that they were fair; and they took them wives, of all whom they chose." Of this loose and lewd mixture were born "giants, who became mighty men," and who were in that day "men of renown." As the immediate consequence it followed, that "God saw, that the wickedness of man was great, and that every imagination," i. e. every purpose and design, "of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually: so evil, so abandoned, that "it repented the Lord, that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. The earth also was corrupt before God; and the earth was filled with violence; and God looked upon the earth; and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way on the earth." Here is a concise, but strong and finished picture of the entire profligacy of the human race, and their utter abandonment of all principle, and all decency. "All flesh had corrupted his way;" was lewd, sensual, brutal: "the earth was filled with violence," i. e. as the word is explained, with vengeance, fraud, rapine, and oppression: and those, who were the great, the leaders in this profligacy, "were giants," fierce, tyrannical, men of oppression and of blood, and for these very reasons "men of renown." So polluted did the world in a short time become, that "God repented,

that he had made man ; and brought upon the world a flood of waters, whereby the world that then was," except eight persons, *perished*. Such was the result of one trial ; such unquestionably would be the issue of another.

### REMARKS.

1st. *From these observations we derive complete proof of the wisdom of God in limiting human life by its present bounds.*

There are few dispensations, so naturally mysterious and perplexing, in a world formed by the Author of life and perfection, as *Death*. The whole explanation of this strange and melancholy event is furnished only by the moral character of man. We see, in the observations already made, abundant reasons why he should be removed from the present world ; since his continuance in it would be ruinous to himself, and to his fellow men. We are also presented by them with abundant reasons why he should be removed after a short continuance here, rather than after a longer one ; and why he should be removed in a gloomy and painful, rather than in a joyful and triumphant, manner. Death, the last act of Providence towards man in the present world, is, and ought to be, a solemn testimony of God against human corruption. Were we universally to go from the world, as *Enoch* and *Elijah* went ; the terror of death would cease ; for it would be concluded, and with strong probability, that with all our corruption we were regarded by God with favour, and destined to a prosperous future being. Were our life extended to the antediluvian date ; men would universally assume the antediluvian character ; and the world be filled with the antediluvian vice and corruption. Men are *now*, at least, sufficiently sinful ; sufficiently deaf to the voice of mercy ; sufficiently blind to their own good ; sufficiently hardened against warning, reproof, and reformation. *Then*, the mental eye would be closed in absolute darkness, and the heart be changed into adamant. No argument would persuade ; no warning alarm ; no reproof reclaim ; and no reformation be found.

We naturally love life ; and at every period instinctively wish to live longer. But reason here clearly decides, that it would be really undesirable to extend our earthly being beyond the present boundary ; that God in fixing it has manifested his supreme wisdom and goodness ; and that the dispensation, though unwelcome to us, is established in a manner far better than that which would accord with our wishes.

2dly. *We also learn the wisdom, and the necessity* of employing this short life in acquiring a life which is eternal.

Immortality is necessarily the object of earnest desire to every intelligent, and would be if he could form the thought, to every percipient, being. It was the actual and glorious lot of our first parents. It may be the lot of every one of *us*. A short period, a limited life, is the only period during which we can obtain it. This very consideration demands of us the utmost anxiety and diligence. The death also, which we must all undergo, enforces strongly with its painful and distressing circumstances this powerful argument. Like a beacon, lighted up with an eternal fire on a height visible to all the nations of men, it solemnly warns us of the evils to which we are exposed, and of which to all the impenitent it is itself the beginning. We need thus to be warned. If we are wise, we shall welcome the alarm ; and, beholding the Sun of life hastening through the heavens, shall “ do, while the day lasts, whatsoever our hand findeth to do with our might ;” and, to quicken our diligence, shall cast a constant and apprehensive eye toward the rapid approach of that *night* in *which no man can work*. Instead of wishing to live longer, we shall labour to live better. Instead of vainly panting for immortal being in a world of sin and sorrow, where we, together with others, should only sin and suffer ; we should bend all our efforts, to find it in that glorious world, where it can be actually found ; and where its ages roll on in the “ fulness of joy, and pleasures forevermore.”

## SERMON XX.



### THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE xvi. 26.

*And besides all this between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you, cannot: neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.*

THE design of the parable, from which the text is taken, is to shew the dangerous influence of wealth and luxury; and the superiority of the most abject poverty, when connected with piety, to all worldly gratifications. The rich, the proud, and the splendid, are designed to be here alarmed and warned; the poor and forsaken, to be comforted and encouraged. The parable is also filled with a great variety of evangelical doctrines; almost as many as it contains words. All these are exhibited in a most distinct light by the contrast which is studiously maintained between the several parts of the parable, as well as between the two principal characters which are exhibited in it.

It is the design of the present discourse, to consider the contrast between the situation of Dives and that of Lazarus; both in the present, and in the future, world.

Between the circumstances of these individuals the difference was immense.

Dives was in this world rich, honourable, and externally happy; while Lazarus was poor, despised, and externally wretched. Beyond the grave the condition of both was utterly reversed.

I shall consider

I. *The Circumstances of Dives, in his two different states of existence.*

*In this world, Dives was possessed*

1st. *Of an abundance of earthly good.*

He had great wealth. This doubtless was of the same kind with the wealth of that country, at the present time; and consisted, among other things, of lands, houses, cattle, silver, gold, gems, servants, and apparel. This great, proud, luxurious man may naturally be supposed to have delighted in walking over his possessions, and in surveying his lands and houses; in admiring the fertility of the one, and the elegance and splendour of the other. It may be easily believed, that he delighted to see the number and labours of his servants, and the increase of his property by their industry. We cannot doubt that he loved to count his money, and to calculate his gains. All worldly men do this. He probably did it with the same pleasure and exultation which is experienced by others.

2dly. *He knew how to enjoy this abundance, according to the usual meaning of this phraseology.*

He did not amass riches for their own sake, but for the sake of enjoying them. He was clothed in purple and fine linen; at that time the dress of nobles and princes; and of them only. Here softness and splendour were united; and both contributed to enhance and variegate enjoyment. It seems indeed that he did not deny himself any enjoyments; but meant to live while here, and to let posterity take care of itself, and futurity bring with it what it might. He also fared sumptuously: he ate and drank to the full the richest and most dainty viands; and these were supplied to him every day. Thus it appears that his life was a life of uniform abundance and enjoyment, and was varied by diversities of pleasure only.

3dly. *He was probably, so far as pertains to human nature in these circumstances, possessed of entire ease of mind.*

There is no reason to believe, that he was at all disturbed by considerations of futurity or by any anxiety about the present. Let us eat and drink: to-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant: were probably the maxims by which he regulated his life and enjoyments. Death seems to have disturbed him little.



if at all. Eternity we may believe affected him still less. Of Eternity, the Judgment, and the Recompense of reward, he probably believed nothing. Death by him, was perhaps regarded as an Eternal Sleep; as it is generally by modern infidels. His life was plainly that of a mere animal. His death was, therefore, naturally believed by him to be that of an animal, also.

It would seem, that he was a Sadducee. His mode of life accords only with the doctrines of that sect of the Jews. If this be a just opinion, it is certain, that he believed neither in the existence of Angel nor Spirit; neither in a Resurrection, nor in a state of reward. In the spirit of a modern infidel he boldly denied every thing, which pertained to future and endless being, to the judgment and eternity, to heaven and hell.

At the fears of such poor and pitiful wretches as Lazarus, he doubtless laughed with many an ingenious jest, and many a cutting sarcasm. Their cowardly apprehensions of a future world, a world of retribution too, he magnanimously despised; and triumphed in his own independence of thought, raised above the superstition of nurses, and bigots, and fanatics, who were held by their fears in a constant and miserable bondage. His own passions and appetites, he knew, were all natural, and were doubtless given only to be gratified. Whatever was natural, was doubtless lawful; and whatever was in itself good, was unquestionably designed to be enjoyed. "Let the miserable beings," he may be imagined to say, "who know no better, tremble, and pray, and destroy all the comforts of their lives, by the bugbear terrors of futurity. God made me, if I was made at all, to be happy; and he has amply provided me with the means of being so. I shall not abuse his bounty by refusing to taste and enjoy, nor by trembling to taste, the good which he has given. Certainly the Creator, if he be a benevolent being, cannot grudge his creatures the enjoyment of the good which he has himself given. The bounties of his providence were never intended to be lost in self-denial and fasting. The roses blossom, to be seen and relished. I will pluck them, ere they wither."

Like other Infidels, both speculative and practical, he could

probably reason learnedly on accountableness, and prove that man is a machine; that all his volitions are governed irresistibly by motives; that those motives are presented to him without his contrivance, or concurrence; and, therefore, that all his actions are necessary and mechanical. Of course, they are neither right nor wrong, neither good nor evil. It is indeed probable, that at times he complained, like other such men, of the faults and sins of his servants; and that he cursed them for their omissions of duty, and their trespasses on his property and convenience. He may also, have followed the customs of the age, and at times whipped and tortured them, for their crimes, as he himself styled them. But, whatever was the case with servants, and however wicked they might be, or however accountable to him; he certainly was not accountable to God, nor capable of being a sinner. A saint he never pretended nor wished to be. Upon the whole, he was satisfied with his allotments in life; and he presumed that God, who gave them, would, and must, be satisfied also.

If men lived beyond the grave, he had concluded, and in his own view proved, that they must be happy. Otherwise God must be unjust and malevolent. This, all men denied, as well as himself: the consequence therefore must be admitted.

Around his board, as around those of others of the same character and condition, there doubtless swarmed a multitude; who were buzzing in the sunshine of opulence, and feasting on the honey which it yielded. All these united in approving his arguments, applauding his ingenuity, and adopting without a question his conclusions. These were all equally necessary and comforting to them, as to him. None therefore called them in question; but all united to confirm him in the conviction, that his doctrines were certain, and his arguments unanswerable.

Nor was he probably less persuasive on other favourite topics of Infidelity. The want of chastity he could prove, like Hume to be, when known, of little consequence; and, when unknown, to be nothing. Adultery he could exhibit also, like Hume and Bolingbroke, as not forbidden by the law of nature, and as ne-

cessary to the real enjoyment of life. The innocence of Gambling and Profaneness he could display with arguments, fraught with the same ingenuity and conviction; and when argument failed could rout his antagonists with a jest, applauded of course by all his dependents and associates in pleasure.

Thus he withheld not his heart from any joy. Life was to him a period of sunshine, and a circuit of vernal seasons only. Light and gaiety, verdure and bloom, abundance and pleasure, frolicsome companions and laughing amusements; were his constant round of happy existence. Every day brought its brilliancy and its enjoyments. Every sun rolled round only a succession of good. In his bosom conscience, early silenced and finally discouraged, ceased to reprove; and, during his life, no gloomy preacher or melancholy enthusiast embittered happiness by unseasonable and unwelcome suggestions concerning sin, or judgment, or future retribution.

But in the midst of this joyous career, Death pointed the fatal arrow at his heart. His wealth, his grandeur, his gaiety, his sports, his flatterers, his physicians; could not defend him from this conflict, nor prevent his fall. Perhaps his stupidity and grossness of mind continued to the last; and he died, as he had lived, a brute. Perhaps, like many other proud, hardened, and guilty wretches, he awaked on a dying bed to sense and reason, for the first time; and now found, that all his former conduct was madness, that his pleasures were nothing, and that his dangers were real and dreadful. Now, perhaps for the first time, he began to feel that he was dependent on God, and accountable to him. Now, perhaps, he made the first essay towards a prayer. But the day of grace was past to him. His prayers were the cries of hardened guilt, extorted by danger and fear; and they were disregarded and rejected! The Mercy he had so long slighted and so impiously mocked, now laughed at his calamity, and mocked when his fear came. He called, but God would not answer: he stretched out his hand, but God would not regard.

At Death his situation was in all respects reversed.

1st. *He was disembodied.*

All his pleasures in this life came to him through the body. They were all pleasures of sense, and arose from animal indulgence. They consisted in pampering the lust of the flesh, in satiating the lust of the eyes, and in fulfilling the demands of the pride of life. Eating and drinking, sloth and lewdness, wealth and splendour, gaiety and amusement; were his whole list of enjoyments; the amount of all which he considered as real good.

But his Body was now gone. His face and limbs, so delicately fed and adorned, were turned into a pale and lifeless corpse, divested of all its former beauty and splendour, and clothed with deformity and corruption. The form, which he once idolized, was now carried out of the palace which it so long and so proudly inhabited, and laid in the solitary grave. There it was proved to have been pampered only for the feast of worms. Worms were now its only companions, and reigned over the great and proud man with absolute dominion. All, that remained of him, was turned into dust, undistinguishable from the earth around him.

2dly. *He was now in the absolute want of all things.*

As his body had been the means of all his enjoyments; with its destruction all his enjoyments vanished. In the vast universe he could find nothing, which he could call his own. All was a wide and solitary waste; where no good sprang up, no spring of pleasure flowed, and no living verdure rose. An Arabian desert, boundless and hopeless, it presented nothing to his eye but barrenness and death.

3dly. *He was despised.*

In the future world the treasures of the mind only make rich; and the dignity of the mind only confers honour. Of these treasures he had none. Of course he was wholly destitute of the means of conferring enjoyment on others. He was unable to befriend any; and wanted therefore the means of awakening gratitude, or creating dependence; of engaging flatterers, or securing services. The respect and deference, produced by affluence and splendour, he could not command; because he possessed nothing. Personal worth he had none. Of course he could not be respected. The

attributes and actions which commanded respect, he had always despised and rejected. On the contrary he chose a character, in itself contemptible ; and he scorned and loathed all real dignity. He could claim, therefore, no regard for what he was, or what he possessed. As all this was the result of his own choice, he appeared only as a madman and a profligate ; and he was of course regarded only with scorn and derision. The contempt, with which he had formerly treated all good men, now rebounded on his own head. Eye he had, in this respect, paid to him for an eye, and tooth for a tooth ; and his gross conduct to others, causeless and insolent, was now repaid sevenfold.

4thly. *He was miserable.*

All his good things, the whole stock destined for him throughout eternity, he had received in this life. Like a giddy prodigal he had spent his whole estate ; and he was now a bankrupt forever. He was dreadfully disappointed of all his expectations. He had fully intended, and firmly resolved, *not to be*, beyond the grave. But in spite of himself he existed. He had as firmly resolved, if he should exist, to be happy ; and had often proved to himself and to his companions, that God could not, consistently with his character, make him unhappy.

In hell he was forced to reside ; and there he was tormented by all the ingredients of misery. The world of woe spread immensely before his sight ; and through its melancholy regions he was now beginning an everlasting journey. All around him was dreary and desolate : all before him was forlorn and dreadful. He was without friends, without enjoyments, and without hope. He confesses himself to be friendless in the world where he dwelt ; for he appeals not to any of his companions, but to Lazarus and to Abraham, for relief. In the request which he makes to them, he also declares himself to be utterly destitute of enjoyments ; for he asks for the least of all enjoyments only ; and even this was denied.

He saw at the same time Lazarus, in heaven, in the bosom of Abraham ; the man, whom above all others he pitied and despised, as the wretch pre-eminently outcast from heaven, and forgot-

ten and miserable in this world. To this forsaken wretch, who, a few days before, had desired to be fed from the crumbs which fell from his own table, he now becomes a suppliant for a single drop of water. This prayer he found with full conviction could not be granted; and the refusal put an end to his hopes and his prayers forever.

I shall now consider,

II. *The Circumstances of Lazarus; in the present world, and in the future.*

*In this world, Lazarus was*

1st. *In a state of the most abject poverty.*

He was a beggar, proverbially the poorest of mankind, and perfectly destitute of property; of comforts and necessaries alike. He was poor, even for a beggar; and in want of those things, which beggars usually obtain. He desired to be fed from the crumbs, which fell from the rich man's table. Even the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table were an object, and it would seem the highest object, of his desires. Beyond the possession of these, it does not appear that he even raised or cherished a wish; and it would seem, that even these were sparingly given to him. He was laid at the gate of the rich man by those, who, not improbably, wished to free themselves from the burden of seeing and relieving him; and who cast him down here, with that cold compassion, which was satisfied if it did not see him die of want. Here he lay under the naked heaven, and had no bed but the ground.

He was also full of sores. A malignant and incurable leprosy appears to have infected and overcome him; so that he was unable to walk, and was therefore carried by others to this place. Of course he was unclean; an outcast from the congregation; and an object of loathing to all who saw him.

There he had neither physician, nor nurse. The dogs were the only assistants which he found, or who had feeling enough to attempt his relief. They came, and licked his sores, and furnished him with his only earthly comfort, except the crumbs on which he meagerly subsisted.

2dly. *He was miserable.*

All the preceding circumstances exhibit this as an additional ingredient in his sufferings. His want, his wretchedness, his loathsomeness, the incurable and odious disease with which he was affected, the place where he was laid, and his desertion by mankind; are all so many striking proofs of the contempt, in which he was holden.

Equally are they evidences of the constant misery which he suffered. The pains of his disease must have been continual, intense, and dreadful. His total want of friends, of relief, of compassion, of hope; the contempt and loathing, which he was obliged to sustain; and the hardness of heart, which he saw daily proved by the conduct of all around him; must have pressed equally upon his body and mind, and overwhelmed him with anguish and despair.

Thus he was without good in possession or in reversion, in the present world.

After suffering for a time these numerous evils, this singular complication of woes, his frame sunk under them; and nature, wearied out with enduring, gave way. He died, and gave up the ghost. That he was buried, does not appear. It is scarcely probable, that those, who had entirely neglected him through life, were mindful of him after he was dead. What was now his condition?

*In the future world, he was*

1st. *Rich in the abundance of all things.*

Poor as he was in this world, destitute as he was of earthly property, friends, and hope; he had, with an industrious and careful hand, laid up treasures in the heavens. Durable riches and righteousness constituted his property, and of these he had an abundance. The wealth of the mind, the hidden treasure, the wealth which makes rich beyond the grave and which passes with an eternal currency among immortal and glorified beings; he had stored up with an eager diligence. With these treasures he entered that world, and immediately found himself to be amply provided for his future and eternal subsistence.

2dly. *He was honourable.*

In that world, as well as in this, all the rich are respected and honoured. The treasures, which exist there, are the means of certain and universal reputation and regard. These he was seen and acknowledged to possess in a superior degree, and was therefore regarded as justly claiming the respect of all its inhabitants.

What a contrast was this to his former situation! With what emotions must he have been agitated, when he entered that world? So poor, despised, and humble a man could hardly have failed to expect some share at least of that lowliness of condition and character, which on earth he had known from bitter experience. To be lowly, and despised, and poor, was to him a habit; and the only habit, which, with respect to these things, he could be supposed to have formed here below. How then must he have been surprised and astonished, when he opened his eyes in eternity; and beheld angels waiting to receive him, and to conduct him to the house of his heavenly Father. In what manner must he have been lost in wonder, who knew not what respect or kindness was from his fellow men, to see these immortal beings meet him with smiles of friendship and complacency, hail him as their friend and companion, salute him as one of those sinners whose repentance had diffused an universal joy over the heavenly world, and proffering themselves to him as his conductors to heaven.

Think of the glorious character of his attendants; the change of his circumstances; the novelty of the treatment which he received; and the wonders of the prospect, opened before him. To the great and splendid in this world he had only bowed with awe. From them, he had never received even a look of tenderness and compassion; much less the acts of beneficence and relief. Above him they were lifted too high, to cast their eyes down on so lowly and insignificant a being. Of but little more consequence than a worm, all, that he expected, or could expect, was, not to be crushed by the foot of insolence and power.

But now these illustrious inhabitants of heaven, who stand before the throne of GOD, in comparison with whom all the princes and nobles of the earth are as insects, presented themselves be-



fore him as his friends, companions, and guides ; welcomed him to their affection and esteem ; and proffered voluntarily to him every kind office. The eye of contempt could now no more glance at him ; the finger of scorn no more mark him as its butt ; the heart of unkindness no more harden itself against his sufferings ; nor the door of pride be insolently shut against his petitions. Now he was changed from the beggar, the leper, the child of suffering and despair, into a son, and king, and priest, of God ; and he was destined to reign with him forever and ever.

3dly. *He was happy.*

He was happy in external things, in which he was before miserable. All such things now became supremely delightful and desirable to him. His habitation, now, was the house of his heavenly Father ; one of the mansions of which was henceforth allotted to him as his everlasting residence. In this glorious place he was united to companions and friends, who knew, and acknowledged, and rejoiced, in his worth ; who possessed the same character, delighted in the same objects, and were occupied in the same pursuits, with himself. To minister to his enjoyments, and to receive from him with pleasure and gratitude his kind offices ; was one of the employments which they coveted, and to which they were to be forever devoted. The Master, whom both he and they served and were forever to serve, was their infinite and eternal Friend ; who forgave, redeemed, and sanctified them all ; and who removed them from this miserable world to his own immediate residence, only to bestow on them a never ending series of blessings. Here he was a son, an heir, a joint heir with Christ, the First-born, "to an inheritance undefiled and that fadeth not away." His prospects were, therefore, all bright and ravishing. On earth all the evil, that he was ever to suffer, had been received. Throughout the ages of the eternal future nothing remained for him but good, overflowing and eternal good.

His conduct, during his probation on earth, was approved. He had "been faithful over the few things," entrusted to his charge ; and being pronounced to have well done, he was admit-

ted forever into "the joy of his Lord." His sins were all forgiven, and washed away in the blood of the Redeemer. His soul was purified from every stain; and delivered from every error, and from every fear. His former hopes were now terminated in fruition immensely superior to all that eye had seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived. His faculties were ennobled and perfected. To know, to love, and to enjoy, was henceforth his only business; the proper destination of a rational, virtuous, and immortal mind.

To the Resurrection he looked forward without impatience, but with a delightful assurance of hope. Then his vile body, committed to the grave in weakness, corruption and dishonour, he knew would be raised in power, incorruption, and glory; and changed, and refashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, according to the working, whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself. He knew, from the promises of God, that, at that period, his body and mind would be re-united; and would constitute one perfect and glorious man, formed for none but exalted purposes and enjoyments. He also knew, that, at that period, all his companions in the faith and patience of the saints would be united with him; and that, thus united, all would commence the divine system of virtuous existence and virtuous conduct, destined to adorn the new heavens and the new earth, wherein righteousness shall dwell forever.

## SERMON XXI.



### THE COMING OF CHRIST.

LUKE xii. 40.

*Be ye therefore ready, also ; for the Son of Man cometh at an hour, when ye think not.*

IN the preceding part of this Chapter our Saviour gives us a series of most solemn and important instructions concerning our conduct in the present life, and our preparation for that which is to come. In the 35th verse he enjoins the duty of watchfulness as eminently interesting to man, especially to Christians ; and in the succeeding verses, enforces it by several solemn considerations. To this injunction he returns, immediately, in the text ; and annexes to it a reason, of the highest moment : “ Be ye, therefore, ready, also ; for the Son of Man cometh at an hour, when ye think not.”

In discoursing upon this passage I propose to consider briefly

- I. *The persons, to whom the command is addressed ;*
- II. *The command itself ; and*
- III. *The Reason, by which it is enforced.*

I. The persons, to whom the command was addressed, were originally, the audience, to which our Saviour was speaking. These, as *St. Luke* informs us, were “ an innumerable multitude of people,” gathered as it would seem, to hear him preach the Gospel. A part of them were his disciples : a part of them were his enemies : and a part, probably including the greatest number, could scarcely have known any thing of him, unless by report. To all these classes of men the command is addressed in the written Gospel. To him, who reads it, and to him, who

hears it, it is addressed alike; and that, whether he be a christian, or a sinner; acquainted with Christ, or unacquainted. At the present time, it is addressed immediately to every member of this audience.

II. *In examining the command itself* I shall briefly mention,

1st. *What that is, for which we are to be ready*: and

2dly. *What is included in being ready.*

1st. *We are required to be ready for the Coming of Christ.*

There are several senses, in which this phrase may be fairly understood, as used in the Scriptures. When it is applied to individuals, it particularly denotes *the day of death*. Death to every man is the time, in which Christ will come; which will terminate every man's probation, and put an end to the necessity and duty, of watching, so solemnly enjoined in the text. All the purposes, for which he is to watch, are then finally settled; and all the opportunities of becoming ready for the appearance of his Master are ended forever. Whatever privileges, whatever means, of amendment he may have possessed; he will possess them no more. Whatever resolutions he may have formed, whatever labours he may have begun, towards the preparation, enjoined; they will all cease at this period. If the work is not now done; it will never be done. For the coming of Christ, then, on our dying day we are here commanded to be ready.

We are also required to be ready for *the Judgment*. When we leave the world, we shall be summoned to give an account of the manner in which we have spent our probation, and employed our talents. This account we shall give to Christ himself; and shall then be declared by him to have done well, or ill. The sentence, which he will here pronounce, will be irreversible; and the trial admit of no appeal. Our souls will be suspended on its issue: and whatever good or evil may be in store for us during the progress of our future being; whatever may be hoped, and whatever may be dreaded, by us; it will all follow this decision. For an event of this magnitude it is immensely important, that we should be ready.

We are, also, to be ready for Eternity. In this immense duration the final sentence will be carried into complete, and endless, execution. Every work, which we have done in this life, will then find its reward : and the sum of happiness, or the mass of misery, allotted to us, will be immeasurably great. Who ought not to be ready for such a state of being, as this? What measures ought to be grudged? What pains ought to be spared? What self-denial ought not cheerfully to be undergone?

2dly. *I will now proceed to enquire what is included in being Ready.*

This subject, for reasons which satisfy myself, I shall canvass in *the negative form*. From the characteristics of those, who are *not* ready, my audience may, if they are willing, learn with some advantages, which are peculiar to this mode of discussion, the true nature of that preparation for the coming of Christ, which he has enjoined in the text.

In the first place, *No person is ready for the coming of Christ, who does not keep the Sabbath holy.*

We are required in the Scriptures to “turn away our foot from the Sabbath, from doing our pleasure on this holy day; to call the Sabbath a delight, and the Holy of the Lord honourable; and to honour him: not doing our own ways, nor finding our own pleasure, nor speaking our own words.” If we do this; we are furnished with a series of most gracious promises, conveying to us the richest of all blessings. We shall be accepted in all our solemn services; shall be enabled to “delight” ourselves “in JEHOVAH;” shall be made “joyful in his house of prayer;” and shall have given to us “an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.” At the same time, we are required not to “forsake the assembling of ourselves together; to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;” and are taught, that all the good, esteem the “tabernacles of JEHOVAH amiable;” that their “heart,” and their “flesh, cry out for the living GOD” that his house is to them, as a nest to the sparrow; and that “every one of them in Zion appeareth before him.” Here, we are taught, “he is their Sun, and their Shield:” here he “gives grace, and glory;” and here “he

withholds from them no good thing." On the other hand, the anger of God against the pollution of the Sabbath is awfully shown in the law, which required, that "the Sabbath breaker should be stoned;" in the declaration, that the land should lie desolate during the *Babylonish* captivity, because it did not rest in their *Sabbaths*, while the *Israelites* dwelt upon it; and in the prediction of God, recorded by *Ezekiel*, that he "would pour out his fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them, because they greatly polluted his Sabbaths."

It will not be denied, that in this audience the number of persons, who do not perform these duties, and are guilty of these sins, is not small. The listless, sleeping, stupid attitude, so often seen in this house; and the trifling, light-minded, irreverent character, perhaps on no Sabbath unseen; prove beyond a hope, as well as beyond a doubt, that this holy day is by the same persons profaned, and polluted, elsewhere. To every one of these persons I say without hesitation, You are not ready for the coming of Christ. You live in a regular, gross, daring disobedience to the commands of God; commands, too, delivered to mankind in a manner, awful and solemn beyond expression. At the same time you have not attempted, you are not now attempting, to prepare yourselves either for death, judgment, or eternity. This is evident beyond all controversy, because the Sabbath is the very day, and the Sanctuary the very place, in which, more than in all others, this preparation is to be made. This is the time, in which God especially requires you to "hear his voice, and not harden your hearts." This is the day, on which, if ever, your *burnt offerings and sacrifices* are to be *accepted* on his *altar*. This is the day, on which "the Lord hath chosen Zion, and desired it for his habitation." On this day he says, "This is my rest forever: here will I dwell. I will abundantly bless her provision. I will satisfy her poor with bread:" the bread of life. "I will clothe her priests with salvation; and the saints shall shout aloud for joy." To these commands you refuse obedience; these blessings you cast away.

If you feel at a loss concerning your readiness for the coming of Christ ; ponder with deep solemnity the emotions with which you will recite before your Judge, the manner, in which you have hitherto kept the Sabbath, and behaved in the Sanctuary. What reasons will you be able to give, why you have from week to week profaned this holy day, and wasted its golden hours in idleness, in trifling, in stupid inattention ; and why in this house of God you have forgotten all your duty, and neglected your souls ? What reasons will you allege for turning a deaf ear to the precepts, and denunciations, of the divine law ? What reasons will you give for turning a hard heart to the offers of mercy in the Gospel ? Christ has often met you here. Can you allege a reason, which he will admit, why you have not believed in him ? Often, very often, has he proffered to you all the blessings of his redemption. Why have you not received them ? He has solemnly called upon you to forsake your sins. Why have you not forsaken them ? He has warned you with infinite tenderness to “flee from the wrath to come.” Why have you not escaped ? He has intreated you to “lay hold on eternal life.” Are you possessed of a reason for refusing it, which you are willing to recite to him in your final account ?

Beside these glaring proofs of your absolute want of preparation for this most affecting interview, remember, that Heaven is the temple of God ; the seat of perpetual worship. Over its delightful realms rolls an everlasting Sabbath. This day of immortality dawns, to be succeeded by no future evening. Its morning incense spreads wide its fragrance, never to cease again. Its piety kindles, its raptures glow, never to be extinguished. Its praises tremble on the harps, and lips, of “the multitude, which no man can number,” to be silent no more forever. How can *you* be prepared to unite in such worship as this, to whom the present, momentary, imperfect worship of an earthly Sabbath is an insupportable burthen ? How can a voice, dumb in this world to the praise of God, bear a part in the harmony of that ? How can souls, sluggish and dead ; how can eyes, which are here closed in deep sleep amid the worship of God ; be awake, and

alive, to the sublimer worship of Heaven? With what emotions must the half-day attendant on the sanctuary, in this world, behold the morning of a Sabbath, to which there will never be an end?

Secondly. *Prayerless persons are not ready for the coming of Christ.*

“In every thing,” says St. Paul, “by prayer and supplication make known your wants unto God.” “Pray always,” says the same Apostle again, “with all prayer.” No commands are more explicit, or unconditional than these. He therefore, who does not obey them, obeys none. At the same time, the inducements to pray are infinite. Man is not warranted to hope for a single blessing, except as an answer to prayer: and if he prays with the heart, he is assured of every blessing. The commands requiring this duty, are given in every form, and on every occasion. The encouragements to pray are numberless, and immeasurable. Nay, prayer, in the Scriptures, is only another name for piety. “Arise,” said Christ to *Ananias*, “and enquire in the house of Judas for one, called Saul of Tarsus: for behold he prayeth.” Thus the whole welfare of the soul is suspended on the duty of Prayer. In him therefore, who has not begun to pray, “there is found no good thing towards the Lord God of Israel.”

Yet how many are there before me, who never uttered a prayer in their lives; who have yet not learned the way to their closets; nor ever asked God to forgive their sins, or to save their souls. How deplorable a part of your final account must this story be? With what amazement will you remember your refusal to pray; your negligence of prayer; and the reasons, for which you neglected this great duty. The promises were all before you. The hand of God was opened to give. The water of life flowed at your feet: and you were invited to take of it freely. But you would not ask; and therefore could not receive.

Thirdly. *Those, who do not profess the Religion of Christ, and enter into his Covenant, are not ready for his coming.*

“Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny, when I shall come in the glory of my Father and with the holy Angels.



And whosoever shall be ashamed to confess me before men, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in the glory of his Father, and with his holy Angels." This audience well know how great a proportion of their whole number have, hitherto, failed to confess Christ before men. The reason, which you yourselves will allege for this act of disobedience is, that you do not believe yourselves prepared to make a profession of Religion in such a manner, as it ought to be made. In alleging this reason do you not see irresistibly, that you declare yourselves to be unprepared for the coming of Christ? Certainly then, you will not think it hard, that I take you at your word, and pronounce you unprepared. You will not doubt, that those, who are unfit to commune with Christ at his table, here, are unfit to sit down with him in the kingdom above. If you have no sincere interest in his death and sufferings; you have unquestionably no title to the blessings, which they purchased.

The command to enter into covenant with God is sufficiently plain to forbid all doubt in every man concerning his duty. God covenants with us to be "our God," only when we covenant with him to be "his people." What, then, is to become of those, who do not enter into this covenant? Let every such person remember, that there is no title to any spiritual or eternal blessing, but through this covenant; and that, if he be not found in it in the end, he will not be acknowledged as a child of God, nor admitted into his heavenly kingdom.

That persons do, in some instances, become real penitents, and true believers, and from scruples of conscience are yet deterred from making a public profession of Religion, I readily acknowledge. I further acknowledge, that these persons have, in every case, really given themselves up to God in this covenant; although they have not done it publicly. I also acknowledge, that every one of these persons is numbered among the people of God, and is entitled by the promises of this covenant to all the future, immortal blessings, which it conveys. So far as these considerations will communicate hope, peace, and comfort, to any individual in this Assembly, I certainly wish to give him consolation.

That there are such persons in this Assembly is not improbable: and I certainly wish them all the comfort, and all the hope, which on evangelical principles they can obtain. As, however, it is of the last importance, that they should not be deceived, either by themselves, or by me, let me suggest to them the following things.

They have not hitherto, made a public profession of Religion. The reason, why they have not done it, is they doubt their own fitness to make it, or in other words their ability to make it with truth. In this manner they give their own deliberate judgment against themselves.

Let me then ask them, whether there is not reason for them to fear, that their own judgment is at least sufficiently favourable to themselves; and whether GOD, who sees them exactly as they are, may not judge even more unfavourably than they.

At the best, their whole safety obviously lies in the supposition, that they are self-deceived, and that their case is really better than it is believed to be by themselves. It is hardly necessary to observe how insufficient this supposition is to furnish solid comfort, and supporting hope. Let me exhort them, therefore, to give themselves no rest, until they see their way to a public profession of Religion clear, and until they have actually confessed Christ before men.

Fourthly. *Those persons also, are unprepared for the coming of Christ, who prefer the world to him.*

“He,” saith our Saviour, “who 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.” If we may not prefer these most intimate relations, whom GOD has required us to love with great tenderness, more than Christ; certainly there is nothing, which we are permitted to love in this manner. Accordingly, *St. John* observes, “If any man love the world; the love of the Father is not in him.”

To every intelligent being there is some one supreme object of his affections: and this is, probably, always either GOD, or himself. But GOD admits, here, no rival. His only command with

respect to this subject is, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." By every person, who prefers the world to Christ, this command is continually violated.

Ask yourselves, then, whether you do not prefer the world to Christ. To determine this question, enquire further, whether its riches, honours, and pleasures, are not more frequently the objects of your thoughts, your wishes, your designs, and your labours. Enquire whether they are not more frequently the subjects of your conversation; and whether Christ is the subject of your conversation at all.

Enquire further, whether you have hitherto believed in him with the faith of the Gospel; with that confidence of the heart, which flows out continually in acts of obedience to his commandments, and ordinances; whether you have felt, that your salvation must be derived from him only; that there is no other possible expiation for your sins, and no other ground of acceptance with God; and that therefore, if not interested in his righteousness, you will be undone.

If you have, indeed, formed these views, and exercised these affections; you do prefer Christ to the world; and may hope, with the best reasons, to be "remembered" by him "in the day when he makes up his jewels." But alas! how much cause do most of you daily give, even in the view of charity and compassion, to fear, that they are all, hitherto, to be begun; that the world is now your god, your portion, and your all. What a deplorable account must every person of this character give to Christ, at his coming, of "the deeds, done in the body."

Fifthly. *All persons are unprepared for the coming of Christ, who have hitherto put off their Repentance to a future season.*

"Except ye repent," said our Saviour to his Apostles, "ye shall all likewise perish." But he, that has postponed his repentance to a future day, is hitherto in this perishing condition; and, should Christ summon him to the Judgment, must appear before him in all his guilt. His first labour is yet left undone. His first step towards Heaven has hitherto not been taken.

“Procrastination,” says *Dr. Young*, “is the thief of time.” With time, it steals away also all the designs, and efforts, of man, out of which, his reformation might spring. In this manner it steals away your probation; and will finally steal away your souls. Not only, therefore, are you now unprepared, so far as this is your character; but there is the most melancholy reason to fear, that you will never be prepared for that interview with your Judge, at which all your interests of soul, and body, are to be fixed forever.

Sixthly. *All those persons, also, are unready for the coming of Christ, who in their schemes of reformation reserve to themselves the indulgence of some sinful disposition, or the perpetration of some particular sin.*

“Whosoever abideth in him,” says *St. John*, “sinneth not. Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.” I. John iii. 6. To sin is no part of the scheme of action, proposed for himself by him who abideth in Christ. That every such person commits sin is unquestionable: but it is not a part of his designs. Yet those are not wanting; and, it is to be feared, they are not few; who form general intentions of reformation, and believe themselves to be really, and in some good degree, reformed; who still, in their scheme of amendment proceed no farther, than to drop such sins, as they can most easily part with, and reserve to themselves the privilege of committing such, as are especially dear to them. The Christian’s design is to “lay aside every weight,” and, especially, “the sins, which most easily beset him.” The design of these men is to retain such sins, and lay aside others.

The miser, for example, will quietly give up the costly pursuits of ambition and pleasure, if he may be only permitted to amass wealth, and use the means, which are necessary for that purpose. The ambitious man is willing to yield wealth to the miser, and pleasure to the voluptuary; if he may only remain undisturbed in the chase of distinction. Give the voluptuary his pleasures; and he will cheerfully consent, that any others, who will, may toil in the sordid business of ambition and avarice.

These are gross and obvious cases: and concerning them there will probably be little doubt. But there are very many others, scarcely suspected to be of the same nature, which are, yet, always equally dangerous, and often no less fatal. There are very many persons, who from motives of safety, reputation, or decency, pass with no small propriety through life, and acquire even the character of Christians: who yet practise, habitually, sin which is scarcely observed by others, or perhaps by themselves. If they advance so far, as to give up other sins; they believe, that God will be satisfied, and that themselves shall be accepted. Some of these persons reserve to themselves the privilege of being peevish and fretful; some, that of being censorious; and some that of tale-bearing. Multitudes cannot give up the pleasure of making good bargains as they are pleased to style them. Multitudes insist upon the right of conforming to the customs of the world; and often speak of it as a thing absolutely necessary. Among these, many feel, that they may safely neglect family prayer. Not a small number feel, that they may sport and jest with sacred things; or that they may make journeys of convenience, or excursions of pleasure and amusement, on the Sabbath; or that they may use impure language in their conversation; or that they may safely colour their representations beyond the truth. Others, still, believe, that they may harbour an unkind, unforgiving spirit; or that they may safely enjoy the diminution of a rival's reputation; or that they may read licentious books, or indulge a licentious imagination. Finally, there are very many, who claim to themselves as a privilege to spend the golden hours of life in specious idleness; in the progress of which little is done, that is useful to God or man, in which amusement takes the place of business, the day of salvation is consumed in ease and sport, and the soul is bartered for the pleasure, found in trifling. Little do these persons feel, that they are bound *not* to "be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; to work while the day lasts," and to remember, that "the night cometh, when no man can work."

In these and many other ways multitudes of mankind reserve to themselves some sinful course of life, or other, as a privilege. They are willing, that is, they think themselves willing, to obey most of the commands of God; and secretly hope, that he will not require their obedience to the rest. Thus in their hearts they make a bargain with their Maker; and agree, that, if he will permit them to sin in such and such ways, they will obey him in such and such other ways. The sins, which they reserve, are always their favourite sins; those, "which most easily beset them;" and those, therefore, which God requires of us always most anxious and watchfully to resist.

He, who does not intend to obey the divine commands universally, neither intends to obey, nor actually obeys, them at all. Multitudes cheat themselves in this respect; but they cannot cheat their Maker. The universality of our obedience is the first proof, that it is real and sincere. All those, therefore, who adopt the conduct, which I have here described, must be miserably prepared to meet their Judge.

*Seventhly. Those, also, are unready for the coming of Christ, who do not continually, and solemnly, converse with death, judgment, and eternity.*

We become ready for death by bringing it home to our hearts; by pondering it daily, and deeply; and by thus learning what it is to die. We become ready for our final account by considering with all anxiety of mind what that account will be, and what are "the deeds, done in the body," of which it will be composed. We become ready for eternity by realizing, often, its endless duration; the immense magnitude of the scenes, which it unfolds; and the irreversible nature of the allotments, destined to us beyond the grave. I do not mean, that such meditations will sanctify us, nor that they will entitle us to sanctification; but I intend, that they are among the happiest means of bringing forward this divine consummation. This at least will, I presume, be granted on all hands: that he, who does not think of these things, must be ill prepared to meet them.

Nothing is more evident, than that our negligence will not alter the nature of those momentous events, which are before us. However regardless we may be ; it will still be a solemn thing to die ; an awful thing to be judged ; an amazing thing, to enter upon the recompense of reward. How many of you have either never considered these subjects at all, or thought of them only with a glance of the mental eye, or a momentary excursion of the imagination : and this, too, forced upon you by some alarming discourse, or some sickness which arrested you, or the death of a friend, or some other terrifying event. Think, I beseech you, what it is to die ; what it is to stand before God ; what it is to give an account of all your conduct in the present life ; what it is to hear the last sentence ; what it is to ascend to Heaven, or go down to Hell. Does not even a momentary reflection compel you to believe ; nay, does it not compel you to feel ; that no thought, no anxiety, no labour, can be too great to prepare you for events of such overwhelming importance ? Does not the same thought prove to you, that he, who never ponders them at all, must be deplorably unprepared.

*Eighthly. Careless Christians are, also, unhappily prepared for the coming of Christ.*

It is to be particularly remembered, that the precept in the text was especially addressed by our Lord to his disciples. It was, therefore, necessary for them. But, if *they* needed it, no Christian, of modern times, will believe it to be less necessary for himself. Peculiarly is its quickening influence desirable : and, let me add, especially when Christians are at ease, negligent, and sluggish, in the performance of their duty. Certainly such Christians are unhappily prepared for the coming of their Lord.

Of what will the final account, given by these persons, consist ? How few, how imperfect, will the services of the best men appear, when they come to be rehearsed at the final day, examined by the eye of the Judge, and set in the light of his countenance ? How much fewer, and of how much less value, will be the services of the persons in question ? How small a part of their duty will they be found to have done : and how great a por-

tion of their life will appear to have been filled up with mere negligence? How much nearer than they mistrust, how much nearer than they will then be willing to remember, will they be found to have approached towards the character of the “unprofitable, and slothful, servant, who wrapped his talent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth?” These, certainly, will be melancholy recitals to him, who came from heaven, lived a life of suffering, and died on the Cross, that we might live forever. Let every slothful Christian, then, awake to a sense of his condition, and character. Let him search his life. Let him probe his heart. Let him mark the little periods, in which he has done his duty; and the melancholy chasms, filled up either with doing it by halves, in fragments and scraps, or with doing nothing, or with committing sin. Let him also remember, that all these things will constitute a part of his final account.

III. I will now proceed to the consideration of *the Reason, by which the duty of preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ is enforced in the text.* “For the Son of Man cometh in an hour, when ye think not.”

In other words, Death, Judgment, and Eternity, will come at a time, which we cannot foresee, and of which we are not aware. The true weight of this reason lies in the fact, that these things are of such vast concern to us. Death ends our probation, and introduces us to the Judgment. The Judgment finally decides the great question, whether we shall be happy or miserable throughout eternity: and Eternity involves all our well-being.

As the time when these things shall arrive, is wholly uncertain; we ought, obviously, to be ready for them at every period. We are to be ready for them to-day, to-morrow, the next week, and the next year; because at either of these periods they may arrive. Christ *comes*, as he himself informs us, and as all experience proves, “at even, at midnight, at the cock-crowing, and in the morning.” How plainly, then, ought every one of his “servants to watch, lest, coming suddenly, his Master find him sleeping.”



Unhappily, we are always prone to think death at a distance; and thus to feel, that we may safely postpone our repentance to a future day. How few persons would be guilty of this procrastination if they really believed, that death was at the door! This then is our peculiar danger; and to a great extent the source of our negligence, and our ruin. The very uncertainty, which ought to rouse us to the greatest diligence, only prompts us to sloth. That, which ought to fill us with alarm, only lulls us into security. Thus we go on, postponing the great business of life, till death knocks at the door, and finds the work yet to be begun.

But to all, who thus waste their probation, and abuse the mercy of GOD, the time of Christ's coming will be dreadful.

"Death, 'tis a melancholy day  
To those, who have no God."

Surprised, hurried, overborne with distress, they leave the world in terror; and awake in eternity, utterly unprepared to meet their Judge.

These solemn truths are peculiarly interesting to persons in middle, and declining, life. If *we* are not ready; when are we to become so? If our repentance is not now begun; when is it to commence? If we have not renounced sin; overcome the world; believed in Christ; and given up ourselves to GOD; what reasons have we to hope, that the little of life, which remains, will be spent to any better purpose, than the great portion, which is past?

How solemnly ought we to remember, that death will not wait for our wishes; that the Judgment is now hastening; that Eternity is at the door? Disease, unperceived, may now be making progress in our veins; and may be preparing without a suspicion on our part to hurry us to the grave. How absurd, how deceitful, how fatal, is our procrastination! How dreadful our stupidity! What terrible reasons have we to do what our hands find to do in this concern with our might!

Are we in health, and for this reason at ease about our salvation? So a month since were those, who died yesterday. Their

end exposes our folly in this senseless security; and from the tomb calls to us, "Be ye also ready."

To the young this duty becomes immensely interesting, because they now enjoy the best of all seasons for making this preparation. Remember, that, however hard your hearts may now be, they are more susceptible than they will probably be at any future period. Lose not, then, this hopeful, verdant season, this seed-time of life. Should the good seed be actually sown in advanced years; it will find a sterile soil, and an inclement sky: and the crop, if it should really follow, will scarcely repay the labours of the reaper. What fearful reasons have you to believe, that your hearts will be covered with thorns and briars; that they will be nigh unto cursing, and that their end will be to be burned? How few of you are ready for the coming of Christ? How few would declare, that they believed themselves to be ready? How few, while taking a retrospect of their lives, can find in them such a train of actions, as they would be willing to rehearse before their Judge?

Open your eyes; and see your privileges, and with them your hopes, every day lessening. Behold God every day removing farther from you; and the world taking a more entire possession of your hearts. Look back. Do you not perceive, that the gates of Heaven have already become more distant, dim and doubtful, to your eyes? Listen. Are not the calls of mercy already more indistinct. What hope can he, who is sinking every moment, rationally entertain, that he shall not be drowned? What hope can he, who is sliding down a precipice and all whose efforts stop not his career at the beginning, soberly indulge, when he is farther advanced, that he will not be dashed in pieces at the bottom. Now, then, lay hold on the hope set before you.

Remember further, that life to you, also, is absolutely uncertain. When your hopes of living long are high, and with full confidence you are promising yourselves many days; go to the neighbouring burying-ground; mark how many monuments are there raised over the young; and consider how many more at the same period of life have become inhabitants of those dark and melan-

choly mansions, concerning whom no stone tells where they lie ! How soon may you join these tenants of the grave ! Wait not, then, for hoary locks to inform you, that you are tottering over the tomb. The gates of eternity are always open : and the youth, the child, and the infant, are passing through them night and day. The knell may soon toll for your funeral also : and your weeping friends may soon follow you to the grave. How distressing will it be to them to look into that dark and narrow house, without a hope, and to follow your souls into eternity with no supporting evidence, that, while here you believed in the Redeemer, or loved God ; or that there you will give your account with joy, be acquitted at the final trial, or find your names written in the Lamb's book of Life.

## SERMON XXII.



### THE FINAL INTERVIEW.

#### ECCLESIASTES xii. 7.

*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was ; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.*

AFTER the death of one of our fellow men, we hear the funeral bell summon together the surviving friends and neighbours of the deceased, to perform the last kind offices. The assembly gathers ; a prayer is made ; the coffin is placed on the bier, and borne to the grave. The body is then committed to the earth. A solemn address is made to the living, while surrounding the narrow house ; and, with impressions produced by the affecting event, and in some degree suited to its melancholy nature, they then return to their own habitations.

Our friend has now bidden us a final adieu. The intercourse between him and us is terminated ; and both the persons and “places which knew him” in the present world, “will here know him no more.” Nothing is more obvious, than that this solemn subject affects the survivors less than its importance demands. The widow indeed, and the orphan children, usually mourn sincerely, and in earnest. The death of the husband and the father, has wounded their affection, lessened their happiness, and overcast their hopes. There are, also, at least in many instances, other friends, less intimately connected, who sensibly feel the breach made upon their enjoyments. But there are multitudes of others, and those often not very remote in acquaintance or consanguinity, whose last affecting emotions concerning the departed man are felt at the grave ; and who, when they turn their feet

homeward, leave behind them every sympathizing reflection, every solemn thought. With them, life immediately assumes the same aspect, as if they had never known him ; and the world, as if he had never been.

But notwithstanding all this indifference to death, and to those who are dead, there are occasions, on which these emotions will in some measure come home to the heart ; incidents, which will call them up to view in an affecting light ; and persons, by whom they will be seriously realized in a manner not unsuited to their importance. On such occasions, most men, perhaps, experience at times some degree of solicitude ; and feel an involuntary twinge, a transient chill, passing over their hearts. That we should be so inattentive to a subject which so nearly concerns us, and so strongly appeals to our natural tenderness, seems at first thought to be strange. The explanation is in some degree, perhaps principally, furnished by our fears. The death of others naturally alarms us concerning our own departure ; and the consideration of *their* future allotments easily leads us to reflections concerning *our own*. It is not to be wondered at that subjects, so painful as these, should be unwelcome whenever they approach ; and be dismissed, not only without reluctance, but with eagerness and self-gratulation.

There are however seasons, in which we cannot wholly refuse to wander into the unseen world. Those, who are witnesses of the death and burial of this departed friend, will, at times, follow him in the exercise of imagination ; and inquire with some anxiety whither he is gone ; where he dwells ; and by what circumstances he is surrounded. His body, we know, is lodged in the grave ; is mouldering into its native dust ; and is already become the prey of corruption, and the feast of worms. But where is *the Man* ? Where is *the living, conscious Being*, that saw with the eyes, spoke with the tongue, and moved the hands, of that body ? Where is the being who thought and chose, loved and hated, controlled the cares of the family, mingled in the intercourse of the neighbourhood, and took an active part in the interesting concerns of the present world ?

Obviously, he is gone, to return no more. But whither has he gone? Is he "blotted out of the book of the living?" Has he returned to his original nothing? Or has he become an inhabitant of some unknown world, whence no person was ever permitted to come with tidings to us? He has "given up the ghost, and where is he?"

To these questions the Text returns a decisive answer. "Then shall the dust return to the earth, as it was; and the spirit shall return to GOD, who gave it." The man, the living, conscious being who inhabited the body lately committed to the grave, has returned to GOD. We naturally inquire, "For what end has he been summoned to the Presence of this glorious and awful Being?" A following verse of the context replies, "For GOD shall bring every work into Judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." This short and affecting answer to a question so solemn and interesting, it will be the aim of this discourse to expand into a few particulars, kindly presented for our meditation in other parts of the Word of GOD.

It ought however to be observed, before I commence the execution of this design, that *he*, concerning whom we inquire, has now become an unembodied spirit. That union with the body which bound him to earthly objects, employments, and connections, is finally dissolved. To all these he has bidden his last farewell; and now wings his way alone, through the regions of invisible being. *The same man*, who lived a little while since in the midst of us, and whose remains we followed to the grave, is now an inhabitant of eternity. *Him* we are now following to that amazing vast; that unknown somewhere. We pursue, not an airy being of fancy, but a real man; a neighbour and friend; separated from us but yesterday. Of this person it is to be observed,

1st. *That he has now begun his acquaintance and connection, with that World, of which he is to be a perpetual inhabitant.*

The present world is a stage, where we are called to act a part; and are then destined to retire behind the curtain. The part assigned to us, is short; and the time allotted to it, momen-

tary. When it is ended, we shall reappear no more. Such was the situation of our deceased friend.

But now he has begun a state which is enduring, and incapable of change or termination. All his connections are eternal: his pursuits; his character; his allotments. No new world lies beyond. No revolution of years, or of ages, advances him nearer to a close. No distant old age brings on its decays. No death waits, to release him to some other, untried scenes of existence. He has opened his eyes at once on a prospect literally boundless; and, roving onward and onward, with a wearisome investigation, he sees ages rising after ages in a succession which will begin forever.

2dly. *He has entered into the presence of GOD, the Judge of all.*

In this world our neighbour, like ourselves, saw GOD at a distance; in his works, faintly seen and slightly considered; or in his word, scarcely read, imperfectly understood, and little regarded; or perhaps in his own meditations, reluctantly employed on this great subject, and coldly accompanied by affections engaged about the things of time and sense.

But now he comes directly into the presence of his Maker; and beholds him face to face. He does not, indeed, behold "Him," whom "no one hath seen, or can see, and live." But he presents himself before the Son of GOD; the divine person, "to whom all Judgment is committed." His face he has beheld; his voice he has heard; as in this world he had heard the voice, and seen the face, of an earthly judge. While our friend lived in the present world; he had often heard many things concerning this glorious person. He had heard of him, as a poor, despised man; as rejected, hated and persecuted; as tried, condemned and crucified. He had heard of him, as wrapped in swathes and spices, and laid in the grave; as having risen from the dead, and ascended to heaven. Perhaps he believed, perhaps he disbelieved, the whole. If he believed, it was at the best imperfectly; distantly; with a dullness, at which he is now astonished; with an insensibility, which now overwhelms him with

shame and confusion. If he disbelieved ; it was with a mind clouded by moral darkness, and with a heart harder than the nether millstone.

But now he has no opportunity either to believe, or to doubt. *Knowledge* has now succeeded to conjecture ; and the evidence of the eyes, to the report of the tongue. He stands in the presence of this wonderful person. How changed from him, who expired on the cross, and was carried to the tomb ! Now he sits on the throne of the universe ; and is worshipped and served, by angels, archangels, and the endless multitude of the first-born ! Before him burn with an intense and eternal flame “ the seven lamps of fire, which are the seven Spirits of God ! ” In his presence “ the Seraphim bow, and veil their faces : ” while “ the four and twenty Elders fall down, and worship ; cast their crowns before his throne ; and say, ‘ Thou art worthy, O Lord ! to receive glory, and honour, and power ; for Thou hast created all things ; and for thy pleasure they are, and were created ! ’ ” Round about his throne stand “ the four Living Creatures ; ” all life ; all eye ; all intellect ; and with an unceasing and eternal voice cry, “ Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty ! who wast, and who art, and who art to come ! ” To his name are attuned all the harps of the heavenly world. To his praise ascends the continual and everlasting hymn of the virtuous universe, “ Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, and wisdom, and might, and thanksgiving, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever : ” while “ the innumerable company of angels,” and “ the four living creatures ” at their head, subjoin their solemn *Amen*.

Before this glorious and wonderful person he now stands, face to face ; and sees and hears him, as he is. He sees him the Judge of the universe ; the great dispenser of good and evil ; whose word is life and death ; whose favour is heaven ; whose anger is hell. “ His eyes are as a flame of fire ; and his countenance is as the sun, shining in its strength. ”

No helpless babe of *Bethlehem*, is here thrust into a stable, or swathed in a manger. No “ man of sorrows ” is here, “ despised



and rejected of men," and destitute of a place, "where to lay his head." No forsaken prisoner is here, crowned with thorns, sceptred with a reed, mocked with insolent homage, buffeted, spit upon, nailed to the cross, and laid, a lifeless corpse, in the solitary grave. The Author and Proprietor of all worlds, the object of immense and endless homage, obedience, and praise, sits, here upon the throne of Judgment, to receive the account of his conduct in the present life; to acquit, or condemn him; and to utter that irreversible sentence, which decides his state of being throughout eternity.

How new, how amazing, must have been the sight! How awful must have been the interview! In what manner must even the best of men; *Abraham, Moses, Paul, or John*; feel, when summoned before him! *Paul* was once, while he lived here below, actually introduced into his presence: and was so overwhelmed, that, as he himself has informed us, "he knew not whether he was in, or out of, the body." What emotions then must our departed friend have experienced! With what immeasurable importance, in his view, must the occasion have been invested! With what stupendous glory must the Judge have disclosed himself to his eyes! What a train of hurried, tumultuous thoughts must have crowded upon his mind! How must he have shrunk into a worm, and felt as if he were returning to his original nothing.

3dly. *He has passed through that Trial, which awaits all the children of Adam beyond the grave.*

In this world our deceased friend was a probationer for endless life. A time was allotted to him for his probation; talents entrusted; and privileges given. Such an use as he chose and loved, he here made of them all. He either loved GOD, or the world; embraced or rejected the Redeemer; believed or disbelieved the Gospel; yielded to the Spirit of Grace, or resisted his influence. He either did good or evil; loved virtuous men, and attached himself to them; or "sate in the seat of the scorner," and "was numbered with the transgressors."

He has now come, to render his final account. All the transactions of his life have passed in exact review under the eye of the awful and glorious person, to whose presence he has been summoned. His profession in life, and the manner in which he has discharged it, have been completely examined, and precisely weighed. His conduct towards his fellow men has all been sifted. His bargains particularly, have been thoroughly explored; the spirit with which he formed his contracts, and the manner in which he acquired his gains. All his good or ill offices to his neighbours have been disclosed; his consent or refusal to interchange the common kindnesses of good neighbourhood; his disposition or indisposition to impart to the poor, to befriend the sick, and to relieve the distressed; the malignity with which he slandered, or the integrity with which he defended, his neighbour's good name; and the spirit, with which he obeyed or disobeyed the laws, resisted or submitted to the Government, and injured or promoted the interests, of his country. The manner also, in which he has treated his family, has been exactly displayed. His care of their lives, and his attention to their happiness and hopes in this world; and his provision for their happiness beyond the grave, daily made in discharging the duties of family piety, and in furnishing his children with a religious education; or his wanton wickedness in neglecting the comfort, instruction, government, and salvation, of those whom God committed to his care. At the same time, a complete disclosure has been made of the indulgence or restraint of his own passions; of his sloth, lewdness, and intemperance; or of his diligence, continence, and sobriety. Nor has the exhibition been less perfect of his reverence or profaneness, his love or hatred, towards God; his obedience or disobedience to the divine commands; the fervency of his prayers, and the warmth of his gratitude; or the cold, stupid, prayerless, thankless manner, in which he has passed through his earthly pilgrimage. All the secret sins, also, of his life, committed in thought, in darkness, and in solitude; or the duties, practised in the loneliness of retirement; have now been shown in clear and open day, and set "in the light of God's countenance."

All these things *he has himself recited*. His memory, with new power, has been opened on all the events of his earthly life. His tongue, with a veracity before unknown, has spontaneously yielded to the impulse of truth; and, whether accustomed or not to utter truth here below, has now declared with perfect exactness, all the things "done in the body." The evil and disgraceful scenes of his life he has rehearsed without disguise; even those which here he would not, for a thousand worlds, have uttered to his nearest friend. Those which were honourable and virtuous, he has in the same sincere manner declared, with no self-flattery, and no concealment of modesty. Naked truth has here been the only law of communication.

Among the things which have most interested him on this affecting occasion, those parts of his conduct, *which have immediately respected Christ*, have undoubtedly holden a primary place. With what peculiar emotions must he have repeated to the Saviour of men, now arrayed in supreme glory and power, his own unbelief and disobedience! How difficult, and distressing, must have been the rehearsal of the disregard, with which he heard his instructions; the stupidity, with which he contemplated his miracles; the enmity, which he exercised towards his character; the disobedience, which he exhibited to his commands and ordinances; and the contempt, which he cast upon the sufferings of the cross! When he beholds, face to face, the Son of God, who died that he might live; in what manner must his ingratitude to so disinterested and divine a benefactor for benefits so endearing, and so evidently immense, have awakened in him shame, confusion, and self-abhorrence? How deplorable must his reasons for all this evil conduct have appeared! How naturally must he have called to mind that solemn declaration of the same Saviour, often repeated to him on this side of the grave, "Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: therefore I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind."

On the contrary, with what emotions of joy has he mentioned, if it was in his power to mention, the gift of "a cup of cold water, to a disciple in the name of a disciple;" a single faithful prayer, humbly offered up to God in the name of Christ; a single union with his fellow Christians in the public worship of his Maker; a single sincere commemoration of the dying love of the Redeemer. What comfort and courage has he found in remembering that he faithfully confessed Christ before men; and shewed that he was "his disciple indeed, by doing all things, whatsoever he hath commanded?" With what satisfaction has he recollected, that, while living in this world, he "did to others, that" which he wished "others to do to him;" that he was just in his dealings, sincere in his declarations, and kind in his affections and conduct, that he cheerfully forgave his enemies, supplied the wants of the poor, and relieved the sufferings of the distressed? How joyfully must he have called to mind, in an especial manner, his offices of love to the followers of Christ; and rehearsed, that, when they were "an hungered, he fed them; when they were thirsty, he gave them drink; and when they were strangers, he took them in?"

How different have been the things in which he rejoiced and gloried, at this amazing interview, from those in which probably he gloried at times, in the present world? How little has he felt inclined to speak of his estate; his person; his talents; his accomplishments; his honours; his offices; his hard bargains; his successful struggles against rivals; and his agency in exciting public discontent, turmoil, and trouble?

What an account, before this awful Judge, would be the story of a duel, fought by our deceased friend; of the affront which occasioned it, the resentment which penned the challenge, the spirit which drove him to the field, and the frenzy which prompted him to cut off the life of a fellow creature in the midst of his sins. What an appearance must the rehearsal make of a fortunate intrigue; a successful amour; a gambling match; a horse race; a swindling speculation; a furious law suit; a riotous debauch; the ruin of a neighbour; the neglect, and corruption, of a family; a profane and dishonest covenant; and a dissembling, faithless ministry.

On the contrary, what must be the account of the exercises of a humble, meek, patient, believing, penitent, spirit, filled with love to GOD and kindness to men.

4thly. *He has heard the final sentence pronounced on himself.*

At the close of this trial, he was declared to be a "good and faithful," or an evil and "unprofitable, servant;" and was received, as being interested in the righteousness of Christ, to "the inheritance of them that are sanctified;" or rejected, as having lived "without GOD" in this world, and died "without hope" in the next. If he sustained the former character; he was found to have "been faithful over a few things;" and appointed to "rule over many things," and was welcomed "to the joy of his Lord." If he had sustained the latter; he was found to have been useless and worthless, in the Kingdom of GOD; and was therefore "bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." This sentence was pronounced in his hearing by the Judge; and conveyed to him endless happiness, or endless woe. It was final; it was just: for it was formed by infinite wisdom, goodness, and truth. The Judge, who pronounced it, is perfectly qualified for this awful employment; for He has "searched the heart, and tried the reins," of every intelligent creature, from the beginning. With an intuitive survey, he has seen every action of every such creature; the circumstances, which attended that action; the motives, views, and ends, with which it was performed; together with all its consequent aggravations, and palliations. These he can bring up into one clear and perfect view; settle in every case the degree of guilt or worth, with unerring certainty; and apportion with absolute exactness the allotted reward. From him, also, there is no appeal. No future trial exists, at which the sentence may be reversed. No Judge of superiour authority or skill remains, before whom the cause may be heard anew.

Here, then, our departed friend has appeared, for the final settlement of all his interests. He was not in question concerning conduct, upon which were suspended the enjoyments of another day; or another year; or another such life, as the present. He

was in question concerning his endless well-being. *His all* was at stake. *Himself* was to be disposed of. Whatever good he hoped for was to be established; or whatever evil he dreaded to be fixed beyond recall.

5thly. *At the close of this interview he has gone to receive his reward.*

Of this affecting subject I shall only observe, that to the moral character, the service, the life, and the allotment, which he chose here, he will be sentenced there. If he chose the character of holiness, the service of God, and the enjoyments of heaven, in the present world; he will forever serve God, practise holiness, and enjoy the blessings of heaven, in the world to come. If he loved and practised sin; chose the service of Satan, and delighted in the company of wicked men, here; he is consigned to endless sin, the eternal service of Satan, and the perpetual company of the wicked, in the future world. Thus his destiny will be the result of his choice, and will exactly accord with that choice, throughout eternity. In this respect, the reward, allotted to him, exhibits the strongest appearance of the most exact and absolute equity, on the part of God.

### REMARKS.

No subject is more solemn, more awful, or more instructive, than this. From the multitude of practical remarks, which it naturally suggests to a serious mind, I shall, at the present time, select the three following.

1st. *These considerations teach us the pre-eminent wisdom of doing that, and that only, here, which will give us support and consolation when we appear at this trial.*

All these things will then be present, real, and of the highest importance to us. We shall then have arrived at the final determination of every interest, and every hope. This determination will be founded entirely upon "the deeds, done in the body, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil." On the decision of that day eternity will hang; and that decision

is suspended on the conduct of this life. No conduct, therefore, can be esteemed useful, except that which will *then* be found useful. Happily, it is now easy to know what this is, without any danger of mistake. With the Bible in our hands, and its precepts in our minds, precepts easily acquired, and so far as this object is concerned easily understood, remembered and applied, we have only to ask with respect to any action, word, or thought: "In what manner will this appear before the Judge of the quick and dead?" This question will at once satisfy any mind, willing to be satisfied; and resolve every doubt, not voluntarily retained.

In truth, the difficulty, found in regulating our conduct so as to be ready for the final trial and a glorious reward, does not lie in our ignorance of its nature; but in our indisposition to pursue it, when actually understood. To understand it seems easy enough; but to adopt it is usually a business of labour and struggle. In order to overcome this reluctance, few things can so powerfully contribute, as a clear, strong, habitual remembrance of the affecting scenes which have now been presented to our view. Can he, who thus knows and feels that his body will soon go down to the grave, and his "spirit return to God, who gave it;" that he must then give an account of every work, which his heart has contrived, and his hands wrought; that he shall then be acquitted or condemned, as these works shall have been good or evil; that, if acquitted, he will ascend to Heaven, and enjoy endless happiness and glory; and that, if condemned, he will sink down to undying misery, remorse, and despair: can this man fail to examine all his thoughts and all his actions, day by day? Can he fail to inquire with an anxious and prying eye, whether they will be pleasing or displeasing to his judge; whether they will ensure him a glorious reward, or a dreadful punishment? Must not eternity rise up continually to his view; and spread its amazing scenes to his eye, in unceasing and awful succession? Must not "hell be naked before him, and destruction have no covering?" Will not the New Jerusalem appear to him daily, "coming down from God out of heaven;" and dawn upon his ravished eyes with delightful and inexpressible splendour?

Will he not see his former friends, the deceased Christians, whom he loved, standing in the entrance; pointing to him *the path of life*; calling upon him to strive to “enter in at the straight gate;” stimulating his efforts; encouraging his progress; and waiting to renew their joy over his repentance? Must not the Redeemer of men stand ever in his sight? Must he not see his wounds open; his blood poured out; and his life terminating with agony; that he himself might live? Can he fail to hear the voice of this divine and compassionate Saviour, calling to him with the yearnings of infinite love, “Ho! every one that thirsteth! Come ye to the waters: and he that hath no money: come ye; buy and eat; yea come; buy wine and milk, without money and without price?” Can he forget how transporting it will be humbly to declare, when summoned to the judgment, in the presence of the Son of God, “Lord thou deliveredst unto me five talents. Behold, I have gained, beside them, five talents more:” or how ravishing to hear him reply, “Well done, good and faithful servant! Thou hast been faithful over a few things: I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?”

How delightful will it then be to have believed in this great Judge of angels and men; this beloved Son of God; this infinitely benevolent Saviour? How delightful to have walked blamelessly in all his commandments and ordinances; and to have had “the same mind, which was also in” him! How supporting, on that solemn day, to have “loved God with all the heart, and our neighbour as ourselves;” to have continued patiently in all “well doing;” and thus to have sought effectually “for glory, honour, and immortality!” How honourable to have worn the image of God; and to be able to display this divine resemblance, as unquestionable proof of our relation to him; as acknowledged evidence, that we are “sons and daughters to the Lord Almighty!” What emotions must the final sentence of approbation excite in our own minds, when pronounced on *us*!

At the same time how dreadful a reverse will a reproaching, angry conscience, a frowning Judge, and a final rejection; cre-



ate in a mind hurried, convulsed with guilt, and overwhelmed by despair? How will the self-ruined, friendless, hopeless, apostate feel, when he sees the time arrived; the trial finished; the sentence declared; and himself driven away to receive the terrible reward?

Of what value will the scriptures then seem to have been? Of what value the Sabbath; the Sanctuary; the privileges of prayer, self-examination, the conversation and example of good men, and all the means of salvation? How much to be prized that little life, on which eternity and its mighty interests were suspended? How wise will it then appear to have hated sin; to have shunned temptation; and to have resisted the fascinations of riches and honour, power and pleasure?

How soon will all these solemn things arrive? Even now they are at the door. A few days will bring them to every member of this assembly. How plainly ought they to be esteemed of the same inestimable importance to us, this day, which they will be seen to wear beyond the grave?

2dly. *How interesting, how amazing, will all eternal things then appear?*

Death, the Judgment, Hell and its sufferings, Heaven and its endless rewards, the awful anger of God, his glorious mercy and unchangeable love: all these things will then become real, present; and will affect the imagination as deeply, as if they were now present; and reach the heart in spite of its stupidity and sin. They will terrify and oppress the soul with all the sufferings of perdition; or delight it with the possession of life begun, happiness realized, and glory already enjoyed. These will then be our all. The present world will then have retreated forever from our view. Time will have numbered all its hours; and emptied its glass of all its remaining sands. The vast world to which we are going, will have opened its boundless prospects; its everlasting enjoyments and sufferings. The day will then have dawned, to which no evening will ever arrive. The system of dispensations will then have commenced to which there can be no conclusion. What a prospect will this be! What a progress of be-

ing ! What a series of blessings ! Or what a succession of woes ! What will it then be to find God disclosing himself to us with smiles of approbation, and with favour which will brighten forever towards supreme and meridian glory ?

What will it be on the contrary, to find the same God “ a consuming fire,” kindled for eternity, and destroying finally all the workers of iniquity ? How terrible will it be to “ awake” only “ to shame and everlasting contempt ;” to see all amiableness and honour, happiness and hope, retiring from our sight ; to behold ourselves forever guilty, despised, and abhorred ; to sink under a consciousness of our debased character ; and, casting a despairing eye over the melancholy world of darkness, to discern nothing but “ mourning, lamentation,” and “ woe,” without mixture, and without end ?

3dly. *How strange is it, that the deaths of others do not compel us to lay to heart the end of all living ?*

Others have lived, as we now live ; have sinned, just as we now sin ; and, like us, have resolved to repent, and reform, and live forever. They still loved the pleasures of sin ; and determined to enjoy them for a season ; at the end of which they intended to begin their lives anew. But this season began, to last forever. No to-morrow of repentance followed their day of present sin. Ever near to the intentional penitent, it was ever one day before him, until it vanished in eternity. With it, the repentance, which it seemed to bear on its wings, vanished also ; and vanished, to appear no more.

All these persons hold out to us an exact picture of ourselves, while travelling onward in the bewildered path of *intentional repentance and reformation*. They have now finished their connection with time, and sense ; with the pleasures which they loved, and the sins which they “ rolled as sweet morsels under their tongues.” With these, they have also terminated their probation, and their enjoyment of the Means of Grace. Where are they now ? What are now their views of the conduct, which they pursued in the present world ? What, if they were permitted to return, would probably be their language to us ?

“Poor, unhappy, deluded mortals;” would they not say? “mark our conduct; and consider our end. We, like you, were once probationers for endless life; were trained up in religion, and educated for everlasting joy. All the means and hopes, furnished by the Grace of God, were put into our hands. Like you, we were blessed with the word of God, and the news of salvation, by a crucified Redeemer! The Sabbath weekly dawned upon us with the smiles of love. The Sanctuary opened the doors of peace and praise, of prayer and faith, of repentance and holiness; and invited us to enter in, and be saved. We heard the calls of mercy; the voice of a pardoning God, a dying Saviour, a heavenly Comforter, reproving us for our sins, and charming us with divine wisdom to return and live. To return we always intended; but found no opportunity: and were ourselves never ready to begin this indispensable work. The pleasures of sense fascinated our hearts: and we found nothing in repentance to engage our affections, or invite our efforts. The day fled; and with it fled every call, and every hope. The night came, to which no day of grace ever succeeded. *Our end will be yours. Like us you live: like us you will die: and O like us you are preparing to die forever!*”

## SERMON XXIII.



CONSIDERATIONS ON THE FINAL TRIAL.—SERMON I.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 14.

*For GOD shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

THIS verse is the conclusion of one of the most extraordinary books, which the world has ever seen. The writer, the subject, and the mode of discussion, are all of a remarkable character. The writer was the wisest of all men; the subject is the supreme good of man; and the mode of discussion is solemn, impressive, and happy, without a parallel.

No man was ever so fitted to examine this subject. It is hardly necessary, to observe that the question, *In what consists the supreme good?* has been almost endlessly discussed by a great variety of ingenious writers, of most ages and countries, distinguished for illumination. The question has been answered in a vast multitude of ways. Varro informs us, that, within his knowledge, philosophers had adopted concerning this subject no less than two hundred and eighty-eight different opinions. Among these, some placed it in quiet of mind; others in rest of the body; some in knowledge; others in wealth; some in reputation; others in what is appropriately called pleasure; and others, still, in a great variety of other objects. The most prominent of these opinions are examined in this book; and in the most satisfactory manner refuted. For this employment *Solomon* was not only fitted by his peculiar wisdom, his extensive acquaintance with the affairs of the present life, and his enlarged views of the doctrines and duties of religion, but by his own experience also: No man

ever had such an experimental acquaintance with the objects and pleasures of science, taste, sense, imagination, refinement, ambition, avarice, and religion, united. At the same time he was perfectly disposed and qualified to enjoy all these pleasures. It is truly said of him, nay he says of himself, that he "withheld not his heart from any joy." Thus, whether he speaks of the affairs of this world or that to come, the pleasures of sense or the enjoyments of religion, he speaks, as far as this can be done by an inhabitant of earth, from personal experience. His observations therefore have a weight, his opinions an authority, which cannot be claimed by those of any other man. They are the opinions of one, who had more power, than could be challenged at that time by any other inhabitant of the earth. His wisdom, fame, wealth, and all other sources of sensual enjoyment, have never been rivalled. Nor were his attainments in Religion small. We may well wonder indeed, that in these circumstances he should be religious at all. Yet we are informed by *Nehemiah*, that "among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his GOD."

After *Solomon* has gone through an extensive consideration of the various branches of this important subject, he gives us the result of all these investigations in form. "Let us hear," says he, "the conclusion of the whole matter;" or, in *Hodgson's* more exact translation, "Let us hear the substance of all that has been said. Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is all that concerneth man." To this infinitely important declaration the text is subjoined, as a proof of its truth which cannot be questioned; and as a reason, to enforce its importance on the mind, which cannot be resisted, except by voluntary blindness and hardness of heart.

In this passage the word "Work" obviously denotes *the overt conduct of man, his words, and actions*. The phrase "secret thing" intends *the thoughts, and affections of the heart*. Or *Works* may with propriety indicate *that, which is said, and done, before mankind*; and *secret things, that, which is done where others neither see, nor hear*; whether in the heart, in darkness, or

in solitude. According to either mode of explanation the phraseology includes every thing, which we think, speak, or do. All this, the text informs us, "GOD will bring into judgment."

With this explanation, the Doctrine, contained in the text, is as clearly and forcibly declared, as it can be. My intention in choosing the passage as the theme of discourse, at the present time, is to derive from it the following plain, practical, solemn, *Remarks*.

1st. *How unprepared are We, in all probability, for this disclosure of our characters.*

Every child of *Adam* has, probably, done many things, which he would not have known, for any consideration, to his fellow creatures. Not a small number of these no motive would persuade him to discover to his nearest and best friends; to those who would regard him with the greatest tenderness, and cast the most indulgent eye upon his failings. Look into your hearts; and see whether there are not many such things which have been done by *you*, every year, every month, every week, nay some, at least, every day. Of these there are in all probability some, which, if they were to be disclosed to mankind, or even to an individual friend, would overwhelm us with shame, dismay, and anguish. How many are there, think you, in this assembly, who would not shrink and tremble if they were compelled publicly to utter their impious thoughts of GOD; their unkind, envious, and ungrateful, their false, and fraudulent, feelings towards their fellow men; or their impure indulgences of a licentious imagination, and a corrupted heart? Where is the face of bronze, that would not turn pale at this disclosure; or the heart of marble, that would not dissolve beneath the eyes of those to whom it was made? Would not the character be blasted; would not the hopes wither; at the very commencement of the melancholy tale?

How many of these thoughts have been such, as we have never dared to speak? How many of them, designs, which we should have shuddered to execute? Nay, how many of the words which we have spoken, and of the designs which we have executed,

have been in our own view so guilty and so shameful, that the only peace, which we can find when remembering them, is derived from that miserable refuge of sin; *that they are known only to ourselves?* Were we to be informed, that a disclosure of them was about to be made; would not the information probably put an end to our peace forever?

But if it would be distressing to a degree not easily comprehensible, to have these things known even to our friends, how much greater would be our anguish to have them known to mankind? What, then, must be our emotions, were they to be published to the assembled universe? What a triumph will it be to fiends, to see the race of *Adam*, and ourselves perhaps equally with others, holden up before all Intelligent beings in so odious, shameful, and humbling a light? How must good men feel for themselves; and weep for others? If angels can weep; must not their tears fall over such a recital?

Above all things, how dreadful must it be to have this disclosure made before the eternal GOD; to have all our *secret* as well as open *sins* "set in the light of his countenance," and in this noonday splendour placed *in order before our eyes*. Infinitely more important to us will His views of our character be than those of all other beings united. Proportionally overwhelming will it be to see, and know, and feel, that our whole character is naked before him, and our sins without a covering.

In addition to all these distresses, *we ourselves shall be compelled to make this humiliating disclosure*. "Every one of us," says *St. Paul*, "shall give account of himself to GOD." This discovery of our character would be terrible, if the facts were all recorded in a book, and read over in our hearing. How much more distressing must it be for the unhappy culprit to rehearse his own sins before "the Judge of the quick and the dead?" Whose lips would not tremble, whose heart would not rend asunder, when summoned to such a task as this? Who would not stand aghast, when he saw the multitude of his own crimes; and marked their black and dreadful die? How could his tongue begin the terrible recital? Where and when could it end?

But the one half of this distress is not yet told. On this disclosure our final sentence, our everlasting reward, will be founded. "We must appear," says *St. Paul*, "before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good, or bad." (II. Cor. v. 10.) Of all the anguish suffered on this side of perdition, none will be so excruciating as that which will be excited in the soul of a sinner by his account of his own sins; given with a full conviction, that from that very account will proceed the sentence which will condemn him to eternal woe. On this tremendous occasion how will the best of men need to be supported and encouraged, when presenting before their Judge the innumerable evils which even *they* have committed? How deeply will they, feel their necessity for the all-cleansing blood of the Redeemer, to change their crimson into white?

Should, then, the *judgment be set*; and *the books*, out of which mankind "will be judged according to their works," be *opened* this day; is it not plain to every person in this assembly, that he is very unhappily prepared for such an exhibition of his character?

2dly. *What a mighty change will then be made in the state of men.*

In this world mankind have agreed upon certain principles; according to which they estimate the characters of their fellow men, and yield their applause, or distribute their censures. Those who are rich, who are in high offices, or of great influence; men of genius, learning, and eloquence; the splendid, the beautiful, and the polished; the brave, and the powerful; are regularly the objects of admiration and praise. The poor, on the contrary, the weak, the defenceless, the dependant, the unpolished, and the ignorant, are neglected, despised, and forgotten.

But *there* a far different mode of estimating characters will be adopted. There all will be tried by *the great rule of good and evil, friendship to God and enmity, faith in the Redeemer and unbelief.*

To have been good, here, will, be to be happy there; to be rich, honourable, and beloved. To have been evil, here, will be



to be poor, despised, miserable, "and in want of all things," there. It will never be asked, there, whether the person, who is a candidate for shame or honour, punishment or reward, was born in a palace or a cottage; sat on a throne, or a stool; owned a rood or a province; was learned or ignorant, eloquent or dumb. It will only be asked whether he employed such powers and means as were given to him, for the glory of God, and the good of his fellow men.

It will not be asked whether he was brave, but whether he was meek; not whether he was renowned, but whether he was humble; not whether he was opulent, but whether he was "rich in faith and good works;" not whether he acquired applause and glory, but whether he diligently promoted the piety and the happiness of his fellow men.

From this new standard of estimation mankind will be divided into classes, totally different from those which exist in the present world. Multitudes of the rich, the great, the learned, the polished, and the renowned; will appear on the left hand, in shame, and want, and woe, inexpressible. Multitudes, at the same time, of the poor, the humble and the despised, will appear on the right hand, invested with *glory*, *honour*, and *immortality*. You are not however to understand, because it is not true, that the possession of wealth, power, refinement, learning, and distinction, in this world, will, in that, be considered as a crime; or become to any man the foundation of future shame and punishment. It will not be the possession of these things, but the manner in which they were desired, sought, or used, which will prove the source of condemnation to the guilty possessors. Multitudes of the rich, the great, and the polished, will find their "names written in the Lamb's book of life;" and be received with "an open and abundance entrance" into the favor of God. Still it will be seen in a terrible manner, that those, *who* here *would be* rich, *fell* almost of course "into temptation and a snare," and "into many hurtful and corrupt lusts, which drowned" them "in destruction and perdition." Yet it will be found that some of this number "trusted not in uncertain riches, but in the living God; that

they did good," and were "rich in good works;" were "ready to distribute and willing to communicate;" and that thus they "laid up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, and laid hold on eternal life." On the contrary poverty, ignorance, and degradation, in this world, will constitute no part of the reasons for which those, who have suffered these things, will be accepted in that. They will be accepted, because they have been "poor in spirit;" because they have been humble followers of the Redeemer; because they have loved and served God: Those, who have not done these things, however degraded and beggared in this world will at the final day sink into poverty and wretchedness, inconceivably more distressing.

From this mode of estimating characters, also, most afflicting distinctions will be made among those who have lived in the same condition, the same circumstances, the same neighbourhood, the same house; who have been members of the same congregation, the same class, the same family. Of all these "one will be taken, and another left." When *David* smote *Moab*, "he measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground. With two lines measured he, to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive." A process, in effect resembling this awful procedure, will be adopted at the final day. Persons, united by the tenderest ties of life and the strongest bonds of affection, will there be separated forever. *Eli* will no more be united to his sons; nor *Samuel* to his. *David* will be finally separated from *Amnon* and *Absalom*; *Hezekiah* from *Ahaz*; and *Josiah* from *Amon*. These, melancholy to think, are not exempt cases. They are not even extraordinary. The nearest friends now, as truly as then, and probably as often, will be sundered in this manner. Which of those, who are before me, intends at this awful season to see his companions and classmates on the right hand, arrayed in immortal glory, and to take his own miserable station on the left? What brother is prepared in this manner to part from his beloved brothers? What sister, regarded here with intense affection, will be able to open her lips, and pronounce to her sisters the eternal farewell? What parents can sustain even the thought,

that between themselves and their children, what children, that between them and their parents, a *gulf* will now be *fixed*, which neither "will be able to pass" forever. When this terrible distinction shall be made, what will be the looks, mutually cast by the affectionate husband and wife; what the throes, which will agonize their bosoms?

Even these are not the only separations which will be made. This dreadful discrimination will be extended also to those, who have worshipped in the same house of God; communed at the same sacramental table; and preached in the same desk. *Judas* and *Peter* were commissioned to preach by the Saviour himself. Where are they now? What separations have probably been made in the members of the church at *Corinth*? How melancholy a thought, that these have been repeated in every church which has existed, from that period to the present hour? What solemn impressions ought this awful consideration to make upon our hearts, when we enter the desk, or sit down at the table of Christ?

When this new standard of character shall be made the great rule of distinction, strange separations will also be made in the various classes or sects, who have worn the name, and professed the religion, of Christians. Such sects, here, are often inclined to challenge the Christian character exclusively to themselves. All, who differ from them in name, or forms of worship, some sects have considered as doubtful candidates for eternal life: while others have put them without the covenant of grace, and beyond the hope of salvation. This assumption of exclusive rectitude, this separate claim to the divine favour, this substantial excommunication of those who differ from us, is probably as old as the distinctions of character, which furnished an opportunity for forming these opinions. Among the *Jews*, who were called to be "a chosen and peculiar people unto God," this character existed and operated with its full force; and with better reasons to justify it, than can be alleged by any other class of men. They were informed by Inspiration itself, that they were separated from all nations, as the favourite people of *JEHOVAH*; and that they were

the seed of *Abraham*, his friend. The rest of mankind, they knew, were almost universally idolaters, “in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity.”

But *John the Baptist* informed them, that they must not “think to say within themselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father;’” and that “God was able of the stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” Christ, also, told them, that they should “weep, and gnash their teeth, when they saw Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, sit down in the kingdom of God, and themselves thrust out; that many should come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God;” and that “there were last, who should be first, and first, who should be last.”

*St. Peter*, whose prejudices against the *Gentiles* were the same with those of his countrymen, was taught the groundless nature of this opinion by the miracle of “the vessel, resembling a great sheet,” which was “let down to him.” From this vision he first began to learn, that “whatever God had cleansed was clean.” Accordingly he solemnly renounced his former prejudices on this subject; and declared, as the Scriptures of the Old Testament had long before done, that “God is no respecter of persons;” and “that in every nation he who worketh righteousness will be accepted.”

It is a melancholy subject of reflection, that, with the Gospel in our hands, we should be unwilling to adopt the same equitable rule, as the standard of acceptance with God; and that we should still think it enough to have *Abraham* for our father. That both these things are extensively done cannot with decency be denied. Multitudes, plainly build their hopes on a foundation of this sandy nature: while other multitudes, as well as they, are scarcely willing to think favourably of those, who in things, which the Scriptures regard as unessential to the Christian character and justification of life, differ from themselves.

But “in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men,” he will judge the world according to his own rule, and not according to ours. Then he, who is found to have believed on the Lord

Jesus Christ, will be saved ; in whatever church he has been baptized, or has worshipped. Nay, if with the thief on the cross he has not had an opportunity of being baptized at all, his soul will still be found with Christ in Paradise.

How vast, then, will be the difference, made among mankind by the righteous judgment of GOD, from that which is made by us ? How surprisingly will their characters, circumstances, and allotments, vary from those which have been formed in our pre-conceptions ? What multitudes of grave, decent men, who have confidently expected salvation from the numbers, splendour, and dignity, of the churches, to which they have been united, and their regular performance of the worship and duties prescribed by them, will find that all this "bodily exercise" has "profited them little;" and that "godliness" only, "has the promise of the life which is to come?" On the contrary, what vast numbers of zealous enthusiasts, who here condemn all others as heretics and outcasts, who do not unite with them in their wild rhapsodies, and profess the same internal light and extraordinary communications, from heaven, will find their zeal "a fire of their own kindling;" and, notwithstanding their high hopes and magnificent promises of life beyond the grave, will *lie down in sorrow*? How many of every class, name, and profession, who have relied on the peculiarities of their class, their name, and their profession, will find these things *wood, hay, and stubble*? How many individuals, who unchurch their neighbours because they differ from them in opinions of comparatively little moment, or even in manners, nay in dress, will at this great disclosure see *them* shine forth as real Christians, and themselves detected as mere pretenders, possessing only the hope of the hypocrite ?

3dly. *At this solemn period the difference between the righteous and the wicked will be seen to be far greater, than is commonly believed in the present world.*

In this world the external appearance of the righteous and the wicked is often nearly the same. Evil men often labour with great pains to acquire reputation by assuming the character and conduct of the virtuous ; and in many instances with success.

Their vice is extensively concealed from the public eye, and not unfrequently from the eye of their friends. *Judas* was believed by his fellow apostles not only to be a real, but an eminent, christian. When Christ predicted, that one of the number should betray him ; all his companions distrusted themselves rather than *Judas* ; and every one said, " Lord, Is it I ? Lord Is it I ? "

Hypocrisy is, as is said by the great English poet, " The only evil, which walks unseen by all but the eye of God. " No human optics can pierce through the thick covering, spread by skilful hypocrisy, as a shroud of darkness, over its designs. No sagacity can trace the windings, the hidden paths, the insidious measures, of this snaky agent.

Beyond this, in cases where no peculiar hypocrisy is exerted or intended, there are innumerable causes of concealment and illusion, which prevent us from knowing, in many respects, the real character of multitudes around us. The character even of neighbouring families, their peculiar interests, their internal pursuits, and the disposition of their several members manifested in those pursuits ; are often chiefly unknown by us, and widely mistaken. A servant, who comes from another family to live in our own, will not unfrequently force upon us, however disposed to construe charitably, or indisposed to listen to the tale, various apprehensions concerning that family, which we never entertained before. Not unfrequently we ourselves become members of such families. In such cases we find them, in some instances at least, to possess, in several respects, a character widely different from that which *they* had before exhibited or *we* mistrusted.

Individuals also, even those with whom we live in habits of intimacy, often conceal from us much of their real character. We sometimes love them long, and esteem them highly ; and find afterwards that they had no claims either to be loved or esteemed. We trust those, who after long-continued familiarity deceive us. We respect those, who ultimately become objects of our contempt. We befriend those, who, after receiving from us a numerous train of kind offices, requite us with ingratitude. How often do we hear our fellow men say, how often do we say

ourselves, when some mean, base, dishonest action is rehearsed concerning a person of our acquaintance, some ungenerous exhibition of covetousness, some gross act of unkindness, some treachery to a friend, some sordid specimen of pride or ambition, "I am greatly disappointed in that man. I could not have thought, that he would be guilty of such an action." The voice of Omniscience has declared, and it ought never to be forgotten by us, that "the heart," the heart of man, the heart of ourselves and of all others, "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?"

From this hypocrisy, this concealment of character, springs that extensive jealousy, which is entertained by mankind respecting each other. From being often deceived we learn to distrust; and ultimately to distrust almost all men; even neighbours and friends, ministers and magistrates. From this cause the very best of our race; those who have given the most decisive proofs of integrity and piety; are still doubted by multitudes. Nay it still remains a question with some, whether there are any real Christians; any persons of genuine piety. Worldly men often deny the fact altogether. Even Christians are not unfrequently doubtful of their fellow Christians.

I readily acknowledge, that mankind are unreasonably disposed to jealousy; and that jealousy is an unreasonable passion. Still it cannot be rationally believed, that, if hypocrisy were unknown; and deceit unpractised; jealousy, such as this, would find a place in the human bosom.

It ought here to be added, that genuine Christianity from its own nature "vaunteth not herself, and is not puffed up." Christianity unaccompanied by foreign appendages, is always modest, unassuming and self-denying. *Boasting*, we have long since been told "is excluded by the law of faith. The kingdom of God in the heart cometh not with observation;" and none are disposed to *say* concerning it, "Lo here," or "lo there." Hence the Christian, uninclined to make a display of his excellence, and more willing to be, than to seem, religious, rarely becomes an object of very favourable inspection to mankind; and not unfre-

quently sees his true character unknown, as well as unacknowledged. The Hypocrite, at the same time, is always employed in soliciting for himself the character of a Christian. Hence, when a weak man, he makes a perpetual parade of his discoveries, his gifts, and his attainments. When a sagacious man, he discerns that this bald exhibition must disappoint itself; and resorts, therefore, to measures less exposed to scrutiny: and these are often so well devised, so specious, so like the humble, meek, and gentle, character of Christianity, as to pass usually without suspicion.

But, when "the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed," these fetches and concealments, these pretences and resemblances, will entirely vanish. The Hypocrite, the merely decent professor of Christianity, will stand forth in all his native deformity; and will be seen as he is; a gross and dreadful sinner. His hypocrisy will only render him more guilty and more odious, more abominable in the sight of God and more despicable in that of the virtuous universe.

At this time, the "meek and lowly" Christian will appear more excellent and amiable by means of his former modest, self-denying deportment. He will now be acknowledged before the assembled universe as the friend of God and of man; as the follower of Christ; as voluntarily consecrated to the great cause of truth and of righteousness. As such, Christ will not be ashamed to receive and confess him; and will on the best grounds welcome him to his arms, his kingdom, and his blessings: While at the same time, and with equal propriety, he will say to all those, who have merely assumed the character, as a cloak for their sinister and base designs, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Among the things, which will pre-eminently contribute to make this separation clear, and this contrast incalculably impressive, this will be one: Mankind, nay the whole Intelligent universe, will be forced to see the *immeasurable distance between truth and falsehood, holiness and sin*. In the present world this difference is often denied; often considered as insignificant: and usually feebly felt and dimly perceived.



Than these no opinions can be more groundless, false, and unhappy. Between the objects in question the difference is infinite. The love of truth and holiness on the one hand, and the love of falsehood and sin on the other, constitute the whole moral distinction between Gabriel and Satan, between Paul and Judas. Nay the love of truth and holiness forms the whole moral beauty and greatness of JEHOVAH; and constitutes the boundless difference between his infinitely perfect character, and that of a being equally powerful and immensely malevolent. Truth obeyed, and holiness practised, are the cause and the amount of the celestial glory. They form heaven: they create the angelic character: they will generate throughout eternity the endlessly progressive happiness of the Intelligent universe. Falsehood obeyed, and sin pursued, would make the universe eternally miserable; and will in fact produce, to a great extent, the misery of hell. This immense difference will now be seen in a full, overwhelming light: and so different will appear the characters of the friends and the enemies of GOD. In the language of the prophet *Malachi*, Mankind “will return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth GOD, and him that serveth him not.” But “a book of remembrance” will be found for “those, who feared the Lord, and thought upon his name. ‘And they shall be mine,’ saith the Lord of Hosts, ‘in the day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.’”

## SERMON XXIV.



CONSIDERATIONS ON THE FINAL TRIAL.—SERMON II.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 14.

*For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

IN the former part of this discourse, after explaining the text, I proposed to derive from the doctrine which it contains, several observations. Of these I mentioned the following :—

1st. *How unprepared are we, in all probability, for the disclosure of our characters, indicated in this passage of Scripture.*

2dly. *What a mighty change will, in consequence of this disclosure, be made in the state of men.*

3dly. *On the solemn day when this disclosure shall be made, the difference between the righteous and the wicked will be seen to be far greater, than is commonly believed in the present world.*

I will now proceed to finish the design, with which I selected this passage of Scripture, as the theme of our meditations at the present time, and observe,

4thly. *That our own character will appear to us widely different from what we have been accustomed to believe it in the present world.*

- Every person, who has read the Bible with any attention, must have remarked that it presents very different views of the human character from those which we and our fellow men are ready to entertain. Every such person must have perceived, that man is there exhibited as far more sinful than he has been accustomed to imagine. Probably, very few have risen from reading the two first chapters of the epistle to the *Romans*, without feeling that

they present views of human nature far more gross, odious, and humiliating, than they can easily admit to be just. Particularly, there are few who do not secretly refuse to apply this description of the human character to themselves, and rejoice that it is not their own character. I do not intend, that we rejoice because we are not heathen and idolaters; or because we are not Jews and reprobates; but because we have not the same sinful nature, that gave birth to the several gross crimes, which form this painful description of man as a moral being.

When we read in the prophet *Jeremiah*, this declaration; “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?” we are rarely willing, though it is uttered by God himself, to believe it true in its full import, even concerning our fellow-men. Much less are we ready to mistrust, that our own hearts are thus deceitful, and thus wicked.

Few employments can be more useful, or more necessary, for such beings as we are, than to inquire why our views of this subject differ so widely from the views of Him, “who searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins of the children of men.” That his must be right; that ours, so far as they differ from his, must be wrong; can need neither proof nor explanation. Nor is it less evident that, whenever our apprehensions of a subject, so important, and so practical, are wrong, they must be injurious, and may be fatal.

Among the reasons which lead us to false views of our own character, the following deserve our very serious attention.

First. *We are so accustomed to the perpetration of iniquity, that we often sin without being conscious of it, even at the time of transgressing.*

To commit sin is, with us, a thing of course; a thing done by all men every day, and by most, every hour, and every moment. It enters into all our habits of thinking and acting; and, in unrenewed men, is the sum and substance of every moral habit. Even renewed men sin incomparably oftener than they are ready to believe. But, whatever is thus habitual, and therefore continual, naturally ceases to be an object of particular attention; and, to a great extent, of any attention at all.

Besides, to attend critically every moment is altogether too wearisome an employment to beings, who are subjects of so much sloth of mind as men. Few persons, comparatively, are willing to attend critically, at all. Fewer, by far, can bring themselves to undergo so much mental labour as is involved in that perpetual attention, which is absolutely necessary to make us acquainted either with our hearts, or with our lives.

Further, we rarely attend minutely to objects which give us pain; unless when we cannot avoid it. Our moral character is always a painful object to us, so far as we either are, or believe ourselves to be, sinful. Self-examination is terrible to wicked men; and is rarely taken up in such a manner as to be of any use to them, whenever they can find a way to escape: and, unhappily, an escape is almost always in their power.

In addition to all this, we form at very early periods of life such favourable opinions of our character, as persuade us that it is unnecessary to undergo this labour and pain; and therefore feel justified in neglecting to scrutinize our conduct.

Finally, we form such gross conceptions of the divine law, of its extent, spirituality, exactness, and perfection; and thus possess such apprehensions of what it requires, and what it prohibits; that we are very often ignorant of the true nature of our moral conduct. The commandment does not come to us, as it did to *Paul*; and therefore we do not see our sins, as he saw his. Hence, as our moral standard is very low, (far lower than that of the Gospel,) we sin, without mistrusting, that we sin; not imagining, that such things as we do, are forbidden, or that such as we omit, are required by the commands of GOD.

From all these causes it comes to pass, that we commit innumerable sins of which we have little or no knowledge, or even suspicion, at the very time when they are committed. Of course, none of these ever enter into the estimate which we form of our moral character.

Secondly. *We think so lightly of the guilt of sin, that we never mistrust the greatness of our own guilt in those sins which we are conscious of committing.*

One of the most difficult attempts of man, is to adopt, without any diminution, those representations which are made concerning the guilt of sin in the Scriptures. It is with vast reluctance, that he can believe himself to be so "abominable and filthy" in the sight of GOD, notwithstanding "he drinks iniquity like water." This, also, is a fruitful source of unwarrantably favourable estimates concerning our character.

Thirdly. *As we never think ill of ourselves unless when compelled; and as, then, we believe ourselves to be vile and guilty, only with extreme reluctance, mortification, and regret; so, of choice, we thrust out of our remembrance as many of our transgressions, as we can.*

This is an employment, in which we are but too successful. In the progress of it we are able to forget, and do actually forget, a great multitude of the evils which we have perpetrated.

Fourthly. *For the same reason we palliate and lessen, the real guilt of such sins, as we are conscious of committing; and hence think far less hardly and less justly of our sinful character, than truth requires.*

How often do we hear *others* excuse their sins by ascribing them to their infirmities, temptations, and the difficulties which stand in the way of their duty. How often have *we* alleged the same difficulties, as excuses for our own. These pleas are made by very gross transgressors. The profane swearer says, and intends materially to lessen his guilt, both in his own eyes and ours, while he says, that he cannot avoid swearing profanely. The drunkard pleads his invincible attachment to strong drink. The lewd man tells you, that his inclinations are natural; and the revengeful man, that his wrath is too violent and painful, to be subdued. All these persuade themselves, and hope to persuade others, that they are at least partially, if not absolutely, justified. In a similar manner, sinners of every description have their excuses; which, they believe, will render them in some good measure innocent.

Fifthly. *We see others sin; and from their example and number persuade ourselves, that we are far less guilty than we really are.*

That others are as bad or worse than we, obviously deceitful as the argument is, has ever been, and, while the mind continues to love sin, will probably ever be, a consolation, a support, which will prop the sinner in his pursuit of iniquity ; and induce him, with a deplorable self-flattery to think his sins far less numerous and far less gross, than they are declared to be in the Word of GOD.

For these and other similar reasons, our real character is in a great measure hidden from our view ; and by most men the guilt, which they have incurred, is probably never mistrusted on this side of the grave. This spirit, drawn out into the several acts which I have mentioned, and into others of a similar nature, is what *St. Paul* styles with supreme propriety “ the deceivableness of unrighteousness.” In this manner men according to our Saviour’s declaration, “ love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. He that doeth the truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in GOD. But he, that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprovèd.”

But, when we shall appear before the bar of Christ, and “ every work, with every secret thing, shall be brought into judgment ;” all the sins which we have committed in thought, word, or deed, will be disclosed in full view to our consciences, as well as to GOD. At the same time, all the aggravations of our sin will be also disclosed : the criminality of these very excuses ; the dishonest nature of this very self-flattery ; the turpitude of this very self-deception. Every perpetration will appear in its full die ; the mass of crimes in its full size ; and the author of them, as the subject of all the guilt charged upon him by his maker. To the full import of his declarations the conscience of every sinner will be compelled to say, “ Amen.”

But when we see sin as GOD sees it, and cannot shut our eyes to any part of our guilty conduct ; how different from our present estimate, how novel, how overwhelming, will be the judgment which we shall be forced to form of our character ? In that awful day “ every man’s work shall be made manifest : for the day shall

declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire : and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is." Then the best of mankind will appear to themselves, as *St. Paul* appeared to the eye of Inspiration, surrounded by "a body of" sin and "death." Then multitudes, who have been thought in this world pleasing, amiable, and almost faultless, will be seen to have possessed hearts full of evil, *evil only, and that continually*. Then, not murder only, but malice, will be seen to be monstrous, hateful, and devilish : not blasphemy only, but profane and idle words will be the ground of final reprobation. Then not the mockery of God only, but negligence of his worship, and irreverential thoughts of his character, will be the foundations of eternal ruin. It will not then be said to those only who have crucified Christ, but to those also who have been "ashamed to confess him before men, Depart ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Then those, who have said unto their brother, "Thou fool," as well as those who have cursed him in the bitterness of their heart, will be "in danger of hell fire." Then the adulterer will be shut out of the kingdom of God ; and by his side will be excluded those also, who have loved obscene conversation, and cherished impure thoughts. Then "he, who has offended in one point, will be found guilty of the whole law ;" of sinning against its whole authority and obligation, and of rebelling against its divine Author. On that searching day, the "righteous will" be seen "scarcely" to "be saved : where then shall the wicked and ungodly appear?" At that awful period, few things in the hearts or the lives, even of good men will be found to have been done for God : while in vast multitudes, all the thoughts, words, and actions, will be seen to have been perpetrations of iniquity and services of Satan, intended for no good, but for every evil, purpose. At that period, what will become of the favourable opinions which we form of our own moral character ? How groundless, how false, how fatal, will they appear ?

5thly. *How humiliating, how dreadful, will be the appearance of mankind, on this solemn day ?*

Those, who are saved, will, as we are told by St. John, be “a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, kindreds, and tongues. Still, the multitude of those, who will be lost, will also be very great; and all these will be exhibited in their proper character, when they come to the judgment. If we turn our eyes for a moment upon the mass of crimes committed in this guilty world, even in a single day, we cannot but feel that a complete disclosure of them must be dreadful beyond expression. What, then, must be the appearance of the whole human race, loaded with all the evil which has been done from the beginning of time, and which will be done to the end of the world?

Think for a moment, solemnly think, what a multitude of sins, of what black and dreadful dies, will then be disclosed to the universe. Think what an endless multitude of *private iniquities* will be “set in the light of GOD’S countenance.” Think what a train of domestic contentions will then “be proclaimed on the house-top;” of quarrels among those, who were bound to the tenderest affection by every ligament; quarrels, which violated at once the law of GOD, and the strongest ties of nature, between parents and children; between husbands and wives; between brothers and sisters. What a countless multitude of animosities and litigations, among neighbours and friends! What a list will be that of murders; and what a host, that of assassins! How many extortions and cruelties of sordid avarice will astonish the universe? What swinish debauchery, what prostitution of reason, what dishonour to human nature, what abuses of the bounty of GOD, will be unveiled; when the retreats of gluttony and drunkenness shall be laid open before the last tribunal? What a boundless multitude of cruelties inflicted by the master, and of miseries suffered by the slave, will sicken the heart of benevolence; when the history of private vassalage and domestic tyranny shall be read in the ears of the listening world? How will *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah* approach, and whiten, at the side of modern impurity; of lewdness, perpetrated within sight of the Sanctuary; of stews and brothels erected in the open day of the Gospel, and among those who have been “baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost?



Let me exhort you to ponder, also, *the public wickedness*, which will then be exposed to view. How immensely will the scarlet crimes perpetrated by Ambition, outnumber the sands upon the seashore ; and, when gathered into a mass, overtop the mountains, and reach up to heaven. What an amazing multitude of oppressions will be recounted by the voice of Tyranny when rehearsing his guilt before the throne of God. How many millions of the human race will draw nigh, and present before the Judge the miseries which they have endured from this enemy of God and man. How many millions torn from friends and home ; chained to the oar ; sunk in beggary ; bereaved of parents, and of children ; imprisoned in the dungeon ; and consigned to the rack and the gibbet, the stake and the cross ? How many fiend-like cabals will be uncovered, when the private retirements of statesmen shall be laid open ; and the universe shall see the happiness and the hopes, the lives, liberty, and property, of nations bartered with frosty indifference for place and power ? What a dreadful train of iniquities will astonish the universe, when the annals of War are recited to “the Judge of the quick and the dead ?” How many widows and orphans will rise up, as terrible witnesses, against the hero ; number over the husbands, and fathers, whom he has butchered ; point to the villages, towns, and cities, which he has wrapped in flames ; to the fields, which he has drenched in blood ; and to the world, which he has covered with desolation ? How will the tears of anguish stream afresh ; the sighs of sorrow be heaved anew ; and the groans of misery be remurmured before the throne of judgment. With what ecstasy of woe will the voice of sufferers innumerable call for exemplary vengeance on the head of the wretch, who has bathed a world in tears, and filled the reign of time with agony and despair. How will heaven and earth stand amazed, when Superstition, Enthusiasm, and Bigotry, advance to their final account ; and rehearse the illimitable tale of misery, which they have created, while usurping the throne of God, and lording it over the consciences of men ? See the Inquisition unveiled ; its midnight dungeons laid open to the day ; its racks, and wheels,

and crosses, still stained with blood ; its fires still smoking ; and the groans of torture dying upon the ear ! Look at the glorious company of martyrs, clothed in white, and crowned with immortality, confronting the wretches who slaughtered them for their piety, and sent them to heaven from the flames and the cross ! See the smile of angels overcast ! See the countenance of fiends relaxing at the sight of crimes, which have sunk men to their own level. See bloody *Nineveh* rise up in judgment against the persecutors of Judea and Christendom, and wash away her stains ! Behold her exult in comparative innocence ; *wipe her mouth ; and say, " I have done no wickedness !"*

To complete this awful catalogue, what will be the emotions of the great Assembly, when the story of impiety, ingratitude, profaneness, and idolatry, shall be told in the ears of the universe ? On the throne will sit the Saviour, who has been disbelieved, and rejected, despised and crucified afresh. The glorious and eternal **JEHOVAH** will be here seen, from whom the great family of *Adam* have revolted ; and in the light of his countenance will rise up the demons and the men, the brutes and the stocks, whom they have worshipped in his stead. With what shame will the worshippers be overwhelmed at the sight ? and how will all virtuous beings turn their faces aside with horror ?

6thly. *What, have we reason to think, will be the appearance of this Congregation ?*

How many of those who are before me, it is to be feared, will appear, when this solemn disclosure shall be made of their characters, to have lived "without God in the world ?" How many of you will be found never to have entertained one serious thought concerning your guilt, nor one anxious inquiry concerning what you should do to be saved ; to have made not one sober effort to gain eternal life, nor a single attempt to escape from perdition ? How many of you, it is greatly to be feared, will be found never to have asked God to save your souls, and "deliver" you "from going down to the pit ?" How many will be found never to have united with the heart in a single ordinance of the house of God ; nor to have done voluntarily one good thing for your Cre

ator, your fellow creatures, or your own souls? Remember, I beseech you, that every person of this character is “a stranger to the covenant of promise; an alien from the commonwealth of Israel;” hitherto “without hope, and without God, in the world.”

Were the great day of disclosure now to arrive; what would be your appearance? How changed from the sloth and indifference, the sport and gaiety, which you now exhibit? What new thoughts would you form? What new wishes would you exercise? With what amazement would you hear the last trumpet sound; the Archangel call; and the shout of the saints rend the heavens? With what amazement would you see the graves burst; the dead arise; the living changed; and yourselves among the living; the Judge descend; the throne set; and the books opened? With what terror would you wait, while “the righteous” rose “to meet the Lord in the air;” and hear yourselves summoned to the left hand of the Judge? How would you be overwhelmed, when the sentence of reprobation was pronounced; and yourselves were “banished to everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?”

If this would be your miserable condition, were all these things now to take place; have you not the most fearful reason to expect the same anguish and dismay, when they shall actually take place at the day of judgment? You are now quietly enjoying “the pleasures of sin for a season;” and that season is life. You have formed no plan, you have entertained no purpose, of turning to God. With the world you are completely satisfied as your portion; and say to it daily, “Deliver us; for thou art our God.” All your past thoughts, affections and privileges, have issued only in increasing hardness of heart and blindness of mind; a more entire devotion to sense, and sin, and Satan; and in a greater and greater alienation from holiness, and from God. Nothing has hitherto been attempted by you, which has done you the least good; or for a moment withdrawn you a single step from sin. Even now you are not willing to do so much, as soberly to ponder these infinite subjects. Much less are you solemnly beginning a new course of life, and earnestly labouring to escape from perdition.

What hope, then, can you indulge of escaping at all? Youth, the best of all seasons for the attainment of eternal life, you are deliberately squandering away. Your hearts are now too hard to receive any saving impressions from the Gospel. What will they be in the torpor of riper years? "Wicked men and seducers," we are told, "will wax worse and worse; deceiving, and being deceived." Are not you evidently *wicked*? Are you not mutual *seducers*? Are there not distressing reasons to fear, that in this same course of increasing corruption you will go on as you have begun, finish life, and enter eternity?

Among the things, which peculiarly contribute to render your case an object of deep anxiety and dread, this consideration ought solemnly to alarm you. You have uniformly despised and abused the invaluable privileges, mercifully given to you by your Maker. To you the word of God has spoken, the Sabbath dawned, and the Sanctuary opened its doors, in vain. Your Parents have taught, and governed, and lived, and prayed, before you in vain. In vain has the voice of Mercy called; the Redeemer poured out his blood; and the Spirit of truth striven to bring you to repentance. Unamended, unwarned, unmoved, you still go on, *despising instruction, and rejecting reproof*. What reason then can you allege why the Judge should not address to you the awful language of his Word? "Because you hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; because you would none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof: Therefore shall ye eat of the fruit of your own way, and be filled with your own devices."

Remember, that these things have been declared to you a thousand times; and that they have been a thousand times disregarded. You hear; but without even sober attention. You are reminded from Sabbath to Sabbath; but voluntarily forget. You are warned; but slight the admonition. You are invited and urged, to faith, repentance, and reformation; but your only answer is, "I pray thee, have me excused." In the very house of God you harden your hearts. At the foot of the mercy-seat you refuse to pray. In the immediate presence of your Maker you refuse to hear his voice. Before the table of Christ you despise his

sufferings; and cast contempt on that love, which he manifested to your souls, and which has amazed both heaven and hell. Of all this God has been a witness every sabbath which you have spent in his house. The all searching eye has looked directly into your hearts; and the book of remembrance has recorded them all against the reckoning of the final day.

Even this is far from being all the guilt which you have incurred. Look into your hearts and lives; and you will see a multitude of sins of many kinds, burrowed in your hearts, and creeping out into your lives. Think how many private debasements have polluted you "from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot." Call to mind the profaneness with which you have dishonoured your Creator, and digraced yourselves; with what irreverence you have regarded *that glorious and fearful Name, JEHOVAH your GOD.* Think how often this irreverence has been manifested, not only in the language appropriately styled profane, but in that also which is decent and chastened; which was not directed immediately against God himself, but against his Word, his Ordinances, and his Church; because you thought it safer to attack them, than HIM.

Remember how many *idle words* you have spoken, and continually speak; words flowing from a vain, empty, worthless mind, thoughtless of God, forgetful of your duty, and regardless of your salvation; words answering no good, and therefore always accomplishing a bad purpose.

Call next to mind the *impure thoughts* which you have indulged. Think how often your imaginations have wandered after objects, and sated themselves on images and scenes, which you never dared to mention. How little did you think at the time, that God was looking on, and beholding the progress of pollution in your hearts. Recall next *the polluted books*, which you have read with eagerness and delight; *the polluted pictures*, at which you have gazed with the same spirit; and *the polluted words*, to which you have listened with pleasure, or which with equal pleasure you have uttered to others.

To these things add *your indulgence of other evil passions.* Remember. particularly, your sloth in the service of God. Can

you find in your whole lives a single act, cordially intended to glorify him? If you cannot; how great must be the number of those actions, in which you have dishonoured him? Feel how destitute your lives must have been of all duty; and how entirely you have sustained the character of "unprofitable servants."

"Love not the world," says *St. John*, "neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." In what manner have you loved the world? Has it not hitherto been your God; and engrossed your affection, obedience, and worship. To this general idol have you not bowed daily in humble prostration; and sacrificed your time, your services, and yourselves. What costly sacrifices are these? How unworthy of such oblations is the god, to whom they are devoted?

*Riches, honours, power, and pleasure, have engaged all your thoughts, and all your time.* Riches, perhaps, you have not coveted for their own sake; but you have coveted them for the sake of the reputation, splendour, and luxury, which they procure; and, in this sense, have worshipped Mammon with a devotion not less real, than that of the veriest miser. With honour and power you have been delighted. With pleasure you have been fascinated to frenzy. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," have reigned over you with a despotism, which, from any other source, would have broken your hearts, and made you *cry out of wrong*, without measure. Still you have hugged your chains; and licked the hand of your oppressors.

Call, next, to mind *the eagerness, with which you have sought the haunts of sin, and courted the means of corruption.* Recollect the times and the spirit, with which you have gone to those places where sin was known by you to be practised; where it was made easy, convenient, and safe; where temptations were gathered and hoarded up with a careful hand, lest they should fail of their ruinous efficacy, and lest otherwise the young should not in sufficient numbers be destroyed. Think of the midnight hours, which you have spent in seeking and perpetrating iniquity. Think of the companions whom you have loved and chosen; and with whom you have united in crimes, which neither you nor they would ever have dared to commit alone.

With these things before your eyes remember also how often, and in what distressing degrees, *you have set an evil example before others*. Of all means of corruption an evil example is the surest: and among the bitter objects of regret seen by the mind on a dying bed, our own corruption of others is one of the most bitter. To think, to feel, that we have encouraged others to sin; that we have contributed to fix their evil habits; have lessened or destroyed their conscientiousness, have led them to evil thoughts, principles, and actions, of which, but for us, they would never have dreamed; have, under the name and guise of friendship, taken them by the hand, and led them to perdition, or prevented them from turning back to the path of life: is to think, and feel, one of the most distressing combinations of guilt which will ever agonize the soul. Yet alas how often are mankind, even in early life, forced to think and feel, unless they are torpid, these melancholy things.

The time would fail me to proceed farther in this employment of remembrance. From what has been said, it will be easy for you all to pursue this solemn subject to any extent. How well does it deserve to be pursued to the utmost extent, by every man living?

With these most interesting objects in view, I ask again, *What will be the appearance of this Congregation before the Judge of all the earth?* How different from that, which we would fain believe; from that, which we cannot but fervently desire!

7thly. *Let me exhort every person present solemnly to ask himself, how he will appear at the great day.*

The sole use of preaching is *to make the mind better*. To the accomplishment of this end it is indispensable, that those who hear should make the case their own; and consider *themselves* as primarily concerned in that which is said. If then you, who have heard these awful considerations, would derive from them the least benefit; you must severally bring them home to your own hearts. Every one of you must realize that he himself will hereafter appear before the bar of GOD; and that "every work with every secret thing" which he has done, "will be brought in-

to judgment." Then it will be scarcely possible for him to fail of asking himself the question, which I have now proposed.

Your *past life* you cannot alter. It is gone beyond recall. But it may be reviewed; and by reviewing it you may become better. If that life, when it shall be brought out into open day, will fill you with shame and anguish, and even with despair; how immensely important is it that your *future conduct* should be such as to alleviate these distresses, and furnish you support and consolation at the final trial. For this end you must consent to watch your hearts with all diligence; to mark the rising sin, and to spy out the approaching temptation. You must *resolve*, that you will serve GOD; must "turn to him with all the heart;" must mourn for your sins, and renounce them; must believe the Redeemer, and yield your souls into his hands. You must faithfully "seek the Lord, while he is to be found;" you must "call upon him, while he is near." If you do these things; "he will have mercy on you, and abundantly pardon you."

To prompt you to this most interesting change of your conduct, keep these amazing considerations before your eyes. "Bind them upon your right arms: lay them up in your hearts: speak of them, when you sit in the house, and when you walk by the way." Solemnly ponder them, "when you lie down, and when you rise up." Can you remember in this manner, that you will soon be judged; and yet continue stupid? Can you ask, each for himself, "What will be the account which I shall give? What will be the place where I shall stand? What will be the doom which I shall receive?" and still sleep the sleep of death? Remember that you are hastening to endless ruin, or immortal glory. "Behold, the day cometh, which shall burn as an oven: and all the proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day, that cometh, shall burn them up, and leave them neither root nor branch." In that dreadful day, "They that fear the Lord," saith JEHOVAH, "shall be mine, when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son, that serveth him." *Life and death are this day both set before you; therefore choose life, that you may live forever.*



## SERMON XXV.



THE DISAPPOINTMENTS, WHICH WILL TAKE PLACE AT THE DAY  
OF JUDGMENT.—SERMON I.

LUKE xiii. 28—30.

*There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of GOD, and you yourselves thrust out.*

*And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of GOD.*

*And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.*

IN the 24th verse of this chapter we are informed, that a certain man said unto Christ, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" As this was a question of improper curiosity, Christ, instead of answering it, directed him, and all others who shall become acquainted with the injunction, to "strive to enter in at the strait gate;" and subjoined, as a powerful reason for obedience to the command, that "many would seek to enter in, and would not be able." To this melancholy declaration he annexed a most affecting account of the miserable disappointment, which will be experienced by those, who, in this world, but on false grounds, expect an admission into the divine kingdom. They will go with confidence to the door of life, and say, "Lord, Lord, open to us." They will declare, that "they have eaten, and drunk in his presence," and that "he has taught in their streets;" but he will reply, "I know you not, whence ye are: depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." Then he subjoins, "There shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac,

and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last, which shall be first ; and there are first, which shall be last.”

In this passage of Scripture we are taught,

I. *That some of the human race will be shut out from the kingdom of God, who have confidently expected admission.*

II. *That others, whom they expected to see shut out, will be received.*

III. *That the distress, occasioned by this disappointment, will be very great.*

These subjects, deeply interesting to every religious assembly, and demanding, at the present time, the most solemn attention of this audience, will be briefly considered in the following discourse.

I. *Some of the human race will be shut out of the kingdom of God, who have confidently expected admission.*

“ There shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.” The persons, to whom these words are addressed, are exhibited in the context as coming with an assurance of admission ; and as alleging what they think very sufficient reasons, why they should not be rejected. They gave Christ the honourable title of Lord ; and thus indicate their own character as his servants. They request him to open to them, in terms, which sufficiently prove, that they expect no denial. They declare, that they have eaten and drunk in his presence, as friends ; and that he has, at a former period, shewn them peculiar favour, by teaching his religion publicly in their streets. These very persons he addresses in the text, as being, to some extent, a part of his audience. This audience, we know, was formed of *Jews* ; all of whom, being children of *Abraham*, confidently regarded themselves as heirs of the divine kingdom. In the corresponding passage, (Matthew viii. 12.) Christ himself calls them, as they were probably accustomed to call themselves,

“the Children of the Kingdom.” “I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: But the Children of the Kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth.” These Jews therefore, notwithstanding their confident expectations of being admitted, will be finally shut out. Like them, all, who on similar grounds form the same expectation, will be disappointed.

Christ has proffered to mankind a glorious immortality in the future, eternal kingdom of his Father. But He has proffered it on his own terms only. Many of mankind, however, intend to obtain this blessing on terms, widely different from his. Of these, multitudes feel assured of success; and will enter the future world with this assurance. The expectations of all these persons will be disappointed; and, while they are crying, “Peace and safety,” “sudden destruction will come upon them, which they cannot escape.” As some, perhaps many, of this audience, may be in this very situation; it cannot be an unprofitable employment to examine the character of those, who will meet with this unexpected reception.

1st. *Of this number will be all those, who leave the world, relying upon their own Righteousness.*

Christ has taught us abundantly, and absolutely, that *his* righteousness is the only foundation of our acceptance. Hence, He is styled “The Lord, our righteousness,” and our Salvation: “Mine eyes,” said *Simeon*, when he took Him up in his arms, and blessed Him, “have seen thy Salvation.” Hence, also, He is called, “The hope of glory” to mankind: i. e. the foundation upon which Evangelical hopes of future glory may be safely built. Hence, also, God says, “Blessed is the man, who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.” Hence, on the contrary, He says, “Wo unto them that are wise,” i. e. righteous, “in their own eyes.” Hence, also, He says, “Cursed be the man, who trusteth in man.” And again, “He, that believeth on the Son of God, hath everlasting life; but he, that believeth not, shall be damned.”

Still, there are many persons, who rely either wholly, or partially, on their own righteousness for salvation, and not on his. In many respects these persons differ from each other greatly: in this, their character is exactly the same. If they go out of the world in the possession of this character; they will hereafter be united in the ruin of their hopes.

*Of this number are all those persons, who place their reliance on External religious services.* Confidence in the external services of Religion has probably existed in every generation of men; and especially at those periods, in which Religion has been peculiarly corrupted. These plainly constituted the whole religion of the Pharisees. But our Saviour says to his Disciples, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." These services were, also, in an eminent degree, the religion of the *Jews* in the time of *Isaiah*: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons, and Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with. When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear." But, notwithstanding these decisive declarations, not a small number of persons, through every succeeding generation, have placed their hopes of final acceptance on the same services.

"He that believeth," and he only, "shall be saved." Whatever may be intended by that faith, which is the means of our justification, and, therefore, of our title to eternal life, it is certain, that it can be nothing external. Faith, whatever else it may be, has its seat in the soul, and cannot possibly be an exercise of the body. How valuable soever, then, these services may be, their value cannot exist in this; that they constitute, either wholly or partially, the foundation of acceptance with God. Of course, every man, who has placed his reliance on his prayers; his praises; his communion at the table of Christ; the dedication of himself, or his children, to God in baptism; his assumption of the

Christian covenant ; his confirmation ; his absolution ; or his exact attendance on the established, or occasional, worship of God ; will find, all these of no more use or avail than a pilgrimage to Mecca, or an ablution in the Nile or the Ganges. When they are recited in the final account, however numerous, exact, and uniform, they may have been, he will learn, what he ought now to know, that they are “ a smoke in the nostrils of JEHOVAH ; an abomination, which he cannot away with.”

The multiplication of such services, and extreme exactness in performing them, united with many scruples and fears concerning things of an indifferent, and therefore ordinarily of a lawful, nature, constitute the character of those who are styled *superstitious*. The difference between the superstitious man and the external Christian lies not in the kind, but in the degree. Between the observances of superstition, and the faith, repentance, and holiness, of the Gospel, the distance is infinite : there being nothing in the former which bears even a remote resemblance to the latter. To the latter God has promised salvation : to the former he has promised nothing. In the day of trial therefore, the superstitious man will find, that all his hopes are built upon the sand.

*Of the same number is the enthusiast.*

*Enthusiasm is a reliance for religious knowledge, dispositions, and duties, on immediate and supernatural communications from God.* No such communications exist in fact. Those, which are mistaken for them, are only the suggestions of a wild and heated imagination. Were they really what they are believed to be ; they would contain in themselves nothing, which is evangelically good ; nothing, of the nature of Religion ; nothing, which can entitle the subjects of them to eternal life. “ Though I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not love ; I am become as sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal.” These supposed communications from God are also supposed to be proofs, that the subjects of them are peculiarly his favourites. In consequence of this belief, they are filled with what they erroneously call *spiritual joy*, but what is in reality nothing but

gross *spiritual pride*. Accordingly, they erect themselves very often into private, and not unfrequently into public, teachers of Religion. They profess to know, that themselves are, and that others are, or are not, regenerated; and to determine whether *Ministers* are, as they style it, *sent*, or *have an internal call to preach the Gospel*. They not unfrequently speak of themselves, as being thus *sent*, or *called*; intending by the call an *internal impulse, a direct communication from heaven*; which they professedly feel, and understand, to be of this nature. Thus, they consider themselves as summoned no less clearly and certainly to preach, than *Paul* was; and, substantially, in the same manner; viz. by a direct revelation from God. *A real call to preach the Gospel*, whenever it exists, *is made up of piety; a capacity to understand the Gospel; an actual, and extensive, acquaintance with what it contains, derived from an enlightened understanding, and intense study; together with such extensive knowledge, as will enable a man to write, and to speak, so as hopefully to convince his fellow-men of the Truth, and persuade them to embrace it.* All this, however, as every man, even the best, is perpetually in danger of deceiving himself, especially with regard to his own endowments, and attainments, *should be clearly decided by the judgment of those around us, who are eminently wise and virtuous.* But these men have no such qualifications; and, therefore, no such call.

With regard to the knowledge, which they profess of their own conversion, they are equally and miserably deluded. The Scriptures no where tell us, that we shall know *the fact, that we are converted*. Were this otherwise, and the fact known; it would not at all help us to know *the time, when our conversion took place*. There is not a hint in the Gospel, that this time is ever known; and, were it actually known, it would preclude all the necessity of self-examination, so often enjoined; and render useless the evidences of regeneration, given us in the Scriptures; and nugatory the rules, by which we are to try ourselves.

As to their knowledge of the regeneration of others, whether ministers or Christians; we may judge of its soundness from this

fact: that *St. Peter*, in the plenitude of inspiration, and under the immediate guidance of the Holy Ghost, said of *Silvanus* or *Silas*, the companion of *Paul*; a prophet; a man inspired; an eminent, laborious, and very successful minister of the Gospel, whom *Paul* thought proper to unite with himself in the two Epistles to the *Thessalonians*; of this man *St. Peter* said, only, "Silvanus a faithful brother, as I suppose." Unless, therefore, the men, whom they pronounce to be Christians, are better men than *Silas*, or they, better judges of this subject than *St. Peter*, it would certainly become them to exhibit no more confidence, than he has thought proper to exhibit.

The truth is, all these opinions are deplorable delusions; unwarranted by Scripture; unsupported by facts. Nor is this all. Their pretensions are, in the most absolute manner, refuted by facts. Instead of exhibiting the wisdom and piety of good men, they ordinarily exhibit a character, made up of gross folly, and gross sin. Particularly, they are wonderfully guilty of the complicated sins of spiritual pride and self-righteousness; and are thus a wound to Religion, and a *smoke* to the eyes of all its friends.

Let every person of this character remember, that, were he possessed of all the communications from heaven, which he challenges, they would not go a single step towards proving that he is a Religious man. *Balaam* was really inspired; and in a higher degree, than these persons will dare to boast. He uttered, also, several sublime and wonderful prophecies. Yet "he loved the wages of unrighteousness;" and perished in his iniquity. If I am asked whether none of these men, whom I have described, can be good men; and am so severe as to condemn them all; I answer, that my own business lies not with the men, but with their principles, and practices. As there are sinners, who have hypocrisy enough to appear like Christians; so there are Christians, who have folly and wickedness enough, remaining, to make them appear much like sinners. The principles, and practices, of these men I condemn absolutely; and pronounce with confidence, nay, with certainty, that they will not help them a single

step towards heaven. As to the men themselves; “to their own Master they stand, or fall.” For myself, when they cease to be “puffed up, and to vaunt themselves;” when they become meek, modest, humble, and self-denying; when they are more willing to obey that precept of *St. James*; “My brethren be not many teachers;” I shall begin to think more favourably of their character.

*Of the same number, also, are those persons, who rely upon a decent and amiable behaviour.*

To give pleasure to others, and to be loved by them, are attainments, naturally desirable in the eyes of all men. Nor will he, who steadily aims at this object, fail of giving the pleasure, which he intends, and of being loved by those, to whom it is given. The disposition, which gives birth to such behaviour, is in itself amiable, and useful; and contributes much to the peace of domestic life, and to the comfort of good neighbourhood. It is therefore naturally, and in some sense deservedly, esteemed and commended. For what is thus commended they of course give themselves full credit. Others think well of them; and they think still better of themselves. Others think them good; they think themselves eminently good. But, unhappily, they stop here; and, while they are much busied in pleasing men, make no attempts to please God. God, therefore, is not pleased with them; and, of course, will not accept them at the final day.

*Of the same number, also, are they, who rely upon what are called the Moral duties of life.*

These persons, pay their debts; speak truth; treat others kindly; are charitable to the poor; are sober, diligent, frugal, chaste, and temperate. At least, they profess all these things; and rarely profess, or do, any thing more. *These*, also, are useful members of society. The things which they do, are useful things: nay, they are essential and indispensable parts of the Christian character. But it is indispensable, also, that all these and all other things which are done by man, should be done with a spirit of obedience to God. All *good things*, such as the Scriptures call good, come forth “out of the good treasure in the heart of



a good man ; out of a heart informed with faith, repentance, and love. They are the fruit of "the good seed," sown in such a heart. That, which is not done with a supreme reference to the will of GOD, is not morally good in itself ; and will never be styled good by him.

The morality, on which these persons rely, will never bear an Evangelical examination. But, were it as excellent as themselves believe, it would never purchase heaven. Heaven is the reward of Christ's obedience ; and becomes ours only by faith in him. "Though I give all my goods to feed the poor," said the Apostle *Paul*, "and have not love, it profiteth me nothing."

It is ever to be remembered, that the "young Ruler," who came to Christ, to know "what good thing he should do, to inherit eternal life," united in himself both these characters. He was so amiable, that "Jesus, beholding him, loved him ; and from his youth had done all" the "things," on which the moralist relies for salvation. Still "he lacked one thing ;" and that was "the one thing needful."

2dly. *Another class of men, who will be exceedingly disappointed hereafter, will consist of those, who rely on what may be called a Religious Character.*

The particular grounds of reliance, in this case, are very various ; the general ground is the same. The *Jews* expected heaven because they were the "children of Abraham ;" members of the visible church ; and the chosen people of GOD ; because they were Pharisees, Scribes, or Doctors of their law ; and for other reasons of a similar nature. Persons at the present time, and in this land, expect heaven, because they are the children of pious parents ; because they are baptized ; because they are Communicants ; or because they are Ministers in the Church of GOD.

In the same manner the friends of religious persons ; their companions, and equals ; accustomed to the same sentiments, and course of life ; united with them in many hopes, wishes, and pursuits ; having the same character given them ; and being treated by others, as *they* are treated ; easily believe themselves to *possess* the same character ; and form strong hopes of finding

hereafter the same destiny. Their religious companions, they doubt not, will be saved ; and entertain almost as little doubt, that themselves will obtain the same salvation.

3dly. *Persons, who believe themselves to be religious because others believe them to be of this character, constitute another class of those, who will experience this dreadful disappointment.*

Solomon says, “ He that says to the wicked, ‘ Thou art righteous,’ him shall the people curse : nations will abhor him.” This denunciation was probably directed, immediately, against such judges, as acquit the wicked in opposition to law, and truth, and thus pronounce them righteous. But it certainly may with even more force be applied to those, whether Christians or Ministers, who “ sew pillows under all arm-holes ;” who “ slightly heal the wound of the daughter of God’s people ;” and who by “ speaking smooth things cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before” mankind.

When we remember the amazing things, which have been done to accomplish our salvation, in the Redemption of Christ, the mission of his Spirit, and the course of his providence ; when we remember, that nothing less than this could have accomplished our salvation ; we cannot avoid the conclusion, that the moral character, which entitles us to eternal life, the communication of which is the end of all these labours, is not in man by the mere influence, and in the usual course, of nature.

Yet a great multitude of persons, and among them not a small number of preachers, have ever represented Christianity as nothing more than the heathen have often acquired, and Christians as nothing more than heathen, enlightened, polished, and improved, by the Gospel. No radical change of heart, where these men influence, is taught or believed. To be pleasing and reputable on the part of some ; to speak truth, and do justice, on the part of others ; and to have done, as it is emphatically expressed, no harm, that is, to have been quiet, orderly members of society, on the part of others still ; is esteemed a character sufficiently safe, a ready passport to the world of glory. But all these will, at the great trial, find with deep amazement, that nothing will be ac-

cepted by God, but that contrite, believing, and obedient heart, which is created in man by the Spirit of Truth. "Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4thly. *Another class of these persons is composed of those, who place their religion in the knowledge, and not in the obedience, of divine truth.*

"Though I have the gift of prophecy," saith *St. Paul*, "and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and have not love, I am nothing." You cannot but discern, that this declaration is absolutely decisive, and cuts off every hope of salvation from every man who is not the subject of evangelical love. In the same manner, saith *St. John*: "He, that loveth," or is the subject of evangelical love, "is born of God, and knoweth God." "He, that loveth not, knoweth not God: for God is love." Notwithstanding these declarations, there are, however, men, who acknowledge the Scriptures to be the word of God, and spend much time in learning their doctrines, and who yet concern themselves with nothing farther. These men often think well, and converse well, on divine subjects. Their instructions are listened to with pleasure; received with respect; and mentioned with commendation. As they naturally love to dwell upon subjects, by which they please others, and gain their esteem; they are easily believed to love the truth, which they make so frequently the theme of their conversation. The character, thus given to them by others, they readily assume to themselves; and with the aid of a little self-complacence, hesitate not to believe themselves to be Christians.

These observations are strongly descriptive of *most Enthusiasts*. The religion of these men, to a great extent, lies in the knowledge, which they imagine themselves to have acquired by extraordinary communications from heaven. This knowledge they are always eager to impart, for the purpose, as they would persuade you, of enlightening others; but with the real design of exalting themselves. Could *they* be prevented from talking; or *others* from listening to them; the world would be surprised to

find how little there was left of that religion, which now makes so much bustle.

5thly. *Another class of the same persons is formed of those, who place their reliance on their Zeal.*

“It is good,” saith the Apostle *Paul*, “to be zealously affected, always, in a good thing.” Gal iv. 18. A cold, stupid, heartless professor of Religion, absorbed in the concerns of this world, gives little evidence, that his profession is sincere; and, if he be a Christian, is a disgrace to the name, and a spot upon the character of Religion. Yet there is *a zeal*, which is “not according to knowledge.” *St. Paul* testifies *this* concerning the Jews. Rom. x. 2. “They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.” Even *Jehu* could say to *Jehonadab*, “Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.” Yet, we are informed, “*Jehu* took no heed to walk in the law of the God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of *Jeroboam*, who made Israel to sin.” The zeal of *St. Paul*, before his conversion, was such, that, as he himself says, he was *εμπαίνομενος*, *entirely mad*, or *absolutely delirious*, in opposing Christianity.

The persons, of whom I speak, are not only zealous, but rely upon their zeal, as being itself Religion; or at least as being a primary part, and a chief evidence, of their Religion. Persons of this character are remarkably engaged in all those religious services, which are seen by mankind; and especially in those, the performance of which is supposed to require more than ordinary earnestness in the cause of God. They are zealous, often, for the worship of the Sabbath; but as others, in great numbers, are punctual attendants upon this worship, and themselves, therefore, can acquire no distinction from such attendance, they are still more zealous about those private religious meetings, which are of mere human appointment, and are voluntarily entered into by Christians for their mutual comfort, and edification. Such meetings are certainly warranted by the Scriptures; and, when conducted with the order and decency of the Gospel, are both useful, and commendable. Still they are not instituted by God; and can, therefore, hold no place in comparison with those, which

are. The institutions of GOD we are bound by infinite authority to observe: the appointments of men we may observe, or not, as our judgment shall direct: effectual care being taken, however, that we do not neglect them from sloth, avarice, pleasure, or other guilty inducements. Yet I do not remember a man of this character, who did not discover far more solicitude about those religious services which are not, than about those which are, of divine institution.

Zeal, which is not according to knowledge, is always *censorious*. Such persons are hardly willing to allow those to be Christians, who do not meet when, and where, they meet; think as they think; talk as they talk; and act as they act. Mild and self-governed Christianity, though far more correct, more productive of good fruits, more amiable, more evangelical, more heavenly, and incomparably less deserving of blame, than their own character, passes with them for little or nothing. A great part of their business is to judge others; and it is to be feared, that they rarely remember that they themselves are to be judged.

6thly. *Another class of the persons under consideration, is formed of those who place their hope in a Faith, which is without works.*

“As the body, without the spirit, is dead,” saith *St. James*, “so faith, without works is dead also.” This is a melancholy declaration to all those who wish for a cheap religion, and intend to go to heaven without self-denial. Probably not a few of them have secretly wished, that this text, and the chapter in which it is contained, had never been embodied in the Scriptures. It is a pleasant thing to persuade ourselves that we may “love the world,” and yet “the love of the Father be in us;” that “the kingdom of God” does consist “in meat, and drink;” in amassing wealth, acquiring personal consequence, and in enjoying pleasure; and not “in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” It would gratify our feelings not a little, if there were no cross to be taken up; no violence to be done to our passions and appetites; no sacrifice to be made of our time, our labours, our property, our sensual enjoyments, to God. He, however.

has determined otherwise : and we must obtain heaven in *his* way, or not at all. Those, who will “inherit the kingdom” of our heavenly *Father*, are such, as have done kind offices to the brethren of Christ, and, through them, to Christ himself. *The fast, which God has chosen, is, that we deal our bread to the hungry ; that we bring the poor, who are cast out, into our houses ; when we see the naked, that we cover him ; and that we hide not ourselves from our own flesh.* The faith, by which alone we shall be justified, is “the faith which worketh by love.” No mention will be made, in the the final day, of the dead faith spoken of by *St. James*, and exhibited by him as a carcase, without a soul to animate it : and, on the ground of such a faith, no child of *Adam* will be accepted.

II. *Other persons, whom these expected to see shut out, will be accepted.*

Of this number there will be.

1st. *A multitude of such, as, in this world, have lived in humble and despised circumstances.*

Pride always leads us to imagine ourselves better than we are ; and better, particularly, than others. Them it depresses below, ourselves it elevates above, the standard of truth. Nor does this deceitful passion employ itself less on our *moral character*, than on our wealth, learning, office, or reputation. “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are,” is the language of immense multitudes, who would disdain to be called Pharisees. *The hypocrite* says, with great self-complacency, to *the open sinner*, “Stand by thyself ; for I am holier than thou.” The open sinner desires to be thankful, that he is no hypocrite. The *enthusiast* pities the cold *rational man*, because he is not distinguished by the peculiar tokens of divine favour, which himself enjoys. The *rational man* blesses himself that he is not bewildered by the delirious vagaries of the enthusiast.

When we compare ourselves with those, who are greatly beneath us in external advantages, we give ourselves more credit, and them less, than we otherwise could do. A poor man is apt to be considered as more beneath us in moral worth, than we

should imagine, if he were rich; an ignorant man, than if he were learned; an humble man, than if he were in an elevated station. Hence we naturally suppose, that such men are not regarded by God with the same favour, which we claim to ourselves. Much less can we believe them to be objects of the divine favour, and ourselves objects of wrath and indignation.

Multitudes of such men are, however, sincere followers of Christ, and genuine children of God. All these, at the final day, the Judge will summon to his right hand; and their appearance in that enviable place will excite not a little astonishment in those, by whom they have been despised in the present world. To see the man of rags, and wretchedness, clothed in *fine linen, white and clean*; exalted from a dunghill to a throne; translated from insignificance, and contempt, to *glory, honour, and immortality*; and from ignorance and weakness, elevated to superiour knowledge and divine wisdom; while we, in our own conceit, already wise, and great, and good, are given over to shame and abhorrence; will seem to us a wonderful dispensation.

2dly. *In this number will be found great multitudes, who have been our own friends, companions, and equals, in the present world.*

Nothing seems more natural than the belief, that those, who have lived together as husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbours, companions and equals; on the same level, with the same reputation, in the same pursuits, and with the same testimonies of esteem and affection from those around them; are of the same moral character, and destined to the same allotments beyond the grave. Yet some of these are totally unlike others. Some are Christians *in deed, and in truth*; others *in name only*. Some are children of God; others children of the Devil. Some are heirs of endless life; and others, of endless death. As unlike, as are their moral characters here, will be their destiny hereafter. When the final separation is made, those, who are summoned to the left hand of the Judge will with deep amazement see their companions and equals placed on the right.

3dly. *In this number will be included, also, a multitude of persons, who, in this world, appear to be religious, and are, on that account, despised by others.*

Most men easily believe, that others despise those, who are despised by themselves; and that they are, deservedly objects of contempt; and can hardly believe, therefore, that they are entitled to the favour of God. Yet this is true of every really religious man: and every such man is found among those, who appear to be religious. However contemned, then, such persons may be, and however hated such persons are, in the present world; they will be "remembered" by God "in the day, when he maketh up his jewels, and" he "will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

4thly. *Of this number, also, will be found those, whose acknowledged characters, and opinions, have, in many respects, been different from ours.*

Difference in religious opinions is extremely apt to alienate men from each other; and to generate uncharitableness, censure, hatred, and obloquy. Ardent and rash men, on the ground of this difference, at times pronounce each other to be heretics, and deny to each other the character of Christians. Especially, when open debates have arisen, and the spirit of controversy has become warm; when the theme of contention has become public, and the doctrines in question have acquired peculiar importance, from the zeal with which they have been disputed; we are prone to forget the question of *St. Paul*, "Who art thou, that judgest another man's servant?" The dislike of *Luther*, and his followers, to those who denied his favourite doctrine of *Consubstantiation*, was little less, than to the Romanists; and his censures of them, were scarcely less severe. The same feelings, and the same conduct, produced by similar causes, have been predicable of men, in every Christian age and country. Multitudes of persons, who have been guilty of this unchristian conduct, will hereafter see the very objects of their hatred and obloquy, heirs of the everlasting favour of God. It is true, that many of those, who have been guilty of this censoriousness, afterwards regret it, as



*Luther* did, in the decline of life. With others, there is reason to fear, it descends to the grave and enters eternity. These will probably find, that, while the opinions, of which they judged so hardly, do not prevent the objects of their severity from being admitted into heaven, themselves will be precluded by their own anti-christian dispositions. Happily for us, "it is a small thing to be judged by man's judgment." Happily for us, *Christ* alone can finally *condemn*.

In the same manner, different *Churches*, and *Sects*, are prone to regard each other with alienation and animosity; and to speak of each other in the language of enemies, and not of Christians. Those, which are numerous, always feel strong in their numbers; and, constituting the tribunals, which confer reputation and stamp disgrace, become assured that they and those who think with them, are founded on truth, and that salvation is encircled by their own pale. The smaller, humbler, and less reputable, sects of Christians, they place, of course, without the limits of the Gospel, and the reach of divine favour. In both respects they will be greatly disappointed in the great day of account. No questions will be asked by Him, who "is no respecter of persons," concerning the name, which an individual has borne in this world, or concerning the Church, or the Sect, to which he belonged. He, "who worketh righteousness" in this world, will, in the world to come, be accepted; by whatever title he may have been distinguished here. The conventicle, or the barn, will probably send many of its worshippers to heaven; while by the splendid church many outside devotees will be yielded up to shame, and everlasting contempt.

On the other hand, small sects exercise exactly the same spirit towards those which are larger, and, in the eye of the world, more honourable. Under its influence they adopt the same hostile conduct, and are equally uncharitable, censorious, and bitter. But hereafter they will see, and undoubtedly will be astonished to see, in very many instances, those, who have been members of Established, and, as they are pleased to style them, Formal, and State churches, "sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. and themselves thrust out."

When we look at the Sect, or Church, of which ourselves are members, we are but too ready to cry, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these." When we look at those, which differ from us, especially if they are in any respect seriously opposed to us, we are but too ready to consider them as *the synagogue of Satan*. We ought to remember, that the name, the church, the sect, is nothing; and that the heart is all. A purified mind, in a purified body, "renewed after the image of GOD, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness of truth," is the only real "temple of the Holy Ghost," below the sun; the habitation, in which this divine guest loves to dwell here, and in which beyond the grave he will dwell forever.

## SERMON XXVI.



THE DISAPPOINTMENTS, WHICH WILL TAKE PLACE AT THE DAY  
OF JUDGMENT.—SERMON II.

LUKE xiii. 28—30.

*There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of GOD, and you yourselves thrust out.*

*And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south; and shall sit down in the kingdom of GOD.*

*And, behold, there are last, which shall be first; and there are first, which shall be last.*

IN the former part of this discourse, after explaining the import of the text, I derived from it the following doctrines :

I. *That some of the human race will be shut out from the kingdom of GOD, who have confidently expected admission.*

II. *That others, whom they expected to see shut out, will be received.*

III. *That the distress, occasioned by this disappointment, will be very great.*

The two first of these doctrines I considered at that time. Under the former I observed, that in the number of those, who will thus be excluded from the divine kingdom, will be

1st. *All, who leave the world, relying on their own righteousness for acceptance with GOD.*

This comprehensive description, I observed, includes *such, as confide in the external services of Religion; superstitious persons; enthusiasts; persons, who trust in a decent and amiable behaviour; and persons, who build their hopes upon what are called the moral duties of life.*

2dly. I mentioned *those, who rely upon what may be called a religious character*; such, for example, as those of *Communicants, or Ministers*; as destined to the same unhappy end.

3dly. *Those, who believe themselves to be religious, because others suppose them to be of this character.*

4thly. *Those, who place their religion in the knowledge, and not in the obedience, of divine truth.*

5thly. *Those, who place their reliance on their zeal.* And,

6thly. *Those, who place their hope in a faith, which is without works.*

II. *Of the persons whom these expected to see shut out, and who will nevertheless be accepted, I observed,*

1st. *There will be a multitude of such, as, in this world have lived in humble and despised circumstances.*

2dly. *Of those, who have here been our friends, companions, and equals.*

3dly. *Of those, who, in this world, appear to be religious, and are, on that account, despised by others.* And,

4thly. *Of those, whose acknowledged characters, and opinions, have, in many respects, been different from ours.*

I shall now proceed to finish the discourse; and, according to the plan proposed, observe,

III. *That the Distress, occasioned by this disappointment, will be very great.*

“Weeping, and gnashing of teeth,” are glowing images of extreme anguish: and this anguish is, by our Saviour, attributed to the two-fold disappointment, mentioned in the text. What less can be believed, from the nature of the subject? The disappointment will follow strong and high raised expectations; and, in many instances, undoubting confidence. It will be a final disappointment. It will be a disappointment of every object, for which we can hope; of every good, which we are capable of enjoying. It will be a disappointment, on which “Mene, Tekel, Upharsin,” will be all written, and on which eternity will be stamped, by the hand of *JEHOVAH*. *The portion of those, who considered themselves as the only children, will be taken away;*

*and*, to add to the sore mortification, it *will be given* to those, whom they esteemed *dogs*. They will not only be sunk to the depths of depression, but will also see those, to whom they had always felt themselves greatly superiour, elevated to supreme and endless distinction. To behold mere rabble, the refuse of mankind, the offscouring of all things, raised to the most enviable station and happiness; and ourselves, the great, the wise, and the honourable, the true church, the chosen people of God, "thrust into outer darkness," with extreme disgrace, and interminable woe; must be to be poor, and miserable, indeed. Who could bear such a change even in the present world? Who, much more, can bear it, when every hope is buried in the grave? What amazement, what anguish, will be felt when the workers of iniquity look around them, and see of whom their assembly is composed! What emotions will be excited, particularly, when they see *themselves* of this number! themselves; whose character has, in their own view, been always so meritorious, so good, as to make it absolutely improbable, and nearly impossible, that God should condemn them? Who have performed all external religious services with so much exactness? Who have scrupulously done even little, and uncommanded things, in order to be secure of doing every thing necessary? Who have received such immediate communications from God, as proved them to be his peculiar favourites! Who have been peculiarly decent and amiable in their lives? and Who have performed the moral duties with such care, that they could come to Christ, and ask with confidence, "What lack we yet?" How will they be astonished to find themselves of this number, although they have been Communicants in the church of God! nay, Ministers of that church: although they have been acknowledged, by all around them, to be Christians; although they have thought correctly, and conversed wisely, on the doctrines and duties of Religion; although they have been peculiarly zealous in its cause; although they have believed the Gospel, without a single doubt concerning its divine origin!

How much will this surprise be increased, when, extending this survey, they behold those friends and neighbours who flattered them, both by their conversation and their example, into a belief that they were safe ; and the Ministers, who taught them from the desk, that these things would secure their title to heaven ; involved in the same ruin ! How unspeakably will this astonishment be increased, when they see multitudes of the poor and despised, the objects of their scorn and abhorrence, their servants, clowns, and beggars, admitted at the same time, with an abundant entrance, into the kingdom of God ! What pangs will harrass their bosoms, when they see their husbands, their wives, their children, their brothers, their companions, their equals, seated on the right hand of the Judge, in glory inexpressible ; and themselves on the left, doomed to shame and everlasting contempt ! How will they be amazed to find those, who differed greatly from themselves in religious character, and opinions, so greatly, as to be pronounced by them Heretics and outcasts from the church ; and who were members of churches, or sects, which they believed to be without the pale of salvation ; acknowledged by Christ as his true followers, and made heirs of “ the kingdom, prepared for ” the righteous “ from the foundation of the world ! ” Well may we suppose, that “ there will ” then “ be weeping, and gnashing of teeth.”

#### REMARKS.

From these solemn and affecting considerations, we can hardly fail to derive many, and those most important, practical lessons.

1st. *We are strongly urged by them to the most watchful care in determining what the genuine religion, required by the Gospel, is.*

We have here seen, that not only many individuals, but many numerous classes of mankind, and all these inhabitants, also, of Christian countries, will, but too probably, be finally deprived of salvation. For this melancholy fact there is a peculiar cause ;

and that cause may be easily and certainly discerned. *All these men have totally mistaken the real ground of salvation, or the true nature of that religion, to which salvation is annexed by the Scriptures; and have supposed it to consist in that, in which the Scriptures have not made it to consist.* You will naturally ask, "Whence this mistake has arisen?" Is the subject so difficult in its nature? Are the Scriptures, which communicate it to us, so perplexed, doubtful, and obscure, that such multitudes of mankind, and among them many, who are well informed and even learned in subjects of Theology, have not sufficient understanding to discern its nature? I answer, "No:" Neither of these is the cause of the disastrous conduct, and ruinous consequences, which we have been employed in examining. The nature of genuine Religion may be easily understood; and is unfolded in the Gospel clearly, and exactly. All the real difficulty in the nature of the case, lies in *the Application of the Evangelical doctrines concerning this subject to ourselves.* This, I admit, is a task really attended with difficulties; and liable in a greater or less degree, to the intervention of error. Yet it is fraught with no such obstacles, no such necessary perplexities, as to prevent uneducated peasants, beggars, and even little children, from becoming christians *in deed, and in truth.* The subjects of error, who have been mentioned in this discourse, have not learned their mistakes from the Bible; nor fallen into them from any necessary misconception of its doctrines, nor from any perplexity, obscurity, or other defect in the manner, in which they are there communicated. *They have made their errors for themselves.* The Bible has no where taught us to trust in *our* righteousness for acceptance; but, in the most explicit manner, has required us to trust only in the righteousness of *Christ.* Surely there needs be no mistake, here, in the mind of any man. The Bible has no where annexed salvation to the external services of Religion; nor to the scrupulous observances of the Superstitious. The Bible has no where, in a single hint, taught us to expect immediate communications from God; nor promised a single blessing to Enthusiasm. No where in the sacred canon is the merely de-

cent, amiable man permitted to hope for eternal life. Let the Moralist also, however scrupulous and exact he may be, explore the whole code of Revelation; and he will not find a single promise of future good made to him. Equally at a loss will *he* be, who, because he is born of religious parents, or is a Member, or Minister, of the Christian Church, regards himself as a religious man, to find the least encouragement, given to him in the Gospel, of acceptance with God. Nor has the Saviour, nor have the Apostles, nor the Prophets, even hinted, that any man is religious, because other men believe this to be his character. Nor have they taught us, that this divine attribute consists at all in Speculative knowledge; or in Zeal; or in the "Faith, which is without works."

If religion is made to consist in any, or all, of these things; or if salvation is promised to those who possess them; I ask, in what part of the Sacred volume is this declared? I have read the Scriptures for many years; and with some attention; but have never met with a single suggestion of this nature; and, therefore, boldly pronounce, that *there is not one*. But if there is no suggestion of this kind in the Scriptures; surely *they* are not chargeable with being the source of these errors.

The Religion of the Gospel consists in faith, repentance, and holiness. But the *Faith* is not "the faith, which is without works." By such a faith, *St. James* expressly declares, no man can be justified, or saved. It is the faith, not of *Simon Magus*, but of the *Eunuch*, whom *Philip* baptized. It is "believing with all the heart." It is "receiving the truth in the love of it." It is "believing with the heart unto righteousness;" that is a faith productive of righteousness. It is "the faith, which worketh by love;" and therefore "purifieth the heart;" and therefore "overcometh the world; and therefore looses the hold, which the world naturally has on the heart of man.

Equally clear is the Scriptural doctrine of that *Repentance*, which it declares to be "unto life." There is a repentance, which is there called the "sorrow of this world," and is said to "work death." By divines it is often called false repentance; that is re-



penitance, which is not genuine, but is falsely, or erroneously, conceived to be such. These two affections of the mind are in the Scriptures, distinguished by two Greek words; *μεταμέλεια*, which invariably is used to denote this natural sorrow for sin, as injurious to our happiness; or the erroneous repentance, which has been mentioned; and *μετάνοια*, which denotes a real and permanent change in the disposition for the better. A sorrow for sin, as being unworthy, and guilty, in itself; as dishonourable to God, and injurious to mankind. The account, universally given in the Scriptures of these two affections of the heart, is every where correspondent with the proper meaning of these words, as here expressed. A plain man may, therefore, easily understand the distinction between them.

Equally intelligible is the Scriptural exhibition of *Holiness*. Evangelical holiness is obedience to the two great commands of the moral law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thine understanding; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Certainly, these commands are among the most perspicuous sentences, which can be found in language: and no man, it is believed, who is willing to let them speak for themselves, ever mistook their meaning in any such manner, as to lead him dangerously astray. But, plain as is the nature of the faith, repentance, and holiness, which form the religion of the Gospel, that religion, as we have seen, has been frequently, and fatally, misapprehended. The evil, of which I complain, lies in *the heart* of those, who thus misapprehend. They love not real Religion; and yet wish to be saved. They are willing to be externally religious, even in a superstitious and burdensome degree. They love to have it thought, that they are renewed; that they receive extraordinary communications from heaven, and are its distinguished favorites. They often are disposed to be decent and amiable in their deportment. They are willing to understand the doctrines of Religion; and are pleased to converse about them. They love often to be zealous; and to be moral; so far as their external conduct is concerned. All these things pro-

mote their reputation; gratify their pride; contribute to their convenience; quiet the reproaches of conscience; and comfort them with the hope of obtaining eternal life. But, although some of these things are indispensable duties of a religious man, and essential to a religious life, they are in no sense Religion itself. All of them may exist; and yet the subject of them be entirely alienated from GOD, and an heir of final condemnation.

As, then, we have seen so many of our fellow men fatally deceived with respect to this great subject; and as *we*, in pursuing the same courses, shall be deceived in the same manner; it becomes immensely important to every one of this assembly to determine what the genuine religion, required by the Gospel, is. The great rule for coming to a final decision on this point is, in my apprehension, this: *to receive the declarations of the Sacred Volume in their plain, obvious sense.* Christ, the Prophets and Apostles, always addressed themselves to men, almost universally plain, and uneducated. They intended, that these men should understand them; and, therefore, spoke a language, which could be understood by such men. But such men are unable to annex any meaning to language, except the obvious one. In all ordinary cases, therefore, the obvious meaning must be the right. Were this rule cordially observed; the difficulties, usually found in determining on the religion of the Gospel, would vanish.

2dly. *With these solemn considerations in view, let me also urge every member of this assembly, to examine the grounds of his own hope of salvation.*

If the observations, made in the former part of this discourse are just; multitudes of those who believe themselves to be Christians, will be fearfully disappointed at the final day. They will go to their account with strong expectations of being accepted; but will nevertheless be cast out. "Am I, or am I not, of this unhappy number?" is a question, which is of infinite moment to every member of this assembly. The solution of it is, indeed at hand. If you repent; if you believe; if you obey; you will be saved: if not; you will be lost. Could these things, or either of them, be satisfactorily determined; this solution would be com-

plete. But there are, I acknowledge, very serious difficulties, in many cases at least, in obtaining such satisfaction: the difficulties which I have already mentioned, as lying in *the Application of the Evangelical doctrines, concerning this subject to ourselves*. The defect, here, is not however in the doctrines, but in *us*. So many of our natural affections resemble those, which are Evangelical: the resemblance itself is often so strong; the motives, from which we act, are sometimes so difficult to be distinguished; and we are such partial and otherwise such imperfect judges: that there is frequently not a little reason to distrust our decisions. The importance of the case is, however, such, as to demand every effort which we are able to make, for the purpose of obtaining a satisfactory and safe determination. If we are faithful to ourselves: if we diligently search the Scriptures: if we watchfully enquire into the state of our hearts, and lives: if we humbly ask God to direct us in all our investigations: we have every encouragement to believe that we shall proceed with safety. The evidence of our piety may not be, indeed, so great as we should wish: yet I am persuaded it will be such, as to prevent us from being discouraged, and to keep us alive in the Christian course.

But the examination, which I here mean especially to urge upon you, is that, which respects the several sources of self-delusion mentioned in the former part of this discourse. Are you not in danger, from one or other of these causes, of the deplorable disappointment there specified? Have you not been accustomed to expect salvation from your own righteousness? Do you not expect it from your performance of the external duties of Religion, and Morality: from the decency of your deportment, or the amiableness of your character; from your zeal; from your ability to understand, and converse about, religious subjects: from your integrity, justice, and kindness to others; or from your unqualified belief of the Scriptures, a belief, however, producing no valuable fruits in your hearts or in your lives?

Not one of you intends finally to perish. On something which you have done, or something which you expect to do, every one

of you relies for acceptance with God. Many of you, I presume, look to that broken reed, a distant, perhaps a death-bed, repentance ; but many of you trust, it is to be feared, in what you already are, or have already done. But, if you are not Christians in deed ; nothing which you are, nothing which you have done, will furnish you with the least consolation at the final trial.

Let me beseech every one of you to reflect solemnly, and deeply, on the immense importance of this amazing subject. You will all soon “stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.” How will you severally be received ? What account will you give ? What sentence will you hear ? Whither will you go from the trial ?

Are you prepared to recite your faith in Christ ; your repentance towards God ; and your obedience to his holy law ? The truth, whatever it is, whatever it shall be, you must declare. Before Him, “who searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins,” no falsehood, no disguise, no concealment, can avail. Can the poor, naked, disembodied soul, alone and friendless, sustain a denial in that day ? Can any member of this audience endure to go into the presence of the glorious Redeemer, and say, “Lord, I have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets ;” and hear him reply, “Depart from me, I know thee not, thou worker of iniquity ?”

Can you endure to hear the sentence of final reprobation pronounced on *you*, to be thrust out of the kingdom of God, to see heaven shut to you forever, to behold immortal life, the last comfort, and the last hope, vanish ? Can you bear to see God hide his smile of mercy, his children withdraw from you, *their* enemies, and *yours*, approach to hear your condemnation, and triumph in your ruin, the world of darkness unfold its wide and melancholy gates ? Can you endure to hear the chains of misery clank, and the groans of endless mourning echo around the dismal region ? to see the stream of everlasting sorrow flow from every eye ! and to hear the curse of eternal rebellion howl through the dreary and desolate midnight forever ?

How changed will be the scene from your present enjoyments, and your present hopes ! Now you are probationers for immortal life, and peace, and joy. Now you are alive ; in the house of God ; in his immediate and gracious presence. You come, and may come boldly, to offer your prayers, and present your praises. You come to “seek him, while he may be found ; to call upon him, while he is near ;” to ask the forgiveness of your sins, the renovation of your souls, and your deliverance from endless woe. You come to spread all your wants before him of life and death, of time and eternity ; and to request and obtain the needed supplies from his hand. He is present to hear and answer, to bless and save, you. How comforting the situation ! how bright the prospects ! how divinely glorious the hopes ! A reconcileable God seated upon a throne of mercy to receive you, as penitent, returning children ! A crucified Saviour calling you to faith, repentance and holiness, and opening the “everlasting gates” that you “may enter in !” Heaven unfolding its light and glory for your enjoyment ; and all her divine assembly waiting to renew their joy over your arrival in their delightful mansions !

Why will you not then be saved ? Consent ; and the work is done. “Hear ye the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word : The Lord, your God, in the midst of you, is mighty ; he will save, he will rejoice over you with joy. He will rest in his love ; he will joy over you with singing. He will gather them, that are sorrowful, for the solemn assembly. He will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against him ; He will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed. He will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear him forever. Incline your ear, therefore, and hear, and your souls shall live : and He will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. He will give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ; that you may be called ‘Trees of righteousness,’ ‘The planting of the Lord,’ that he may be glorified.”

3dly, *These considerations strongly urge us to entertain very humble apprehensions of our own character.*

There is no passion which is more odious than pride: "The Lord hateth a proud look. Every one, that is proud in heart, is an abomination to the Lord." There is no passion more deceitful: "He, that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool." There is no passion more dangerous: "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." There is no passion, which creeps more insensibly into the mind; there is no passion more universal. At the same time, no passion so readily finds food every where, on which to nourish itself. We are proud of almost every thing within us, and without us, with which we have any connection; and it makes little difference whether it be an endowment or an attainment, an attribute or an accident. We are proud even of our native moral character; fitted, as one would think, to inspire no feelings, but those of humility. Almost all the persons, mentioned in the former part of this discourse, as experiencing the dreadful disappointment spoken of in the text, are distinguished for the species of pride which is commonly styled *spiritual pride*. No persons are in a higher degree spiritually proud, than the superstitious, and enthusiastic: the one, of the superiority which he derives from the exactness of his observances; the other, of the favour with which he believes himself to be regarded by his Maker. The speculative Christian prides himself in his knowledge of the Scriptures, and the ability with which he converses in religious subjects; the zealot, in his zeal for God; and the moralist in his reputation and blameless life. Self-righteousness is to all these men, a primary cause of their ruin. "Seest thou a man wise," that is righteous, "in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool," that is of a wicked man, "than of him." The reason is obvious. The man, who feels himself to be a sinner, forms no expectations of being saved on account of his present character; but feels, of course, that a new and better one must be attained, before he can hope for salvation. The man, who is religious in his own conceit, will, on the contrary, be satisfied with his present character; and feel-

ing secure of the favour of GOD, will seek for no other foundation of hope. The danger of this situation I need not explain.

How different is the language of Scripture concerning the humble: "Thus saith the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, 'I dwell in the high and holy place; yet to this man will I look; even to him, who is of a humble and contrite spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the spirit of the contrite.'" "GOD," saith *St. James*, "resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." "Before honour," saith *Solomon*, "is humility." "By humility are riches, honour, and life."

But the point, on which I would, here, especially insist, at the present time, is the dangerous nature of spiritual pride, and the absolute necessity of a humble spirit to our safety. It is impossible for GOD to accept him, who comes into his presence with the declaration: "GOD, I thank thee, that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican: I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." The first step towards acceptance into the favour of this glorious and awful Being, is, to assume the spirit of the Publican; a spirit, prompting us to stand afar off; regarding it as presumption to *lift up* even our *eyes unto heaven*; disposing us to *smite upon our breasts*, and to *say*, "GOD be merciful to us sinners."

How preposterous is it for a being, born yesterday of the same dust with the worms, and destined soon to become their prey, and return again to the same dust, to be proud! How impious is it for a sinner to present this lofty character in the presence of GOD! How dangerous, to add this sin to all his other guilt; a sin, existing every moment, and always increasing; a sin which disturbed the peace of heaven, and ruined this world! It is impossible for the man of spiritual pride to know his character, or perceive his danger, until he assumes a new disposition. He has "eyes, which see not; and ears, which hear not; and a heart, which cannot understand;" and, should he continue to exercise the same spirit, he will never be *converted, nor healed*.

4thly. *These considerations powerfully compel us to exercise charitable thoughts towards others.*

When we are indulging pride, and self-righteousness; when we are exalting ourselves, and regarding and treating others as objects of scorn, derision, and hatred; when we are branding them as heretics, and reprobates; when we are looking down on them as the dirt and scum of the universe; how profitable might be the remembrance, that these very men may hereafter "sit down in the kingdom of God, and we ourselves be thrust out! *Who are we, that thus intruding into the seat of judgment, "condemn another man's servant?"* and forget, that "to his own master he standeth, or falleth?" We are those, who are ourselves to be judged; whose cause is yet to be tried; whose character is yet to be settled; and whose reward is yet to be measured out. If *they* are Christians, our contempt and hatred of them, so long as they are indulged, will of course prevent us from becoming like them: if *we* are, they will prevent them from becoming like us.

There is perhaps no folly, and no sin, to which we are more prone, than to this. Nor is there any, to the existence, and operations of which we are more blind. It is always pleasant to prefer ourselves to others. That the preference is just, the pride, which creates it, does not permit us to entertain a doubt. The judgment is formed of course, and admitted with pleasure; and there is none to call it in question. Yet all men, though blind to this folly and sin in themselves, discern intuitively, that the decision, in most instances, is false; although in his own cause, each is sure that it is true.

The cause of this unreasonable and unhappy conduct lies not in the understanding, but in the heart. To the heart, therefore, must the remedy be applied, if we would hope for a cure. Should each one of us solemnly realize, that the very man whom he contemns and derides, may not improbably be admitted, with *an open entrance*, into the kingdom of God, and he himself be shut out forever; that the object of his scorn will, at the final day, be raised to immortal glory and immortal joy, and himself be driven, with supreme disgrace and woe, from the presence of his Judge; it would seem, that he could hardly fail to contract his



pride, lay his hand upon his mouth, and his mouth in the dust, and take his only safe and proper station, at the foot of the cross. Here he would make it his business to pray for others, and to judge himself.

This consideration may be eminently useful to Christians. Even they, it is not to be denied nor concealed, *measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not always wise*. Perhaps there is scarcely a precept, which respects our fellow-men, which Christians, ordinarily, find it more difficult to obey, than that, which requires us to *esteem others better than ourselves*. The precept, however, is in itself divinely wise; and was never obeyed without the most solid advantage. At the same time, its foundation is laid deep in facts. Every Christian, if not grossly unfaithful to himself, knows, incomparably better, his own unworthiness, than that of others. Hence he is furnished with complete proof, and proof which exists in no other case, that his own station ought, if he is rewarded according to his works, to be very low. Surely this consideration is more than enough to balance all those defects, whether real or imaginary, on the ground of which he forms uncharitable opinions of others; censures them with severity; and perhaps denies them a place in the favour of God. Surely his own sins will weigh more in the scale, which should determine the moral character, than the trifling peculiarities of the sect, class, or church, to which others may belong; or any differences in religious doctrine, which are not absolutely essential, or which do not involve in themselves plain and gross criminality. How many persons, of whom we have thought hardly, will make a brighter and better appearance than ourselves, at the great day!

*Boerhaave*, a man who rendered himself immortal by his talents and labours, and who, there is the best reason to believe, has become immortal in a far higher sense by his beneficence and piety, is reported to have said, when present at the execution of a criminal, "Perhaps that poor guilty wretch is, in the sight of GOD, less guilty than I am." How few persons, have we reason to believe, entertain such just views of the guilt of sin, and the

heinousness of their own sins, as this great and good man ! By thus *humbling himself*, how highly is he *exalted* in the view of every person present. How greatly would pride and self-righteousness have lowered him in our estimation ? How exact a counterpart is he of that first of all men, that greatest of the Apostles, who, after being endued with wonderful inspiration, after being caught up to the third heaven, after having converted half the known world, could say, “ Unto me, who am the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

Imitate, then, I beseech you, these glorious examples. Make it your business, not to applaud, but to know, not to flatter, but to amend, yourselves. Open your eyes daily on your errors, and your sins ; and labour earnestly, not to justify, but to renounce them. Remember always, that GOD will hereafter judge both you, and your fellow-men ; and that “ his judgment ” will be “ according to truth.” Ask yourselves, day by day, how you will appear in his eye, and what sentence he will pronounce upon your conduct in this life ; and remember, that you cannot obtain his favour, nor be received into his kingdom, unless you essentially resemble that glorious Redeemer, who, although “ the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person,” has declared his own character in these remarkable words, “ I am meek, and lowly of heart.”

## SERMON XXVII.



THE HARVEST PAST.

JEREMIAH viii. 20.

*The harvest is past, the summer is ended ; and we are not saved.*

To understand the import of these words, it will be useful to consider the state of the people, in whose name they were uttered by the prophet. The Jews were at this period, on the eve of destruction. Their temporal prosperity was, from the first, suspended on their obedience to God. Secular good was more frequently promised, as a reward to their obedience, than that which is eternal ; and secular evil more frequently threatened, as a penalty for their disobedience. Every corrupted nation may be justly considered, as hastening to its fall in the natural progress of things. But the nation of the Jews, of which God was the Sovereign, was taught to expect this fall as an immediate judgment from heaven ; as the punishment denounced against rebellion in the constitution of their government. Their sins were known, overt acts of treason against their Supreme Ruler ; and as such, were to be punished with peculiar severity.

A short time previous to the period when the text was written, Josiah was on the throne of Judah. The reformation, begun by him, was the last before the final ruin of the kingdom. At this time, the prophet clearly saw every hope drawing fast to a close. They had been intreated, warned, and threatened, by every prophet from Moses to Jeremiah. But all, as the great founder of their Empire had predicted, was in vain.

Infidelity and irreligion had taken entire possession of the nation. Their kings, their nobles, their priests and their citizens,

with one universal declension, had finally turned their backs on JEHOVAH ; and yielded themselves up to the abominations of the heathen. Truth, justice, and benevolence, had fallen in the streets ; and falsehood, injustice, and cruelty, rioted without control. The gold was become dim, and the most fine gold changed into dross.

The government itself, as in every case of this nature, was unhinged. The King\* had become a mere cipher ; and was afraid to do a plain act of justice to the prophet Jeremiah, or even to have it known that he had consented to receive a message from God. A sensual and brutal nobility had weakened every social bond ; and the people, encouraged by their example and actuated by their influence, had reached the verge of anarchy, and of all the evils which that last curse of mankind so plentifully produces. Accordingly, they were finally rejected by God, and given over to cursing.

What a melancholy prospect is here presented to our view ! A nation fast declining, through its sins, from the summit of human virtue and glory, into the depths of corruption, disgrace and ruin : without friends abroad ; without harmony at home : their enjoyments vanishing, their hopes setting in darkness : peace and prosperity offered to them a thousand times ; urged upon them by God with the most affectionate solicitude, on the most desirable of all conditions, that of returning to their duty ; but despised, rejected, and lost forever. The very time allotted for their reformation, the day of grace and hope, now hiding behind the mountains ; and leaving the world to a long night of misery and despair.

They and their children, destined to captivity and to the sword, were still gay, sensual, impure, avaricious, false, fraudulent, cruel and impious. Not a symptom of reformation appeared, to gladden the anxious eye with a hope of recovery. The political body was infected with the plague ; and was fast changing into a mass of putrefaction and death. They had been often reprov-

\* Jeremiah xxxviii.

but had steadily hardened their necks; and were now to be suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy.

All these were immortal beings. Of course their ruin reached beyond the grave. Their present destruction was only the beginning of another, which was to endure throughout eternity.

In what circumstances could the prophet, with more propriety, have taken up the affecting lamentation in the text, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended; and we are not saved?" The time of harvest in Judea was the time, when the inhabitants and the nations, by which that country was surrounded, usually went out to war. At this time their faithless allies the Egyptians, in whose aid they chose to trust rather than in that of God, and who almost of course deceived their fond hopes of succour, were expected to bring them assistance against the king of Babylon. But the harvest came; and no Egyptian friends appeared. The summer also was ended; but these auxiliaries never came. This last hope therefore vanished, and left the wretched expectants in the gloom of despair.

There are, my brethren, many situations in the life of man, to which this lamentation may be applied with the utmost propriety and force. Wherever great blessing have been enjoyed and abused, or hopes have been cherished and lost; where God has been long indulgent, and has finally withdrawn; all those, who are especially concerned, may very properly adopt this afflicting exclamation. These, however, are not the only situations to which it is applicable. Nor can the consideration, which it expresses with so much energy, be of any use to the persons here intended. A state of absolute despair, a state of remediless ruin, admits of no alleviation. Those, who look on, may indeed derive from a subject so awful and distressing lessons of the greatest utility. The warning may arouse the ear of sloth, and sound an alarm to the heart of stupidity; where all considerations of inferior magnitude would be unheeded and lost.

But there are circumstances, in which the mind of man is often placed, of such a nature as to invite this solemn reflection; and to render it hopefully and highly profitable to the man hum-

self. When our own case has become seriously alarming ; when we have enjoyed many and great privileges, without any profit to ourselves ; when the mercies of God have hitherto been lost upon us, and we have taken occasion from them only to harden ourselves in sin and security ; a just sense of the import of this text would not improbably awaken the most useful emotions in our hearts, and produce the happiest effects on our conduct.

Among the cases, to which the words of the text may be properly applied by mankind, I shall select the following.

1st. *Every person who still remains in sin, may, at the close of a year, usefully adopt this lamentation.*

Every year removes every sinner further from eternal life. Mankind are never stationary in their moral condition, any more than in their being. He, who does not advance, always recedes. He, who does not become better, of course becomes worse.

Nor is this all. The declension is more rapid than we ever imagine. Blindness, as you well know, is a common name for sin in the Scriptures ; and is strongly descriptive of one important part of its nature. Nor is it blindness to divine things only, to God and Christ, to its duty and to its salvation ; but it is also blindness with respect to itself. The mind knows not, that itself is thus blind ; and asks triumphantly with the Pharisees of old, "am I blind also?" In its own view no one is possessed of eyes equally good and discerning ; and it usually pities all who differ from it, as unable to see. No deception is so flattering and incurable as this. The views of such a mind concerning itself are false ; and of course are more supporting and encouraging than truth would warrant. The soul of the unawakened sinner is invariably more sinful, and his life more deformed, than either appears to be in his own eyes. Yet, with a most unhappy self-deception, he confides in his own decisions wholly ; and on those of others, of the Bible, and of God, he places no reliance.

Hence his state is in every respect more dangerous, than he does or will believe ; and his declension more rapid, than with these views he can possibly imagine. This is true of every year of his life. Of consequence, the loss of a year is a greater loss

than he can be induced even to suspect. Few sinners reflect on their moral condition, to any such extent, and with any such solemnity; as the suspended state of an immortal mind, and the evident danger of endless ruin, plainly and vehemently demand. Usually they conclude, that their situation is at the worst attended with no uncommon danger; that if one, or two, or twenty, or fifty, years are gone and lost, years enough remain to secure their salvation and begin their repentance, when other pressing concerns of business or of pleasure shall be finished. "It is a hard case," will every sinner say, "since seventy years are the destined date of human life, and twenty of them still remain, if a work, which demands so little time for its accomplishment, cannot be performed within that period. I may therefore sit down to eat and drink, and rise up to play; and yet have abundant opportunity to renounce my sins and turn to God."

But a sinner ought to remember at the close of a year, that he has lost that period; and not only lost it, but converted it into the means of sin and ruin; that he is more sinful, more guilty, and more odious to God, than at the beginning; that all the difficulties, which lie between him and salvation, are increased beyond his imagination; that his mass of guilt and the reasons of his condemnation are mightily enhanced, his evil habits strengthened, and his hopes of returning lessened far more than he is aware; that that year was added to those which he had lost for the very purpose of engaging him to seek eternal life; that God, who waited every day which it contained to be gracious to him has seen him employ every one of these days in wickedness only; and that, instead of living many years to come, he may within a few days be lodged in the grave, summoned to the judgment, and sentenced to that endless death which he has hitherto laboured uniformly to deserve.

He ought also to cast his eyes around him, and see that all, or almost all, others who have like himself trusted to a future repentance, have from year to year become more hardened in sin by these very means; have thought less and less of turning back, and taking hold of the paths of life; and although whitened with

the locks of age and tottering over the grave, are, with an assiduity and eagerness not less than his own, indulging "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life;" as if assured by a messenger from the invisible world that there is no God, no heaven, and no hell. Such as *they* are, will *he* be. Their thoughts, their conclusions, their conduct have been the same: *their end* therefore will be *his*. How properly then may he exclaim at the end of a year designed for his salvation, but spent in accomplishing his ruin, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended; but I am not saved!"

To bring the subject home to this Assembly, and to prevent, so far as may be, each individual from hearing for his neighbour and not for himself; let me address it directly to his conscience.

God, my Friends and Brethren, has with infinite patience and mercy prolonged your lives another year; and, in spite of all your sins, has renewed his blessings to you every morning, and returned them every moment. You are alive; have been fed and clothed by his bounty; have been preserved from every fatal evil, and furnished with an abundance of earthly good. You are still made probationers for an endless life. The gate of salvation is still open. The voice of the Redeemer is still heard: "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest." The Sabbath still smiles with peace and hope. The sanctuary still resounds with praise; and invites you to seek and ask, to find and to receive. The sceptre of forgiveness is still held out for you, to touch and live.

In what manner have you lived, in the midst of these blessings?

Have you solemnly, often, and effectually, thought on the great subject of Religion? Have you felt that your souls were immortal; that they must be either saved or lost; that they are sinful, and of course condemned and ruined, unless you return with repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ?

Have you under these affecting apprehensions entered your closets, bowed your knees before God, and asked him to have mercy on you? Have you assembled your families with all hu-



mility of mind ; and, with strong crying and many tears, besought God to sanctify and save them, also ! Have you faithfully come up to the house of the Lord ? Have you wantonly lost no sabbath during the past year ? How many half days have you given to pleasure, sleep, or business ; when God came down to meet you in his house, and to bless you ? When you were here, what conduct has the All-seeing eye of God beheld you adopt ? Have you united with all the heart, in the prayers and praises of this holy place ? Have you taken heed how you heard the words of eternal life ? Have you remembered, pondered, and resolved to obey, what you heard ? Have you thus obeyed ?

Have you delighted in the law of God after the inner man ? Have you rejoiced in the glorious promises of the Gospel ? Have you searched the Scriptures to find them ? Are you better than you were when the year began ? Are you more friendly to Christ ; more dutiful to God ; more hopeful of salvation ? Are you nearer to heaven, or nearer to hell ? To what good purpose have you lived ? Is not the harvest in one important sense past to you ?

2dly. *A season in which Religion prevails is also eminently a time of harvest ; and such, as lose this season, may well adopt with regard to themselves the lamentation of the text.*

In one place, and at one time, and another, Religion seizes strongly the minds of men ; and becomes, in some measure as it ought, the supreme concern. In such seasons, more persons have within a short period become the subjects of piety and the heirs of heaven, so far as the human eye can judge, than at other times in many years. The Spirit of Grace descends then, as the showers on the mown grass ; renews the face of the earth ; and produces a living verdure, where before there was nothing but barrenness and death. Men, at such seasons, literally fly as clouds, and as doves to their windows. The wilderness blossoms as the rose ; and the desert is the garden of God.

At these periods all things conspire, to persuade men to turn to God. God is then seen and known to be peculiarly gracious ; and draws near to sinners with infinite tenderness and compas-

sion. The fields are ripe ; the labourers are busy and successful ; the sun smiles upon their industry ; and a plentiful harvest is reaped and gathered. The force of example, the strong power of sympathy, the daily sight and hearing of Religion, and its attendant circumstances ; conspire with the ordinary means of grace to affect the soul, and force it to become solemn, serious, and in the end religious. A great variety of hindrances are then also removed. The common temptations of the world are in a great measure suspended. Fashion, ridicule, coldness, and evil example, lose their wretched hold on the mind ; and a vacancy is left for candour, truth, and God.

But these seasons have their close ; and some persons, at least, retain in the midst of them their former hardness of heart, increased by the resistance which they have so lately made to the offers of mercy. While others have crowded around the pool of healing, they have stood secure on the brink : and have employed themselves in watching their companions, in laughing at their eagerness and anxiety, in wondering that their credulity can persuade them to expect a cure : or have perhaps been curiously philosophizing on the nature of the waters, and in determining that the remedy is the result of natural causes and not supernatural ; of the peculiar quality of the waters themselves, and not of any virtue infused by the Angel of health.

Of such persons, although usually very sagacious in their own opinion, it may be said that they have eyes, but they see not ; ears, but they hear not ; and hearts have they, but they do not understand : for their heart is waxed gross, their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed ; lest they should see, and hear, and understand, and be converted and healed. If there be any persons in this Assembly to whom these observations are applicable, let me intreat them, since they put from themselves the Word of God, and judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life, to remember the solemn address made to such as they are by St. Paul from the prophet Habakkuk : “ Behold ye despisers, and wonder and perish ; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.”

At these seasons a man resists uncommon and most happy means of grace; provokes God in a peculiar manner; and hardens his own heart to a degree and with a rapidity, which ought to fill him with alarm and terror. How few persons have ordinarily beheld such an accepted time repeated, in their own neighbourhood! With hearts so hard as then to remain impenitent, what hope can they safely indulge that common seasons will suffice to bring them to repentance? They were then stupid, and asleep, and "dead in trespasses and sins." When will they awake and live? What reason have they to fear, that the harvest with respect to them is past, and the summer ended, while their salvation is not secured!

Sdly. *Another situation, to which this melancholy reflection is peculiarly applicable, is that of a dying sinner.*

Human life is one continued scene of delusion. Present objects demand all our attention, and all our care. To them alone we attach importance; and that, an importance far beyond what their value will warrant. They engage, they engross our labours, our anxiety, our hopes, our fears, our joys, and our sorrows. In the language of most men, worldly success is the only meaning of prosperity. To be rich, to be splendid, to be great, to be honourable, to be luxurious, and to fill the wishes of sensuality; are the only objects coveted by most men, the only happiness known.

One is often tempted amid the eager round of worldly bustle to conclude, that no passage of Scripture is regarded by such men, except that proverbial expression of brutishness: "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." By such men the health and well being of the soul are contemned and forgotten; and the soul itself is scarcely remembered, amid the vehement pursuit of wealth, honour, and pleasure. But do these things, my brethren, accord with truth and wisdom? Place these objects in some distant period of eternity; and say, in what manner you would regard them. Would you, to obtain a reversion of them all, rise before the sun, and toil when the evening has spread her curtains? Would you watch and strive, with anxiety and agony; tremble at the approach of disappointment; and, proclaiming

that your whole happiness is centred in this world, declare at the loss of money, fame, power or pleasure, that you are ruined.

The blessings of this world are means of life, support, and comfort to man, while he is here; and they are also means of enabling him to do good to his fellow men, and in this way to benefit his own soul. In this view I acknowledge their value. For what else can they be valuable? They are means, not ends. As means, they are useful: as ends, they are dross and dirt. Had they any other value, were they in themselves good; they would be valuable through eternity, and desirable even in heaven.

Suppose one worldling then, a votary of pleasure, were to indulge and increase in sensuality throughout endless ages; and with a constant progress to become more slothful, more lewd, and more intemperate, forever. Suppose another worldling to become more and more avaricious, and with unremitting eagerness to heap up riches through eternity; to raise the pile to the size of mountains; and convert at length worlds and systems into gold. Suppose a third were to increase his pride and ambition, throughout the same infinite duration; and to be daily more haughty, more envious towards rivals, more impatient of control, more dissatisfied with his own honours, offices, and fame; and after he has subdued and ruled one world, and wept until he had found and subdued another, finally to say in his heart, "I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High."

Would either of these persons in your view have found the road to real good? Could you covet the employment, the life, the character, the allotment? Yet, if these things have an inherent value, they will be valuable forever: and, the more of them we possess, the more respectable and the more happy should we be justly esteemed.

Future things, on the contrary, have far less value in our eyes than they really possess; especially eternal things. We think them distant, but they are near; we think them uncertain, but they are sure; we think them trifles unconnected with our hap-

piness; whereas they are things of infinite moment and of infinite concern to us.

This delusion not uncommonly travels with us through life; sometimes probably enters with us into the grave; and is scarcely shaken off, when we appear before the bar of God. Its influence is also universal, and extends to our thoughts, affections, and purposes alike, and to the objects with which they are conversant.

On a dying bed, however, it often vanishes: and if sickness and patience leave us in the possession of our reason, juster views prevail with respect both to things present and things future, things temporal and things spiritual. From such a bed a sinner may therefore be veiwed, as taking a new survey of all the objects of his aims and efforts, of his hopes and fears. Under the influence of this clear discernment in this new state of the mind, the following observations will shew with how much propriety he may take up this despairing lamentation.

Among the objects which may be supposed most naturally to arise to the view of a sinner on his dying bed, *his youth* would undoubtedly occupy a place of primary importance. In what colours will his various conduct during this period appear? He is now on the verge of eternity, and just bidding his last adieu to the present world and all its cares, and hopes, and pleasures. The earth and whatever it contains, are vanishing forever from his sight; and the places, which have long known him, will within a few hours know him no more.

Where are now his high hopes of sublunary good? Where his lively, brilliant spirits; his ardent thirst for sensual enjoyment, for gay amusements, for sportive companions, and for the haunts of festivity, mirth, and joy? These once engrossed all his thoughts, wishes, and labours. With a voice, sweeter and more deceitful than that of the fabled Sirens, they once sung to him: "Let us pluck the rose buds ere they wither;" and "Let us withhold not our heart from any joy." Where are they now? They have vanished with the gaiety of *the morning cloud*: they have fled with the glitter of the *early dew*. Of what madness will he

see himself to have been possessed, that he could be allured away from duty and salvation by bubbles, which, though adorned with the hues of enchantment, burst in a moment, and were gone forever!

In this precious, golden season GOD called to him from heaven, and proclaimed aloud; "I love them that love me; and those who seek me early shall find me. Receive my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than fine gold. For wisdom is better than rubies, and all things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. I will cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." His face was then clothed in smiles; and his voice was only tenderness and compassion. Christ also, with the benignity and sweetness of redeeming love, invited him to "come, and take the water of life freely;" proffered to him the eternal blessings of his atonement and intercession; pointed to him the wounds with which he was pierced for his sake, and the love with which, stronger than death, he had been broken on the cross, and poured out his blood, that he might live.

The Spirit of Grace, with the same boundless affection, whispered to him, "to turn from every evil way, and every unrighteous thought, to the Lord his GOD; who was ready to have mercy on him, and abundantly to pardon him." In the recesses of the soul he awaked the friendly monitions of conscience, the salutary fear of sin, the cheering hope of pardon and peace, and the glory of the promises found in the Gospel, containing and communicating everlasting life.

With what amazement will he now look back, and see that he refused these infinite blessings; that he turned his back on a forgiving GOD; closed his ears to the calls of a crucified Redeemer; and hardened his heart against the whispers of salvation, communicated by the Spirit of truth and life! How will he wonder that the dream of life could seem so long; and that he could, even in *one* instance, much more in a *thousand*, say to repentance, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee!" How will he be astonished,

that he refused to sow the seed of the Gospel in this precious season ; and thus rendered the field of his life an Arabian desert !

*Riper years* will naturally next offer themselves to his view. The bustle of this period seemed at the time to be of real importance ; and, although not devoted to virtue, yet to be occupied by business serious and solid. But, now, how suddenly will this specious garb drop ; and leave in all their nakedness his avarice, his ambition, and his graver sensuality ! Of what value now are the treasures which he struggled to heap up ; and the offices which he toiled and sighed to fill ; the honours, which he sacrificed truth and duty to acquire ; and the power, which he so ardently longed to enjoy ? In how vain a shadow did he walk ! On what mere wind, did he labour to satisfy the hunger of his soul ? How will his boasted reason appear to have been busied ; in what dreams of unreal good ; what bedlam schemes of splendour and pride ; what swinish devotion to appetite ; what infantine contentions about toys and gewgaws ; and what dreadful neglect of himself, and his eternal well-being ! Instead of being employed in discovering truth, and performing duty ; he will see it, throughout this most discreet period of life, labouring to flatter, to justify, to perpetrate iniquity ; to persuade himself that safety might be found in sin ; and that old age, or the last sickness, was the proper season for repentance and reformation. Blind to heaven, it had eyes only for this world. Deaf to the calls of salvation, it listened solely to those of pride. Insensible to the eternal love of God, it opened its feelings only to the solicitations of time and sense.

Behind manhood, we behold *age* next advancing ; age, to him the melancholy evening of a dark and distressing day. Here he stood upon the verge of the grave ; and advanced daily to see it open, and receive him. How will he now be amazed that, as death drew nigh, he was still in no degree aware of its approach : that, when his face was covered with wrinkles and his head with hoary hairs, when his body bent towards the ground and his limbs trembled over the grave ; he could still postpone the great work of salvation to a future day, and believe that repentance might

yet be safely begun at some distant time! How hard will that heart seem to him, which, when the King of terrors was knocking at his door, when the judgment was set for him, and the books were opened; when the vail of the invisible world was just rending in twain, and the voice of God was heard calling with a most awful sound, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee;" when *hell was enlarging her mouth to receive him*, and the doors of heaven were closing forever: he was still unwarned and unconcerned; a drowsy passenger, saying, "Yet a little more sleep, a little more slumber," while the vessel in which he was embarked was plunging into the abyss. In all these periods, with what emotion will he regard his innumerable sins! How many will he see to have been committed in a single day, a month, a year; of omission, of commission; of childhood, and of riper years! How will he shudder at his insensibility to his enormous guilt; at his union with other fools in making a mock at sin; at his blindness to its dreadful debasement, and most fearful reward! Sins now are seen by him to be the most dangerous and fatal of all enemies; mustered in battle array against his soul, at the most awful of all seasons; and when no ally, no friend, appears to aid him in the unequal conflict.

Among the sins which will most affectingly oppress his heart, his negligence, abuse, and prostitution, of the means of grace will especially overwhelm him. God, all along through the various parts of his life, put into his hands with unspeakable kindness his Word, his Sabbath, and the blessings of his sanctuary. He gave him line upon line, and precept upon precept; warnings of his Word and providence without number; and invitations to embrace the Redeemer, and yield himself to him as a free-will offering, which were new every morning and fresh every moment.

Nothing will now more astonish him, than that he could possibly lose, profane, and destroy in amusement, business, idleness or sleep, a single sabbath; that he could ever be absent from the sanctuary; that he could wander after covetousness and pleasure, during a single prayer; or neglect to hear and ponder a single



sermon ; that he was not engrossed by the voice of the Divine Charmer, charming him with infinite wisdom and tenderness to life eternal ; that he did not tremble at the word of the Lord, resounding in his ears the guilt, the danger, and final doom, of all the workers of iniquity, and proclaiming glad tidings of great joy unto every repenting and returning prodigal.

How naturally, how passionately will he now exclaim, “ Oh, that my lost and squandered days might once more return ; that I might again go up to the house of God ; that I might again in the invaluable season of Youth, before my sins had become a burden so heavy and so grievous to be borne, be present at the morning and evening sacrifice of prayer and praise ; and again hear the Divine voice calling me to faith and repentance in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the possession of endless glory ! Were a thousand worlds mine, how cheerfully would I give them all, for one day to be spent in the Courts of the Lord ! Oh that one year, one month, one sabbath, might be added to my wretched, forfeited life ! But ah ! the day of Grace is past : my wishes, nay my prayers, are in vain. In that long eternity which opens before me, no sabbath will ever dawn upon my wishful eyes ; no sanctuary will unfold the gates of peace and life ; no prayers will ever find a gracious ear ; no praises will ever ascend to heaven ; no sermon will ever call wandering and perishing sinners to repentance ; no proffers of endless life will ever be made ; the charming sound of a Saviour’s voice will never more be heard ; and the music of salvation will be dumb forever.”

Such will be the natural *retrospect* of a dying sinner. What will be his *prospects* ?

Before him, robed in all his terrors, stands Death, the messenger of God, now come to summon him away. To what, to whom is he summoned ? To that final Judgment, into which *every work* of his hands will be speedily brought, *with every secret thing* : to that Judge ; from whose sentence there is no appeal, from whose eye there is no concealment, from whose hand there is no escape. Through the last agonies lies his gloomy, dreadful passage into the unseen world : his path to the bar of God.

What a passage ! What an interview ! He, a hardened, rebellious, impious, ungrateful wretch ; who has wasted all the means of salvation, prostituted his talents, squandered his time, despised his Maker, “ crucified afresh the Lord of glory, and done despite unto the Spirit of Grace ;” now comes before that glorious and offended God, who knows all the sins which he has committed. He is here, without an excuse to plead, without a cloak to cover his guilt. What would he now give for an interest in that Atonement which he slighted, rejected, and ridiculed, in the present world ; in that Intercession, on which while here he never employed a thought ; and in that Salvation, for which perhaps he never uttered a prayer ! The smiles of redeeming, forgiving, and sanctifying love are now changed into the frowns of an angry, and irreconcilable Judge. The voice of mercy sounds no more ; and the hope of pardon has vanished on this side of the grave.

To the Judgment succeeds the boundless vast of *Eternity*. Live, he must : die, he cannot. But where, how, with whom, is he to live ? The world of darkness, sorrow, and despair, is his final habitation. Sin, endless and increasing sin, is his dreadful character ; and sinners like himself are his miserable and eternal companions. Alone in the midst of millions, surrounded by enemies only, without a friend, without a comfort, without a hope ; he lifts up his eyes, and in deep despair takes a melancholy survey of the immense regions around him, but finds nothing to alleviate his woe, nothing to support his drooping mind, nothing to lessen the pangs of a broken heart.

In a far distant region he sees a faint glimmering of that “ Sun of Righteousness,” which shall never more shine upon him. A feeble, dying sound of the praise, the everlasting songs of “ the general assembly and church of the first-born ” trembles on his ear ; and in an agonizing manner reminds him of the blessings in which he also might have shared, and which he voluntarily cast away. In dim, and distant vision those heavens are seen, where multitudes of his former friends and companions dwell ; friends and companions, who in this world loved God, believed in the Redeemer, and by a patient continuance in well-doing sought for

glory, honour, and immortality. Among them perhaps, his own fond parents ; who, with a thousand sighs, and prayers and tears, commended him, while they tabernacled here below, to the mercy of God and to the love of their own Divine Redeemer. His children also, and the wife of his bosom gone before him ; have perhaps fondly waited at the gates of glory in the ardent expectation, the cheering hope, of seeing him once so beloved, reunited to their number, and a partaker in their everlasting joy. But they have waited in vain.

The curtain now is drawn ; and the amazing vast is unbosomed to his view. Nature, long decayed, sinks under the united pressure of sickness, sorrow, and despair. His eyes grow dim ; his ears deaf ; his heart forgets to beat ; and his spirit, lingering, terrified, amazed, clings to life, and struggles to keep possession of its earthly tenement. But, hurried by an unseen Almighty hand, it is irresistibly launched into the unseen abyss. Alone and friendless, it ascends to God ; to see all its sins *set in order before its eyes*. With a gloomy and dreadful account of life spent only in sin, without a single act of piety, or voluntary kindness to men, with no faith in Christ, and no sorrow for iniquity ; it is cast out as wholly wicked and unprofitable, into the land of darkness and the shadow of death ; there to wind its melancholy journey through regions of sorrow and despair, ages without end ; and to take up forever the gloomy and distressing lamentation in the text, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended ; but I am not saved.”

## SERMON XXVIII.



CONSIDERATIONS ON THE CHARACTER OF NOAH.

II. PETER ii. 5.

—*But saved Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.*

IN this chapter St. Peter argues from the analogy of God's providence, that, as he punished sinners in the former ages, so, from the immutability of his character, it is to be believed, that he will punish sinners, also, under the dispensation of the Gospel. Among the instances of such punishment, selected by the Apostle for this purpose, one, the most affecting, which he could have chosen, is the destruction of the ungodly by the flood, mentioned in the text. In his account of this subject he remarks, in order to remind his readers of the love and faithfulness of God to the righteous, the preservation of *Noah* from the general ruin; and characterizes him by this honourable epithet; "a preacher of righteousness."

To understand the import of this character, we must recur to the age, and circumstances, of *Noah*. In his days, we are informed, "the earth was corrupt before God, and was filled with violence." From the account, given us in the sixth chapter of Genesis, it would seem, that the family of *Seth*, or more probably, the great body of the descendants of *Adam*, who had been professed worshippers of the true God, relaxing their religious principles, had, much more closely than before, united themselves to that part of their fellow men, who were openly irreligious. The distinction between the friends and the enemies of Religion had, for ages, been strenuously preserved. On this ground opposite

names are given to them by *Moses*; or perhaps more probably, the names were assumed by themselves, and retained by *Moses*. The class, which, by publicly adhering to the precepts of God, manifested in their character his image, were called *Children of God*: while the class, which, by their irreligion, appeared to be totally destitute of this image, and discovered strongly their likeness to apostate *Adam*, were called the *Children of Men*.

These two great divisions of the human race, it is indicated by the sacred historian, entered, some time before the deluge, into numerous and intimate connections by marriage. "The sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair; and they took them wives of all whom they chose." The offspring of this immoral and indefensible union became, as we learn, eminently licentious "and also," says the sacred historian, "after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men, which were of old, men of renown. And God saw, that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord, that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." From this forcible language it is clear, that the corruption was excessive, and wonderful. It is evident also, that it was extended throughout the world; not, probably, so as to reach every individual, beside the family of *Noah*, but so as generally to prevail wherever the earth was inhabited.

Whenever virtuous men condescend to the measures and principles of the wicked; or, in Scriptural language, whenever such men "are conformed to the world" Religion regularly decays; and wickedness gains the ascendant. A steady, firm, open adherence to undefiled religion, is a primary means of supporting the cause of God, and perpetuating virtue in mankind. All civility to sin, all conformity to loose customs, all compliances with the demands, all concessions to the persuasion, all submission to the authority, of mere worldliness; are direct sacrifices of righteousness and truth. It is of no consequence how decent, how apparently harmless, how agreeably conciliatory, this conduct may

be. He, who concedes in this manner, yields up the very object, which he may be really labouring to promote, and which, he may flatter himself, his measures are calculated to secure. In periods of declension virtue must, in a great measure, lay aside the sweetness and gentleness of her character. Her face, instinctively overspread with smiles, must assume austerity and sternness. It is no longer her business to allure, and charm; but to resist, contend, and overcome. Her followers must then "put on the whole armour of God;" must "blow the trumpet in Zion," rally around the divine standard, and conflict "earnestly for the faith, once delivered to the saints." The mildness of *Melancthon* will not here succeed: the strenuousness of *Luther* is indispensable.

If good men yield, nay, if they condescend, to the opinions, and customs, of bad men, of whatever nature they may be; much more if they form intimate connections, and alliances, with the licentious; they give up the cause, which they are summoned to defend. Thus it was in the case before us. From the concubinage here described, and the lewd dispositions which gave birth to it, sprang, according to the unchangeable law of nature, oppression, injustice, contention, irreligion, and the final abandonment of all duty, and all principle.

In consequence of this general prostration of moral good, God determined to destroy the race of men. Yet, according to his abundant long suffering, he allotted to them "one hundred and twenty years," as an opportunity for repentance and reformation. During this period, probably through the whole of it, and to this collection of human beings, *Noah* was "a preacher of righteousness." His situation, while performing the duties of his office to this evil generation of men, has often struck me with very great force; and appeared to furnish very valuable lessons of instruction.

To understand, and realize this subject, it will be necessary to consider, the circumstances, in which *Noah* was placed. He was alone in the midst of a world of opposers and enemies. All the weight of immense numbers; all the power of example; all the force of argument; all the efficacy of hatred; all the pun-

gency of scorn, derision, and obloquy; were, beyond any reasonable doubt, exerted against him. For support he could look to nothing but his family, his faith, and his GOD. He saw, that he must overcome the world, and every worldly feeling; or yield to destruction here, as the commencement of a more terrible destruction hereafter. Even his preservation was overcast with gloom and sorrow. The millions around him were hastening on to ruin. Among them, in all probability, were numbered many of his own beloved connections. The catastrophe was approaching with a sure and rapid, as well as dreadful, step. The guilty beings, who were exposed to this terrible evil, were perfectly at ease, and heedless of their danger. To these persons his predictions, warnings, and exhortations, were all addressed. On his part they were accompanied with yearning, anxiety, deep sorrow, and sore discouragement. On theirs, they were received with unbelief, gaiety, contempt, and ridicule. Such was the situation of the preacher; and such the character of his audience. Let us see what instruction we may derive from this subject.

1st. *It is evident, that the general Opinion cannot be pleaded with any force in matters of Religion.*

Here the universal opinion of a world was directly opposed both to the will, and the worship, of GOD. All plainly forgot their duty; disbelieved their GOD; and despised his religion. But the opposition was not the less false, or foolish, because it was universal. Truth does not cease to be truth, because it is uttered, nor duty lose its importance, because it is practised, only by one man. Nor is falsehood less erroneous, or mischievous, nor irreligion less guilty, because they are adopted by a world. At the same time, the opposition was not, on this account, at all the less ruinous. None gained any thing by the general countenance. Every one lost and suffered as entirely, as if he had embarked singly in this opposition.

*Noah*, in the mean time, was alone. Yet he was right, both in his opinions and his practice. He held the truth, though he held it against a world. He performed his duty, although he opposed the whole family of *Adam*. He set his face against all the

wise and learned, the ingenious and eloquent, among mankind. He moved onward against the stream of authority, wealth, power, and grandeur. Still he was a wise and good man; and all who opposed him, were fools and sinners.

2dly. *The contempt and ridicule, exerted against Religion, neither prove its falsehood, nor lessen its value.*

Noah, we are abundantly warranted to believe, was an object of contempt to most of his contemporaries. It is at all times difficult, when we are despised, to escape ridicule. *Here* it was impossible. Every one felt himself secure; and regarded the alarm sounded by the preacher, as the outcry of enthusiasm, folly, or frenzy. The "scoffers, who walked after their own lusts" at that period, exclaimed, not only with more insolence and contempt, but with better reason, and greater success, than those of modern times: "Where is the promise of his coming? for, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the Creation." The philosophers of those days undoubtedly questioned with as much good will, and more ability, than those among the antient heathen, or the Infidels of our own times; the providence, the perfections, and even the existence, of God. The same "evil heart of unbelief" has exactly the same tendencies, and produces exactly the same effects, in all ages, and circumstances. But the mind of man was not improbably possessed, antecedently to the deluge, of a superiour native capacity, and peculiar strength. The body, which it inhabited, was certainly composed of nobler materials, and constructed on a higher scale; was nourished by purer aliment, and inhaled a more healthful atmosphere. Its vigour was such, as enabled it to endure through a thousand years; and its faculties were, in all probability, suited to its extended duration. Unlike the frail, perishing tenements, in which our minds dwell, it passed through a childhood, youth, and manhood, of eight hundred years: and throughout this period at least, was full of energy, and fitted for exertion. With the superiour vigour, and comparative perfection, of such a body, so fitted to aid an active mind in all its investigations, men sharpened their reasoning powers



by exercising them throughout this long period. It may well be believed, therefore, that they discovered many objections against a Revelation from God, and against his being, character, and works, which modern Infidels have not yet explored; and handled the weapons of unbelief with a skill and acuteness, to which they are strangers. In the mean time, we may safely conclude, that the false philosophy now in vogue, was then far better understood, and far more successfully employed in their hostilities against Religion. Almost every argument of this nature, urged by our own contemporaries, had *then* a foundation, and a force, incomparably superiour to what it can now claim. The date, assigned to the Creation by *Moses*, now denied, because the world must be supposed to have existed more than *six thousand years*, could then with a far better face be pronounced false; because it could much less reasonably be supposed to have existed only *two thousand years*. Life, now considered as sufficiently desirable to become the only object of rational attention, was then ten times more valuable, and proportionally more deserving of regard. Passion and appetite, now declared to be the only sources of real good, were then influenced by a keener excitement; sustained by stronger powers; and indulged through an immensely greater period. To be a mere animal, now so coveted, was then beyond measure more deserving of the attachment of mankind. The aphorism of vice was not then, "Let us eat, and drink; for to-morrow we die:" but, "Let us eat, and drink; for we shall live forever." Easily, and finally, could men of this character prove to their own satisfaction, that the world had existed from eternity; that the plastic powers of nature were amply sufficient to account for the existence of all the beings which it contains, without the interference of an Intelligent first cause; that, if there was such a cause, he had given men their natural passions and appetites, and provided means for their gratification. As an irresistible consequence, therefore, it was both lawful and wise to indulge them; for this was, plainly, the proper end of our being. As all that is termed sin, is only the indulgence of some passion, or some appetite; and as it was thus

shewn, in every case, to be lawful ; they may be easily believed to have determined, with *Hobbs*, that it is lawful to get whatever we can with impunity ; that nothing is right, but what the Magistrate enjoins, and nothing wrong, but what he forbids ; that there is no distinction between right and wrong, and no foundation in nature for either : with *Bolingbroke*, that the law of nature forbids no lewdness, unless incest in its high degrees : with *Hume*, that eloquence, gracefulness, health, cleanliness, taper legs, and broad shoulders, are virtues ; that a miracle cannot exist, and that, therefore, there can be no Revelation : with *Voltaire*, either that there is no God, or, if there is one, that he is a limited being : and, with *Godwin*, that promiscuous concubinage was lawful ; marriage an unjustifiable monopoly ; and immortal life in this world, the only thing necessary to complete the perfection of man, easily attainable by the proper use of natural and moral medicines.

To all these conclusions they were led, with peculiar confidence, by the ease, with which subsistence was acquired, and the vigorous constitution, which still remained in other things as well as in man. The curse appears not to have found its completion, until after the deluge. A part of the paradisiacal state seems to have continued in the world, until this great catastrophe. The frame of man was fitted to endure. The air, which he breathed, and the food, by which he was sustained, were still endued with powers, so favourable to longevity, that decay and death stood aloof, and were hardly realized. The earth, also, retained, still, so much of the fertility of Eden, as to produce, spontaneously, not a small part of the subsistence of its inhabitants. Hence industry was almost unnecessary : and life might, without the fear of want, be chiefly devoted to sloth, and sensuality. The means of pleasure were more easy, and more abundant ; the relish for it was more acute, and the enjoyment was less interrupted, and protracted through an incomparably greater extent. Hence every sensual habit became more intense, more operative, and more absolutely immoveable. The sources of licentious sophistry were, therefore, more abundant ; and the ar-

guments, derived from them, replenished with superiour strength. They were also received by such minds with a keener relish ; as being peculiarly important to them, and in a sense indispensable. The conclusions, which were adopted, must have been admitted, therefore, without a doubt, and with hardly a solitary exception.

At the same time, the considerations, which now have a primary influence in restraining men from sin, and are triumphantly insisted on in the desk, as the chief dissuasives from licentiousness and stupidity, were then prevented of almost all their force. It was in vain for the preacher of righteousness to urge the vanity of earthly enjoyments before men, who knew that their enjoyments were not vain ; but sure, abundant, and delightful. It was in vain to insist on the danger and distress of sickness, before men, who were never sick. The pangs of a dying bed were recited to no purpose, where death was seen only at the end of many centuries. Eternity could scarcely be awful to those, who either denied its existence, or saw it in dim and misty vision, beyond a long succession of future ages. If we suppose a judgment to have been believed ; what influence could it have had on minds, who saw a kind of immortality spread between them and their final trial ?

The solitary individual, therefore, who, in these circumstances, and before these men, attacked lust, denounced sensuality, and doomed sin to a dreadful retribution, was hated much, and despised more. The finger of scorn pointed out to universal derision the vain, senseless Enthusiast, who dared to resist all the wise and great. The hiss of obloquy pursued the dreaming Itinerant, who singly advanced his own opinions, against those of the whole race of men. Wherever he went, he was surrounded by enemies : wherever he preached, he was heard with sneers. To every audience his language must have been, " Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish : for I work a work among you, which none will believe, though a man declare it unto you."

Religion *then*, was almost absolutely what Infidels have triumphantly said it will be, in the course of another age, exterminated from the world. Still, it was true ; still, it was from God.

3dly. *Example, although it is that of numbers ever so great, or of individuals ever so able, splendid, or powerful; is no proof of rectitude.*

Here all mankind walked in one *broad, and crooked road*. "The earth was corrupt before GOD, and was filled with violence. And GOD looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt: for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually." "And GOD said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them: and, behold, I will destroy them, with the earth."

Still "the way" was "broad, and crooked;" although "many there were, who went in thereat." It was "the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." Thither it led; there they all entered; there they all perished.

Whatever *others* do, their example will furnish no justification, and no safety, to *us* in following them. That, which they do, is not the less guilty, nor the less dangerous, because they do it; nor because of their numbers, their talents, their stations, or their fame. Had *Noah* followed this world of sinners, would he have been innocent? Would he have been safe? Would he have been more innocent, or more safe, because the sinners, whom he followed, were immensely numerous? Would he ever have entered the ark? Would he have passed securely over the waves of destruction?

4thly. *Religion is not less true, less excellent, nor less secure of the favour of GOD, because the number of its votaries is small.*

Never was that number so small, since the earth first became extensively inhabited. Yet *Noah* and his family were distinguished by peculiar proofs of the favour of GOD. They were selected out of a world of sinners; and secured in the ark from the universal ruin. The earth, recovered from destruction, was given to them, with an absolute dominion over all which it contained. Their sacrifice was graciously accepted. The Lord smelled a sweet savour in the offering; established his covenant

with them ; in which he was pleased to declare, that “the waters of Noah should no more return to cover the earth.” To confirm this covenant he “set his bow in the cloud ;” and promised that he would look upon it, “and remember the everlasting covenant between GOD, and every living creature.” To these and many other proofs of the divine favour he finally added the blessings of immortality : and the faith, approved on earth by these glorious testimonies, was rewarded beyond the grave with enjoyments, endless and inexpressible.

5thly. *Sinners can derive no hope of Safety from their numbers.*

Perhaps no consideration more strongly contributes to persuade sinners, that they are safe, than that of their multitude. So far as I have been able to observe, they feel usually assured, that GOD will not destroy such a numerous train of intelligent beings, as are included under this name. This argument was undoubtedly pleaded, before the deluge, as a complete refutation of the warnings, and predictions, of *Noah*. It is easily realized, that it was advanced with triumph, and considered as decisive. We can almost hear them say, and say with both the smile, and the sneer of victory, “Can it be imagined, that GOD made so many of his creatures, merely to destroy them.” Never could this suggestion be made with equal force ; for the destruction threatened was almost absolutely universal. Still it was a mere suggestion ; and those, who made it, were all in fact destroyed. They were not indeed created, nor any other beings, for destruction, as the proper end of their existence ; as is here falsely insinuated ; but beings were here created, who were afterwards actually destroyed for their rebellion and impenitence, notwithstanding this argument. What was true of these men will be true of all other impenitent sinners. Every person of this character, who enters the future world in a state of impenitence, is undone. “Without holiness” no man ever did, “no man ever will, see the Lord.”

6thly. *The genuine Faith of the Gospel will resist, finally and effectually, all opposition.*

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark, to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness, which is by faith.” The faith of *Noah* was the faith of the Gospel: the “faith,” which “worketh by love;” the faith, “which purifieth the heart;” the faith, “which overcometh the world.” Throughout his life, and particularly for one hundred and twenty years, he resisted the opinions, the practices, the influence, and the authority, of a world; of a race of men more abandoned, more opposed to Religion, to good men, and to God, than any other generation, which has lived. But neither their numbers, their learning, their power, nor their hostility, could shake his purpose, slacken his labours, or change his character. So far as we are able to conjecture, there was never more done to excite unbelief, or subvert faith, in any human bosom. Never were circumstances, either for their duration or their efficacy, more fitted to break down so frail a being as man, than those of *Noah*. This eminent preacher of righteousness had all the human feelings. There is not a reason to believe, that he loved singularity any better than we; that he was more willing to oppose his fellow creatures; more pleased with hatred and persecution; or less sensible to the stings of contempt and derision. But he looked beyond these; and saw the glory of his Maker, his duty to his fellow-men, and the salvation of his own soul, demanding of him unalterable resistance to this host of temptations. To the eye of such beings, as those, whom he was compelled to address, how ridiculous must appear his prediction, and much more his belief, of an approaching deluge: an event absolutely unheard of before; so contrary to all the acknowledged laws of nature; for which the world itself did not contain a sufficient quantity of water; for which then, certainly, there was no visible preparation; which every philosopher of the day pronounced to be impossible; and the arrival of which the Prophet himself thought proper to postpone for one hundred and twenty years. Why, if it should come at all, did it not come sooner. It was true *Noah* professed, that he had received a

Revelation concerning this event from GOD ; but who could rationally believe that GOD would reveal his designs to him, rather than to ten thousand other persons, in every point of view as worthy and respectable, and in many much more so, than he was? Could it be supposed, that the Creator felt such a partiality towards *him*, above all the people on the earth ; above men far greater, wiser, and more respected, than he? Could he be weak enough to imagine, that all the millions of the human race, beside himself and his family, were to be destroyed ; and that *they* were to be snatched from the destruction? Surely none but the most pitiable bigot, the most hoodwinked enthusiast, the most contemptible fanatic, could give credit to such a tale.

When he began to build the ark, and thus proved himself in earnest, the news undoubtedly flew among his neighbours with rapidity. A work so extraordinary, begun for so singular a purpose, must unquestionably have excited their curiosity, their wonder, and their contempt, in the highest degree. As he began it fifty years before the predicted period of the deluge, it undoubtedly seemed a ridiculous anticipation even of his own prophecy. As it demanded the expense of a princely fortune ; as it required labour, care, and trouble, never before heard of in the world ; and as all things went on during the whole time just as quietly, as they had always done, it can scarcely be doubted that he was the song, the jest, the by word, and the hissing, of all, who beheld him busied in this employment.

But the faith of *Noah* met, endured, and triumphed over, all these evils. Such always in kind, and sometimes in degree, is the faith of a Christian.

7thly. *The preacher, and the professor, of Religion must preach, and live, amidst wicked men as if he were in the midst of Christians.*

The preacher must declare the truth, whether his hearers believe or disbelieve. The professor must perform his duty, whether others follow or oppose him. Thus *Noah* preached and lived. Perhaps no herald of truth was ever so unsuccessful, so universally disbelieved, so much the object of scorn and derision. Probably

no saint was ever so destitute of companions and supporters. What audiences must he have uniformly found? By what neighbours was he surrounded? What workmen must he have employed? What unbelief, what hostility, what contempt, what mockery, must he have encountered? How must he have been wearied of all this opposition and abuse, protracted through one hundred and twenty years? Yet he "set his face as a flint" against this host of difficulties, and this world of opposers. No enemy terrified him, no difficulty discouraged him. In the path of duty, the straight and narrow way that leads to life, he moved onward with immovable firmness, and unclouded serenity. GOD beheld his course, and smiled upon his faith and fortitude; sustained him in every trial; and in every conflict enabled him to overcome.

*Noah* preached the revealed will of GOD, and delivered his Master's message faithfully. The most painful truths he hesitated not to declare: the most terrible threatenings he denounced in all their awful import. The wicked, numerous and formidable as they were, he resolutely warned of the "error of their way;" and although they did not "turn, and live," yet "he delivered his own soul." Such will be the preaching of every faithful minister of Christ. Like *Noah*, he will boldly declare "the truth, as it is in Jesus;" and declare it in its purity and simplicity, "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." All Christians, also, will live in some good measure, as *Noah* lived. Their faith is the same with his: their fortitude will resemble his. All of them will not, indeed, be equally firm and faithful; equally secure at all times from the influence of temptation, and the danger of backsliding. Still they will "endure unto the end;" and under the influence of the Spirit, by whom they are sanctified, and sustained, and with a consciousness, that "the afflictions of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed hereafter," will fix their eyes upon GOD, the promises of the Gospel, and the blessings of immortality; and while they "wait upon the Lord, will renew their strength; will mount up with wings, as eagles; will run, and not be weary: will walk, and not faint."



3thly. *Every Christian, however long, or severely, tried in the present world, is here taught, that his interests are safe in the hands of God.*

The trials of *Noah* were longer, and more discouraging, than those of any Christian. The support, the consolation, which was furnished to him by the objects of time and sense, by his friends, or by mankind, was comparatively nothing. *All these things were against him.* Even his own preservation was in many respects forlorn and comfortless. To anticipate the ravages of an universal deluge was a most melancholy employment. To behold the ruins of a world; to be an eye-witness of the destruction of all the race of *Adam*; to ponder the perdition, to which they were consigned in a future state of being; must have embittered deliverance itself, and spread gloom over his own merciful preservation. Still *Noah* himself was safe, and his family were safe; and all these distressing things were made to “work together for their good.”

There are seasons, in which even good men will despond. All the *waves* of sorrow will seem to *go over* their heads, and the anchor of hope appear to lose its hold. Health will at times be impaired; the spirits will decay; friends will become cold, or die; the means of support will recede, or vanish; the world will become peculiarly hostile; Religion will decline; its professors will be comparatively few and lifeless; “the ways of Zion will mourn;” the house of God will “sit solitary;” and its glorious inhabitant will appear to have withdrawn his presence and his mercy. In the mean time, the passions and appetites of the Christian himself will regain their control; the world will recover its ascendancy; his energy will sicken; and his piety will sleep. Yet even then “the bruised reed” will not be broken, nor “the smoking flax” extinguished. “Fear not, thou worm Jacob, saith Jehovah that created thee; fear not; for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by my name: thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the

flame kindle upon thee." "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me," saith the Saviour of men, "because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; to appoint unto them, who mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called Trees of righteousness; The planting of the LORD; that he may be glorified." No child of God is so hidden from the eye, so imperfect in his character, or of so little value in *his* sight, as to prevent him from being known, protected, sustained, and conducted finally to heaven. It is not improbable, that amidst all his sufferings dangers and discouragements, amid the enemies, by whom he was surrounded, and the hostilities, which he was daily called to encounter, the eminent Saint, whose character we have been investigating, was often ready to despond, and to feel that his burden was greater than he could bear. Yet he was safe: and the ruin, which overwhelmed a world, was unable to reach him. His case is that of every good man. Not one of those, who wear this name evangelically, will ever be forgotten. To all such men "the foundation of God standeth sure, and has this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." As his, they will be conveyed safely through life: as his, they will be supported in death: as his, they will be remembered in "the resurrection of the just." "In his wrath he may smite them for a small moment; but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy on them." *Amen.*

## SERMON XXIX.



DUTY OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL.

GALATIANS i. 8, 9.

*But though we, or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*

*As we said before, so say I now again : If any man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*

IN these words, we have St. Paul's estimate of the Nature, and Importance, of the Gospel, as preached by himself. Every reader of the Scriptures must have remarked the peculiar force of the phraseology, in which it is conveyed. "Even if we, or any man, or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel, than that which we have preached unto you ; let him be anathema." Let him be separated from the church on earth ; let him finally be separated from the church in heaven. A crime, on which so dreadful a sentence is pronounced, must certainly be enormous. On what is this enormity founded ? On the nature of the Gospel, preached by St. Paul ; the authority, with which it was communicated to mankind ; and its comparative excellence, when examined with relation to any other Gospel. But if these considerations lay the foundation for the enormity of this crime, the Gospel, preached by St. Paul, must undoubtedly be possessed of singular and superlative excellence. Our time cannot be unprofitably employed in the serious consideration of a subject, so interesting to us and our fellow men.

The supreme importance of the Gospel, by which I intend the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, may be exhibited under the following heads.

I. *It is an account of the Designs, and the Works, of God.*

By these I intend those designs, and works, which are of peculiar importance in the divine system, and by which the divine character is especially manifested. Such are the Creation of the Universe; the Law, by which it is governed; the great Dispensations of Providence towards the race of Adam; the Establishment, and Preservation, of the Church; the Mediation of the Son of God; the Agency of the Holy Ghost in renewing the soul of man; the General Conversion of mankind to Christianity; the Resurrection; the Conflagration; the General Judgment; and the Final Retribution. These, it is presumed, will be readily acknowledged to be in the number of those designs, and works, by which the character of the Ruler of the universe is especially displayed to intelligent creatures; and in which what he is pleased to term *his Glory* is peculiarly exhibited. The importance of these *Works* will be readily acknowledged. The importance of the *Gospel*, considered as a Record of them, is visible in the following facts: that it is a true record, and therefore exhibits them as they are; that it is a record, dictated by infinite wisdom, and therefore exhibits them in the wisest and best manner; and that, as such a record, it possesses the power of spreading, and actually spreads, the knowledge of them through periods and places, remote from those in which they exist.

Some of these things took place, either before, or during, the several ages, in which the Gospel was written. These it presents to us in *historical narratives*. The remaining part was, at the termination of the sacred canon, and to a great extent is still, future. The several things, included in this division of scriptural subjects, it presents to us in the language of *Prophecy*.

If the Gospel had not been written; all these wonderful, and most interesting, things would have been concealed from the knowledge of almost all the human race, during their continuance in the present world. Of the Creation they would have literally

known nothing ; but, as in the past ages of heathenism, would, at the present time, have been employed in amusing themselves with dreaming conjectures about this wonderful event ; or in questioning, with Aristotle, its *possibility* ; or in determining, with *Epicurus*, that the universe was formed by a casual concourse of atoms. Of the Deluge, Noah and his family would have had the only knowledge, possessed by man : while the great body of their descendants would have been left, for all their acquaintance with it, to doubtful, vibrating tradition. To the same dubious instruction must they have been indebted for their apprehensions concerning the Establishment of the Church, and concerning all the successive dispensations, by which it was preserved, distressed, or prospered, down to the days of the apostles. Of the Redeemer we should have heard, if we had heard at all, in some such manner, as we have heard of Pythagoras, Zoroaster, or Confucius ; and regarded him as being, like them severally, the author of one collection of reveries in the region of conjectural philosophy. Of future events we should have had no ideas beyond the roving of poetical imagination.

But the Gospel brings all these astonishing subjects to the knowledge of distant lands, and ages ; and, interesting and amazing as the works and designs are in themselves, gives most of them their real consequence to the great body of mankind. By its aid we travel back, through sixty centuries, to the period when the world began ; and become eye and ear witnesses of the wonderful work of Creation. We behold the Maker of all things descending from the highest heaven, surrounded with infinite glory ; and hear his voice calling into being the formless chaos ; the light with which it was first illumined, and the firmament by which it was overspread, as by an immeasurable curtain. The dry land, and the ocean, are at the same call separated before us : the earth is instantaneously clothed with the verdure, and beauty, of the spring : and both are peopled with millions of animated beings, fitted to enjoy that bounty, which supplies “ the wants of every living thing.” We behold, also, the sun lighted up ; the moon commencing her wandering course ; and myriads of stars

kindling their flames in the heavens. With no less astonishment, we see man rising under the forming hand of the Creator ; and shewing by his aspect, that he is animated with the breath of life, and “inspired by the Almighty with understanding.” Last of all, we hear the voice of infinite wisdom pronouncing the vast work to be “very good ;” and listen to “the songs of the morning stars, and to the sons of God shouting for joy,” while celebrating that glorious sabbath, which concluded the divine work, and became the first type of the everlasting sabbath in the heavens.

In the same manner do we become witnesses of the destruction of this sinful world by the Deluge ; the terrible devastation of the cities of the plain by a tempest of fire and brimstone ; and the overthrow of Egypt by signs and wonders, successively advancing at the call of Moses. We accompany the Israelites in their march through the Red Sea ; station ourselves at the foot of Sinai ; behold the mountain compassed with a flame of devouring fire ; and tremble, with the people in the camp, while, amid the thunders and lightnings, God promulges with his own voice the Law, which controls all the concerns of the great family of Adam.

With the same guide, we enter the stable, in which the Son of God was born ; and see him, “who is head over all things unto the Church,” wrapped in swaddling clothes, and cradled in a manger. Surrounded by the shepherds of Bethlehem, we behold “a light from heaven shining suddenly round about them ;” and hear a voice from that happy world, proclaiming, “Fear not. Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people ! For unto you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ, the Lord !” We listen to “a multitude of the Heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest ; and on earth peace : good will towards men.” We accompany this Divine Person through his private life, and public ministry ; are witnesses of his baptism and miracles, his glorious wisdom and unspotted holiness ; behold in silent amazement his agony in the garden ; surround him, while he ascends

the cross ; and follow him to the tomb. “ But it is not possible, that he should be holden of death.” An angel descends, “ and rolls away the stone from the sepulchre.” He rises triumphant, from the grave ; ascends through the visible heavens, and finally vanishes from our sight.

On the wings of Prophecy, we adventure, in the same realizing manner, into the immeasurable regions of futurity ; and there listen to the sound of the last trumpet, and the voice of the archangel, summoning the dead to life. The graves open : the earth, and the ocean, return the innumerable myriads, slumbering in their recesses : the Redeemer descends : and the universe of angels and of men is doomed to its final retribution. The last flames are kindled by the breath of the Almighty : we behold “ the earth and the visible heavens flee away ; and no place is found for them any more.” With a trembling eye we cast a glance towards the melancholy regions of darkness and sorrow, destined to receive and embosom the impenitent workers of iniquity : and rise with ecstasy, to see the “ everlasting gates” of life and immortality “ lift up their heads, that the King of glory may enter in,” together with a “ multitude” of his happy followers, “ which no man can number, of all nations, kindreds, and tongues.” We behold them surround the throne of the majesty in the heavens ; and hear them unite their harps and voices in the eternal song ; “ Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto our God, who sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, forever, and ever. Amen.”

Thus the Gospel brings the earth with all its mighty dispensations, hell with its amazing terrors, and heaven with its endless glories, before our eyes. Thus it presents God to us in all the awful, and all the endearing, displays of his character. It is the history of the actions of JEHOVAH. Without it, these actions would in a sense be nothing to us. Too distant to be realized, too obscure to be discerned with clearness or certainty ; they would be unheeded and unknown. This divine book spreads the knowledge of JEHOVAH through the world. It is the temple, in which He delights to dwell ; the mercy-seat, from which He gives

oracles of peace to enquiring mankind. The race of Adam are the congregation, gathered before it, to ask counsel of GOD: and the answers are given, not to a single, solitary tribe, but to the universe of man.

II. *The Gospel contains the will of God concerning our duty and salvation.*

Here, and here alone, we find the immutable and eternal Law, by which intelligent beings are governed. It is comprised in these two great commands: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thine understanding: and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." These wonderful precepts bear on their very face the stamp of divinity. They are so short and so plain, as to be easily understood, remembered, and applied to his own circumstances, by every intelligent creature; and so comprehensive, as to include within their grasp all rational beings, and all the endless variety of their thoughts, words, and actions, and to control alike the child and the seraph. Every duty is required by them: every sin is forbidden.

This holy and perfect Law we violated; and thus apostatized from our duty to GOD, and lost every hope of his favour. To man in this situation the Gospel publishes the will of GOD concerning our Restoration to that favour; prescribing the duties to be performed, and the means to be employed, for this all important purpose. This will, in both cases, is alike the will of JEHOVAH; invested with infinite authority, and excluding all interference on the part of men or angels. Every addition to it, every variation from it, "is strange fire, which the Lord hath not commanded." The authors of it are the progeny of Nadab and Abihu: and neither their sacrifice, when burnt with this fire, nor their persons, when employed in kindling it, can be accepted of GOD.

III. *The Gospel proposes as its great object the most valuable of all Ends to man; the salvation of the soul.*

The soul of man is an Intelligent and Moral Existence, made capable of knowing, loving, and serving his Creator. In its own



nature it is immortal. It will, therefore, survive the ruins of the world, and the ravages of time; and will flourish with indestructible vigour, when "the heavens shall be no more." In this world both its enjoyments and sufferings are mingled, and partial. Beyond the grave, it will be only miserable, or only happy; and both the happiness and misery will continue forever.

But its happiness will not be merely eternal. As its knowledge increases, its virtue will become more exalted, and its enjoyment more intense, throughout the boundless ages of its existence. There is no limit, which it will not ultimately reach: there is no finite elevation, to which it will not ultimately ascend. Think, to what a mass of guilt, and woe, endless sin and endless misery will amount. Think what an accumulation of happiness, what splendour of virtue, will adorn the ever-growing progress of a sanctified mind. How plainly will the former exceed all that has been suffered by this sinning world? How soon will the latter leave out of sight the whole assemblage of virtues, the whole combined enjoyment found beneath the sun. From these premises it is irresistibly concluded, that the worth of the soul is literally boundless. Accordingly, He, "who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, who of old laid the foundations of the earth, and garnished the heavens," yet to save the soul "from going down to the pit," voluntarily "emptied himself" of his external glory; "took upon him the form of a servant; and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death; even the death of the cross." The end of his divine mission, he has declared, was to "seek and save, that which was lost." Nay, he has expressly taught us, that "there is joy in heaven over the repentance" and recovery of one lost soul, "more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance."

For the same divine purpose, the Spirit of Grace has descended to this world, to renew and sanctify the soul of man, and thus complete its title to endless life. In this manner, the Father of all mercies, who "gave his Son to die," that we might live, and sent his Spirit, to renew us, that we might become ob-

jects of his complacency, and heirs of his eternal kingdom ; has set his seal upon the worth of the soul ; and declared it to possess a value, which no numbers can estimate.

But all the worth of the soul is involved in its salvation. In this is the Father pre-eminently glorified. In this is the object of the mediation of Christ, and of the mission of the Divine Spirit, illustriously accomplished. When, therefore the Gospel makes the salvation of man its end ; it exhibits itself as of inestimable worth, and incomprehensible excellence ; as a favourite work of Wisdom and goodness, literally divine.

IV. *The Gospel is the Means of accomplishing this end.*

Of this the proof is complete. Wherever the Gospel has been published, and embraced, religion has existed, and prospered. Wherever the Gospel has been unknown, religion has also been unknown. The Gospel is the rain and sun-shine of heaven upon the moral world. Wherever its beams are shed, and its showers fall, “the wilderness blossoms as the rose ; and the desert as the garden of GOD :” while the world beside is an Arabian waste, where no fountains flow, and no verdure springs ; and where life itself fades, languishes, and expires. The Gospel is *all these means*. “His divine power,” saith St. Peter, “has freely given us all things, which pertain,” or are necessary, “to life and godliness.” The work is complete. It is such a work, as God himself thought best adapted to the accomplishment of the glorious end. Accordingly, man, though busily employed for this purpose, has not, throughout the long period, which has succeeded the publication of the Gospel, been able to add any thing either to its doctrines, or its precepts. It may be asserted, without hesitation, or hazard, that no doctrine, nor precept, of human philosophy has ever been subsidiary to this purpose, or contributed in a single instance, or in the least degree, to the salvation of man. The philosophy of the ancient heathen was totally destitute even of the semblance of piety ; the first and great ingredient of virtue, and the basis of all other virtue. It was, therefore, radically lame, and fatally defective. Accordingly, in the opinion of Cicero himself, the best judge of this subject, perhaps,

whom the world has ever seen, it never reformed either the philosophers themselves, or their pupils: not, as this great man observes, in a single instance. Infidel philosophy has been still more deficient and profligate. All that has been better in it has been borrowed from the Bible. All that has been worse has flowed from the hearts of its authors. It ought to be added, that neither of these classes has laboured, at all, to promote the reformation of mankind: a work hitherto confined wholly to Christ, the prophets, the apostles, and their followers.

From these observations it is evident, that the Gospel is inestimably important and valuable. It is "the wisdom of GOD, and the power of GOD, unto salvation." It is a divine record of the Character, and Works, of the Infinite Mind; of those works, in which that Character is pre-eminently displayed. It is the Will of GOD, and his *whole* Will, concerning the Duty, and Restoration, of mankind. The End, which it proposes, and accomplishes, is divine: and the Means, which it furnishes for the accomplishment of this end, are, on the one hand, the best and most efficacious, and, on the other, supremely honourable in their nature to the wisdom of their Author. His instructions and precepts are in themselves infinitely excellent. To us, as the means of holiness, and as guides to endless life, they are possessed of infinite value.

If these observations convey to this audience the same evidence concerning this subject, which they claim in my own mind; it will be impossible for them not to feel, in a very forcible manner, the declaration, made by St. Paul in the text. It will be impossible for you, my brethren, not to feel, that the Gospel is hallowed ground; and not to ask, "What man, what angel, shall dare to intrude upon it, unbidden, unallowed, of his Maker? Whoever enters the desk, for the solemn purpose of exploring this sacred field; you will instinctively say to him, "Take thy shoe from off thy foot: for the place, whereon thou standest, is holy." The Gospel is the temple of GOD; into the courts of which neither Jew, nor Gentile, can enter without the permission of Him, who has consecrated it to his own honour and worship! It is "the

Holy of Holies ;” the peculiar residence of JEHOVAH himself! What man, what angel, shall venture into this awful recess, and place himself on the mercy-seat by the side of his Maker? Who, with a still more desperate madness, if madness can be more desperate, shall thrust himself, in JEHOVAH’S stead, into the bosom of the Shechinah; and thence utter, as the oracles of this glorious Being, the presumptuous dictates of his own reason, and the wretched dreams of his own imagination?

Suppose an Angel engaged in this impious employment; and, shorn of all his piety, glory and beauty, already commencing the unnatural, the monstrous, task of modelling anew the Word of GOD. Of what nature, we ask, are his instructions to be? Shall he change the Divine Law? Shall he declare to mankind, that they shall not, henceforth, “love the Lord, their GOD, with all their heart; nor their neighbour as themselves:” and thus institute a new rule of righteousness, for the government of the moral universe? Shall he compound a new kind of virtue, unknown, or uncommanded, of his GOD? Will he bind the Creator to approve, and reward, it? Shall he adventure still farther; and change, and lessen, the Penalty of this Law; and repeal the curse, which it denounces against transgressors? Shall he proclaim to fallen man new terms of Restoration to the divine favour? Shall he say, that “there is some other Name under Heaven, given among men, whereby they must be saved?” Shall he say, that “GOD hath not set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood;” that we are not “justified freely by grace, through the redemption that is in him;” that “a man” need not “be born again,” in order to “enter into the kingdom of GOD;” that “by works of righteousness, which we have done, he saved us;” and not “according to his mercy,” nor “by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost?” Shall he declare, that “he, who hath begun a good work in us, will not perform it unto the day of Christ?”

To what end would he declare these things? And what would be the consequences of his declarations? Would GOD regard them? Would he hate sin less? Would he punish sin-

ners with less severity? Would he accept them on easier terms? He has declared, that "heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than one jot, or one tittle, of the law," by which sinners are tried, and condemned, "shall pass, until all be fulfilled." Would He annul, would he change, the whole, or a jot, or a tittle, of it, at the bidding of a creature?

Should *we* be profited? Would our sins be more easily washed away? Would our souls be forgiven, justified, and sanctified, on easier terms? Would our escape from hell be rendered more hopeful? Would the doors of heaven more readily open, to admit unbelieving and impenitent sinners? In what respect would the new Law render our condition better; our hopes brighter; or our future being more desirable?

Would not the Creator, would not the whole virtuous universe, exclaim with a single voice; "Who art thou, that repliest against GOD? Hast thou an arm like GOD; or canst thou thunder with a voice like Him? Wilt thou also disannul his judgment? Wilt thou condemn him, that thou mayest be righteous? Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct Him? He that reproveth GOD, let him answer it." Would they not ask with indignation, "Canst thou by searching find out GOD? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven, what canst thou do; deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

If an angel could not change the Gospel in these mighty particulars; could he, with more success, alter it in others? *The Record, which it contains of the Divine conduct, is now true.* Shall an Angel be employed in falsifying it? Those actions of the Creator are now recorded, which Infinite Wisdom thought proper to select. Shall an Angel erase them; and substitute others in their stead?

Or shall he with a daring hand efface *the Prophecies*, contained in this sacred volume? There was a period, in which an Angel exclaimed in the heavens, "Who is worthy to open the Book," containing the future designs of JEHOVAH, "and to loose the

seals thereof?" There was a period, when it was answered, that "no one in heaven, nor in earth, nor under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon." There was a period, when heaven resounded with hymns of exultation and rapture, because the "Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne," assumed this stupendous office; opened the book; and loosed its seven seals. Is any Angel, at the present time, more able, or more worthy, to understand, or unfold, the desigus of his Maker?

Finally. Shall the angel in question undertake to correct *the Words*, which the Wisdom of God has chosen, for the purpose of communicating his pleasure; substitute for them new and better phraseology; call in question their propriety; change their real and obvious meaning; and make them speak what was never intended by their Author? Shall he thus sit as a critic on his Maker; review his works; and pronounce an authoritative judgment concerning the truth or the erroneousness, the wisdom or the folly, the beauty or the deformity of that, which has been written by the finger of God?

There was a time, when even Angels fell; and fell, by aspiring to the prerogatives of God. The attempt changed them into fiends; and hurried them down from heaven into the regions of darkness and despair. Such an effort can never be made in that glorious world, a second time. Among all the exalted beings, who inhabit it, there is not one, who would not be filled with horror at the bare thought of thus ascending the throne of God, and snatching the sceptre out of his hand. A single wish of this nature would extinguish forever the immortal beauty of his character; shroud in eternal darkness his glorious destinies; and change the heaven within him into a hell.

But, my brethren, if an *Angel* may not intrude upon this awful employment, how much more unbecoming, preposterous, and profane, must be the intrusion of *Man*. Angels were originally possessed of vast powers, and the noblest opportunities for improving them. They were brought into existence in the highest heavens; have from the beginning surrounded the throne, and stood in the presence of God; and for many thousand years have

executed the pleasure, studied the works, and learned the character of their Maker. Their minds, therefore, great and exalted at first, have been wonderfully expanded and ennobled during this long succession of ages. Their dispositions, at the same time, are conformed to the dictates of perfect rectitude; and are fitted, therefore, to advance in the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom, with unrivalled celerity. Their application, also, neither sleep, nor weakness, nor weariness, interrupts. Their energy, neither age nor activity can lessen.

Men, on the contrary, are of yesterday; the offspring of dust; and allied to worms, and corruption. Their faculties are feeble; their knowledge stunted; their dispositions alienated from truth; and their views darkened by prejudice and passion. To them error is congenial, and sin an object of choice. How impudent, how absurd, how monstrous then, must such a being appear, when thrusting himself into the province of his Maker, and dictating another Gospel to mankind. There have, however, been those among our race, who, in the early days of the church, assumed this office in form; and boldly wrote, and published, "other Gospels," than those written by the Evangelists. The period of these forgeries is long since past. But modern times have furnished many proofs of the spirit by which they were dictated.

There are *two modes*, in which a Gospel may be preached, differing essentially from that of Paul. *The words may be changed, and, together with them, the doctrines, and precepts; or the doctrines, and precepts, may be changed; while the words are permitted to continue the same.* The Gospel is the true meaning of the Gospel; not the terms, in which it is written. The words may be considerably varied, and yet the meaning not be altered; and are valuable, only because they express and preserve that meaning. The preachers of modern times have not, in any great degree attempted, as plainly they could not attempt with any hope of success, to change the words of the Gospel. All their wishes to substitute another Gospel for that which came from heaven, have terminated in *efforts to change the meaning*

of its doctrines and precepts. Of these efforts, at the present time, there is certainly no scarcity.

The preacher, who forms and expresses different views of the Character, Law, and Government, of GOD; of the Character, and Mediation of Christ; and of the Terms of salvation; from those, which are presented to us in the Scriptures, preaches a Gospel, differing just so far from that of St. Paul. If his views of these subjects are *essentially* different from those exhibited in the Scriptures; his Gospel will be essentially different; because these are *the fundamental subjects of revelation*. If, for example, the Scriptures declare the Character, and Law, of GOD to be perfect: if they assert, that “he worketh all things after the counsel of his own Will;” and that “every one, who continueth not in all things, written in the book of the law to do them, is accursed:” if they declare Christ to be “GOD over all things, and blessed forever,” and to be the Creator, Preserver, Proprietor, Ruler, and Judge, of the Universe: if they testify that “except we repent, we shall all perish;” that “he who believeth” on Christ, with the faith, which “worketh by love, shall be saved;” and that “he, who believeth not, shall be condemned;” that “we are justified by grace, through faith in the Redeemer;” that, unless “we are born again of the Spirit of GOD, we cannot enter into his kingdom;” and that without the love, required by the divine law, we are, in the spiritual sense, nothing: then the preacher, who contradicts these declarations, or, in other words, exhibits doctrines, and precepts, opposed to these, preaches another Gospel, than that of Paul.

But, my brethren, this work is not always done in *a manner so complete*. In far the greater number of instances it is *partially done*. Many preachers reject parts of the Gospel; and receive other parts. Some profess to relish the precepts, who yet find much difficulty in admitting the doctrines. Some contend earnestly for the doctrines, who seem to have little relish for the precepts. By inculcating one of these classes of scriptural communications, and neglecting the other, the preacher, by degrees, impresses on the minds of his congregation, more forcibly than he



could easily do in any other manner, a conviction, that *that, which he neglects, is of no serious importance*. In this way, a multitude of preachers persuade those, who hear them, that *the doctrines of the Gospel deserve little attention*; and another multitude, that *the precepts are of the same insignificant character*.

Another set of preachers, of which the present period may boast its full share, enter the desk, to *exhibit themselves*, if we may be permitted to judge, *rather than the Gospel*. These men are, frequently, not deficient with respect to their orthodoxy; and trespass in *the Manner, and the End, of their preaching* more than in *their doctrines, or precepts*. The End, which they appear to propose, is the display of their talents, for the entertainment of their hearers. The Manner, in which they attempt to accomplish this end, is usually formed of *metaphysical disquisitions*; or *brilliant appeals to the imagination, and powerful addresses to the passions*. That Ministers should employ the whole energy of reason, fancy, and feeling, to elucidate divine truth to the understanding, and to impress it on the heart, is not only allowed, but, in my apprehension, demanded, by the Scriptures. The hearer, to whom the doctrines and duties of the Gospel are not exhibited in a clear manner, and proved by solid argument, will never be stable in his belief, nor in his practice; will easily be driven about by every wind of doctrine; and become, regularly, a prey to every specious sectary. The Truth of God, only, can make men free from the bondage of sin. But, to produce this effect; it must be shown, and seen, to be truth. This must be done by the clear light, and sound reasonings, of common sense, obvious to the general apprehension, and incomparably more satisfactory than those nice and subtile discriminations, which, invisible to the common eye, serve only to display the preacher's ingenuity, and to excite popular applause.

He also, who is taught only to understand, and not to feel, the truths of the Gospel, however rational and just may be his views, will ever be in danger of regarding those truths with a cold assent, and stupid indifference. To prevent this incalculable evil.

no method ought to be left untried, to quicken the apprehension, rouse the conscience, and move the heart. Of these two great constituents of Evangelical Preaching the apostles, particularly Paul, have left us the most honourable examples.

But, when the object of a Preacher is to exhibit himself with advantage, he will reason, not to make his hearers understand the truth of God, but to make them admire his own powers of reasoning; will cull fine images of fancy, and pour out warm effusions of feeling, not to render the truth, which he preaches, pungent and efficacious, but to command applause for his brilliancy, and eloquence. In both these cases, the preacher becomes an Actor; and his sermons a mere amusement for the day. This, to say the least, is not to preach as Paul preached. *His* Gospel was formed, wholly, to instruct, convince, awaken, and convert, sinners: a work, which, I am afraid, is not to be hoped from either of the modes of preaching, which have been here reprehended.

The doctrines of the Gospel are painful, the precepts of the Gospel are burdensome, to unrenewed men: for both contradict their wishes, awaken their consciences, and excite the most alarming apprehensions concerning their future destiny. Still they are the doctrines and precepts of God. Of course, they are true, and right. It is therefore your duty, my brethren, to be willing, to be desirous, that Ministers should preach them *to you*. You are not permitted by your Maker to have itching ears. You are not permitted to "heap to yourselves teachers after your own lusts." You may not refuse to endure sound doctrine. You may not "turn away your ears from the truth, nor be turned unto fables." You cannot lawfully, you cannot safely, "say to the seers, 'See not,' and to the prophets, 'Prophesy not unto us right things: speak unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits.'" "Get ye out of the way; turn aside out of the path; cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." As they are bound to speak the truth; you are under the same solemn, and indispensable obligations to receive and welcome, to believe and obey, every thing which they preach, so far as it was preached by Paul.

It may indeed contradict, not unfrequently, your former opinions, as well as your present wishes. Should this be the fact, those wishes are wrong, and those opinions false. But false opinions and wrong wishes can never advance you a step towards heaven. The only effect of both will be your ruin. "To the law, then, and to the testimony." If Ministers do not speak, if you do not believe, this word; it is because there is no light in them, nor in you.

Were an Angel from heaven to bring you a message from your Creator; were he to come with the splendour, in which one of these glorious beings exhibited himself to the prophet Daniel; "his loins girded with the fine gold of Uphaz, his body like the beryl, his face as the appearance of lightning, his eyes as lamps of fire, his feet as polished brass, and the voice of his words as the voice of a multitude:" you would probably quake like the companions of Daniel, "and flee to hide yourselves;" or, like the prophet himself, would stand trembling; your strength vanished, "and your comeliness turned into corruption." If you should be able to command yourselves sufficiently to hear his message; with what solemn attention, with what profound awe, with what eager solicitude, would you listen to the heavenly messenger, and catch every word which fell from his tongue." Which of you would dispute his doctrines? Which of you would question his precepts? Is there a man in this assembly, who would insult the divine herald by telling him, that his declarations did not harmonize with the decisions of human philosophy; that they were hard sayings, gloomy and discouraging in their nature, and terrible in their import? Is there an individual, who would reply, that great and learned men had thought differently from him; or who would satisfy even himself in refusing to obey the voice of this wonderful preacher by recollecting, that he was contradicted by Hume and Voltaire, by Arius and Socinus?

Is there a person present, who would feel himself justified in declining, or neglecting, to comply with the precepts brought by this illustrious being, until a future and more "convenient season?" Should he command you "now to repent, and believe the

Gospel ;” would you not feel, that you were indispensably, bound to obey? should he require you now to “love the Lord, your God, with all the heart, and your neighbour as yourselves ;” would you feel excused, in prolonging your impiety, or your injustice ; your avarice, ambition, or sensuality? Should he announce the Messiah as your Saviour, as the only “propitiation for the sins” of men ; and require you “with the heart to believe” in him “unto righteousness, and with the mouth” to make “confession” of him “unto salvation ;” could you feel any longer safe in your unbelief, or your refusal to “confess Christ before men?” My brethren, Angels have actually declared, in substance, all these things to mankind. The “Law was given by the disposition of Angels ;” and Angels announced the Redeemer to Daniel and Zechariah, to Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds of Bethlehem.

Convey yourselves in imagination to yonder burying ground. Behold the earth heave beneath your feet, the grave unfold its secret chambers, and a white-robed inhabitant of the unseen world ascend before your eyes from its silent recesses. Hear him proclaim to you, alternately, awful and delightful tidings of heaven and hell ; and inform you, that within a few years you will inhabit one or the other of these worlds of retribution, and spend your immortal being in unutterable happiness or misery. Listen, while he subjoins the most affecting admonitions concerning your guilt and your danger ; and warns you to “flee from the wrath to come,” and to “lay hold on eternal life.” Can you be insensible to the persuasions of the awful stranger? Can you sport, or wander, or sleep, beneath the sound of a voice, which addresses you from the tomb? My Brethren, the Gospel was, in substance, all declared by one “who rose from the dead.” These very tidings he brought from the invisible world. These very admonitions, these very exhortations, he now addresses to you from heaven ; and repeats them every day you live.

Remember, my brethren, I intreat you to remember, that neither the glory and majesty of an Angel, nor the awful character, and alarming appendages, of a person rising from the grave, could change at all the nature or the importance of the message,

which either might bring to you. These beings, I acknowledge, would probably deeply effect and terrify you. Still, the message, which they would bring, and the God, by whom they were sent, would alone be the objects, supremely and finally interesting to you. This message you now have, sent by the same God, from whom they must both derive their commission. He has directed, that it shall be weekly delivered to you by your fellow men; men, not risen from the grave, but sharing the same life, and the same infirmities, with yourselves. Still, it is no less a message from him, no less clothed with his authority, no less interesting to your eternal welfare. Your Minister is obliged to deliver it exactly as he has received it, "whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear." You by the same authority are obliged to embrace and obey it; and can refuse, or neglect, it only at your peril. The terrible anathema, pronounced against him, or against an Angel, should either preach any other Gospel, will be pronounced against you, if you do not welcome it in your hearts, and fulfil its precepts in your lives.

There is a day approaching, in which you, and all other congregations, and their Ministers, will meet together before "the Judge of the quick and the dead!" How solemn, how affecting, must be this interview! How transcendantly important will then appear the connection, which, in this world, has existed between Ministers and their people! Every Minister is here constituted by Christ the shepherd of his flock, "to watch for their souls, as one that must give an account;" to feed them with the bread of life; and to conduct them through this wilderness to the regions of everlasting rest! *They* are committed to him by the same Divine Person; that, under his pastoral care and guidance, they may direct their path to the kingdom above! How important will it then appear, that these divine purposes should have been accomplished? No emotions will be more intense, than those, which this last, solemn meeting will produce. The day, the scene, the Judge, the assembly, the trial, the sentence, together with its affecting grounds, and amazing consequences, will lend it a force and distinction immensely great and awful! What

emotions must move the heart of that Minister, who, surrounded by his own flock, is compelled to declare to the Judge of all the earth, that he has preached another Gospel, than that which was preached by Paul; that he has neglected, withheld, and falsified, the Truth of God; that he has substituted, in its place, his own dogmas, speculations, and wishes; that he has deceived, misguided, and turned away from heaven, the feet of his flock; that he himself, assuming the office of guiding them to eternal life, has, with a faithless, unfeeling heart, and a treacherous hand, led them down to the chambers of death! With what emotions must his flock hear this terrible rehearsal; and see themselves conducted to perdition by the very man, who ought to have gone before them to endless life!

On the contrary, with what views will the mind expand, with what transport will the heart throb, of that Minister, who, on this tremendous occasion, can look back, with the serene sunshine of the soul, upon a life, faithfully devoted to the service of God, and a Ministry, employed in proclaiming the Gospel of his Son to mankind? How must he glow, and exult, while with humble confidence he approaches the throne of Judgment, in the midst of his beloved Charge, and joyfully pronounces, "Behold here am I, and the Children whom thou hast given me?" With what unspeakable delight will he read in their eyes, their gratitude, their affection, and their triumph! What a blessing will it then seem to them, to have been committed to his care? United to an assembly, so beloved on earth, he will regard the glory of immortal life as peculiarly endeared, and heaven itself as adorned with additional beauty, and more intense joy! Instead of trembling in expectation of the terrible anathema in the text, he, and they, will only draw near, to be pronounced "good and faithful servants;" declared to have "well done;" and commanded to "enter into the joy of their Lord." The gates of life will spontaneously unfold, to receive them; and the angelic host will welcome their arrival with peculiar gratulation.

If a minister, and his people, wish for such a close of their accepted time; *he* must faithfully preach; and *they* must cordially embrace, the Gospel, preached by Paul.

## SERMON XXX.



### THE DIGNITY AND EXCELLENCE OF THE GOSPEL,

A SERMON PREACHED APRIL 8, 1812, AT THE ORDINATION OF  
REV. NATHANIEL W. TAYLOR.

#### I. PETER i, 12.

—*Which things angels desire to look into.*

THE things, of which *St. Peter* speaks in this passage, are explained by him in the context. They are styled, *The salvation of the soul; the reward of faith; the things testified by the Spirit of Christ concerning his sufferings, and the glory that should follow them; and the things, which had been reported, or announced, to the Christians of lesser Asia, by those who had preached the Gospel to them, with the Holy Ghost, sent down from heaven; that is, by those whose preaching had been accompanied by the inspiration, and miracles, of the Holy Ghost; in other words, by Paul and his immediate companions; the preachers, who principally carried the news of salvation into that country. To him, who is willing to bestow even the slightest attention upon this various phraseology, it will be evident, that these things can be no other than the sum, and substance, of the Gospel.*

Into these things angels are here said to desire to look. The Cherubim in the tabernacle, whose wings overshadowed the mercy-seat, were formed in a bending posture; with their faces looking down on this divine symbol, as if earnestly desirous to pry into the wonders, which it represented. In the text, “angels,” it is said, ἀγγελοι, (not οἱ ἀγγελοι, *the angels*;) “desire to look into these things,” εἰς ἃ ἐπιθυμουσιν ἀγγελοι παρακνῆσαι: “into which things angels earnestly desire to stoop;” in other words, “into which

things angels earnestly desire to pry, with the most attentive investigation."

By angels, here, is denoted *the whole Host of heaven*, involving all its orders, and dignities: the relish for the object of inquiry being the same to all, and the spirit of investigation the same.

If these exalted beings are thus desirous to search into the Gospel, and the system of religion which it contains; it is because the precepts, and doctrines, which it unfolds, and the facts, which it declares, merit their inquisition. *The intellect, and the circumstances, of angels are such, as to prevent them from error.* Their minds are indeed finite; and their knowledge must, therefore, have its boundaries. Still they admit nothing but truth; and, so far as their capacity enables them to understand any subject, they see it as it is. They have no bias, no prejudice, no inordinate desires. *The love*, which is enjoined in the Gospel upon men; which is declared to be *the fulfilling of the law*; and which reigns in their minds with an absolute and undivided dominion; rejoices in the truth; and prompts them to embrace it always, and alone, wherever it may be found.

At the same time, *these exalted beings are possessed, also, of the most noble and refined taste.* Their *relish* is as regularly conformed to truth, as their *intellect*. Nothing little can engross their attention: nothing debased can give them pleasure. All the objects, which they relish, are of course important, and valuable. When, therefore, we are informed, that the Gospel is an object of their earnest investigation; we are also informed, that it is an object of supreme value, and importance.

It is to be remembered, that, when the text was written, these celestial beings had been employed in studying the subjects, contained in the Gospel, more than four thousand years. From the time, when it was first published in the sentence, denounced on the serpent who deceived our first parents, to the day, in which *his head was bruised* by the Redeemer of mankind in the completion of the work, which he came to accomplish, they had watched the progress of this divine system of dispensations with the most minute, and critical, examination. During this long



period also, they had been voluntarily, and actively, employed, as *ministering spirits*, in carrying the designs, which it involved, into execution. In this manner they acquired a knowledge of the Gospel, which was in many respects experimental; and understood it far more perfectly, than even they could have done in the exercise of mere speculation. Besides, they had dwelt, during this period at least, in the highest heavens. Heaven, the place both of their birth, and their residence, is not only the native region of truth, but also the scene of the most sublime and glorious dispensations in the universe. In that world all the wonders of Providence are consummated. In that world the perfections of God are manifested in their supreme beauty, splendour, and greatness. Every thing which it contains is refined; every thing is noble; every thing is for ever improving. But, after all their acquaintance with the glories of heaven, angels earnestly desired to look into the things, which are contained in the Gospel.

The wonder, excited by this fact, will be lessened, if we remember, that “God created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent, that now unto principalities, and powers, in heavenly places, might be known, *δια της εκκλησιας*, by means of the Church, *ἡ πολυποικίλος σοφια θεου*, the immensely various wisdom of God.” Such apposite, and advantageous, means of exhibiting the divine wisdom to principalities, and powers, in heavenly places, were involved in this system of dispensations to the Church, that the Most High deemed it a sufficient reason for the creation of all things. With this consideration in view, we cannot think it strange, that the system of the Gospel should command the researches of angels; since God has thus clearly indicated, that they will here find displays of his manifold wisdom, which will enlighten their understanding, and exalt their views, after all their acquaintance with the dispensations of heaven. Our wonder will probably cease, if we further remember, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the great Agent in the system of the Gospel; and that his character, actions, and sufferings, are the principal subjects of its doctrines, precepts, narratives, and institutions. “By him,” saith St. Paul.

“were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” If the Creator of thrones and dominions, of principalities and powers, thought it proper for himself to become the supreme Agent in this system; it must cease to excite admiration, that those of his creatures, the energy of whose minds is formed of unmingled virtue, should delight to sustain a subordinate agency in its dispensations, and to study the mysteries, involved in a work so wonderful, and sublime.

To him, who assents to the truth of Revelation, this passage amply proves the *dignity, and excellency*, of the Gospel. To prove the truth of a Scriptural doctrine is, however, but one, and that, often, the least necessary, and the least laborious, object of preaching. To illustrate the nature of the doctrine, and the manner in which it is true, and to impress its importance on the minds of those who hear, are always objects of high moment; and often demand the chief attention of the preacher. Where a doctrine is merely proved, it is loosely regarded, and rarely remembered; but, when it is clearly illustrated, and forcibly applied, a hope may justly be entertained, that the impressions, which are made on the minds of an audience, will be permanent, and useful. With this hope, I will now attempt to illustrate THE IMPORTANCE, DIGNITY, AND EXCELLENCE, OF THE GOSPEL, by several considerations, which if I mistake not, are suited to such a design. In the mean time, those, who hear me, will remember, as they cannot fail distinctly to perceive, that to do justice to the subject is beyond the power of a *human* preacher; and demands at least the abilities, possessed by the beings, who have thought it deserving of their own most laborious investigation. Even angels could not do it justice. In itself, and in its consequences, it will engage their study, and admiration, for ever; and they will perpetually find their former views of its extent, and value, inadequate, and, in many ways, imperfect. What then must be the views of a man? St. Paul, when *this treasure* was committed to him and his inspired companions, informs us, that it was

placed in *earthen vessels* ; coarse, frail, and perishable. Succeeding ministers will certainly station themselves below the level of the Apostles.

The Gospel, by which I intend, in this discourse, the Scriptures at large, is a *History of the Mediatorial kingdom of the Deity* ; of that kingdom, which involves all the concerns of the children of Adam. From every other history it is infinitely different in the nobleness of its subject. Kings and heroes, nations and empires, the highest subjects of other histories, have here little significance. Jehovah is the Potentate, the Messiah the Hero, his children the nation, his actions the events, and his kingdom the empire, which engross the labours of the sacred historians.

*The Design* of this kingdom, is the salvation of an endless multitude of immortal beings. In this design are equally included their deliverance from sin and misery, and their exaltation to virtue and happiness, which will know no end.

*The Theatre*, in which this design, and all the events, connected with its accomplishment, are completed, is proportionally majestic ; and is formed of heaven, earth, and hell ; the stage of probation, and the seats of retribution, for the righteous and the wicked.

Proportionally dignified also, are *the Actors* in this magnificent plot. Kings and nations are, here, forgotten. Moral dignity is alone regarded, where the design is salvation ; and the actors, employed in accomplishing it, are prophets and apostles, the the general Assembly of the first born, principalities, and powers, in heavenly places, and the infinitely glorious persons of the Godhead.

*The Duration* of this kingdom is eternal.

*The Laws*, by which it is governed, are like the Author of them, holy, just, and good. They are so simple, as to be comprised in two commands ; yet so extensive, as to reach all the possible actions of intelligent creatures ; so short, and so plain, as to be sufficiently understood, easily remembered, and obviously applied by every moral agent ; so honourable to the law-giver, as if nothing beside his honour had been consulted in their forma-

tion; so beneficent to his subjects, as if devised only for their happiness.

*The Ultimate End* of this kingdom is the manifestation of the glory, or excellency of God. For the accomplishment of this end "He, who was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation; took upon him the form of a servant; and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name, that is named in this world, and that which is to come: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in the earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue confess, that he is Lord to the glory of God, the Father."

The benevolence of God is the glory of his character. "God," saith the apostle John, "is love." This peculiarly divine attribute was illustriously displayed to the angels in heaven, in the communication of their exalted powers, in quickening their minds with unmingled virtue, and in replenishing them with pure and immortal enjoyment. But these just beings "need no repentance." They have ever been obedient, and, therefore, have ever been happy. They could not be forgiven; for they had never sinned. They could not be redeemed; for they had never been cast off.

But in fallen man the benevolence of God found a new object; an object, on which its finished beauty might be exhibited in a manner, unknown even to angels. "God commendeth his love to us," to angels, and to all beings, who are witnesses of it, "in that, while we were yet sinners, he gave his Son to die for us." This is the consideration, on which the apostles dwell with such transport, when they descant upon "the height and the depth, the length and the breadth, of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." This was the theme, which warmed the tongue of the angel, when he said to the shepherds of *Bethlehem*, "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all peo-

ple!" This was the enrapturing subject, which tuned the voices of his heavenly companions when they sung, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace; good-will towards men!"

Mankind were the lowest order of rational beings; were born of the dust; and were allied to worms. Still they had revolted from God; and with the impudence, as well as the hostility, of rebellion, had said unto him, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him; and what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him?" Although *His eternal power and Godhead were from the beginning, clearly seen* throughout the world, *being every where understood by* any mind willing to understand them; they denied his perfections; impeached his government; questioned his existence; and "said in their hearts, There is no God." *Creatures, and those the vilest, and most insignificant, they worshipped, rather than the Creator.* From the east to the west, from the north to the south, temples innumerable, raised for the worship of stocks, and men, and devils, insulted the Skies: and altars, "from the rising of the sun, to the going down of the same," smoked, not with incense and oblations only; not with victims, selected from the fold and the stall; but with human blood. Nations immolated the best, and brightest youths of their age and country. Parents "caused their own children to pass through the fire unto Moloch."

Equally gross, vile, and dreadful, was their conduct to each other. Rulers wielded a sceptre of iron; and every where set up the gaol and the gibbet, the stake and the cross, as the instruments of their sway, and the symbols of their character. The hero waded through the blood, and planted his laurels amid the bones, of men. Fields were *sown with salt*; and cities rose in flames to heaven. The robber haunted the high-way; the thief prowled around the cottage; and the assassin lurked behind the curtain of night. The soul was infected with a plague; and without a physician, without a remedy, to check the malignant poison, it decayed, died, and became a loathsome mass of corruption.

Thus the world was one great scene of desolation. Nor were its miseries allayed even by hope, that *balm of Gilead* to a *wounded spirit*. Its *situation* was dreadful; its *prospects* were replete with horror. With heaven its communication was cut off. God was unknown, and forgotten. The path of life was unoccupied, and unsought. Year after year, and age after age, rolled over its melancholy regions; and saw no messenger arrive from distant, happier climes, with tidings of restoration, or deliverance. It was a world in ruins; a vast sepulchre, hung round with darkness, and replenished with decay and death; where no sound of consolation pierced the slumbering ear, and no beam of hope reilluminated the eye, closed in eternal night.

On such a world it was impossible for God to look without abhorrence. That righteous law, by which he governs the universe, had declared, "The soul, which sinneth, shall die." But every child of *Adam* had sinned: all, therefore, were irreversibly condemned to death. Nor could the "law pass," without the fulfilment of every "jot, and tittle," included in it; although the fulfilment should require the destruction of "the heavens and the earth." In this state of absolute despair, "the Father of all mercies" was pleased to say, "Deliver the soul of man from going down to the pit; for I have found a ransom." Heaven was startled at the declaration; and the bosoms of all its inhabitants trembled with astonishment and rapture. They had seen their own apostate companions cast out of the regions of happiness, and "reserved in chains, under darkness, to the judgment of the great day." No more favourable destiny could be expected for man.

The ransom found, was the life of the Son of God; "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." The gift, on the part of the Father, was the greatest of all gifts. The self-denial, on the part of the Son, was the highest possible self-denial. The sacrifice was infinite; and could not be demanded, even by a suffering universe. It was conceived only by boundless wisdom; it could be executed only by boundless love.

The destiny of our race, announced by the law of God, and the reversion, proclaimed by the Gospel of his Son, will strongly illustrate the nature of this transaction. The interests of the immense and eternal kingdom of **JEHOVAH** demand, absolutely, the final exclusion of all those, who rebel against his government, from every future good. Sin is the die, which, cast once, is cast for ever. The career, once entered upon, is endless: "None that" commence it "turn again; neither take they hold of the paths of life." Misery is both its concomitant, and its consequence. To sin, and suffer, through ages which cannot end, was, therefore, the certain, final allotment of every child of *Adam*. The sin was entire; the suffering was complete. The sinner was removed beyond the desire, and beyond the attainment, of any virtuous, or amiable quality. The sufferer was placed beyond the hope, and beyond the possibility, of any alleviation, or of any end, of his wo. To such beings, how vast must be the accumulation of wretchedness, in the progress of ages! Proportional is the value of the deliverance, and the extent of the wisdom, and goodness, by which it is accomplished.

Proportionally bright and glorious, also, is the destiny, opened by the promises of the Gospel. "He, that spared not his own Son," saith the apostle, "but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him, also, freely give us all things?" The greatest gift He has already bestowed; it cannot be strange, that he should willingly give every thing else to those, on whom it was bestowed. A mind here, pure and perfect, united to a body immortal like itself, and "refashioned like the glorious body of Christ," will begin, and advance in, an eternal progress of knowledge, virtue, and enjoyment; of gratitude, adoration, and praise; of moral glory, and divine beauty; in the house of God; amid the innumerable company of angels; and united to the general assembly of the first-born. Beneficence will be its business; heaven will be its home. No enemy will disturb, no fear lessen, no casualty interrupt, and no succession of ages terminate, the transports of the blessed. Before the throne of infinite mercy they will sing, with the harps of angels, "Unto Him, that loved us,

and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings, and priests, unto God, even his Father; to him be glory, and dominion for ever. Amen.”

Perfectly suited to the magnificence of this scheme are the *Doctrines and Precepts* of the Gospel. *The doctrines* are, every where, such as become the Author of them; such as *become godliness*; such as are plainly derived from the Wisdom, and fraught with the Excellence, of JEHOVAH. His character is here drawn by an unerring hand. The lines are all lines of the most perfect symmetry; the colours are the colours of heaven. United, they form the only portrait, beneath the sun, in which is seen the likeness of a God. Heathen philosophers, and modern Infidels, have only caricatured their Maker.

Equally noble and excellent are the *Precepts*. The heathen philosophers understood not the nature of virtue, or of vice; nor discerned the boundary, by which they are separated. Infidels have voluntarily blended them; and left them a mere mass of mixture and confusion. The distinction between them was originally begun, and has ever been continued, in the Gospel. With a discrimination; unknown to all other moral systems, it separates universally, good and evil thoughts, words, and actions; and suffers not a single transgression of the most exact, and most refined, bounds of virtuous conduct.

So comprehensive are the doctrines of the Gospel, that they involve all moral truth, known by man: so extensive are the precepts, that they require every virtue, and forbid every sin. Nothing has been added to either by the labours of philosophy, or the progress of human experience.

Proportionally noble, also, are the *sentiments*, and even the *descriptions*, contained in the Gospel. Compared with them, the highest efforts of *Greece* and *Rome*, celebrated as they have been, are low, little, and childish. This, was indeed, a thing of course. The gods, whose characters and actions, were the basis of their moral and religious systems, were themselves vicious, grovelling, despicable beings; greatly inferior in respectability, and worth, to such men, as *Atticus*, or *Titus Vespasian*. But



the mind of the moral teacher will never ascend higher, than the character, which he forms of the object of his worship. In some instances, I readily acknowledge, they uttered noble and sublime thoughts concerning their deities; particularly concerning *Jupiter*, the chief of their *dii majores\* gentium*. But, for all these thoughts they were indebted, originally to hints, gleaned from foreigners, and derived ultimately from Revelation. Aided in this manner, their minds, which, in several instances, were of a superiour mould, formed conceptions of this nature, which were honourable to their talents. But every such effort was merely the leap, not the steady flight, of imagination: much less was it the elevated course of enlightened intelligence. Accordingly the *whole representation* of the subject, made by any such writer, is a monstrous mass of debasement, varied, in solitary instances only, by more just and elevated conceptions. By the Scriptural writers we are uniformly presented, not with the unworthy actions of gods plural; imperfect; mutable; debased with human immoralities; unable to discern, or prevent, the course of things established by fate; dissenting from each other with mutual enmity, and mutual sufferings; endangered by the rebellion of creatures, and defended by their assistance; but with the perfect agency of *JEHOVAH*; by whose wisdom all things were contrived; by whose word they were created; by whose arm they are upheld; and to whose glory, with a solemn progress, they unceasingly operate; unfolded in images, and declarations, so noble and majestic, as to wear on their very face the impression of divinity.

*The Catastrophe*, by which all the intricacies, and wonders, of this immense plot are unravelled, is formed by the proceedings of the final day. The Son of God will then descend from heaven in clouds; surrounded by the glory of his father, and accompanied by all his holy Angels. He will then summon the dead from the grave; and reanimate the dust, of which their bodies were formed. The innumerable nations of men will stand upon

\* Superiour gods.

their feet in a moment ; and be gathered around the tribunal of Infinite Justice. The wicked will be doomed to “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels :” and the righteous admitted to “the kingdom, prepared for them from the foundation of the world.” The visible “heavens will then pass away with a great noise ;” the earth will be consumed with fire ; the Son “will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father ; and God will be all in all.

Thus, my brethren, have I attempted to illustrate the nature of this subject ; and have exhibited, in a very imperfect and summary manner, the parts, of which it is primarily constituted. Into these things angels earnestly desire to look, and all, who, like angels, relish the beauty, greatness, and glory, of the Godhead.

From these observations I infer,

I. *That the Gospel is a Revelation from God.*

To do justice to this inference, as connected with these premises, would require a series of volumes. Still, the following considerations, briefly as they must be suggested, may, in some degree, be useful to those who hear me. The *Jews*, it is well known, were never distinguished for learning, or science. By the *Romans*, after they became acquainted with them, they were spoken of only with contempt. By modern Infidels they have been still more despised ; and made the objects of more contemptuous wit, and more bitter obloquy. The *Greeks*, and *Romans*, on the contrary, were eminently learned, and scientific. The former, also, have been generally considered as holding the first rank of human genius ; and the latter, as excelling in wisdom every nation, which went before them. Whence, then, let me ask, have the *Jewish* writers left those of *Greece* and *Rome* so far behind them, in their exhibitions of moral and religious subjects ? On all other subjects the *Greeks* and *Romans* speak like men : on these they lisp like children. Children every where else, the *Jewish* writers here speak, not like men, but like angels. The God, whom they describe, is indeed *very God*. His attributes they have formed in a manner, perfectly suited to that Being, who is the first cause, and the last end of all things. Noth-

ing can be added to them: nothing, without impiety, can be taken from them. In all the writings of the human race there can be found no rival to them, and no second. But they have not merely *drawn* his character: they have exhibited him as the universal *Agent*; and, fearlessly entering upon a task, the most difficult, which was ever assumed by man, have ascribed to him an immense series of *actions*, perfectly suited to the stupendous character, which they have drawn, and fraught with a sublimity, hyperbolical and amazing. These actions are, the Creation of the heavens and the earth; the preservation and government of the universe; the accomplishment of our Redemption; the final judgment of angels and men; and the endless retribution of the righteous, and the wicked. Compared with the JEHOVAH of the Gospel, the gods of heathen philosophy are motes, compared with the luminary, in whose beams alone they are visible.

*The system of dispensations*, here attributed to this mighty Agent, is boundlessly vast, and immensely complicated. The parts, of which it is composed, admit neither of number, nor of measure. What cause expanded the minds of these men over this unlimited field of thought? Whence were they able to fathom depths, where the rest of mankind merely floated? Whence is it, that they never sink beneath the grandeur of their subject? never wander from its truth? and never halt amid its complications? Whence is it, that all move on with perfect harmony? and, while the writers of other nations dissent endlessly, not only from each other, but from themselves, these maintain a perfect consistency from the beginning to the end?

By the heathen philosophers, even the ablest and best of them, *Morality* is only darkened, and debased. They discerned neither the nature, nor the limits, of vice and virtue. Against the former, indeed, they inveighed, and the latter they eulogized, with a vigorous eloquence; yet they very often exposed virtue, and adorned vice; and alternately enjoined, and prohibited, both, with a confusion of thought, and a depravity of heart, which make their instructions means of corruption merely, and never of reformation. The Scriptural writers, on the contrary, enjoin virtue only,

prohibit only vice, and define both, in a manner so exact, and yet so obvious, that a child need not mistake them. Their *way of holiness is a highway*; and *wayfaring men, though fools, will never necessarily err therein*.

The philosophers of antiquity saw clearly, that mankind were sinners, and needed pardon and justification. In this stupendous subject *Socrates* advanced so far, as to doubt whether it were possible for God to forgive sin. But this, painful as is the conclusion, was a stretch of wisdom, never attained by any other philosopher. Whence, then, did the apostles derive their system of Redemption? Who enabled them to find a redeemer? a scheme, of pardon, a scheme of justification, so satisfactory, that no man, by whom it was understood, was ever yet afraid to venture his soul upon its issue?

It is a remark of *Johnson*, that in all the poetry of *Greece and Rome*, and I add, without hesitation, in the philosophy, and history also, *there is not a single truly amiable character*. The cause of this essential defect, as justly assigned by this great man, is, their unacquaintance with the Gospel. Whence, then, let me ask, did the Evangelists form their character, of the Redeemer? A character, not amiable only, but perfect; a character, compared with which, the brightest on the pages of heathenism, is a rush-light to the sun.

To these philosophers also, *a future state of being* was unknown. Several of them, indeed, conjectured, and a few hoped for, such an existence. By what means did the Scriptural writers become possessed, not of hopes and conjectures, but of the knowledge, of this interesting subject? Whence did they derive their resurrection; their heaven; their glorious immortality?

To comprehend the true import of all these observations, it is necessary to remember, that there are, in the Scriptures, at least one hundred different writers and speakers, employed on these various subjects; that they lived through a succession of fifteen hundred years, and in all the states of society, involved in that period; that they were of every class, from the prince to the peasant; and that they wrote in almost every form, which dis-

course admits, and on occasions as various, as were the writers themselves. Yet these characteristics belong to them all. They have the same God ever in view ; the same Redeemer ; the same salvation ; the same immortal life. Their views of holiness, and of sin, are alike comprehensive, and exact. Their precepts all require, and all forbid, the same things. The grandeur of their views, and the sublimity of their conceptions, are, also, every where wonderful. With an eagle's eye they all look directly at the Sun ; and with an eagle's wing ascend perpetually towards the glorious luminary.

To impress this subject with its proper force, let me exhibit it in a single point of view.

*The apostle John* was born in an age, when the philosophy of his country was a mere mass of quibbling ; its religion a compound of pride and bigotry ; and its worship a ceremonious parade. His lineage, his circumstances, his education, and his employment, were those of a fisherman.

On what possible, natural principle can it then be accounted for, that, like the sun breaking out of an evening cloud, this plain man, in these circumstances, should, at an advanced age, burst upon mankind with such a flood of effulgence and glory ? Whence did it arise, that in purity of precept ; sublimity of thought ; discernment of truth ; knowledge of virtue and duty ; and an acquaintance with the moral character of man, and the attributes of his Maker ; this peasant leaves *Socrates, Plato, and Cicero*, out of sight, and out of remembrance ? Do you question the truth of this representation ? The proof is at hand, and complete. There is not a child of fifteen, in this house, nor, if possessed of the common education, in this land, who would not disdain to worship *their* gods, or embrace their religion. But *Bacon* and *Boyle, Butler* and *Berkeley, Newton* and *Locke, Addison* and *Johnson, Jones* and *Horsley*, have submissively embraced the religion of *St. John* ; and worshipped the God, whose character he has unfolded. *Their* systems have long since gone to the grave of oblivion. *His* has been animated with increasing vigour to the present hour ; and will live, and flourish, through

endless ages. *Their* writings have not made one man virtuous. *His* have peopled heaven with the children of light. The 17th chapter of his Gospel, written, as it is, with the simplicity of a child, yet in grandeur of conception, and splendour of moral excellence, triumphs, with inexpressible glory, over all the efforts of human genius, and looks down from heaven on the proudest labours of Infidelity.

Nor are *the Images*, formed by the mind of this Apostle, disproportioned to his moral sentiments. Read his description of our Saviour, amid the seven golden candlesticks; of the majesty of GOD, and of the divine assembly of the first-born in the highest heavens; of "the angel," at whose command "the seven thunders uttered their voices;" of "the woman, clothed with the sun;" of "the King of kings," at the head of his armies; of the solemn transactions at the great day; and of "the New Jerusalem, coming down from GOD, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband;" and tell me in what nation, in what writer, counterparts for them can be found? Hear him in a few plain, unadorned expressions leave every effort of Grecian genius out of comparison. "And I saw a great white throne, and him, that sat on it; from whose face the heavens and the earth fled away; and there was found no place for them."

At the same time, the immensely complicated and mysterious scheme of Redemption, and the vast system of Providential dispensations, founded upon it, were distinctly comprehended by the mind of this humble man. These amazing subjects he has handled in innumerable instances, and forms: and light, beauty, and glory, have every where sprung up at his touch.

Let us now make this case practical. Suppose the most ingenious fisherman of this country were to attempt the same subjects; and to form a new scheme of Redemption, and a new system of Providence. What, does common sense declare, must be the character of his writings? Yet in this country fishermen, as well as all other men, are educated in a manner, far superior to that, which existed in Judea at the time of the apostle *John*: and here, also, their conceptions on these subjects are enlarged, and

ennobled, by his writings, and those of his fellow-apostles. I will only ask further, what man of any talents, and with any education, could now write as *St. John* has written ?

II. *From these observations, also, I argue the folly of Infidelity.*

Angels delight in the Gospel : Infidels loathe it. Angels earnestly study it with the deepest attention : Infidels cast it away. Angels learn from it the manifold wisdom of God in his dispensation to his Church : Infidels treat it with contempt and derision ; and, proud of their own attainments, and lapped in self-sufficiency, coolly say, “ *Doubtless we are the people ; and wisdom shall die with us.*” To which will common sense give the palm of wisdom ?

Infidels are losers by their rejection of the gospel in the enjoyments of taste ; in intellectual enjoyment ; in their character ; in their hopes ; and in their end.

Educated Infidels covet the character of men of taste ; and boast of possessing it in a superiour degree. The primary objects of taste are novelty, grandeur, beauty, and benevolence. The three former are extensively diffused over the natural world ; the moral world is replenished with them all. The beauty and grandeur of the natural world ; the beauty of the landscape, and of the sky ; the grandeur of the storm, the torrent, the thunder, and the volcano ; the magnificence of mountains, and the ocean ; and the sublimities of the heavens ; may undoubtedly be relished by the mind of an Infidel, as really as by that of a Christian. But how insignificant are even these splendid scenes of nature, if the universe is only a lifeless mass ; a corpse devoid of an animating principle ? How changed is the scene ; how enhanced the sublimity ; when our thoughts discern, that an Infinite Mind formed, preserves, controls, and quickens, the whole ; that this Mind is every where present ; lives ; sees ; acts ; directs ; and blesses the beings, whom it has made ; that, “ if we ascend into heaven, God is there ; if we go down to hell ; lo, He is there ! if we take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea ; even there his hand will lead us, and his right hand hold

us." At the same time, how infinitely more sublime is such a Mind, than all the works, which it has created! "I am," saith JEHOVAH, "and there is none else. All nations, before me, are as nothing; and they are accounted unto me less than nothing and vanity."

In the moral world their loss is entire. Of the beauty, and greatness, of that world they form no conceptions. For these objects their taste is not begun. The pleasures, derived from this source, are the privilege only of minds, which are invested with moral beauty, and adorned with the loveliness of the Gospel.

In the field of *Intellectual enjoyment* they are not more happy. Infidels are not unfrequently men of learning, and of science; but their learning is usually mischievous to them; and their science, of no value: for both serve only to inflate them with pride, and estrange them from their Maker.

Moral science is the end of that, which is physical. In this field the attainments of Infidels are *oppositions of science, falsely so called*; a collection of dreams, more specious, and decent, but equally unreal with those of *Behmen*; and bearing the same relation to knowledge, as a romance to history. What is the world in the eye of an Infidel? A product of fate, chance, or necessity; without design; without government; without a GOD: its inhabitants born, none knows why; and destined to go, none knows whither. Of duty, virtue, worship, acceptance with GOD, and the rewards of obedience, they know, and choose to know, nothing. To them the moral universe is a chaos. The Gospel, looking on this mass of confusion, has said, "Let there be light: and there is light."

But, although "this light has come into the world," Infidels have "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Instead of the pleasure, furnished by the glorious truths of the moral system, they find only doubt and perplexity. *Sweet as the light* is to those, who have eyes to see it; and *pleasant as it is to behold the Sun* of righteousness; Infidels turn away their sight from this divine object; and therefore only grope, and stumble, and fall.



In *their Character* their loss is inestimable. It is the loss of Evangelical virtue; of the esteem of all the wise and good; and of the approbation of GOD.

Inestimable, also, is their loss of *Hope*. They reject the Redeemer; and are, therefore, left to stand on the ground of their own obedience. But they have never obeyed; and are, therefore, condemned by the law, which they have only broken. Reason decides, that GOD does not love, and cannot reward, bad men. This decision Revelation repeats in thunder. But Infidels are all sinners. The only objects before them are, of course, annihilation, or endless woe.

“There is,” saith Solomon, “a way, which seemeth good to a man: but the end thereof is a bitter death.” Were the Gospel as untrue, as Infidels assert; they would be no gainers. If it should be true; what will become of them? What must be the feelings of an Infidel on a dying bed, if he is then in possession of sober thought; and solemnly remembers his contempt for the Saviour, and his rejection of the offers of life? With what emotions must he enter Eternity?

III. *This subject furnishes every minister of the Gospel instructions of supreme importance.*

Some of these I shall address immediately to the Pastor elect.

You have heard, my friend, and brother, an imperfect representation of that Gospel, to the ministration of which you are this day solemnly called, of the purity of its precepts, the excellence of its doctrines, and the glory of that divine kingdom, of which it contains the history. Let me address to you these all-important considerations with the freedom, and the affection of a friend, and a minister.

Let me remind you, that in the Gospel, as in a mirror, clear and undeceiving, is imaged in the strongest manner, and in living colours, the dignity of your office; not a dignity, fostering ambition, nor flattering pride; but a dignity, existing wholly in the mind, shining in every meek and humble grace, and adorning a life, consecrated to GOD, and useful to mankind. In all your efforts for the salvation of men, you are here taught to regard

yourself as a fellow-labourer with angels ; as co-operating with the Redeemer. He also preached the Gospel ; and although "his name is above every name," adorned his office with far other splendours than pomp and pride. Let me urge on you his perfect example, and the exalted subject of his preaching, as a divine combination of motives, indispensably necessary to so imperfect a creature, as man, to do nothing, which will not become the disciple of such a Master.

Among the attributes, which form a dignified character, none is more essential than *faithfulness*. To this excellence every inducement is presented by the revealed system. It points you to an all-seeing God, intent with an awful and searching eye upon every part of your conduct ; an infinitely faithful Redeemer, present in every trial, and every distress, to accomplish the salvation, which you preach ; a cloud of witnesses, faithfully spending, and cheerfully sacrificing, their lives for the same desirable purpose ; the immortal life of your own soul, and the souls of your congregation, placed in colours of life before your eyes, and appealing with immense solemnity and endearment to your heart. Your great duty, which is "the manifestation of the truth," will call you continually to encounter many temptations, from the love of popularity, the fear of offending, and the desire of seeing peace in your days. In the same system are the means, and the motives, by which you may avoid them, set before you in the strongest light. It may be profitable, on this solemn occasion, to remind you, that you are there considered as a stranger here below ; destitute of an abiding city ; and wandering through the wilderness of human life to that invisible world, where every faithful minister will find his eternal residence. Between that world, and the present, it is the only channel of communication. It opens the gates of those regions, which spirits unembodied and immortal inhabit. It teaches you, that in that world you will need dignity, recommendation, and enjoyment, infinitely more than in this ; and that the qualifications, which will confer these blessings on you there, are very different from those, which will produce them here. To the inhabitants of that world it will be a matter

of perfect indifference, whether you have here dwelt in a palace, or in a shed; have ruled an empire, or fed a flock. So different are the views, and manners, of that world from the same things in this, that to have been "rich in faith," to have been "an heir of the promises, and to have performed faithfully the solemn office, which you have chosen, will be higher dignity, a stronger recommendation, and a source of more extensive enjoyment, than to have swayed the sceptre of a world. If you suitably realize these considerations; no others *will move you*; "neither will you account even your life dear to yourself; so that you may finish your course with joy, and the ministry, which you receive of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

In the faithful manifestation of the truth you will undoubtedly experience many distresses from insensibility, opposition, and evil speaking. The great preacher informs you, that, "if the world hate you, it hateth him also; and that it is enough for the servant, if he be as his Lord. He hath not left you comfortless. He hath prayed the Father; and He hath given you another Comforter, even the Spirit of Truth; that he may abide with you for ever. Seek earnestly to be purified; labour earnestly to purify yourself; that you may become *a temple fitted for the inhabitation of this divine guest*. From him will you derive the peace, which Christ left to his disciples; *the joy*, which he alone *can give*, and which the universe is unable to *take away*. Grudge not, therefore, the worldling his wealth, the statesman his power, the philosopher his science, the man of taste his villa, or the sensualist his dainties. To you the Gospel unfolds treasures, which are real, and unlimited; influence, which will extend through immortal ages; science, sublime, immense, and rapturous; a mansion in the house of God; and an eternal banquet, gathered from that Eden, which his own right hand hath planted. Here enjoyment will be your interest, your honour, and your duty. Here intemperance and satiety cannot exist. Here indulgence is bounded only by the capacity.

In the Gospel, to the ministration of which you are this day to be consecrated, is embodied that exalted science, which you

are especially concerned to attain. Immensely different from the cold speculative systems of philosophy, which, although they sometimes amuse the head, have no connection with the heart; the doctrines, involved in this science, are all practical, divinely efficacious on the character, and means, at the same time, of expanding, ennobling, and purifying, the soul. At every step, as you advance in this knowledge, it will make you not only more learned, but more virtuous, and more useful. Every step, also, will be a step of delight. Here, and here only, truth outruns all the efforts of fiction, in beauty, sublimity, and glory. Whatever is great to the view of the intellect, whatever is sublime to the eye of imagination, whatever is ravishing to the feelings of the heart, is found here, in degrees, which cannot be limited. In the pursuit of this truth the mind is not merely delighted, but enraptured; is not merely elevated, but ennobled; does not merely look on, but, while it looks, "is changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord." These are, "the things" into which "angels desire to look." Shall not men, infinitely interested in them, shall not ministers, whose first duty it is to communicate them to others, follow their example? Those, who would resemble angels, must love the employments of angels. Unite, then, with these exalted beings in studying the divine system of truth, contained in the Gospel. Here you will find all, which you need, under God, to make you a blessing in this world, and to assure you in the world to come of an inheritance in the kingdom of glory.

The same system of truth cannot but inspire you with the strongest benevolence to the people, committed to your charge. We hope, we trust, you preach a God, who has pardoned you; a Saviour, who has died for you; doctrines, which you firmly believe; and precepts, which you faithfully intend to obey; endless misery, from which you hope to escape, and endless happiness, in which you hope to share. Make, then, their interest your own; feel for them, as for yourself. Think what it is to be saved; what it is to perish. Recollect daily, that they may be your companions in heaven; and that through eternity you may enjoy the

transport of remembering, that you have been the instrument of their salvation. Through eternity they may remember, that under your ministry they were born of GOD; made heirs of endless life and fitted for the glory of heaven. Think what a consummation of your ministry it will be to lead them up to the throne of judgment, at the final day; and to say to him, who died on the cross, "Behold, here am I, and the children, whom thou hast given me." Think what it will be through endless ages to have their blessings heaped upon your head.

With these solemn considerations always in full view, you will labour, earnestly, to "come forth" to this people "in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Peace." Your sermons, before they are brought to the house of GOD, you will water with your tears, and embalm with your prayers. You will "plant the seed" of life "with all humility of mind; and with many tears," you will beseech the Author of all blessings to "give the increase." You will remember, you will feel that you are appointed by the great Shepherd to "watch this flock in the fear of GOD, as one who must give an account." But what must be the account, given by a minister, at the bar of GOD, of a wasted life; of squandered talents; of sloth, and cowardice, in his master's service; of a perverted Gospel; of an abused ministry; of faithless sermons; and of a neglected flock, left by himself to error, sin, and ruin, precluded from eternal life, lulled into the sleep of death, and led to perdition!

With these awful considerations in view, who, that deserves the name of a minister, who that deserves the name of a man, can fail of delivering the message of GOD boldly, fervently, faithfully, with the deepest tenderness, with the strongest yearnings of affection. Must not his heart beat; must not his voice tremble; when he rehearses to dying creatures, hastening to the judgment, the terrors of the final day, and the burnings of devouring fire? Must not his bosom heave; must not his eye kindle; must not his tongue glow; when he repeats the wonders of redemption, the sufferings of the cross, the excellency and loveliness of the Redeemer. the mercy of a forgiving and sanctifying GOD, and

the glories of immortal life; when he puts his hand on the door of heaven; and, opening it for the entrance of his flock, discloses to them the throne of God and the Lamb, the innumerable company of angels, the general assembly of the first born surrounding the tree of Life, and singing with transport the eternal hymn; "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him, that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen!"

IV. *Let me from this view of the Gospel, urge every member of my audience to secure its blessings.*

To this divine, this indispensable employment, every motive calls you, which can reach the heart of virtue or wisdom. The terms, on which these blessings are offered, are of all terms the most reasonable. You are summoned to no sacrifice, but of sin, and shame, and wretchedness. No service is demanded of you, but services of gain, and glory. "My son, give me thine heart," is the requisition, which involves them all. Remember how vast, how multiplied, how noble, these blessings are! Remember, that the happiness of heaven is not only unmingled, and consummate; not only uninterrupted, and immortal; but *ever progressive*. Here all the attributes of body and mind; the peace within, and the glory without; the knowledge, and the virtue; the union of minds, and the beneficence of the hand; gratitude to God, and his complacency in his children; together with the peculiarly divine system of providence in that delightful world; will advance with a constant step towards the ever-retreating goal of absolute perfection. The sanctified infant will here hasten onward to the station, occupied by *Abraham, Moses, and Paul*. These superiour Intelligences will regularly move forward to that of angels; and angels will lift their wings to a summit, to which, hitherto, no angel ever wandered, even in the most vigorous excursions of thought. Thus will this divine assembly, make a perpetual progress in excellence, and enjoyment, towards bounds, which ever retire before them, and ever will retire, when they shall have left the heights, on which Seraphs now stand, beyond the utmost stretch of recollection.

To this scene of glory, all things continually urge you. The seasons roll on their solemn course; the earth yields its increase; to furnish blessings to support you. Mercies charm you to their author. Afflictions warn you of approaching ruin; and drive you to the ark of safety. Magistrates uphold order, and peace, that you may consecrate your labours to the divine attainment. Ministers proclaim to you the "glad tidings of great joy;" and point out to you the path to heaven. The sabbath faithfully returns its mild and sweet season of grace, that earthly objects may not engross your thoughts, and prevent your attention to immortality. The sanctuary unfolds its doors; and invites you to enter in, and be saved. The Gospel still shines to direct your feet, and to quicken your pursuit of the inestimable prize. Saints wait, with fervent hope of renewing their joy over your repentance. Angels spread their wings to conduct you home. The Father holds out the golden sceptre of forgiveness, that you may touch, and live. The Son died on the cross, ascended to heaven, and intercedes before the throne of mercy, that you may be accepted. The Spirit of grace and truth descends with his benevolent influence, to allure and persuade you.

While all things, and GOD, at the head of all things, are thus kindly, and solemnly employed, to encourage you in the pursuit of this inestimable good, will you forget, that you have souls, which must be saved, or lost? Will you forget, that the only time of salvation is the present? that beyond the grave there is no Gospel to be preached? that, there, no offers of life are to be made? that no Redeemer will there expiate your sins; and no forgiving GOD receive your souls? Of what immense moment, then, is the present life! How invaluable every Sabbath; every mean of salvation! Think how soon your last sabbath will set in darkness; and the last sound of mercy die upon your ears! How painful, how melancholy, an object, to a compassionate eye, is a blind, unfeeling, unrepenting immortal!

But, O ye children of Zion, in all the perplexities and distresses of life, let the Gospel be "an anchor to your souls, sure and steadfast." To the attainment of the happiness, which it unveils,

consecrate every purpose, and bend every faculty. In the day of sloth, let it quicken you to energy. In the hour of despondency, let it reanimate your hope. In the season of wo, let it pour "the balm of Gilead" into your hearts. View every blessing as a token of love from the God, to whom you are going; as a foretaste of immortal good. Stretch your imaginations to the utmost; raise your wishes higher and higher, while you live: not a thought shall miss its object: not a wish shall be disappointed. Eternity is now heaping up its treasures for your possession. The voice of Mercy, with a sweet and transporting sound, bids you "arise, and come away." Your fears, your sorrows, your sins, will all leave you at the grave. See the gates of life already unfolding to admit you. The first-born open their arms to welcome you to their divine assembly. The Saviour, who has gone before to prepare a place for your reception, informs you, that "all things are ready." With triumph, then, with ecstasy, hasten to enjoy the reward of his infinite labours in an universe of good, "and in the glory, which he had with the Father before ever the world was."



## SERMON XXXI.



### THE PREACHING OF PAUL BEFORE FELIX.

A SERMON PREACHED AT THE ORDINATION OF THE REV. SAMUEL MERWIN, AS PASTOR OF THE UNITED SOCIETY IN NEW-HAVEN, 1805.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

*And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled ; and answered, Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

IN the preceding Chapter we are informed, that certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, to kill Paul. In consequence of this conspiracy, his sister's son, having heard of their design, disclosed it to Lysias, the Chief Captain or principal Roman Officer, who resided at Jerusalem. To prevent the execution of it, Lysias sent Paul to Cesarea, to the custody of Felix, the Roman Governor of Judea. In the Context we are further informed, that Ananias, the Chief Priest, and other Jews of distinction, appeared at Cesarea, to accuse Paul before the Governor. As they were unable, however, to support their accusation, Paul, contrary to their hopes, escaped. Still, Felix, was willing to gratify them, so far as he could consistently with the appearance of propriety ; and, therefore, kept him confined at Cesarea. During this confinement, it seems, he frequently sent for him, and communed with him. On one of these occasions at least he gave him leave to discourse concerning the Faith in Christ.

At this time Drusilla, here called his wife, was present. This woman was the daughter of Herod Agrippa; was contracted to Epiphanes; was married to Azizus; and now lived in adultery with Felix. Felix himself, therefore, was an adulterer. He was also an iniquitous ruler; as is evident from his conduct towards Paul. Paul was accused, but was cleared; and ought to have been instantly set at liberty. Two reasons prevented his release; the disposition of Felix to gratify the Jews, and his hope of receiving a bribe from Paul. Both these reasons are incapable of being felt by a just man; yet Felix was governed by them both.

Such was a part of the audience, to which the preaching of St. Paul, mentioned in the text, was addressed; the part, to which it was especially addressed. I have dwelt on the subjects of this Introduction the more particularly, because they contribute in a peculiar manner to the illustration of the text, and give it a force and importance which it could not otherwise possess.

Considered in connection with this story, the text appears to me to contain one of the most perfect single accounts of the great Duty of preaching the Gospel, and the manner in which it ought to be performed, to be found in the Scriptures. On this Duty only do I intend to insist in the following discourse. All the other duties of a Minister, together with those, which a Church and Congregation are bound to render to him in the other concerns of his Ministry, I shall leave to be inculcated by such, as come after me in the solemn services of this Day.

In the account, given in the Text of St. Paul's preaching, there are *three things*, which especially merit our attention:

1st. *The Subjects*, and

2dly. *The Manner, of his Preaching*; and

3dly. *The Effect which it had on a part of his audience.*

1st. *The Subjects of St. Paul's preaching, recited in the Text, are these three; Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come: or, more agreeably to the Greek, Righteousness, Self-Government, and the Judgment which shall be hereafter.*

*Righteousness*, although used often to denote moral rectitude generally, signifies, in its original and proper sense, *Justice*; the

great Duty especially of Rulers in the execution of their office ; and the prime Duty of Men in their dealings with each other. Nothing could have been more properly addressed to Felix. This Man, originally a Slave, had been freed by the Emperor Nero ; and by the influence of his brother Pallas, and a man named Narcissus, both favourites of the Emperor, had been placed as governor over the Province of Judea. There he was guilty of the most enormous and barbarous exactions ; hired Doras to kill Jonathan, the High Priest ; practised a great variety of other cruelties ; and became in the end so odious to the Jews, that they accused him publicly to the Emperor. So gross were his crimes, that he would have been put to death, had not the influence of his brother Pallas been powerfully exerted to save his life. I need not inform my audience how greatly such a man needed to have *the Duty of Righteousness* explained to his understanding, and enforced on his conscience.

*Temperance*, (or more literally rendered, *Self-Government*,) was with equal propriety addressed to Felix, and also to Drusilla. They were both, at this time, living in open adultery. On the Duty of *Continence* ; for this appears to be the real subject of the Apostle's preaching, here ; on the great Duty of Continence, the virtue directly opposed to this enormous sin, St. Paul addressed these powerful and wicked hearers.

*The approaching Judgment* was the last subject, on which St. Paul insisted. This was the natural and proper close of such a discourse. To these great, dissolute, abandoned personages a preacher of the Gospel still had access through the final Judgment. Before that Judgment they, together with all others, must appear ; must give their account ; must be judged in righteousness " according to the deeds done in the body ;" and must be rewarded according to the nature of their conduct. They " neither feared God, nor regard man ;" but the certainty and nature of future Judgment were capable of being so explained, and brought home to their hearts, as to rouse their slumbering consciences, and to alarm their fears concerning their approaching destiny.

2dly. *We have, here mentioned, not only the Subjects, but also the Manner, of Paul's preaching. As he reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come, Felix trembled.*

The meaning is, that the Preacher explained, and proved, Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come; and thus solemnly enforced them on the consciences of his hearers.

3dly. *The effect of these Subjects, handled in this Manner, is also recited. Felix trembled; and answered, "Go thy way, for this time; when I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee."*

If we consider the wickedness of Felix; the power, which he had over Paul, of life and death; his peculiar hardness of heart; the splendour of his circumstances; and the superstition in which he had been educated; we shall easily conclude, that the preaching, which produced so great an effect on such a man, must certainly be of the most excellent kind, and most happily formed to operate successfully on the heart of Man.

From these considerations, plain and indisputable in themselves, and therefore needing no extended discussion for the present purpose, I derive the following REMARKS.

1st. *The Preacher, who would preach as Paul preached, will directly disclose the sins, dangers, duty, and safety, of his hearers.*

Paul directly addressed to Felix and Drusilla the great duties of Righteousness and Continence, the sins of injustice and pollution, and the danger, to which by these sins they were exposed at the coming Judgment. These were their peculiar duties, their peculiar sins, and their peculiar dangers. If a Preacher would be like Paul in integrity, in wisdom, or in success, he will take effectual care to preach in the same manner.

Were all preachers to be asked, one, by one, whether they would wish to resemble Paul; there can scarcely be a doubt, that each would answer in the affirmative; and be not a little offended, to find the sincerity of the answer called into question. But in the language of the great English Poet Cowper, to whom

I shall take the liberty of appealing on the present occasion, without reserve, I ask,

“Are all such teachers? Would to Heaven all were!”

There are undoubtedly those in the sacred desk, who never dwell on the sins or the dangers, the duty or the safety, of their hearers; but studiously avoid these solemn subjects, lest they should give pain, or become unpopular. There are those, who spend the sacred and heavenly season, allotted especially to the dispensation of the word of life, in uttering mere addresses to passion, and holding up pictures to the imagination; brilliant, perhaps, and beautiful; eloquent and interesting; fitted to amuse the fancy, and agitate the feelings; but not fitted to enlighten the conscience, or mend the heart. There are those, who preach the icy morality of Plato, Seneca, and Aurelius; and plainly declare by their practice, that they think Cicero and Socrates better preachers than the Saviour and his Apostles. There are those, who waste the Sabbath in useless metaphysical disquisitions; in making distinctions, which, like the lines of the Spider, are invisible, except to an eye fixed in a peculiar position, and possessed of peculiar acuteness: and which, when seen, are, like the same lines, of no possible use to man. All these, and many others, do not preach like Paul. He always seized the subjects, which were most likely to be useful to his hearers; the subjects, therefore, which they could understand, and the subjects, which they could not fail to feel. Sinners, he knew, were guilty and hateful in the sight of God, were condemned by his most holy Law to everlasting punishment, and were exposed of course to final ruin. These amazing truths he addressed to them directly. They were plain truths, which sinners could not but discern; and solemn truths, which they could not but feel. They were truths, which demanded and admitted no wiredrawn disquisition; and rejected with scorn all wanderings, sports, and prettinesses of fancy. That they would give pain to his hearers he perfectly knew beforehand; and for that very reason chose them in preference to all other subjects. No sinner, he clearly perceived, was ever brought to

repentance, but under the alarm and distress, occasioned by a convincing sense of his sins. The distress, therefore, was indispensable to the sinner's well-being. With this knowledge also, and the solemn emotions which it produced, his heart would have been frozen, if he could have repeated the seesaw morals of heathen philosophy. But he could not have repeated them. His Soul was too intensely warm with love to his hearers. "Knowing the terrors of the Lord," as revealed against sinners, he "persuaded men to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on Eternal life."

With these awful things in view, he asked not the question: Whether his hearers would be pleased, or displeased; but enquired merely how he might promote their salvation. Never was a preacher presented with stronger temptations to indulge the fear of man. Felix was the supreme Ruler of the country; held the power of life and death in his hands; and now sat in judgment on Paul himself. He was also an enormous sinner; an oppressor; an adulterer; a murderer. By his side sat Drusilla; a woman false, lewd, and hardened; an apostate from the religion of her nation, dictated by God himself; and openly defying conscience, shame, and retribution. Paul, in the mean time was a prisoner, on trial for his life; accused by the great council of his country; forsaken; friendless; and vehemently hated by the body of his nation. Yet in this very situation of depression and danger, the Apostle, with an integrity and benevolence transcending all praise, addressed, without disguise or apology, to these splendid and formidable sinners the very truths which they needed most to know; reproved them solemnly for the sins, of which they were especially guilty; and warned them of the infinite danger, to which they were peculiarly exposed. In this manner he laboured as far as was possible, to recall them to the duties, which they had forgotten; and to lead them to the safety, which they could in no other way obtain. This example, sanctioned by Inspiration, and thus invested with divine authority, proclaims to every Minister of the Gospel, "Go thou, and do likewise."

2dly. *Every such Minister will fill his discourses with truth and conviction.*

Paul reasoned of these great subjects ; explaining, proving, and discussing, them thoroughly ; so that they were understood, believed, and felt, by his audience. He did not, like a Heathen Sophist, or like Tertullus in the context, or like many a man, who has stood in the place of a Preacher, dress up an ingenious, entertaining, courtly harangue, suited to the nice and fastidious palate of his guest ; used, as he may be presumed to have been, to dainties of this nature. Paul's business was not to flatter, but to convince and awaken ; not to please, but to reform and save.

He did not attempt to display his own superior talents, in an eloquent declamation, adorned with fine images of fancy, or pathetic effusions of passion. On the contrary, he entered at once upon his proper business ; declared those solemn truths, which respected the sin and danger, the recovery and salvation, of his hearers ; and enforced them by arguments, which could neither be refuted, nor resisted.

The Truth of GOD, not the pictures of fancy, nor the effusions of passion, will, if any thing will, "make mankind free from the bondage of Sin and Death." The proof of this is complete. The Heathen philosophers and poets, and the host of modern infidels, have exhibited such images and effusions, through several thousand years, in very many delightful forms, and, in many instances, with as much genius, and strength, as can be hoped for by man, and far more than can be displayed by most men : yet they have never reformed, nor saved, a single child of Adam. These images and effusions cannot, therefore, accomplish this great design ; and will prove as fruitless in the hands of Christian Ministers, as in those of poets and philosophers.

All this might indeed be easily and perfectly foreseen. We have, and can have, no interest in any thing, but truth. Fictions of fancy may please, passion may affect us ; and in any degree : but in the objects of both we are perfectly unconcerned, as to every real interest. *That which has been, is, and will be,* contains our all. Our past character, our present conduct, and our

future lot; are every thing to us which is of any real moment. *This* truth, and truth alone, declares. But truth, in order to be seen to be truth, must, in almost all cases, be evinced to be truth by solid and immoveable arguments. When thus evinced it becomes, in our view, an account of that, in which lies, and is thus seen to lie, our real and whole well being. By truth, thus evinced, we are, therefore, seriously and permanently affected, forced to deep consideration, led to form plans of future action, and compelled to labour at least for our safety and welfare. These things no efforts of imagination or passion, ever accomplished; nor can accomplish. Whatever else may be said of these efforts, it cannot be said, that they are truth, or the means of evincing truth. Had Paul used them with the highest possible ingenuity and success, Felix would never have trembled at his representations.

I well know, that these brilliant exhibitions are highly entertaining to mankind; and that the successful authors of them are greatly admi- red and applauded. I know also, that they are, therefore, greatly coveted by others, and the Exhibitors sedulously imitated by multitudes, at the present time. I see, or think I see, with deep regret, both in Great Britain and this country, a constant leaning to what I should call, *not preaching, but pulpit exhibitions*. The scheme of such exhibitions appears to be, to write like some of the ancient historians and rhetoricians, not truth, but handsome compositions; made up of brilliant images, and striking and pleasing sentiments of passion, and adorned with fine figurative language, bold exclamations, and pompous phraseology. These, delivered with theatrical tones and gestures, carefully studied and artfully practised, are what seems now to be esteemed by multitudes the perfection of preaching. Accordingly, such as exhibit these things in this manner are greatly commended, and followed with eagerness and admiration.

Were this subject to be regarded only as a matter of taste, it might perhaps be worth the time and labour of a critic to shew, that the scheme, which I reprobate, is equally a violation of correct taste, and of duty. But it can scarcely merit a sober discus-



sion from the desk. I shall only observe, that this was not the conduct of Pericles, Demosthenes, nor even of Cicero, when in earnest; much less was it that of Chatham. These great men in all their fervid addresses to their countrymen laboured, like persons of real business, to shew them their real faults, errors, dangers, and duties; to evince the truths, which they taught, by irresistible arguments; and to make their audiences feel and act, because truth so powerfully demanded it. This is the way of nature, and the true road to success. He, who would acquire the success which they acquired, must follow the path which they trod.

In the desk the preacher is bound to remember, that he is the Messenger of God to a guilty, ruined world; that the Message, which he brings, is delivered to him by his great Master, and consists of the truths, which he has been pleased to declare; and that he is bound to disclose it to others, just as he has received it from God. He is bound to remember, that he is professedly standing in that awful place, to invite and compel Sinners to repent, and Saints to increase in wisdom and grace; that their salvation is the great errand, on which he is sent; and that, if they be not saved, they must perish. With these affecting objects in view, can he possibly spend his time in trifling; in amusing his audience with fine efforts of fancy and passion; in culling tropes and figures to gratify their taste; or in assuming the character and arts of a Stage-player? In the language of the poet, already quoted—

“What, will a man play tricks? Will he indulge  
A silly, fond conceit of his fair form,  
And just proportion, fashionable mien,  
And pretty face, in presence of his GOD?  
Or will he seek to dazzle me with tropes,  
And play his brilliant parts before my eyes,  
When I am hungry for the bread of life?  
He mocks his Maker; prostitutes, and shames  
His noble office; and, instead of truth  
Displaying his own beauty, starves his flock,  
Therefore avaunt! all attitude, and stare,  
And start theatric, practised at the glass

I seek divine simplicity in him,  
 Who handles things divine; and all beside,  
 Though learn'd with labour, and though much admir'd  
 By curious eyes, and judgments ill-inform'd,  
 To me is odious."

The preacher, who feels as Paul felt, will come to the desk filled with the desire, and the design, of accomplishing the salvation of his flock. This, the great end of preaching, will fix his eye; fill his heart; and inspire, control, and direct, all his efforts. To effectuate this end, he will at once apply himself to his proper and only business. The word of God lies open before him. From this, the sole source of all the means and hopes of eternal life, he will derive the great considerations with which he is to affect both saints and sinners. There he will find, even without searching, that all men by nature are guilty and ruined; that, left to themselves, they cannot escape; that the Law of God, in itself, perfectly reasonable and righteous, and, like its glorious Author, unchangeable in its nature, has condemned them by an unalterable sentence. There he will also find the "Glad Tidings of great joy, that there is born unto them a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord;" that through Repentance of sin, Faith in his name, and Holiness of heart and life, they may be interested in the blessings which he died to purchase. There he will find displayed, with the wisdom and skill of an Infinite hand, all the interests, duties, and hopes, of man. He will find them also displayed in every manner, calculated to enlighten the understanding, and to affect the heart. He will find them portrayed in ten thousand forms and varieties, fitted to every mind and awakening every feeling; immensely great and glorious in themselves; solemn and awful beyond example: and able "like the fire and the hammer, to break the rock in pieces." There he will find all that he needs, to alarm, awaken, convince, and reprove the Sinner; or to instruct, amend, and edify, the Christian. The truth, contained in this "Word of God," and nothing else, he will by experience learn, unless his eyes are dull of seeing, and his ears of hearing, "is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, pier-

cing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, of the joints and the marrow, and proving a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." These truths, therefore, will constitute the sum and substance of all that he declares to his people.

But it will be his constant aim to shew that they are truths : and that they are the truths, which God himself has spoken. To this end, he will, like Paul, thoroughly discuss them. Whatever he thinks obscure, or doubtful, he will explain, or confirm. Whatever arguments or elucidations he finds necessary, he will derive from the same Word, the Providence of God, and the nature and history of Man ; subjects intended by God himself to illustrate, and therefore always actually illustrating, each other. The end, which he will first propose to himself, will ever be to shew men their true situation, their real guilt, their actual danger, and their only escape. To this end he will, so far as human infirmity will permit, make all his efforts subservient. Nothing will be admitted by him into his discourses except that which he thinks will promote this end. He will strive to write and to speak as well as is in his power ; but he will write and speak nothing to display his powers. He will consider that as the best of all sermons which leaves the strongest impression of its subject on the minds of his Hearers, and leaves them least inclined and least at leisure either to censure or admire the preacher. That, on the contrary, which produces only or principally admiration and applause to himself, he will consider as an idle piece of amusement ; in which Christ and God and his hearers are forgotten, and his own ambition and vanity only are consulted, flattered, and idolized.

It may here be asked, Whether I am inclined to discourage, or reject, all efforts of Eloquence in the desk ? My answer is, that that is genuine Eloquence, which I have described ; the manner of addressing mankind, which leaves them most deeply impressed with the truth and importance of the subject. That is the most perfect eloquence of the desk, which leaves the sinner most solemn, alarmed, awakened, and determined to exert himself to find a way of escape ; or the saint most edified, refreshed, and strengthened to amendment. Here the discourse grows entirely

out of the preacher's own conviction of the truth and importance of what he declares ; and all the impression, which it makes, out of the same conviction wrought in his hearers. Withdraw the truth, the evidence, the certainty, the reality, of the things represented from the representation ; and it would become a dead letter, productive of no effect. Every emotion, every image, which is found in it, is the natural and necessary offspring of the preacher's own views of the affecting truths which he utters. Such truths cannot fail to be felt by a religious mind, when solemnly contemplating them ; nor to be so exhibited by such a mind, as to make others feel them, when fairly proved to be truths.

*The way to the heart*, by which I intend the great, controlling faculty of Man ; the faculty, by which he moves, and acts, as a rational being ; *is through the Conscience, and not through the imagination and the passions.* Conscience is nothing, but the Mind judging of moral subjects ; of truth and falsehood, right and wrong. This judgment is necessarily formed only by means of evidence ; and, when just and useful, is conformed to truth. To enable the conscience to act, it must therefore be furnished with evidence, and be able to discern what is true. This the Preacher can accomplish only by sound and solid arguments ; evincing, beyond a doubt, that that which he urges is true, and that which he reproveth is false. To a sinner, stupid in his sins, and devoted to sensual pursuits, of what importance can be the pictures of fancy, however solemn, or however beautiful ? Can they show him his danger, guilt, or recovery ? To rouse him from his slumber, and withdraw him from iniquity, he must discern, that his soul is really sinful, guilty, endangered, and, in his present condition, lost. To a sinner convinced of all these things, the same pictures can be nothing, but mere toys and gewgaws to his eye, mere trash to his palate. In his case, all that is important, all that is good, lies only in knowing, and pursuing, the *real way of escape.* This can be shewn by truth and evidence only. Truth and evidence, therefore, are all, with which he has, or can have, any concern. The same observations are, with the same force,

applicable to the Christian in every situation ; whether he is back-sliding, or advancing, in the Christian course. Nothing can be interesting to him except truth ; and truth is interesting, only as it is shewn to be truth by its proper evidence.

All that can be said in favour of the images of fancy, and the expressions of passion, as introduced into sermons, is this : the preacher, who feels the solemn and affecting subjects of his discourse, will like the prophets and apostles, and like Christ himself, exhibit his feelings while he is discoursing, and disclose the truths which he teaches, and the duties which he inculcates, with that earnestness with which he feels them. When the mind feels strongly, the imagination is naturally vivid ; and will form bolder thoughts and stronger images, than when it is calm. The language, also, will then be more ardent and impassioned ; and the whole discourse will assume a higher and more impressive character. All this, every preacher will acknowledge and practice ; while his sole business will still be to teach the truth of God. The only reasons why his mind will thus feel and his discourses thus glow, are the reality and importance of this truth, the strong sense of these things in his own mind, and his earnest desire to communicate his own views to his hearers. Whatever images he displays, whatever applications, he makes to the passions of his audience, will be admitted into his discourse, merely because they offer themselves, unsought, to a mind possessed of such views. Instead of being the soul and substance, they will be only the form and the dress, united to that truth and argument, which are the real soul. In this manner they will have propriety and use ; but in this manner only.

The difference between these two modes of preaching is this : that which I recommend, and which Paul adopted, aims only at accomplishing the end of all preaching by the direct and natural means ; the means used by all men of real business, when addressing their fellow men, with a design to compass an important end. The end of the preacher is to produce the salvation of those who hear. The means are a display of those truths, which God has taught for this purpose. made in such a manner, as to

persuade them that they are truths, and truths in which themselves are personally and infinitely interested. The mode, which I reprove, aims at displaying, with peculiar advantage, the powers and accomplishments of the preacher. The difference between the ends is infinite, and between the modes of preaching incalculable.

Metaphysical preaching, although it seems to coincide with that which is here urged, and to unfold divine truth to an audience, is substantially opposed to it. That which it teaches may be true; and the arguments used to support it may be sound; but the distinctions, even in this case, are so subtle, and the reasoning so abstruse and difficult, that the hearer's attention to the truth is lost in his attention to the preacher's ingenuity; his mind prevented from feeling what is intended by the absorption of his thoughts in the difficulties of the argument; and his heart chilled by the cold manner, in which all such discussions are conducted. The Metaphysician, whether aware of it or not, is employed in the same business with the brilliant man; viz. in displaying his own ingenuity, and not in disclosing and confirming the truth of God. His discourses, if ingenious and just, are merely ingenious, and usually empty, speculations; in which few of his hearers will follow him, and by which none of them will be profited; evidences, indeed, of his own powers of discrimination, but not means of salvation to mankind.

I have hitherto supposed the best of this manner of preaching; a character which it sometimes, but almost never, has. Usually, it is a mere effort of little minds to appear great; a mass of distinctions without differences to support them; a bundle of perplexities, which only puzzle the preacher, and distract or disgust his hearers. It deserves attention from every preacher, that men, really and greatly distinguished for metaphysical talents, have rarely, if ever, preached metaphysical sermons.

Distinctions, which are, or which can be made, obvious, are the only distinctions, which should ever employ discourses delivered to popular assemblies. All the preacher's illustrations should be drawn, according to Cicero's direction to his Orator, *de medio*;

from the common objects, with which men are customarily acquainted. These are wholly better, clearer, and more forcible, than any other. Accordingly we find such illustrations, and such only, used by Christ, the Prophets, and the Apostles, in all their discourses.

“Would I describe a Preacher,” says the excellent Poet, whom I have before quoted,

“Would I describe a Preacher, such as Paul,  
Were he on earth, would hear, approve, and own,  
Paul should himself direct me. I would trace  
His master strokes, and draw from his design.  
I would express him simple, grave, sincere;  
In doctrine uncorrupt; in language plain;  
And plain in manner: Decent, solemn, chaste,  
And natural in gesture: Much impress’d  
Himself, as conscious of his awful charge;  
And anxious mainly that the flock, he feeds,  
May feel it too: Affectionate in look,  
And tender in address, as well becomes  
A Messenger of Grace to guilty man.”

In a word, let the Minister forget himself, and think only on his business, and on the means of accomplishing it. Let him ask himself, what considerations would most convince him of his duty, and persuade him to embrace eternal life; let him direct all his efforts to produce the same conviction and persuasion in his hearers; and there will, with the ordinary blessing of God, be little danger that he will fail of preaching with wisdom and success.

3dly. *Such a Preacher will, without reserve, address himself boldly and directly to the consciences of his hearers.*

Of this conduct the Text furnishes us with a glorious example. Paul, humble as he was, endangered as he was, and great and guilty as his hearers were, came directly home to their consciences. He did not go round about with his discourse, to insinuate cautiously the truths which he wished to teach. He did not attempt to secure their favour and his own safety, by soft addresses, amusing speculations, or lying panegyrics.

On the contrary, he set their guilt, their danger, and their duty, directly before their faces. He held up to them the mirror of the Gospel, and shewed them their true resemblance; awful in its form, and terrible in its colours. The image was their own; and so striking a likeness that it could not be mistaken. Felix trembled; and confessed himself unable to endure the sight.

What Paul did on this occasion, all Ministers of the Gospel, so far as they are able, are bound to do. Every Minister, when he comes into the desk, should remember, *what office he sustains; who sent him; to whom he is sent; and for what purpose.* He is a Preacher of truth and righteousness; a Messenger from the Lord Jesus Christ; sent to sinful, perishing men; and sent to accomplish their salvation. How solemn the office; how great and glorious the Author of it; how pitiable and distressed the objects; how divine the purpose! With infinite authority the awful Being, whose message he is sent to deliver, requires him to deliver it faithfully; and in no wise to “shun,” or neglect, “to declare all the counsel of God” to his hearers. With a cogency, only inferior to that authority, the infinite danger of his flock compels him to the same duty. The All-searching Eye, with clear and piercing view unceasingly surveys his heart and his conduct; to mark the manner, in which he performs this duty. Before him a multitude of immortal beings, who may be saved, and who, if not saved, will be lost; plead with silent but overwhelming eloquence for a punctilious discharge of his Ministry. God has declared, that if he, and they, are faithful, “he shall save both himself and those that hear him.” How can any man, thus circumstanced, prove unfaithful?

The Message is sent by the Creator of all men; of kings and beggars alike. It is sent alike to all men; both great and small. Can he fear and betray the former? Can he forget and ruin the latter?

Away then with all trifling from this solemn scene, with all displays of talents, brilliancy, sagacity, eloquence! Away with all displays of the Preacher; with all remembrance of himself! with all prettinesses of thought and language! Away with all



the fear and flattery of Man! with all the homage, customarily rendered to greatness, power, and splendour. Felix is no longer a governor; a judge; a man who controls life and death. Paul is no longer a prisoner, in question for his life, and suspended over the grave. Paul is an Ambassador of the Eternal God, come to proclaim his awful pleasure to the creatures whom he has made. His audience are all raised, or sunk, to one common level. Who is that splendid being, arrayed "in purple and fine linen," and rolled to the house of God in a chariot of state? He is a child of apostate Adam, and by nature "a child of wrath, being a child of disobedience, even as others." Who is that wretch, half covered with rags and dirt, come to the same solemn place, supported by a beggar's staff? He is another child of the same apostate, and sustaining precisely the same character. Both, together with all around them, are sinners, exposed to the wrath of God, and in the most imminent danger of final perdition. All, also, are immortal; are probationers for eternal life; and are now "prisoners of hope." To this place are they come, "to hear words, by which they may be saved."

In this single character, then they stand before the Preacher. What shall he say to them? He shall deliver the Message which God has put into his hands. He shall "cry aloud, and spare not; he shall lift up his voice as a trumpet, he shall shew the house of Jacob their iniquities, and his people their transgression." He shall say, "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions: so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by turning to the Lord. Make you a new heart, and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel! For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves and live ye. Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God; and your sins have hid his face from you. Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread; and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Incline your ear, and hear, and your souls shall live; and I will

make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Seek ye the Lord, while he is to be found; call ye upon him, while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him turn unto the Lord; for he will have mercy on him; and to our God; for he will abundantly pardon him. For thus saith the High and Lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a humble and contrite spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wroth: for the Spirit would fail before me, and the souls which I have made."

To the children of God he shall at the same time address the most solemn reproofs, and the most delightful consolations; to stay their backslidings, on the one hand, and, on the other, to cheer their progress through this vale of temptation and sorrow. He shall say, "My beloved Brethren, work out your salvation with fear and trembling: For it is God that worketh in you both to will, and to do, of his good pleasure. Be ye, therefore, blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke. Forget the things which are behind, and reach forth to those which are before: Pressing forward towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ our Lord." Remember, that "without Holiness, no man shall see the Lord; that circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but keeping the commandments of God. Be ye therefore holy in all manner of conversation" Without love ye are and can be nothing in the divine kingdom. "Let no man deceive you. Evil communications corrupt good manners. Flee filthy lusts." Be not satisfied, that you have "a name to live. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. Strengthen the things that remain, and are ready to die. Hold fast that which ye have, and let no man take your crown. Build yourselves up on your most holy Faith; praying in the Holy Ghost. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

He shall also "speak comfortably to Jerusalem, and shall cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. For thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy Name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt: neither shall the flame kindle on thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel thy Saviour. The Gentiles shall see thy Righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new Name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord; a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be called Forsaken; neither shall thy land be any more termed Desolate. But thou shalt be an eternal excellency; a joy of many generations. For although in my wrath, I smote thee for a small moment, yet with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord Almighty."

In a word, he will rouse the consciences of sinners by disclosing to them their true character, their real danger, their amazing guilt, and the anger of God denounced against their sins. He will point out to them the only way of safety; the righteousness of Christ received by faith in his blood, and applied for their salvation by the Spirit of Truth, in the sanctification of their souls. He will call them to Repentance and Holiness, to the renunciation of their sins and the reformation of their lives, in the Lord Jesus. *Christ* only will, in all his discourses, be held out as *the Hope of Glory* to Mankind; as the only Atonement for sin, and the only Saviour of sinners.

To Saints he will point out the difficulties of the Christian race; the temptations and "sins which most easily" and frequently "beset them;" and the means of strength, peace, and safety. He will exhort them to remember, that the Faith of the Gospel "worketh by love;" and that their true character is known by its fruits. He will shew them, that they have many duties to per-

form, many enemies to encounter, many difficulties to overcome, and many dangers to escape; and will remind them, for their encouragement and consolation, that in GOD, if they faithfully seek him, they will find hope, and courage, and strength, to surmount them all.

In this manner, "he will teach, as one having authority, and not as the scribes; and his speech, and his preaching," will be "not with enticing words of Man's wisdom;" which instead of awakening the conscience, amending the heart, and rectifying the life, will merely allure those who have *itching ears*; and produce the empty admiration, and useless applause, of the Preacher; "but in demonstration of the spirit, and of power." And the *Faith* of his hearers "will stand, not in the wisdom of Man, but in the power of GOD."

As the amount of all his instructions and exhortations is found in the word of GOD only; he will of course make that inestimable book the object of his daily, patient, and intense study. He will not, on the one hand, foolishly rely upon the mere force of his genius and literary attainments, to supply what the Scriptures only can give; nor, on the other, presumptuously trust to unwarranted expectations of assistance from on high. These are merely the result of ignorance, sloth, and presumption; and when GOD can be shewn to have promised his peculiar aid to the errors of ignorance, and the sins of sloth and presumption; then, and not till then, may such assistance be rationally expected. Until that time, every preacher of the Gospel will be bound "to give himself wholly to reading and meditating the Scriptures," according to the solemn injunction of Paul to Timothy; that he may be really profited, and that his "profiting may appear unto all."

At the same time, while he carefully discourages all negligence and unscriptural hopes in his hearers; he will feel himself bound *never to despair of the salvation of any*. How can we conceive of a case, apparently more desperate than that mentioned in the text? The preacher was a prisoner, under trial for his life as a capital malefactor; of a subjugate and hated nation; of a sect of that nation, peculiarly hated and despised even by the nation

itself; and was accused by the great council of that nation, comprising all its principal men. Felix was the chief magistrate of the country; a Roman, and therefore supremely haughty, and impatient of censure; a ruler unjust and cruel; an oppressor; a murderer; a man lewd, profligate, and abandoned. Yet this preacher roused the conscience of this man, and made him to tremble at the honest recital of his sins and dangers. Had not Felix with a spirit of procrastination, but too common among sinners, postponed his attention to these solemn things to a future, "convenient season," which never arrived; there is reason to believe, that he might have been brought to repentance. While life remains, no preacher is warranted to think any man beyond the reach of divine mercy. When he least expects it, the most hardened sinner may be brought to tremble at a plain and powerful exhibition of his sins, and to flee with terror from final perdition. "In the morning," therefore, let him "sow the seed, and in the evening withhold not his hand;" and leave it, commended by his prayers, to the rain and the sunshine.

4thly. *Hearers ought ever to expect such preaching from their ministers, and to receive it willingly and kindly.*

Such preaching ought certainly to be expected from every faithful minister of the Gospel, because such was the preaching of Christ, the Prophets, and the Apostles. These furnish the only example to ministers; and that, a perfect example. In this example the preacher finds not only his instruction, but the law by which he is to be governed. On this subject God himself has given us his own comment, and precluded all dispute and doubt. "Son of Man," said he to the prophet *Ezekiel*, when going forth to preach to the *Israelites*, "I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast de-

livered thy soul." Can any preacher hear this tremendous denunciation against unfaithful watchmen, and not tremble? Can any people hear it, and question the rectitude of such preaching, as I have enjoined? Can they be willing, that the blood of impenitent and obstinate sinners should be required at the hand of their minister in the great day! Can they fail to wish, and to pray, that he may "deliver his own soul?" What congregation, unless one were to be formed of maniacs, or to be summoned from the regions of eternal sin and perdition, can be supposed thus mad, thus profligate, thus forsaken of their God. What congregation, but such an one, can demand, can wish, can expect, can consent, that their minister should thus become a suicide, and murder his own soul! If there be a being in this Assembly, who performing the usual functions of a man, is accounted a rational being, and yet claims this conduct at the hands of a minister of the Gospel; let him, before he enters the house of God, read this dreadful commission to Ezekiel, and henceforth be dumb on this subject forever.

If arguments can be needed, after what has been already said; let every hearer remember, that the preaching, here urged, is the only preaching, which will do *him* good. The very opposition, which he manifests to this preaching, the very reluctance, which he feels, to have his guilt and dangers brought home to his heart; is the strongest proof, that this preaching is peculiarly necessary for *him*. He is the Felix of the text; a gross and guilty sinner; exposed to the wrath of God, and the danger of devouring fire. Let him remember, that in displaying his guilt, and in denouncing his danger, his minister is using the only possible means of saving him from both. The physician heals a pestilential disease by the administration of bitter remedies. Still they are remedies, and will accomplish the cure. Were he to substitute for them all the sweets of Hybla; the patient, though he might please his palate, would lose his life. The surgeon heals an ulcer, or a fracture, by exploring it with a hard hand, a painful probe, or a searching caustic. All these are uncomfortable; but, were he to neglect them, the wound would mortify, and the limb perish.

Every truth concerning a sinner, except this, *that there is hope that he may cease from sin*, and those truths which depend on this by an inseparable connection, is, and cannot fail to be, painful. Still these very painful truths are the means, without which there is no hope, that he will ever cease to be a sinner. To do him good, they must be told to him, and plainly ; without disguise, concealment, or softening. The preacher must not, indeed, end his work here ; but must also spread before him all the hopes and consolations, furnished to the penitent in the Gospel. But he must do this work ; and the sinner must consent to have it done, unless he intends to be lost forever.

5thly. *Hearers are by this text solemnly warned to obey the truths, thus preached, without delay.*

Hearers have *two* great duties, with regard to the preaching of the Gospel, enjoined upon them by GOD : *to receive such preaching ; and to obey it without delay.* The Beræans have this honourable testimony borne concerning them by the Spirit of God ; “ that they received the word with all readiness of mind ; ” that is, they were willing to be told the truth ; and, to satisfy themselves whether the truth was told them, “ they searched the Scriptures daily ; to see whether ” it was the truth, or not. This was a glorious and happy character, and merits the imitation of all, to whom the Gospel is declared. There are those, who are impatient of all honest disclosures of evangelical truth ; and who regard the preacher, when delivering it, with hatred and anger. But, in spite of the natural opposition of the human heart to the truth of the Gospel, it is my firm belief, that no preaching is in this country so popular, as that which is strictly evangelical. The manifestation of the truth commends both itself, and him who preaches it, so effectually to every man’s conscience, that the natural opposition of the human heart is not unfrequently silenced and overcome. Even the selfishness of the sinner is unwittingly embarked, and not unfrequently, on the side of the preacher. The sinner often, perhaps usually in a well instructed congregation, knows what is the truth ; and is completely satisfied, that truth alone can ever do him good, and prove the

means of salvation ; whereas error, he equally well knows, can only flatter him here, to destroy him hereafter. Besides, there is something so venerable, excellent, and even awful, in the honest preaching of the Gospel, as to make a sinner afraid and self-condemned, whenever his heart rises in anger against the faithful preacher. Even Felix was not angry with Paul ; but regarded him, though a prisoner, with high veneration. Whatever is the cause, this is certain ; that no preacher, who does not preach evangelically, is, in most parts of this country, long held in high estimation, or relied on as a religious man. But an evil, of another kind, is still found here, and found abundantly. Sinners hear, and respect, the preacher ; acknowledge the truth of his doctrines ; and confess the importance of obeying them. Nay they usually, or at least in many instances, intend to obey them. But here they stop.

Let me appeal to this Assembly for the truth of these observations. Have not most of you, who now hear me, at some period of your lives thought seriously about your salvation ? Have you not believed yourselves to be sinners, standing in absolute need of “repentance toward God, and Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ ?” Have you not designed to begin this great business, and to “escape from the wrath to come ?” What then hindered you from proceeding to accomplish it ? You were not ready. You were too deeply immersed in business, or too intensely devoted to pleasure.

In the mean time, you saw life lengthen before you through days and years, enough to furnish you with a thousand future seasons of repentance. To one of these many seasons, far more suitable for the purpose in your view, than the time present, you concluded to postpone the work ; resolving, when the happy period should arrive, to begin it in earnest. Days and years have, through the mercy of God to you, flowed on ; but have you found this happy season ?

My Brethren, the world is filled with those, who say to Repentance, to Faith, to Holiness, to Christ, to God, “Go thy way for this time ; and when I have a convenient season I will call



for thee." To procrastinate the business of salvation is the real madness, the crying sin, of Man. "Procrastination is the thief," which steals away not only our "time," but our hopes, our souls, our all. Ourselves and those around us, however contentious in other things, are agreed wholly in this; that we will delay that, which alone ought never for a moment to be delayed. "Behold, now," saith the Apostle, "is the accepted time; Behold, now is the day of salvation!" "Behold, now," we reply, "is the time of business! Behold, now is the day of amusement!" But the accepted time, the day of Salvation, is *to-morrow*; a season always one day before us, and never overtaken.

Can this conduct, my Brethren, be justified? Can it consist with wisdom, with duty, with common sense? "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind; that ye may see." Is not the attainment of eternal life the only end, for which you live? And shall the only end of life be postponed to its close? Judgment and eternity, heaven and hell hang, on this little period. Shall it be wasted in blowing bubbles? in picking straws? in gathering cockle shells? Will you "sit down to eat, and to drink, and rise up to play," when God is commanding you from heaven, "to do what your hand findeth to do with your might;" and declaring, "that there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither you go:" when Christ is calling on you "to strive to enter in at the straight gate," and assuring you "that straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life," and that "wide is the gate and broad is the way which leadeth unto destruction." Is it a time to bustle, and toy, and trifle, when "hell is naked before you, and destruction hath no covering;" when the door of life is ready to be shut, and the voice of Mercy to sound no more forever?

But when is the work of Salvation to be begun? Is it to be begun to-morrow, the next year, or at some distant period? "Boast not yourselves of to-morrow, for you know not what a day may bring forth." Allow, what you have no right to expect, that these promised seasons will all arrive, and find you here. Will you be at all better disposed to begin it then, than now?

Why are you now indisposed ? Because your hearts are opposed to repentance, and absorbed in “ the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” At every future period, your opposition to Repentance will be stronger, and your absorption in the world and its lusts more entire. “ Now, therefore, while it is called to day, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.”

You, with all men, condemn the procrastination of Felix ; but, while you condemn it, you act it over again. Where is he now ? What would he give, what would he not give, to have the day return to him, in which Paul preached before him in so faithful a manner ? His interest, under this preaching, was the same with yours, under the faithful preaching of your own ministers. Procrastination ruined *him* forever : continued, it will ruin *you*. Whenever, therefore, your preacher comes out to you with independent honesty, and sincere affection ; and sets your sins and duties, your danger and safety, before you, in the strong light of the Gospel ; whenever you, at the same time, acknowledging the truth and importance of all his solemn declarations, begin to postpone your obedience and salvation to a future day ; let each of you recite to himself, When “ Paul reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come, Felix trembled ; and answered, Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.” Thus he acted, and perished. If I act in the same manner, I shall perish also.

## SERMON XXXII.



### THE PURITY OF THE MINISTERIAL CHARACTER.

A SERMON PREACHED AT THE ORDINATION OF THE REV. MOSES STUART, AS PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH AND CONGREGATION IN NEW-HAVEN, MARCH 5, 1806.

MATTHEW v. 13.

*Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

THESE words are a part of Christ's sermon on the mount; and immediately follow the Beatitudes. From the place, which they hold in this wonderful discourse of our Saviour, it will naturally be supposed, that they are of peculiar importance. They are addressed to his disciples; a considerable part of whom were afterwards apostles; and most, if not all, of the others, were ministers of the Gospel. It is, however, undoubtedly directed to all Christians, and is true of them all; but it is particularly applicable to Ministers of the Gospel; such as most or all of those were, to whom it was immediately addressed; and peculiarly to the apostles; who were ministers, in a higher sense than any others.

To these Ministers it is declared by the Redeemer, that they "are the salt of the earth." Salt, among the Hebrews, and, it would seem, among several other eastern nations also, was the emblem of *purity, wisdom, and perpetuity*. The Israelites were directed to offer Salt with all their offerings, as a symbol of the purity of mind, with which those offerings were to be made. In Numbers xviii. God gave to Aaron, and to his sons, by an ordin-

ance forever, certain offerings, presented by the children of Israel; and styled this ordinance *a covenant of Salt*. "Let your speech," says the Apostle to the Colossians, "be always with grace seasoned with Salt;" that is, with *wisdom*; referring, perhaps, to the pungency, with which observations, eminently wise and useful, affect the minds of those who hear them. Salt was also an emblem of several other things, which need not now be mentioned.

As the emblem of *purity*, Salt is chosen with singular propriety; on account of the peculiar power, which it possesses, of preserving all things, enclosed in it, or impregnated with it, in their sweet and natural state, and securing them from corruption and decay. This, however, it accomplishes only when possessed of its own proper and perfect nature. This it is capable of losing; and when it is lost, the Salt becomes useless. Mr. Maundrell, journeying in the valley of Salt, about fifteen or twenty miles from Aleppo, broke off a piece of this substance, from a small precipice, from which, the Salt was continually taken away by the inhabitants of the neighbouring country. This piece he found, though resembling perfect Salt, in its appearance, had yet, by exposure to the rain, air, and sun, entirely *lost its savour*; and speaks of it, as being the kind of Salt, intended by our Saviour, in the text.

This *savour*, or, as it is called by Christ, Mark ix, 50, *saltiness*, is the property, which constitutes the only value of Salt; for, when this is lost, "it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men." It can no more be employed for human use; and is fit neither for the purposes of seasoning, or preserving, our food; nor indeed, for any of those ends, for which it was especially designed.

In the same manner, the purity of ministers is the foundation of all their usefulness; all the means of seasoning themselves and others; all the means of rendering themselves and their ministry acceptable, and useful, to mankind, and of preserving themselves and their hearers from corruption and ruin.

The purity of ministers may be advantageously considered, as *internal*, and in this sense, invisible except to the eye of God; or, as *external*, and visible to their fellow men, by manifesting itself in the life and conversation. It is my design to consider it, particularly, in the latter sense. As we can never know the internal character, except by its manifestations; so it is plain, that it can, in no other manner, have any influence on the affairs of mankind. It must exist in the soul, or it cannot be manifested; it must be manifested, or it will not be useful. The importance, therefore, of this subject commends itself very forcibly, as well as immediately, to the mind; and demands the very serious attention of both ministers and their fellow men. Ministers cannot but see, that, in this sense, they are bound to "have Salt in themselves;" according to the command of Christ: their fellow men cannot but see, that they have a right to expect, and require, it at their hands.

My own views, concerning the purity of the ministerial character, in the sense specified, I shall endeavour to express, so far as the present opportunity will conveniently permit, under the following heads,

- I. *Purity of Preaching*;
- II. *Purity of Administrations*; and,
- III. *Purity of Life*.

I. *Purity of Preaching includes the doctrines, which are preached; and the manner, in which they are preached.*

1st. *Purity of doctrine denotes, that the Gospel be faithfully and exactly preached.*

If I were asked, what I intend by the Gospel in this observation, I should answer, that I intend the following doctrines, and others revealed in that sacred book, which in my view are inseparably connected with these.

That there is One, Self-existent, Infinite, and Perfect God.

That all things were created, and are preserved, and governed, by him, according to his pleasure.

That the Law, by which he governs moral beings, is holy, just, and good; and requires them to "love him with all the heart, and their neighbour as themselves."

That "he, who doth these things, shall live in them; and that the soul which sinneth shall die."

That all mankind have sinned, "and are, by nature, children of wrath, being children of disobedience."

That Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is himself "over all, God blessed for ever, became flesh;" and "was set forth" by the Father, as a propitiation, to expiate the iniquities of mankind, by dying on the cross, that they might live:

That "he, who believeth on him, shall be saved; and that he, who believeth not, shall be damned:"

That "we are justified freely, by the grace of God, through Faith; and that" that Faith is "not of ourselves, but the gift of God:"

That the Faith of the Gospel is that, "which worketh by love:"

That, except we repent, we shall perish.

That "without holiness no man shall see the Lord:"

That "those, who believe in God," are bound to "be careful to maintain good works:"

That "not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saves us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" the Third Person in the glorious Trinity:

That the "Law is established" by the Gospel, and "not made void," and is, and ever will be, the rule of righteousness to all men:

That God "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness" by Jesus Christ, and "reward every man, according to his works."

That all true penitents will be blessed forever. That the finally impenitent will be "punished with an everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power:"

That the Word of God, by its instructions, precepts, and ordinances, particularly by the ministry of the Gospel, is, in the hands of the Divine Spirit, made effectual to salvation.

These Doctrines, and others intimately connected with them, are in my view pure Doctrines of the Gospel.

Generally, the Gospel in its own proper, obvious meaning; the Gospel, allowed to speak its own sense, and not a sense devised for it with labour and contrivance; so as to make it conform to our pre-conceived opinions; is what I intend by purity of Doctrine. The things preached should ever be things really revealed. "Secret things belong to God." Things which are revealed, and only those, "belong to Man." By revealed things I intend not only such as are expressed; but also those which are clearly and certainly implied. Yet, as human reasoning is so commonly and so easily deceptive, especially when it is our own reasoning; I should always suspect such inferences, as are connected with scriptural declarations by any considerable course of arguments; and admit them, as scriptural doctrines, only with extreme caution. All that is really disclosed is to be admitted, as a doctrine of the Scriptures; and admitted in its own proper sense; and *that* indifferently, whether it accord with our opinions, or contradict them. "Let God be true, but every man a liar," is a sentence, which should rule in the mind of a minister, whenever he sits down to read the Scriptures. When he asks for the sense of a passage, he ought to remember, that the *obvious meaning*, if it have one, is ever to be preferred; that is, the meaning which is upon the whole obvious. It is a just remark of Doddridge, that that sense of the scriptures, which naturally strikes the minds of plain men, is, almost of course, the true one.

Ministers, more frequently than in any other way, trespass against Purity of Doctrine *by preaching their own philosophical opinions*; or opinions, derived from their own reasonings, and not from the Scriptures. This is often done from the love of novelty; often from the desire of preserving consistency in our own system of doctrines; often from reverence for the opinions of others; and, probably almost always, with a persuasion, that what we preach is true, and must be scriptural. But, as man could not make a system of Divinity at first; so it is plain, that he cannot mend the system, which God has made. A Minister, therefore, will ever act prudently, in being satisfied not to be "wise above that which is written." Almost all heretics have

been ingenious and philosophical men; and were themselves ensnared, and ensnared their disciples, in the manner which I am reprobating. If a Minister can, like the Apostles, prefix, or subjoin, *It is written*, to his opinions, and his Preaching; he will be safe himself, and will usually convince and satisfy his hearers.

Young men are commonly in peculiar danger from this source. As we advance in years, we naturally lose a part of the boldness, ardour, and high sense of intellectual independence, which are apt to prevail in the youthful mind. We are, also, compelled to see how regularly human systems of Theology, though often admired and believed for a time, lose their evidence, and their influence; and are ultimately regarded as splendid play-things, fitted only to amuse and deceive; while we are, also, more and more convinced, that "the foundation of God standeth sure; and that every word of God is pure, and endureth forever."

2dly. *Purity of Manner denotes the following things.*

*That the scheme of preaching, as to the sentiments, style, and utterance, be simple and direct;* springing from a sense of the importance of the Preacher's business, and an earnest desire to accomplish it as perfectly as may be; expressive of a high sense of the great end, for which the Preacher enters the Desk; viz. to instruct, and move, his audience; and in this way to persuade them to repentance and reformation:

*That it be clear and intelligible;* exhibiting doctrines thoroughly distinguished, and strongly supported, in plain, obvious language; and happily disclosed by a judicious chosen method, and easy illustration:

*That it be solemn;* suited to the amazing solemnity of the subject, and the end of preaching; to the occasion on which, and the assembly before whom he appears; to the design of the Sabbath, and the venerable character of the Sanctuary:

*That it be fervent;* fitted to the benevolent, interesting, and glorious design of rescuing mankind from the bondage of corruption. He, who is not interested on such an occasion, belies his office; he, who is interested, and at the same time persuades others by a cold and heartless manner of preaching, that he is not,



benes, though, it may be, insensibly to himself, his own feelings. In preaching, if in any thing, a Minister is bound to be "not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord :"

*That it be bold* ; not indeed with self confidence, and pride of talents ; this is the boldness of childhood and folly, but with the firmness, springing instinctively from a rivetted persuasion of the goodness and importance of his employment. The most modest man may be invincibly firm, from this source ; while none but the vain, proud, and silly ; will derive any material support from the other. This attribute was gloriously exemplified by Christ, the Prophets, and the Apostles. Nathan said unto David "Thou art the man." "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees," said our Saviour, "who devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers ! Ye shall receive the greater damnation. O Generation of Vipers !" said the Baptist to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come ?" and to Herod, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." "But ye denied the Holy One, and the Just," said St. Peter to the Jews, "and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of life." "O full of all subtlety," said St. Paul to Elymas, "and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness ! wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord ?" Every faithful Minister will follow these glorious examples, as occasion demands ; and never suffer the *fear of man* to prevent him from "warning the wicked of his way, that he turn from it, and save his soul alive." This attribute is mentioned near thirty times, as a characteristic of Christ, and the first preachers of the Gospel ; and is by this fact strongly commended to our adoption. Nor will it fail to be a most supporting consideration on a dying bed, to remember, that, with Paul, "we have not shunned to declare all the counsel of God."

Finally, *that it be acceptable*. Of the great Jewish Preacher it is recorded, as a general and honourable character, by the Spirit of God, "that he sought to find out acceptable words ;" and, lest we should imagine, that he sacrificed truth and righteousness for the attainment of applause, it is immediately subjoined, "that

that, which was written, was upright, even words of truth." Upright words, then, and words of truth, may still be acceptable words. While, therefore, we are directed "to the law, and to the testimony," to find the doctrines, which we are to believe and preach; and are informed, that "if we speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in us;" we are also required to preach these doctrines in "acceptable words." Nor let any one suppose, that this is an easy task, or to be accomplished without serious labour and care. The inspired Preacher himself, with all his unrivalled wisdom, was obliged, it would seem, to make this attainment an object of exertion: for we are told, "he sought to find out acceptable words." If we would find them, we must labour in the same manner. All the characteristics of Preaching, which have been already mentioned, contribute in their several ways to render the manner acceptable; but I intend something more by this term. I intend, that the manner shall be such, as to discover a reigning sweetness of disposition: an affectionate sympathy with Christians, mingling itself with all the counsel, exhortation and reproof, addressed to them: a tender concern for the salvation of sinners, exhibiting itself as well in disclosing the threatenings and alarms intended to awaken them to repentance, in the rebukes designed to chasten their iniquities, and in the solemn warnings of their guilt and danger; as in disclosing the persuasive and glorious motives, held out to them in the invitations and encouragements of the gospel: a universal moderation and candour in discussing disputed doctrines: a fair statement of objections against the Preacher's own opinions: a serious and benevolent mode of answering them: and a careful avoidance, on the one hand, of such phraseology, as is known to be regarded with particular prejudice by his hearers; and, on the other, of all such exhibitions of doctrine or precept, as terminate merely in exciting fearful apprehensions concerning the Preacher's own heresy. Every Preacher is bound by the authority of God to preach the truth; but no authority obliges him to exhibit it in such a manner, as to persuade his hearers, that it is falsehood.

To what has been here observed, it is proper to add, that every man has, naturally, *a characteristical manner of thinking, writing and speaking, which is his own.* This, undoubtedly, ought to be conceded freely to every man: for none can drop it with advantage, and successfully assume another. But with this native manner of every man, who is qualified to preach at all, all the qualities, insisted on in this discourse, are consistent; and may therefore be attained by him, in a greater or less degree. The natural manner of one man will, I acknowledge, lean more to some of them than to others, and that without any material disadvantage. Substantially, they may all be acquired by every Preacher.

*The opposites to Purity of Manner, or the modes in which Preachers are most exposed to fail of it, are chiefly the following.*

1st. *Uttering our passions in the Desk:* such, for example, as our resentments against individuals, classes or sects. In this conduct are often exhibited, instead of evangelical zeal, and attachment to the Gospel, our own bigotry, hatred, anger, and contempt, for others. Another example may be found in the pride, heat, and petulance of a Polemic; often displaying the censurable spirit of controversy, the insolence of victory, and the impatience of defeat; instead of the sober love of truth, the impartial submission to evidence, and the honest desire to do good, which characterize the upright minister of the Gospel, “contending earnestly,” from the desire, not of victory, but of defending “the faith, once delivered to the saints.”

2dly. *A manner, sometimes adopted, of alarming and distressing an audience, not concerning their guilt and danger, but concerning the heretical character of the Preacher, and his Doctrines.*

This effect is produced by the choice of new and strange phraseology; the utterance of singular, and, to mankind in general, perplexing opinions, in a great measure foreign to both the faith and duty of the hearers, as well as of the Preacher; and delivering paradoxes, instead of the sober sentiments of Revelation and common sense. These are generally made up of inferences, de-

rived, by long and perplexed reasonings, from passages of Scripture, or from acknowledged doctrines ; are always in danger of being false ; are rarely evinced to be true ; and, if true, and evinced to be true, are rarely of any serious importance or utility. At the same time, by their novelty, and the boldness and confidence with which they are declared, they rouse attention, and excite alarm ; and, when they are rejected and reprobated, the Preacher, unfortunately in my view, consoles himself with the reflection, that the opposition to him and his doctrines arises only from the hatred of the truth, so generally discovered by mankind.

3dly. *An ostentatious manner.* In this, the Preacher labours to discover his learning, his sagacity, or his brilliancy.

4thly. *A manner, which I shall call, covert.* In this, the Preacher, either carefully, or carelessly, avoiding exactness of definition, clearness of method, and distinctness of discrimination, throws his discourse together in a mass ; so that it is usually out of the power of his hearers to know what *he himself* believes, or what he would wish *them* to believe. Texts he glosses over without determining their precise meaning, or whether they have any such meaning. His own opinions he slurs in such a manner, as to leave them to be guessed out, rather than understood ; and keeps his hearers in such a state of uncertainty concerning what he believes, that it sometimes remains in doubt, even after his death. This conduct is, in some instances, the result of negligence ; in others, of the fear of offending those who hear ; and, perhaps more frequently still, of lax opinions in the Preacher, which he is conscious cannot be safely disclosed.

5thly. *A manner characterised by levity.* Such, as preach in this manner, exhibit the truths of the Gospel with much the same air, with which they recite ordinary occurrences. Their language is, to a great extent, so cool, sportive, and trifling, and their sentiments are so marked with indifference and lightness of mind, as naturally to persuade their hearers, that they are assembled rather to be amused, and pass away pleasantly those hours of the Sabbath which would otherwise hang heavily, than to learn

their guilt and danger, and obtain their salvation. Such Preachers forget, that GOD has required a "bishop to be sober;" that they speak in his name; that they address immortal beings, in imminent danger of perishing forever; that by their Preaching, if faithfully performed, these beings might be saved; that Christ and his Apostles never trifled with their hearers; and that themselves must soon give "an account" to GOD "of their stewardship."

6thly. A *lazy manner*. It is not to be expected, that all men should be equally animated and fervid in their addresses to mankind. I am ready cheerfully to make all the allowances which can be asked, for constitutional differences of character. But no man needs to be lazy. Every man can be in earnest; and can persuade others that he is in earnest; and when he has persuaded them of this fact, can produce in their minds a serious and solemn sense of serious and solemn truths. This being admitted, every man's native manner will be a good and useful one; the best always, which can be adopted by *him*. The lazy manner, of which I speak, is natural to no man; at least to no man, who ought ever to be found in the Desk. It may, perhaps, be the result of habit, insensibly creeping on the mind; but it is far more frequently the result of unpardonable inattention to the importance, subjects, place, and occasion, of Preaching; the offspring of a very censurable carelessness, concerning the great end of the evangelical ministry. The language, the sentiments, the arguments, of such a Preacher indicate strongly that he is solicitous rather to pass without censure, than to discharge his duty; and to keep his audience quiet, rather than to promote their salvation.

All these modes of Preaching offend plainly against Purity. Some of them, whether intentionally or not, are evidently violations of common honesty. All of them are unhappy: all of them may, with suitable care and faithfulness, be avoided. No man will, I think, hesitate to say, that every Preacher of the Gospel is bound to avoid them.

II. *The Administrations of a Preacher are either Public or Private.*

*The Public Administrations of a Preacher are principally confined to the Sacraments and to Discipline.*

*Purity in the Administration of the Sacraments demands, that they be administered to the proper and scriptural objects; and of course, that the Minister, with the utmost care, study, and faithfulness, determine in his own mind, and to his own satisfaction, who are those proper objects. He is bound to remember, "that other foundation" of the church, or temple, of God "can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ; that he, and every other Minister, is bound to take heed how he buildeth thereupon; that if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it; because it shall be revealed by fire: and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss. Himself indeed, if found faithful, shall be saved, yet so as by fire." It cannot be necessary, that I should attempt to enforce these declarations.*

*Purity in the manner of administering Sacraments demands, that their nature, end, and use, be faithfully and effectually explained; that the great truths, which they so powerfully exhibit, be strongly inculcated; that the deep interest, which all men have in coming to them evangelically, be frequently and forcibly inculcated; and that they be conducted with the highest earnestness, solemnity, and affection.*

*Purity in the administration of Discipline requires indispensably, that it be undertaken with the utmost care, caution, forbearance and tenderness; and at the same time, with steadfast fidelity and firmness. None but gentle passions of the Minister ought here to have any place. No other passions of the Brethren ought to find the least indulgence. The only appearance of any single act of Discipline ought to be, not as it sometimes is, that of the prosecution of private revenge, but that of discharging an*

indispensable duty to God, and to Christians; intentionally directed only to the good of the offender, the edification of the church, the advancement of religion, and the glory of Christ. Here, "the wisdom which is from above, which is without partiality," ought supremely to control, and beautifully to shine. Here especially, "the Servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men." At the same time, there are occasions, on which he is required "to rebuke" both solemnly and sharply; that those who are rebuked "may be sound in the faith." On all occasions also, he is bound "to watch for the souls" of his flock; that he may approve himself a "a faithful and wise servant;" although for this conduct he may endure many afflictions.

*The Private administrations of a Minister are information, demanded by the ignorance; exhortation, by the sloth; and reproof, by the manifest sins, of his people.* The members of every congregation need continually to have their ignorance removed; their faith settled; their doubts dispelled; their duty explained; and particularly those, which are called cases of conscience, so determined, as to prevent, or recall from, error and sin, and to guide to truth and righteousness. Beside the faithfulness, necessary for the discharge of this, as well as of every other, ministerial duty, *two things* are especially required here: *the knowledge of the Scriptures and the knowledge of the human character; or, more definitely, the knowledge of man as a moral being.* The general character of man, as a moral being, is most extensively, exactly, and wonderfully communicated in the Scriptures. But the peculiar traits, which distinguish one man from another, can never be learned, except from man himself. So vast and various a subject can never be comprised within the compass of any book. To gain this knowledge, every Minister must with unceasing care and attention apply himself to the study of men; and learn them from themselves. Cases of conscience, doubts, and difficulties, he will find ever varying from each other in something, and in something which deserves his attentive regard. To

their own accounts, particularly, he must lend a patient and watchful ear; that he may learn the true nature of their difficulties, distinguish between their real and imaginary evidences of piety, and between false and well founded hopes; mark carefully their self-flattery, their causeless despondency; and effectually discriminate between these and their solid consolations, their genuine light, and their evangelical joy. All these and the like things he must learn from *Men*; for he will find them imperfectly recounted in *books*. Vigilance and perseverance will make him possessed of this invaluable knowledge. When possessed of it, he is bound to apply it to the several cases, presented to him, with fidelity; whether the application be painful or pleasant, comfortable or discouraging; without flattery or concealment, and with the utmost tenderness and concern for each individual.

*His private exhortations* he is required to administer on every proper occasion: to watch opportunities, as an eminent Divine once expressed it, *to drop a word for God*; to urge his fellow Christians to their duty, especially when they are dull and reluctant; to move and invigorate pious and charitable purposes in their minds; to quicken diligence; to rouse activity; and to temper zeal.

*Purity in administering private reproof* demands, that for all private transgressions, and for many which are not private, *the reproof be administered privately*. "Go, and tell thy brother his fault, between him and thee alone," is a rule, which cannot be too much regarded by a Minister of the Gospel. Nor in any case, except where necessity requires it, should the facts be disclosed afterwards. To reprove successfully is an attainment of high importance, and far less common than could be wished. The great secret of doing it lies in seizing the happiest opportunities; in possessing, and manifesting, the gentle, meek, and forbearing spirit of the Gospel; and in evincing a desire of nothing, but doing real good to him who is reproved. Pride, petulance, and passion, airs of superiority, resentment, or indifference, sting-



ing expressions, and even those which are blunt, or cold, are totally out of place here; and will awaken no emotions, but those of anger, opposition, and contempt. Even the Psalmist could say, "Let the righteous smite me kindly, and reprove me: let not their precious oil break my head." At the same time, every Minister should remember, that to reprove privately, as well as publicly, is one indispensable part of his duty; "and that although he who reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame; yet as an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear."

III. *Purity of life involves Innocence, Prudence, and Activity.*

"Be ye harmless as doves," was one of the directions, given by our Saviour to his Apostles, when they were entering upon their first mission; and is still a direction of incalculable importance to every minister of the Gospel. Accordingly the first attribute, required of a Bishop by St. Paul, is, that "he be blameless."

The character of a Minister should ever be regarded by himself, as demanding the same care, the same exact and delicate attention, with that of refined and respectable women. In the same manner, it is required of him by the world, not merely that he do not transgress the acknowledged rules of Religion and propriety, but that he keep at a remote distance from every fault, and every reasonable suspicion. He must not be seen to approach, he must not in fact approach, he must not by sober and candid men be suspected of approaching, towards transgression. Let no Minister think these restrictions injurious, or burdensome. On the contrary, they are eminently honourable and beneficial. Their very existence proves, that Ministers have so conducted themselves in this country, that this conduct from them is regularly expected, as well as demanded. At the same time, they furnish strong, and important security to every Minister of his continuance in an unblamable character, and of his possession of that peculiar usefulness, which can be derived from no other

source. We cannot have too many inducements to do that which is right, or to abstain from that which is wrong.

True *Wisdom* originally *dwelt with Prudence*; and dwells with it always. When Christ directed his Apostles to "be harmless as doves," he directed them also to "wise as serpents." This cardinal excellence of mind finds its chief employment in the prevention and avoidance, of evil. How necessary is this excellence in such a world as this, where evil is ever at hand; and where imprudent men are continually marring the best designs, perplexing the peace, and preventing the happiness of their fellow men!

Among the essential ingredients of this excellence in a Minister *gravity or sobriety is one*; and one, of no trifling significance. Accordingly it is expressly required by St. Paul in the character of a Bishop. This characteristic is indispensable to give dignity to his life, weight to his opinions, and authority to his reproofs. Levity is wholly inconsistent with the nature of his office, and with all personal dignity. Trifling conversation, light-minded sentiments, and frivolous conduct, will, of course, humble him to a very ordinary level; and withdraw from him all the respect, naturally attached to his office. *Caution*, also, is an indispensable ingredient of Prudence. A single rash, headlong act may deeply stain, or wholly destroy his character. He is bound, therefore, habitually to watch all his conduct; to consider well before he resolves; to abstain, in this sense, "from every appearance of evil;" and, in every difficult or doubtful case, to apply himself for counsel to those in whom he can safely confide. Especially ought he to be cautious of interfering, without plain necessity, in the concerns of others, where the interference is not demanded by the nature of his office. St. Peter appears to class a "busy-body in other men's matters" with persons of the vilest and most scandalous characters.

*Affability, modesty, gentleness, and moderation*, are also traits in the character of Prudence, each of which is of no small importance. Men intentionally reserved are rarely loved; proud,

vain, and self-confident men are either hated or despised; harsh men are loathed of course; and vehement men distrusted and dreaded. He, who would be loved and trusted, must distinguish himself by a character, directly opposed to all these disagreeable defects.

But the chief ingredient of Prudence is "watchfulness over the tongue." "My Brethren," says St. James, "if any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain." And again, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." "By thy words," saith our SAVIOUR, "shalt thou be justified; and by thy words shalt thou be condemned." "Death and Life," says *Solomon*, "are in the power of the tongue, and whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles." With these solemn declarations in view, every Minister is powerfully called on to unite with David in that earnest prayer, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips!" The evils, especially opposed to this great ministerial duty, and from which incalculable mischief sometimes flows, are particularly the following. Giving characters; reciting private history; uttering sentiments and expressions of levity, passion, and contempt; delivering sudden and rash opinions; attacking with bitterness such as are opposed to us, either in opinion, or conduct; and discovering strong wishes to shine, by attempting frequently bold, brilliant, and witty observations; assuming the character of satirists; embarking in our conversation in private contentions; and thus shewing, that we enter unduly into the wishes and resentments of others. He who does these things will, after all the warnings of St. James, not unfrequently be surprised to "behold, how great a matter, a little fire kindleth."

All the observations, which I have made under this head hitherto, respect merely *the avoidance of doing evil*. This, though perhaps the most difficult part of a Minister's duty, is yet only *an indirect manner of doing good*. *Purity of life* demands of the

Preacher, *that he do good directly also* ; and that in this honourable employment he exert an unceasing *Activity*.

*In his study* this activity is first to be employed. Sloth is the source of almost all serious defects in a Preacher. Sloth is necessarily, and regularly, the source of ignorance ; and an ignorant Teacher is a self-contradiction. Sloth is also the source of barrenness of thought and therefore of dullness in the Preacher, and inattention in his hearers. Sloth is also the source of barrenness of instruction ; and therefore of ignorance, error, and stupidity, in his hearers. Few employments are more laborious and difficult, than to preach continually, and yet acceptably and usefully, for a considerable series of years. Almost any man of tolerable information, choosing the happiest seasons of thought, and the subjects with which he is best acquainted, may form a few good Sermons, with no other labor than that of composing them. The difficulty lies in providing such Sermons for ten, twenty, and thirty years in succession. No man, who does not study, can overcome this difficulty. Whatever powers of imagination or eloquence he may possess ; he will still be defective in useful information, sound sense, and solid thought ; and will soon find, that for these, as the means of *entertaining*, as well as *profiting*, his audience, there can be no substitute. The great business of a Preacher is to preach the Truth. Without diligent study the Truth cannot be known by him : without study, therefore, his prime duty cannot be faithfully performed. At the same time, his sloth will be a wound to his conscience, which he cannot heal ; and a reproach to his character, which he cannot wipe away.

*Abroad*, his Activity must be extended to all his concerns. He must visit, instruct, and comfort, the sick and the distressed ; allay, as much as in him lies, the heat and violence of contention ; reconcile such as are employed in it ; and preserve peace and good neighbourhood among his people : remembering, that "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, of them who make peace." He must also devise, encourage, and invigorate, all

prudent, charitable efforts; strengthen the hands of parents and instructors in the virtuous education of children; and promote by every proper means the good order and welfare of his country. In all these desirable things he must not be merely an adviser, and exhorter, but an eminent and distinguished example. "His light must so shine before others, that they, seeing his good works, may," by approving and imitating his amiable conduct, "glorify our Father who is in heaven;" and that his flock, by his life, as well as his preaching, may be drawn after him in his way to eternal glory.

### REMARKS.

From this summary account of what is included in the purity of the Ministerial character its nature may, I hope, be in some good measure discerned. The importance of this attribute is in the most forcible manner displayed in the text. "If the salt have lost its savour, it is thenceforth good for nothing; but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." An *entire want of purity* is, to a Minister, an *entire want of worth*; in the eyes of both God and men. Beyond this, it is a character loathsome and contemptible, a violation of all his professions, a sacrifice of all his duty. *Every approach towards it* is, therefore, to be dreaded, and shunned.

When a Minister, then, calls to mind the commission which he has received, the hand by which it was written, the employment to which he is consecrated, and the divine end for which his office is instituted by God; will it be possible, that he should fail to cultivate with unceasing earnestness and zeal Purity of preaching, of administrations, and of life? Can he fail to "watch thereto with all perseverance?" Will he not "bow his knees" daily "to the Father of all mercies, for wisdom to direct" him, and for "grace to help in time of need?" Will he not "seek for it, as for silver; and search for it, as for hidden treasure?" Purity is the seasoning of his Ministry, the sweetness and ami-

ableness of his character, and the means of preserving his flock from corruption and ruin.

“ I venerate,” says the illustrious *Cowper*,

“ I venerate the man, whose heart is warm,  
Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life,  
Coincident, exhibit lucid proof,  
That he is honest in the sacred cause.”

What man of common candour, or even common sobriety, would not subjoin to this sentiment his solemn Amen? What Minister would not watch, and strive, and pray, unceasingly, that, in an office so sacred, with a destination so dignified, and in a cause so momentous; he may establish, preserve, and exhibit, a character, on which all his usefulness and peace of mind so evidently depend? At the same time, let every Minister, and every church and congregation, strongly realize *the excellence as well as the importance, of this office*; and of that evangelical Purity of heart and life, which is its soul and substance. “Ye are the Salt of the earth,” said our Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples; including probably some, who through life continued to be private Christians, as well as others, who were destined to the apostleship, and to the ministry. The excellence of all christians is their christianity. The peculiar excellence of Ministers lies in the diligent, zealous, and faithful application of their christianity to the great purposes of persuading others to become Christians, and of preserving and edifying those who have already assumed the Christian character. “Ye are the Salt of the earth:” the means of preserving it from final and fatal corruption. This great world is every where, naturally, an immense mass of putrefaction; corrupted with error; tainted with sin; and, left to itself, tending rapidly to absolute ruin. The great instrument in the hands of God, both for restoring and preserving it, so as to be fitted for the use, of which it is capable, and rendering it again an object of the divine complacency; is unquestionably the ministry of the Gospel.

The Pulpit, says the excellent Poet, whom I just now quoted,

“ I say the Pulpit (in the sober use  
Of its legitimate, peculiar powers)  
Must stand acknowledged, while the world shall stand,  
The most important and effectual guard,  
Support, and ornament, of virtue’s cause.  
There stands the messenger of truth. There stands  
The legate of the skies. His theme divine,  
His office sacred, his credentials clear.  
By him, the violated law speaks out  
Its thunders; and by him, in strains as sweet  
As angels use, the gospel whispers peace.  
He establishes the strong, restores the weak,  
Reclaims the wand’rer, binds the broken heart;  
And, arm’d himself in panoply complete  
Of heavenly temper, furnishes with arms,  
Bright as his own, and trains by every rule  
Of holy discipline to glorious war,  
The sacramental host of God’s elect.

If any man demands evidence of the soundness of these declarations let him cast his eyes, for a moment only, on those countries, or even on those parts of his own country, which have been long destitute of the ministry of the Gospel; and he will find proofs, of the most convincing kind. He will find religion unknown; morals languishing, or dead; extreme ignorance universally prevalent; knowledge neglected and despised; vice reigning triumphantly; virtue expiring at her feet; the Bible unread and forgotten; the Sabbath devoted to horse-racing, visiting, revelling, and riot; the tongue an instrument of profaneness and blasphemy; the hands mere weapons of injustice and violence, or mere tools of avarice and fraud; the salvation of the soul unattempted, and unthought of; the life of man that of a profligate; and his death that of a brute. From this miserable prospect let him turn his eye to the “Mount Zion” of Christians, “and go round about her. Let him tell the towers thereof; mark well her bulwarks, and consider her palaces.” Then let him, if he can, refrain from exclaiming with David, “Beautiful for situation,

the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, in the sides of the North, the city of the great King." Let him, if he can, refrain from believing, that "the Lord hath chosen Zion;" that "he hath desired it for his habitation;" or that he hath said, "This is my rest forever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread: I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy."

To a faithful Minister, then, labouring diligently to perform the duties of an office, instituted, approved, and commended by GOD; sustained by the glorious Redeemer, while he tabernacled in the flesh; so honourable in itself; destined only to the most benevolent and desirable purposes; the means of preserving this great world from absolute destruction; and the chief instrument of restoring to mankind virtue, glory, and immortality; the members of every church and congregation are bound, both by the authority of GOD, and their own supreme good, to lend continually their countenance and aid. By these solemn obligations, they are required to receive and welcome the evangelical doctrines which he delivers; to assist all his benevolent efforts to promote the common good, and that of individuals; meekly to receive his reproofs and exhortations; generally to render his life useful and comfortable, and his weight and influence as a minister as effectual, as may be to every evangelical purpose.

The best Minister is *a man*; and of course surrounded by human imperfections. St. Peter has taught us, what he well knew by unhappy experience, that this treasure is placed in earthen vessels; made of humble materials, frequently defective in their structure, and easily broken to pieces. A church and congregation are, therefore, required both by reason and revelation to regard the imperfections of a Minister with moderation and tenderness. It may be thought, that I have delineated the duties of a Minister with a rigid hand: it will scarcely be suspected, that I have drawn them with a lax one. But, while I think *him* indispensably bound to labour diligently and faithfully to per-



form these duties ; I regard his hearers as equally bound to perform theirs ; to regard him kindly in all his evangelical exertions ; to remember his work and labour of love ; to consider the difficulties with which it is attended ; and to keep in view the numerous imperfections within, and discouragements without, with which he is obliged to struggle. Even Paul could not help exclaiming, “ Who is sufficient for these things ? ” All the difficulties, which he found, except such as arise from persecution, still remain, and are still attached to the office. If his hearers remember this, and consider its importance : if they regard him with Christian affection ; if they treat him with evangelical kindness ; if they aid him with continual and fervent prayers to God ; *he* and *they* will be mutually blessed in the present world ; and become to each other “ a crown of rejoicing in the day of Christ Jesus.” Amen !











