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Emily Morris—

SERMONS,

BY

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Late Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New-York.



IN TWO VOLUMES.



VOL. II.



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SERMON I.

The Duty of adhering to Christianity.

JEREMIAH ii. 13.

My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

FROM the testimony of the universal history of mankind, the truth of Solomon's observation will be evident to every intelligent observer; "This have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." Soon was the knowledge of the true God obliterated among the corrupted descendants of Adam. As the human race increased and extended itself over the face of the earth, the light of primitive revelation became more and more obscure; till, at length, darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. The impious absurdities of idolatry universally prevailed. Men became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened: they changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. In this

state of universal degeneracy, Abraham was called from among his kindred, and his posterity was separated from the other nations of the earth; so that at least, in this one nation, the knowledge of God might be retained, and the worship offered which was due to his holy name. This people was favoured with many wonderful manifestations of the Divine greatness and glory: they were fenced in on every side by a multiplicity of laws and ordinances. But, it is painful to observe in every period of their history before the Babylonish captivity, how much inclined they were to break down every barrier, and start aside into the idolatries of their heathen neighbours. This fatal propensity subjected them to much severe reproof from God's messengers, the prophets; a striking instance of which is afforded in some of the verses immediately preceding the text. To render their ingratitude and folly the more conspicuous, the prophet recounts the former manifestations of God's power and goodness:

“ Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers
“ found in me, that they are gone far from me, and
“ have walked after vanity, and are become vain?
“ Neither said they, Where is the Lord that brought us
“ up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the
“ wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits,
“ through a land of drought, and of the shadow of
“ death, through a land that no man passed through,
“ and where no man dwelt? And I brought you
“ into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof, and
“ the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled
“ my land, and made mine heritage an abomination.
“ The priests said not, Where is the Lord? And they
“ that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also

“transgressed against me; and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.” Great must have been the ingratitude and stupidity of that people, who could forget the kindness of such a bountiful benefactor, and disregard the power of the Almighty Protector. Men are commonly extremely tenacious of the rites of their religion; but the *fickleness* of the Jews was equal to their *other* vices: thus the prophet proceeds in a strain of still more aggravated reproof; “Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this; and be horribly afraid; be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

It is scarcely necessary to remark, that in the figurative language of sacred Scripture, the grace and goodness of God to his people are frequently represented under the image of fountains of living water. To the inhabitants of a sultry clime, such allusions must have been made with peculiar efficacy. Could people in such circumstances ever be induced to quit the copious fountain of pure and refreshing water, and depend upon the broken cistern that would inevitably fail in the moment of their greatest necessity? Such is the rashness, so great is the absurdity of those, who relinquish their dependance on God, the only never-failing source of bliss to intelligent and immortal creatures, and seek for happiness among the perishing gratifications of this earth.

We are not, indeed, in any danger of falling into the gross absurdities of heathenism. But we may, nevertheless, defile the land, make our heritage an abomination, and walk after things that do not profit. We may set up our idols in our heart. We may live without God in the world. We may, in various ways, commit the two evils reprobated by the prophet; we may first forsake the greatest and best of all Beings, the fountain of living waters; and then, attempt to allay our never-ceasing thirst after happiness from the vanities of this world. And, is it not a melancholy truth, that the desire of banishing the fear of God, and a sense of religion from all human concerns, is a sentiment too prevalent among the visionary reformers of the present day? Permit me, then, to introduce the observations which I shall now proceed to lay before you, with the words of an inspired apostle: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation; it was needful for me to exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. I will, therefore, put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not."

We have been saved with a great salvation from more than Egyptian servitude. The great Captain of this salvation hath vanquished the tyrannical power of the enemy: he hath risen triumphant over sin, and death, and hell: he goes before us towards the land of everlasting rest: he sends forth his blessed Gospel, as a pillar of fire to enlighten our path, and conduct us on our way. Let us take heed, not to forsake him, lest

we perish in the wilderness. Let us remember, that although he hath saved us by his meritorious life and sufferings, from the condemnation of the law; he will, nevertheless, finally destroy those who believe not, and who are disobedient to his word.

Let, then, these important considerations be ever impressed on our minds. We forsake God, when we perceive not, nor acknowledge in all the stupendous works of his creation, the power, and wisdom, and goodness, of a present Deity; when we suffer the business or the pleasures of this world to usurp that place in our affections which ought to be reserved for him alone; when we pay more respect to the creature, as the source of our felicity, than to the Almighty Creator.

We forsake God, when we live not under an habitual sense of his superintending providence; praising him in the hour of our prosperity, as the author and giver of all good things; and, in seasons of affliction, adoring his mysterious dispensations, who, like a tender parent, correcteth those whom he loveth, that he may thoroughly purify their corrupted nature, and prepare them for higher degree of honour, for more copious communications of bliss from the fountain of living waters.

We forsake God, when we refuse to submit to his institutions, as contained in the word of everlasting truth, the blessed Gospel of the Redeemer: when we reject the terms of salvation which are there proposed; denying the Lord who bought us; despising the atonement which he offered for our sins, and trampling under foot the blood of the everlasting covenant; disputing the propriety of the declaration, "There is no other

“ name under heaven given among men, whereby we
“ must be saved ;” and, consequently, neglecting the
sacraments which he has instituted as means of grace,
and pledges of his never-ceasing love to his Church.

We depart from the pure fountain of living waters,
when, insensible to the joys of devotion, we seek our
only bliss from the sensual gratifications of a corrupted
world ; forgetting to assemble ourselves together for
the purposes of public worship ; not keeping the Sab-
bath, nor reverencing the sanctuary ; turning the grace
of God into lasciviousness, by wasting in riot and
debauchery those precious moments which ought to
be devoted to religious exercises, preparatory to the
enjoyment of the undisturbed rest and pure bliss of
heaven.

In a word ; we forsake God, when we acknowledge
him not in all our ways, during this earthly pilgrimage ;
in every difficulty, looking up to him, to guide us by
his wisdom, and then receive us into his glory ;
endeavouring, like the patriarchs, “ to walk with him”
in the path of holiness ; under the seducing approaches
of vicious pleasure, exclaiming with the Psalmist,
“ God is my portion for ever ; there is none upon
“ earth that I desire in comparison of thee ;” and
striving with the apostles, even while we sojourn here
below, to have our conversation in heaven.

Let it not be said, that we can never be reduced to
the lamentable state of ingratitude and impiety which
the prophet so severely condemns. Even in a Chris-
tian land, cast your view over the busy scene of human
affairs. How many of those who are so eagerly en-
gaged in the pursuit of power, or the accumulation of
riches, have forsaken God in their thoughts and affec-

tions! How many are heard openly and impiously to avow, that in the management of the concerns of this life, there is no necessity to invoke the interposition of the Deity! But, surely, to every dispassionate mind, such sentiments will appear as absurd as they are impious. The universe bespeaks the power, and wisdom, and goodness, of its great Creator: the heavens declare his glory, and the firmament showeth his handy-work. How consentaneous to reason is it, to conclude, that the government of God is extended over all his works, and that rational creatures must be accountable for their conduct! These momentous truths have the express sanction of a revelation from heaven. The Gospel which inculcates them, was at first established upon sufficient evidence of its divine origin. From the commencement of this heavenly system, its institutions have been respected in various parts of the earth; its Sabbaths have been observed; its sacraments have been celebrated; its doctrines have been publicly taught; and its priesthood has been continued by uninterrupted succession down to the present day. So that, with respect to those to whom the ordinances of the Christian religion are regularly administered, it may be affirmed in the words of Solomon; “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? And the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof.” Let us, my brethren, impressed with a due sense of the advantages which we enjoy, listen to the admonitions of this heavenly wisdom. Animated

by lively gratitude for the blessings which the Divine bounty has poured down upon us, let us exclaim under the steadfast purpose of holding fast our integrity to the end, "What shall separate us from the love of God?" When troubles come to discourage us, or pleasures to seduce us from the right way; let us look up to heaven, and with the eye of faith, behold our dear Redeemer enthroned in glory. Let us hear him asking with affectionate solicitude for our steadfast continuance in well-doing, "Will ye also go away?" Let the humble reply, prompted by heartfelt gratitude, ever be, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. We will not renounce our dependance on *him*, in whom is everlasting strength, and rely upon things which cannot help, nor profit. We will not forsake the fountain of living waters, and seek our only refreshment from broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

And may not the vanity of all earthly gratifications be justly represented under this image, if you set aside the love and fear of God, and the blessed hope of immortal bliss and glory? In the absurd mythology of the ancient heathen, some of the wicked in the infernal regions were said to be tormented with the unprofitable labour of pouring water for ever into a vessel that was perforated on every side, and of course could be never filled by their most painful exertions. And do not sensual and wicked men, even in this world, voluntarily condemn themselves to a punishment in some respects similar? Are they not continually hewing out to themselves broken cisterns, that can hold no water? Are they not for ever attempting to collect the chief sources of their enjoyment in places where, the very

constitution of their nature, renders it impossible to hold them? The immortal spirit of man can never be completely satisfied with the transient gratifications of this earth; with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Observe the conduct of those who have no higher hopes nor wishes. They are pouring in delight after delight without intermission; and still the vessel is ever empty. One amusement, one gratification, is succeeded by another; and still, the thirsty soul is never satisfied. And how can it be otherwise? Our beneficent Creator has animated these frail bodies with never-dying souls—with spirits of a superior nature; reaching forward to the comprehension of all truth; longing after immortality; and plainly evincing, by their unwearied exertions, that nothing but God and the pure bliss of heaven is completely adapted to their spiritual nature, and commensurate to their enlarged desires.

Looking forward to the comforts which the Gospel was to supply, the encouraging language of the evangelical prophet is, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and drink freely!” And when the Messiah appeared upon earth, he repeated the affectionate invitation; “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” The blessed Gospel of Christ is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. Although, with respect to our temporal affairs, it offers no stores of wealth; by teaching us temperance and industry, it commonly supplies us with competency, with food that is convenient for us; and it relieves the immediate pressure of want, by animating us with patience and resignation, and inspiring us with the hope

of better things to come. But, in all our *spiritual* necessities, the religion of Jesus affords abundant relief: to the thirsty soul it is a fountain of living waters. From a consciousness of guilt, do we want the consoling promise of the remission of our sins? From a deep sense of our native infirmity, are we looking up for the aid of heaven? Amidst the perplexing darkness, the grievous trials of this sublunary world, are we longing for the light, and glory, and bliss, of that celestial state, where we shall see face to face; where sorrow and sighing are done away for ever? By the Gospel of our compassionate Redeemer, repentance and forgiveness of sins are preached to all people; the Holy Ghost is sent to help our infirmities; life and immortality are brought to light.

From the whole of what has been now said, let us draw the three following important points of practical instruction:

Ist. Let us learn the great absurdity of seeking our supreme felicity from any other source than that to which God has directed us—the knowledge and love of himself, and sincere obedience to the dictates of his religion. He knows whereof we are made. He knows what gratifications are best adapted to our nature. He created us for eternity; and, therefore, justly expects that we should love not the world, nor the things of it, as the chief sources of our bliss; that we should elevate our desires above all those things that must perish in the using, up to those substantial and permanent delights, which will survive the dissolution of this material universe. The earth may be dissolved; the elements may melt with fervent heat; the heavens may pass away with a great noise; but the spirits of the just

will rejoice for ever in the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

2dly. Let us keep close to this fountain of living waters : let us never forsake God, who is our best portion for ever : let us, in this remote place of our earthly pilgrimage, maintain a friendly communion with him by meditation, and prayer ; by constant attendance on the solemnities of religion, the preaching of his word, and the administration of his sacraments ; by devout attention to the duties of both public and private devotion.

Lastly ; let us remember, that although in our thoughts, and affections, and practices, *we* may forsake God ; he will never forsake us : he will keep near to us in the manifestations of his mercy, or he will visit us in the inflictions of his wrath. Whether we are so wise as to go up to heaven, or so rash and foolish as to descend into hell ; we shall not escape from his presence, nor go from his Spirit. Let it, then, be the great concern of our life to secure his loving-kindness and mercy ; so that when the earth and all its enjoyments are vanishing away, we may be enabled to exclaim, “ In thy presence is the fulness of joy, and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.

SERMON II.

The uncertain State of Man.

PSALM ciii. 16.

As soon as the wind goeth over it, it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

VAIN and thoughtless mortals take *this* for the place of their rest, and seem to be little affected by the unceasing mutability of all human affairs; their presumptuous language is, “We shall never be removed, our mountain is made so strong.” The considerate Psalmist entertained more just conceptions of the frail and perishable estate of man—of man fallen from happiness and immortality, subjected to all the vicissitudes of time and chance, to a life of misery, and then to death, and dissolution in the grave. Surely, the tear of compassion must be ready to start in the eye of every person who reads the pathetic description of man’s uncertain condition, contained in the words of the text, and in the preceding verse of this psalm: “The days of man” says holy David, “are but as grass;” like *that*, he springeth out of the earth, and remaineth but a little while upon it: “he flourisheth as a flower of the field;” fair, but very transient: he

unfoldeth his beauty in youth; he continues for a short time in the vigour of manhood; but soon the penalty denounced against the first transgressor is inflicted, the breath of God's displeasure passes over him, and "he is gone;" like the dying flower, he boweth his drooping head, and mingles again with his native dust; his friends and his companions look for him in vain at the accustomed spot which was once enlivened and beautified by his presence: the earth has opened her mouth; the dreary mansion of the grave has received him; "he is gone, and his place shall know him no more."

And is this the sad termination of all our earthly pursuits? Is this the melancholy conclusion of the busy scene which surrounds us? Is it for this that the covetous toil for wealth, the ambitious struggle for power, and the voluptuous for earth-born gratifications? Vain man would be accounted wise; but surely, there is little wisdom in thus grasping at fleeting shadows, and disquieting ourselves to no valuable purpose. Happy are they, who, from a just sense of the transitory nature of all earthly possessions, have been induced to lay up permanent treasure in heaven; who, from serious meditations on the brevity of human life, are inclined to seek for glory and immortality in those blessed regions where death has no more dominion over us.

The Psalmist, in the passage before us, particularly alludes to the uncertainty of our existence, our perishing condition, in this world: and nothing can be more expressive of the frailty of human life, than the images which he here introduces. But, in the following discourse, I shall take the liberty to extend the Psalmist's observation to other objects besides the *life* of man:

of all the most stable works of his hands, it may be affirmed; "The wind goeth over them, and they are gone; and the place thereof shall know them no more."

Shall we take this as our everlasting habitation, when universal experience teaches us, that we are as transient as the flowers of the field? Where are the myriads of the human race, who from the beginning have successively been called into existence? They are swept away from the face of the earth, and consigned to the profound oblivion of the grave. Some few have made themselves a name, and are remembered either with infamy, or honour. But the great bulk of mankind who have gone before us, are as entirely banished from our view; are as totally forgotten, as if they had never existed. The mighty flood has continued to pour along through successive ages, without ever returning. *We* are now borne forward by its irresistible power, as *they* were who have preceded us; and, like *them*, we shall soon launch forth into the boundless ocean of eternity. As we are rapidly hurried along, how incessantly does the prospect vary! Now we behold a pleasant lawn, and now a frightful precipice. Sometimes we glide through smooth waters, and sometimes we are hurled down the dangerous cataract. Short as our progress has been, how many sad changes have taken place in ourselves and others; in the appearance of our bodies, and in the sentiments of our minds? How many dear companions have been separated from us! How many tender ties have been suddenly broken! How speedily has the bloom of youth been succeeded by the pallid hue of sickness or of age! How soon has beauty been changed into deformity,

and strength into weakness! Of all that we hold most dear in this world, it may be affirmed in the pathetic words of the text, "the wind goeth over it, and it is gone for ever."

Shall we attempt to lay the foundation of our felicity and glory upon this unstable earth? He who thus builds upon the sand, will, ere long, find the floods arising, and the rains beating upon his ill-founded fabrick, and sweeping it entirely away. The most substantial works of human ingenuity and strength cannot withstand the shock of all-subduing time. The lofty tower and the magnificent city fall in undistinguished ruin. Great Nineveh has disappeared; proud Babylon has become a dreary habitation for dragons and for owls; even God's own city Jerusalem, the joy of the whole earth, for the crimes of its inhabitants, has been swept with the besom of destruction: according to the prediction of our Lord, not one stone has been left in it upon another, which has not been thrown down. In countries which once exhibited the most wonderful productions of human art and power, the melancholy traveller now finds nothing but one extended scene of desolation; nothing but a few sad monuments of ancient beauty and magnificence. Thus is the pomp and pride of man levelled with the dust. Thus are we taught by woful experience, that what was deemed the most durable of all earthly possessions, is, in reality, as fleeting as a vision; the wind goeth over it, and it is gone: and the man of wisdom stands on the desolated spot, and with a sigh moralizes on the uncertainty of hope, and the vanity of human wishes.

But, we may proceed still farther, and apply such

observations as these even to this great globe itself, the theatre on which are displayed all the wonderful works of man. The time will assuredly come, (and a thousand years in the sight of God, who inhabiteth eternity, are but as one day)—after a few more revolutions shall have finished their course, the wise purposes of God's providence, with respect to the present system of things, will be accomplished; and then will come the end: the wind of Almighty power will pass over this material universe, and it is gone: the sun will be turned into darkness, the earth will be dissolved, and the elements melt with fervent heat. At this awful moment, what shall support those inconsiderate mortals who have made this world their sole dependance? Of what avail will be all their treasures laid up for themselves upon earth, when the earth itself is sinking under their feet? They must fall with horrible consternation into the gulph of remediless despair. Let us, while the accepted time and the day of salvation continue, secure a right to the *everlasting* inheritance. Let us lay up treasures in heaven, in that city which hath foundations never to be affected by the revolutions of time.

Thus true is the observation of the Psalmist when applied to the most flourishing condition of man in this world; "As soon as the wind goeth over it, it is gone; and the place thereof knows it no more." He cometh up and is cut down, like the transient flower of the field. His body is made subject to perpetual alterations by the violent assaults of sickness, or the more gradual advances of old age, till the great change come, which is effected by death. His most *beautiful* works are soon defaced, and the *strongest* are soon

overturned by the rude hand of time. Not the earth itself will be of everlasting duration. Nothing will be found a sufficient support for the human soul, but hope and trust in God, who is unchangeable and eternal. Let us, then, make a due improvement of these solemn truths. Let a just sense of our present condition lead us to a suitable deportment. And,

1st. Let a due consideration of the transitory nature of all earthly possessions, teach us not to fix our affections with too much ardour on the things which are below; but let us learn to elevate them in time, to those better things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, preparing a place of rest for all his faithful people. If the bloom of beauty must speedily fade; if the nerve of corporeal strength will soon be unstrung; if death, in a short time, will separate us from our stores of wealth, and drag us down from our seats of power; if the pomp of the voluptuous must, ere long, be brought down to the grave, and the noise of their viols be made to cease; if, in the solemn moment of departure from this terrestrial scene of things, we shall say of every earthly delight, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity;" let us be persuaded to seek for a more lasting consolation and support. Let our greatest solicitude be, to become the objects of God's especial love in Christ Jesus. So that, when we are falling from this earth and all its possessions, the everlasting arms may be spread under us: so that, when we are passing through the valley of the shadow of death, we may have a sure rod and staff to support us: so that, amidst the last convulsions of nature, when the earth is removed, and the mountains carried into the depth of the sea, we need fear no evil.

2dly. Let us remember, that although *body* and *estate* may fail; the good dispositions of the *mind* which are now cultivated, will remain with us for ever, and be the source of unceasing felicity. By the goodness of the Almighty Creator, the soul of man was made for immortality: the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. All the adventitious ornaments which this world can supply, will be stripped off by the rude hand of death; but the virtues of the soul will never leave nor forsake us; they will accompany us beyond the grave; they will be the ministers of pure delight through the ages of eternity. Let us then cease to strive with so much violence for the meat which perisheth; and be more solicitous for the acquisition of *that*, which endureth unto everlasting life. Let the splendour of wealth, and the parade of power, be deemed, as they really are, matters of little significance, when set in competition with the heavenly qualifications of love, joy, and peace, long-suffering, gentleness, and goodness. These are plants of immortal growth: the wind of God's displeasure will pass over the gay productions of human folly and pride, and they will instantly wither and die: but *these* virtues will flourish in never dying freshness and beauty: their seat is the human soul, and this place will know them for ever.

3dly. Let these reflections lead us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God; that he may exalt us in due time. What can justify the pride and vanity of man; a frail child of the dust; a fading flower that withers as soon as the wind goeth over it? We may be elated with fond ideas of our importance in the world; but how soon shall we pass away, and

perhaps our very names perish! *Some few* may cherish the remembrance of us with mingled emotions of grief and pleasure; they may long deplore the vacancy which death has made in the ranks of human life. But the world in general will be little concerned; its business will go on without us; they who come after us, will eat and drink, buy and sell, plant and build, with as much eagerness, as if *we* had not lived and died: the place will be occupied by others, which knows *us* no more. Let us, therefore, consider the end, and learn in time to be wise. Pride was not made for man. The presumptuous builders of Babel may vainly imagine, that they have erected a tower whose top reacheth unto heaven; that nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do; that they have made themselves a name in the earth, which will continue for ever. But God, who exalteth the humble and meek, scattereth the proud in the imaginations of their hearts. *We* are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, as all our fathers were. Let us think soberly of ourselves, as we ought to think. The grave levels all earthly distinctions. He alone is truly pre-eminent, who vaunts not of his wealth, or power, or any other temporal possession; but who has acquired a title to glory, and honour, and immortality, in the heavenly kingdom of our Redeemer.

4thly. We may deplore the sad effects of sin; the *misery and death* which have been introduced into the world: but Christianity teaches us, not to be sorry as men without hope. Let us bless God for his infinite compassion in providing sufficient consolation for all our misery, and in pointing out the way by which even death himself may be vanquished. By the Gospel of

Christ, life and immortality are brought to light. As in Adam all die, so in Christ may all be made alive. The flower that fadeth in Adam, will bloom again through Jesus Christ, and then will die no more. What though death may for a short time, have dominion over us: the morning of the resurrection will soon dawn upon the darkness of the grave. This corruptible will then put on incorruption. The body that was sown in weakness, will be raised in power, and flourish in immortal youth, and never fading beauty.

When infidelity looks forward into futurity, what blackness of darkness must rest upon the prospect! The world is receding; and beyond it, there is no support, no consolation. The body is tending to dissolution in the grave; and there is no cheering prospect of its ever reviving. Temporal enjoyments are just coming to a conclusion, and they terminate in dreary annihilation. Very different are the glorious views which the Gospel opens before us. Here, light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. In every period of our existence here below, let us embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life. This is the only effectual comfort, when we are conflicting with the trials of the world, or when we are passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death.

Lastly; in this *frail and uncertain* estate, the necessary lot of all men; and more especially, at this season of wonderful changes and revolutions in human affairs; let our souls rest upon a wise and good Providence, as the best security, the surest protection from harm. Let us trust in the Lord for ever, who alone can supply us with effectual strength for every trial. This is the

conclusion which the holy Psalmist draws from his reflections on the uncertainty of human life, and the transitory nature of all earthly enjoyments: notwithstanding the temporary disorders which prevail in the world, "The Lord," saith he, "hath prepared his seat in heaven; and his kingdom ruleth over all:" notwithstanding the evils to which frail man is now subjected, "The merciful goodness of the Lord endureth for ever and ever upon them that fear him." This kingdom which ruleth over all, will produce from partial evil, universal good. This merciful goodness which endures for ever, will make the short affliction of a moment terminate in a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. From his seat in heaven, the Almighty Creator extends the sceptre of his dominion over all the works of his hands; and his *goodness* is co-extensive with his *power*. To those who *love and serve* him, in life and death, in the enjoyment of things present, and in the expectation of things to come, in time and through eternity, he can make all things work together for good.

SERMON III.

Be not overcome of Evil.

ROMANS xii. 21.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

UPON hearing this positive injunction of the holy apostle, the humble man, conscious of his native frailty, will begin to tremble at the supposed impossibility of obedience; and the proud, and passionate, and resentful, will be inclined openly to revolt. "Is it not a manifest absurdity, (it will be alleged,) to enjoin creatures so infirm and depraved as we are, and who are exposed to trials so numerous and severe, not, on any occasion, to be overcome of evil: and, instead of attacking the wicked with severity, and repelling their injuries with equal violence, to pursue the more tedious and uncertain method of bringing them to a proper sense of their crimes, by forbearance, and gentleness, and goodness."

This mode of representing the subject before us, is well adapted to gratify the too predominant pride and stubbornness of the human heart. But, it is the intention of Christianity, not to indulge these odious dis-

positions; on the contrary, to suppress and eradicate them. The blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ, breathing nothing but a spirit of mercy, peace, and love, encourages us with the promise of such supernatural aid, as will enable us to overcome the evils by which we may be assailed; and, it most expressly and repeatedly declares, that no provocation must ever induce us to return injury for injury; that it is more amiable, and commonly a more effectual method, to subdue the refractory spirit of the vicious, by exertions of courtesy and good-will, than by bitterness, and wrath, and clamour: that the noblest victory over vice is to show a superiority of virtue. To illustrate and enforce these important truths, shall be the business of the following discourse.

It will be observed, that the precept of the text is *general*, directed to *all those* who hear the Gospel; the apostle well knowing that to encounter evil under various forms, is the common lot of mortality. Since the apostasy of our first parents, what part of this sublunary world has ever been the seat of perfect felicity? What path of human life has ever been entirely free from the molestations of evil? Natural and moral evils, pains of body, and disturbances of soul, infest the degenerate sons of Adam in every period of their earthly pilgrimage: during the whole journey of life, from heedless childhood to decrepid old age, at various distances they lie in wait for their prey, and no passenger entirely escapes from their assaults. We are, therefore, to sustain with patience, what the very condition of our nature forbids us entirely to avoid. We cannot *escape* from the evil; but, by the grace of God, it may be *overcome*: nay, the short affliction of a

moment, under the dispensations of a merciful Providence, may be made effectual to the working out for us, of a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Since, therefore, constant experience teaches every one of us, that we are liable to evil; to be disturbed by temporal losses, by pains of body, or infirmities of mind; by our own frailties, or the wickedness of others; since, with the fairest show of outward prosperity, some secret sorrow may prey upon the heart which knows its own bitterness: let me entreat your serious attention to the following considerations, and let them serve as a strong encouragement in all circumstances, “not to be overcome of evil.”

1st. Cherish not the groundless expectation that *you* shall be exempted from the common fate of all men, and therefore may relax your vigilance, and sink into a state of heedless indolence. Under the baneful influence of this disposition of mind, the adversary will attack you; and, before you are aware of your danger, an advantage over you may be gained; you may sustain an injury ever to be deplored; but, perhaps, never effectually redressed. He who is perfectly acquainted with our situation, and who knows whereof we are made, has, therefore, directed us to watch and be sober; to take unto ourselves the whole armour of God; to be patient and persevering, for that man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.

Let these reflections be particularly recommended to the consideration of the young. Let them not be so enchanted with the gay prospect that surrounds them, as to make no provision for the difficulties and dangers of their future journey through life. They

will find upon experience, that the shrub, which appeared so beautiful at a distance, conceals many pointed thorns: as they travel along, they will often tread on venomous serpents lurking under fragrant flowers. Let the season of youth, therefore, be considered as a state of discipline preparatory to the approaching conflict. In the gaiety of spring, and the warmth of summer, let the stores be collected which are absolutely necessary to mitigate the severity of the wintery storm.

2dly. When evils overtake us, that we may not be overcome by them, we are to divest ourselves, so far as may be, of the prejudices of self-love; not impatiently complain, as though some strange thing had happened unto us; not perversely magnify them; and then, with the peevish spirit of the prophet Jonah, maintain that we do well to be angry. The humble and the patient man, in the most grievous calamities, will always discover some alleviating circumstances: he will be ready to acknowledge, that in the midst of judgment, God always remembers mercy. Has he deprived you of riches? he has blessed you with health. Has he afflicted you with sickness? he has surrounded you with friends. Has he taken away *one* friend who was the source of much felicity? he has spared to you another, by whom you are equally beloved. Our compassionate Redeemer alone could say with propriety, "Behold, and see, all ye that pass by; if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger!" To every one of us may be addressed the exhortation of the apostle to his Corinthian brethren; "Neither murmur ye, as some of

“ them also murmured, and were destroyed of the
“ destroyer. There hath no temptation taken you,
“ but such as is common to man : but God is faith-
“ ful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that
“ ye are able : but will with the temptation also make
“ a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

3dly. Let it ever be remembered, that this is a probationary state ; that we are engaged in a trying conflict with powerful adversaries ; that we are made an interesting spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men ; that the reward proposed to the victorious, is a crown of life and glory that fadeth not away. From these considerations, we are again to form the good resolution, not to be overcome of evil ; to resist the devil, that he may flee from us ; to be strong, and quit ourselves like men. By this severity of discipline, the soul is strengthened, and improved in all virtue—in the necessary qualifications for heaven, which otherwise could not have been acquired. “ Tribulation worketh
“ patience ; and patience, experience ; and experience,
“ hope ; and hope maketh not ashamed :” and the result of all this heavenly cultivation is ; “ the love of
“ God is more abundantly shed abroad in our hearts
“ by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” For, we are to consider,

4thly. That under the Christian dispensation, we are not left to the exertions of the poor remains of our own strength ; but we are supplied with supernatural aid from on high. To a weak and ignorant world, grace as well as truth came by Jesus Christ. In all our trials and distresses, his encouraging language is, “ My grace
“ is sufficient for thee.” In confirmation of which truth, one of his first disciples, who was called to the

severest toils in his Master's service, could say at the conclusion of his work; "His grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." And, from this heavenly source he derived fortitude to *bear*, as well as strength to act; he learned *passive*, as well as *active* obedience to the will of his Lord—"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where, and in all things I am instructed, both to be full, and to be hungry; both to abound, and to suffer need: I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." And if these were the exulting declarations of the primitive saints in that gloomy hour of cruel persecution, shall we ever despair of being supplied with spiritual strength sufficient for the discharge of the ordinary duties of the Christian life? The lines have fallen to *us* in pleasant places, not infested with danger. It is not *our* hard fate, to resist unto blood, striving against sin. Utterly inexcusable shall we be, if, in the performance of our comparatively easy task, the weak hands be not strengthened, and the feeble knees confirmed; if we run not in the way of God's commandments without fainting, and walk not in all his ordinances without being weary.

The last motive which I shall urge, in order to induce a compliance with the apostle's injunction, "be not overcome of evil," is drawn from the consideration of our Lord's example. "Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow? His visage was so marred by the

“ strokes of pain, and his form more than the sons of men.” And yet, he suffered not for himself; “ but he was wounded for *our* transgressions; he was bruised for *our* iniquities.” And shall *we*, disobedient children, guilty sinners, “ despise the chastening of the Lord, and faint when we are rebuked of him? Let us rather look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame.” Let us, with grateful affection “ consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself; and be not weary, nor faint in our minds. He suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps.” And, under our severest conflicts with temporal distress, surely it is a source of abundant consolation to know, that if we *suffer* with our Redeemer, we shall also be *glorified* together.

Whatever, therefore, the trial may be in which you are engaged; whether it arise from the immediate appointment of a mysterious Providence; from your own frailties, or from the wickedness of others; whether it affect mind, body, or estate; recollect, that evil under various forms is the common lot of mortality: that judgment is ever tempered by mercy: that even angels are anxious spectators of that conflict by which we are now disciplined for heaven: that we need never to be destitute of the Holy Spirit of God, who helpeth all our infirmities: that we are encouraged by the example of our dear Redeemer, who is now highly exalted, and invested with all power to confer on his faithful followers an ample reward. Let these considerations be duly impressed upon your minds, and you will not be

overcome of evil ; nay, you will be induced to go on to a higher degree of perfection, and “ *overcome evil with good.*”

He that commits sin, by way of retaliation for an injury received, degrades himself to a level with the offender ; and instead of correcting, confirms him in his crimes. On the contrary ; by a rigid adherence to truth and integrity in our dealings with the most inveterate foe ; by moderating our resentful passions, and treating him with kind offices, when he stands in need of our assistance ; the superior charms of virtue become so apparent, that the obdurate heart will in time be softened, and the injurious hand held back from offending. This sentiment the apostle thus expresses in the verse which immediately precedes the text ; “ If
“ thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him
“ drink : for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire
“ on his head”—thou shalt melt him down by the warmth of thy beneficence, into ingenuous compunction and relenting gratitude ; as the artificer, by heaping fire upon it, melts the hard metal. He who violates the positive injunction of the Gospel, “ bless them that
“ curse you ;” he who returns railing for railing, exasperates resentment, and adds fuel to the devouring flames of anger : but how often has a soft answer turned away wrath ? When David was hasting to take vengeance on the churlish Nabal, the meek and prudent Abigail met him, “ and bowed herself to the ground,
“ and said, Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in
“ thine audience.” Her whole intercession on this occasion, is a beautiful specimen of mild and persuasive eloquence ; and the conclusion of it is particularly

affecting: "And it shall come to pass, when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel, that this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself." And the happy result of this meek intercession was; "David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand."

In our intercourse with the world, should our pearls be sometimes cast before swine, who not only trample them under their feet, but turn, and rend us: should our gentleness and benevolence be received with insensibility, and instead of subduing the violence of the ill-disposed, only render them more forward in offending; we have the consolation to reflect, that we have so far at least overcome evil, as not to be provoked by it into a violation of our duty: we have displayed the superiority of virtue; and when the day of retribution comes, it will be seen how infinitely superior is our reward.

But, with our best endeavours to do well, were God to be extreme in marking what we have done amiss, who could stand justified in his sight? Betrayed by the infirmity of our nature, seduced by the subtilty of temptation, or overborne by the violence of pain, what frail mortal can lay his hand on his bosom, and say, "I am pure; I have never fallen in

“ the conflict ; I have never been overcome of evil ? ” Conscious of our weakness and our guilt, let us, with true penitent hearts, acknowledge our transgressions, and entreat God not to enter into judgment with his servants ; let us be most vigilant against that particular evil which most powerfully besets us ; let us fly to that atoning blood which was shed to take away the sins of the world ; weary and faint, let us go, from day to day, to that fountain of living waters which, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, has been opened for the strengthening and refreshing of our souls. Thus shall we proceed towards the heavenly mansions, with the consolations of humble penitence, though not with the confidence of perfect innocence. And, by the grace of God provided in the Gospel, the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls, is secure. For, the good tidings of great joy, the birth of a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, are announced to the fallen race of Adam : repentance and remission of sins are preached in the name of this Saviour, not to the perfectly righteous, (for such are no where to be found,) but to penitent sinners. If it be now so degrading, and, to every heart of the least sensibility, so afflicting, to be entirely overcome of evil, and brought into a state of abject bondage to sin ; how thoroughly wretched must be the sinner’s fate in the regions of remediless woe, where good never enters ; where penitence is of no avail ; where the domination of our cruel adversary is in a great degree uncontrolled ! Let us turn from this dreary scene, and rise upon the wings of faith and love, to those blessed mansions, where evil finds no admission ; where there

is need of no repentance, for there is no sin; where the Lord God omnipotent reigneth in the perfection of bliss and glory; and where the righteous are his delight, through the boundless ages of eternity.

SERMON IV.

The Wages of Sin is Death.

ROMANS vi. 23.

The wages of sin is death: but the gift of God is eternal life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

WHEN Moses, the man of God, had been representing to the people of Israel the blessings that would ensue from obedience, and the mischiefs that would be incurred by violating the divine law which was given to them, he concludes his address with this solemn appeal; “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.” In like manner, the holy apostle, in the conclusion of this chapter, with awful solemnity lays before his Roman converts the vastly different consequences of a vicious and a godly life; he tells them, that they had no fruit—no real permanent advantage in those vices, whereof they were ashamed when brought to a more considerate state of mind: that the end of those things is death: that since they were made free from sin by repentance, and become the servants of God by faithful obedience

to his laws, they had their fruit unto holiness, and the happy end would be everlasting life. He incites them to perseverance in the good way which they had chosen, by leaving this momentous truth impressed upon their minds; "The wages of sin is death: but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

From the representation which St. Paul has given in the preceding parts of this Epistle, of the vices that were prevalent in the world at the time of the publication of the Gospel, it would seem that human nature was sunk to the lowest depth of depravity. He speaks in general terms; but, it is probable, he had the Roman people particularly in view. The descriptions of their own historians and poets correspond with those of the apostle. They had proceeded in the common course of debasement—their extensive conquests had procured wealth; this had introduced all the luxuries of the earth; and the effect of these, was an universal depravity of manners. Here was an ample field for the great apostle of the Gentiles, in which to display his holy zeal and commanding eloquence. Accordingly, we find, that he employed every instrument which human learning, or the doctrines of Christianity could supply, to beat down these strong holds of iniquity. His attacks are conducted with all the force of argument, and all the insinuating arts of persuasion. He sometimes alarms their fears, and sometimes applies to their hopes. Now he plainly tells them, "That the wages of sin is death;" and now comforts and encourages them with the assurance, "That as sin reigned unto death, even so does grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

In every age of the world, among the degenerate sons of Adam, iniquity has so far prevailed, as to render it necessary for the messengers of the Lord of hosts, to cry aloud and spare not, to show the people their transgressions, and exhort them to repentance. It will not be denied, my brethren, that we live in an age when the most open and daring attempts are made to weaken the restraints which religion imposes upon vice: when infidelity and impiety not only prevail, but in too many instances, even appear to glory in their achievements: the monsters no longer lurking in their den, and coming out only to make occasional depredations; but appearing with an undaunted countenance in the open light of day; extending their ravages through the streets of the city, and the fields of the husbandman; climbing up into the chambers of the great, or creeping into the cells of the cottage. At such a season, every Christian, every lover of human nature, must be well-pleased to hear the pernicious effects of unbelief and sin represented in the plainest terms. Hence it will be apparent, that *they* are our best friends who endeavour to strengthen the obligations of virtue and religion; *they* are our most cruel enemies who attempt to break down the barriers which separate us from vice.

The truly compassionate man sympathizes in *all* the distresses of his neighbour. He wishes to relieve his *poverty*, and to mitigate his *sickness*; but is much more solicitous to convert him from *error* to *truth*, and from *vice* to *holiness*. He feels for calamities which distress the *body*, but is much more affected at the prospect of those which will destroy the soul. He dreads the evils which are of *short continuance*, but is

more alarmed at the apprehension of those, the fatal effects of which will *endure for ever*. Let me, then, entreat you to hear me patiently, while I am calling your attention to the former part of the text, "The wages of sin is death." We listen with alacrity to the grateful declaration, that "eternal life is the gift of God." But such is the predominance of sinful appetite and passion; so stubborn are our vicious habits, that we love not to contemplate the sad effects of sin: we wilfully turn away the eye of the mind from the dreary prospect: much persuasion, and reproof, and threatening, is necessary to make us relinquish a present gratification, from the apprehension of its distant consequences.

It is, nevertheless, a solemn and important truth, which we are highly concerned to bring frequently and closely to the view of the mind, that sin is the source of all evil to mankind; the cause of present and future misery; the parent of temporal and eternal death.

In discoursing on this subject, here I might describe, in pathetic terms, the mischiefs which immediately spring from vice, among the inconsiderate children of men—how intemperance soon produces the pangs of an acute, or the wasting poison of a more lingering disease: how idleness and debauchery necessarily lead to all the miseries of want: how ignominy and scorn commonly pursue the footsteps of flagrant dishonesty: these subjects would afford abundant matter of serious consideration. But, I shall confine myself, at present, to its pernicious influence upon our intellectual and moral faculties—its wages is death to the best powers of our rational nature, and consequently to our true felicity through eternal ages.

1st. Habitual commission of sin has a direct tendency to darken the *understanding* of man. It may, indeed, with propriety be asserted, that all vice *originates* in folly; for that person is unquestionably *foolish*, who forsakes happiness, and pursues misery; and, that this is the sottish course of the wicked, no one can deny, who believes that God is just, and that man is immortal. But vice has a re-action upon the mind of the sinner: it tends to aggravate the weakness by which it was occasioned, and to add a deeper gloom to the mists of error from which it originally sprang. Be assured, by the indulgence of vicious passions, clouds and thick darkness rise to obscure the light of truth that was beaming upon the mind; the powers of the understanding are enfeebled; her fondness for error increases, as her love of truth is diminished; till, at length, the Holy Spirit of God, the source of illumination, as well as warmth to the soul of man, is provoked to abandon the transgressor to his unhappy fate.

2dly. By contracting habits of vice, that sympathetic tenderness of soul is destroyed, which was planted in our bosoms by our wise Creator for very benevolent purposes. We were designed for social creatures; hence it is, that we find in the human heart a native propensity to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep. But, let a man indulge himself in frequent violations of his duty; in acts of impiety to heaven, injustice to men, and intemperance with respect to the regulation of his own appetites; and we shall find, that he will soon become hard and insensible. As he fears not the wrath of God, so he will regard not the sufferings of men. He will prosecute his own selfish designs; he will gratify his own

inordinate wishes, at the expense of every gentle and generous sentiment of the human heart. The pains of his neighbour will become familiar to him. He will obey the call of sensual delight; he will follow the suggestions of his avarice or his ambition, regardless of the consequences: he will view without pity, the oppression of the poor; and hear with stubborn indifference, the lamentations of the widow and fatherless. That vice proves thus destructive to all the tender sensibilities, the compassionate emotions of the human heart, too many shocking instances attest in modern, as well as in ancient history.

3dly. Repeated transgression will destroy the activity and life of that heavenly monitor, fixed in our bosoms to be the director of our conduct; to administer reproof, or to bestow applause, as our actions happen to be wicked or virtuous. And this is a sad part of the wages of sin. When heedless mortals first enter into the path of vice, conscience, vigilant and active, is continually apprizing them of their danger; reproving them for every wrong step which is taken; and admonishing them to walk with more circumspection. But, if her friendly admonitions be, from time to time, disregarded, she will, at length, become listless and silent, and the unhappy wanderer will be left without interruption to the error of his ways, to rush upon his own destruction. And truly deplorable is the condition of that sinner, who is thus given up to a reprobate mind; to work all manner of wickedness with greediness; to be encompassed with the most horrible mischiefs, and yet to go on insensible of his danger. And that this is too often the wretched fate of wilful transgressors, our own observation of the daily occurrences

of human life abundantly testifies. How many from the innocence, and simplicity, and flattering prospects of youth, have been gradually debased, till their mature age is polluted with the grossest crimes! How many, whose minds were once as pure as their persons were delicate, by frequent violation of the dictates of conscience, have become so entirely callous, that the shafts of reproach make no impression; so thoroughly depraved, that even the dread of shame has lost its influence!

These are some of the melancholy effects of sin, and these may be avoided by timely care and discretion. There are other evils inflicted by this deadly foe, which it is the *common lot* of mankind to sustain. We may, therefore, go on to observe,

4thly. That when the apostle asserts, "The wages of sin is death," he has chiefly in view the dissolution of this corporeal frame. The penalty annexed to the divine law, was expressed in these awful terms; "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." And the sentence denounced against the primitive transgressors, was, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Derived from mortal progenitors, all their children are subjected to the same fate—it is now appointed unto all men once to die. Death entered by sin; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. And, surely, none of us will be inclined to deny, that this is a grievous punishment. Had we continued innocent, none of the pure delights afforded in this first stage of our existence would have been interrupted; none of the tender connexions formed in this world would have been for a moment dissolved: we should have been translated to

higher regions of bliss and glory, without so many sad partings by the way, without passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death. Far otherwise is now the condition of fallen man. After a few fleeting years, the righteous, as well as the ungodly, must sink into the grave; must go to the land where all things are forgotten; must bid an everlasting adieu to the present scene of things, with which they are so intimately acquainted, and launch forth into that unknown world, which can now be only dimly descried by the eye of faith. And that this is a sore punishment inflicted upon the human race, the heart-rending sighs and lamentations, the floods of tears which from the beginning have been occasioned by it, abundantly testify.

But this, however grievous, is not the worst evil which depraved man is liable to sustain; for, it is to be observed,

In the last place, that the wages of sin is an everlasting banishment from the joys of heaven, a wretched existence in those hateful regions where every object will be to him a minister of woe. This deplorable and hopeless condition is frequently represented in Scripture under the denomination of *death*. Thus it is said, "As righteousness tendeth to life; so he that
"pursueth evil, pursueth it to his own death. If ye
"live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through
"the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall
"live. He that overcometh, shall not be hurt of the
"second death." This is the last and most fatal mischief inflicted by our deadly foe. From all the other sad consequences of sin we may escape: but he who falls under the just judgment of the Almighty, and is doomed to the place of misery provided for impenitent

transgressors, must expect no mitigation of his distress, no release from his cruel tormentors. To those dreary mansions, the light and warmth of God's converting grace are not extended. The accepted time is past; the season of probation is over; now, there is no place for repentance.

Can any intelligent being of the least sobriety and discretion, look forward to this desperate state of wretchedness, without the most lively emotions of fear? Can any person who entertains the slightest regard for his own real felicity, forbear to inquire with extreme solicitude, "What shall we do to be saved from this "unhappy lot of obdurate sinners?" Helpless mortals, sink not, however conscious of your weakness, into a state of utter despondency! Penitent offenders against the laws of your God, awakened as ye now are, to a just sense of your danger, behold the means of safety placed in your hands! What can be more consoling to you, than the declaration of the holy apostle, in the latter part of the text, "The gift of God "is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord?" *They* who were made subject to death by the prevalence of sin, may be restored to life through the tender mercy of heaven—a life not of short continuance like our existence here below, but one that is *eternal* in the mansions of perfect bliss. This life, this inestimable blessing is not the wages of *our* righteousness, the reward of *our* merit, as death is the just wages of sin; but it is the free gift of God to sinful mortals, who had no reason to expect any thing from him, but the execution of the sentence denounced against the violators of his law. And this precious gift was not obtained by our pleading our necessity; by our imploring the

Divine compassion and liberality; but it is imparted to us through Jesus Christ our Lord—it was purchased by his merits, and will be distributed according to his righteous judgment.

What remains then, but that I address *you*, my brethren, in the language of Moses to those who lived under the first testament of God's mercy; "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing." If you have any dread of the severest misery; if you have any regard for your true and lasting felicity, let me conclude with exhorting you to choose life.

The melancholy sentence is inflicted upon all men—"In Adam we have all died;" but, for ever blessed be the tender mercy of our God in furnishing us with the means of rising from that ruined condition; "in Christ we may all be made alive." Let us believe and obey his Gospel, and he will save us from every real evil: he is the first-born from the dead; and we, in due time, will be the sons of the resurrection.

In this world, the joys of paradise have been lost; but man is not left by his Creator destitute and forlorn. Let us look forward to that better country, to that new heavens and new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness: there, the faithful servants of God will be amply compensated for every present loss: there, the tree of life will flourish with unfading bloom, with unbounded fertility; and rivers of the purest pleasure will never cease to flow.

If it be painful to close our eyes for ever upon these fair works of God's creation; to part, for a season, from those beloved friends who are left behind in this state of earthly pilgrimage; let us prepare ourselves in soul and body for admission into far more splendid

mansions, the blessed habitations of the just; for the enjoyment of that society of the faithful, which will no more be separated by death; from which sorrow and sighing are banished for ever.

Let us, by a patient continuance in well-doing, endeavour to soften the frown of the king of terrors. The sting of death is sin. Vice strews the sick man's pillow with thorns; raises round his couch hideous forms to scare away his peace; and assails him with two-edged tortures—a sense of past guilt, and dread of future woe. Penitence for our numerous defects, faith in the merits and mediation of our Redeemer, and hearty obedience to his laws, will, on the contrary, make smooth the bed of death, and cheer the surrounding gloom with a bright prospect of the approaching bliss and glory of heaven. In a word, let virtue and religion enlighten our understandings, mollify our hearts, keep alive the sensibility of conscience, mitigate the pangs of temporal, and save us from the horrors of eternal death. Thus shall we be qualified for the reception of the greatest of all blessings, even eternal life, which is the free gift of God through Jesus Christ.

SERMON V.

On Humbleness of Spirit.

1 PETER v. 6.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

THE disposition of mind which is here recommended is highly becoming, nay, absolutely necessary, in every condition of human life. Among the members of civil society, it promotes harmony and love; and among those who profess themselves to be Christians, it sets the beauty of our religion in the most engaging light. Reason proclaims the necessity of it; and the precepts of the Gospel entirely coincide with the voice of reason. In all circumstances, to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, is equally conducive to our present and future felicity. It renders us easy and contented in ourselves, ready to do good to our neighbour, and prepares us for the enjoyment of happiness in heaven.

Since, therefore, we are always under the mighty hand of God, created by his power, redeemed by his mercy, preserved and governed by his wise providence;

it will not be amiss, from various considerations, to impress upon your minds the injunction of the text, "Humble yourselves before him, that he may exalt you in due time."

In our progress through this variegated life, numberless are the perplexities and disappointments which fall in our way: of these we are ever ready to complain with much indignation and bitterness of spirit. It were well, if we would seriously consider, whether the fruitful source of most of our disquietude be not lodged in our own bosoms. Instead of walking humbly with our God, as creatures who have no right to claim as *a debt* even the smallest blessings; instead of confining our desires within the limits of moderation, and thus adapting them to the present state and condition of man; we are too much inclined to give them, on all occasions, an unrestrained indulgence. We *may* have acquired much, but every new acquisition prompts a new desire. We vainly imagine, that what we already possess, by adding to our importance, renders us worthy of still greater favours from the hand of a merciful Providence. As we advance, the prospect opens before us; we seize the *present* joy; and still, some *distant* good beckons us along. Stimulated by insatiable appetites, our expectation of complete felicity is continually disappointed; our toils and anxieties never cease; we murmur *to-day* that our satisfaction is not perfect, and *to-morrow* will furnish the same cause for complaint. Now, although *this*, to a certain degree, is the fate of man, in his *best estate*; it is certainly our wisdom, as well as our duty, to *mitigate* an evil which we cannot entirely *remove*. Humility will, in a great measure, *relieve*, though it may not

altogether *banish* from our hearts, this wasting anxiety. The man who has proper notions of the exalted perfections of the Deity, and of his own insignificance and unworthiness, and who consequently humbles himself in the sight of God, will be satisfied with few and simple things—he will not keep his mind in a state of perpetual agitation, from disadvantageous comparisons of his own condition with that of other men—though *his* fields may not be so abundantly productive as those of his neighbour, he finds that they yield sufficient to satisfy the demands of temperance—though *his* habitation may not shine with the splendid decorations of the proud man's palace, he finds it well calculated to shelter him from the inclemencies of the seasons—he knows that more real, heartfelt happiness is frequently to be found in the poor man's cottage, than in the costly domes of the rich and great. Destitute of this temper of mind, no station of honour will be sufficiently elevated; no stores of wealth will be altogether satisfactory. As we proceed, the toils of our journey will increase—hills will peep over hills, and alps on alps arise. If, therefore, we wish to avoid many and grievous disappointments, into which the inconsiderate rashly plunge themselves, let us be careful not to give up the reins to every extravagant desire. Let us proceed with calmness and moderation, in all the pursuits of this transient life. Let us not fret and repine, and refuse to enjoy the bliss which lies before us, because we cannot obtain all that the eye sees and the heart desires. For joy without any alloy of pain is not to be expected; the felicity of mortal man, in his present state of trial, ever has been, and ever will be incomplete.

Amidst all the vicissitudes of this fleeting life, “to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God;” to live in a state of constant dependence upon a wise and merciful Providence, is the best support under the shock of every disaster. However melancholy the change in our situation may at any time be; under the influence of this meek and humble disposition, we shall suppress every irreligious complaint; we shall check every impious doubt of the Divine goodness and justice; no angry and turbulent passions will rise in our bosoms; but in the lowest depth of woe, we shall find strength and consolation. We shall be ready to confess, that, in all his dispensations, God best knows how to promote our real good; that he, at no time, afflicts us with unbounded severity; but in the midst of all his judgments remembers mercy. It was thus that Job humbled himself before God, and found consolation in a condition the most destitute and afflictive. Deprived of all his earthly possessions, and bereft of his dearest connexions, he sinks under the mighty hand of the great Disposer of all things; but in his lowest state, is enabled to exclaim, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” And in the same manner, even our Saviour himself, when he so far humbled himself as to assume the nature of man, sustained the last scene of his bitter agony with patience and pious confidence; “May thy will, O my Father, and not mine be done.”

There are persons in the world so captious and malevolent, that the fairest reputation is not a sufficient security against their invenomed arrows. They will attempt, by open obloquy or subtil insinuations, to sully the purity of the most spotless character, and to

disturb the peace of the most determined virtue. Now, against these assaults, to which all men are subject, humbleness of mind is the best shield of defence. While pride serves to point the dart, and inflame the wound; while it renders us sensible to the slightest touch; humility either entirely avoids the stroke, or by gently yielding, breaks its violence. When David was driven from Jerusalem by the insurrection of his ungrateful son Absalom; Shimei, whose dastardly spirit was still changing with his changing fortune, came and poured forth bitter execrations against the king and all his servants. Abishai, the steadfast friend of David, could not brook the insult—"Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." The royal sufferer was not to be incited to rash and extravagant resentment; though, in several respects, he had acted ill: if his faults had been great, his penitence had also been sincere. He was conscious of his innocence, with regard to the crimes alleged against him, by the malevolent Shimei. Revenge was a stranger to his heart—the dart of calumny fell harmless to the ground. He restrained the impetuosity of his friend; "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruijah; if the Lord has permitted him to speak evil of me, who shall say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" If *we* endeavour to acquire the same humility and meekness of spirit, it will sustain us through a contentious world, amidst the strife of tongues; our peace will not be much disturbed by the ill grounded opinions and the rash aspersions of others; we shall pass through *evil* report, as well as *good* report, with a complacency seldom interrupted, and never totally destroyed. We

shall always proceed under the heart-reviving consideration, that the precipitate judgments of men will, in due time, be corrected by the just decision of Almighty God.

We ought assiduously to cultivate the virtue which I am here recommending, because its direct tendency is to promote tranquillity and love among all orders of men. A proud and arrogant spirit is a great disturber of peace; but wherever humility dwells, there is quietness and harmony. It banishes from domestic life all contention and animosity; for how can these mischievous foes intrude themselves, where, on all occasions, there is a mutual condescension and desire to please? In societies of a more extensive nature, should each one, through a vain opinion of his merits and abilities, fly from his proper sphere, and thus counteract the designs of others; the necessary consequence would be perpetual enmity and confusion. But where men walk humbly before God, they are inclined to discharge the duties of their respective stations with quietness and fidelity; no one thrusts himself forward to provoke his neighbour's envy or resentment; but *all* restraining their pursuits within the bounds of moderation, the wheels of order and good government glide along without interruption, and a general contentment is diffused over the whole community.

If we consider ourselves in the sacred character of Christians; if we reflect upon the precepts of our religion, or the example of our Lord and Master; how flagrant will be the absurdity of our conduct, to act, on the common occasions of life, with a supercilious and overbearing spirit; and, at the same time, acknowledge,

that we are obligated to imitate the behaviour of Jesus Christ, and to obey the injunctions of Christianity! What are the most prevailing injunctions of our peaceful religion? Which is the virtue that shines most conspicuously in our Lord's example? *He* who is best acquainted with the nature and condition of men; who knows what is most useful, as well as most ornamental to us, has recommended humility and lowliness of mind, in almost every page of the sacred Scriptures; and has exemplified, in the whole course of his life, the doctrines which he taught. Knowing that the first step in the Christian progress, is a sense of our weakness and necessity; and that we must feel that we are poor, and blind, and wretched, before we shall be willing to fly to him for relief; he begins the sermon on the mount with, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." He calls those persons blessed, who, from a thorough conviction of their great necessities, hunger and thirst after righteousness; declaring that they shall be filled—that God satisfieth the hungry with good things; but sendeth the rich, (those who vainly imagine they want nothing,) empty away. If we trace the steps of our Redeemer through this world, when he took upon him our nature, and came and dwelt among us; we find from his birth to his crucifixion, that humility was his constant companion. Under the pressure of sorrows too great for mere mortal strength to sustain, in patience he possessed his soul: when poor and destitute, he suppressed every complaint; when reviled, he reviled not again; when expiring in the bitter agonies of the cross, he prayed for his implacable foes. And shall we pre-

sume to call ourselves *his* disciples, while we are deficient in that disposition of mind which was one of the principal excellencies of his perfect character?

But further; shall we not humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, when we take an impartial view of our real state and condition in the first stage of our progress? We are beings entirely dependant upon almighty power and goodness. And shall that person who is continually supported by the hand of charity, vainly boast of his riches? Upon our entrance into this world, we are utterly incapable of providing for ourselves; and while we are passing through it, we every moment depend upon the bounty of our God for life, and health, and every enjoyment. From our earliest years we are prone to iniquity, and our vicious propensities are too often strengthened by unrestrained indulgence—inclined, as we are, to rush headlong into every seducing snare of our great adversary—falling seven times in a day—violating the dictates of conscience, and the precepts of our holy religion—disregarding God—despising the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. And, in this condition, was God to be extreme in marking and punishing what we have done amiss, how fearful must be our forebodings of wrath and fiery indignation from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his Majesty! It is to his undeserved mercy that we are indebted, not only for all our comforts here, but also for the blessed expectation of eternal happiness and glory. When we were unable to help ourselves, *he* laid sufficient help upon One that is mighty to save. He loved the world with such a free and disinterested love, that he sent his only-begotten

Son to open the door of salvation to us, which, by our own strength, could never have been effected. Well may we exclaim in grateful astonishment, "Lord, what "is man, that thou hast been so mindful of him!" All that he demands, in return for his inestimable bounties, is humility and gratitude. The best sacrifice which we can offer to *him*, is an humble and contrite heart. "He hath showed thee, O man, what "is good. And what doth the Lord thy God require "of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk "*humbly* with thy God?"

Was it possible for us, without this frame of mind, to be admitted into the heavenly mansions, even there we should be restless and discontented. Placed upon an equality with the highest saints in glory, we should imagine that we were worthy of being advanced to the dignity of angels; and when elevated to the throne of an archangel, we should still be dissatisfied, being still at an infinite distance from the great Supreme. It was this spirit which prompted Satan to rebel in heaven. Supposing his advancement not equal to his merit, he murmured; became refractory and seditious; and at length rose openly, against the Omnipotent, in arms. The presumptuous attempt was terribly chastised. He was driven from the blessed abodes of the righteous, and is now confined in chains, under darkness, against the judgment of the great day.

Let me conclude, therefore, with repeating the exhortation of St. Peter, in the words of the text. In all conditions of this mortal life, "humble yourselves "under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt "you in due time." He has promised to exalt you to glory, and honour, and immortality—to scenes of

such *perfect* felicity, that the human mind, at present, can form no adequate conception of it. Serve him with fear and lowliness of heart, and in due time, when this season of trial is over, you will have reason to be abundantly satisfied with the reward, "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." In the mean time, frequently meditate upon the ineffable majesty and greatness of Almighty God, and upon your own unworthiness and infirmity. Pray continually for the aid of that blessed Spirit which produces in us love and peace, meekness and long-suffering. Sensible of the absolute necessity of these virtues, both for our temporal and eternal welfare, let us cherish them in every state that is allotted us by Divine Providence.

In our never-ceasing pursuit of happiness, are we subject to continual disappointment, and to unexpected disasters? May the most spotless reputation be attacked by the invenomed darts of calumny; and thus, if all censure were worthy of regard, the peace of the most virtuous be frequently destroyed? Are love and unanimity desirable blessings, in domestic life, and in the most extensive civil society? Are we, by profession, Christians, under the most solemn obligations to obey the precepts of our religion, and to imitate the example of our Master? Do *we*, frail children of the dust, who are fading as the flower, and transient as the morning dew; do we hope and expect to be prepared for the happiness of heaven? Then, during our pilgrimage here below, let us walk humbly with our God. In all our intercourse with our fellow-men, as well as with our great Creator, let us subdue the turbulence of overbearing pride. In sorrow and in joy; in death as well as in life, our serenity will not be

destroyed, while we can say in the sincerity of our hearts, "We are not worthy, O Lord, of the least of thy heavenly bounties; but with mingled joy and reverence, we know, that thy property is always to have mercy."

SERMON VI.

—◆—
The Excellence of Faith.
—◆—

1 JOHN v. 4, 5.

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.
Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that
Jesus is the Son of God?

IN every part of the sacred Scriptures, the excellency of faith is celebrated, and the necessity of it pointed out, in order to defend and support us in our progress towards the happiness of heaven. The Christian life is represented under the image of a *warfare*. We have to contend with the powers of darkness, the allurements of a vicious world, and the seducements of our own corrupted nature. Surrounded as we thus are, by foes so numerous and powerful, without the defence of this celestial armour, we should never be able to repel the assault; without the expectation of succour from on high, we should not have resolution to sustain for a moment, the severity of the conflict. The inspired writers, therefore, recommend it to us, "Above all things to take the shield of faith, whereby we shall be able to quench the fiery darts of our wicked adversary:" they exhort us, "To fight with cheer-

“fulness the good fight of faith, under the animating assurance, that we shall come off more than conquerors through him who loveth us.” And, in the same style of encouragement, St. John, we find, tells us, in the words of the text, that “the victory which overcometh the world, is our faith;” and that *he* may be said to possess this victorious faith, who “believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.”

You will observe, that the latter part of the text is explanatory of the words immediately preceding. The apostle first asserts, that faith giveth us the victory over the world; and then goes on to inform us what this faith is; “It is a belief in Jesus as the Son of God:” in other words, it is believing in him as the Messias, foretold by the prophets, and prefigured by the sacrifices and other rites of the law: it is believing in him as the second person in the sacred Trinity, assuming human nature, and revealing the will of God to man, so that consequently all his promises, threatenings, and precepts, must be true and worthy of our most serious regard; it is believing in him as the Mediator between God and man, through whom we have access to the Father, having obtained remission of our sins. And surely, it must be evident to every one, that the natural tendency of this heavenly principle is to make us rise superior to the world; to give us the victory over its frowns and its allurements, by presenting constantly to our view the *rewards and punishments* of a future state; and the life, and death, and glorious resurrection of our Redeemer, in order to procure for us the one, and to prevent our sustaining the other.

In the prosecution of this discourse, I shall, therefore, proceed to show the salutary operation of faith, in the

various circumstances of this mortal life; whence will appear the truth of St. John's observation, that it is the victory which overcometh the world; and this will give occasion to a few words of affectionate exhortation, by way of practical improvement.

Scripture and experience teach us, that men are, in their best and most permanent estate, nothing more than strangers and sojourners here upon earth, travelling through a wilderness beset with numberless difficulties and dangers, towards a better habitation, a place of rest: the earth under their feet is frequently barren and dreary; and the heavens over their heads are often covered with clouds and thick darkness. In this situation, faith is to be recommended, as the best comforter and surest support, under all their distresses. Its strong eye perceives the clear heavens expanded beyond the surrounding gloom. To its extensive view temporal calamity seems to shrink, and becomes almost annihilated. It sees the world and every thing in it flying swiftly away upon the wings of time. It launches forth into the vast abyss of eternity, where all the little concerns of this world; its pride, pomp, and glory; its oppression, poverty, and contempt, are swallowed up, and lost for ever. Whatever the distress may be, it serves as an universal comforter: it gives health upon the bed of sickness, riches amidst the trials of indigence, liberty in the chains of bondage, and life itself under the stroke of death.

Things temporal are seen, they are constantly pressing upon every sense, to solicit and engross our attention: worldly *pleasure* allures us into the paths of sin; temporal *pain* terrifies us from the performance of our duty. But let faith become the ruling principle of our

hearts, and the things which are *eternal* immediately gain the ascendancy. This heavenly principle teaches us, that the *afflictions of a moment* are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed hereafter; it seems to give us the reward, before our work be done; while we are carrying the cross, it sets the crown of glory on our heads. And as to the seducing *pleasures* of this world, instead of those which are transitory, it discloses to our view such as will never have an end; instead of comforts which can never satiate the desires of the immortal soul, it directs us to those blessed mansions, where only is to be found a *fulness of joy*; instead of this shallow cup of earthly entertainment, which is always mixed with an infusion of bitterness, it gives us drink from those rivers of pleasure, which flow at the right hand of God; which are always pure, and ever growing more and more delightful.

Humble resignation to all the dispensations of Divine Providence, is the necessary consequence. What though the mountains may shake at the tempest of the Lord; while we see *him* in the midst of the storm, our hope will not be moved! What though our duties may be hard, and our trials grievous; while we are satisfied that these things are all under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness; while we *believe*, we shall be *established*; we shall not fall nor faint, but endure patiently unto the end, pursuing the footsteps of those primitive and heroic Christians, who, through faith and patience, now inherit the promises. Of *these*, St. Paul has commemorated many illustrious examples in the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews. Although they were stoned, were sawn asunder, were

tempted, were slain with the sword ; destitute, afflicted, and tormented ; through the strength of their faith, these holy men of old obtained a good report ; and their names are recorded for our admonition and encouragement, that we, emulating their virtue, may become partakers of their felicity.

But, when the humble Christian thus enters upon the performance of his duty, and seriously considers the magnitude of the task by which his soul is to be saved, and the joys of heaven obtained, he may well begin the work of his salvation with fear and trembling ; he may well implore, with the first disciples, “ Lord, “ increase my faith ! ” He feels the weakness and depravity of his own heart ; he is sensible of the powerful influence of vicious example ; he knows how liable he is to be seduced into a violation of his Lord’s command, “ Love not the world, nor the things of it. ” “ How then shall he avoid the snares which lie in his “ way ? How shall he preserve himself innocent and “ undefiled ? ” Steadfast faith in Jesus the Son of God, is the best, the only security. *His* Gospel offers aid and protection ; his encouraging language is, “ My “ Spirit shall be sent down to strengthen and comfort “ you : my grace shall be sufficient for you : through “ *this*, thou shalt be enabled to do all things ! ” When these merciful promises are heartily embraced by a lively and true faith, apparent difficulties vanish from before it ; alarming apprehensions are diminished in proportion to the steadfastness of his dependence on the truth and goodness of his Redeemer ; and the meek Christian pursues his way, through the path of virtue and religion, under these cheering reflections ; “ The “ Lord will not leave me, nor forsake me : I had,

“indeed, utterly fainted in the performance of my duty, but that I believed verily to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!”

But, alas! such is the inherent depravity of human nature, that the best resolutions of man, at some unguarded moment, are liable to be defeated; and the sincerest piety may be misled into the transgression of the law of God. Sorrow and compunction of heart will soon succeed; the clamorous consciousness of guilt will suppress all the soft whispers of its former peace. Humble penitence may implore forgiveness, and promise to avoid, in future, the dangerous snare. But, promises of future amendment are no compensation for past transgression. Where, then, shall frail mortals seek for comfort?

It is that faith alone which embraces the Gospel as the word of everlasting truth, and thus fixes our hopes and wishes on the atoning sacrifice offered by the Son of God—it is that alone which can dispel these terrors, and speak peace and comfort to the soul. For here we are taught, “That on *him* was laid the iniquity of us all: that he is the full and perfect propitiation for the guilt of men: that through *him* we have redemption, even the forgiveness of our sins.” When the humble penitent hears and believes these gracious declarations, his exulting language will be, “Turn again then unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath rewarded thee! And why? He hath delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from utterly falling.”

While we are speaking of *faith*, as the victory that overcometh the *world*; it will not be supposed, that we are to pay no attention to the things of *this life*; that

we are to overlook and despise all the bounties of Providence, which are so abundantly strewed in our way. This mighty Conqueror overcometh the world, not by annihilating it; but only by repressing its exorbitant power. And it may with truth be affirmed, that the man whose faith raises his affections, in a great measure, above this sublunary scene of things, has more enjoyment even in the goods of this world, than his unbelieving and unrighteous neighbour. What though his inflexible probity has not stooped to those iniquitous means of increasing his stores, which the unbeliever embraces without remorse? What though his benevolence diffuses among the necessitous for useful purposes many superfluities, which the scornful infidel, having collected in fraud, dissipates in folly? He enjoys what temperance requires, and he feels no painful void. Whatever he has obtained, his acquisitions are unmixed with anxiety, shame, and remorse; he views them, and exults in conscious innocence. His sobriety, it must be confessed, restrains him from many turbulent enjoyments, in which the sons of licentiousness revel; but then, he is much more contented in the just discipline of his passions. The world never obtains the mastery over him, because his best interest lies beyond the grave; and where his treasure is, there will his heart be also.

How different is the situation of the unbelieving sinner, whose hopes and wishes extend not beyond the things of this transitory scene. In the height of his temporal prosperity, he is like the troubled sea when it cannot rest; destitute of temperance and moderation, his soul must be perpetually agitated: and there cannot be a more melancholy object than such a wretch

struggling with affliction, the bitter fruit of his folly and vice. See the prodigal reduced to poverty, and tormented by disease, the immediate consequence of his dissipation and debauchery! See the fraudulent man detected in his injustice, turned out and exposed to derision and contempt! See the more atrocious criminal shrinking from the hand of justice, uplifted to take vengeance on his aggravated crimes! Whence shall he obtain consolation and support? Not from within: not from the world, which has hitherto engrossed his care and affection: not from heaven, while he remains impenitent, for *there* he beholds an angry Judge, and has nothing to expect but fiery indignation. The former companions of his crimes will forsake him in the hour of his distress. The good may pity his condition; but it is not in *their* power to afford him effectual relief. The *Gospel alone* has provided a balm for his wounded spirit; a remedy for all his maladies; but this Gospel he has hitherto neglected and despised. He has no faith; and, consequently, no hand to stretch forth to the merits of a crucified Saviour; no heart to entreat his merciful intercession. Should there be any such person present, let him begin at once to consider his ways; and may God, by the blessed influence of his Holy Spirit, work in him mightily all the good pleasure of his will! May God pour down upon him the abundance of his mercy, forgiving him those things whereof his conscience is afraid; and giving him those good things which he is not worthy to ask, but through Jesus Christ our Lord.

If faith, then, be a virtue so essential to the establishment of our present peace, and to the attainment of future felicity, will not every considerate person be

desirous to acquire and to retain it, until it gives place to perfect vision in the kingdom of glory? For this purpose, let me suggest to you three important directions.

In the first place, let those who are weak in faith, examine the Holy Scriptures with seriousness, diligence, and impartiality, as containing the revelation of God's will respecting the method of our salvation: the subject is one of the most important that can possibly engage the attention of the human mind. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Consider the evidence by which this word is supported; the purity, excellence, and comprehensive nature of the doctrines and precepts there inculcated; the prophecies, miracles, and testimony of those who laid down their lives in confirmation of the truth of it. Imitate the noble Bereans, and search diligently to be satisfied whether these things be so; and conviction will be the result of this candid inquiry. Since, to a certain degree, we have a power over the mind, so as to attend or not, as we think proper, to any subject proposed to our consideration; remember, that if unbelief spring from the want of due attention, you are as accountable for *this*, as for any other crime. Hence it is, that faith is ranked with meekness, and temperance, and other virtues.

2dly. Look up to heaven with deep humility of soul, and pray fervently for the aid of the Holy Spirit to give you at all times the hearing ear and the understanding heart; to enlighten your darkness; to beat down every rising spirit of pride and obstinacy; to work in you the meek, and docile, and affectionate disposition of children; so that on all occasions you may be ready to

say with the youthful Samuel, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."

3dly. Enter cheerfully upon the performance of the *duties* which the Gospel of Jesus, the Son of God, has prescribed. They are so worthy of God, so conducive to the true honour and felicity of man, that in the keeping of them there is great reward. Setting aside the *future* joys of heaven, there is even *now* attendant on the performance of our Christian duty, a delightful consciousness that we are acting agreeably to our rank and station among intelligent beings. The more diligently we yield obedience to the *precepts*, the more thoroughly shall we be convinced of the truth of the *doctrines*: "If any man, says our Lord, will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God."

Ye, whose hearts are established in this faith, are to be congratulated on your happy condition. Walk worthy of your holy profession; and let faith have its perfect work in bringing forth all the fruits of a virtuous and godly life. Under the influence of this heavenly principle, let it be evident that you have obtained the victory over the world. Let not the pomps and vanities, the gaudy shows, the debasing pleasures of this corrupted world, divert your thoughts and affections from the great concerns of futurity. Let not the distresses which you are doomed to encounter in this scene of trial, diminish your trust in the wisdom and goodness of Providence: say not, "I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." Rather remember the "years of the right hand of the Most Highest;" and let faith be your support and consolation: "let it be unto you, the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen."

Let the awful objects of the eternal world, which can be contemplated only by the eye of faith, induce you to walk humbly before God. Consider the misery that may be endured, or the felicity that is to be obtained; and surely, you will take every step with holy reverence; you will work out your salvation with fear and trembling. This is the disposition which most becomes depraved and erring mortals. The meek and lowly heart is prepared for fresh communications of grace and heavenly benediction: this is the soil which is rendered most fruitful by the streams of loving-kindness, that are ever flowing from the great source of life and joy. The unaspiring valley is refreshed, while the lofty and rugged mountain remains barren and dry.

It is this divine faith which leads the Christian to the merits of his Redeemer for acceptance in the sight of God: "Of him," says the apostle to some of the primitive Christians, "are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Blessed condition of the true believer! By a sense of divine justice kept from presumption, and by mercy kept from despair, his course of virtue and piety is easy and uniform. The worst state of this mortal life is not void of consolation, and even the last stage of it is stripped of its terrors: For why should the soul of that man be cast down and disquieted within him, who is kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation? Let the unrighteous infidel then, be persuaded to become wise; let him see the things which belong to his peace; and he will at once acknow-

ledge, that in the way of religious wisdom is life, and in the pathway thereof there is no death. And,

Let these considerations encourage humble believers to persevere in the good way which they have chosen: in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, let them not be ashamed of Christ and of his words; but rather endeavour the more strenuously to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things. A vain and wicked world may sometimes employ ridicule, and sometimes scoffs and insults, to divert them from the purity and simplicity of the Gospel; but let them not be moved by any of these things. Ignorant and impious men may reject their principles, and deride their conduct; but God approves, and his approbation will last for ever; it is the only sure foundation of present peace and future felicity. If the love of praise be natural to the human mind, why should we seek honour one of another, and entirely disregard that which cometh from God alone? Why should we love the praise of fallible and prejudiced men, more than that of God, who, on all occasions, is guided by unerring truth? *They* whom *he* commends, must be really estimable: he will protect those whom he loves: he will guide them by his wisdom, and in due time receive them into his glory. Then, before an assembled universe of intelligent beings, *religious wisdom* will be justified of all her children, as she will procure for them the final approbation of their Judge, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.”

SERMON VII.

The persuasive Calls of God to Man.

REVELATION iii. 20.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with *him*, and he with *me*.

ST. John, the author of this book, survived all the other apostles; and the Revelation, which was made by Jesus Christ to this faithful and beloved servant, concludes the canon of sacred Scripture. He is directed to write to the angels or bishops of the seven principal churches in the lesser Asia; and to give them advice, commendation, or correction, as their respective circumstances required. The last of these Epistles is written “unto the angel of the Church of the Laodiceans,” who is reprov'd for his lukewarmness, and for his pride and self-sufficiency in supposing that he was rich, and had need of nothing; when, in reality, he was wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked. In this deplorable condition, he is counselled by our Lord, (who styles himself the true and faithful witness) to seek more ardently a pure and permanent treasure;

“Buy of *me* gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be *rich*; and white raiment, that thou mayest be *clothed*.” He is threatened with deserved chastisement for his former omissions; but, at the same time, is assured, that the rod of punishment, in the hand of God, is guided by affection—“As many as I *love* I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent;” that the benevolent intentions of our Lord are not defeated by the first ungrateful opposition; and that the methods which are pursued to reclaim an offending mortal, are various and long continued: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

From these words, thus introduced, we may observe, in the first place, that although our benevolent Lord is offended with the transgressions of men, yet he does not immediately give them up to the error of their ways, but employs all the means which are suited to the nature of free and rational creatures, to reclaim them, to render them obedient, and consequently happy. He solicits their attention, by his works, his word, the influences of his Holy Spirit, and the dispensations of his providence.

From the creation of the world, the invisible things of the great Creator, even his eternal power and godhead, might have been clearly seen. So that when men became vain in their imaginations; when their foolish heart was so darkened, that they changed the truth of God into a lie, and served the creature more than the Creator who is blessed for ever; they were altogether without excuse. He might, in just judgment, have given them over entirely to a reprobate mind, and not

displayed the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, in order to lead them to repentance. But God, in our present state of probation, deals not with men according to their sins, nor rewards them immediately, according to the real demerit of their iniquities. When the world sat in darkness and the shadow of death, he was graciously pleased to send forth the light of truth from on high, to dispel the surrounding gloom. In times past, he spoke unto the fathers by Moses and the prophets; and hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by Christ and his holy apostles. And what an extensive, what a strong and wonderfully well connected chain of truth runs through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament! How accurately, how gloriously is the whole building founded, and framed, and joined together, though the workmen have been so numerous, and employed in so many different ages of the world! Here the man of God is thoroughly furnished unto all good works. To establish our *belief*, miracles are faithfully recorded, and prophecies exactly fulfilled. To enlighten our *ignorance*, we have clear and comprehensive precepts, a pure and perfect law. To animate our *hope*, we have great and precious promises. To alarm our *fears*, there are grievous denunciations of tribulation and anguish. And to quicken all our *virtuous exertions*, there is the offer of a great *reward*, expressed in the strong language of *rivers of pleasure*; a *crown of glory*; a *perfection of joy*, of which (under the present infirmities of our nature,) it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive. These things were written for *our* admonition and comfort, upon whom the ends of the world have come; and it is expressly commanded in the words immediately succeeding the

text, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." In the sacred Scriptures, God is continually speaking to us; he stands at the door and knocks—he demands our serious attention—he solicits admission to the purest affection of our hearts. By all the promises of his mercy, by all the threatenings of his wrath, by the most powerful motives that can be brought to operate upon the minds of reasonable beings, he expostulates with the heedless and refractory—"How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity! How long will the scornors delight in their scorning! The Lord *waiteth*, that he may be gracious unto you. Turn ye at my reproof. Establish a covenant of peace and amity with me. Become my people, and I will be your God."

That the admonitions of his word may have their full weight and efficacy, our gracious Lord farther solicits our attention and regard, by the operations of his *Holy Spirit*. This is the peculiar discovery of the glorious Gospel; and it is a doctrine full of consolation and encouragement to infirm and ignorant mortals. The same divine Comforter, who was promised by Christ to the primitive disciples, still continues to operate among the servants of God; he extends his sacred influences over the whole Christian Church; he is given to every man to profit withal; and, whatever our spiritual necessity may be, in all cases he helpeth our infirmities. This great Agent in the kingdom of the Redeemer, enlightens our understanding, purifies our affections, shows us what is really *good*, and prompts us to pursue it. To stimulate us in the prosecution of our true happiness, he imparts, at proper seasons, fresh and almost irresistible charms to the

native beauties of truth and virtue; and to deter us from the pernicious gratifications of sin, he occasionally disturbs our fatal repose, and adds keener pangs to the remorse of a polluted conscience. But these aids of the Divine Spirit are imparted in such a manner, as not to violate the freedom of our will; and, of course, not to disqualify us for becoming the proper subjects of punishment or reward. He opens our hearts to attend to the truth; but this assistance supersedes not the necessity of our own exertions. He invites by gentle persuasion, and not compels by resistless violence. He does not drive us, like senseless machines; but in the character of a cheering friend, accompanies us in our way to heaven. Quench not, therefore, the suggestions of this heavenly Visitant. When he persuades, devoutly listen; when he invites, cheerfully obey. They only who are led by the Spirit are the sons of God.

Again; our Lord calls us to a more intimate communion with himself; to a more habitual acknowledgment of his supreme dominion over us, by the common and daily dispensations of his wise providence. When the children of Israel were journeying towards the land of promise, Moses gives them this exhortation, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no." And this is still the benevolent intention of all his dispensations towards us, while we are travelling to a place of rest. Though *we* are not so miraculously conducted by the visible interposition of his great power and glory, we are, nevertheless, his

people, and the sheep of his pasture. The man of humble piety, in every object around him, discovers a present Deity: he acknowledges the superintending power of God in all his ways: he has the pillar of a cloud by day, and of fire by night, to conduct him through the wilderness of this world. But *they*, who perversely harden their hearts and blind their eyes, perceive not the guiding hand of the Almighty. To persons of this sort, our benevolent Parent repeatedly calls—"My people are bent to backsliding from me. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger; I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man." With these compassionate sentiments, he, from time to time, endeavours to awaken our attention, and to prove what is in our hearts, whether we will keep his commandments or not. He tries our pious emotions of thankfulness and wonder, by the common bounties of nature, by the wisdom and goodness which are displayed in every part of the creation, and by the magnificence of the whole design. He proves our patience and resignation, by defeating some favourite scheme, or inflicting some unexpected distress. He solicits our gratitude by some signal blessing, or some unexpected deliverance from impending calamity. This merciful invitation is implied in every dispensation of his providence—"O that my people would hear my voice, and learn, and perform the words of my law; that I might do them good in their latter end."

Another observation which naturally arises from the words of the text, is this; in our present state of pro-

bation, God deals with us as rational creatures and free agents; not impelling us by absolute authority and irresistible force, but inviting us to happiness, and deterring us from misery, by persuasion and threatening; by promises of reward, and denunciations of punishment. When it is said, “*If any man hear my voice,*” and open the door, I will come in to him,” the words necessarily imply, that there is a possibility of our rejecting the gracious offer of his love; that we may refuse to listen to the calls of mercy; that we may keep the door of our hearts shut against the solicitations of our best friend, who comes to bring us joy and peace. Our disobedience is *voluntary*, and therefore our punishment is not arbitrary nor unjust.

Some, from early neglect, or an ill-directed education, entertain unreasonable prejudices against all the claims of revealed religion. Some, through long and immoderate indulgence in sensual gratifications, have fallen into a state of inattention, and almost insensibility, with respect to every religious concern. Some are so eagerly engaged in the pursuits of wealth and ambition, that they vainly imagine they have not time to turn, and listen to the gentle invitations of divine mercy. It may easily be imagined, that persons of this sort will find little difficulty in refusing admission to a guest, who would impede their vicious pursuits, and disturb the whole system of their present enjoyment. God sometimes arrests the sinner in his mad career, by miraculously interposing his strong hand and mighty arm. But let not the wicked man presume, and build his hopes of security upon such a deviation from the established order of things. If he will not attend to

the dictates of reason, and follow that light which lighteth every man who comes into the world; if he will not weigh with candour and impartiality the pretensions of our holy religion; if he stifle the suggestions of that good spirit which prompts him to repentance; if the prospect of everlasting wretchedness, or inexpressible felicity, has no influence upon his conduct; he must not expect, that, for his sake, a miracle will be wrought—he must not imagine, that, like Elijah, he will be taken up to heaven by violence, in a chariot of fire. He resists the motives to obedience, which are best adapted to the nature of rational beings, who are to be responsible for their conduct. His condemnation, therefore, will be just. He will have no right to complain, when he hears that dreadful sentence, “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 re-
“ proof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock
“ when your fear cometh.”

If, therefore, it be left to our own discretion, either to receive or reject the offers of divine mercy; and if, consequently, we are proper subjects for reward or punishment; let us abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good. Since we are called upon, in this day of grace and salvation, to choose whom we will serve, let us determine, with Joshua, to serve the Lord our God. Happy will be the result of this determination.

For we observe, in the last place, the gracious promise of our Lord, conveyed in the concluding words of the text; “If any man hear my voice, and open the

“ door, I will come in to him, and *will sup with him, and he with me.*” Blessed is that soul which enjoys this intimate communion with the greatest and best of all Beings! To be called the *friend of God*, was a distinguishing appellation of the patriarch Abraham; but our gracious Lord has said to *all his disciples*, “ Ye are *my friends*, if ye do what I command you.” What manner of love is this! What astonishing condescension is here displayed to all those who receive and obey the Gospel! *He* who is the Head of all principality and power, reveals himself to us in the character of a companion, a friend, and brother. *His* faithful people are connected together in the bonds of unity and love: nor is the union less intimate with *him*, who is the Head of the Church, and from whom the whole body derives nourishment and strength. This heavenly intercourse is carried on by meditation; by prayer; by receiving the holy communion; by hearing the word of God and obeying it, from a real principle of piety. The requisite qualifications, on our part, are faith, humility, gratitude, and love. The happy *consequences* are these; we are more and more assimilated to the divine nature; the same mind dwells in *us*, which was also in Christ Jesus. We grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. We have a leader, under whose guidance our spiritual adversaries will in the end be effectually subdued. We have a friend to support us under every perplexity; and, in all our temporal calamities, to inspire us with an inward and spiritual joy, which is unspeakable and full of glory. This happy state of the saints and servants of God is thus described in the strong and

beautiful language of the Psalmist: "The Lord is
" my Shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing. He
" feeds me in green pastures, and leads me forth
" beside the waters of comfort. He anoints my head
" with oil, and my cup runneth over. His loving-
" kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of
" my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
" for ever."

Since, therefore, the great Author of our religion continually calls us to serious consideration and amendment of life, by the manifestations of his power and goodness in the works of creation, by the admonitions of his word, by the suggestions of his Spirit, and by the daily dispensations of his Providence; let us be persuaded to attend to the heavenly call. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief. Cherish every religious impression which may at any time be made upon your souls. When God speaks, be not so inconsiderate as to turn disrespectfully away. When he offers to weak and unworthy mortals, life and immortality, be not so thoughtless and ungrateful as to spurn the blessing from you.

Life and death are now placed before you. The way of virtue and piety leads to life; but, the wise man assures us, that the paths of sin go down to the gates of death. You may choose freely; and according to the choice which you make, you will be punished or rewarded; you will be miserable or happy for ever.

Blessed is that man who, rejecting all other dependence, seeks the peculiar friendship and protection of

God, as his best portion, and most permanent inheritance. In life, he will want nothing that is really good; in the valley of the shadow of death, he will have a rod and a staff to comfort him; he will go from strength to strength, till he appears before God in Sion.

SERMON VIII.

The Nature, Necessity, and Advantages of Trust in God.

PSALM xxxvii. 5.

Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in him.

THAT we are creatures entirely dependent upon God; that in him we live, and move, and have our being, and that we ought to be sensible of this our dependent state, is a truth which, it is to be supposed, none of us, in a moment of serious consideration, will be inclined to deny. Whenever they speak of their creation, preservation, and the various blessings of this life, all the holy men of old, whose praise is recorded in Scripture, ascribe every blessing to the superintending care and goodness of God: their common language is, “He hath given me life, and his visitation hath preserved my spirit. It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed. He openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness. Trust in him for ever, and he will be thy strength. Cast thy care upon him, for he careth for thee. Commit thy way unto him, and he will guide thee by his presence, and conduct thee to glory.”

changes and chances to which, in every age, this mortal life has been subject; he reflects on the various incidents which have occurred in the progress of his own earthly pilgrimage; and the result of all his meditations is, a deep sense, an humble acknowledgment that God is every where present; that he ruleth over the inhabitants of the earth, as well as among the armies of heaven; that he is about our path and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways; that from the riches of his mercy proceed our life, and health, and all things which we so abundantly enjoy. Such sentiments are suited to the nature of man, and they necessarily predominate in every sober and reflecting mind: deeply impressed with them, let us acknowledge that gratitude is due for the smallest bounty of heaven, since it is conferred upon such unworthy creatures; that no sin is to be deemed unimportant, since it is committed against a Parent so full of long-suffering, goodness, and tender mercy.

It must, however, be observed, that to commit our way unto the Lord; in all circumstances, to seek his guidance, and humbly to depend upon his protection, does not imply that we are to relax our own endeavours, in prosecuting our worldly business in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call us. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Our benevolent Creator has imparted the light of reason, and superadded the aid of his blessed Spirit; he has given us rational souls to think, and bodies to execute his righteous commands; and it is only while we are exerting the faculties with which he has endowed us, that we can expect his blessing. Let us, therefore, rise to the vigorous performance of all the duties incumbent upon us;

and then, we may call upon the name of the Lord our God, and he will hear us. Whatever our worldly occupation may be, under a lively impression of the divine care and benediction, we shall prosecute it with more diligence and cheerfulness: in every situation of human life, a sense of the awful presence of the Deity will produce in us a propriety of deportment: the insolence of prosperity will be corrected, and the pains of adversity rendered much less severe.

Such is the *nature* of that great duty to which we are exhorted by the Psalmist in the text; the *necessity* of it cannot be disputed, whether we consider the attributes of the Deity, or our own rank and condition among created beings. He is perfectly wise, and powerful, and good; he is our Father, our constant Benefactor, our Lawgiver, and he will hereafter be our Judge: we are weak, and ignorant, and sinful. Does the helpless child stand in need of parental care and protection? Does the sick man anxiously apply for the aid of the physician? Does the benighted and bewildered traveller wish for a faithful guide to extricate him from his difficulties? Does the criminal humbly implore the clemency of his judge? And shall not weak, and diseased, and erring, and condemned man, throw himself entirely upon the mercy and loving-kindness of his God? Shall he not, without reserve, commit his way unto the Lord, as to the guide who alone can conduct him in safety through the perilous journey of life? We are set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our mortal nature, we cannot stand upright; in the numberless perplexities which surround us, of ourselves we are not able to help ourselves; without the divine

grace and benediction, among depraved mortals nothing is strong, nothing is holy. Let us, then, look up to God, the merciful protector of all those who put their trust in him; he will be our ruler and guide, and will so conduct us through things temporal, that we shall finally lose not the things which are eternal.

Happy are the people who are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people, who in this manner, have the Lord for their God! They who thus put their trust in him, who voluntarily surrender themselves to his service; they who are desirous to preserve his peculiar favour by a patient continuance in well-doing; they who devoutly acknowledge his superintending care in every step of their progress, and are grateful even for the least of all his mercies; they who walk circumspectly from a thorough conviction that they cannot escape from his presence; they who even in their worldly business are not slothful, but are fervent in spirit from a consciousness that they are serving the Lord: those persons who thus abide under the shadow of the Almighty, who thus trust in the Lord Jehovah for ever, have indeed an everlasting strength; their triumphant language is, "The Lord is my strength" and my shield, my heart trusteth in him, and I am "helped: my heart danceth for joy, and in my song" will I praise him!" Let us be careful to cherish in our bosoms this great principle of virtue, this copious source of the sweetest consolation. Commit thy way unto the Lord; put thy trust in him, and thou wilt be preserved from all evil. Under the influence of this disposition, thou wilt be kept back from the commission of sin. When inordinate appetite presses hard upon the rein which controls it; when the world spreads

its dangerous allurements, and Satan his insidious snares, the steady determination will be, "God is the strength of my heart, and my best portion for ever: how then can I do this wickedness, and sin against him?"

In all the vicissitudes of this mortal life, *trust in God* is the never-failing source of calmness and contentment: it makes every burden light, every service a perfect freedom; if it do not entirely pluck out the thorns of adversity, it will most assuredly mitigate the anguish of the wound. Let this heavenly affianced enter the most gloomy cell of wretchedness, and instantly glory will shine around it: the languid head of sickness will be raised, poverty will cease to murmur, sighs of sorrow will be changed into notes of praise; the song of faith will be, "The Lord loveth those whom he chasteneth; he will make all things work together for good: he will cause the short affliction of a moment to be conducive to the attainment of a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Happy is the lot of the humble and faithful Christian! How full of comfort and confidence must that heart be, which can disburden all its cares, and fears, and distresses upon God, that affectionate Parent, who will unquestionably, in due time, and in the most expedient manner, supply all the wants of his people, protect them from harm, deliver them from trouble, and send a blessing upon all their good endeavours! If, in the perplexities of the world, we deem ourselves happy in the advice and consolation of an *earthly* friend, what can be more cheering to the soul, than the steadfast persuasion that our concerns are all intrusted to the management of that Friend, with whom is no variable-

ness nor shadow of turning ; that Friend, so faithful, so affectionate, so able, and, at the same time, so entirely disposed to do us good !

Among other advantages resulting to the good man from a due compliance with the precept of the text, it is not one of the least, that he is thereby enabled to repel the shafts of calumny and unjust reproach : thus the Psalmist proceeds to assure us ; “ Put thy trust in God, and he shall bring it to pass : he shall make thy righteousness as clean as the light, and thy just dealing as the noon-day.” The foul breath of obloquy may, for a little while, sully the lustre of the purest character ; but, ere long, it will shine forth with unclouded splendour. Let injured virtue, therefore, listen to the sage advice of the sacred penman ; “ Hold thee still in the Lord, and abide patiently upon him ; grieve not at him whose way doth prosper, against the man that doeth after evil counsels. Leave off from wrath, and let go displeasure ; fret not thyself, else shalt thou be moved to do evil.” A just discrimination will soon be made ; “ for wicked doers shall be rooted out ; but they who patiently abide the Lord, shall inherit the land of uncorrupted truth and perfect felicity.”

To conclude ; let us be persuaded “ to commit our way unto the Lord, and to put our trust in him ;” because, when every other support fails, *this* will be steadfast and unmoveable. The solemn moment is fast approaching, when thy earthly friends will not be able to minister any effectual consolation : then, the world will be found a broken staff to those who lean upon it : thy beauty will fade ; thy strength will decay ; thy riches will disappear. In this destitute condition,

what can support the sinking soul? While unhappy sinners find that they have been toiling for that which satisfieth not, and feel themselves forsaken at this awful period of their utmost need; they who, by patient continuance in well-doing, have made God their friend, will have a rod and a staff put into their hands to support them through the valley of the shadow of death. The everlasting arms being spread under them, they will lie down to rest, with the blessed expectation of a joyful resurrection to glory, and honour, and immortality.

SERMON IX.

The World is apt to esteem what God abominates.

LUKE xvi. 15.

That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

THIS declaration of our blessed Redeemer, who was full of grace and truth, ought to humble the pride of the human heart; to make us sensible of the difficulty of forming a right judgment in all things; to apprize us of the danger to which we are continually exposed, of being misled by prejudice and passion in our opinions respecting the affairs of this world—the real value of earthly things, and the true merit of human conduct.

The words of the text were addressed to the haughty and hypocritical Pharisees. They assumed the appearance of rigid mortification and scrupulous sanctity; they were nevertheless extravagantly fond of the pomp and power of this world; they were more solicitous to secure the applause of men, than to gain the approbation of heaven: as we are informed in some of the preceding verses of this chapter, they were *covetous*, notwith-

standing all their affectation of abstraction from the world; they heard our Lord's discourses, but they *derided* him because he exposed their hypocrisy and pride; and this extorted from him the severe rebuke, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

Thus we learn, that these words of our Lord refer to a particular case; to the situation of the Pharisees, who, by rigorous attention to the external ceremonies of their religion, imposed upon the people, and obtained credit for virtues which they by no means possessed; and, of course, while they were justified by *men*, were condemned by the righteous judgment of *God*; while they were highly esteemed by those who can look only at the surface of things, they were held in abomination by *him* who knoweth the motives that actuate the heart.

But, it may be observed of many other objects of human pursuit, that in the eye of right reason, they are of little value, perhaps highly prejudicial—"that which is much esteemed among men, is of no estimation in the sight of God." It shall be the business of the following discourse, by various instances, to exemplify the truth of this observation; and then to draw from it some practical improvement. It is the perfection of wisdom, to know our true felicity, and to employ the most effectual means for the attainment of it. But, through the fatal influence of sin, the light of man's understanding is obscured, and the rectitude of his will perverted: in many cases, he perceives not his real interest; and, it too often happens, that even when he

knows the good, he is not inclined to pursue it. Look round the world: a scene of perplexity and tumult is presented to our view: every where we behold men in great commotion, with subtilty supplanting, with violence assaulting, with cruelty oppressing each other: all eagerly engaged in the prosecution of some favourite scheme; and all apparently determined, at every hazard, to accomplish their purposes. But, what are commonly the objects of these ardent affections, these violent pursuits? Will not dispassionate reason say, "They may be highly esteemed among men; but surely, in the sight of God they are of little estimation." To man, who was made for immortality, of what real value are all the stores of wealth, the ensigns of power, the glitter of parade, the fickle shouts of applause, which he may now enjoy? These relate only to this perishable body, which must soon be deposited in the grave: they can effect us only *in time*; and we must soon enter upon an unchangeable *eternity*. Yet these fleeting possessions engage the affections, and influence the conduct of the greater part of mankind: they prompt to the commission of every crime; they banish, for the most part, present tranquillity of mind; and, they have no favourable aspect on futurity: we need not, therefore, hesitate to conclude, that they are "*abomination in the sight of God.*" His commandment is, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve:" but mammon is the god of this world. This is the golden image which has been set up by human folly; and nations and languages fall down and worship. Before this false god, all kinds of music are heard to play; the trumpet

sounds the dreadful signal to war and slaughter, and the psaltery and dulcimer invite to luxury and wanton dissipation.

To break the fetters of servitude, to escape from the rod of the oppressive tyrant, to secure the freedom and felicity of civil society, are unquestionably noble exertions of the generous mind. But, if there be truth in the intimations of reason, and the express declarations of Revelation, "that we must hereafter render an account of the deeds done in the body; that vice will be miserable, and virtue for ever happy;" of how little importance is it, to secure our *temporal* interests, to the total neglect of our *everlasting* concerns; to call ourselves free, while we are the slaves of vice; to have the liberty of acting as we please on earth, only to precipitate ourselves the more speedily into the pit of utter darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

Were we to form our opinion from the general tenour of human conduct, we must necessarily conclude it to be a very prevalent sentiment among men, "that if the *end* be laudable, it will sanctify the most "iniquitous *means*." But, in the estimation of dispassionate reason, in the sight of God, nothing can justify unrighteousness and cruelty; nothing can excuse the folly of attempting to advance our temporal well-being, by the corruption and the consequent wretchedness of the immortal soul. Let us, therefore, in the course of our conduct, take heed, not only that our *intentions* be upright; but that the *means* also which are employed for the accomplishment of them be pure and laudable. Let us ever remember, that

what is abomination in the sight of God, is in truth of little value, although it may be highly esteemed among men.

If we proceed one step farther, and turn our attention upon the qualities of the human mind, here also we shall find, in too many instances, the declaration of the text verified—many things pass for virtues and excellences among men, which are odious to a righteous and merciful God.

What sort of knowledge commonly commands the most respect, and is in the highest estimation among men? Is it that *meekness of wisdom*, which delights more to retire from the confusion of the world, and in privacy to cultivate the good affections of the heart, than to mingle in the turbulent scenes of life, and to employ all the arts of controlling and directing the storms of human affairs? Is it that heavenly science, by which we are instructed to acquire the riches of divine grace, and thrones of immortal glory, rather than the mammon of unrighteousness, or seats of temporal authority? The children of this world may be wiser in their generation than the children of light: they may lay their plans with more art, and prosecute them with more ardour: they may attract greater attention, and command more of the applause of every bystander. But, how transitory and perishable are the best acquisitions of this worldly wisdom! The fruit can scarcely be tasted, before the tree withers and dies. When the skill of the politician has ceased to direct the movements of civil society; when the imagination of the poet has ceased to wander over fields of enchantment; when the eloquence of the orator no longer commands the passions of his audience; the true wisdom which

cometh down from above will be justified of all her children: it will then be found, that length of days, even immortality, is in her right hand; and, in her left hand, the only permanent riches and honour.

Far be it from every one of us, to depreciate any branch of secular science which tends to improve and embellish the present state of human existence: but, let it ever be remembered, that the intellect of man can never be so nobly and so usefully employed, as in acquiring the knowledge of those things which concern his eternal welfare. We must learn our duty before we can perform it; and the word of divine truth has determined, “the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; to depart from evil, that is true understanding.”

In the opinions which we are apt to entertain of the dispositions of the human heart, it may again be observed, “That which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God.” The children of this world most highly esteem that restless and ardent temper of mind, which is ever going forth in quest of strange and dangerous adventures; that proud and lofty spirit which is jealous of the slightest indignity, and ready to punish every supposed offence, even by sacrificing the life of the offender; that hardness of soul which, under the specious appearance of liberality, will venture to attack the most venerable institutions, human and divine. But, how totally discordant are these dispositions from those which are every where inculcated in the blessed Gospel of Christ? Here, it is most expressly required, that we study to be quiet, and be content with such things as we have; that on all occasions, we be inclined to forbear, and ready to forgive one another; that we submit to every ordinance

of man, for the Lord's sake ; and yield implicit obedience to *all* the commandments of God, to the tithing of mint, and anise, and cummin, as well as to the weightier matters of the law.

In the business of religion, how frequently is the great bulk of mankind egregiously imposed upon by empty show and vain parade ? The hypocritical Pharisee, full of self-importance, makes long prayers, though he gives not much alms ; he assumes the appearance of excessive zeal for the honour of God, and tender solicitude for the welfare of men ; with sanctimonious scrupulosity he travels along, as if he were searching for objects to excite disgust, and to provoke reprehension, when his pride prompts him to say to a fellow-traveller, " Stand off, for I am more holy than thou," it is done under the pretence of extreme anxiety to preserve the most spotless purity of character ; and, when he indulges his censorious disposition by slandering his neighbour, he wishes to make the world believe that it arises from a delicate attachment to the cause of virtue and religion. All this is done merely to be seen of men. God knows, and every accurate observer of the workings of the human heart has abundant reason to suspect, that it is all hypocrisy and affectation ; still, too many will be deceived, and highly esteem what ought to be universally detested. It was this character which our Lord had particularly in view, when he uttered the words of the text ; and his determination is, however men may applaud, " to God, who knoweth " the heart, it is abomination."

Thus do the sentiments of the man of this world disagree with those of God, who can, in no wise, be deceived: the one seeks wealth; the other recom-

mends holiness: the one prizes the applause of his fellow-mortals; the other directs us to prefer the praise of God: the one admires shining talents; the other commends humble virtues: man wishes for a long life in this world, furnished with all temporal accommodations; God calls our principal attention and care to the securing of a happy eternity: man pursues the vanities of the earth; God commands us, before all things, to seek the substantial glories of heaven. And shall we not listen to the voice of boundless mercy and unerring truth? *Let us* be ever on our guard against these deceptions into which we are so liable to fall; and, with this view, let the following directions be so deeply impressed upon our hearts, as to influence our conduct.

1st. Let us ever remember, that the God whom we serve is truth itself; that infinite wisdom cannot be deceived; that boundless mercy cannot deceive others; from *him* is derived whatever truth is to be found in the world; every ray of light that beams forth upon the habitations of men, proceeds from this great source of light and glory. Bewildered mortals! in this obscure place of your earthly sojourn, lift up your eyes to this glorious luminary, and let your footsteps be directed into the path of virtue and true holiness. Thanks be to our merciful God, that we have not been left in a state of utter darkness! Notwithstanding the obscurity which sin has spread over the face of the earth, we still enjoy the feeble light of reason and conscience; and to *this* has been added the bright effulgence of the Gospel of Christ. Upon *us* the sun of righteousness has risen. To *us* the light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon us. Let us, then, attend to the word of

God; the revelation of the divine will: let this be the comfort of our life; and, on all occasions, the unerring guide of our conduct.

2dly. Let us look forward to that awful day of final decision, when the truth of God's declarations will be manifested in the sight of angels and men; when the erroneous opinions of weak and sinful mortals will be corrected; and when it will be too late to lament our errors. We may now disregard the determinations of infinite wisdom with respect to the true means of human felicity; we may vainly imagine that *this* consists in the multitude of our earthly possessions; we may say with fatal unconcern, "Soul, take thy rest, for thou hast much goods laid up in store, for many years to come." But, let us think in time, that the day is fast approaching when this vain confidence will utterly fail; when this unsubstantial fabrick of our happiness will be totally subverted. Let *our* will, therefore, be now conformable to the will of God. By his wisdom let our ignorance be instructed. By his rectitude let our crooked paths be made straight. Let us shun the ways of vice, which, however agreeable, he has apprized us, lead to misery; let us resolutely pursue those of virtue and religion, which, notwithstanding some present unpromising appearances, he has positively assured us, will terminate in perfect happiness and ineffable glory.

3dly. Let us see and acknowledge the vanity of being highly esteemed among men, if we are abominable in the sight of God. Can the estimation of man alter the real nature of things? Can it change the leopard's spots, or make the skin of the Ethiopian white? Can it quiet the clamours of conscience, of

give beauty to the deformity of vice? Can it shut the door against the messenger of death, and suspend or pervert the just judgment of the Almighty? Men may flatter our follies; they may even applaud our vices: but it will soon be found, that lying lips are but for a moment; while truth is mighty, and will stand fast for ever: human errors will be swept away, like the spider's web; while the truth of God, like the strong mountains, will remain unmoveable.

Lastly; since God is perfectly acquainted with the motives of all our actions, let us learn the necessity of making the service which we offer to him, *the business of the heart*. His affectionate invitation, from the beginning, has been, "My son, give me thine heart." One ardent petition, one strong ejaculation of praise, one sigh of humble penitence rising from a sincere heart, is more acceptable in the sight of God, than all the ostentatious services which the hypocritical Pharisee can offer to him. Let us, then, worship him in simplicity and godly sincerity; and we shall, ere long, be exalted to those blessed regions, where our pious affections will be no more diverted by the amusements, weakened by the business, nor destroyed by the vices, to which we are continually exposed in this world of vanity and vexation of spirit.

SERMON X.

The Deliverance afforded to Man through a Redeemer.

EZEKIEL xxxiv. 16.

I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.

THESE words of the holy prophet relate, in their primary signification, to the restoration of the children of Israel from the Babylonish captivity. As in many other passages of the sacred Scriptures, God is here represented under the character of a tender Shepherd seeking his flock, that had been attacked by ravenous wild beasts, driven away from the fold, wandering in the deserts, some of them torn and bleeding from the assaults of their cruel foes, and some of them sick and weak from hunger and fatigue. This was a lively representation of the sufferings of the Jews, under the ferocious enemies who had driven them away from their native land, and dispersed them in a sad state of captivity among the heathen nations. The merciful promises contained in the words of the text, were intended to console them in their distress, and to cheer

them with the happy expectation of release from the thralldom under which they suffered, a joyful return to their own country, and a perfect re-establishment in all their privileges, civil and religious.

At the expiration of seventy years, these gracious declarations of the Almighty, by the mouth of his prophet, were completely verified. But the words have unquestionably a farther reference to the restoration of the Jews, from the dispersed and degraded condition in which we now find them among all the nations of the earth. We derive an irrefragable argument in confirmation of the truth of our holy religion, from the consideration that their present situation is exactly conformable to what had been predicted by the prophets of the Old Testament, and by our Saviour Christ. After all their dispersions and sufferings through a long course of ages, they are still, in a miraculous manner, preserved a distinct people; no doubt, to answer the wise purposes of God's providence, who has declared, that after the fulness of the Gentiles is come in, "He will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth; he will bring them from the east, and gather them from the west: he will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth." Then, in a more particular manner, "he will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away; he will bind up that which was broken, and strengthen that which was sick."

But, although this prophesy of Ezekiel relate, in its primary intention, to the afflicted circumstances of his

brethren, the children of Israel, it has unquestionably a far more extensive signification: it looks forward to the days of the Gospel, and it contemplates the whole human race. It is not necessary to remind you, that in the language of sacred Scripture, the representations which are there made, of the distresses of the Jews under their temporal foes, and of their deliverance from them, are intended to lead our imagination to the afflicted state of mankind, under the oppressions of our spiritual adversaries, and to the happy deliverance which is afforded through the intervention of a Redeemer. In this view, I shall now proceed to consider the passage before us; and surely, nothing can be more expressive of the wretchedness of man, occasioned by sin, and of the tender relief which is offered through the loving-kindness of God in Christ Jesus.

Since the ravages that were made upon human innocence and happiness by the assaults of Satan, that roaring lion who goeth about seeking whom he may devour, the natural condition of mankind may well be represented by that of a flock dispersed by ravenous beasts, and chased through the wilderness: they are driven far away from their true home, the seat and centre of real felicity: with respect to that sustenance which is necessary for the support and comfort of their immortal souls, they are in a very destitute condition—hungry and thirsty, their soul fainteth in them; they are ignorant of the way which leads back again to the place of rest; and, if they be informed of it, sick and faint as they are, their own strength will not suffice; without foreign assistance they cannot return. In one respect, indeed, the comparison will not hold. Man is too often more absurd and ungrateful than the beasts

who perish. The straying lamb is happy to fly back again to the sheltering fold. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but sinful man has no desire to know and reverence his rightful Lord: he will not consider his wretched condition, nor cheerfully embrace the means of safety, even when they are proposed to him.

Are wandering mortals, then, given up to the error of their ways? Has God sworn in his wrath, that they shall not be permitted to return, and enter into his rest? No; as it was *he* who made us, and not we ourselves; notwithstanding our ingratitude and disobedience, he does not cast us off in utter displeasure; he still entertains a tender compassion for the work of his hands; he graciously invites us to return, to become his people, the sheep of his pasture.

The only-begotten Son, who is designated under the character of the "*good Shepherd*," has appeared in the wilderness of this world, to seek and to save that which was lost. Hear his merciful intentions, as they are expressed in the words of the text. He waits not for *us* to return; for, alas, we have by nature neither the inclination nor the ability to go back again to our best friend, our happy home: he came to *seek* that which was lost. He has removed every obstacle that stood in the way of our restoration to the favour of God, and recovery of the forfeited joys of paradise: the good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. He died for our sins, and he rose again for our justification. He once sought them in person, and he *now* seeks those who have erred and strayed from the right way, by his messengers who beseech the wanderers, in his stead, to return and be reconciled to God. He

invites them by the promises of the Gospel. He admonishes them by all the dispensations of his providence. He solicits them by the suggestions of his Holy Spirit.

If they listen to these merciful invitations, "he brings again those who were driven away"—he brings them to the full enjoyment of the rich blessings of his religion.

"He binds up that which was broken"—he imparts consolation to the broken and the contrite heart, by the assurance of pardon: he says to every humble and penitent sinner; "Let not thy soul be any longer cast down, nor thy spirit disquieted within thee: arise, and follow me in peace, for thy sins are forgiven thee."

If the repenting offender be desirous to obey the heavenly call; to follow his Master to the mansions of bliss through the path of holiness; "he will then strengthen that which was sick"—he will enable him to run in the way of God's commandments without fainting; to walk in his ordinances without being weary; he will cure the spiritual maladies of the afflicted penitent, and cause him to proceed from strength to strength, till he appear before God in the pure regions of immortality. Are these the words of truth and soberness? Are these the gracious assurances of him who cannot deceive? Let me then entreat those who have wandered from the path of their duty, and who are inclined to persist in their errors, to consider their forlorn condition, and to ask with the deepest solicitude of heart, "What they can do to be saved from the wretchedness that surrounds them?" Behold, the Bishop and Shepherd of your souls has

come to seek, and is ready to save you, although you have been long lost to virtue and to happiness; although you have been broken and torn by your cruel adversaries, and made sick by the venomous contagion of sin. Only repent, believe, and obey the Gospel, and every evil will be remedied: he will guide you by his wisdom, protect you by his power, bless you with his love, and at last crown you with his glory.

These are strong declarations, but we are authorized to make them by the word of Christ himself. In the addresses of our Lord to his people, he repeatedly presents himself to them under the endearing character of a *Shepherd*. Viewed in this light, all his offices are those of tenderness and love. Not one of his faithful and obedient people escapes his merciful notice; his vigilant eye is continually over them: "I am the good Shepherd," saith he, "and know my sheep, and am known of mine."

He fleeth not like the hireling, in the hour of danger, and leaveth the wolf to catch and scatter them, but is ready to hazard even his life in their defence.

He goes before them, to direct and encourage them in the right way; and they follow him, for they know his voice.

He is very compassionate to all their infirmities; he gathers the lambs with his arm, and carries them in his bosom; and gently leads those that are with young.

He abundantly supplies all their spiritual wants; he feeds them in a green pasture, and leads them forth beside the waters of comfort: they lack nothing: even when they pass through the valley of the shadow of death, they need not fear any evil; for even there he is with them, and his pastoral rod and staff comfort them.

Happy are the people who live under the guardianship of such a kind and powerful Protector! *We*, my brethren, have been received into the congregation of Christ's flock, and have been signed with the sign of the cross, to designate our character, and intimate to what Master we belong. Highly, then, does it concern us, to inquire what rules he has prescribed for the regulation of our conduct; what sentiments, and what sort of deportment are best suited to creatures so entirely dependent as we are. And here, let it be observed, that in our intercourse with our Lord, the great Shepherd of the sheep, *humility* must be the ground work of all our services; *this* must influence the thoughts of our heart and the actions of our life. For, it ought to be deeply impressed upon our minds, that he who was so compassionate to those who were lost and driven away; he who is so ready to bind up the broken and to strengthen the sick, has also declared, "But I will destroy the fat and the strong;" that is, to such as are sensible of their weakness and necessity, and who, therefore, commit themselves entirely to my care and protection, I will yield every necessary assistance: but those who are confident in their own wisdom and strength; who depend not upon my bounty; who will not submit to my directions; who deem themselves sufficient for their own security and happiness—those who are thus haughty, presumptuous, and refractory, I will miserably destroy.

As this spirit is altogether unbecoming in redeemed sinners, and is repugnant to a cordial reception of the Gospel, we find it condemned with great severity, in every part of the word of God. It is said, "That he
"bringeth down the mighty from their seat, but ex-

“alteth the humble and meek: that the hungry are
 “filled with good things, while the rich are sent empty
 “away: that the wise man must not glory in his
 “wisdom, nor the mighty man in his strength; for
 “that the weakness of God is stronger than man, and
 “the wisdom of the world with him is foolishness:
 “that imaginations must be cast down, and every high
 “thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of
 “God; and we must bring into captivity every thought
 “to the obedience of Christ: that vain mortals too
 “often delude themselves with the fond imagination,
 “that they are rich and increased with goods, and have
 “need of nothing; when in reality, they are wretched,
 “and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”
 These declarations are exactly consonant to that of the
 text; “I will destroy the fat and the strong.” At this
 awful hour of decision, the dreadful denunciation will
 be verified, “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man,
 “and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth
 “from the Lord. The lofty looks of man shall be
 “humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed
 “down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that
 “day.”

Think of this, ye who imagine that there is no need
 of an immediate revelation from heaven to enlighten
 the darkness, to instruct the ignorance of mankind; ye
 who suppose that the human understanding is com-
 mensurate to all truth, and therefore reject the mys-
 teries of our religion; ye who rely upon your own
 native strength, and therefore ask not the aid of God’s
 Spirit; ye who depend for acceptance upon the per-
 fection of your obedience, and therefore disclaim the
 doctrine of atonement, and seek not the kingdom of

heaven in the humble garb of penitents, but with the haughty demeanour of those who demand the payment of a *debt*, instead of petitioning for an unmerited *favour*. Be assured, that this disposition is most offensive in the sight of God; is altogether inconsistent with our rank and condition among intelligent beings; and effectually precludes us from all that blessedness which the Gospel of Christ was intended to confer, in this world and the next, in time and through eternity. *He* is in reality most strong, who places most dependence upon the strength of his Almighty Protector: he is best directed, who takes the wisdom of God for his guide: he is most abundantly supplied with all good things, who is most inclined to ascribe whatever he receive, to the mere bounty of heaven.

Let us, then, be persuaded to walk humbly with our God; or, as it is expressed in the Gospel, to know the voice of our Shepherd, and to follow him whithersoever he may think proper to conduct us, submitting ourselves entirely to his holy will and pleasure. Thus shall we be authorized to draw comfort from the concluding words of the text, "I will feed them with judgment." He will adapt *his* relief to *our* necessities, whatever they may be. If, at any time, we grow too confident and careless, he will gently admonish us, by some check of conscience, declaration of his word, or dispensation of his providence. If, from a consciousness of our weakness and depravity, we begin to sink into the depths of despondency, he will cheer us with the gracious promise, that, in his name, repentance and remission of sins may now be preached to all people. In a word, whether our necessities relate to mind, body, or estate, of this we may rest assured,

that he who loved us even unto death, and is now the Head over all things for his Church, will not fail to feed us with food that is convenient for us. Let us only follow his directions, and depend on his bounty; and he will open his hand to fill us with plenteousness here, and hereafter he will show us his salvation.

From what has been now said, we may infer,

1st. That those who have wilfully transgressed the laws of God, and are determined to persist in their errors, are in a very destitute and dangerous condition. Their deplorable circumstances are thus represented in the figurative language of the prophet—"They are said to have no shepherd; to be scattered upon the face of the earth; to wander through all the mountains, and upon every high hill; to become a prey, and meat to all the beasts of the field." Obstinate transgressors may be insensible of their danger, but let them be assured, that destruction threatens them in every step of their unsteady progress. They are wandering in a state of distraction, without any fixed object before them; they are destitute of all those gratifications in which alone a rational soul can acquiesce; they have no dependence upon the good providence of God; they are now a prey to a host of furious and tormenting passions; and Satan, the grand adversary, is ever lying in wait to seize and rend them with unutterable misery. Wonderful infatuation, that wicked men can be unconcerned in the midst of such horrible dangers!

2dly. To those who have been brought to a right sense of the miseries attendant on a life of sin; who view in a proper light their original depravity, and their many actual transgressions; who are impressed with a

just idea of the value of their souls, of the necessity of religion, and the importance of immortality; who are, therefore, disturbed and anxious about their future welfare—to persons of this description, let the words of the text afford sweet consolation. Behold, the good Shepherd comes to seek that which was lost, and to bring again that which was driven away; to bind up the broken, and to strengthen the sick. Upon the Gospel plan of salvation, ample provision is made for the relief of all your wants: here is pardon to the penitent for past transgressions; clear instructions for the regulation of their future conduct; grace to assist them in the sincere discharge of their duty; and, in the whole course of their earthly pilgrimage, a cheering confidence in the kind providence of God, and a blessed hope of immortality beyond the grave.

Lastly; let those who have availed themselves of these high advantages, and who live as becometh the Gospel of Christ, be duly sensible of their happy condition, rejoice evermore, and in every thing give thanks. They know, from experience, the import of these figurative expressions of Ezekiel; “I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will feed them by the rivers in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.” And what shall separate you from this love of God? You have, surely, no desire to quit the peace, security, and plenty, which you now enjoy in the faithful performance of all your religious duties, for the vain amusements, or the vicious gratifications of this perishable world. You will not leave the rich pastures, and

seek to satisfy your hungry souls with husks which the swine do eat. You will not turn from the fountain of living waters, and go for refreshment to the broken cisterns which can hold no water.

Happy would it be, could all who are now present be induced to estimate, in this manner, the joys of a religious life! Let us entertain just notions of our dependent state and condition. Let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt us in due time. Let us cast all our care upon him, for he careth for us. Let us be sober and vigilant, because our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour. Thus, by the grace of God, we shall be made perfect, stablished, strengthened, settled in our religion here; and when the chief Shepherd shall appear in the character of our Judge, we shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

SERMON XI.



On the Resemblance between Christians and little Children.



MATTHEW xix. 14.

Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

THE Pharisees and Scribes contradicted the doctrines of our blessed Lord, and affected to deride the miraculous works which were performed by him; calling him a Deceiver, and one that was in league with Beelzebub, the prince of devils. But many of the common people, who formed their opinions from the plain dictates of unbiassed reason—who were not under the influence of prejudice and passion, entertained very different sentiments of him, esteeming him as a prophet sent from God, of eminent wisdom and piety, full of grace and truth: they therefore diligently and reverently attend to him. And, as it has been customary in all ages to place a high value upon the prayers and blessings of wise and holy men; among other marks of respect, they bring young children unto Jesus, requesting him, that he would pray over them, lay his hands upon

them, and bless them. The disciples, seeing their Master thronged with much company, and supposing him to be fatigued with long teaching and exhortation, attempt to repress the eagerness of these people, and rebuke them for their seeming intrusion. But, our gracious Lord, always ready to seize every occasion of conveying some useful instruction, takes this opportunity to inform his disciples and the surrounding multitude, what sort of temper and disposition of heart was indispensably necessary, if they wished either to attain or to enjoy the happiness of heaven—assuring them, that unless they became like those little children, whom they were driving from his presence, they would not be proper subjects of his Gospel-kingdom here, nor would they be prepared to partake of his heavenly happiness in a future world.

It will not, therefore, be an improper employment, from an attentive examination of human nature, to inquire what those distinguishing characters and dispositions of children are, which met with the particular commendation of our Lord; and of the persons possessing which, he declares, that the kingdom of heaven is composed—“Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for *of such* is the kingdom of heaven.”

We are expressly taught in the holy Scriptures, and our own daily experience confirms the assertions of the word of God, that man cometh into the world under the disadvantage of an original and inherent depravity. Upon this doctrine is founded the whole scheme of Christ's redemption. From this doctrine we argue the *necessity*, and therefore adore the *mercy* of a mediating Saviour; who by one oblation of him-

self, once offered, made an atonement for all our guilt, whether original or actual ; and who now, by his office of Intercessor at the right hand of God, from time to time, assists our weakness, relieves our wants, and makes our imperfect services acceptable. But, although human nature be corrupted and depraved, the seeds of vice do not commonly shoot up at once to their full growth—it requires *time* to bring the bitter fruits to maturity. Observation may teach us, and the declaration of Jesus Christ, in the words of the text, justifies us in asserting, that in children are found many amiable and excellent qualities, which, if they could be retained through life, would show human nature in a very engaging light, and display several of those dispositions which we *must* carry along with us, when we enter the kingdom of heaven. Let us, then, proceed to point out what the most striking of those qualities and dispositions are, which our Lord has commanded us to cherish and improve, that we may become the subjects of his kingdom, and the heirs of his glory.

What first deserves our attention, is a spirit of *meekness and docility* of heart. When children look around, they find themselves encompassed on every side, with objects new and unaccountable. Sensible of their own ignorance, they are ever ready to *ask*, and willing to *receive*, assistance and instruction ; and unconscious of any deception in their own bosoms, they place the most implicit confidence in the information of others. And is not this a spirit highly becoming ; nay, absolutely necessary, in the rise and progress of the Christian life ? When we contemplate the *new creation*, the work of our redemption through a suffering Saviour, we perceive ourselves surrounded with wonders.

“ Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest “ in the flesh.” When we consider man as having fallen from the state of innocence and happiness in which he was originally placed—as being justly liable to the dreadful penalty of the divine law—with no other prospect before him, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation; we may well exclaim, with the apostle, “ O the depth of the riches, both of “ the knowledge and wisdom of God!” It was his wisdom that concerted, and his mercy that carried into execution, the great scheme of eternal salvation; so that he may still be just, and yet the Justifier of those who believe. The infidel, because he cannot thoroughly explain this mysterious dispensation of the divine goodness, is determined to reject the whole. But if he be a sinner, how presumptuous is it to despise the promise of forgiveness, because he dislikes the mode in which it is proposed to him! If he hope for happiness at the last, how absurd is it to spurn the offer of salvation, because he cannot distinctly comprehend the method by which the blessing was wrought out for him!—In this case, our only wisdom, as well as best advantage, is to adopt the language of Mary, and to act upon that principle; “ Behold the servant of the Lord, be it unto “ me according to thy word!”

2dly. Children are sensible of their *weakness* and *inability* to take care of themselves, and therefore fly to a parent or a friend for assistance and protection. And in the same spirit, it becomes *us*, conscious of our various infirmities, to go unto the great Parent of all; under the shadow of whose wings we may be safe; who is the shield and buckler of those who flee to him for succour. Among other petitions, our Saviour

taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation"—not that he meant to insinuate that God can tempt any man to sin; but his only design was to teach us the necessity of looking up to our heavenly Father for aid in every trial—that when our own weakness would infallibly betray us into the snares of sin, *his* mighty arm might protect and secure us from evil.

There is nothing that more effectually disqualifies the soul for the reception of divine grace and benediction, than pride and self-sufficiency. The holy Scriptures are therefore filled with exhortations to cherish the contrary virtues. When the prophet showed the people of Israel what was good, and what the Lord their God required of them, he tells them, it was not only "to do justice, and to love mercy; but also, to *walk humbly* with their God." The Scribes and Pharisees, vainly elated with notions of their own wisdom and importance, would not condescend to ask instruction, or receive assistance in the way to heaven, from Jesus of Nazareth. "Have any of the rulers believed on him? Are *ye* also deceived?" say they to the officers who were sent to take him; "Search, and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." Those who supposed themselves to be *whole*, said, We have no need of a physician. It was the poor and humble, the blind and miserable, that applied for aid. It was persons of this description who were ready to exclaim, "Son of David, have mercy on us! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" It is thus that God scattereth the "proud in the imagination" of their hearts—that he putteth down the mighty "from their seat, and exalteth the humble and meek—

“that he filleth the *hungry* with good things, but
“sendeth the *rich* empty away.”

Further; we have all observed, with what *confidence* children go for relief in the hour of danger and distress, to those of whose tenderness and love they have had frequent experience—they ask with sincerity, and they fear no reluctance nor deception. And with the same disposition of mind should Christians call upon God their Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. If the experience of former mercies be a reasonable ground for future hope and trust, to what other person should we go; or what other name is there given under heaven, whereby we may be so effectually saved? To *him* we are indebted for our *creation* in the rank of rational and immortal creatures—for our *preservation* amidst all the dangers with which we are *necessarily* encompassed, or into which we have heedlessly plunged ourselves. *He* has holden us up ever since we were born. To him we are indebted for health and competency, and every other blessing that renders life easy and comfortable. And above all, notwithstanding our weakness and guilt, to him we are indebted for the blessed hopes of eternal glory through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. We ought, therefore, at all times, to send up our petitions to *him* with humility, and with full assurance of faith—convinced that “he
“who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up
“for us all, will, with him also, freely give us all
“things that are necessary for our real happiness.
“For what man is there among *you*, if his son ask
“bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a
“fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being

“evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”

Let it not, however, be concluded from what has been said, that we are to discard the use of reason altogether; or that we are to submit implicitly to whatever comes under the name of a revelation from heaven, without inquiring whether it be right or wrong, reasonable or absurd. This would open a wide door for every religious imposture, that has been obtruded on the world. We are to examine, by the help of all the light which is imparted to us from the Father of lights, whether the things that are taught us be really so. We are to comply with the admonition of St. Paul, who requires the Christian to be able to give a *reason* of the faith that is in him.

When we speak of the weakness of human nature, and of the absolute necessity of imploring the divine mercy and help, we are not to suppose that our only business is to sit still and lament our inability. We are to ask, before we can expect to receive—we are to knock, before the door of mercy will open to us. It is God that worketh in us, who animates and strengthens our endeavours; we are, therefore, to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

With whatever devout and holy confidence we may present our petitions before God, let it not be concluded, that he will therefore answer our requests, at the very time, and in the very manner, which *we* may think the most proper and convenient; but let us patiently rest, in full assurance of faith, that he will make all things work together in the end, for our best advantage. What I mean to inculcate is this; to

imitate the disposition of children, by cherishing a tender and teachable heart—humility to wait upon God, in every ordinance which he has appointed, as the means of conveying his grace and mercy—not misguided by prejudice and pride, nor hardened by obstinate unbelief—but be always glad to hear, willing to learn, and ready to accept salvation upon any terms on which the divine wisdom and goodness may think proper to offer it. But, to proceed;

There are several other qualities, which the words of the text may fairly lead us to recommend to your serious consideration, as social creatures, and as Christians. To feel and resent whatever bears the appearance of injurious treatment, is agreeable to the constitution of our nature—it is a part of that necessary law of self-defence which our Creator has given us for our security and preservation. But, after the danger is past, the guard may go to rest. Accordingly we find the child very sensible of an injury, and quick to resent and repel it. But the storm that was raised in his bosom is soon allayed, and is succeeded by a settled serenity—he never harbours a dark and implacable resentment—he forgives the injurious person upon the first appearance of returning kindness, and embraces him again with a sincere and affectionate heart. Although the word of God permits us, on certain occasions, to be angry, and sin not; yet there is no duty more frequently, or more earnestly inculcated, than that of *long-suffering and forgiveness*. In *this*, more especially, we are to imitate the great pattern of all perfection; “who commands us to be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as he for Christ’s sake hath forgiven us.” To the malignant and

unrelenting spirit he makes this unanswerable appeal —“ O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me : shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?” And, it is made, in the Lord’s prayer, an express condition of our expecting forgiveness for all our trespasses, at the hands of God, that we be ready to forgive *those* who have trespassed against *us*.

The *cheerfulness and joy* of children, arising from innocence, and purity of thought and intention, is almost incessant and uninterrupted. If at any time, the sunshine of the mind be overcast, it is but of momentary duration—the cloud passes away, and light and cheerfulness return. It is thus that the Christian is to go on his way rejoicing—he makes not his religion consist in a gloomy and severe temper of mind, but thinks a cheerful heart the best tribute of gratitude. “ *That godliness*, which he has chosen as his portion for ever, is profitable for all things; having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come—he can, therefore, rejoice evermore, and in every thing give thanks.” Not that I would carry this doctrine so far, as to assert, that any affliction, for the present, is joyous, rather than grievous; or that the good man cannot feel, like other men, the stroke of pain and distress. But still, the most afflictive changes and chances of this mortal life, cannot deprive him of that peace of God, which passeth all understanding—they cannot banish from his soul the joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. He whose affections do not altogether grovel here below, but are elevated to things above, cannot be rendered entirely

miserable by all the commotions and revolutions of this world. So true is it, that in all circumstances, "joy is laid up for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart;" and, therefore, the prophet exults in these animated strains; "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be found in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

In the child, we commonly observe a happy disposition to be *amused and pleased* with every object that falls in his way. Satisfied with the comfort of the present moment, he does not make himself miserable with melancholy forebodings of future calamities. And this also is a turn of mind which cannot be too earnestly recommended in every stage of this variegated life. Though the prudent man will endeavour to foresee the approaching evil, and so far as possible, to hide himself from it; yet surely, he ought not, by anticipation, to make the mischief *certain*, which was only *probable*. A steady and pious confidence in a wise and gracious Providence, is a ground of consolation that can never be shaken. In God we live, and move, and have our being. Let us trust the Creator of the universe with the direction of his own works—let us humbly submit ourselves to be guided by his wisdom, and we shall be received into his glory. Say not with a murmuring, or a desponding heart, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? Be careful for nothing with a fretful and pining solicitude; but seek ye first

the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all things necessary for your permanent happiness shall be added unto you.

Having thus laid before you such reflections as the words of the text seemed naturally to suggest; what remains, but earnestly to entreat you all, if they appear to be the words of truth and soberness, to let them sink deep into your minds, and produce their due effects. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you, an evil heart of unbelief. But since the light of the glorious Gospel has shined unto you, walk as the children of light, in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.” Remember, that without holiness no man can see the Lord. But if ye are diligent in cultivating the dispositions of long-suffering, meekness, and gentleness, ye will be prepared for the glorious kingdom of the Prince of Peace—where (far removed from the unhappy regions of discord, and strife, and malevolence,) ye will bless God, and love one another to all eternity. There, perfect innocence, undisguised truth, and uninterrupted joy will prevail and triumph for ever. Acquire those qualifications in this world, which are necessary for the enjoyment of this blessed society. Be converted from the hardness and impenitence of sin; and become like little children. Be meek and docile—let a consciousness of your own infirmity induce you to fly for succour to the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation. You have hitherto experienced his wonderful love; learn then to rely upon it for ever. Amidst the various provocations which you must necessarily meet with in a selfish and malignant world, possess your souls in patience, curb the impetuosity of resentful passions, and forgive, as

you hope to be forgiven. Look round upon the works of nature, and seriously meditate on those of grace; and let your hearts rejoice in the loving-kindness of the Lord; for it becometh well the righteous to be joyful in their God. Cast your view forward to that eternal world, towards which we are all hastening; and if you lay up your treasures in heaven, you need fear no evil. A crown of glory awaits you. These are the dispositions which will constitute your immortal happiness. The kingdom of heaven is open to you; and, in due time, you will enter into the joy of your Lord.

SERMON XII.

On the Mysteriousness of the Ways of Providence.

PSALM lxxvii. 19.

Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.

THE Psalmist is here speaking of the mysterious providence of God. Under the image of his passing through the sea, and having his paths in the great waters, in which every impression that is made is soon obliterated, are represented the vanity and presumption of our attempting to search out his judgments, and perfectly to comprehend his dealings with the children of men.

The soul of man seems to be formed with a natural thirst for knowledge; and the desire of prying into futurity is universally implanted in the human breast. But, natural propensities and desires, which, under due regulations, are sources of joy, when extravagantly indulged, are only productive of pain. It is true, while God has said to the sea, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther"—while irrational animals soon arrive at the summit of their improvement; no bounds are assigned to the increase and extent of human know-

ledge. But still, in our present imperfect state, there are many things too dark and intricate for our comprehension; we cannot, in all instances, accurately trace the footsteps of the Almighty. In a future state, our faculties will be strengthened and enlarged. Having come to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus, we shall then put away childish things. We shall no longer know in part, nor see through a glass darkly. *Light*, (a glorious increase of knowledge,) is laid up for the righteous; as well as gladness for the upright in heart.

There is much truth in the pointed remark, that, "where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise." Our Saviour himself has taught us, "that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." An eager anticipation of evil lengthens the duration of distress, and infuses bitterness into the cup of rational pleasure which we now hold in our hands. Was it possible for any person, upon his entrance into life, to draw back the curtain of futurity, and to take a full prospect of all the perplexities and distresses which are to infest his way; from that moment, his peace would be destroyed; every enjoyment would be embittered by trembling apprehension.

Thus we perceive, that our wise Creator is *good* in what he *denies*, as well as in what he *grants*. We are, therefore, to rest contented with our condition; to proceed with humility and resignation; satisfied that the Judge of all the earth will *do right*, though we cannot, in all cases, perceive the immediate propriety of his determinations. This is an important principle in the conduct of human life; and perhaps the most effectual way of impressing it forcibly upon your

minds, will be to produce instances from the sacred Scriptures.

And here, the surprising history of the life of Joseph immediately presents itself to our view. That innocent and unsuspecting youth was treated with injustice and cruelty by his envious brethren; he was sold to strangers, conducted into a distant country, and reduced to the abject condition of a slave; he was falsely accused of crimes which he abhorred; incurred the resentment of a master whom he faithfully served; and was condemned, at last, to endure among malefactors, the miseries of a loathsome dungeon. With respect to him, the paths of God were in the great waters; the ways of Providence were altogether mysterious; but, the event declared, that they were directed by wisdom and mercy, for the preservation of Jacob and his children, as well as of the whole land of Egypt. Joseph, being given up to the hands of the Ishmaelites, sold to a principal officer of Pharaoh's court, thrown into the very prison where the king's prisoners were confined—Joseph, passing through this obscure path of dejection and misery, was in the direct road to happiness and honour. In this manner, he became a saviour to the Egyptians, and to his Father's house—"As for you," says he to his brethren, "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive." And, it may be farther observed, in all these occurrences, he was an eminent type of Jesus Christ. When we read the history of our Saviour's life and sufferings; to a partial and superficial observer, the footsteps of God would not be known. The Jews rejected him, because they depended more upon present

appearances, than upon the wisdom and power of God. It was, indeed, mysterious and astonishing, that *he* whose birth was so obscure, whose life was spent in poverty, and concluded by an ignominious death; should, nevertheless, be the Redeemer of his people Israel, and the light of the Gentiles. And yet, we now rest assured, that from all these circumstances of distress, he proved himself to be the true Messiah. Being thus humbled; making himself of no reputation; he has given us a perfect example of meekness and humility; he has showed himself able to triumph over the most dangerous temptations; to vanquish even death and the grave. So that the faithless and unbelieving justly merit this severe reproof; “O, fools, “and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets “have written! Ought not Christ to have suffered “these things, and then to enter into his glory?”

For the perfect completion of the prophecies which related to him, there was a wonderful combination of circumstances. When the fulness of time came, and the Redeemer was to be born into the world, it was so ordered, that a decree went forth from the Roman government, to which the Jews were then subject, that the whole land should be taxed. This rendered it necessary for the parents of our Lord to leave Nazareth, and take a long journey to Bethlehem, a city of Judah, because they were of the house and lineage of David, with which family it was required to have their names enrolled. At this particular time, Christ is born; and thus, the prophecy was fulfilled, “Thou, “Bethlehem—Ephratah, though thou be little among “the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he “come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel;

“ whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

Not long before our Redeemer came into the world, Judea had been conquered by the Roman arms; the Jews were reduced to a state of entire subjection; and although their Sanhedrim, or great council of priests and elders, were permitted to exercise some authority; they were totally deprived of the power of inflicting capital punishment. Thus our Lord was condemned by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; the punishment inflicted, (crucifixion,) was not a Jewish, but a Roman punishment; and Christ, by enduring it, verified the prophecy, that his feet and his hands should be pierced; and exemplified an ancient and figurative representation, by being lifted up on the cross; as the brazen serpent was lifted up in the wilderness to heal the wounded Israelites.

Thus we perceive, that although it is said by the Psalmist, the paths of God are in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known; yet the event sufficiently proves, that all things are settled by weight and measure, and conducted by unerring wisdom and truth. Let us, therefore, learn to scan the works of the Almighty with reverence. Let us live under the steadfast persuasion, that the foolishness of God is wiser than man; and the weakness of God is stronger than man. Let us love him with sincere hearts, and we know that all things will work together for good.

Every person who reads the Scripture with attention, will not a moment hesitate to acknowledge, that he who created the universe, still presides over the works of his hands; that he rules among the inhabitants of the earth, as well as the armies of heaven; that we and

all our concerns are ever under the guidance of his wise and gracious providence.

But, setting aside past occurrences, many have found, from *their own* experience, that, what was deemed at first a grievous misfortune, has proved, in the issue, a great blessing. By suffering, for a season, under some sharp calamity; by being disappointed in their expectation of obtaining what was deemed a valuable good; by losing some object which warmly engaged their affections; they have found, that they were prevented from running into a more deplorable state of misery; and the loss of a present possession has been amply compensated by the obtaining of a much more estimable blessing. In this manner, we clearly perceive, and are able to account for the proceedings of Divine Providence; and the conclusion of every pious heart will be, "Now know I that the Lord is good; I will therefore trust in him for ever."

But, although the designs of Providence are sometimes clearly opened and explained to us in this world; it frequently happens, that we are compelled to walk through life in a dark and mysterious path, tempted at every step to complain, "Why has the Lord thus dealt with me!" The complete explication of these mysteries must be referred to a future state of existence. Reason and Scripture teach us, that there is a God who created and who governs the universe. He who *made*, must have a *regard* for his own creatures. His mercy is over *all* his works, and is more especially displayed in the creation, preservation, and redemption of *mankind*. This God loveth virtue, and hateth iniquity: he will undoubtedly take care that his faithful servants lose not their reward. This is not our everlasting

abode. We are journeying towards a better and a continuing city. There we shall be thoroughly convinced, that the difficulties which we now meet with in the way, were well-designed; there we shall have a perfect comprehension of what is now utterly inexplicable.

When the pious Psalmist compared his own afflicted condition with the prosperous state of the wicked, the first suggestions of his mind were, "then have I cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." He afterwards corrected this hasty conclusion. For, although complaint be the natural consequence of suffering; although no affliction for the present be joyous, but rather grievous; still, good men frequently find, that as their burden grows heavy, their strength is increased to bear it; that the loss of one comfort is alleviated by the acquisition of another; that as temporal calamities have thronged around them, their spiritual joys have been proportionably multiplied; that as the earth and its possessions have been vanishing from beneath them, they have been enabled to take the stronger hold of the heavenly inheritance. And is not this a merciful provision of our Father who is in heaven, to mitigate the afflictions of our mortal nature by extraordinary supplies of his Holy Spirit; to elevate us above the distresses of this life, by disclosing to us the joys of eternity? "Of myself," says the apostle, "I am nothing; and yet, through Christ, who strengtheneth me, I can do all things." With this support, the glorious company of apostles and noble army of martyrs, took patiently the spoiling of all their earthly comforts; and, through a great fight of afflictions, continued faithful unto death. This support is now

offered to *us*: for God remaineth the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He who gave his own Son to be a ransom for us all, will with him also freely give us all things.

In the perplexities of this mortal state, it must certainly be a source of much consolation and confidence to every considerate mind, to reflect that the universe is under the absolute government of a Being who is perfectly wise, and powerful, and good. “The Lord reigneth; the earth may rejoice; yea, the multitude of the isles may be glad thereof.” However dark and perplexed the present disposition of the affairs of this world may be, let us ever recollect, that all things are under the management of irresistible power, infallible wisdom, and boundless mercy; and surely, murmuring and complaint will cease. For in what better hands could universal empire be placed? Whom would we sooner choose to govern us, than such a Being, who is infinitely perfect? Suppose the providence of God did not superintend the affairs of men; suppose we were permitted to accomplish all the intentions of our hearts without check or control; what a scene of confusion and misery would this earthly habitation be! Ignorant and precipitate, we should rush against each other; peace and happiness would immediately vanish, and future good would not be produced from present apparent evil, but the result of all would be perpetual disorder and wretchedness. Let us, therefore, not only *acquiesce* with humility in the divine government; but even *rejoice and exult* with the delightful consciousness, that we are always under the guidance and protection of One, who knows what is best for us; who is able to execute every pur-

pose of his own will; and who is good to all who love and fear him.

“Take no thought,” says our Lord, “for to-morrow: to-morrow shall take thought for the things of itself: sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” By which expression he does not mean to prohibit prudent forethought, and diligence in the management of our temporal affairs; for these are duties frequently enjoined in other parts of Scripture; but his intention is, to forbid all anxious, impatient solicitude, which indicates a want of pious confidence in the good providence of God. After we have discharged our duty faithfully, let us trust the event to him. Doubt, and anxiety, and fretfulness, are utterly inconsistent with true piety; they lessen our ability to sustain the apprehended evil; they are, in a word, altogether absurd and unreasonable. For all our impatience will not wrest the sceptre out of the hand of God, nor change the course of things. He will still be our sovereign Lord, to whose sway we shall be *compelled* to submit, if we yield not a *willing* obedience. “The Lord is King, be the people never so impatient: he sitteth between the cherubims, be the earth never so unquiet.”

Christ has taught his disciples to call upon God continually, under the tender appellation of “*Our Father*.” Children, we know, are apt to be impatient under the wholesome restraint imposed upon them by their parents. But still, the discreet and affectionate child will repose so much confidence in the wisdom and goodness of a parent, as not to rebel against his positive injunctions. Many have lived to see and acknowledge the justice of prudent correction,

and to bless the father who restrained them, at the moment when they were struggling for unlimited indulgence. This argument is thus beautifully prosecuted by St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees."

To conclude: since God has endued us with various powers of body and mind; since he has appointed certain means to be employed for the accomplishment of every end; let us exert the faculties which he has given us. Let us not tempt Providence by carelessness and sloth; but let us pray earnestly for the acquisition of good; let us deprecate all manner of evil; let us strive by vigilance and industry to obtain

what is needful for soul and body; and we may safely trust the Lord Jehovah for ever. He will be our shield and buckler in present danger; and hereafter, our exceeding great reward.

SERMON XIII.

On the Resurrection of Lazarus.

JOHN xi. 35, 36.

Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, "Behold how he loved him."

THESSE words were spoken of our Saviour, while he was standing at the grave of Lazarus, just before he raised him from the dead. The miracles of our blessed Lord commonly answered a twofold purpose; to display his own greatness and glory, in the character of the expected Messiah; and, at the same time, to supply the necessities, and alleviate the miseries of mankind. From several instances, we find, that he experienced all the *tender affections* of human nature, without yielding to any of its *weaknesses*; and although he declared, that every one who did the will of his heavenly Father, was his sister and his brother; yet he regarded particular persons with a peculiar degree of complacency and love. Among these was Lazarus of Bethany, whom he calls *his friend*, and on whose account he performed one of his most astonishing miracles, in restoring him to life, after he had been four days dead. This wonderful exertion of divine

power, with some of the circumstances which preceded it, I shall make the subject of the following discourse. Here our Saviour appears as a glorious personage who claims our *love* and *adoration*: he that was susceptible of all the emotions of the most animated friendship, is surely entitled to our esteem. He that could reanimate the lifeless body, ought to be had in universal reverence. Let us strive to imitate his *benignity*, while we revere his *power*.

This miraculous transaction is related only by the Evangelist John, the disciple most remarkable for a friendly and sympathetic heart. He could not omit a representation, in which his Master appeared in a light so amiable, and so congenial to his own disposition and turn of mind. The principal circumstances of his relation, you may recollect, are these—That in the town of Bethany dwelt Lazarus, with his sisters Mary and Martha, who had hospitably entertained their Lord, and treated him with that respect which was due to one whom they acknowledged to be Christ the Son of God; and in return, they were particularly beloved by him. That in the illness of Lazarus, they immediately sent to implore relief, “saying, Lord, behold he whom thou lovest, is sick.” That Jesus complied not immediately with their request, “but abode two days still in the same place, where he was.” That, in the mean time, the sick man died; and when Jesus came, at last, Martha met him with a gentle remonstrance, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died;” at the same time, reposing the most humble confidence in his goodness and power: “I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.” That after expressing his sorrow

with all that sensibility of heart, which the melancholy occasion required, he came to the grave, and with a loud voice, commanded the dead man to come forth; who immediately obeyed the summons, and came forth, to the conviction of the incredulous, and to the great astonishment of the whole multitude of spectators.

From this relation, the following observations seem naturally to arise. Wherever the religion of Jesus Christ prevails in its full force, there tenderness of heart, and gentleness of manners will be its constant attendants—there peace and love will abide for ever. The spirit of piety is a social spirit—its direct tendency is to soften the hardness and mitigate the ferocity of the human heart. Although, in the Christian world, the doctrines of our holy religion have not that full effect, which every good man would desire—although the kingdom of Christ is not yet come in all its efficacy and power; it is, nevertheless, evident, that since the introduction of Christianity, the manners of mankind are become less ferocious, and more tractable and civil. Wars (at the best but too full of terror and cruelty) are conducted with less barbarity—the intercourse among nations is more gentle and easy—and a spirit of benevolence is more universally diffused. Among the independent communities of men, as they are spread over a great part of the earth, the prevalence of our holy religion has been productive of these happy consequences. But we are more sensible of its blessed effects, as they appear in smaller societies—in families composed of few individuals. The rays of the sun diffuse a general warmth and joy over the whole face of nature; but we are more struck with their irresist-

ible power, when many of them are collected to a point, and brought to operate on one object. We are informed that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." They had frequently attended to his divine instructions—they obeyed his precepts, and endeavoured to imitate his example. The consequence was, they were connected by uniformity of sentiment and affection—they were awake to each other's pains and pleasures—the light of joy was increased by reflection from one bosom to another; the stream of sorrow was weakened, by being separated into different channels. Happy would it be, were the same unanimity to prevail through *every* Christian family—the same spirit of mutual forbearance and condescension—the same solicitude to promote each other's pleasure, and to ward off the assaults of pain. Let the religion which you profess have its due influence on your hearts, and this will assuredly be the case. You will strive to accommodate yourselves to the inclinations of one another. You may perhaps differ, as to the mode of expressing your devotions. But disagreement in trifles will not break the bonds of harmony. You will have one Lord, and one hope of your calling. You will have the same Father of mercies, to whom you may express your gratitude—the same compassionate Saviour, to whom you may fly for succour in the hour of distress.

For, from the history of all the past ages of the world, and from the frequent instances which fall under our own observation of virtuous and pious men struggling with distress, we find the words of the apostle constantly verified, "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

In sorrow shalt thou eat the fruits of the earth, is a sad sentence of an ancient date; and all the children of men, of every description and character, have experienced its melancholy effects. Of Lazarus and his sisters, it is expressly said, that the *Lord loved them*; and yet, we find they were not exempted from their portion of sorrow. Hence, we may further observe, that we are not presumptuously to throw the bolts of the Almighty, nor to deal condemnation round the land on those we judge his *foes*, merely from circumstances of temporal affliction. There is no standard by which to determine the degree of divine approbation and love, but by the degrees of our own advancement in true wisdom and sincere piety. And yet, how frequently do men, either from ignorance or perverseness, form their judgment on very different principles! The pretended friends of Job reproached him; “If thou wert *pure and upright*; surely now God would awake for thee to dispel thy distresses, and to make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous.” When, after his preservation from shipwreck, a viper fastened on the hand of Paul, one of the inhabitants of the island immediately denounced, “No doubt, this man is a *murderer*, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.” While our blessed Saviour was suspended on the cross, the taunts and revilings of the chief priests were as unjust as they were malicious—“He saved others, *himself* he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him *now*, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God.” From such instances as these, we may learn, not to

form rash opinions of the merits of others, or of ourselves, from the circumstances of temporal good or evil. The present unequal distribution of happiness is one of the strongest arguments which *mere reason* can urge for a day of future retribution. What though the wicked may now flourish like the green bay-tree; if God be just, his end is, to be cut down, and perish for ever. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious," said the Psalmist in the time of his trouble, "will he shut up his compassion in displeasure, for ever?"—But he corrects this murmuring spirit—"I said, It is mine own infirmity—I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High—I will remember that the end of the upright man is peace." Let it not, however, be concluded from what is now said, that virtue is not more favourable than vice, to the *present* happiness of man. Though it may, in general, be affirmed, that all things come alike to all; yet, surely, daily experience teaches, that virtue and religion screen us from many mischiefs and miseries to which wickedness is perpetually exposed; and that they open copious fountains of consolation, in the wilderness which affliction may spread around us—fountains of consolation, which are never found in the paths of vice.

The distresses which befall us in this life, have commonly a tendency to *humble our pride*, and to abate that *self-sufficiency*, which, though very prevalent, is but ill suited to the frailty of human nature. In the height of his prosperity, Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built by the might of *my* power, and for the honour of *my* majesty?" But, when the voice fell from heaven, "*The kingdom is departed from thee;*" he then began

to acknowledge, in the humility of his heart, “That God ruleth in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth—that his works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those who walk in pride, he is able to abase.” It is in the moment of trouble and abasement, that we are most effectually convinced, that man was not designed for a solitary being—that it is not *good* for him to be alone. We then become thoroughly sensible of our weakness—we look around on every side, and anxiously inquire, “Who will show me any good? Where is the sympathetic bosom into which I may pour my griefs? Where is the friendly arm which will support me, for a little while, through this toilsome journey?” Happy is it for those who have obtained a friend, willing to hear, and able to assist them! In the illness of Lazarus, they immediately send to Jesus, “saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick”—to Jesus they apply for relief, of whose love they had rendered themselves worthy, and in whose power they were persuaded they might confide. It sometimes happens, that the utmost exertions of *human* skill and strength are found to be ineffectual—the sympathetic condolence of our *earthly* friends may *mitigate* a distress, but not entirely *remove* it. In these circumstances, every Christian ought to remember, that the same Jesus, who was so tenderly affected by the calamities of mankind, while he lived on earth, is now exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, that he might become our intercessor in heaven. What abundant reason, therefore, have we to admire the wisdom, and rejoice in the goodness of God, who has so far condescended to our weakness, as to provide a Mediator for us in our own

nature—one who, we are assured, can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities; and to whom we are invited to come with boldness. Frail and imperfect man! weak and wretched as thou art; in all the sorrows that overwhelm thy soul, pour forth thy complaints to *him* with steadfast faith and humble penitence; and he will hear in heaven, his dwelling place; and in due time, turn the affliction of a moment into an everlasting good.

For, we may further learn, from the subject now before us, not to repine and show an impatient spirit, if God should not answer our petitions in the very manner, nor at that particular time, which we may think the most proper and convenient. After Jesus had been made acquainted with the distress of his friend, and entreated to come to his relief, we are informed, “He abode two days still in the same place where he was.” With what impatient sorrow must they have watched the lamp of life, growing, every instant, more faint and feeble; and when it was utterly extinguished, with what seeming justice might they have broken forth into bitter expostulations! “Is it thus that our great Teacher expresses his regard? Is it thus that he puts his own precepts of benevolence in practice, by absenting himself from his dying friend? Have we not frequently, by every mean in our power, testified our respect; and has he not as frequently declared, that our expressions of esteem were acceptable to him? In the day of our *prosperity*, he was often a welcome guest. Surely, he is not like those base and mercenary mortals, who can court the smiles of the fortunate, but instantly shrink away from the cries of the miser-

“able!” The event proved that such expostulations, however natural, ought not to be indulged. The dispensations of Divine Providence must often be mysterious to the imperfect apprehensions of men, who can only view them through a glass darkly; but yet, they are directed by unerring wisdom and truth. Clouds and darkness are round about him; yet righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat. Why was Lazarus permitted to languish, and to die? It was, as our Saviour told his disciples, for the glory of God, and for the confirmation of their faith. Why was Joseph led through such a long and intricate path of misery? It was, that he might become a father to Pharaoh, and be made the instrument of saving the lives of his brethren, by a great deliverance. Why was Christ himself subjected to cruel mockings and scourgings—to ignominy and death? It was, that he might conquer *him* who had the power of death, and show himself the Lord of life and glory to all that believe. However difficult, therefore, our path may be, or however deformed with rocks and precipices; let us go on with confidence and alacrity. The further we proceed, we shall only be the more elevated, and the better prepared to enjoy the delightful prospect which lies beyond these surrounding difficulties.

After what might have appeared a long and unseasonable delay, the Saviour came at last, to assure his friends that the cause of their affliction should be removed—that he was the resurrection and the life; having all power in heaven and in earth, to accomplish the purposes of his benevolence. But, before he proceeded to that astonishing exertion of divine power, in recalling his friend from the bed of death; touched

with the general distress of those who were near him, he yielded, for a moment, to the emotions of grief that were struggling in his bosom. The exercise of every native passion of the human heart, when not indulged to excess, is right. Jesus himself, the great pattern of all perfection, was affected by anger and love, by joy and sorrow. *He wept*; perhaps, not only for the more immediate affliction of his friends; but for the calamities, which, in consequence of sin, had overwhelmed the whole human race—for the *body*, designed for perpetual youth and immortality, now subject to disease and death, and to dissolution in the grave—for the *soul*, created after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, now debased and polluted by sin; and, of course, in too many instances, condemned to misery. *Jesus wept*—but, as the Jews observed, it was only an indication of his love—it did not, as is often the case with weak mortals, disqualify him for action; or cause him to turn away from a scene of distress, which, by staying, he might remove: he spoke the commanding word, and the dead obeyed his voice, and came forth. And here, imagination might indulge itself, for a moment, in describing the various emotions that disclosed themselves in the spectators of this wonderful transaction. With what a mixture of amazement and reverence did Lazarus throw himself at the feet of his Almighty Lord! With what transports of gratitude and joy did the weeping sisters view their reviving brother! With what gloomy discontent did the obstinate turn away from the astonishing spectacle! With what exultation did the meek and docile triumph in the fulness of their faith!

From what has been said, I shall conclude with exhorting you to endeavour to deserve the love of your Saviour, by every method which is prescribed in the Holy Scriptures. It is a love that is neither weak nor wavering—in the valley of the shadow of death it will shield you from danger—it will follow you into an eternal state; and continue to bless you, as long as *he* exists, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.

Learn to tremble at the power of *him* in whose hands are the issues of life and death. Who can reanimate the sleeping dust—who has power to kill the body; and not only so, but to destroy both body and soul in hell.

Frequently meditate on that great article of the Christian faith, a future resurrection either to happiness or misery. Cast your view forwards to that tremendous scene, when the graves shall be opened, and the sea give up her dead—when the father and the son, the sister and the brother, shall stand together before the awful tribunal of God. Let these reflections sink deep into your hearts, so as to induce you to live together now, in the true spirit of the Gospel of love and peace; and then, in the great day of decision, you will not be separated—the harmonious company of just men made perfect, will join with angels and archangels, and all the host of heaven, to praise God, and promote the happiness of each other for ever.

Let religion be the faithful guide of your conduct, in the various duties of human life, and she will be your comfort and support under the pressure of unavoidable calamity. If men were wise; if they knew

the things which belong to their peace, surely they would embrace and ever hold fast the blessed Gospel of Christ, which affords a rod and a staff to sustain us in the valley of the shadow of death; which enables us even to triumph over death and hell; and crowns us with glory and immortality.

In the hour of temporal calamity, let us never abandon ourselves to despondency, as if God had forgotten to be gracious, and had cast us off in his displeasure for ever. The deceased Lazarus may rise from the bed of death: our withered comforts may revive: the gloomy night of affliction will be succeeded by the morning of the resurrection, and the glorious day of immortal bliss.

What though the affectionate sisters of Lazarus may be exposed to acute distress on account of their dying brother: what though the sensible heart may experience many a pungent sorrow, of which the stupid and obdurate are utterly ignorant: let us bear the shock of misery for a little while; and then carry these dispositions along with us into the regions of immortality. There will be objects worthy of the most enlarged, and the most ardent affections of our souls: there chagrin and disappointment will cease to blast the promised joy: there sorrow and sighing will be done away for ever.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Let us make *him* our friend, and we may bid defiance to the virulence of all our spiritual adversaries. In life, he will be our shield and buckler; in death, our comfort and security; and, through the boundless periods of eternity, the dispenser of our exceeding great reward. Whither he

is gone, we know ; the way which leads to his glorious mansion we know, for it is clearly pointed out in his own Gospel. Let us follow his footsteps ; and, in due season, we shall partake of his glory.

SERMON XIV.

On the Temper necessary for the Reception of the Gospel.

JOHN vii. 47, 48, 49.

Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But this people, who knoweth not the law, are cursed.

WHEN the Author of our holy religion came and dwelt among men, to accomplish the great work of redemption, he gave abundant evidence of his divine mission; he demonstrated himself to be the Son of God with power. The stupendous miracles which he wrought, produced conviction in the minds of many of the unprejudiced common people, and they received him as the Messiah, so frequently foretold by the prophets; for, the Evangelist informs us, "That many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" But, the arguments which were sufficient to convince the humble and dispassionate mind, only served to confirm the prejudice, and exasperate the resentment of the proud and self-interested Pharisees. Instead of candidly examining his preten-

sions to a commission from on high, they resolve, by the threatening of punishment, to suppress, at once, his growing influence among the people; “so *they* and “the chief priests sent officers to take him.” But, the word of truth is sometimes, when it is least expected, quick and powerful. They who were sent to apprehend Jesus, are themselves overpowered by his heavenly discourse; return without executing the unrighteous task assigned them; and, when they are questioned, “Why have ye not brought him?” ingenuously acknowledge, “Never man spake like this man.” With mingled emotions of disappointment, contempt, and indignation, “then answered the Pharisees, Are ye also “deceived? Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But this people, who knoweth “not the law, are cursed?” A warm expostulation this, but proceeding from a vicious motive. Their arguments were frivolous, and their execrations fell harmless to the ground. Thus difficult is it for the light of heavenly truth to penetrate and illumine that mind which is overspread with the earth-born clouds of pride, covetousness, and ambition. Thus strongly inclined is the prejudiced heart, to grow angry, when it ought to consider; to use opprobrious language, when it ought to convince by strength of reasoning; to curse in the bitterness of misguided zeal, when it ought to soothe by the gentle methods of persuasion.

“Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers, “or of the Pharisees, believed on him?” These contumelious interrogations were proposed, at the commencement of Christianity, for the purpose of shaking the faith of believers; and the same sentiment, although not expressed precisely in the same words, with an

intention equally mischievous, has been repeatedly urged in succeeding ages. From the beginning, to this day, the same causes have been productive of similar effects: the heavenly system of our holy religion has been hid from the wise and prudent—from those who are vainly puffed up with extravagant notions of their own acuteness of penetration and depth of judgment; and it has been revealed to babes—to those who are conscious of their weakness; who feel their necessity of instruction in divine knowledge, and direction in the way to heavenly bliss.

When all circumstances are considered, it is an argument of little force against the truth of the Gospel, that it was at first rejected by the hypocritical Pharisees, and supercilious rulers of the Jews: the more accurately the pretensions of this celestial wisdom are examined, the more clearly may she be justified by all her children. For, let us consider,

1st. The kingdom of our blessed Redeemer is not of this world: it was not founded upon the principles of worldly wisdom; it was not to be extended over the earth by the strength of the arm of flesh, but by the mighty power of God; it flatters not the confident pretensions of the wise and the powerful men of this earth, but its direct tendency is, on all occasions, to abate the swelling vanity of the human heart. And is it not to be expected, that such an institution would meet with virulent opposition from the proud and selfish; from those whose sole object was their own aggrandizement in the world? God, in his infinite wisdom, intended to give to all mankind the most illustrious evidence of the divine origin of our religion. Hence it was, that the apostle observed, "God hath

“ chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.” And the important inference which he draws, is this; “ That no flesh should glory in his presence: that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of man.” Thus, we have this strong confirmation of the truth of Christianity, that it prevailed, not only without the aid, but in defiance of the most avowed and violent opposition of the rulers of this earth.

2dly. The Pharisees believed not on Christ, because they had permitted their prejudices to prevail so far as to blind their judgment, not only in the interpretation of prophecy, but also in their opinions with regard to evident facts. In the time of our Lord, Galilee was one of the three provinces into which the land of Israel had been divided. This part of the country was inhabited by a great number of Gentiles interspersed among the Jews. The inhabitants were deemed rude and illiterate; hence, one of the bitterest terms of reproach thrown by their foes on Christ and his apostles, was to denominate them *Galileans*. This was the distinguished scene of our Lord's benevolent ministrations; here he frequently delivered his divine discourses, and here he wrought many of his miraculous works. The Pharisees, too precipitate in their judgment, supposed him to be a native of the country, and hence concluded, that he could not be the expected Messiah, who, according to the ancient prophecies, was to be of the tribe of Judah, and a de-

scendant of David. When Nicodemus, who was one of them, although secretly a believer, attempted to check the violence of their proceedings against Christ, gently remonstrating, "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" they contemptuously replied, "Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." Had they not been blinded by prejudice and resentment, they might have discovered from the public records of their country, that prophets had actually arisen out of Galilee, such as Jonah, Nahum, and Elijah; and that with respect to the place of Christ's nativity, he was born, according to the predictions of the prophets, at Bethlehem of Judah, and of the house and lineage of David. Thus, the Pharisees believed not, because they were prompted by the pride and restlessness of their hearts, to put a wrong construction upon the prophecies that related to the Messiah. It had been predicted, that kings should bow down before him; that nations should do him service; that he should be a mighty conqueror, glorious in his apparel, and travelling in the greatness of his strength. Hence, they expected that he would lead his countrymen to the conquest of their enemies, and give them an extensive and glorious temporal dominion. They were offended at the mean appearance and humble deportment of our blessed Redeemer, and rejected with scorn his pretensions to the authority of the Messiah. Candid examination of the whole scope of prophecy, and due attention to the miraculous proofs which he brought of his divine mission, would have effectually removed their error: they would have found that he was to be the Prince of Peace, meek and lowly,

binding up the broken-hearted, speaking comfortably to Jerusalem; in a word, that his conquests were to be over the spiritual adversaries of man's felicity: that the greatness of his strength was to be displayed in subduing sin, and death, and hell: that his glorious apparel consisted of his pre-eminent virtues, and his wonderful works: that kings should bow down before him, and nations do him service, as the Lord of all power and might; the Head over all things for his Church.

Lastly; the rulers and Pharisees, the great men of the earth, believed not the Gospel, because it made a direct attack upon some of the most predominant inclinations of their hearts. The *wise men* of this world disdained to be instructed by a company of illiterate fishermen: they despised the simplicity of the Gospel, the foolishness of preaching: they deemed it too abject a submission for men of their comprehensive faculties, "to cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

The *proud and the hypocritical* were offended at those doctrines which represented all men as sinners, thus making repentance necessary for all; which more immediately, and with peculiar severity, attacked those vices of which *they* were guilty; thus weakening the influence which they had unjustly acquired over the minds of the people; which placed the despised Gentiles on a level with God's ancient people the Jews; breaking down the middle wall of partition that was between them, and making them all one in Christ Jesus; which represented their rigid attention to the external ordinances of their religion, as of little signi-

ficance in the sight of God, unless they were accompanied by the more weighty matters of the law—unless these outward observances originated in purity and uprightness of heart.

The *voluptuous* shrank away in terror from that heavenly system of pure morality, which required men to love not the world, nor the things of it; to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts; to be sober in all things; not to live in pleasure, for that he who thus liveth is dead to all the valuable purposes of life; in a word, to take up the cross daily, and follow the steps of the great Author of this divine institution, through the rugged paths of patience and mortification.

From all these considerations, we are not to be surprised, that the Gospel, at its first appearance, was rejected by artful hypocrites, wealthy sensualists, and supercilious tyrants: as the apostle observed; “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.” But, while these, with fatal disregard to their best interests, spurned the blessing from them; whenever it was proposed to men of humble and docile hearts, it was gratefully received as the most precious gift of heaven; it was cordially embraced as the power of God unto salvation.

My brethren, human nature has been the same in all ages. Ignorance and vice have ever borne too extensive a sway. The understandings of men have been always liable to be perverted by prejudice, and their hearts corrupted by passion. *We* are not exempted from the common infirmities, we have too much rea-

son to deplore the general corruption of our nature. To aid the weakness, to correct the depravity of mankind, is the benevolent design of the ever blessed Gospel. This Gospel *we* have received as the word of everlasting truth: we have not entirely rejected it, like the proud and wicked rulers of the Jews; but the causes which then operated to its total rejection by those corrupted men, have ever since checked its progress, and diminished its influence in the world. Let us, then, attend to the transaction recorded in the passage of sacred Scripture, which is the subject of this discourse; and let us draw from it the following important points of practical improvement.

1st. Let the intentions of our hearts be pure and upright; let us be desirous to obtain truth, and to improve in virtue: this disposition of mind will be the best advocate for the excellency of our holy religion; it will lead us to receive its doctrines with humility, and to execute with alacrity its heavenly precepts. The proud and hypocritical Pharisees made a vain show of piety, but in their hearts they had no sincere regard for truth, no real love of virtue: hence, they rejected Christianity, and derided and persecuted the divine Author of it. What man that wishes for the comfortable assurance of pardon to the penitent, of grace to subdue the depravity of his nature, of instruction in all righteousness, of supernatural aid in the performance of his duty, of the most sublime representations of God, and of that great reward which he will bestow upon his faithful people—what man that has his mind thus disposed, can turn away with contempt from the Gospel of Christ, which affords such abun-

dant gratification to all these exalted desires of the human heart?

2dly. Here let our attention be particularly called to the fatal tendency of affluence and power, in hardening the human heart against religious impressions. The rulers believed not; in defiance of the most incontestable evidence, they refused to become Christ's disciples, because his doctrines tended to restrict their pleasures, and to lessen their authority. "It is easier," says our divine Instructor, "for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." He afterwards qualifies the expression, by restricting the difficulty to those who *trust* in riches. And does not every one's daily observation supply him with too many instances of this vain confidence? Wealth can procure abundance of sensual gratifications; whithersoever it goes, numerous votaries are ready to do it homage; it prompts to the commission of crimes, and then furnishes the means of concealing or palliating them. In these circumstances, will not the rich man be almost irresistibly tempted to disregard the prophet's exhortation; and to glory in his riches, instead of glorying in this, that he understandeth and knoweth the Lord, who exercises loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth? The apostle well knew the treachery of the human heart, when exposed to this temptation, and therefore has left this solemn direction to the ministers of Christ's religion; "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God." Permit me, then, affectionately to charge those who are elevated to

affluence and power, to guard with incessant vigilance against the peculiar dangers of their situation: not to be high-minded on account of such frivolous distinctions; not to place their dependence on possessions which are this day with us, and to-morrow make themselves wings and fly away; not to forget, that religion is as necessary to *them*, as it is to others; that as to its influence on the rest of mankind, it is of much more consequence when it shines forth in them, than when it appears in men of inferior station; that it is as necessary for them to trust in the living God, as it is for the poorest beggar who lies at their gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fall from their table.

3dly. This portion of Holy Scripture affords an instructive lesson to those who are inclined to presume on their *wisdom*, as well as on their wealth and power. The Pharisees and rulers of the Jews, too confident in their own abilities, perverted the words of prophecy to support their erroneous opinions: they corrupted the law setting aside the authority of the more substantial precepts of morality, and laying the greatest stress upon insignificant rites and ceremonies: they condemned with unbecoming severity those who would not adopt their notions; declaring that they were deceived; that they knew not the law; that they were cursed before God. Hence, they justly drew down upon themselves the severe rebuke of our Lord, who styled them "blind guides, making the word of God of none effect "by their traditions." In matters of religion, divine revelation is the great source of all our knowledge: this is the true light shining from heaven to guide us onward in our way to immortal bliss. Let us purify our

hearts from all undue attachment to the vanities of this wicked world; let us consult the oracles of heavenly truth with upright intentions, in simplicity and godly sincerity, and we cannot fail of becoming wise unto salvation. We are not to wrest the Holy Scriptures in confirmation of our rash opinions, but must correct our groundless prejudices, and regulate our sentiments by that unerring standard. We are not to sit down and indulge our own vain imaginations, proudly determining what was best for God to do in his dealings with the sinful race of Adam; but rather, anxiously to inquire, What has he actually done? Weak and ignorant as we are, let us not presume to form schemes of salvation for ourselves, but with humble gratitude, accept that which has been already proposed to us by infinite wisdom and goodness. For,

In the last place, the more we become acquainted with this wonderful plan of divine mercy exhibited to a sinful world through a Redeemer, the more shall we be inclined to adopt the hearty acknowledgment of those early converts, "Never man spake like this man!" He speaks to us now in the sublimest precepts of heavenly wisdom; in the most winning accents of never-dying love: he speaks to us by his word and providence; by the suggestions of his spirit, the dictates of enlightened reason, and the reflections of a tender conscience. Let us listen, and be obedient to these celestial admonitions. Let us not be ashamed to confess him before men—to acknowledge the pious convictions of our hearts, although the men of this world may call us deceived, may revile, and even execrate. And he will not be ashamed of us, when

he comes in glory, with his holy angels. He will speak to us in language that will cause our hearts to exult with joy through the boundless ages of eternity; "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

SERMON XV.

On the Salvation offered in the Gospel.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

THE Holy Scriptures universally represent *faith* as the source of every Christian virtue, and ascribe all sorts of wickedness to an evil heart of *unbelief*. Were we thoroughly convinced that the awful doctrines of divine revelation are true, this conviction must necessarily have a powerful influence upon our behaviour. If we sincerely believe that man is now in a fallen, degenerate condition; that the Son of God, with unparalleled condescension and love, came to redeem him from this state of sin and misery; that our existence in this transitory world is only preparatory to an unchangeable eternity; that we are accountable and immortal creatures; and that all the present dispensations of Providence have respect to our future welfare—if we heartily believe these momentous truths, will not the natural consequence be, that in every stage of our

Christian progress we shall walk circumspectly, and make it the great business of life to work out our salvation with fear and trembling?

The heedlessness of thought, and dissipation of manners, which so generally prevail among nominal Christians, must be, to every truly considerate person, matter of equal surprise and concern. Is it, indeed, true that we are animated by immortal souls? Do heedless sinners run upon the brink of a precipice, where the first false step which they make may plunge them into everlasting misery? Is it necessary even for the Christian who thinks he stands in the utmost security, to be continually admonished to take heed lest he fall? Surely, then, the injunction of the holy apostle cannot be too frequently inculcated—"with fear and trembling, work out the salvation of your immortal souls."

The words of the text naturally lead our attention to four very important inquiries.

- I. The nature of that salvation which is offered to us in the Gospel;
- II. In what sense it may be said, that it is to be worked out by *us*;
- III. The disposition of mind with which this work is to be performed—"with fear and trembling;"
- IV. The encouragement which we have to proceed with alacrity under all difficulties and dangers, since God worketh in us both to will and to do.

The Gospel of our blessed Redeemer provides the means of salvation from all the sad effects of the original transgression of the divine law.

1. It offers to save us from *ignorance*, by affording the most clear and comprehensive precepts with respect

to our duty in this world, and the most positive declarations relative to our destination in a future state of existence. Christ is, therefore, with the utmost propriety, called “a Light to lighten the Gentiles;” and with equal reason it is said, “that life and immortality “ were brought to light by the Gospel.”

2. This wonderful scheme of mercy proposes to save us from the dreadful *penalty* which was denounced against *sin*. The justice of God demanded satisfaction for his violated law. The Redeemer of sinners interposed, and satisfied every demand. *He* offered an adequate atonement for the sins of mankind. *He* became an effectual Mediator between a holy God and his polluted creatures. So that we may now exclaim with exulting hearts, “Who is he that condemneth? The curse of the law is now taken away: “ its condemning power is destroyed by being nailed “ to the cross. Through the atoning blood of Christ, “ we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins.”

3. The salvation offered in the Gospel was designed to rescue us from the *tyrannical power of sin*. This grace of God teacheth us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts; not to permit sin any longer to have dominion over us, but to become a holy nation, a peculiar people unto God. He who nameth the name of Christ, is most indispensably required to depart from iniquity.

4. But, the salvation which is now proposed to our hopes and wishes, is not confined to the narrow limits of this mortal life. It is extended to the world of spirits; to the regions of immortality: it looks forward to eternity. It is a salvation from misery, represented in Scripture under images the most alarming to human

nature; from the worm that never dies, and the fire that is never quenched; from the unutterable wretchedness that is prepared for the devil and his angels. Well, therefore, is it called by the apostle, a *great* salvation; and, of infinite moment is the question, "How shall we escape if we neglect it"—how shall we escape the just imputation of folly, ingratitude, and presumption? But this leads us to inquire in the

Second place, in what sense it may be said to be "*worked out by us.*" And here, a necessary distinction is to be made between the terms *redemption* and *salvation*. All mankind have been *redeemed* by the active and passive obedience of Jesus Christ. He has tasted death for every man: he has paid a ransom for all. But, although our *redemption* is accomplished, our final *salvation* is suspended on certain conditions. Sufficient provision has been made to save us from *ignorance*. But still, we may refuse to receive instruction; wisdom may utter her voice in the streets, and the simple ones may nevertheless love simplicity; we may set at nought the wisest counsel of God.

Through the intercession of Jesus Christ, repentance and remission of sins are now to be preached to all people. But if impious transgressors harden their hearts in iniquity, the atonement is of no avail to them. The burden of guilt remains. They refuse to repent; and, consequently, their iniquities are not forgiven.

The grace of God is sufficient for us. The aid of his Holy Spirit is freely offered, to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But, if we do despite to his holy suggestions, we shall not escape from the pollutions of this wicked world.

We are now in a state of probation, where it is

practicable, by a diligent use of the means of grace, to secure the salvation of our immortal souls. But still, the language of the Redeemer may hereafter be to *us*, what it once was to the refractory Jews; “*Ye would not*”—ye would not comply with the terms prescribed, and your condemnation must be attributed to your own perverseness.

Since, therefore, the feast of the Gospel is so plentifully furnished, let not any of those who are invited refuse to come; and let those who appear have on the wedding-garment. Let us work while it is day. Let it be ever impressed on our minds, that now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation. We must sedulously do God’s will, that we may obtain his precious promises. We must give all diligence to make our calling and election sure. To this end, let it be the great concern of our life, to have our understanding enlightened with the wisdom which cometh down from above; to obtain the forgiveness of our sins; to have the love of holiness implanted in our hearts; and thus, under the influence of faith and penitence, to entertain a well-grounded hope of a blessed immortality.

The third thing which the text proposes to our serious consideration, is the disposition of mind with which this great business of working out our salvation is to be conducted; and that is, *with fear and trembling*. So powerful is the influence of godly fear, and so necessary for the regulation of the Christian’s conversation through life, that we find it earnestly recommended in almost every page of the sacred Scriptures. “The fear of the Lord” is said “to be the beginning of wisdom;” as it leads us to reflect on the dangers of

error and vice, and to withstand their fatal delusions. "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life;" as it first prompts us to seek, and afterwards keeps us steady and circumspect in that good way which leadeth unto life and immortality. "The fear of the Lord is strong confidence;" not in ourselves, but in the aid and protection of him who possesses all power in heaven and earth. We are commanded to pass the time of our sojourning in this world, in fear; and our Lord has left this solemn injunction for the regulation of the conduct of his disciples to the end of the world; "Fear not those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more which they can do; but fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell; yea, I say unto you, *fear him.*"

And, surely, the necessity of this disposition of mind will be very apparent, if we call to remembrance our situation in this life—that we are weak and depraved creatures: that our spiritual foes are subtile and malignant: that God is just, as well as merciful; powerful to punish, as well as to reward: that the manifestation of his loving-kindness in Christ Jesus will aggravate the guilt of those who derive no benefit from the Gospel: that the coming of light into the world will only serve to increase the condemnation of wicked men, who love darkness rather than light: in a word, that the awful consequence of our neglecting the means of grace, and despising the hope of glory, will be not only the loss of this far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, but the enduring of a misery, represented by the inspired writers in a variety of expressions, altogether calculated to impress the human heart with terror.

Let us, then, under awful impressions of the everlasting consequences of our present conduct, take every step, in our Christian progress, with the disposition of mind required by the holy apostle. In the hour of trouble and distress, let us fear lest our patience should be overcome, and our dependence on God's providence destroyed. In the season of prosperity, let us fear, lest our hearts be seduced by the gratifications of this world, into forgetfulness of the joys of eternity. In the enjoyment of all the divine bounties, both temporal and spiritual, from the recollection that a blessing abused will operate to our final disadvantage, "let us ever rejoice with *trembling*."

But, that we may not be disheartened with a sense of our own infirmity, and sink into utter despondency, from an apprehension of the difficulties of our task; we are to consider,

In the last place, the encouragement which is afforded us in that gracious declaration, "It is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure." What though it be said in the word of divine truth, "that we are born in sin, and are by nature the children of wrath; that in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" and, consequently, that we are not able, of ourselves, to help ourselves—to turn unto God, and do those things which are acceptable in his sight; he who hath redeemed us unto God by the price of his own precious blood, hath purchased for us the aid of that blessed Spirit who helpeth our infirmities, and is emphatically styled *the Comforter* under all our difficulties and distresses. By his mysterious operation upon our rational and immortal spirits, without destroying the freedom of our

actions, and consequently our responsibility to God, he enlightens our understanding to the acknowledging of the truth; he controls the perverseness of our wills; he sanctifies our affections, and recovers them from the ensnaring enticements of the devil. No doubt, this heavenly Assistant is given to every man to profit withal. Ye who live in the glorious light of the Gospel, will be utterly destitute of every excuse for your neglect of the salvation which is now offered to you. If ye would yield to the impulses of that Holy Spirit, which frequently prompts you to the pursuit of heavenly things; if ye would cherish those good desires which, from time to time, are rising in your bosoms; if ye would earnestly pray for continual assistance from on high—happy experience would teach you, that *he* is faithful who has promised; that your heavenly Father supplies strength for the performance of every duty which he requires; that evil propensities may be restrained; that comfort may be found under trials, and a way made to escape from temptation; that the love of holiness will increase, and the practice of virtue become more and more easy and delightful. While, therefore, we contemplate with grateful hearts, the abundant provision which is made in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for the relief of all the necessities of weak and dependent mortals, let us ever, with the holy apostle, draw this important conclusion—“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by bap-

“ tism into death: that like as Christ was raised up
“ from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so
“ we also should walk in newness of life.”

Thus walking in the way of God's commandments, our terrestrial journey will terminate in the land of everlasting rest. Thus abounding in the work of the Lord, our labour of love will, in due time, receive an exceeding great recompense of reward. The end of that faith, which proves itself genuine by the production of good works, will be the salvation of our souls.

How different is the wretched condition of the wicked and impenitent! They also work; but they labour for that which satisfieth not. They weary themselves for nought, for worse than nothing—that they may lie down in misery: as it is said in the emphatical language of Scripture; “ They are sowing
“ the wind, that they may reap the whirlwind.” They also fear and tremble; not with the filial reverence of affectionate children, but with the dreadful apprehensions of criminals who expect the sentence of their judge.

Godliness is, indeed, profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. The pious Christian finds it necessary to work while it is day—while the season of probation continues; but, whatever the task may be which is imposed upon him, he is always cheered with the consciousness that divine assistance is ever ready to sustain him; and he is perfectly convinced that his labour will not be in vain in the Lord. His reflections on his past conduct are not embittered by remorse; and, when he looks forward to futurity, his hope is full of glory. He believes that the dead are blessed who

die in the Lord; and, according to the divine promise, that their works will follow them; that the pity which Christians now express for the poor, the alms which they now bestow, will be like seed sown in the earth, from which they will hereafter reap plenteously—God will not forget their labour that proceedeth of love. He believes, that constant attention to God's holy word and sacraments, to all the offices of devotion, has a direct tendency to produce in us those qualifications which will be the source of bliss through an unchangeable eternity. God grant, that all who now hear me, may be persuaded to act upon these divine principles, for the sake, and through the merits of our compassionate Redeemer; to whom be all praise, honour, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XVI.

On the Existence and Government of God.

ROMANS xi. 36.

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom
be glory for ever. Amen.

FOR the regulation of human conduct, and the well-being of mankind, nothing is so essentially necessary as a solemn sense of the existence, and the moral government of Almighty God. In every age of the world, and under every form of civil society, this principle has been brought into operation, in order to retain depraved man in the performance of his duty. Some modern refiners, indeed, have impiously attempted to destroy its influence over the human mind; and we all know the lamentable consequences. Religion is the only sure foundation on which to build our felicity for time, as well as eternity; and *this* entirely depends upon our belief, that the universe was created, and is still governed by a Being of infinite power and wisdom; and that man is a moral agent, an accountable creature, who will hereafter be called into

judgment for the deeds done in the body—for his whole conduct during this probationary state.

At sundry times, and in divers manners, God has formerly revealed himself to patriarchs and prophets. To the whole people of Israel he gave visible tokens of his more immediate presence, by the cloud of glory which went before them during their march through the wilderness, and which, after their settlement in the promised land, rested over the mercy-seat in the tabernacle and in the temple. To *us* upon whom the ends of the world are come, is afforded no such extraordinary manifestation of his presence. We have, nevertheless, two volumes from which to learn the greatness of his glory: the book of nature, bespeaking his power and wisdom, is open to the inspection of every eye; and, in the sacred Scriptures are to be found the most sublime representations of his glorious attributes. Among numberless passages which might be adduced to this purpose, I have selected, as the subject of our meditations at this time, that awful declaration of St. Paul, “Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” “Of him are all things,” as he is the Creator, the efficient cause of whatever exists. “Through him are all things,” as he is the Director and providential Disposer of the universe of matter and spirit. “To him are all things,” as the design and end of all is the illustration of God’s glory, and the manifestation of his divine perfections. And, to this high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity; to *him*, whom his inspired servants have emphatically styled the most *Highest*, it is unquestionably the duty of the whole intelligent creation to ascribe majesty, dominion, and power: to

him be glory for ever; and, let every heart that swells with the slightest emotions of piety, say, Amen.

What an astonishing thought! The great object of our adoration existed from eternity, alone. *He* who is the Author of all being, never began to be: *he truly is*; all other things are but shadows of his glory. All the knowledge that is displayed among intelligent creatures, from the highest archangel, to the lowest of the human race; all the power, and wisdom, and beauty, which is exhibited throughout the immensity of his works, springs from this exhaustless source of all that is great, and wise, and good. Dreadful excellence! How our souls are beaten back with the light of thy glories! We may reach forward; we may burn with eager desire to comprehend thy essence, and to yield thee suitable adoration; but still, thou art above the warmest affections of our heart, and the most enlarged conceptions of our understanding!

This self-existent Being, by whose powerful word the universe was spoken into existence, now presides over the works of his creation with uncontrollable sway. Far beyond this great system of which our earth is a part; far beyond the spheres of other planets circling other suns, no doubt the effects of his power extend. But, however our imaginations may range through the immensity of space, wherever creatures exist, there the government of the Creator prevails: "*through him are all things.*" This mighty system of nature appears to be governed by stated laws; but still, in his hand is the constant regulation of the whole stupendous machine. He can suspend or alter its operations, to answer the purposes of his universal government: he can make the waters of the sea forget their usual

course, and rise on an heap to open a passage for his chosen people: at his command, the sun himself will stand still.

In the works of nature, however, we find that these deviations from the established order of things, seldom occur. In the *moral* world, to a much greater degree, disorder unhappily prevails. Among the numberless beings who are the offspring of the great Parent of all, some were called into existence, intelligent creatures; free and moral agents; capable of understanding the laws of their Creator; endued with the power of standing in their first estate, but at the same time liable to fall. The rational creature, man, fell from his original rectitude: God made him upright, but he sought out many inventions. Hence, sin and misery pervade the world. Hence, the violence of passion too often subdues the feeble efforts of reason. Hence arise civil broils, wars, and commotions, afflictive changes in families, and convulsions of mighty empires. But still, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, be the foolish people ever so unquiet: he ruleth among the armies of heaven, and over the inhabitants of the earth: he saith to the folly and madness of mankind, as he said to the raging of the sea, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther." He controls all the passions and violent exertions of men, so as best to answer the purposes of his universal dominion: even from their follies and their vices, he takes occasion to display his own wisdom and mercy; as it is said by the pious Psalmist, "Surely, the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." This truth is abundantly confirmed by the history which is afforded us in Scripture, of the transactions of those ancient

nations who were in any way connected with God's chosen people, the descendants of Abraham: *they* were prosecuting their selfish schemes of interest, ambition, or revenge; but God turned all their exertions into a subserviency to his own comprehensive views, in the moral government of the world.

In the course of such meditations, we are naturally led to that wonderful dispensation of his providence, which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, respecting the recovery of mankind out of their present wretched condition, and raising them to the perfection and final happiness of their nature, through the mediation of a Redeemer. God so loved the world—a rebellious and sinful world—that he sent his only-begotten Son to reconcile the degenerate race of mankind unto himself, not imputing their transgressions unto them. By and through *him*, was this astonishing scheme of mercy devised and carried into execution. Through *him*, prophets were inspired to predict future events: miracles were wrought, from age to age, in confirmation of the testimony of his messengers; and all the revolutions of the world were made subservient to the establishment of the Messiah's dominion in the earth. Through *him*, the first preachers of the Gospel were enabled to triumph over every difficulty and danger, till the religion of a crucified Redeemer was firmly established among men: and through him—through the blessed influence of *his* grace and Holy Spirit, this religion is now made effectual to the restoration of fallen man—to the conversion of sinners, to the present sanctification of our nature, and to our future exaltation to a state of happiness and glory.

Let those, therefore, who have been happily called

to a knowledge of the truth; let humble believers ever remember, that the end of all God's dealings with them, is to advance their best interests; to secure their everlasting welfare. Through *him*, is the injunction laid upon them to walk in all the ordinances of his religion; to celebrate his sacraments, and to adore him in the public and private offices of praise and prayer. Through *him*, are the various trials which they meet with, in the course of their earthly pilgrimage: the frowns of temporal affliction, and the seducing smiles of earthly prosperity, are both intended to try their moderation and sobriety; to improve their patience and resignation; to strengthen their faith; to elevate their hopes more and more from earth to heaven; and, in all respects, to qualify them for the enjoyment of future bliss and glory.

From these reflections on the works of God and the ways of his providence, we may well concur with the holy apostle, in his declaration, that “to him are all things”—all things are subservient to the setting forth of his glory, to the illustration of his divine perfections. If we look round upon this material universe, how can we forbear to exclaim with the Psalmist—“O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all! The heavens declare thy glory, and the firmament showeth thy handy-work; the earth also is full of thy goodness!”

If we consider those dispensations of his providence which have occurred in past ages of the world, those which have fallen under our own observation as relating to others, and those which we ourselves have experienced; how wonderfully has the wisdom and the power of God been displayed in the management

of human affairs! He ruleth among the inhabitants of the earth. He putteth down one, and setteth up another. Although we now see but a very small part of his ways; although clouds and darkness are round about his throne; still, we see enough to be perfectly convinced, that mercy and truth go before his face; that righteousness and equity are the habitation of his seat.

But, more especially, have we reason to say, that “to him are all things,” when we contemplate the wonderful scheme of redemption provided for fallen man through the mediation of Jesus Christ. In this astonishing dispensation, we are called near to meditate on the glory of the eternal Trinity. The incomprehensible Deity is held forth to our profound adoration, under the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and these Three Persons are all concerned in the merciful work of man’s salvation, as our Creator, our Redeemer, and the Sanctifier of our corrupted nature. This is, indeed, a great mystery of godliness; and yet, so far as we are able to comprehend it, we perceive the attributes of God wonderfully harmonizing: here, mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other—God is merciful to sinners, and yet true in the execution of his threatening, that sin shall not go unpunished: he is righteous in vindicating the honour of his violated law; and yet, penitent transgressors may look up with the blessed expectation of pardon and peace.

Thus, all things serve to the manifestation of the divine perfections. And, if this observation be true, even in this imperfect state, where we know but in part, and where our clearest vision is but seeing

through a glass darkly; how much more will our enlightened spirits be inclined to acknowledge, "that to him are all things," when we come to the conclusion of this scene of moral discipline! Then, the clouds which now surround the habitation of his seat, will be dispersed; the most mysterious dispensations of his providence will be unfolded; and, whether his justice be displayed in the punishment of the wicked, or his mercy in the salvation of the righteous, his ways will be perfectly vindicated in the sight of all intelligent beings.

By such meditations as these, let our hearts be warmed into effusions of adoration and praise: let us exclaim with the apostle, "To him be glory for ever!" No doubt, this divine strain began with the creation of the first rational being. When the foundations of the earth were laid, and the corner-stone thereof was fastened, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Man is the only creature upon earth capable of knowing his Creator, and of rendering him a reasonable service. Let us unite with the inhabitants of the celestial regions in the song of praise. Let us attune our voices now to those heavenly halleluiahs; which will continue through the ages of eternity. The glowing cherubim and seraphim who stand nearest to the throne of God, can only praise him as their almighty Creator, their righteous Sovereign. *We* can speak forth his glory as our merciful Redeemer from sin, and death, and hell. Let us, then, not only as rational and immortal creatures, but as redeemed sinners, glorify him by reverential thoughts, by words expressive of our inward veneration, and by actions suited to the purity of his righteous laws. Let him

who has redeemed us to God by his blood, receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. To the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto—to *him* be glory in the Church throughout all ages, world without end.

It will readily occur to you, my brethren, that from the subject on which we have been now discoursing, many practical inferences, of great importance, may be easily deduced.

1st. Our limited faculties, we may reasonably conclude, can never perfectly comprehend the nature of the great Jehovah; of that glorious Being who exists from everlasting to everlasting. To a certain degree he has revealed himself to us, in the sacred Scriptures. This is the God of Christians. Let us never presume to be wise above what is written. To these oracles of divine truth, let us have recourse for direction in our devotions. Here we are taught to present our religious services to the ever-adorable Trinity, as engaged, at first, in the formation, and afterwards in the redemption and sanctification of man. And, in perfect conformity to these principles, *the litany*, (in other words, that which may be emphatically styled, *the service* of our Church,) after a particular address to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, concludes in this fervent strain of humble supplication—"O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three Persons, and one God; have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!"

2dly. From what has been now said, let us learn with patience and humility to acquiesce in all the dispensations of God's providence: *through him* are

all things. After having diligently used all the means which heaven has placed in our hands for the avoiding of evil and the attainment of good ; after having prayed fervently with all supplication in the spirit, for the guidance and protection of infinite wisdom, and goodness, and power ; let us humbly rest persuaded, that all things will work together for good. In the hour of thy prosperity, be not so ungrateful as to forget *him* who openeth his hand and filleth thee with plenteousness. In the season of thy distress, remember, that he can make the short affliction of a moment conducive to the attainment of a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

3dly. If such be the perfections of the self-existent Jehovah, of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all things ; let us be induced to walk before him in humility and godly fear ; let us acknowledge his wisdom and power in all our ways. *He* hath searched us out and known us. He is about our path in the public walks of life, and about our bed in the stillness of retirement. There is not a word in our tongue which he knoweth not altogether : nay, he understandeth the very thoughts of our heart long before they are expressed in language. Let these awful reflections have their due effect, in restraining both open and secret iniquity. Let the name of this great Being never be profaned in common conversation ; and, more especially, in the solemnity of an oath, let it always be remembered, that a direct appeal is made to *his* wisdom who searcheth the heart, to *his* justice who hateth iniquity, and to *his* power who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.

4thly. If it be unquestionably true, that both the

temporal and eternal welfare of mankind are promoted by their living under a constant sense of the superintending power of the Deity, let us hold in becoming estimation that holy religion, the direct tendency of which is to impress a thoughtless world with these salutary sentiments. Why was the Sabbath instituted, a priesthood appointed, sacraments ordained, the preaching of the Gospel commanded, public worship required of all the professors of Christianity? The blessed design of all these institutions, is to keep alive in the minds of men an awful sense of the present authority, and the future judgment of Almighty God. Let that man, therefore, be considered not only as an enemy to religion, but as a mischievous member of civil society, who habitually profanes the Sabbath, endeavours to bring into disrepute the Christian ministry, vilifies the Scriptures, disregards himself, and strives to make others disregard the public services of the sanctuary. If, with all the restraints which religion can impose upon the human mind, so many horrid scenes of sin and misery are every day presented to our view; what would be the condition of the degenerate race of Adam, were they to believe that in this life there is no righteous Inspector of their conduct, and after death no judgment? Let us, my brethren, with full purpose of heart, endeavour to prevent the miseries which must necessarily result from these irreligious principles. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; and, by a holy life and conversation, adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. Let our meditations be frequently elevated to that glorious Being who is infinite in all his perfections. *There* let the most ardent affections of our hearts be fixed, where

only true joys are to be found. In this remote place of our earthly pilgrimage, we know but in part—our understanding is very contracted, and our love is too often engrossed by unworthy objects. Blessed are they who shall be qualified to see face to face in the regions of immortality. To *them* God will, indeed, make manifest his glory. They will be admitted to those delightful entertainments of heavenly knowledge and divine love, which in this imperfect state, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. Let it be our delight, in all circumstances of this variegated life, to draw near to God in the solemnities of his holy religion; and more especially, under the pressure of any temporal calamity, from this inexhaustible source let us draw sweet consolation. The day will, ere long, arrive, when we must behold him, either as an avenging Judge, or as a Father reconciled through Christ to his penitent children. Let us, in the celebration of the ordinances of his Church here upon earth, behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord; so that being changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, we may be qualified for a more intimate communion with him through the ages of a blessed eternity.

SERMON XVII.

The Necessity of adding Piety to Morality.

MALACHI iii. 8.

Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

IT is observed by the holy apostle James, “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” Although, upon the first view, there be in this declaration an appearance of unreasonable severity; upon more attentive examination, it will be found to rest upon unquestionable principles of truth and equity. For if any man, in other respects, be scrupulously obedient, and yet live in the habitual and wilful violation of any one known precept of the divine law; it is evident that he is actuated by some sinister and temporary motive, and not by a real love of his duty—by a sincere reverence for that wise and powerful Being, from whom the whole law, one precept as well as another, derives its authority. Thus the apostle argues; “He that said, Do not commit adultery; said also, Do not kill:” and he who commits one crime, although he avoid the other, is never-

theless become a transgressor of the law—an opposer of that righteous Power which has a right to prescribe the limits of our duty, and to demand our entire and unreserved obedience.

Let these observations be attended to, by the men of mere *moral virtue*, who discard religion, neglect the offices of piety, and place their whole dependence upon a punctual discharge of the duties of the second table of the law; deeming themselves perfectly secure, because they do no injury to their neighbour, and give to all men their dues. But, have they no connexion, no intercourse with any other intelligent Being in the universe, besides their fellow-men? Is there not an almighty Creator, a wise Governor, a righteous Judge? And has not he an equitable claim to the implicit obedience of those whom he created; to the warmest affections of those who have been so highly obliged; to the most awful reverence of those, who must render an account of themselves before his august tribunal, and, according to the deeds done in the body, receive punishment or reward? We may disclaim with abhorrence all intention of injuring our neighbour, either in person or property. So far it is well; but this is only a part of our duty. Let us attend to the solemn interrogation of the great Jehovah himself; “Will a man rob God?” This would be impiety added to injustice. We may presumptuously inquire, “Wherein have we robbed thee?” The steady reply will be, “In tithes and offerings”—in failing to present to me those services which my religion indispensably requires. *They* who refuse to render to the almighty Sovereign of the universe, the inward reverence and affection of their souls, together with that external homage which

is expressive of heartfelt piety, rob him of the honour which is due to his sacred name. Sooner or later his indignation will be awakened by such injustice and want of gratitude: as it is said of the iniquitous Israelites, in the verse immediately following the text; “Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.”

And shall this ever be our unhappy fate? Shall we heedlessly expose ourselves to such a dreadful denunciation? God forbid, that we should be so regardless of *his* glory, or our own good! Let me, then, entreat your serious attention, while I endeavour to impress your hearts with a deep sense of the duty which you owe to God, and point out some of the modes in which this humble and dutiful disposition is to be expressed. And may the happy result of our meditations be a steadfast determination never to rob him of those reverential thoughts, respectful words, and obedient actions, which he has so just a right to claim from *us*, his intelligent creatures.

He is our almighty Creator. From nothing, he called us into existence; and in all the powers and faculties of both soul and body, we are entirely his workmanship. If we have had earthly parents whom we revered and obeyed, how much rather shall we be in subjection to the Father of spirits, that we may live and be happy with him for ever? A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: with how great propriety may *he*, then, demand, “If I be a Father, where is mine honour? If I be a Master, where is my fear?”

As he originally created, so he continually preserves the being which he gave. From him we derive life,

and health, and all things: he openeth his hand, and filleth us with plenteousness. He justly, therefore, expects, that this should be the habitual language of our grateful hearts—"What reward shall I give unto the Lord, for all the benefits which he hath bestowed upon me?" He justly expects, that we should praise him for the goodness which we have already experienced, and pray without ceasing for a continuance of his blessings.

When, by the wilful commission of sin, the descendants of Adam were subjected to misery and death eternal; he redeemed us from this deplorable condition by a wonderful dispensation of mercy. Hence he derives a new claim to our love and obedience. For we are not our own: we are bought with a price from the thralldom of sin and Satan: we are bought by the precious blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot. We, therefore, lie under indispensable obligations to serve God in our bodies and in our spirits, which are his.

He will be our righteous and all-powerful Judge. Before his awful tribunal all the nations of the earth will be collected; and he will consign the wicked to misery, but call the good into life and bliss eternal. How solicitous, then, ought we to be, to secure *his* favour and loving-kindness, upon whose final decision our fate depends for eternity! If we fear those who can kill the body, how much rather ought we to fear *him* who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell!

And, after all these considerations, will a man presume to rob God? Will he refuse to pay the just tribute of fear to his Creator, gratitude to his Preser-

ver, love to his Redeemer, and reverence to his Judge? Strange as such absurdity may appear; dangerous as such presumption may be; how many inconsiderate persons are there among us, to whom this severe expostulation may be addressed, "Yet, ye have robbed me, saith the Lord." They live, as if no such Being existed in the universe: "they live," in the strong language of the apostle, "without God in the world." They look round upon the stupendous works of creation, but their hearts swell not with wonder, and adoration, and praise. They regale themselves from day to day with the divine bounties, but forget the hand that spreads the plenteous board before them. They hear of God's awful displeasure against sin, as it is manifested in the wonderful scheme of our Redemption through a suffering Saviour; and yet, neither fear nor gratitude can bring them to repentance. The warning voice of conscience coincides with the awful declarations of Scripture, "that God will judge the world in righteousness;" and yet, they persist in their crimes with as much unconcern, as if they were never to give an account of the deeds done in the body.

The prophecy of Malachi, whence the text is taken, was delivered to the children of Israel, after their return from the Babylonish captivity; and we find from the book of Nehemiah, who was one of their leaders on this important occasion, that they had lately entered into the most solemn engagements, not to rob God of any thing that was due to him, according to the ordinances of their law: as it is said, "They entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and

“to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord their God, and his judgments, and his statutes.” *We* have entered into similar engagements: those who have been baptized into the name of the sacred Trinity, have solemnly obligated themselves to fear, and love, and serve, that great Being whose holy name they confess; the revelation of whose will they believe to be contained in the sacred Scriptures. Let us not, like the fickle and inconsiderate Jews, violate the solemn obligation of God’s law. Let us ever keep in mind the promise and profession which we have made: let us die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness: let us continually mortify our evil and corrupt affections, and proceed daily in all virtue and godliness of living: in a word; let us renounce the devil and all his works; believe in God, and serve him in mind, body, and estate. This is the bounden duty of all professing Christians. Prove your own selves, therefore, my beloved brethren; examine your heart and life by the rule of God’s commandments. If you deem it ignominious not to discharge your debts to your fellow-men; if you are impressed with becoming sentiments of the respect which is due to an earthly superior; think of that profound veneration, that unreserved obedience which is due to an almighty Sovereign, the most bountiful Benefactor, a Being of infinite perfections.

God is the absolute proprietor of all. When he requires any thing from his creatures, he only demands his own. Not that he stands in need of us, or our services: not that his felicity can be advanced by our obedience: his sole intention in all that he requires, is to improve our virtue, so as to qualify us

for the enjoyment of a higher degree of happiness and glory.

We rob God of that share of our *affections* which is due to him, when we love the world and the things of it, more than the expected joys of heaven, where he displays the perfection of his goodness and glory. We rob him of our *time*, when we waste those hours in idleness or in vice, which ought to be spent in useful industry or devotional exercises. We rob him of that portion of our *worldly goods* which ought to be devoted to his service, when we are regardless of the necessities of the poor, and refuse to contribute any thing towards the support and advancement of his religion among the children of men. We rob him of that habitual *reverence* which is due to his sacred name, if we are afraid, in our intercourse with the world, to vindicate his honour; or if, in private, we forget that we ever live in his presence. We rob him of those *services* which are due from accountable creatures, when, during the time of six days, the common business of this life is conducted without any regard to his present inspection or his future judgment; or when, on the seventh day of rest and devotion, this hallowed season is prostituted to serve the purposes of idleness and vice—when we either entirely absent ourselves from the public solemnities of religion, or, if we appear in the house of God, make it evident from the inattention of our deportment, that neither himself nor the solemn services which he requires of us in this place, are in all our thoughts.

Were we solicitous to maintain a consistency of character; could we be persuaded to regulate our affections by the standard of truth and virtue—to

estimate things in proportion to their real value; surely, the transient gratifications of time would be deemed matters of little significance, when set in competition with the solid joys of eternity: we should not think it hard, at stated seasons, to retire from the pleasures or the business of this world, for the purpose of acknowledging, in the exercises of prayer and praise, our entire dependence upon that awful Sovereign of the universe, who originally created us, and who every instant preserves us in being: we should be ready at all times to express our gratitude to the bountiful Bestower of all good things, by devoting a part of our worldly possessions to the relief of our necessitous brethren, to the advancement of his glory among the sons of men: whenever we appear in his more immediate presence; when we come into his house, and make a show of prostrating ourselves before his footstool, the mingled emotions of fear, and love, and gratitude, rising in our bosoms, would prevent all lightness and indecency of behaviour—every look, and word, and gesture, which is not suited to the sacredness of the place, and the solemnity of the occasion.

The apostle speaks of the Man of God who is thoroughly furnished unto *all* good works; and this consistency of conduct, this perfection of character cannot subsist, unless religion be united with morality; unless men be as solicitous not to rob God of the services which are due to him, as they are to discharge their respective duties to each other. For the truth of this assertion, I will appeal to every understanding that can reason with propriety, to every heart that can feel with tenderness. Can that man pretend to be extremely anxious not to violate his obligations to his neighbour,

who is nevertheless entirely inattentive to that relation in which he stands to God Almighty? Can that man be actuated by pure social affections, who has no fear of an all-powerful Sovereign, no veneration for his heavenly Father, no love for his kindest Friend, no gratitude for his most bountiful Benefactor? However exalted the attainments in worldly wisdom may be, which now excite our admiration; however men may be distinguished by those virtues which are concerned merely in making provision for our temporal well-being; rest assured, that an awful sense of religious duty ever gives new dignity to the grave and wise; and to the most refined and delicate, it affords a peculiar sweetness and grace; it diffuses over the whole character a heavenly lustre, which we behold with both love and veneration.

In this age of scepticism and impiety, we hear much of what each one has a right to claim, of what is due from one man to another; but those who declaim with most vehemence on this subject, seem to be the least inclined to step forth and vindicate the rights of God. The unbeliever will petulantly observe; "He stands in no need of our feeble assistance: he is altogether able to maintain his own authority." It is true; he will support the dignity of his government, either by the reformation or the destruction of the transgressor. But still, he expects that we should endeavour to extend his dominion over the hearts and lives of men, by all the rational methods which he has placed in our power: that we should not be ashamed of him and his word before a sinful generation: that on all proper occasions we should express an humble submission to the dispensations of his providence, and a profound

veneration for the institutions of his religion: that we should let the light of our virtue and piety so shine before men, that they may be induced, first by applauding, and then by imitating our good example, to glorify our Father who is in heaven. Ye men of deep meditation and comprehensive views; ye generous promoters of peace, and order, and security; ye disinterested guardians of the welfare of human society, testify in your whole deportment, that you deem it no degradation to seek instruction from infinite wisdom, no meanness to be obedient to the injunctions of almighty power: embrace every opportunity of signifying to the scoffers of these last days, your sense of the high importance, the absolute necessity of religion, in the prosecution of our true felicity!

Human laws provide punishments for those who violate their engagements; but they offer not rewards to those who owe no man any thing, and are careful to pay to all their dues. How much more liberal is our heavenly Lawgiver to his dutiful people! Hear his gracious assurances to the children of Israel, in some of the verses immediately following the text; “Bring ye
“ all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be
“ meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith,
“ saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the
“ windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that
“ there shall not be room enough to receive it. And
“ all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a
“ delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts.” Should our obedience be requited with few or no *temporal* rewards, let us persist in the determination not to rob our God of the services which are due to him; and, we may rest assured, that in his own good time, having

translated us to a better state of existence, he will open the windows of heaven, and pour us out a blessing which there will not be room enough in our most enlarged faculties to receive: we shall say, from happy experience of the love of Christ, that it passeth knowledge: we shall find, that his mercies, as well as his judgments, are unsearchable; and that the ways even of his loving-kindness are past finding out.

Let us, then, from the whole of what has been now said, learn the necessity of uniting the love of God and our neighbour; of adding piety to morality, in order to constitute a thoroughly consistent and truly amiable character.

While we are sensible of the propriety of discharging with alacrity all the relative duties of life; of cultivating all the tender charities of parents, children, and brethren; let us not forget the relation in which we stand to the ever-adorable Trinity—to him who created us, who redeemed us from misery and death eternal, who sanctifies our polluted nature, and makes us fit inhabitants of the pure regions of celestial bliss and glory.

Let us cherish religious sentiments in our own hearts, and endeavour to extend their influence over the heart and life of others, as the strongest incentive to the faithful discharge of duty in all the ranks of civil society; as the best preservative of both public and private virtue. He who stands in awe of God, will be careful not to offend his neighbour; but, it is to be feared, that he who is so presumptuous as to rob his almighty Sovereign and Judge of the honour which is due to his sacred name, will not hesitate to deprive a

fellow-man of his rights, whenever by this injustice some temporary interest may be promoted.

We may now neglect the duty which we owe to God, and no immediate punishment may be inflicted on our crime: but, let us remember that a day is fast approaching, when he will appear in terrible majesty, to vindicate the authority of his insulted laws. Obstinate transgressors will then find a dreadful vengeance overtaking their sins; while they, who have offered him the grateful tribute of a prompt obedience, will receive the great reward of glory and immortality in heaven.

The compassionate Being whom we are required to worship and obey, does not demand difficult and costly services: the weakest and most destitute mortal may present that offering which is most acceptable in the sight of God; for *the humble and the contrite spirit* he will never despise. Let us cherish in our hearts a constant sense of his immediate inspection. Let us habituate ourselves to converse with him now, in pious meditation; in the offices of private and public devotion: thus shall our souls be attuned on earth, to the enraptured strains of heaven. We shall ascend from his house of prayer here below, to the blessed mansions which Christ is now preparing for his obedient people. We shall be called from the congregation of worshipping saints in this earthly tabernacle, to the Church of the first-born which are written in heaven; to the glorious assembly of angels and just men made perfect, where *our* voices will be united with *theirs* in lauding and magnifying his holy name for ever.

SERMON XVIII.

On Christian Self-denial.

LUKE ix. 23.

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

TO the votaries of licentious pleasure, this is a very discouraging language. "Are these" they exclaim, "the severe conditions of becoming truly pious; of following Christ in the way to heaven? Is it absolutely necessary to pass through a path, where we must be subject to perpetual restraint and mortification? Has God given us passions; and does he then impose upon us the painful necessity of *denying* them? Has he furnished this world with such a variety of exquisite delights; and must we, on every occasion, stand hesitating before we venture to crop a flower, or to taste the fruit which may fall in our way? Far better will it be for us to escape from this incessant vexation; to relinquish the expectation of *future bliss* which is uncertain, and to seize without any mortifying restriction, *that* which is *present* and *sure*." These are the words of irreligious men,

whose inordinate appetites have vanquished reason and lead it captive at their will. But, could they be induced to consider seriously their real state and condition in this world; they would soon, by God's grace, return to a better mind. Crosses we must all sustain—in the present circumstances of human life, every man must be subject, in a greater or less degree, to disappointment, mortification, and restraint: and the important inquiry is, Do we entertain just conceptions of our present situation? Do we consider this world, not as our continuing city, as our place of rest; but as a transitory state of discipline and trial? Do we stand constantly prepared to encounter the numberless difficulties which fall in our way? Do we take up our cross with alacrity, bear it with patient dignity, and make it subservient to the advancement of our felicity in a future state? Happy are they, who can answer these questions in the affirmative.

To excite, and to cherish these necessary dispositions in the hearts of *you* who are now present, shall be the business of the following discourse: and, for this purpose, let me entreat you, in the first place, to consider, that you are under the guidance of the almighty Creator and wise Disposer of the universe: and that, however mysterious the present procedure of his providence may appear, he will make all things work together for good to those who love him. “We have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” The modest and affectionate child is little inclined to suspect even an earthly parent of partiality and undue severity: how much less reason have we to imagine,

that the Judge of all the earth, the Parent of the universe will not, in every instance, do right? His *power* we cannot dispute; for he is the Creator of all things. His *wisdom* is displayed in all the works of his hands. His *goodness* is expressed to every man, and his tender mercy is over all his works. *His* discipline will, therefore, be adapted to *our* necessity. Like froward children, unable to guide ourselves; pursuing with the greatest ardour, objects which are worthless, and which, if possessed, would prove pernicious to us; his paternal care interposes, crosses our wishes, obstructs our heedless progress, disappoints our fondest expectations. The stubborn and refractory may murmur, and attempt to break, by violence, through these merciful restraints. Let us, rather, submit with meekness, and in patience possess our souls. Let us calmly yield to his direction, who sitteth in the heavens, and ruleth over all. Let us seek first the kingdom of God; and, if we may but be conducted thither at last, not repine, although the crooked ways may not immediately be made straight, nor all the rough places plain. When we shall have reached the felicity of heaven, we shall bless our merciful Parent for those afflictions which tended to confirm and strengthen us in all goodness. When we shall have arrived at the haven of rest, perhaps the recollection of the tempests through which we passed, will give additional delight to the serenity and brightness of the surrounding scene.

As a preparatory step to the taking up of our cross, and bearing it with becoming dignity and fortitude, it is necessary that we should form a just estimate of the present condition of human life. We were not sent

hither, to bask in the sunshine of uninterrupted prosperity, to waste our time in stupid indolence or heedless jollity. From the miseries to which we are continually exposed, and from the various duties which we have to perform, the Scriptures sometimes denominate this earth, *the vale of tears*; and they represent our situation in it, under the image of a journey, a race, a warfare; implying that dangers are to be encountered, that vicissitudes are to be expected, that vigilance, and activity, and fortitude, are ever necessary.

Trace the progress of human life, and in every stage of it we find impediments and crosses falling in our way. The *child* is necessarily held under salutary restraint; the impetuosity of the *youth* hurries him into numberless disquietudes and mortifications; the multiplicity of business in which the *man* is engaged, surrounds him with disappointment and vexation from the carelessness, or the duplicity, or the dishonesty of those with whom he is connected; and when *old age* approaches with all its attendant infirmities, the language of sage experience is commonly this—"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." And throughout the whole journey of life, poverty, disease, pain, and death, are seen, like devouring vultures, hovering over the weary travellers, and, from time to time, seizing their heedless prey.

But, suppose those who are devoted to sensual pleasure to be, for a season, exempted from all these disasters, let them be furnished by health and affluence with all the means of earthly gratification; let them withhold not from their heart any joy: I might appeal to the most fortunate adventurer in this way, whether crosses have not sooner or later invariably obtruded

themselves into the most enchanting scenes of worldly delight; whether some untoward circumstance has not occurred to mar, and perhaps to blast entirely the expected joy; whether the pleasure, on the retrospect, does not sink far below that summit of felicity on which he fondly placed it by anticipation?

In such circumstances, called by the very nature of our existence here, as well as by the voice of our Master, to take up the cross; what course of conduct does wisdom dictate? Shall we give the rein to our impetuous *desires*, and thus spend our lives in adding fruitless complaint to wilful disappointment; or shall we not rather see the absolute necessity of moderating and restraining them? Shall we persist, in opposition to experience, to pursue the fleeting shadow; or shall we not rather, by temperance and forbearance, satisfy the demands of our reason and conscience; and thus lay a strong foundation for the permanent joys of the heavenly world?

This duty of *self-denial* is of a very comprehensive nature, and is to be called into exertion in all circumstances of human life. *He* that would follow Christ in the way to heaven, must expect to deny himself, and, as it is said in the text, take up his cross *daily*. *This* must lead us to withstand the dangerous allurements which affluence ever brings in her train; to suppress those impious doubts and murmurings which are apt to rise up in our hearts when assailed by adversity; to keep a perpetual guard over those passions which are most vehement, and to exercise a peculiar vigilance against those vices which most easily beset us; to submit *our* froward inclinations to the wisdom of Divine Providence; to bend the stubborn pride of the

human understanding to the declarations of Holy Scripture; and not to seek the kingdom of heaven by following our own inventions, when God himself has been pleased to reveal to us the way, the truth, and the life.

It is said in the emphatical words of divine inspiration, "Man, in his best estate, is altogether vanity!" In consequence of the introduction of sin into the world, he is far gone from the original rectitude of his nature. This depravity has been observed and lamented in all ages; but it is from revelation alone that we learn the true cause of it, and are instructed where to apply for an effectual remedy. In this weak and degenerate state, God looketh down from heaven upon his helpless children with tender commiseration. He takes us by the hand; he restrains us when heedlessly rushing into danger; he leads us in the way of safety; he conducts us to everlasting rest. But then, he expects, that we should resign ourselves to his merciful guidance without hesitation; that we should resolutely *deny* ourselves what *he* prohibits; and patiently bear the cross, whenever he deems it necessary to impose the burden upon us. Is our *understanding*, with respect to religious knowledge, naturally weak and very contracted? God has imparted to us the words of eternal life. For the knowledge of divine things, let us search the Holy Scriptures—they are able to make us wise unto salvation: let us beware lest any man should spoil us through the subtile philosophy and vain deceit of worldly wisdom; let us cast down every proud imagination, and in our inquiries after religious truth, bring every thought in subjection to Christ.

Is our *will* perverted, too often neglecting what is good, and cleaving ardently to objects really pernicious to creatures who were designed for immortality? Let us take into consideration the whole term of our existence; and let *our erring will* be influenced by those directions which have been communicated by that Being, who knows what is necessary for our happiness, and who is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

Are our headstrong *passions* apt to break away from the restraints of reason, and involve us in numberless disquietudes? Let us devoutly implore the aid of that divine grace, which alone can order the unruly affections of sinful men—*this* will enable us to do all things—among all the sundry and manifold changes of the world, *this* will cause our hearts surely there to be fixed, where only true joys are to be found.

To those who have been long habituated to unrestrained indulgence in earthly gratifications, it will undoubtedly be deemed a painful task, to exert such incessant vigilance; to moderate their passions; to check even the pride of their understanding; to take up the cross, and follow Christ to heaven, by daily instances of self-denial and mortification. This is, nevertheless, the duty of all Christians; this is the strait gate through which we must pass to the mansions of bliss; this is the necessary discipline preparatory to our reception of the joys of heaven. And, however the sensualist may revolt against it, every considerate person will cheerfully submit to it, not only from a regard to the performance of his *duty*, but for the promotion even of his *present*, as well as *future* felicity. For does not universal experience testify, that modera-

tion leads to happiness; and that excess of every sort is immediately productive of misery? The licentious libertine defeats his own purpose of revelling in uninterrupted delight. Man is a reasonable creature designed for immortality; and no *vicious* indulgence can long prove satisfactory, since it has not obtained the sanction of reason—will not bear the examination of conscience, and brings a cloud over the prospect of future felicity: in this state, the man must be restless and discontented—his frame is disordered and disjointed, and pain must be the necessary consequence—his moral system is thrown into confusion, and he can never contemplate the ruins which surround him, without terror and remorse.

Whatever real delight this earth can afford, certainly falls to the lot of *him* who tastes the cup with moderation. *His* passions are never hurried into a state of distraction. The noble principles which ought ever to actuate a rational creature, are immoveably fixed in his bosom: like the sun at the centre of the system, they communicate light and activity to every part of his virtuous conduct: under their control, the subordinate appetites move in due order and becoming regularity: he exults at the consciousness of acting in conformity to the will of his Creator; and considers this internal peace which he enjoys on earth, as a happy prelude to the perfect harmony, to the rest which remaineth in heaven for all the people of God.

It has already been observed, that pain and misery present themselves under different forms; and, at various seasons, to encounter them, is the common lot of mortality. Now, *he* who habitually indulges his inordinate desires, is totally disqualified for the conflict.

When these foes assault him, he is terrified and confounded; he sinks in pitiable debility and effeminate complaint; his strength is impaired, and he knows not where to look for any foreign assistance. But, in such a season of trial and distress, the man who has been accustomed to *deny himself*; to moderate his appetites; to fortify his breast with all the succours which sobriety, righteousness, and godliness; can supply—the man who has voluntarily submitted to this salutary discipline, takes up the cross with invincible patience; withstands the assaults of pain with steady fortitude; and if he cannot gloriously vanquish, shows that he can, at least, suffer with dignity. From excessive indulgence in childhood, how many have been disqualified for future conflict, and rendered miserable through every subsequent period of their life!

No man liveth to himself. We must not only make provision for ourselves, but endeavour to mitigate the unavoidable calamities of human life, by standing ready to afford relief to our necessitous neighbour. Now, the extravagant sensualist defeats this benevolent design of God and nature. By his excesses, he not only deprives himself of the means of doing good to others, but, such is the common effect of sensuality, he wilfully hardens his heart against all the emotions of compassion.

The end of all our trials and sufferings in this world, is to prepare us for a blessed immortality. And this consideration, although it cannot prevent the stroke, may, in all cases, mitigate the smart. We now *suffer* with Christ, that we may hereafter be *glorified* with him. Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience of our sincerity and constancy; and expe-

rience, hope of a glorious reward. These are the blessed dispositions of soul, without which we should not be qualified for the enjoyment of heavenly happiness. These were conspicuous in the whole life of our Redeemer. In the exercise of these virtues, we must go after him through this earthly pilgrimage; and, in due time, we shall follow him to the kingdom of heaven; to which he has been exalted with great triumph.

The cross of Christ sanctifies all our troubles, and makes them subservient to our future and permanent good. For it was by his cross that the gates of heaven were lifted up, and the everlasting doors opened, to admit the King of Glory as the forerunner of his faithful people. God forbid, therefore, that *we* should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world ought to be crucified unto us, and we unto the world. Christ patiently bore it for our sake; let us bear it cheerfully for ourselves. Let it lead us to mortify all our vicious and corrupt affections; to abstain from all appearance of evil, that the very God of peace may sanctify us wholly; to ascend in heart and mind to those heavens, whither our crucified Redeemer has triumphantly ascended; so that our whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON XIX.

On Sobriety and Watchfulness.

1 PETER iv. 7.

But the end of all things is at hand : be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

THE principal design of this Epistle of St. Peter is to comfort and strengthen the disciples of Christianity, especially the Jewish converts, who, on account of their profession of the Christian religion, were banished from their native land, and dispersed through different countries. By a variety of arguments, he encourages them to be patient, and to persevere in the faith, lest the sad calamities which were coming upon them, should induce them to apostatize from Christ and his holy religion.

He introduces this chapter with proposing the example of Jesus as a pattern worthy of *their* imitation. "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." He then proceeds to inculcate the duties which are incumbent on those who follow the steps of a suffering Saviour. "That they should not live the rest of their

“ time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will
 “ of God. For that the time past of their lives might
 “ suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,
 “ when they walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess
 “ of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable
 “ idolatries.”

In the text, he offers a new motive to sobriety, watchfulness, and prayer. That agreeably to our Saviour’s prediction, who at the same time alluded to the *final judgment*, God would soon come with mighty power to reward the house of Israel according to their evil doings, to destroy the temple and city of Jerusalem, and subvert the whole Jewish polity. And, as our Saviour, when he foretold these things, drew this inference, “ Watch ye, therefore, for ye know neither
 “ the day, nor the hour wherein the Son of man
 “ cometh;” so the apostle concludes, since “ the
 “ end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober,
 “ and watch unto prayer.” Since the destruction of the perverse and obstinate Jews is near; since your lives will soon arrive at their utmost period; since the world itself will be destroyed by a general conflagration, and all men stand before the judgment-seat of God; surely you ought always to be sober, to watch, and to pray.

These sentiments are so constantly impressed in every part of the Scriptures, that it may seem surprising to any considerate person, we should so frequently hear them, and so seldom draw the just conclusion. St. Peter has, indeed, forwarned us, that there should come scoffers in the last days, walking after their lusts, and saying, “ Where is the promise of his coming?
 “ For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue
 “ as they were from the foundation of the world.”

But he assures us—"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise—that he is long-suffering to usward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance—that, nevertheless, the day of the Lord will come, as a thief in the night."

That life and every other enjoyment is uncertain and transitory, has often been said, and has afforded matter for much declamation. A truth so obvious, and so often repeated, one would think, might have a proper effect upon creatures who call themselves *rational*. Were we to form our opinion of the merits of mankind, merely from their *professions* of regard for religion, and concern for their future welfare; so loud is the cry against *vice*, we should be apt to conclude that all men were combined to banish it from society. But should you draw their character as indicated by their *actions*, the representation must be very different. The extravagance, and thoughtless levity which are so prevalent in the world, yield an alarming prospect to the considerate mind. Such absurd and pernicious behaviour could not so commonly prevail, were we to think with the apostle—"that the end of all things is at hand; that the most exquisite sensual pleasures will soon desert us; that life itself will fail; and that shortly we must all stand before the judgment-seat of God, to give an account of the deeds done in the body." Our ignorance of the time does not render it the less certain; for a thousand years in the sight of the Lord are but as one day.

In youth, we solace ourselves with the expectation of many happy days to come. We extend the prospect to an almost immeasurable distance, and no doubt, fondly embellish it with every object that is pleasant to

the eye, and grateful to the taste. Not attending to the loud calls of daily experience—not considering that the tender plant, at farthest, can flourish but a little while; and that no one knows, how soon some baneful blast may arise, and destroy its promising verdure. And it were well, if this inconsistency was confined to the heedlessness of *youth* alone. Age, which by its gravity ought to awe the thoughtless mind into a sober deportment, too often sets the pernicious example of levity and inattention. And what a ridiculous and unbecoming appearance do those persons make, who with all the marks of infirmity strewed thick upon them, run into every puerile extravagance, and only render themselves objects of pity, through an over-anxious desire to please. Flying with an eagerness inconsistent with their years, after every idle vanity, unwearied in the pursuit, till they stumble into their graves. It would alarm our fears to see a person heedlessly sporting upon the brink of a precipice, where he is every instant in danger of falling, and being ruined for ever. *We* stand upon the verge of a fearful eternity; and through negligence and presumption, may sink into an abyss of remediless woe. The apostle well knew our treacherous situation, and has apprized us of our danger. Let us, therefore, follow him in the conclusion which he draws from it; and since our state is thus uncertain, be sober in our desires, and watch unto prayer.

To creatures in *our state*, sobriety is a virtue of *perpetual obligation*; and therefore not without reason so frequently inculcated in Scripture. “We cannot
“ serve two masters; for either we must hate the one
“ and love the other, or despise the one and cleave to

“the other.” Delighted with a constant succession of empty amusements, while such a variety of objects press upon the eye of the mind, they obstruct the prospect of a future world. Excessive indulgence in sensual gratifications, incapacitates the soul for the enjoyment of pleasures more spiritual and pure. Pleasure is of a relative nature—the perceiving faculty must be adapted to the object, else no satisfaction will ensue. The blind eye receives no enjoyment from that beautiful variety of colouring with which the face of nature is decorated; the deaf ear is unmoved by the melody of what might be to others the most transporting music. Thus “while we are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God,” it ought not to be matter of surprise, that religion possesses no joys for *us*.

Should benevolent beings of a superior order look down upon inconsiderate man, they must be moved with a mixture of disapprobation and pity. Should they view our inconsistent behaviour, alternately distressing and distressed; struggling with each other, and trampling upon those that fall; ever active and restless; ever in quest of some delusive phantom, till the king of terrors suddenly arresteth us, and puts an end to the fantastic chace. Should they view us in this situation, and address us upon the occasion, might we not expect to hear some such expostulations as these?—“Vain mortals! why are ye so disquieted for nought? Why are your heads filled with so many romantic notions? Why do your hearts exult with such fruitless hope? Remember ye are but men! Anxious, but to be the more frequently disappointed. Remember that the end of all earthly things is at hand—Remember that after death will come the

“ judgment.” These admonitions have, in fact, been frequently given by messages from heaven. Could we be persuaded to consider ourselves in this point of light, sobriety would be the natural consequence. We should be sober in the pursuit of sensual gratifications; sober in the estimation which we form of ourselves, and our own acquirements; condescending in our deportment to others, and walking humbly with our God.

This sobriety of mind, by repressing the excessive ardour of our affections, and regulating them in all their pursuits, would rescue us from many vexations. To proceed with calmness and circumspection, is the surest indication of success in almost every attempt. And should we *fail* of accomplishing our desires, we must fail with less discomposure than others, who are more eager and precipitate; because we are always prepared for the worst that may happen. When the heart has flattered itself with vast and unreasonable expectations of delight from the acquisition of any object, a disappointment, (which more or less is the lot of *all*,) will wring it with tenfold anxiety. We are not pleading for the total suppression of the passions; *that* were an impossibility; but only for their regularity and due subordination. Out of regard, therefore, to the commands of God, and for the sake of our own peace and happiness, let us be *sober* “ in all things”—not only so, but “ *watch unto prayer.*” Without *watchfulness* we cannot have timely notice of the designs of our enemies; without *prayer* we shall be destitute of strength to oppose them.

A heart strongly inclined to evil, demands our strictest attention. A competent knowledge of our

selves, though the most necessary, is extremely difficult to be acquired. The clouds of so many passions rise up to darken the understanding, that it is seldom we can obtain a clear and impartial judgment. The extremes of some virtues border so nearly upon vice, that the boundaries between them are not easily discerned; so that if we do not watch over our hearts, the motives and principles which actuate us, we may walk on securely, as in the friendly regions of virtue, when perhaps we have arrived within the confines of vice, exposed to all the assaults of the enemy. Let the hardhearted son of *avarice* have the symptoms of his disease ever so strong upon him, he will be apt to flatter himself, it is only *frugality and prudence*. Let the dissolute spendthrift sacrifice his estate and his health at the shrine of his beloved idol, pleasure; he will tell you, it only proceeds from *generosity*, and a *social spirit*. Let the proud unbeliever ridicule the Scriptures, and almost vilify his Saviour; he thanks God that he is blessed with a *freedom of thinking*, unfettered by those idle opinions with which ignorant and superstitious minds are held in shameful servitude. Let the high-sounding enthusiast serve God with a body distorted into ridiculous attitudes, and a mind filled with vain fancies and gloomy apprehensions; he would fain persuade himself that these are the operations of the Holy Spirit. "Watch, therefore, unto prayer," that ye may be able to discern the various turns and impositions of your own hearts; "and not call evil good; and good, evil—put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."

From our constant intercourse with a wicked world, we have need again to be exhorted to the same virtue.

That *love of society* which the God of nature, for the best purposes, has implanted in the breast of man, prompts him continually to render himself agreeable to those with whom he converses, by adopting *their* notions, and suiting himself to their inclinations. Hence arises our danger: for as vice is so prevalent in others, and our own appetites so strong; through a desire to please and imitate *them*, we ruin *ourselves*. When the torrent of sinful example pours impetuously along, instead of opposing its violence, we are too apt to yield to the stream, and go wherever it may chance to convey us. On these considerations, we cannot too frequently inculcate the admonition of the text—
“ Watch unto prayer.”

Without *prayer*, every attempt to surmount the difficulties which impede our Christian progress, will prove ineffectual. Though God is always ready to give us more abundantly than we either desire or deserve; yet “ he has commanded us to *seek*, that we “ may *find*; to *knock*, that it may be *opened* unto us.” He only requires a *heart* properly affected, and with this right disposition of soul, in every attitude, in every place, we may call upon the Lord our God in an acceptable manner. Though the *hands* may be employed on *earth*, the soul, in many a fervent ejaculation, may soar to *heaven*. It is proper, indeed, when we address the awful Majesty of heaven and earth, to signify our inward reverence, by a reverential posture of the body. But this is no farther acceptable, than as it is an indication of sincere humility.

Prayer is the Christian’s great security and support, during his progress through life. It naturally leads us to purify ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,

and to walk circumspectly and humbly before God. For we must be ashamed and confounded whenever we appear in his presence, to thank him for his mercies, or to request a relief of our wants, while we are conscious, that we *wilfully* indulge ourselves in the transgression of his commands. For which reason, as we advance in virtue and holiness, the pleasure of this divine intercourse increases; and on the contrary, gratification of our vicious appetites so alienates the affections from God, that only to *think* of him is frequently painful and terrifying.

Viewing ourselves in a *public capacity*, as members of a *religious society*, we stand in need of many blessings, which are most properly requested, only in a *public manner*—where the united voice of a multitude fixes the mind more attentively upon its proper object; and the flame of devotion, catching from one bosom to another, burns with greater strength and brightness. Whatever some may say of *inward* piety, of praying to our Father in *secret only*, without making any *open* professions of respect and reverence; it is very evident, that religion would presently desert us, were there not seasons and places appointed, where with one heart and one voice, we may acknowledge God as our common Father. Those, therefore, who are sincerely interested in the cause of piety, will never forget to assemble themselves together, as the manner of some is. And if *public worship*, in all religious societies, be proper and expedient, nothing, my brethren, can be better calculated to invite *your* constant attendance, than the established liturgy of the Church to which you belong. If a vast extent of thought; if the greatest energy, and, at the same time, simplicity of language;

if a strain of the warmest and most humble piety, may claim any regard, the *Book of Common Prayer* most justly deserves it. Let the excellency of it command your veneration, and induce you, at all times, to address God with becoming seriousness and devotion. For if an air of levity, indolence, and inattention, be highly indecent in the presence of an *earthly superior*, how much more culpable is such deportment in one who comes to prostrate himself before the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

From what has been now said of the uncertainty of all things which we now enjoy, may God so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. May we be convinced that the end of all earthly things with *us* is at hand; and may that conviction teach us to be sober, and watch unto prayer. May all the means of improvement in knowledge and virtue be attended to with becoming regard; and may they be blessed to the endless comfort of our souls, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer.

SERMON XX.

On the Duty and Advantages of Prayer.

PSALM cxli. 2.

Let my prayer be set forth in thy sight as the incense; and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice.

THE holy apostle has asserted, and every pious servant of God can bear testimony to the truth of his assertion, that “Godliness is profitable for all things, “having the promise of the life that now is, and of that “which is to come.” And, among the other benefits to be derived from a spirit of godliness or pure religion, *this* is not to be deemed the least, that the pious man, in the most calamitous circumstances of human life, can approach the throne of grace with humble confidence, and, in an acceptable manner, present his fervent petitions to the merciful Parent and Lord of the universe. Hence, he obtains consolation and strength: hence, when his footsteps begin to slip, he acquires a rod and a staff to support him: hence, when he begins to faint in the dreary wilderness, he draws forth refreshing waters; from the great fountain of all comfort and joy, streams flow abundantly, to revive his spirits sink-

ing under the gloomy scenes that surround him. Of this important truth, the holy Psalmist was duly sensible. In all his distresses, (and *his* afflictions were frequent and grievous,) *prayer* was the great instrument by which comfort was procured: God was his hope and strength, a very present help in time of trouble: his prayer was set forth as the incense; and the lifting up of his hands was acceptable as the evening sacrifice: his habitual language was—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him."

It is the commonly received opinion, that this psalm, whence the text is taken, was composed by David, when he was driven from one asylum to another by the persecutions of Saul; when he had twice spared his persecutor's life; and still, not daring to trust his justice or generosity, had forsaken his own country entirely, and taken refuge in the land of the Philistines, with Achish, king of Gath. At this time; in such a situation of accumulated distress; at a distance from the tabernacle, where all the solemn prayers of the Israelites, together with the daily sacrifice, were offered up to God; with his face, in all probability, turned towards that stated place of divine worship, he beseeches the great Lord of the universe, from whose Spirit he could not go, nor be concealed from his presence, to accept *all* that was in his power to give, the devotions of his heart, and the elevating of his hands in prayer; that these, although he was at a distance from the sanctuary, might ascend to heaven, fragrant and well-pleasing as the clouds of incense rising from the holy altar, and prevail as effectually for his relief as the evening oblation.

In order to understand this allusion of the Psalmist, to the incense and evening sacrifice, it will be necessary to advert to some of the divine institutions, as recorded in the book of Exodus and in other parts of the Old Testament. Here we are informed, that Moses was directed by the Lord to take sweet spices, and make of them a perfume pure and holy: that he was also commanded to make an altar, and overlay it with pure gold: that this altar was to be placed before the vail that was by the ark of the testimony: and that Aaron and his successors were to burn sweet incense upon it every morning; a perpetual incense throughout their generations. We are further informed, that an evening sacrifice was to be offered to the Lord continually, consisting of a lamb without spot or blemish, and a meat-offering of fine flower mingled with oil; and that at the time when these oblations were made unto the Lord, it was customary for pious people to offer up their prayers for divine grace and benediction. Thus it is said—“That while Daniel was praying, and confessing *his* sin, and the sin of his people Israel, and presenting his supplication before the Lord his God; the angel Gabriel, being caused to fly swiftly, touched him about the time of the evening oblation;” that is, at the ninth hour; or, according to *our* computation, at three o’clock in the afternoon. Thus, while Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, “executed the priest’s office in the order of his course, *his* lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without, at the time of incense.” Thus, we are told, “that Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth

“hour.” And to these customs, St. John alludes in the book of Revelation—“Another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne: and the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God, out of the angel’s hand.” And thus, also, the Psalmist, in the words of the text, expresses his fervent desire—“That his prayer may be set forth in the sight of God, as the incense; and that the lifting up of his hands might be an evening sacrifice.” As if he had said—“The burning of incense on the golden altar every morning, and the offering up of the evening sacrifice, as an atonement for sin, are thine own divine appointment, and are, therefore, unquestionably acceptable to thee. In this pious work, I cannot now be concerned: I cannot now be a partaker of this sacred employment, in which thy priests and people are engaged, in thy more immediate presence, near the place of thy sanctuary. Still, thou shalt receive the best services which I am able to perform. At morning and at evening will I pray, and that instantly. O, let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable unto thee, my strength and my Redeemer! Let them be grateful to thee as the incense which rises from thy holy altar, or as the sacrifice which is presented to thee without spot and without blemish!”

And, no doubt, his devotions, even from the dreary wilderness in which he was wandering, ascended up to heaven, and were heard and answered there: as he

himself expresses it—"The Lord hasted unto his servant, when he called upon him; the Lord heard the voice of his humble supplications, when he cried unto him:" for *his* eyes are over the righteous in all circumstances of human life; his ear is ever open to the prayer of the humble and contrite heart, whether it be presented in the great assembly of the saints, or in the solitude of the desert.

Be it our endeavour, from this example, to derive religious improvement. The propriety and advantage of prayer will not be denied by any person who considers the relation in which we stand to Almighty God, as he is represented in the Scriptures, under the character of our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier. If, by *his power* we were created, and are still preserved in existence; if, to his *goodness* we are indebted for *every* blessing, whether of a spiritual or temporal nature, whether conducive to the welfare of soul or body; if, from his *mercy* we hope to be rendered finally and eternally happy; will any one be so *absurd*, will any one be so impious, as not to adore his excellent greatness, to thank him for his mercies past, to request his present protection, to implore his future benediction? This great duty is, indeed, universally acknowledged by the genuine sentiments of the human heart. We may neglect, nay, almost forget it, in the season of our health and prosperity: but let some afflictive dispensation of Providence call off our attention for a moment from the pleasures and vanities of the world, and rouse us to serious consideration, and the heart at once speaks; its language is—"Prayer is my indispensable duty; God is my best shield and buckler; my only refuge and strength." Let the pestilence

which walketh in darkness threaten with malignant breath to lay waste our dwelling-places; and the general determination is—"We will go into the house of the Lord, and fall low on our knees before his footstool; we will confess our transgressions, entreat his forgiveness, deprecate the impending calamity, and implore the continuance of his blessings." These pious sentiments are, undoubtedly, very rational. Happy were it for professing Christians, if such dispositions were more steady and permanent than they are commonly found to be. Much is it to be lamented, that apparent penitence and devout supplication are too often the mere effect of momentary terror. Let the cause of consternation be removed, and the fervour of our piety vanishes away like the morning cloud or the early dew. To expose such absurdity, it is sufficient only to mention it. If, in our *affliction* we are inclined to seek God early, let us not forget him in the moments of our *joy*. Let our intercourse with heaven be uninterrupted. Let no clouds of worldly care or sensual enjoyment check the effusions of piety that were ascending to the throne of God, and intercept the emanations of livine goodness which were coming down to man below. With pure hearts and warm affections, in all circumstances of life, let our prayers rise as the incense, and the lifting up of our hands be an evening sacrifice.

It is hoped, that none of us will deny the *duty* of prayer; and with respect to the *manner* of performing this important duty, the well-disposed mind can seldom be at a loss. If the dispositions of the heart be right, the service will ever be acceptable. One short sentence of the humble publican—"God be merciful to me a

“sinner,” will be more efficacious than the longest and most florid harangue of the haughty Pharisee.

To aid our devotions, our merciful Lord has composed an excellent form, for the continual use of his people, and to be a pattern to them, by which to frame their own addresses to Almighty God. And, by this admirable pattern we are instructed, that our prayers should be short and pertinent, suited to our own infirmity, and to the wisdom and majesty of God; that, in the true spirit of Christian charity, they should be presented for others, as well as for ourselves; that we are permitted to pray for the necessaries of *this* life, although our principal concern should be for the more valuable blessings of a *future state*; and, that all our petitions must be presented to God alone, our heavenly Father, through the faith that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And as to the public services of religion, the solemn business of *social worship*, you need not be reminded what abundant provision has been made for all your spiritual necessities in the comprehensive liturgy of our Church. I shall not, at this time, deem it necessary to pass any encomiums upon it; to point out its various excellences; but, will only observe in one word, that *they* who with pure intentions worship God according to this established form, worship him both in spirit and in truth, and in all the external beauty of holiness. This daughter of the great King is not only all glorious *within*; her *raiment* also, her outward decorations, are of pure gold. With such pre-eminent advantages, may we not affirm—“Thou art inexcusable, O man, not only if thou neglectest this duty entirely; but, if thy prayers be not at all times adapted to thy situation; if they ascend not as sweet

“incense from the altar of a pure heart, kindled with the flame of true devotion, and rising grateful to heaven, and consequently salutary to thine own soul!”

The profane infidel often puts this bold and scornful question, “What is the Almighty, that I should serve him? or what profit should I have, were I to pray unto him?” Every humble and considerate person, convinced of the propriety of the duty, will rather inquire, “*Wherewith* shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? With what dispositions of heart ought *I* to be animated, who am but dust and ashes, when I address the awful majesty of the great Supreme?” For ever blessed be his holy name, for he hath showed thee, O man! what is good; he hath taught thee to love mercy, to do justice, and to walk humbly with thy God; with the gracious assurance, that *then*, thy *prayers* as well as thine alms will come up as a memorial before him.

The incense which was kindled on the golden altar, was made of sweet spices with pure frankincense, tempered together, pure and holy. The lamb that was offered in sacrifice to God was without spot or blemish. And what was the spiritual signification of these ancient institutions of the law? Certainly they intimate to us, Christians, who enjoy the more perfect light of the Gospel, that God was at *all times* to be approached with purity and sincerity of *heart*; otherwise, no service could be acceptable to him. On this subject, in the Scriptures of the New Testament, *we* have received the most clear and positive directions. We are commanded to pray with that *faith* which is the evidence of things not seen; “Let a man ask in faith, nothing

“waving; let men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.”

We are required to present our supplications with *diligence* and *attention*, suited to our necessitous condition in this wicked and miserable world; “Watch ye, and pray always; be fervent in spirit; continue instant in prayer.”

We are directed to perform this solemn duty with that *animation* and *zeal* which becomes the magnitude of the objects that we have in view; and with that *perseverance* which is natural to the human heart, when engaged in the pursuit of what is conceived to be its greatest felicity; “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.”

Actuated by such dispositions of soul, we may say in the exulting strains of the pious Psalmist—“The Lord will hear us in the day of trouble, the name of the God of Jacob will defend us. He will send us help from the sanctuary, and strengthen us out of Zion. He will remember all our offerings, and accept our burnt-sacrifice. He will grant us our heart’s desire, and fulfil all our mind.” And the happy event will be—“We shall rejoice in his salvation, and triumph in the name of the Lord our God.”

Let us, therefore, from what has been now said, be persuaded to have our conversation in heaven; to maintain an habitual intercourse with the Most Highest, by devout meditation, by public and private devotion. Nothing will have a more powerful tendency to purify our whole nature, so as to enable us to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. When Jesus approached the divine glory which appeared on the mount, even *he*

was transfigured before his disciples; his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light; so that they rapturously exclaimed—"Lord, it is good for us to be here!" From intimate communion with God, some of the celestial splendour seemed to be imparted to Moses; from conversing with the great Supreme, his face was made to shine with more than earthly brightness. From every act of holy communion which *we* may hold with the greatest and best of all Beings, some emanations of the divine perfection and glory will beam forth upon our souls; and we shall come down from the mount, from the heights to which we were elevated by prayer, in all respects more assimilated to the pure inhabitants of heaven.

Let us habituate ourselves to this pious exercise, because it opens a source of never-failing consolation in the numberless distresses of human life. *This*, we have heard, was the refuge and strength of David, in all his troubles. However dark and gloomy the storm of adversity may be, which is beating upon your habitations, from the secret chambers of the godly the pious soul looks beyond the surrounding darkness, up to the bright regions of perpetual day. From this pure source of comfort, beams of cheering light dart through the intervening gloom; and the soul is strengthened; it even rejoices with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

If our mortal bodies have too often been made the instruments of sin, let us begin now to devote them entirely to the service of our God. *We*, our whole nature is bought with a price; we are, therefore, directed to serve God in our *bodies*, as well as in our souls, which are his. Let bodily worship be a true

indication of the pious affections which are actuating our souls. Let us bend our knees in humble confession before God, who is awful in majesty, doing wonders. Let us lift up our hands in ardent supplication for that loving-kindness and mercy, by which alone we are rendered happy in time and in eternity.

It has been observed to you, that when the sacrifice was offered, the pious Israelites were engaged in prayer, supposing that at that solemn moment, their petitions would be most effectual in the sight of God. The great sacrifice has been offered for our transgressions: the Lamb of God has been slain to take away the sins of the world: he now liveth to make intercession for us, ever pleading in our behalf the merit of his atoning blood. Let this consideration encourage us to continue instant in prayer. Aided by this powerful intercession, we know that we shall have, if we ask faithfully; we shall find, if we seek diligently. This is the animating language of the holy apostle—"Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." And more especially, we may add, let us frequently draw near to God in the celebration of the holy communion. The sacrifices of the law looked forward to a Redeemer who was to come. The pure offering of bread and wine, the commemorative sacrifice of the Christian, has a retrospect to the Redeemer, who has now offered himself for the sins of mankind. And, at what time, can we suppose our prayers will be more acceptable, than when we are presenting before God the commemoration of that great

sacrifice which was offered for our transgressions by his only-begotten and beloved Son?

Lastly; when we read the pathetic strains in which the Psalmist laments his banishment from the sanctuary; when, even in the present day, we see a neighbouring city, by the afflictive dispensations of Providence, deprived of all the public ordinances of religion; let us learn to entertain a grateful sense of the advantages which *we* enjoy, and to make a due improvement of them. Let us not forget the assembling of ourselves together in the house of God. Let us keep his Sabbaths and reverence his sanctuary. Let it be the main business of our life, to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness in all the methods prescribed by his holy word. Thus, will he be with us, and bless us: he will keep us in our coming in, and our going out, from this time forth for evermore: he will conduct us by his wisdom; and, in due time, crown us with everlasting salvation.

SERMON XXI.

On Scoffing at Religion.

2 PETER iii. 3.

There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.

THERE is nothing, however sacred and venerable, which wicked and presumptuous men may not treat with ridicule and disrespect. Although the Christian religion be in itself a most rational and amiable scheme of duty and of happiness, yet has it, from time to time, sustained the most virulent attacks of ignorance or wilful prejudice; as if it were neither worthy of God, nor beneficial to man; as if it were even a dishonour to our Creator, an enemy to public peace and private felicity.

Wicked practices and licentious principles commonly go together. Men first indulge themselves in sin; and then attempt to palliate their crimes; to weaken or destroy the authority of that religion which condemns their conduct, and threatens them with a future judgment. It may not be amiss, therefore, in the following discourse, to point out some of the causes

of *that scoffing* which, St. Peter says, is to be found among men “walking after their own lusts;” and then to expose the absurdity and impiety of it.

Inattention, or slight and superficial *inquiry*, is one reason why men are so often tempted to *revile* and *scoff* at religion. In their youth, perhaps little regard has been paid to a religious education. As they have advanced in life, and come forward into the world, it has been their ill fortune to fall among men of libertine principles, who, in order to countenance themselves in their sinful behaviour, would wish to undermine and destroy every obligation of virtue and piety. Thus, without examining for themselves; without exercising that reason which God imparted to them to be a light to their paths, they pay an implicit deference to the opinion of their vicious *companions*, and because *others* are so absurd, *they* become *scoffers* also. And thus is our holy religion made the subject of reviling and contempt, from wilful *inattention* and unreasonable *prejudice*: thus is it unjustly represented as the contrivance of self-interested priests and politicians, to keep the multitude in awe, without having any foundation in *reason* and truth, to influence a liberal mind. Whereas, if men would but examine with attention and candour, they would find, that it is supported by the strongest arguments which the nature of the thing will admit of; that it is admirably calculated to promote the *present* felicity of mankind; and, above all, that it opens the most glorious and ravishing prospects of a future and eternal existence. Before judgment is passed, it is but fair to hear what can be said in vindication of the *accused*; and we need not be afraid to submit the Christian system to the severest scrutiny, if

it be conducted with impartiality and candour; conscious that its excellency must come forth more conspicuous from every trial.

Another cause of *scoffing*, is *levity of mind*, and a vain desire of gaining the reputation of eminent sprightliness and *wit*. There are those in the world of such excessive *vanity*, that they are fond of being *singular* on every occasion. And if they would confine this preposterous passion to dress and equipage, and other matters of equal insignificance, it would be comparatively harmless, nor deserve such severe reprehension. But when, for the sake of a *jest*, they would set objects in a ridiculous light, which all around them consider as serious and sacred; when they would strike out new paths in morality and religion; when they will not be satisfied with common sense and plain Scripture; when they will not consent even to go to heaven, if they must go in the beaten track of the vulgar; every friend to true religion and to the real happiness of men, ought to stand forth to correct so vain and mischievous a spirit. For, surely, to banter the idea of a God, and a Providence, and a judgment to come; to attempt to weaken the obligations of virtue, which is a law to all intelligent beings, and to plead for the privilege of dying like a brute, shows the want of a good heart and a sound judgment, as well as a cruel disregard to the dignity and happiness of human nature. If men, to gratify a spirit of vain curiosity, *must* turn aside into new paths, let them amuse themselves with collecting inoffensive fruits and flowers, and not weeds of deadly poison. If it be the height of their ambition to be esteemed persons of wit and ingenuity, let them not

be so vain as to imagine that this end can be accomplished by sacrificing *truth* and *decency*.

Again; occasion is frequently given to unbelievers to *scoff* at religion, from the *wicked actions* of those who call themselves *Christians*. Thus, when the prophet Nathan was sent to David to convince him of his heinous crime; among other charges, it is made a matter of severe reproof—"that by *that* deed he had "given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to *blaspheme*." And St. Paul directs Timothy to insist upon a discreet and virtuous behaviour in his Christian converts, "that they might give none occasion to the adversary to speak *reproachfully*." Religion only so far has its proper effect, as it influences us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. In vain do we call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ, if we keep not his commandments: in vain do we boast of the excellency of Christianity, of the strength and purity of our faith in all its doctrines; "for as the body without the "spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." The *scoffer*, to encourage himself in his own evil ways, reasons in this manner—"There is the man who calls "himself a *Christian*; who boasts that *his* religion is "beyond comparison preferable to all *others*. But "how does this appear? Does he show the beauty "and excellency of it from its influence upon his conduct? He assures us that the precepts of the Gospel "require him to live soberly, and to be temperate in all "things: why then is he so voluptuous, so apt to indulge in chambering and wantonness, so extravagantly fond of the pomps and vanities of this "wicked world? He declares that he is commanded

“ to do to others as he would wish they should do
“ unto *him*; that he is to be just in all his dealings,
“ and ever desirous of overcoming evil with good.
“ Why then is he so violent in his resentments; so
“ ready to take advantage of the necessity of his
“ brother, and grind the face of the poor; so inclinable
“ to defraud, insult, and oppress, whenever he can do
“ it with impunity? He tells us, that in the Holy
“ Scriptures, which are the words of truth, life and
“ immortality are brought to light; that clear and
“ positive assurances are given of a resurrection from
“ the dead, of a future judgment, of glory and honour
“ to the righteous, but tribulation and anguish to those
“ who do evil, and die impenitent. Why then does
“ he live without God in the world, as if both body
“ and soul were to perish together, and *he* never to be
“ called upon to render an account of his actions? He
“ seems to rejoice when he assures us that every pro-
“ vision is now made for the relief of human infirmity,
“ through the intervention of a Saviour; that *his* laws
“ are well calculated to be a complete guide to our
“ actions, his example a perfect pattern for our imita-
“ tion, and his death an atonement for our sins. Why
“ then does he treat this wonderful scheme of mercy
“ with so much disrespect, not even commemorating
“ (agreeably to a positive commandment) that death
“ and passion, upon which he pretends to ground his
“ hopes of salvation?”

Thus are sinners encouraged to persevere in an evil heart of *unbelief*, by the misconduct of those who ought to lead them into the right way, by wholesome advice and a blameless example. And although it is unreasonable and unjust to charge the faults of professing

Christians upon that religion, which, in every part, severely condemns them; yet, we see by this means, offence *do* come, and unhappy is it for those by whom the offence cometh. Be persuaded, therefore, to let your light shine before men—before those who disbelieve and revile—that they may, by your good works, be induced to glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Further; Christians, who in other respects are of a holy and harmless conversation, frequently bring a reproach upon their religion, by disputing with intemperate zeal about forms and ceremonies of little importance. The great and essential doctrines of Christianity are clearly revealed—otherwise the work of revelation would not be complete. And when men, in their excessive warmth to maintain their own side of a controversy, which, whether true or not, cannot possibly affect their everlasting salvation—when men, for this purpose, will lose that *charity* which “beareth all things, and hopeth all things;” that *charity* which is absolutely requisite either to *attain* or *enjoy* the happiness of heaven; the *scoffer* at once absolutely concludes, that even the essential *doctrines* of our religion stand upon the same ground of *uncertainty*, and thus is tempted to reject the *whole* system. Let us be ever ready to give a reason of the hope that is in us. Let us contend with a prudent zeal for the faith that was once delivered to the saints; but while we think that we are vindicating the honour of *Christianity*, let us not lose the temper and spirit of *Christians*.

But lastly; the great reason why so many are tempted to *scoff* at religion is this, *they are pre-determined to persevere in their sins*. The *scoffers* who were

to come in the last days, St. Peter has told us, were—
“men walking after their own lusts.” For this purpose it is, that they strive to get rid of the restraints of religion, that they may indulge the lusts of a wicked heart without check or control. The idea of a merciful, and righteous, and almighty Ruler of the universe, however delightful to the *good man*, is to the wilful and obstinate *sinner* a dreadful consideration. “*The fool* hath said in his heart, There is no God.” He first becomes a fool; he first errs from the ways of religious wisdom; and then, in his heart, wishes there was no God, no righteous Inspector of his actions, no almighty Judge to punish him as his crimes deserve. When persons of this vicious character hear of a religion which severely condemns all unrighteousness of men; which requires purity, and sincerity, and justice, in our thoughts, words, and actions; which expressly assures us of a judgment to come, and which demands attention from its divine authority—when they hear such doctrines as these, what course are they to take? They must either relinquish their vices, for it is vain to strive with Omnipotence; or they will *scoff* at what they call the *inventions of men*, which they may follow or reject, as may best suit their own inclinations. “And this is the condemnation,” says our Saviour, “that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, *because their deeds are evil.*” Not that they are destitute of sufficient knowledge and clear directions to find the way to happiness; but, *their deeds are evil*, and therefore they shut their eyes against the light, and choose to wander on in the dark paths of sin.

These are some of the causes which excite the

scoffers, mentioned in the text, to cast their poisonous arrows. We are now to expose the absurdity and impiety of such behaviour.

We shall first suppose them capable of *sober reflection*; and then let us ask them, whether there be any thing in our holy religion, when properly explained, that is really *ridiculous*? Is there any thing ridiculous in the opinion that this universe, so amazing in its extent, so beautiful in its appearance, so harmonious in all its movements, is the work of some wise and all-powerful Creator? Is it unreasonable to suppose, that he who created all things by the word of his power, still guides and governs his own works by his ever-watchful providence? From the notions which we are led to form of the glorious perfections of such a Being, is there any thing improper in all the offices of piety—in the highest love, reverence, and adoration—in praying to him for his favour, and praising him for his excellent greatness? When men had abused the light of natural reason, and were almost universally sunk into ignorance and abominable delusions, is it absurd to believe that God should send a person into the world to recover them from this lost estate; to revive, and enforce by additional motives, the great duties of natural religion? Is there any thing extravagant in the opinion, that he who came upon this merciful errand, should be holy and harmless in all manner of conversation; that he should work many astonishing, and yet benevolent miracles in proof of his divine commission; that he should publish a clear and comprehensive set of laws for the conduct of our lives—laws founded upon the unchangeable nature of things—with one or two *positive* precepts, (at the same

time,) expressly calculated to strengthen the eternal obligations of morality; and at last, that he should give the highest proof of his integrity, by dying an ignominious death, to atone for the sins of the world; and the strongest assurance of *our* future resurrection, by rising *himself* from the dead? And, after such a representation as this, may we not conclude, that they who can debase themselves so far as to laugh at matters of such infinite importance, equally expose their folly and their wickedness?

There is commonly a distinction made between a *moral* and a *religious* man: and there are those who pretend to be very exact in the discharge of their respective duties to *men*, and yet neglect in themselves, and ridicule in others, every appearance of piety towards *heaven*. But, as there can be no true religion without pure morality; so neither can *he* be called strictly a *moral man*, who is defective in the duties that he owes more immediately to *God*. Do you not call *him* an *immoral* person who expresses no love nor reverence for a *parent*; who is ungrateful to a *friend* and *benefactor*; and disrespectful and disobedient to his lawful *superior*? And is not *he*, therefore, equally chargeable with *immorality*, who expresses no filial affection and respect for the great Father of all; who testifies no gratitude to *him*, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift; and stands not in awe of *his* authority, who created, and will judge the world?

“ And if in these most essential principles and
“ duties of religion, there be nothing *wild* and *extra-*
“ *vagant*; nothing *weak* and *trifling*; nothing, on the
“ contrary, but what is truly *venerable* and *useful*; he
“ that endeavours to make a *jest* of them, must render

“himself *contemptible*; and gives a certain proof
 “either of the weakness of his understanding, or the
 “depravity of his heart.” Should the doctrines of
 Christianity at last prove to be *true*—and the hardiest
 unbeliever will not pretend to say, it is *impossible* they
 should be so—how severe must be the condemnation
 of those who have prostituted their reason and their
 wit to blaspheme their Maker, and defame that religion
 which was sent down from heaven for the everlasting
 good of men!

Let not, therefore, my beloved brethren, the laughter
 of fools ever prevail upon *you* to sacrifice the blessed
 hopes of eternal life. “Be ye steadfast, unmoveable,
 “always abounding in the work of the Lord, and you
 “will find that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”
 With a sincere and a candid mind, endeavour to *learn*
 the will of God; and when you *know* your duty, only
 think yourselves happy while you *do* it. And be
 assured, the more diligently you practise the precepts
 of your religion, the more thoroughly convinced will
 you be of its truth and beauty. Our Saviour has told
 us—“If any man will *do his will*, he shall know of the
 “doctrine, whether it be of God.”

“Be not carried about with every wind of doctrine,
 “by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, where-
 “by they lie in wait to deceive. But as ye have
 “received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:
 “rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the
 “faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with
 “thanksgiving.”

Be diligent in the performance of *all the duties* of
 our religion; those which are purely of a *positive*
 nature—“the tithing of mint, and anise, and cummin;

“ but more especially those which are of *eternal obligation*, judgment, mercy, and faith; for these ought ye to do, and not to leave the others undone. In all things show yourselves patterns of good works, that they which are of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.”

“ God, who in time past spake unto the *fathers* by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto *us* by his Son. And how can we expect to escape, if we neglect so great salvation! How can we suppose that every transgression and disobedience will not receive a just recompense of reward! Let it not be your condemnation, that light is come into the world, and you have loved darkness rather than light. For it had been better for you not to have known the way of righteousness, than after ye *have* known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto you.” Be exemplary in the discharge of all the offices of benevolence and piety, which are enjoined by the word of Christ, and recommended by his perfect example. Pray without ceasing, in the solemn hours of retirement, and in the great congregation assembled for the purpose of public devotion. In every thing give thanks: in seasons of the severest temporal distress, habituate yourselves to rely upon the wise providence of that almighty Being, who can make the affliction of a moment work out an eternal weight of glory. Have your conversation in heaven. Walk by faith, and not by sight; and may the God of all grace make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you; that after you have done his *will*, you may, in due time, receive his promise,

SERMON XXII,

—◆—
On Idolatry.
—◆—

HOSEA xiv. 8.

Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir-tree: from me is thy fruit found.

THE prophecies of Hosea are chiefly directed to the ten tribes of Israel, who, under Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had revolted from the house of David, renounced the religion of their fathers, and fallen into idolatry. The judgments of that God whom they thus despised, immediately pursued their crimes; and these chastisements of heaven are represented by the prophet as producing their due effect.

The tribe of Ephraim was the *head* of the ten revolting tribes, both on account of its numbers, and because within the limits of that tribe, Jeroboam had fixed the seat of his government. In the prophetic language, therefore, the term *Ephraim* is equivalent to *Israel*, as distinguished from Judah and Benjamin, who remained steadfast in their allegiance to their almighty Sovereign, the only living and true God.

In the words of the text, by way of dialogue, the penitence of the idolatrous Israelites, and the consequent mercy and benediction of heaven, are very emphatically expressed: Ephraim declares an utter aversion to his late grievous crime—"What have I to do any more with idols?" God replies—"I have heard him, and observed him"—I have heard the confessions and righteous purposes of the humble penitent, will pardon his offences, and guide and protect him by my merciful providence. Ephraim acknowledges that upon returning to his duty, he soon rose to a happy and flourishing condition—"I am like a green fir-tree." To preserve his humility, God immediately reminds him that his fruitfulness springs entirely from the divine blessing—"From me is thy fruit found"—it is my holy spirit which puts into thy heart good desires: it is my heavenly aid which enables thee to carry them into complete effect.

It will be said, perhaps—"How is this passage of sacred Scripture in any way applicable to us? How are we concerned in the ancient idolatry of the Israelites? We have never renounced our faith in the true God. We despise the absurdity, and abhor the impiety of falling down to worship the calves set up in Dan, or in Bethel."

But, may we not revolt in our affections from the Lord our God? May we not rather serve mammon; and be lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of *him*? Is not covetousness expressly called idolatry? And may we not, in the language of Scripture, be, said, in various other ways, to set up our "idols in our heart?"

In the estimation of religion; in the eye of dispas-

sionate reason, whatever the object may be, which has so far taken possession of our hearts, as to alienate them from the love of God, and from the service which is due to him, that is our idol. Happy is it for those who can be speedily brought to see their error, and to form the good resolution of renouncing it; exclaiming in the penitential language of Ephraim—"What have I to do any more with the vain idols which have seduced my heart, and engrossed that attention which is due to God alone?"

Look round the world, and, even where the light of the Gospel shines, behold the deluded children of men, bowing down before the works of their own hands, worshipping the creature more than the Almighty Creator. Some make power their idol, at whose polluted shrine, how many supplicating victims are sacrificed; what torrents of human blood are seen to flow! Some devote both soul and body to the service of mammon, for the acquisition of whose glittering stores, truth, justice, and mercy, are all abandoned and utterly disregarded. Some spend six days in the week involved in the cares of this world; in solitudes about what they shall eat, and what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be cloathed; and when the day arrives which the Lord has made, which was set apart for the special purpose of calling us off from these anxious pursuits, and elevating our souls to the contemplation of God, and the awful things of eternity; this day also is dissipated in fatal inattention to these momentous subjects; in direct violation of laws both human and divine; in rioting and drunkenness; in boisterous revellings, or in more calm, though not less seducing festivity.

Instead of glorying in this alone, that they understand and know the Lord who exerciseth loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; how many of the wise, and mighty, and rich men of this world, glory only in their wisdom, in their might, or in their riches? How many, when exalted to the summit of prosperity, instead of praising and honouring him who liveth for ever, look round upon the works of their hands, and in the vanity of their hearts exclaim with the Babylonish king—"Have not I built this by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" How many in the hour of adversity, instead of humbly seeking the guidance and protection of a wise and merciful Providence, depart in their heart from the Lord, and trust in man, and make the arm of flesh their principal dependence?

In terms of much severity, the prophets expose the vanity of idolatrous worship, and reprove the folly and ingratitude of their brethren for relying on the aid of false gods in the hour of distress. They who now forget the God that made them, and render not unto him the honour which is due to his holy name; they who now disregard the grace of God offered in the Gospel—the remission of their sins, the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the inheritance of life and glory: they who are now engaged in providing other helps, and are totally devoted to other objects of adoration, will, ere long, find the words of the prophet verified—"They shall be ashamed, and also confounded 'all of them: *they* shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols." When a consciousness of guilt begins to terrify them, will the earthly pleasure which they have so fondly loved, speak peace to their souls? Will the

sweet sounds of music soothe the pangs of remorse; or the soft strains of flattery silence the clamours of a troubled conscience? Will purple and fine linen mitigate the pains of sickness? Will riches form an impenetrable shield against the dart of death; or will all the gold of Ophir bribe him to suspend the blow? Will all the glittering pomps of this world which we now so ardently venerate—will they illuminate the darkness of the grave, or give us confidence before the awful tribunal of God? Alas! on these solemn occasions, the penitential language of inconsiderate mortals will ever be—“Vain helpers are ye all. What have I to do any more with idols? It is only trust in God that affords effectual support: in him alone is *everlasting* strength!”

We abhor the absurdities of idolatry, which offers divine honours to irrational animals, and requires its votaries to fall down and worship a stock or a stone. So far it is well. But there is another important consideration. We must not only renounce error, but openly maintain the truth. We must not only cease to do evil, but also learn to do well. Do we then give unto the true God the honour which is due to his sacred name? Do we love him with all our heart, and with all our strength; and him only do we serve?

I shall not suppose that there is a person present, who is so foolish as to say in his heart—“There is no God; there is no almighty Creator and wise Governor of the universe.” I shall even suppose, that you believe the revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures, respecting the existence, the attributes, and the works of this glorious Being, the great object of

our adoration and praise. But, if we stand in those relations to him which are pointed out in the volume of inspired truth: if we were created by his power, redeemed by his mercy, and must hereafter abide the decisions of his justice; how shall we reconcile a true faith with vicious practices? How shall we be able to acquit many professing Christians of the most glaring absurdity, who seem to live without God in the world; who neglect the ordinances of the Church; whose hearts glow not with devotion, and whose lips are seldom opened either by praise or prayer; who, instead of setting their affections on things above, appear to love the world alone, and the things of it.

What is the meaning of that busy scene which, whithersoever we turn our eyes, presents itself to our view? Are all those immortal creatures so eagerly engaged, for the purpose of obtaining the favour of their Creator, and securing their everlasting welfare? Do they take into consideration the whole term of their existence; and endeavour so to pass through things temporal, that they may finally obtain the joys which are eternal? No; their views are far more limited: their desires are unhappily not so enlarged. Their exertions are almost entirely confined to those objects which concern the comfortable accommodation of this perishing body; they are employed in guarding against external accidents; in securing or recovering health; in protecting and augmenting property: in a word; in making provision merely for the flesh, to fulfil, sometimes the innocent desires, and sometimes the pernicious lusts thereof. Now, if there be a God who rules above; if there is to be a resurrection of the dead, and a life everlasting; is it not an absurdity

equal to that which we reprobate in the idolatrous Israelites, not to be most solicitous, by love, and veneration, and obedience, to obtain the favour of that glorious Being, who is the absolute Arbiter of our condition through eternal ages? What can be a stronger proof of shameful stupidity, of gross aberration from the dictates of reason, than to fear the inconveniences which assail us in this world, and yet to have no dread of him who can destroy both body and soul in hell; to be careful and troubled about many things which relate to our well being for the term of three score years and ten, and yet to make no provision for the support of our felicity through a boundless eternity?

The revolting Israelites most ungratefully renounced the religion of their fathers—a religion which had been imparted to them with signs and wonders—with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm—with every demonstration of divine authority. Christianity is supported by the same incontrovertible evidence, the most stupendous miracles. Infidels would persuade us to abandon this heavenly system; to abjure our Redeemer, and to worship we know not what; the creatures of a corrupted heart, and a bewildered imagination. When one of the primitive martyrs who had spent near a century in the service of his Lord, while the flames were kindling round him, was commanded by a heathen ruler to renounce his religion, he made this ever memorable reply—“Eighty and
“ six years have I now served Christ, and he has never
“ done me the least wrong: How then can I blaspheme
“ my King and my Saviour?” Has he, my brethren, ever done *us* any harm? Did he do us any wrong,

by assuming our nature, and exhibiting a most perfect example of all virtue; by imparting the purest precepts and the most encouraging promises; by dying to atone for our sins, and rising again that he might even now be our merciful Intercessor in heaven? O compassionate Redeemer! should we ever be so ungrateful as to forsake thee, to whom can we go for the words of eternal life? If we reject thy heavenly doctrines, we shall lose the light of truth itself. If we forsake thy friendly guidance, we cannot but wander from the right way in this dreary wilderness!

Christianity, bringing sufficient proof of its divine origin, was founded on the ruins of heathenism: it has now had an establishment in the earth, for near two thousand years: through every revolving age, and in all countries, some of the wisest and best men have been its zealous advocates: wherever it has prevailed, the condition of mankind has been perceptibly meliorated. And shall we now listen to the insidious harangues, and promote the pernicious schemes of those who, merely to answer the purposes of a wicked policy, endeavour to exterminate it from the face of the earth? Were it possible to effect this nefarious design, and to establish another system in its place, (for men will never live without a religion under some form or other,) be assured, the perpetrators of this mischief would soon have too much reason to exclaim with penitential hearts—"What have we to do any more with idols? Let us return unto the Lord our God; and cherish with pure affection that religion which he sent down from heaven for the everlasting good of man!"

We, my brethren, abhor the penicious design of

banishing Christianity from the world: but, are we not justly culpable, for not affording it that cordial reception to which it is clearly entitled, and permitting it to produce its full effect upon the comfort of our hearts, and the conduct of our life? Have we not too often, in the course of our earthly pilgrimage, disregarded the superintending providence of God, and confided in our own wisdom, wealth, or power? On too many occasions, has not the love of the world been in us, more than the love of our heavenly Father?

With deep abasement of soul, let us acknowledge our faults; and God, for Christ's sake, will listen to the first sighs of penitence, and aid the faintest endeavours to reform. To repenting Ephraim he immediately says—"I have heard him, and observed him"—I have heard his expressions of regret for past offences; his full purposes of future amendment; and, sufficient aid shall be afforded on my part, so that holy desires may be perfected by good works.

In this situation, the Christian may well be represented by the beautiful image of a green and flourishing tree planted by the water side, and bringing forth its fruit in due season: he is grateful to the eye of every beholder; he yields comfort to all who approach. In this fair tree, the birds take refuge from the stormy wind and tempest; the weary traveller is refreshed by its shade; and the hungry and thirsty are regaled by its pleasant fruits. And, watered as it continually is by the dews of heaven, these fruits will never fail: they will flourish in every season, till it comes to be transplanted into the heavenly paradise. "From me," saith God, "is thy fruit found."

By the agency of his Holy Spirit, he works in the

hearts of his obedient children ; and while we cherish the sacred influence, its good fruits will be evident in all circumstances of this transient life : every change of situation will produce some new virtue. In prosperity, *love, joy, and peace*, will be conspicuous. Under injuries and other occasions of distress, long-suffering will be called forth into exercise. Our intercourse with others, and particularly with our inferiors, will be regulated by *gentleness and goodness*. Every trust will be discharged with *faith*, that is, with fidelity and constancy. Provocations will be sustained with *meekness* ; and the power of temptation obviated by the exertions of *temperance*. Thus will the fruits of the spirit flourish and abound : they come from God, and are, therefore, inexhaustible. Thus supplied, whatever our temporal condition may be, we are thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Let us, then, from a general review of what has been now said, be persuaded, by the aid of this blessed Spirit, so to regulate the affections of our hearts, that no earthly attachment may interfere with the love of God, and with the performance of any of our religious duties. His favour is better than life : to obtain it, the dictates of reason, the precepts of our religion, and consequently, a regard for our best interests require, that we should never hesitate to relinquish the choicest treasures, or the sweetest gratifications of this world.

If our hearts have hitherto been alienated from God, and fascinated with the delusive pleasures of this transient scene ; let us resolve at once, to have no more to do with idols ; and God will hear and observe our good resolutions : he will encourage the first pious desire :

he will assist the good exertion, however feeble it may be: the small spark will soon be kindled into a bright flame of piety: we shall proceed from strength to strength, till we come to the fulness of the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus.

And, for our comfort and encouragement, let us often reflect, what an amiable object the good Christian is, in the sight of all considerate men, of the holy angels, and even of God himself. Flourishing like the green fir-tree, even now he withstands the summer heat and the wintery storm. But, ere long, he will be removed to a more friendly clime, where no tempests will assail him; where the light of God's countenance will afford perpetual serenity and joy.

Lastly; let us look forward with transport to those heavenly pleasures which will be found at the right hand of God for evermore. The fruit of his Spirit, under all the imperfections of our present state, is very fair and delightful: how much more so will this fruit be found to be in the paradise of God, where the worm of sin can never enter, to sully its beauty, or diminish its sweetness! If love, joy, and peace; meekness, gentleness, and temperance, be productive now of such transcendent delight in the intercourse of men with each other; surely, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can it enter into our hearts to conceive the perfection of that bliss, which will be the portion of the celestial world, the harmony of which is disturbed by no jarring passion; where the slightest sin gains no admittance; from which every species of sorrow is banished for ever. That it may be the great business of our present life, to obtain the ineffable joys of this,

future and heavenly state of existence, may God, of his infinite mercy grant, for Christ's sake, our Lord and Redeemer; to whom be all praise, honour, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXIII.

On the Resemblance between Jehoshua and Jesus.

NUMBERS xiii. 16.

These are the names of the men which Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun, Jehoshua.

WHEN the children of Israel, in their journey through the wilderness, were now approaching the promised land, Moses, by the commandment of the Lord, sent out twelve men who were rulers in their respective tribes, to search the country; to see what the land was, whether it were good or bad; and the people who dwelt therein, whether they were strong or weak, few or many. Among other chiefs who were despatched on this business, was Oshea the son of Nun, of the tribe of Ephraim, whose name on this occasion was changed, no doubt by divine inspiration, to that of *Jehoshua*. He was to be the leader of the people, after the decease of Moses, and under his direction they were to be put in possession of the promised inheritance. The Hebrew word *Joshua*, signifies a *Saviour*. Among the Greeks, *Jesus* was a name of

exactly the same import; as appears by several passages in the New Testament, the greater part of which was originally written in the Grecian language. Joshua, then, was called the *saviour* of the children of Israel; and as, in this respect, he was an eminent type of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is my intention, at this time, to point out the resemblances between them, and then to draw some practical use from the doctrine inculcated in the preceding parts of this discourse.

And, 1st. In his *name*, which was given by immediate direction from heaven, he prefigured the *Saviour* of mankind: he was called *Joshua*, or the *Saviour*; and, in the New Testament, he has received the very appellation of *Jesus*. Thus, St. Stephen, in his apology to the Jews, recounting some of the principal circumstances in the history of their forefathers, reminds his brethren—"that their fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness; which also *they* "that came after, brought in with *Jesus*," meaning Joshua, "into the possession of the Gentiles, whom "God drove out." Thus also St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, maintaining that there is a future and a better rest than that which was provided for the Israelites in the land of Canaan, declares—"If *Jesus*," that is, Joshua, "had given them rest, then would not "God afterwards have spoken of another day, in "which his faithful people will enter into that rest "which remaineth for them." It was the custom in ancient times, when the Divine Providence more immediately interposed in the management of the affairs of his people, to impose names upon the special ministers of God's grace and glory, answerable to the design, which was, by their ministry, to be accom-

plished. The particular providence of God was thus eminently displayed; and whenever those names were mentioned, men were reminded of the divine benefits, and of the duties which these benefits required. Who could hear the name of *Joshua*, without recollecting that he was the *saviour* of his countrymen in their perilous conflicts with the heathen whom they dispossessed? The same divine wisdom used a similar method, in assigning a name to that person, who was sent into the world to achieve the most high and excellent design which was ever undertaken for the glory of God and the good of men. This name was brought by an archangel, and imposed upon our Lord before his nativity—"Thou shalt call his name *Jesus*," said the heavenly messenger, "for he shall *save* his people from their sins." Whenever this name is heard, let it instruct and admonish us; let it raise in us a high sense of God's infinite goodness; let it excite in our hearts love, and gratitude, and veneration. The prophets had repeatedly foretold, that the expected Prince of Peace should speak in righteousness, and be mighty to *save*. To *save* was the chief employment of the Messiah; to purchase, to publish, and to accomplish salvation for his people, was his peculiar work. Let the name of *Jesus*, therefore, be ever grateful to our ears, and fill our hearts with joy. He came to save mankind from their sins and miseries. At the name of *Jesus*, the *Saviour*, let us bow in grateful adoration; let every tongue confess, that he is the Lord of life, to the glory of God the Father!

2dly. We are informed, that while others gave a discouraging representation, Joshua, the son of Nun, in conjunction with one other person, made a favour-

able report of the land which they had been sent to examine. He brought a cluster of the grapes from the brook of Eshcol; he brought also of the pomegranates and of the figs, as specimens of the fertility of the country. "He spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not." This was, indeed, good news of the promised inheritance, which ought to have excited in the people the utmost alacrity in obeying the commands of the Lord.

And, in like manner, the Saviour of mankind has given *us* the most animating representations of the heavenly Canaan, the future inheritance of his faithful people; he has brought good tidings of great joy, which ought to inspire us with resolution to encounter and vanquish all our spiritual adversaries. Before the coming of Christ, the representations which had been given of a future state of rest and felicity, were very imperfect and obscure. *He* brought life and immortality to light. What glorious descriptions does his Gospel contain, of the abundant goodness of God, and of the joys which are prepared in heaven for those who love him! Pardon, grace, and salvation, are offered with an unsparing hand and unlimited mercy. A joy unspeakable and full of glory is set before us—a joy perfect in its kind, and of eternal duration. He has even brought us a foretaste of the bounties of this

heavenly country. The Holy Ghost the Comforter, which he procured for us, now fills the soul of the pious Christian with joy and peace in believing. The sacraments which he instituted, like the grapes of Eshcol, strengthen and refresh us; they are pledges of his never-ceasing love, an earnest of the fulness of that blessed land of promise, where his people shall want no manner of thing that is good. The Lord is with us. Only take heed, that ye rebel not against him, and he will delight in us; he will bring us into this good land; he will give it to us for an everlasting possession.

3dly. Joshua was educated under the immediate inspection of Moses, and *he* perfected what Moses only began: the one instituted laws, the other fixed the people in a situation where those laws could be carried into complete execution. It is said—"That Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him: that the Lord spake unto Joshua, the minister of Moses, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do all that is written in the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee; for then, thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." He was obedient to the heavenly command, and the institutions of Moses were carried into effect.

Thus Jesus, the Saviour of sinners, was born under the law, and complied with all its directions relative to

circumcision, the passover, and other solemnities. He was obedient unto the law for man. He fulfilled all righteousness. In *him*, the ceremonial law had its entire completion. When he said—“*It is finished!*” at that awful declaration, the shadows began to disappear, and the true light to rise upon mankind. A new system was now to be introduced. Old things passed away, and all things became new. Prophecies were fulfilled. Ceremonies were explained. Types were understood. Sacrifices had their complete significance. Moses, the old servant of the Lord, surrendered his authority to Joshua: the legislator was succeeded by the Saviour: the ceremonial law gave place to the pure and ever blessed Gospel. As the Lord hath commanded—“Let not this improved book of the law depart out of our mouths; but let us meditate therein day and night. Let us turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that we may prosper whithersoever we go.”

4thly. Under the conduct of Joshua, the people were put in possession of the promised inheritance. We are informed—“A long time after that the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, when Joshua waxed old and stricken in age, he called for all the elders, and heads, and officers of Israel,” to give them his last charge and benediction. In this solemn transaction, enumerating the divine blessings which had been abundantly poured down upon them, he tells them—“A land has been given you, for which ye did not labour. Ye dwell in cities which ye have not built. Ye do eat of vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not.” And this is the important inference which he draws—

“ Now, therefore, fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth.”

In like manner, the Redeemer of mankind is called, in Holy Scripture—“ The mighty Conqueror; the Captain of our Salvation;” and he is thus addressed in the animated language of the inspired Psalmist—“ Gird thee with thy sword upon thy thigh, O thou most mighty, according to thy worship and renown. Good luck have thou with thine honour: ride on, because of the word of truth, of meekness and righteousness, and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thy arrows are very sharp, and the people shall be subdued unto thee, even in the midst among the king’s enemies. Thy seat, O God, endureth for ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thy name shall be remembered from one generation to another; the people shall give thanks unto thee, world without end.” Sharp was the conflict which the Captain of our Salvation had to sustain, when he engaged in the arduous work of man’s redemption. But, let his glorious name be remembered from one generation to another. Our spiritual adversaries have all been subdued unto him. He vanquished Satan: he triumphed over death: he ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, opening the everlasting doors to all his faithful followers. Happy are the people who have taken *him* for their leader and guide! The lines have fallen to them in pleasant places; yea, they have a goodly heritage. Many mansions of blessedness are provided for them. He that is most mighty, displaying his worship and renown, shall conduct them in safety through the chilling waters of Jordan, the awful gulf of death; he shall

fix them, according to his infinite mercy, in cities which they builded not, even in that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God: in vineyards and oliveyards which they planted not, even under the shadow and among the fruits of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Lastly; God afforded his people, the children of Israel, his special protection; he gave them a prudent and a valiant leader, to conduct them into the goodly heritage which his mercy had provided for them; they were, therefore, on no occasion to be disheartened; nor were they to loiter and sit down in listless indolence and inactivity. The merciful aid and protection of heaven was intended to stimulate their zeal and virtuous exertions. The command was—"Be strong and of good courage. Pass over this Jordan, and go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you. Five of *you* shall chase an hundred; and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; and your enemies shall fall before you."

Christians enjoy the special assistance and protection of their Father who is in heaven; they have a Leader who has proved himself to be invincible; they have an inheritance provided for them by the mere mercy of God. But, notwithstanding all this merciful provision, strenuous exertions are to be made on their part; certain qualifications are absolutely necessary, before they can be placed in quiet possession of the goodly heritage which the Lord their God has promised to them. Their present state is frequently compared to a warfare: at their baptism, they entered into solemn engagements to fight manfully, under the banner of a

crucified Saviour, against the world, the flesh, and the devil: and, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle has particularly described the spiritual armour which is to be employed in the arduous conflict. Let us, then, rise, and be active; and while we are fighting the good fight of faith, let us derive consolation and encouragement from God's merciful declarations, by his servant Joshua, to his ancient people—"If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land and give it us. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us; therefore, fear them not."

Having thus laid before you some of the circumstances, in which Joshua, the captain of the host of Israel, was an eminent type of Jesus, the Saviour of the world; I shall now conclude with a few practical inferences from the doctrine which has been inculcated in the preceding parts of this discourse.

And, 1st. Since a Saviour has been provided for fallen man; since it was so particularly declared by the angel, that his name must be called *Jesus*, because he is to *save* his people from their sins; let us seriously inquire, Whether we have availed ourselves of this great salvation which is now offered to us? Are we saved from the *guilt* of sin, by sincere penitence and faith in the Redeemer? Are we saved from its *power*, by the operations of the Holy Spirit, sanctifying our polluted nature, and causing us to walk in all the ordinances of our holy religion blameless? What strange infatuation would it be, to neglect this great salvation! to spurn the blessing from us! to answer the gracious invitation of our Lord—"Come unto me,

“and be ye saved,” with this presumptuous language; “we are not solicitous to be saved *now* from the destroyer sin; nor, in a *future state*, from misery and death eternal.”

2dly. Let the saviour Joshua take the place of the lawgiver Moses; let the *law* lead us to the *Gospel* of Jesus Christ. “By the law,” says the apostle, “is the knowledge of sin.” Let us, with the deepest humility of heart, compare our defective obedience, with that pure and undefiled law of God, which goes to the regulation of our thoughts, and words, and actions: and, surely, on our bended knees, with hands uplifted in humble supplication, and hearts glowing with gratitude, we shall thank God, for the atoning sacrifice, the Lamb that was slain to take away the sins of the world; we shall bless his holy name, for sending a Messenger from heaven, not to call the *righteous*, but *sinner*s to repentance.

3dly. Let us ever remember, that the Christian life is a life of activity and diligence. We must *do* the will of God, before we can reasonably expect to receive his promise. We must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We must give all diligence to make our calling and election sure. The crown of life is promised to those only who persevere to the end in well-doing.

Lastly; in all the toils and dangers of our journey through the wilderness of this world, let us contemplate, with delightful expectations, that rest which is provided for the people of God. Art thou now hungry and thirsty, weary and faint? Rivers of pleasure are before thee; a fulness of joy is at hand. In this blessed land of promise, sorrow and sighing will be

done away. The oil of gladness will be poured upon the head of God's people; their cup of joy will be full. Loving-kindness and mercy will follow them; and they will dwell in these regions of pure delight for ever and ever.

SERMON XXIV.

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On the Conduct of Nicodemus.
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JOHN iii. 1, 2.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

FROM this passage of sacred Scripture it appears, that the evidence which our Saviour produced of his *divine mission* proved satisfactory, not only to many of the unprejudiced multitude; but, that it also wrought conviction in the minds of some of the haughty and interested Pharisees. Nicodemus, who was one of them, had been convinced that Jesus was a teacher come from God. A contest was thus excited in his bosom between the dread of censure, and the love of truth: he wished to testify his faith to Jesus himself, but he dreaded the scoffs and reproaches of his unbelieving brethren. He therefore comes privately in the night, and addresses him in the words of the text. What effect our Lord's discourse had upon the mind of this timid, though believing Pharisee, we are not

immediately informed; but, it is evident from his subsequent conduct, that he retained his faith, and grew more and more confident in the profession of it. On a future occasion, when the chief priests and Pharisees had sent officers to take Jesus, with an intention to punish him without a legal trial; Nicodemus gently reproved their prejudice, and checked their violence; “he said unto them, Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” And, after the crucifixion of our Lord, *he* is particularly mentioned as uniting with Joseph of Arimathea in paying the last honours to the dead body of their crucified Redeemer; “for he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes; and they took the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes, with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury; and laid it in a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.” All these circumstances combined, present to our view a character, to which I shall, at this time, request your particular attention: from a due contemplation of it, we may derive much instruction, adapted to the situation of Christians in general, but especially of those who move in the more elevated ranks of life, distinguished by wealth and power.

And, 1st. We may observe the unhappy state of that man, whose bosom is agitated with two opposite and contending principles; who is not yet directed by what our Saviour denominates *a single eye*, which fills the whole body with light. Perhaps, perfect consistency and uniformity of conduct is never to be attained by such a weak and complicated creature as man. But still, a settled principle of action may be acquired, which will evidence itself in all the more material

occurrences of life. Though the flesh, (the vicious part of our nature,) lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and *these two* are contrary the one to the other, it is possible, if not to *exterminate* the foe, at least to abate and restrain his power. When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, he had engaged in the contest, but his victory was far from being complete. Either from ocular demonstration, or from credible report, the miracles which had been performed convinced him, that Jesus was a teacher sent from God; and that, therefore, his word deserved the highest reverence and most implicit obedience. But, he was a ruler of the Jews; his conduct would be, therefore, severely scrutinized: that divine Teacher, whose cause he was inclined to espouse, was persecuted by the people, and was particularly odious to his brethren the scribes and Pharisees. Thus, truth called him one way, and worldly interest and honour prompted him to a contrary course. The force of truth, indeed, prevailed—he followed her heavenly direction; but it was with caution and timidity. This is a pitiable state, for, while the mind is thus distracted, there can be no vigorous exertions; and, of course, no high attainments in virtue.

The Gospel has been transmitted down to us, as the word of God revealing a wonderful method of salvation to ignorant and helpless mortals. And if, with Nicodemus, we are convinced, that Jesus was a teacher sent from God; let us receive his instructions with reverence, and obey them with affectionate zeal. Let our professions of fidelity and love be sincere, and our obedience prompt and unreserved. Our Lord will not be satisfied with partial affections and mutilated

services. The kingdom of God is the pearl of great price; to purchase it, we must sell all that we have. The world is not to be gained, if it cannot be acquired, but with the loss of our own souls. The most laudable affections of our hearts are to be restrained, whenever they rise in competition with the love and duty which we owe to God. For thus our divine Teacher has assured us—"He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. But, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength." Let it not be said, that these are severe injunctions. The most worthy objects are certainly entitled to the highest regard. Every tender and benevolent passion was undoubtedly implanted in our bosoms for wise and useful purposes; but still, on all occasions, they should be exerted in subordination to the will of God. *He* deals with us, as with creatures who were formed for *immortality*; and therefore with justice expects, that we should never hesitate to sacrifice things temporal, whenever they would obstruct the attainment of the happiness which is eternal.

2dly. From this passage of sacred history, we may remark, what dangerous temptations worldly wealth and honour throw in our way, to cause us to swerve from the direct path of our duty; or, at least, to embarrass and impede our progress. Had not Nicodemus been a rich and powerful ruler of the Jews, he would not have come to Jesus with such cautious secrecy, and trembling hesitation. Hence, our Lord declares—"That a rich man," that is, one who trusts in riches, "shall hardly enter into the kingdom of

“heaven.” And, it is to be feared, there will be too much reason to acknowledge the justice of this alarming declaration; if we consider the common frailty of human nature, and the general tendency of affluence and power. Is it not a melancholy truth, that the rich and prosperous man, in the multiplicity of the blessings which surrounded him, is too often seduced into a disregard of the bountiful Giver of all good things? that he is so elated with his superiority on earth, as to forget that he is accountable to a Master who is in heaven? that he is so perplexed with the cares, or dissipated with the pleasures of this world, as to make religion merely a secondary concern? Why is the beauty of holiness, the public service of the Church, so frequently disregarded? It is wealth that, in too many instances, seduces and vitiates the hearts of men. Furnished with the means of immoderate gratification, they depart from the practice of the primitive disciples; and eat not their meat, the rich portion which has been imparted to them, with pious gladness, and singleness of heart. They forsake the house of God, of which the Psalmist asserts—“I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.” They absent themselves from the prayers and praises which are offered up in the congregation of the faithful, upon pretences which neither reason nor Scripture will justify; either to complete some worldly business, which might have been sooner settled; or to saunter away an idle hour; or to recruit from the stupifying effects of some late scene of dissipation; or, in compliance with the dictates of impious fashion, to revel at some luxurious entertainment. But, is this a reasonable way of testifying our gratitude

to God, for all the benefits which he has bestowed upon us? Shall the greatest blessings only give occasion to the greatest neglect of our religious duties? Shall they who enjoy most, for which they ought to be thankful, be the most remarkable for ingratitude? Shall *they* who are so situated as to be least in subjection to the will of others, regulate their time in such a manner, as to devote the *smallest* part, or no part at all of it, to the service of Almighty God?

Would those who are fixed in the conspicuous ranks of life, seriously consider the extensive influence of their good example; how decent and ornamental rational piety is, even in the most elevated stations; what countenance they might afford to the weak and needy; what encouragement to those who are appointed to minister at the altar; what advantage to the community at large, by diffusing a spirit of pure and undefiled religion—would the rich and powerful seriously consider these momentous truths; surely, not much persuasion could be necessary to induce them, with uniform attention to keep God's Sabbaths, and to reverence all the ordinances of his sanctuary. They would be ready to exclaim—"My foot standeth right; I will praise the Lord in the congregations. I will hate the assembly of the wicked, and will not sit among the ungodly. I will wash my hands in innocency, O Lord, and so will I go to thine altar: that I may show the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. For I shall be satisfied with the plenteousness of thy house; and thou shalt give me drink of thy pleasures, as out of the river. For with thee is the well of life, and in thy light shall we see light."

3dly. We may observe, that the dread of *singul-*

larity often proves a powerful obstruction to our prosecution of truth, and advancement in piety. Nicodemus, though he found it necessary to act with caution, was enabled, in a great degree, to surmount this dangerous impediment; for, with freedom tempered by discretion, he opposed the whole council of chief priests and Pharisees, when they were about to inflict upon Jesus an arbitrary punishment. In the common concerns of life, it would betray a want of becoming diffidence and modesty, for any individual to set up his own private notions in direct opposition to the established opinions of the world; it would indicate a captious singularity, to deviate from general customs and manners, which are altogether indifferent. But, when the honour of God, the interest of truth, the good of society, the happiness of our immortal souls; in other words, when the great cause of morality and religion is at stake; to be animated is natural; to be zealous is highly commendable; to be *singular* is our indispensable duty. Thus, the Pharisees are severely condemned by our Lord, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God; and the apostles Peter and John, when they were commanded to abandon the profession of the Gospel, made this reply to the unreasonable injunction—"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." In every deliberation, with respect to our conduct in life, the great inquiry is, whether it be right in the sight of God: *his* authority is supreme; and no power can give a dispensation for the infringement of his laws. This is a general principle; an universal rule;

to which, in all important cases, we can have easy access. Is there a dissipated person, who rushes into all the extravagant pomps and vanities of this wicked world? Is there a rich and prosperous man, who, in compliance with pernicious custom, devotes that time to mirth and jollity, which ought to be spent in the solemnities of religion? Is there an amiable youth, who is declining from the path of decency and sobriety, through the solicitations of vicious companions? Let them, for a moment, recollect themselves; and then ask this serious question—"Is it right in the sight of God?" And if God condemn their conduct, of what real importance is the commendation of all mankind? The determinations of the world are often directed by the passion and caprice of the moment; but the judgment of God is according to truth and equity, and they shall sustain the consequences of it, whether happy or miserable, to all eternity. Furnished as we are, with sufficient light from reason and Scripture, no honest and sincere man will be at a loss to determine what course he ought to take, in all the more important points of duty. And, whenever the will of God is clearly notified, let us surrender ourselves to its guidance, without hesitation; let us endeavour to perform it through evil report and good report; let not the solicitations of bad men, nor the seducements of hurtful customs, divert us from the true and perfect way. In thus keeping the commandments, there is a great reward; peace of conscience, and the approbation of heaven.

In the last place; let me exhort you frequently to consider the evidence, upon which the truth of Christianity stands. In opposition to the inveterate

prejudice of education; contrary to all the powerful suggestions of worldly interest and honour, Nicodemus submitted to the force of truth, and acknowledged that Jesus was a teacher sent from God. The pure and holy doctrines inculcated by Christ and his apostles, and which were supported by the evidence of miracles, carried our holy religion in triumph over all opposition, and gave it a permanent establishment in the earth. Yielding to its mighty power, the haughty and stubborn Pharisee is brought to bow at the feet of Jesus, and humbly ask instruction. Are *we* also convinced, that he was a teacher sent from God? And what effect should this conviction have upon our conversation in the world? If Jesus be indeed the Son of God, invested with power from on high; if the Gospel be the word of everlasting truth; if we have been all baptized into the faith of this Gospel, and, from time to time, make public declarations of our belief; if we are well pleased to bear the *name* of Christians; what strange infatuation, what fatal absurdity is it, not to be most solicitous to become so in *reality*? The doctrines of our divine Teacher are more pure and more comprehensive, than any of the systems of ancient philosophy; they afford a remedy, which human wisdom could never have devised, for that inherent depravity, which infects every man who is born into the world; they have the sanction of divine authority, which no merely human scheme of moral instruction could ever claim; they are enforced by the most cogent motives, which can be brought to operate upon reasonable beings. And after all, by disregarding his doctrines, and slighting the proffered

reward, shall we be so infatuated, as to derive no advantage from this heavenly Instructor? Let us employ the most effectual means for obtaining the knowledge of our duty; but, after *learning* the will of God, let us deem ourselves happy only while we *do* it. The Redeemer of mankind, is our sacrifice to make atonement for guilt; our Teacher, to inform our understandings with the most useful knowledge; and our Guide, to lead us into the practice of all virtue. He is gone before to prepare a place for his humble and faithful disciples; that where he is, they may be also. Let us consider the securing of a title to that everlasting inheritance, as the most interesting business of the present life.—To the acquisition of this great object, let all earthly pursuits be made subordinate—in all circumstances, let us act with a single eye to this *one thing needful*.

When the power and wealth, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world throw their allurements in our way, and attempt to seduce our hearts from the love of God and the practice of our duty; let us walk circumspectly, impressed with the steadfast conviction, that it would indeed profit us nothing, to gain the whole world and lose our own souls.

Let us not be afraid to acknowledge, that it is good to be zealously affected always in a good cause. Let this solemn declaration of our Redeemer be deeply impressed upon our hearts—“Whosoever shall be
“ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous
“and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of
“man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of
“his Father, with the holy angels.”

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; and, in due time, we shall obtain the end of it, even the salvation of our souls.

SERMON XXV.

On the open Profession of our Faith in Christ.

MARK viii. 38.

Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.

AND is it possible, that any of the degenerate race of Adam can ungratefully refuse to acknowledge *him*, who with infinite love and condescension came to redeem them from their lost condition? Can man, a frail child of the dust, so totally dependent as he is, and who has been so greatly obliged, ever treat with disregard his most bountiful Benefactor? Can that being, who was originally placed in so low an order of God's intelligent creatures, and who has degraded himself by wilful transgression, be ever so absurd in his pride, as to be ashamed of the Lord of life, the Head of all principality and power, to whom all authority in heaven and earth is now committed, and who will hereafter come in the glory of the almighty

Father, attended by innumerable hosts of the holy angels?

Yet, such is the absurdity and ingratitude of degenerate man, that our Redeemer and Lord has too often received this contemptuous treatment, from the time in which he assumed our nature in the form of a servant, and dwelt among us in great humility, to the present moment, when he is highly exalted, and has a name given unto him, which is above every name. The haughty Jews, the descendants of Abraham, and therefore vainly elated with the notion that they were the peculiar favourites of heaven, were ashamed of a Messiah so meek and lowly, so entirely divested of all earthly pomp and splendour. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. They treated him with the grossest indignity. They denied the Holy One, and the Just. They desired a murderer to be granted unto them, while they killed the Prince of life. And, although he was raised from the dead, of which momentous fact there were many competent and faithful witnesses; although he be now seated on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, invested with supreme dominion over angels and men; still, he is treated with disrespect by too many of his inconsiderate creatures. They are ashamed of *him* and of his words. They perversely attempt to tarnish the lustre of his mighty achievements in accomplishing the redemption of mankind. They insult his divinity, reject his atonement, and deny the operation of his grace. Lamentable rashness of beings who were made for eternity, thus to deny *him*, through whom alone, life and immortality have been brought to light! Pitiable folly of weak and sinful mortals, to be ashamed of *him* who

ruleth among the armies of heaven, and over the inhabitants of the earth; to whom all judgment is committed; whose last decisive sentence will determine the everlasting condition of the whole human race! Let us inquire into the causes of this ingratitude to our best Friend; of this preposterous *shame*, where we ought to cherish a spirit of *exultation*, and even to make our *boast* in God our Redeemer. Let us consider what is implied in the contrary conduct of confessing him before men—before those who are most inclined to revile and oppose; even before an adulterous and sinful generation. Let us seriously reflect upon the solemn obligations under which we lie, not to deny the Lord who bought us; not to be ashamed of that great Head of the Church, whom to know and acknowledge is our truest bliss, our highest glory.

One cause why even those who believe the Gospel, too often act as if they were ashamed of its divine Author, is the dread of incurring the scoffs of a wicked world. Not that bad men can, in their hearts, despise the virtuous and godly. But, as the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom necessarily tends to the subversion of that of Satan, they are prompted by the great adversary of all goodness, to combine in opposing the progress of our holy religion: if they cannot entirely extinguish the heavenly fire, they will at least attempt to diminish the brightness of the flame. Conscious that they are in the path which leads to destruction, like the malevolent master whom they serve, they take a cruel delight in constantly adding to the number of those who wander from the right way. Hence, they persecute the good with unrelenting malignity; industriously throwing obstructions in their

way; exaggerating their infirmities, and distorting their virtues; assaulting them sometimes with the insinuations of ridicule, and sometimes with expressions of direct contempt; and the fatal consequence of these virulent attacks is too often a culpable fear of confessing our faith in Christ, and love of his holy religion.

The desire of obtaining the commendation of those with whom we converse, is a natural propensity of the human mind. But in yielding to this propensity, is it not to be feared that we permit the dread of unjust reproach to control the emotions of a pious heart? We are afraid to let our light shine before men, lest, instead of glorifying our Father who is in heaven, they should only vilify his servants here upon earth. When the wicked are in our sight, to escape the voice of the slanderer and the blasphemer, we keep silence, even from good words, although it be pain and grief to us. We are ashamed of Christ, from an unreasonable deference to the opinions of ungodly men.

Another cause of this timidity among those who in some respects entertain a becoming sense of religious obligation, is the dread of being deemed vain pretenders to an extraordinary degree of piety. Daily experience teaches us, that the best things are liable to be abused to pernicious purposes. The mask of religion is sometimes assumed in order to conceal the base designs of vice. Under the sanctimonious countenance; pathetic ejaculations to heaven, and fervent declarations of inviolable attachment to Christ and his religion, too often lurk vanity and affectation—the very spirit of the ancient Pharisees, all whose pretensions to extraordinary piety were designed merely to be seen

of men. Now, the dread of incurring the imputation of this odious vice, has frequently an undue influence even upon the well disposed mind. To avoid one fault, we too hastily run into the contrary extreme. We suppress the natural expressions of attachment to our Lord and Master, lest we should be called mere formal professors. Because sepulchres are sometimes whited and appear beautiful outward, we are afraid to boast of the goodly structure even of true religion; to solicit the attention of mankind to its attractive colours and just proportions.

Again; many of those who are not entirely destitute of religious impressions, shrink from a candid profession of their faith in Christ, and love of his religion, from an unreasonable fear of *singularity*. Mankind in general are devoted to the business of this life, while the great concerns of eternity are neglected or forgotten. Whithersoever we turn our view, to make provision for the flesh, in order to fulfil the lusts thereof, seems to be the chief incentive to all human thought and industry: one is going to his farm, and another to his merchandise, and the world and the things of it engage their whole affection. These are the common subjects of conversation in almost every company. Professing Christians, instead of building each other up in our most holy faith; instead of mutual exhortation to love and to good works, spend too much of the precious time which might be devoted to religious improvement (like the inhabitants of ancient Athens) in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. Religion is an antiquated subject, which has no novelty for the curious, no amusement for the gay and profligate, no offers of honour to the ambitious, no

subtile schemes by which the love of money may be gratified: hence, it is exploded with too evident marks of disrespect. To oppose the strong current of custom, requires equal fortitude and discretion. We decline the offensive appearance of *singularity*, in openly advocating the cause of religion, amidst a host of lukewarm friends, or avowed adversaries. We seek honour one of another, but disregard the true honour which cometh from God only. We fear those who can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but we fear not him who can destroy both body and soul in hell. We are ashamed of being singularly pious, in opposition to the fashions of a wicked world; but we think not how great will be our abashment and remorse, when the Son of man is ashamed of us before the assembled universe of intelligent beings.

Those whom I have hitherto mentioned as chargeable with the fault condemned in the words of the text, are not entirely uninfluenced by religious sentiments; but, the good inclinations of the heart are not displayed with sufficient alacrity and zeal in their words and actions. There is another class of much more desperate offenders; men who are determined to work all manner of wickedness with greediness, and therefore wish to throw off all the restraints of religion. These seem to be given up to a hardened heart of unbelief. They not only refuse to acknowledge Christ as the Redeemer of sinners, and the Lord of all power and might, but they vilify him as a base impostor: his person they treat with contempt, and his words are represented as idle tales. They refuse to weigh the arguments that are adduced in support of the veracity

of the blessed Gospel. They either hear not at all, or, if they listen, it is under the influence of invincible prejudice. They themselves know nothing of the comforts of religion, and they take a cruel delight in depriving others of this heavenly consolation. They even wish to banish the remembrance of the *name of Jesus* from the face of the earth—that sacred name at which the whole intelligent creation is commanded to bow in token of inward reverence—that name of wonder and of love, the very mention of which may well cause the hearts of guilty mortals to exult with songs of thanksgiving and praise. Unhappy men! how vain are their efforts to destroy that goodly fabrick which is founded on the rock of ages! How destitute is even their *present* condition, of some of the sweetest comforts which man can enjoy on earth! What horrible consternation, what inexpressible wretchedness will overwhelm them at that awful moment, “when the
“ Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his
“ mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on
“ them that know not God, and that obey not the
“ Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be
“ punished with everlasting destruction from the pre-
“ sence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;
“ when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and
“ to be admired in all them that believe.” That we, my brethren, may be numbered among these happy saints; that we may be prepared to participate in this glory and admiration, let nothing ever induce us to be ashamed of our only Lord and best Friend—neither the fear of the scoffers of these last days, nor the apprehension of being called vain pretenders to goodness which we do not possess, nor the dread of singularity

in opposing the unreasonable customs of a thoughtless world: and, above all, let us guard against that evil heart of unbelief, the direct tendency of which is to destroy the present peace and order of mankind, and to throw a gloomy cloud over their brightest prospects of futurity.

If this be your pious determination, let me entreat you to proceed one step farther, and consider what is implied in our not being ashamed of Christ and his holy words, before a sinful generation. It implies, that we not only entertain a sound belief of all the essential articles of our religion; but, that we be ready on every proper occasion to confess that holy name by which we are called. With the heart we believe unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession must be made unto salvation. It implies, that we be impressed with a deep sense of our unworthiness and guilt, and are therefore inclined to acknowledge the necessity of a Mediator: that we be willing to receive Jesus Christ in all the offices which he sustains, in the great work of man's redemption; as our Prophet to instruct, our Priest to make atonement for, and our King to rule his Church: that we be conscious of the very limited nature of our own understandings, and therefore ready to yield a hearty assent to those mysterious doctrines of Christianity which depend upon the veracity of him who knoweth all things, and who cannot deceive: that we pay a due respect to every thing that relates to him—to his word, his sacraments, his ministers, the poorest members of his mystical body the Church, and even the houses that are dedicated to the worship of his sacred name. He is *Christ*, anointed with the oil of gladness for the

performance of his mediatorial duties. From *him* we are denominated *Christians*; and what appellation ought to be deemed more honourable than this? Let us walk worthy of our high vocation. Let us take care, that the holy name by which we are called, be never blasphemed through our imprudence and vice. Let us honour him ourselves; and, from the happy effect which the celebration of the ordinances of his religion has upon our whole deportment, let us win others to enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; to be thankful unto him, and to speak good of his name.

In these irreligious days, when the love of so many among us waxeth cold, it is scarcely necessary to remark, that *discretion* is to be used; zeal is to be tempered by knowledge, in professing our attachment to our Master, and in vindicating the honour of his name. Whatever the virulence of the unbelieving adversary may be, he is not to be repelled with incivility, nor more exasperated by opprobrious language. We are to be courteous, as well as pitiful. We are to be wise as serpents, while we preserve the harmlessness of the dove. There is a season for all things, and a time for every purpose under heaven; and religious admonition is then only to be introduced, when there is a probability of its being productive of the intended good. If we cannot procure *respect* for our Lord, we are never wantonly to provoke *blasphemy*. Pearls are not to be cast before swine, who will trample them under their feet, and then perhaps turn and rend those who have heedlessly thrown the gem away, which might have been reserved for a better purpose.

With these necessary precautions, let us consider, in the last place, the indispensable obligations under which we lie, to retain in all circumstances our fidelity to our Lord and Master, and to be ever ready to vindicate the honour of his holy religion. It is a duty which we owe to ourselves, as we ought never to forfeit our good name: we owe it to our neighbour, whose welfare we are bound to promote by wholesome admonition and good example: and it is a duty which we owe to our Lord, from every view of the relation in which we stand to him.

When we were received into the congregation of Christ's flock by the holy ordinance of baptism, we were signed with the sign of the cross, in token that we should not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner against our spiritual adversaries. This is now the badge of our profession. We cannot renounce it; we cannot be ashamed of Christ and his words, without proving traitors to our righteous Lord; deserters from the honourable service of the great Captain of our salvation.

At this season of open irreligion, there seems to be a *peculiar* obligation incumbent upon all professing Christians, to retain the form of sound words which has been transmitted from Christ and his apostles; to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering. May not the words of our Lord with propriety be adopted? This is an adulterous and sinful generation. Various are the methods employed by infidelity and vice, to make us ashamed of Christ and his religion. They degrade his character, and they deride his doctrines; and shall we not step forth with generous intre-

pidity to support the one, and defend the other? When our friend is basking in the sunshine of wealth and prosperity, it is not so meritorious to adhere to him with unshaken fidelity. But, when his reputation is unjustly traduced, when he sinks into poverty and other temporal misfortunes, then to preserve an inviolable attachment, bespeaks a proper sense of duty, and discloses a truly noble spirit. Let our zeal and activity in maintaining the cause of our Lord, increase in proportion to the violence of the assaults which are made by Arians and Socinians, by the whole host of unbelieving and vicious men, to exterminate Christianity from the face of the earth.

Should we prove so base and ungrateful, as to violate all our sacred engagements, and desert the service of our rightful Lord; let us think in time what will be the fatal consequences. He will hereafter appear in all the splendours of celestial majesty. He will be attended by innumerable hosts of angels. Before him will be collected all the nations of the earth. And are we so lost to every sense of true dignity, as to entertain no wish of being distinguished before this august assembly? Can we endure the dreadful apprehension of being spurned with contempt from his presence, where alone there is fulness of joy? His loving-kindness is better than life, but his displeasure is death to every reasonable expectation of happiness. If it be grateful to be distinguished by the honourable and powerful men of the earth; shall we not be solicitous to obtain *his* favour, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords? If it be pleasing to receive the applauses of the wise; how can we sufficiently prize his commendation, who

is the light of the world; the very wisdom of God? If it be exceedingly painful to every ingenuous mind, to cause a worthy friend to blush for our indecent deportment; how can we be so insensible as to render Christ ashamed of us, whose love to mankind was stronger than death; whose opinions are always guided by truth; whose friendship is of more value, than that of all the wise and the good men upon earth?

Let *us*, then, my brethren, whatever may be the determination of others, resolve, with pious Joshua, to serve the Lord. Let us testify our regard for him in every way by which gratitude can be expressed to a benefactor, affection to a sincere friend, or obedience to a righteous Sovereign. Let magistrates countenance Christianity as the surest support of peace and good order in civil society. Let those who stand in the inferior ranks of the community, show that they wish to promote the general welfare by a steady adherence to the laws of virtue and piety. Let the ministers of religion imitate St. Paul's example, and not be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, knowing that it is the power of God unto salvation, although some of its doctrines be mysterious, and the whole scheme directly tend to humble the pride of fallen man. Let the people express their regard for this heavenly system, by devout attention to all its ordinances; by speaking often one to another on this sublime and consoling subject; being assured, that the Lord will hear; that a book of remembrance will be written before him for them that fear the Lord, and that think frequently upon his holy name. Let us all be heartily convinced, and let us act under that conviction, that if Christ, when he comes to judgment, shall have

cause to be ashamed of us, it is the grossest folly and presumption for the worldly wise man to glory in his wisdom, or the mighty man in his might, or the rich man in his riches. For, it would eventually profit us nothing to possess the kingdoms of the earth and all the glory of them, unless we have secured *his* approbation, who can bestow salvation on our souls. That we may so run the way of our Lord's commandments, as hereafter to obtain his precious promises, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits and mediation of the same compassionate Redeemer; to whom be all praise, honour, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXVI.

On the Character of Barzillai.

2 SAMUEL xix. 39.

And all the people went over Jordan. And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place.

THE sacred historian is here giving an account of the return of king David to Jerusalem, after he had been expelled, for a season, from the seat of his government, by the insurrection of his son Absalom. In the hour of his distress, when many of his most obliged friends had deserted him, and were persecuting him even unto death, Barzillai the Gileadite remained firm in his attachment, entertained him in his exile with great hospitality, and treated him with every mark of affectionate respect. When prosperity began once more to smile upon him, David wishes to compensate the favours which he had received, and to make his disinterested friend a more intimate partaker of his joy—"Come thou over with me," says the grateful monarch, "and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem." The good old man recommends his

son to the attention of his royal master ; but, for *himself*, modestly declines the proffered kindness. So far as duty and respect required, he was ready to go ; but, the world and its enjoyments were, to him, matters of little worth and significance—"Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king ; and then, let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and my mother." His request was complied with, and he was dismissed with the strongest testimonies of gratitude and respect ; "for the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him ; and he returned unto his own place."

The most effectual mode of conveying religious instruction is, by proposing examples drawn from real life. In this way, moral characters may be delineated with the utmost accuracy, the springs of human action may be clearly unfolded, and all the secret windings of the heart discovered and traced. Virtue and vice, in this manner, seem to be brought nearer to our view ; and from a more distinct prospect of the beauty of the one, and deformity of the other, our love and abhorrence are proportionably increased. Although Jesus Christ has afforded a *spotless example*, by contemplating which, the Christian's emulation may be continually excited ; we are, nevertheless, commanded, in general terms—"To be followers of all those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." The only-begotten Son of God was a personage of a very superior nature ; favoured with extraordinary communications from the great source of all perfection ; entirely without sin, and full of grace and truth. Since the example which he has left us can never be

completely imitated by any imperfect mortal, we are too apt to invent excuses for our voluntary defects; and, instead of aspiring to the nearest resemblance, sit down contented with an inferior degree of virtue: what ought to be a reason for an unremitting progression in all goodness, is made an argument for our stopping in the midst of our career. But when we see persons in the ordinary situations of human life, who are blessed with no superior advantages, either of native excellence or adventitious instruction, by the mere force of incessant application, rising to eminence in wisdom and virtue; every excuse is obviated; our deficiencies stand justly condemned; for it is evident that our inferiority proceeds from wilful negligence, and not unavoidable necessity. Long before the Sun of righteousness arose upon mankind; before the way, the truth, and the life, were clearly revealed; under the obscure and imperfect institution of Moses, many instances of piety and charity were exhibited, which may cause *us* to blush who enjoy the superior privileges conveyed by the glorious Gospel. Of several of these characters, St. Paul has made honourable mention in his Epistle to the Hebrews. That of the good old Barzillai is, indeed, omitted. It is, nevertheless, worthy of attention, and deserves higher commendation than it has commonly received. To set this amiable character in such a point of light, as to attract your esteem and engage your imitation, shall be my endeavour in the following discourse.

And, in the execution of what is here proposed, I shall comply with the immediate requisitions of our Church, who, on this day, recommends the duty of *brotherly love* to our particular regard. After having

conducted our meditations through the various stages of our Redeemer's humiliation and exaltation to glory, she instructed us to conclude, on the last Sunday, one period of our ecclesiastical year in the public profession of a true faith—in acknowledging the glory of the eternal Trinity. We are now to show the purity of our faith, by the goodness of our works. We are now to proceed from meditations on the various scenes of our Saviour's life and sufferings, to the imitation of his virtues. And, as condescension and pity were the predominant dispositions of his heart; as all the law and the prophets are comprised in the two commandments, to love God with all our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves; you observe, the Church has called your devout attention to these duties, by selecting the Epistle and Gospel which were read to you in the course of her service for this day. And can you hear the beloved disciple declare—"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins"—Can you hear this affecting declaration, and not be inclined to follow him in the inference which he draws from it—"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another?" Can you listen to the awful description of the misery to which the luxurious and unfeeling rich man was reduced, and not tremble lest the indulgence of a similar disposition should bring you also down to the same place of torment? Let our hearts expand with genuine charity to every afflicted Lazarus—to every brother who stands in need of the offices of compassion. Let us diligently cultivate the blessed fruits of the spirit, by which we are to testify our qualifications for the enjoyment of the felicity of

heaven. And, for this purpose, let us be encouraged by the good example of those who now inherit the promises in the heavenly mansions; whose advantages were not so great as those which *we* enjoy, and consequently whose virtues we ought at least to equal, if not to surpass. Let the courtesy and pity of the good Barzillai excite our emulation, that they may not hereafter be produced against us, as a just occasion of shame and reproach. Listen, then, with due respect, to the delineation of this amiable character; and, to every person present, let me address this serious exhortation—"As opportunities arise in the changes and chances of this mortal life, go, and do thou likewise."

I shall, first, call your attention to a virtue seldom to be met with, in the intercourse which man holds with man, in this selfish world; and that is, his unchangeable affection and disinterested liberality to a friend in distress. When David was suddenly thrown from his elevated situation, and involved in deep and unexpected calamity; when Shimei and others were pursuing him with unrelenting malevolence; when even his own son was conspiring with his ungrateful foes to deprive him of his honours and his life; nothing could shake the fidelity of Barzillai. His conduct was the very reverse of that of mankind in general; it was reserved to those who are in prosperity, but most zealous in offers of assistance to those who stand most in need of aid. When David was invested with power, and surrounded with all that affluence could procure, we hear nothing of this faithful friend—no proffers of needless succour, no ardent declarations of inviolable attachment, no humble strains of soothing

adulation. But, when the same person was reduced to distress, and was wandering in want of all things in the wilderness of Mahanaim, he then steps forth to distinguish himself by providing sustenance for David, while he lay in that destitute and perilous condition.

The world is commonly inclined to give, only to those who can give as much again. When Job wanted the consolations of friendship to alleviate his complicated distresses, his friends had either entirely deserted him, or, if they drew near, it was only to aggravate his calamities by their unjust reproaches. But, we are informed—"When the Lord turned the captivity of Job, and blessed his latter end more than his beginning; then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him. Every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an ear-ring of gold." When he wanted no *pity*, they were ready to *bemoan* him. When his *sorrows* were dissipated, they came to *comfort* him. When his *wealth* was restored, they offered him *money*. Actuated by interested motives alone, they did eat bread with him, only because his board could now be abundantly furnished; and they zealously offer him all kinds of assistance, only because he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen. Such is the selfishness, the obduracy, and base ingratitude too often to be met with on this busy stage of human affairs! Let a bare representation of such unworthy deportment excite your abhorrence. Let the words of

consolation flow, and the act of benevolence be displayed at the moment when they will do most good to *others*, and not when it is supposed they will be most productive of temporal advantage to *ourselves*. Is thy friend unjustly censured? Vindicate him. Is he poor? Assist him. Is he sorrowful? Endeavour to console him. Let the stream of benevolence be conducted through the *dry and parched* ground; the verdant meadow wants no extraordinary assistance. This sentiment is thus forcibly expressed in the figurative language of our divine Teacher—"When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." By such liberal and exalted motives was Barzillai actuated; and as the example is rare, it ought to be the more highly commended.

2dly. The next thing which deserves our attention, in this amiable character, is his indifference to the vain amusements and fleeting gratifications of the world. He discloses the prevailing sentiments of his heart in this pathetic and very impressive language—"I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing-men or singing-women? Wherefore, then, should thy servant be yet a burden unto my Lord the King?"

The sensualist will petulantly observe—"Well may

“ he disparage pleasures of this sort, when the infir-
“ mities of old age have thus overwhelmed him. No
“ wonder, that he sighs for calmness and retirement,
“ when the senses have thus become dull, and when
“ every power of life and enjoyment is almost entirely
“ exhausted.” But, do we never see the frivolous
amusements and heedless dissipation which are most
prevalent in *youth*, struggling hard to retain their
influence even in the decrepitude of *age*? Do we
never see the old fondly cherishing their early habits;
sometimes amassing wealth till they stumble into the
grave; sometimes indecently attempting with trem-
bling hands to crown their hoary heads with the
garlands of boisterous festivity, quite insensible to
the many warnings which nature has afforded them of
the brevity of human life, and of the necessity of retire-
ing in time, and with becoming dignity, from the fan-
tastic chace of earthly pleasure? If this be too often
the case, let us not hesitate to hold up in the most
favourable point of view, the deportment of the vene-
rable friend of David. The historian informs us, that
he was a very great man. His wealth was not col-
lected merely for the satisfaction of adding store to
store; but, for the purpose of divine benevolence. It
was not the pool of stagnated waters, but the flowing
stream which refreshed and fertilized all the neighbour-
ing country. It was used as the instrument to pro-
cure rational entertainment, and not dissipated in riot
and debauchery, disgraceful in all, but in the aged
peculiarly disgusting. He was just retiring from the
world, and he murmurs not that the moment of depar-
ture is at hand; for he is prepared to retreat with dig-
nity, and can then rest in peace. Let the young look

forward, in time, to this interesting period of human life. Let them remember, that a virtuous youth is the best mode of providing relief for the infirmities of old age; and that whether our continuance here be of a longer or shorter date, *to learn to die well* is the great business of man. Let the words of the wise king of Israel sink deep into their hearts—"Truly, the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet, let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many—all that cometh is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

3dly. We may observe, that amidst all the infirmities to which our mortal bodies are subject, the affections of the soul may remain vigorous and unimpaired. For *himself*, Barzillai expressed no concern; but, at the same time, testified a becoming solicitude for the welfare of his son. The wise man hath observed—"That love is strong as death: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it." The love of parents for their offspring is a natural passion, emitting, indeed, a most vehement flame, not to be quenched by floods of care and pain, nor drowned in the deep gulf of mortality and death. When God would express his loving-kindness to man in the most emphatical manner, he employs such allusions as these—"Like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful

“unto them that fear him. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.” If this be a passion so predominant in the human breast, I shall not suppose that there is a parent present, who can do so much violence to the dictates of nature, as not to imitate the example of Barzillai, and express, on every proper occasion, a deep concern for the future welfare of his child. How odious in the sight of God must those persons be, who counteract these native propensities of their hearts; bringing children into the world, and then leaving them, like the ostrich in the wilderness, to shift for themselves; not only neglecting their education, but corrupting their tender hearts by the most pernicious of all bad examples, even that of a profligate parent! Such persons are enemies to their present comfort, as well as future felicity. Amidst the pains and infirmities of old age, when the silver cord of life is just ready to be broken; what a strong support, what a copious source of consolation must it be, to behold children flourishing in temperance, industry, wisdom, and piety; to recollect, that by parental instruction and example they have been trained up to these virtues; and that thus a foundation has been laid for their well-being through a blessed eternity! For, in the indulgence of natural affection, let it ever be impressed upon the minds of parents, that their children are destined for immortality. If for the advancement of their temporal welfare, you will submit to rise early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness; surely, you ought to be equally solicitous to provide for them an everlasting good, by bringing

them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It is necessary to enjoin this great duty with peculiar earnestness, at a season when licentious principles of every sort are so industriously propagated. First impressions are not easily erased. Much of the future happiness and utility of life depends upon the good direction which is given to the youthful mind. Let the ground be occupied by salutary plants; for, otherwise it will most assuredly be overrun with noxious weeds. Let the heart be guarded against the inroads of infidelity and vice, by instilling good principles, and forming early habits of virtue and piety.

The last observation which I shall make, on the subject now before us, is this; nothing can show the social inclinations of the human heart in a stronger point of light, than that desire of mingling even our ashes with those of persons whom, when living, we loved and respected. "Let thy servant," says old Barzillai, "let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother." And let this social disposition be indulged; for the benevolence of the good man's soul will find objects upon which to exercise itself to all eternity. When we consider death not as the total dissolution of our nature, but only as a translation to a new state of existence, what an animating and glorious prospect opens before us—the prospect of admission into the society of all the wise and good of all preceding ages! It was this expectation which, on the near approach of death, cheered the hearts of many wise and good men even in the heathen world. "O happy day," exclaims the

Roman orator and philosopher, “ when I shall escape
“ from the turbulence and pollutions of this world,
“ and go to that divine assembly of the spirits of good
“ men !” And shall not the Christian, to whom life and
immortality have been brought to light, be animated
by views equally noble and exalted? Let the disci-
ples of Jesus Christ love and practise their religion in
truth and sincerity, and they will, ere long, be removed
to a dignified society in the regions of perfect bliss—
to the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly
fellowship of the prophets, and the noble army of
martyrs; to a more intimate communion with Jesus
the Mediator of the new covenant, and to a nearer view
of the glory of God the Judge of all. Let these ex-
pectations lead us to holiness in all manner of conver-
sation: let them prompt all those who are Christians
by profession, to cherish the same hope of their
heavenly calling; to hold the faith in unity of spirit,
and in the bond of peace; so that they may be qualified
for admission into those blessed mansions, where love,
joy, and peace, will reign without interruption for
ever.

The observations which have now been made,
naturally suggest, in the conclusion, a few words of
affectionate exhortation.

From every example recorded in sacred history, let
us draw some lesson of useful instruction: let us read
with a constant application to ourselves—to our own
dispositions and circumstances in life. Let the com-
mon infirmities of human nature, which are there
pourtrayed, lead us to deplore the general depravity of
mankind. Let the virtues which are there recom-

mended, kindle in our bosoms a flame of emulation; and let the vices which are there exposed, warn us of the dangers that we ought to shun.

To cheer the barren wilderness through which we are now passing, let our heart be a fountain of benevolence, copious and pure, ready to overflow in every direction to all who stand in need of refreshment—to friends, and children, and dependents of every description; comforting the living, and cherishing a grateful remembrance of the dead.

Let us not, in our daily intercourse with mankind, assiduously court and flatter the prosperous, and basely desert the unfortunate; but let our kind attentions be chiefly directed to that quarter, where they will be received with most gratitude, and be productive of most advantage. And, in our religious pursuits, let us be ever ready to take up the cross and follow our Master. Whether he lead us to mount Tabor, the scene of his glorious transfiguration; or to Calvary, the place of his ignominious crucifixion; infinite wisdom and mercy will make all things work together for good to those who love and obey him.

To facilitate the work of heavenly benevolence; that we may be enabled, by the help of divine grace, to please God by keeping his commandments, let us studiously moderate our attachment to this wicked world and its seducing enjoyments. If the silver cord of life be not prematurely broken by some unexpected accident or violent disease; in the common course of nature, the evil days are fast approaching, when the world will lose its fascinating charm. When the sweetest notes of harmony will no longer afford delight—we shall hear no more the voice of singing-men and singing-

women: when the choicest luxuries will become insipid—we shall taste no more what we eat, or what we drink. And how completely wretched must be the condition of that man who has acquired no relish for spiritual enjoyments, when the earth, with all its delusive pleasures, is just ready to forsake him; who has made no provision for futurity, although he be now just launching forth into an awful eternity!

Let us maintain *the communion of saints*, in the full extent of the meaning of that expression. With respect to one part of the Church of Christ, they have passed the dreary valley of the shadow of death; their trials are over; they have entered into their rest. Let our hopes ascend. Let our affections be frequently wafted towards those who have died in the Lord, and have received the end of their faith. Let us so follow their good examples, that with them, we may be partakers of the heavenly kingdom. Let the pious dispositions of our souls be habitually breathed forth in the fervent aspirations of the devout Psalmist—“My soul hath a longing desire to enter into the courts of the living God: when shall I come and appear before him!”

SERMON XXVII.

On the Exaltation of Christ.

PSALM cx. 1.

The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I
make thine enemies thy footstool.

THOUGH Christ is said to have brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel; and by the miracles which he wrought during his abode on earth, and other concurring circumstances, demonstrated himself to be the Son of God with power; yet we find, that the glory of the Messiah was, in some degree, manifested to the fathers, before he took our nature upon him, and came and dwelt among us. Several of the prophets appear to have entertained clear and strong conceptions of his excellent majesty and greatness. But more especially *Isaiah*, who represents his humiliation on earth in very tender and pathetic strains; and also displays great elegance and energy of language in describing the splendours of his eternal kingdom. “His name shall be called Wonderful, “Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, “the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government there shall be no end, upon the throne of

“ David, to order, and to establish it with judgment, and with justice for ever.” It is true, these splendid descriptions of the Messiah were misunderstood by the people in general, who from thence were led to expect a mighty Conqueror to rescue them from the power of their temporal enemies who, at the time of Christ’s coming, tyrannized over them. The Pharisees, the most learned of the Jewish doctors, seem to have laboured under the same mistake. Our Saviour, in one of his discourses, to prove his divine mission, quotes the words of the text—“ Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord; saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his Son?” The Pharisees were not able to resolve the question. But the more enlightened Christian may answer—“ Christ is the Lord, even of David himself, being God over all blessed for evermore;” and yet, in his *human nature*, which was united with the *divine*, he is David’s *Son*, descended from *him*, and born in the same tribe, the tribe of Judah.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, maintaining the superiority of Christ above all *created* beings, even the most exalted angels in glory, introduces the text to corroborate his argument; “ But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?” The use, therefore, which I shall make of these words, will be to show, in what manner Christ is exalted to be

Head over all things to his Church; and who those enemies are that must be subdued beneath his feet.

He is said to be seated at the *right hand of God*; by which we are to understand the great degree of *power* to which he is exalted. Thus he himself asserts—“ Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand
“ of the *power* of God.” Jesus, who was born in the weakness of our humanity, and while a child, was obedient to earthly parents—who patiently endured the severest pains and indignities which the malevolence of man could inflict—“ This same person, we are assured,
“ is now exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on
“ high, having all power in heaven and in earth com-
“ mitted to his hands.”

By this expression we are also to understand, that Christ is advanced to superior *honour*, correspondent to his great *power*. We read in the book of Kings—“ That when Bathsheba went to make a request of her
“ son Solomon, the king rose up to meet her, and
“ bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne;
“ and caused a seat to be set for the king’s mother, and
“ *she sat on his right hand.*” Thus God, though he is a Spirit, and hath no body, nor parts of a body, in condescension to our weak apprehensions, is represented as seating his Son there. Though he took upon himself the form of a servant, and descended to the most humble offices of humanity; yet we see Jesus, who, in his human nature, was made a little lower than the angels, crowned with *glory and honour*—exalted above every name that is named; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.

But further; we are informed—“ That in the pre-
“ sence of God there is fulness of joy, and at his *right*

“*hand* there are pleasures for evermore.” Now this may be said to be the seat of Christ, as he is raised to a state of the most perfect *felicity*, the reward of his sufferings on earth. Thus situated, he is the channel through which the bounties of heaven are conveyed to men below. As we are taught—“That every good and perfect gift which comes from the Father of lights, comes to us through the mediation of his Son Jesus Christ.”

Elevated as he now is to the summit of power, honour, and felicity, let us rest assured, that the words of the text will be verified in our blessed Lord and Saviour; and that every enemy will be *made his footstool*, who denies his authority, or refuses his dominion.

This expression, His enemies shall be *made his footstool*, alludes to the custom of eastern conquerors, who, in order to show the abject condition to which their captives were reduced, placed their feet upon their necks. Thus we find that Joshua, after his conquest “of the five kings of the Amorites, called for all the men of Israel, and said unto the captains of the men of war, Come near, and put your feet upon the necks of these kings; and they came near, and put their feet upon them.”

It is true, the enemies of our blessed Lord, and of his holy religion, are not always punished in this world, according to their deserts. But yet, as righteousness necessarily exalteth a nation; and sin, in the common course of things, must eventually be the disgrace and ruin of any people; so it has sometimes happened, that God has made bare his arm to inflict upon his foes an immediate punishment, in a more open and extraor-

dinary manner. For the truth of this assertion, we need only have recourse to the history of the Jews. They were our Saviour's first and most implacable enemies. They treated his person, his disciples, and his doctrine, with the utmost indignity and contempt. And as they were eminently obstinate and perverse, so were they chastised with peculiar severity. When our Saviour foretold the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem, he declared—"That then should be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to that time; no, nor ever shall be." That this prophecy was exactly fulfilled, an historian of their own has fully informed us. The page of history does not furnish us with an account of more complicated, or more severe calamities, than those which overwhelmed this stubborn and rebellious people. *Without*, a conquering enemy, like a devouring flame, spread desolation over the face of a country, which before had flowed with milk and honey. *Within* the walls of Jerusalem, as if a foreign foe was not the cause of sufficient distress, civil faction, tumult, and confusion universally prevailed. Brother was armed against brother, and the most pressing famine preyed upon them all. When they were, at length, brought into a state of captivity, thousands were even then destroyed, while the survivors were dispersed as slaves into every quarter of the earth. And to this day they remain a standing monument of the truth of our Lord's predictions, and the power of God's avenging justice.

But as the kingdom of Christ is said to be not of *this world*, the enemies over whom he is chiefly to exercise his power, are of a *spiritual*, and not a *temporal*

nature. Immediately upon the fall of our first parents, it was promised—"The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head"—signifying that, in due time, a person was to be born among men, to subdue the power of that evil spirit who had seduced Adam and Eve into disobedience to the command of God. This promise, without doubt, must have given hope and encouragement to the ancient patriarchs; till the prophets more explicitly declared the nature of his office, and the season of his coming. But when the fulness of time was come, and God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, then did the power of Satan receive the blow that had been predicted. By the purity and plainness of his doctrines, he dispelled the cloud of error which involved the world—by the perfect holiness of his life, he paid that complete obedience which the law demanded—by his sufferings and death, he made an atonement to the divine Justice for the guilt of men—and by his ascension into heaven, he is become our Intercessor; so that our prayers may be accepted; grace may be obtained to help in every time of need; to conquer the depravities of our nature; to sanctify us in body and spirit; and make us fit for the enjoyment of heavenly happiness.

For another enemy that must be brought to bow before the authority of Christ, is *sin*, the work of the devil, who was at first the author, and is now the encourager of it. Imperfection will doubtless cleave to the best of men; but, although sin may not be entirely subdued, it is the prevailing bent and inclination of their hearts, to bring it more and more into subjection—to be more holy—more assimilated to the moral perfections of the Deity. Nor is it an arbitrary appoint-

ment of our Maker, that without holiness no man can see the Lord. Light and darkness, things of directly contrary qualities, can never meet in amicable unity. If the habits which we have contracted here, are to remain with us hereafter, where shall polluted iniquity appear? for into heaven no unclean thing can enter. Whither shall the blasphemer of God's name, and the despiser of his worship go? for in heaven it is one of the employments of the happy inhabitants to praise and magnify his name for ever.

As by *man*, through the suggestions of Satan, sin was introduced into this our world; so by *sin* came death. But as in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive. In the sincere and humble Christian, the sting of death is already taken away. He contemplates his latter end without any alarming apprehensions; and sometimes can even rejoice at the prospect of putting off this mortal, that he may gain immortality. The just and the unjust pay alike the debt of nature, and sink together in the grave; but at the last day, when the trump of God shall sound, then shall they who sleep in the dust come forth; and, as St. Paul has said, the *last enemy*, which is *death*, be for ever destroyed. We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God, and then shall be brought to pass the saying which is written, *Death* is swallowed up in victory! Oh death! where is thy sting? Oh grave! where is thy victory? The wicked shall go away into everlasting misery. The righteous will shine forth as the morning, and live and rejoice for ever—placed in a state as permanent as it is delightful, where Satan can no longer assault them, nor sin distress them, nor death put a period to their joys.

When we reflect upon this wonderful work of redemption through Jesus Christ, we must be struck with reverence and astonishment. What could be better suited to the state of weak and depraved mortals? In your endeavours to attain salvation, he is all that you want. For your ignorance, there is a wise Instructor; for your weakness, there is a mighty Conqueror; for your sins, there is a merciful Intercessor. He is appointed the Head over all things for his Church. But always remember, that it would be the highest absurdity to call yourselves members of his mystical body, while by sin you separate yourselves from the Head; or subjects of his spiritual kingdom, while you are aiding the designs of those, who oppose *his* power, and wish to prevent *your* happiness. At your baptism you were engaged “to fight manfully “under the banner of Christ, against sin, the world, “and the devil; and to continue his faithful soldiers “and servants, to the end of your lives.” And it is only while you are endeavouring to fulfil these promises, that you have a right to claim his assistance and protection.

Many are the difficulties with which the Christian is compelled to struggle, and the enemies are not weak whom he is doomed to encounter. But if we have a Lord and Saviour exalted to the right hand of God, and clothed with irresistible power, of whom should we be afraid? However trying may be our distresses—however sharp may be our conflicts, we are assured, that we *may* come off more than conquerors, through him that loveth us. And let this consideration prompt us, at all times, to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might—to go on from strength to strength,

till we are translated from this state of suffering, to a kingdom of glory.

When the disciples began to propagate the Gospel through the earth, they were treated with scorn merely on account of their profession—the name of *Christian* was deemed ignominious. But, notwithstanding this was their unhappy condition, as they had seen their Lord and Master pass through reviling and contempt, rise from the grave, and go up into heaven with great pomp and glory; the expectation of becoming partakers in this glory, had a powerful influence in supporting them under all the disgraces and reproaches which the world threw upon them. Let the same motives animate us. What though the lowly Christian may descend to many offices of kindness, which foolish pride will not submit to: what though he may pass through the vale of life, depressed by poverty, unknown to the rich and flourishing, and despised by the vain and insolent—in the last awful day, when all the superficial ornaments of life shall have fallen off for ever, then, if he is adorned with resignation and piety, with meekness and charity, among innumerable multitudes his Saviour will discover him, and distinguish him with peculiar honours. It was to men of this sort that he once declared—“I go to prepare a place for you. “Where I am, ye shall be also to behold my glory. “The glory which my Father gave to *me*, will I also “give unto you.”

And lastly; since our Lord is raised to a state, not only of power and glory, but also of perfect *happiness*; and since he has invited all to come unto him, and he will give rest unto their souls; let us not be so inconsiderate and stupid, as to disregard his invitation, and

reject the proffers of bliss. Sad experience teaches us, that *here* we must expect tribulation. Then let *immortal creatures* look forward, be of good cheer, and prepare for joys that will never die nor decay! If your Saviour is so highly exalted, learn to reverence and adore him. If his incorrigible enemies have sometimes been punished with great severity; be so sincerely interested in the prosperity of his holy Church, that you may not, by your iniquities, provoke him to remove our candlestick out of its place. If we must submit at last to the will of God, either in mercy or in wrath, let us begin at once to beseech him to work in us all the good pleasure of his will. In our present state of probation, God sends forth his rain, and pours out numberless other blessings indiscriminately upon the just and the unjust. But a time is fast approaching, when a terrible distinction will be made. “Woe unto the wicked, for it shall be ill with *him*; for the reward of his hands shall be given him. But say ye to the righteous, It shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.” While the wicked are dragged reluctantly before the throne of their Judge; and call to the mountains to cover them, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his Majesty; the righteous shall approach with joy, and with songs of deliverance—for now the prize of their high calling is at hand—now they obtain the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls.

SERMON XXVIII.

On the Laws of God.

PSALM cxix. 18.

Open thou mine eyes ; that I may see the wondrous things of thy law.

IT is the intention of the royal Psalmist in this psalm, to set forth, by a rich variety of expression, the many excellent properties of the divine law. He declares that it is applicable to mankind in all conditions of human life—that it is good to direct the erroneous, to stimulate the indolent, to alarm the wicked, and to encourage the virtuous. But however expressive his language may be, he nevertheless intimates that he cannot thoroughly *comprehend*, much less sufficiently *declare*, the wisdom of the Deity in his dealings with the children of men. Impressed with a proper sense of the weakness of the human understanding, and conscious of the native reluctance of the heart of man, when impelled to the knowledge and to the practice of his duty; he calls upon God for divine illumination and spiritual aid: panting for more comprehensive views of truth, and for higher degrees of virtue, he

sends forth this humble and earnest petition—"Open
"thou mine eyes; that I may see the wondrous
"things of thy law."

The more we investigate the works and ways of the Deity, the more sensible shall we be, that we cannot, by searching, find him out to perfection—that all things are constituted by the exactest weight and measure—that one uniform, consistent power pervades and regulates the universe—that after all our utmost exertions, we shall know only in part; the whole scheme of infinite wisdom, in the formation and government of all things, extending far beyond the comprehension of any *human*, and therefore *limited* understanding. But although it may with propriety be said, that we now see through a glass darkly; by steadfast attention, aided and illuminated by divine grace, we may nevertheless have many extensive views of the power and wisdom of God; we may see many of the wondrous things of his law. I shall, therefore, in the following discourse, endeavour to awaken in your minds a proper sense of the *extent* of this law; of its *duration*; of the *mischiefs* which are occasioned by *violating* it; and of the *happiness* that results from a steady and uniform *obedience*.

God existed from eternity; and before the creating word was spoken, the whole scheme of creation was accurately adjusted; all its parts and mutual dependencies were perfectly understood; and the universe rose into existence exactly according to the pattern which had been pre-conceived in the mind of the great Creator. As it is said, that he made all things according to the *counsel* of his own will; as he created them by his power; so he preserves, by his wisdom, the

peace and harmony of all his works. He has given them a law which extends to the utmost limits of his creation—a law which comprehends in its operation all creatures in heaven and in earth, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate—the very least being protected by its care, and the greatest not exempt from its power.

If we consider this law as it operates upon *lifeless matter*, we shall find it continually preserving the harmony of the universe. By this law, the planets, without the least deviation from their prescribed path, are shot so swiftly in their rounds; the moon has her appointed seasons; the earth flies with almost inconceivable velocity, and, though her motions are complicated, never wandering from the right way; but producing, from age to age, the regular return of the seasons, and the grateful succession of day and night. By this law, the elements incessantly perform their allotted tasks—the fire is sent forth to warm and vivify all nature—the waters are carried round in perpetual circulation—the air is kept pure for the purposes of animal life—and the earth, without intermission, according to the original command of God, brings forth grass, and herb yielding seed, and fruit-tree yielding fruit, after his kind. All the glorious discoveries in natural philosophy, for which the present age is so distinguished, are but so many new explanations of the wonders of this divine law.

If we advance one step further, we find it operating in the same uniform manner upon the *irrational animals*. Though, in their different species almost innumerable, and though formed with a great variety of native dispositions, we perceive them *all*, without confusion

pursuing their real good. What is commonly called *instinct*, is nothing less than the law of their Creator, invariably directing them into the path which leads most immediately to the summit of that happiness which they are capable of enjoying.

When we ascend to *man*, we find *him* also, in a peculiar manner, subject to this *divine law*—the law that is imparted to him by the voice of reason, and by immediate revelation from heaven. But man is a being of a superior order; greatly distinguished from the other creatures. While *they* move as they are impelled, without choice, without any consciousness of the end towards which they are tending; to *him* it is given to *know*. Not driven by irresistible necessity, he may *choose* the evil or the good. The law by which he ought to regulate his conduct is properly divulged; the distinction between good and evil is sufficiently clear; the motives which are intended to influence his behaviour are suited to the nature of a *free agent*; from voluntary obedience arises his *happiness*, and from disobedience his *misery*; the very *superiority* of his nature renders him a proper object of *punishment*, as well as *reward*.

When we come, at last, to the summit of God's creation; to *the angels* who surround the throne of his glory; we are taught that *they* also are comprehended within the operation of the laws of God. They have clearer conceptions of the *will*, and of the glorious *perfections* of the Deity; their obedience is more cheerful and more complete; but it is the *same law*, more or less extended, which influences all rational creatures, whether in heaven or in earth. The example of the angels is therefore proposed to our imita-

tion. We are directed to pray that the will of God may be done by *us* on earth, as it is done by *them* in heaven.

What exalted conceptions do such reflections lead us to entertain of the perfections of Almighty God! Sitting enthroned in the glory of his divine Majesty, in the centre of his stupendous works, his word goeth forth and runneth very swiftly to the utmost extremity of his creation. Wonderful is the extent of his law. "Her seat is the bosom of God, but her voice is the harmony of the universe—all things in heaven and earth do her homage—angels, and men, and creatures, of every condition admiring her, as the parent of their peace and joy!"

In contemplating the law of God, the *second* thing that demands our attention, is the *duration* of it. And here it is necessary to make a very essential distinction. Some of the laws of the *Deity*, like most of the institutions of *men*, having been originally intended to serve only a temporary purpose, when that end is accomplished, are abrogated by the same authority that established them. Thus the religious ceremonies of the Jews were designed to be only shadows of good things to come; when, therefore, they had answered the intention of their appointment, they were abolished and done away for ever. Thus under the Christian dispensation, the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, where they can be regularly obtained, are of indispensable obligation. But when this state of trial terminates in one of complete enjoyment; when the means of grace are succeeded by the acquisition of glory; *then*, this part of the Christian law will no lon-

ger operate; the use of these instruments of holiness will necessarily cease.

Thus also, this regular and stupendous system of things will, in time, reach its latest period; the law of nature will be annulled by *him* who framed it; the chain of order will be broken, and worlds will rush against worlds in dreadful confusion. But amidst all this disorder in things which appear at present so stable and permanent; angels and men will still exist; they will still be subject to the authority of God; they will still be obligated to love and reverence, adore and obey him. This part of the divine law will be *eternal*. It is founded in the very nature of things; it necessarily arises from the relation that subsists between immortal creatures and their great Creator; it cannot cease to operate, so long as rational beings are continued in existence. Is it not our *happiness*, therefore, as well as *duty*, to yield a ready obedience to *all* the laws of God; but more especially to those which are of *eternal* obligation? For, consider, in the *third* place, the mischiefs which are occasioned by a perverse violation of them.

They were framed by infinite wisdom; they are enjoined by resistless power; and they all tend to the promotion of one great, benevolent purpose, the order and felicity of the universe. Neither men nor angels can annul, or even diminish them. Moral agents may indeed transgress, but not with impunity. Punishment is the necessary consequence of a violation of the law. The inanimate works of God go as they are impelled; the regularity of their movements is not interrupted; they perfectly perform their allotted task,

and fulfil the law of their nature. And hence it is, that every contemplative mind is compelled to admire the wonderful order and harmony of the worlds which are moving round us. But among rational creatures, who, because they were free agents, were capable of sinning, confusion and misery have been introduced. It was a violation of the law that expelled the angels from their habitations of glory, degraded them from their original state of dignity, and now reserves them in chains under darkness against the judgment of the great day. Man was created happy and immortal—the conditions of retaining this happiness and immortality were just and easy. But he violated the law of his God, and wretchedness was the immediate consequence. The mortal taste of that forbidden tree brought death into the world and all our woe, with loss of Eden; loss of that state of consummate felicity, in which we were originally placed by our merciful Creator. Man, in his present condition, presents to our view nothing more than the splendid ruins of his former grandeur. The body is indeed fearfully and wonderfully made; but it is subject to pain and wasting disease, to death and dissolution in the grave. The soul is dignified with great and surprising powers; but her faculties are too often weighed down by depraved appetite, or disordered by the turbulence of misguided passion—as, if the stars of the firmament were to wander from their appointed courses, in themselves they would remain glorious luminaries, however irregular their motions might be. In a word; whatever misery now preys upon mankind, it is altogether the result of disobedience to the divine law. Nor do the fatal effects of this disobedience terminate here.

We are taught, that they who wilfully transgress and die impenitent, will be consigned to the dreary abodes of everlasting wretchedness, where the worm of devouring anguish dieth not, and the fire of divine wrath is not quenched. These are alarming reflections. If such be the interesting consequences of our present conduct, surely every considerate person will endeavour to keep himself from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over him; he will strive to be undefiled, and innocent from the great offence.

But this leads us to consider, in the last place, the happiness that results from steady and uniform obedience. Such indeed is the extent and spirituality of the divine law, comprehending our thoughts, words, and actions; the intentions of our hearts, as well as our external deportment: and so great, on the other hand, is the infirmity of our degenerate nature, that with the most sincere and strenuous exertions, our obedience can never be entirely perfect. For acceptance in the sight of God, we must still have recourse to the intercession of a Redeemer; not trusting in our own righteousness, but in his manifold and great mercies. But, since God has blessed us with the ability of seeing the wondrous things of his law; a law originally communicated by the voice of reason, and afterwards augmented and confirmed by immediate revelation; since the truth of this revelation was at first established by incontestable proofs, and has been preserved and transmitted down to us, not by uncertain *tradition*, but in permanent *records*; since it is so evidently well calculated to promote and secure our real good; since its sanctions are nothing less than everlasting happiness or misery; let us endeavour, so far as may be, to fulfil

all righteousness; let us be continually advancing towards the great standard of all perfection.

By sincere and uniform *obedience*, we follow the steps of our Lord and Master, who perfectly performed the work that was given him to do; we imitate the example of the glorious angels, who are represented as standing round the throne of God, ever attentive to his commands, and ready to fly and execute his will; we preserve our rank among intelligent beings, and by moving in our proper sphere, promote the order of the universe; we display the dignity, we secure the happiness of our nature: for all our glory, all our felicity entirely depends upon the *favour* of Almighty God; and *this* cannot be obtained but by a cheerful submission to his will. In a word, by *obedience* we obtain a right to rely upon the peculiar protection of our present Lawgiver and future Judge; we shall escape the ignominy, the remorse, the excruciating punishment that will hereafter overwhelm the disobedient and refractory; we shall receive the approbation of our Lord, whose loving-kindness is better than life; and our labours will be crowned, at last, with a great reward; a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Let me, therefore, conclude, with exhorting *you all*, to adopt the pious language of the Psalmist—"Open " thou mine eyes, that I may see the wondrous things " of thy law!" And when, by devout attention and diligent study, under the influence of divine grace, you have learned what the Lord your God requires of you; be careful to walk in all his ordinances blameless; endeavour to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Consider, that although he is exalted far above all height, he continually beholdeth the things that are in

heaven and earth. You cannot go from his presence; you cannot escape from the influence of his law. If you take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea; if you ascend up to heaven, or go down to hell, the hand of his justice will overtake you; the right hand of his power will still hold you.

At our *creation*, God's authority over us commenced; by our *preservation*, he continues his claims upon our faithful services; and by our *redemption*, he has enhanced the obligation to love and obey him. So that it is now emphatically said of all Christians—"Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price; therefore serve and glorify God with all the powers of your nature; in your bodies, and in your spirits, which are his." Since we are immortal creatures, his authority over us will never end. We shall be subject to his dominion for ever, either in a state of happiness or woe. And is it not better to yield, in time, a cheerful submission to his righteous sway, by which we may obtain the reward of the faithful, than to be compelled to a reluctant obedience by the rod of irresistible power?

What though the strength of sin is the law? What though we have all sinned, and therefore come short of the glory of God? *His* mercy has devised a new and living way to the mansions of eternal joy. One greater man, than *he* who fell in Paradise, has restored us, and regained the blissful seat. There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Faith, and repentance, and *sincere*, though *imperfect* obedience, will open to us the everlasting doors, and place us in the possession of life and immortality.

Let us reflect upon the dreadful consequences of obstinate transgression; let us look forward with transport to the reward which awaits the righteous. The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God to those who live soberly, righteously, and godly, is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Good and evil are this day placed before you. Consider what has been said, and the Lord give you a right understanding in all things.

SERMON XXIX.

On the Blessedness of keeping the Law of God.

PSALM i.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in due season: his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so; but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

THIS psalm, which may be considered as a preface or introduction to all the rest, describes, in very expressive language, the opposite *characters*, and the different *states* of the righteous and the ungodly: the blessedness of the one is said to consist in their regard for the law of the Lord, their abstaining from sin, and their continual advancement in goodness; a condition represented under the beautiful image of a flourishing tree planted by the rivers of water. The unhappy fate of the other is held forth to our view, by an allusion to

the threshing-floor : as the light and worthless chaff is scattered away from before the driving tempest, so shall the wicked perish at the presence of the Lord : when God comes to judgment, they shall not be able to stand before him ; they shall be for ever separated from the assembly of the righteous.

The Holy Scriptures were given by inspiration of God, and are good for instruction in all righteousness. But of the Psalms, more particularly, it may be asserted, there is scarcely any thing necessary for man to know in the progress of a life of piety, which they are not able to teach. Like the garden of Eden, this little volume affords us in perfection, every thing that groweth elsewhere ; every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food. Here we find unfeigned repentance, unwearied patience, ardent devotion, the terrors of divine wrath, the comforts of grace, the operations of Providence in the government of this world, and the promised joys of the world that is to come. For every spiritual grief and disease that is incident to the soul of man, here a present and comfortable remedy may at all times be found.

In the language of this divine book, the prayers and praises of the Church have, in all ages, been offered up to the throne of grace. The Son of God, in the days of his flesh, appears to have been well acquainted with it. At the conclusion of his last supper, he sang a hymn which is commonly supposed to have been taken from it. On the cross, he pronounced the beginning of the twenty-second psalm—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And his expiring words were a part of the thirty-first—"Into thy hands I commend my Spirit." Thus our glorious Re-

deemer himself, who possessed all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom, thought proper to soothe his last and most bitter agony, and to yield up the ghost with the words of the Psalmist on his lips. A higher commendation of any book, it is not possible for the tongue of men or angels to give. It well deserves, therefore, the devout attention of every pious person, who is desirous of imitating the good example of those, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises. Let us, then, proceed to consider what instruction, or what consolation is to be drawn from this first psalm, which begins with these encouraging words—"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

In order to excite our attention, and to animate our desires to begin and to persevere in the ways of virtue and piety, the book of Psalms is introduced, like the sermon on the mount, with a divine beatitude, directing us immediately to that happiness which all mankind, in various ways, are solicitous to obtain. All would secure themselves from the assaults of misery, all would be entirely happy; but how few consider, that wretchedness is the natural consequence of sin, and that we must cease to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, if we would be completely blessed.

The Psalmist here apprizes us, that there is a gradation in wickedness, and that he who wilfully deviates from the right way, cannot say how far he may wander. We begin, by conversing familiarly with wicked men; we listen to their fallacious arguments; we are pleased with their winning persuasions. After walking, for a season, thus in the *counsel of the ungodly*, we proceed

to take a part in their crimes; we associate with them in all their iniquitous proceedings; as the Psalmist expresses it—*We stand in the way of sinners*. From this stage of transgression, the transition is short and easy to the last point of depravity. We soon begin to glory in our crimes, to justify what we have hitherto done, and in hardened impiety, to sit down in the *seat of the scornful*. They alone are *blessed*, who flee from sin; and they alone are *secure*, who abstain from all appearance of evil, so far as human infirmity will permit. Our Lord and Master attained a sinless perfection; and *we* must apply to *his* merits and grace; so that by becoming *righteous*, we may be rendered *blessed*.

To the man who is brought to this happy condition, the next words of the Psalmist are properly applied—“His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” When the mind is filled with a sincere detestation of sin; and when we are heartily inclined to become acquainted with the will of God, in order that we may yield a ready obedience to it; the Holy Scriptures will be deemed of more value than fine gold; they will be sweeter than honey, or the honey-comb; they will afford a satisfaction and delight infinitely superior to all the sensual pleasures of this world. In all circumstances, the word of God is the pious man’s companion and guide. To this he applies for direction in the dangerous allurements of prosperity; from this he derives comfort in the gloomy seasons of affliction; to this he flies for succour under every temptation.

The Psalmist proceeds to describe the happy effects of this constant and devout attention to the study and

practice of the law of the Lord: the man who is thus piously engaged "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." By continual meditation in the sacred writings, and by practising what we know, we as naturally improve and advance in holiness, as the tree thrives and flourishes in the most fertile soil. A more striking and beautiful image could not be employed to express the happy condition of the godly. Behold the fair-spreading tree, so beautiful, and at the same time so advantageous! It is refreshed from above with the dews of heaven; it is invigorated at the root by never-failing streams of water; its fruit affords nourishment, its shade yields refreshment, the birds of the air take refuge and sing among its branches. Such is the blessed condition of that man, who standeth not in the way of sinners, but delights in the law of the Lord his God. He is sustained and improved by ever-flowing streams of divine grace; he abounds in all the fruits of the Spirit; in their proper season he displays the virtues of justice, and temperance, and meekness, and charity; the graces which adorn him are not affected by the revolutions of time; they never fade; and whatsoever he doeth, in all his ways, the blessing of heaven attends him: so that whatsoever the event may be, whether life or death, things present or things to come, all will work together for his good.

One would suppose, that a bare representation of this blessed state, would be a sufficient inducement to every reasonable mind, to seek it as the one thing needful. But if we are not to be properly influenced

by the expectation of *good*; let us follow the Psalmist in the dreadful contrast which he draws, and be alarmed and deterred by the apprehension of *evil*. “The ungodly,” says he, “are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.” In the preceding description of the righteous, every thing appeared fresh and flourishing, beautiful and permanent. But here, we are presented with nothing but objects that are fading and worthless, unsettled and transitory, driven about by the breath of God’s displeasure, dispersed at last from the face of the earth, and consigned to the fire that is never quenched.

The threshing-floors of the Jews were commonly on an eminence, in the field; and by the action of a strong current of air, it was the custom to separate the chaff from the wheat. We find frequent allusions to this practice in the writings of the prophets. Thus Isaiah, speaking of the heathen nations, says—“That at the rebuke of God, they shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind;” and Daniel, in his explanation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, declares—“That the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, of which the image was composed, were broken to pieces together; and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them.” Hence we may perceive the strength and beauty of this allusion of the Psalmist, when he compares the ungodly to chaff, which the wind driveth away. They are light and worthless; they are unsteady in their conduct, and wavering in their opinions; they are driven about by the temptations of the devil, and the

storms of their own turbulent passions, and their end is destruction.

Let not the scoffers encourage themselves in their wickedness, saying—"Where is the promise of God's coming to discriminate between the righteous and the ungodly? all things continue as they were from the foundation of the world; all things come alike to all." Hear, in the next verse, the awful declaration of the Psalmist—"Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." However fair and flattering present appearances may be; a day is fast approaching, when the divine husbandman will appear, with his fan in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor. The wheat that shall endure the winnowing of that day will be gathered into the heavenly garner; but the chaff will be driven out of the floor by a mighty whirlwind, and carried to the place prepared for it, where it will be burned with unquenchable fire. Then, there will be a congregation of the righteous, in which sinners will not be permitted to stand. Wheat and tares now grow in the same field. Wheat and chaff lie on the same floor. Good and bad men are promiscuously comprehended within the visible Church. But, ere long, a tremendous separation will take place—a separation final and unalterable. The wicked shall go away into everlasting misery, and the righteous into life eternal.

Who shall be able to abide the coming of this dreadful day of the Lord! Were the judgment to be conducted by ignorant, fallible, or prejudiced men, the sinner might entertain some hopes of escaping

with impunity. But since God is the judge, a Being of infinite wisdom and irresistible power, his *determinations* will be according to truth and equity, and nothing will be able to prevent their being carried into complete effect. For this is the concluding declaration of this instructive psalm—"The Lord knoweth
" the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly
" *shall perish.*" From the limited nature of the human understanding, in the present confused state of things, *we* are often deceived in the judgment which we form of men. But an all-wise God can, in no instance, be imposed upon by false appearances. He is about the bed of the righteous, and about their path, and spieth out all their ways. However low and obscure their temporal condition may be, their pious dispositions, their virtuous actions are not unnoticed. God is with them under every trial; he protects them, even when they pass through the valley of the shadow of death. In the silence of the grave, they will not be forgotten. *His* eye seeth them in secret, and his hand will reward them openly. They shall rise triumphant over the sting of death, and the momentary victory of the grave—they shall be crowned with glory, and honour, and immortality. And, on the other hand, nothing will defeat the purposes of the Almighty, with respect to the final punishment of the ungodly. No art will be sufficient to elude the vigilance of his all-searching eye; no force will be able to withstand that resistless arm, which holdeth the mountains as the dust of the balance, and shooteth the planets so swiftly in their rounds. Everlasting confusion and torment will be the portion of the wicked; "*the way of the ungodly shall perish.*"

Upon reviewing what has been now said, the following practical observations naturally occur.

1st. If we wish to be ranked among the number of those who may justly be denominated *blessed*, we must *take delight* in the law of the Lord our God. By the prevalence of sin and wickedness, the *rational nature* of man is thrown into disorder and confusion. As well might the body be at ease under the anguish of a fractured limb or a scorching fever, as the soul enjoy any real peace, when agitated by the violent and discordant pursuits of wickedness. That vice is the fruitful source of human misery, and that virtue is the spring of all pure and permanent joy, the universal experience of mankind, and our own constant observation, abundantly testify. While the drunkard destroys his health and strength; while the idle spendthrift falls into all the distresses of abject poverty; while the unjust man exposes himself to shame, to painful corrections, and perhaps to an untimely death; while all impenitent sinners remain in continual hazard of being overwhelmed by the eternal condemnation of divine justice; *they* who walk innocently, walk securely; even death itself, the most terrible of all temporal calamities, will be only a friendly introduction to a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

2dly. We here learn the necessity of resisting the first beginnings of evil; of abstaining from all appearance of transgression. The progress of vice is gradual and extremely treacherous. We begin with listening to the counsel of the ungodly; we proceed to stand in the way of sinners as friends and companions; and, at last, we confidently sit down in the seat of the scornful. Many have been the unhappy victims of this fatal

delusion. Some, from treating the name of the Deity with disrespect in common conversation, have proceeded from one stage of irreverence to another, till they have fallen into direct blasphemy and perjury. Some, from slight, and not frequent instances of intoxication, have persisted so long, that a confirmed habit of intemperance has been contracted. And some, in their dealings with their neighbour, from what appeared at first trifling instances of deception and dishonesty, have so far lost a quick sense of right and wrong, that they are now ready to defraud without much compunction, whenever a fair opportunity presents itself. Let us keep the enemy at a distance, if we would be entirely secure: let us defend the out-works, and we know that the citadel is safe.

3dly. It is not sufficient barely to abstain from what is *wrong*; but, if we wish to grow in grace, we must be occupied in the things that belong to our everlasting salvation. The Psalmist has taught us to consider *that man* alone is blessed, “whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates therein day and night.” By constant and devout attention to the sacred Scriptures, the mind is not only diverted from sinful thoughts, and guarded against the first inroads of temptation; but it is strengthened and confirmed in all goodness; it is filled with more exalted ideas of the nature and perfections of God; it is touched with a stronger abhorrence of sin, and animated with a more ardent love of virtue; all its exertions are quickened, to run with patience and perseverance the race that is set before us. The best mean of improving the stock which we already possess, is to employ it with diligence and discretion. The Christian must never sit

down in stupid indolence ; the more he exercises himself in performing the duties which are due to God, his neighbour, and himself ; the more will he increase in knowledge and in all goodness.

Lastly ; let us seriously and frequently meditate upon the last dreadful day of just judgment, when the chaff will be for ever separated from the wheat, when sinners will be banished from the congregation of the righteous. By all the tender ties of relation which connect you together in this life ; by your love of happiness and dread of misery ; by the mercies, and by the terrors of the Lord ; let me entreat you to be so unanimous in your love of God and religion, that you all may be collected, at last, in that place of perfect blessedness, where there will be no more separation nor sorrow.

SERMON XXX.

On the New Jerusalem.

REVELATION xxi. 2, 3.

I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

THERE is something wonderfully striking in this passage of sacred Scripture. The heart of that person must be cold and insensible to a great degree, who is not incited, at the repetition of it, earnestly to inquire—
“Who was that beloved servant of God that was
“favoured with these glorious visions? and what can
“the meaning be of this splendid exhibition? In
“what sense can it now be asserted, that Jerusalem
“cometh down from heaven; that the tabernacle of
“God is with men; and that he dwells with them?”

It is the design of the following discourse, to gratify this laudable curiosity: and, a full explication of these words of the holy apostle will naturally lead to several

useful practical observations. Then only has knowledge its due effect, when it prompts to virtuous actions. If we know the great things of the Gospel, we should deem ourselves happy only while we do them.

The person who speaks is the beloved disciple, John. It had long before been intimated to him, that "*he should tarry till his Master came:*" that is, till Jesus came in terrible vengeance to destroy the city of Jerusalem, and to disperse the nation of the Jews. Agreeably to this prediction of his Lord, he survived all the rest of the apostles; he lived to see his brethren, the inhabitants of Judea, sustaining the punishment which had been denounced against them, for crucifying the Lord of life, and impiously wishing that the guilt of his blood might fall on *them* and their children; he saw their country desolated, their capital city laid in ruins, and their temple reduced to ashes. But, as a compensation for this melancholy spectacle, he was favoured with many extraordinary revelations from heaven; with glorious prospects of the Redeemer's kingdom. The *earthly* Jerusalem had fallen; but instead of *this*, he saw the new Jerusalem, the holy city coming down from God.

It is scarcely necessary to observe, that in the language of sacred Scripture, under the term *Jerusalem*, is frequently comprehended the whole Jewish Church. That city contained all that is necessary to constitute a true Church: the assemblies of the saints; the worship of the one living and true God, according to his own appointment; the regular administration of the divine word and ordinances; and the presence of the great object of their adoration residing in his holy

temple. For the same reasons, by the *new Jerusalem*, St. John means the *Church of God under the dispensation of the Gospel*: *this* is enriched with many excellencies, endowed with many privileges unknown to his ancient people who lived under the economy of Moses. *They* had indeed the doctrine of salvation, but it was wrapped up in types and figures; to *our* view it is clearly unfolded, and the veil is entirely taken away from the face of Moses: *their* ordinances were mingled with many burdensome rites and ceremonies; *we* have a pure and simple worship in spirit and in truth: *their* law was confined to one people; the general assembly of *Christians* is composed of all nations and languages: God was present among *them* in the cloud of glory that rested over the mercy-seat; he dwells among *us* by the wonderful communications of his Holy Spirit.

From all these considerations, the Christian Church may well be denominated the *holy city*. God, in an especial manner, has placed his name there. Many are the glorious epithets by which it is designated in the sacred volume: it is the new Jerusalem; the city of God; the mother of us all: it is the beloved spouse of the Lamb; it is the elect generation; the royal priesthood; the holy nation; the peculiar people: it is the Church which Christ hath purchased with his own blood; for which he delivered himself to the death of the cross, that he might sanctify it, and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, nor any such thing, but that it might be holy and unblemished. It is *holy* from its peculiar relation to God; as it is composed of persons who are to be separated from the profane conversation of a wicked

world, professing a holy faith, obliged to a holy conversation, endued with holy dispositions, and performing holy services. This is the new Jerusalem, the holy city, which the highly favoured apostle saw coming down from God out of heaven.

As under the ancient dispensation of the law, every thing was instituted by Moses according to the pattern that was showed him in the mount by God himself; so in the institution of the Christian Church, the new Jerusalem, nothing was left to the vain imaginations of man: the beautiful model was not devised by man, nor was the glorious work accomplished by the will of man: *it came down from heaven*: its builder and maker is God: it is endowed with singular privileges: it has great and precious promises: it is composed of holy men, who, in the language of Scripture, are said “to be built up as lively stones into a spiritual house,” thus becoming a fit habitation for the Deity himself by the presence of his Holy Spirit.

And hence, St. John proceeds to inform us in his mystical narration—“That the tabernacle of God is “with men; that he dwells with them; that they are “*his* people; and that he will be *their* God.” He dwelt in the tabernacle instituted by Moses, in visible tokens of his immediate presence: here his glory was displayed to conduct his people in their journeyings through the wilderness: hence his oracles were issued for their information in all trying emergencies: and hence, the rod of his strength was sent forth to protect them against the assaults of their enemies. In the Christian Church, equally astonishing have been the manifestations of his glory: with equal propriety may the apostle assert, while he is contemplating the holy

city—"The tabernacle of God is with men; they are his people; and he dwells with them." Upon the new Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit has descended with evident demonstrations of divine majesty and power. *He* enabled the first apostles to perform wonderful works in confirmation of the truth. He inspired them with a perfect knowledge of the will of God with respect to man's salvation. *He*, to facilitate the progress of the blessed Gospel, endued them with the power of speaking with various tongues. By *his* agency, according to the divine promise, God dwells with his people to the end of the world. This divine Spirit accompanies the regular administration of Christ's holy ordinances. Christians are said to be his temples. He inspires them with holy desires, instructs them with good counsels, and supplies with strength for the performance of just works. In a word; with respect to a pious life and conversation, he worketh all in all; so that if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise; from him the virtue proceeds, and to him the praise must be ascribed.

Thus, in allusion to the ancient institutions of the law, the Christian Church is called the *new Jerusalem*: it is a *holy city*, from the regularity of its government and discipline; from its relation to a God of holiness; and from the holy services which are continually performed in it: it cometh down from God out of heaven, as he is the sole Author and Finisher of it: and, to the great consolation as well as glory of the inhabitants of this blessed place, God dwells with them by the agency of his Holy Spirit; in a peculiar manner, he is *their* God, and they are *his* people.

Let us now proceed to make a proper practical im-

provement of the doctrines which have been here advanced.

1st. Since the Christian Church is a holy *city*, an incorporated *society*, invested with many glorious privileges, prescribing a peculiar mode of admission, having its own officers, and existing under the government of wholesome laws; let us take care to be *initiated* into this dignified society according to the positive appointment of our Lord, who is made the Head over all things for his Church; to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been committed. We are not only *permitted* to enjoy the exalted privileges which belong to the new Jerusalem; but we are earnestly *invited*, we are solemnly *commanded* to become members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven; in other words, to be no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. In *our* situation, it is not necessary to inquire, Who shall ascend into heaven? that is, to bring Christ down from above. Or, who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead: for the word of God is nigh us. All the immunities of his peculiar people are freely offered to us. The Christian Church is not, like Jerusalem of old, confined to one particular place; but it is *catholic* or *universal*, as well as holy: it is composed of all nations and languages: the Gospel of salvation has been preached—the blessed privileges of this spiritual society are graciously offered to *us* Gentiles who were far off, as well as to God's ancient people who were nigh.

But, it is probable, that most of us have been admitted by baptism into this highly favoured com-

munity, and we have obligated ourselves to maintain a suitable deportment. Let it then be,

2dly. Observed, that we ought to be sensible of the advantages of our situation, and to be extremely careful never to forfeit them. Man, in his native condition, is said in Scripture to be a child of wrath: he has nothing before him but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. But, when he is taken out of a wicked world, and admitted into the holy city, he is invested by the mere grace of God with many inestimable rights. He has a right founded on the divine promise, to the remission of his sins, to the supernatural aid of the Holy Spirit, to the peculiar favour of the Almighty in this life, and to the enjoyment of everlasting happiness and glory in a future state. Such is the distinguished situation of the saints and servants of God under the dispensation of the Gospel: they belong to a glorious community: they have come unto mount Sion, the city of the living God; and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to an innumerable company of angels; and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant; and to God the Judge of all. And shall we ever voluntarily banish ourselves from this blessed society? After having renounced the pomps and vanities of a wicked world, shall we ever be desirous to be again involved in its cares and in its crimes? If we be extremely jealous of the rights which relate merely to our temporal welfare, how inexcusable will be the absurdity of neglecting and finally forfeiting those in which is intimately concerned the salvation of our immortal souls?

3dly. As citizens of the new Jerusalem, we are indispensably obligated to yield a peaceful obedience

to its laws. These laws are contained in the sacred volume; the best comment upon which is the practice of the primitive Christians. In all important cases they are clear and easy; and if there be some points not so easily to be comprehended, we must be content to act, as we do in the management of our temporal concerns; that is, to seek information from those who have had better opportunities than ourselves of acquiring knowledge. This holy city came down from heaven. It was instituted by God himself. It is not, like all human institutions, subjected to the will of man, to be altered and modified as his caprice or his presumption may direct. It ought to be now what it was from the beginning: there is but one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one hope of our calling. The kingdom of the Redeemer is not of this world: it is not of earthly origin; it interferes not with secular affairs; it is not supported by the weapons of a worldly warfare; it exercises dominion not over the bodies, but over the souls and consciences of men; its grand motives to obedience are of a spiritual and not a temporal nature; its principal rewards and its severest punishments are future and eternal. Let us submit with reverence to the authority which has been established by Christ and his apostles in his holy Church; let us reject all novel and strange opinions which are contrary to that faith which was originally delivered to the saints; let us avoid all factious combinations of men which tend to subvert that peace and order, on which the prosperity of the holy city so essentially depends; in a word, with respect to our religious concerns, let us consult the revealed will of God, and in every instance yield to *this* a ready and implicit obedience.

4thly. We are ever to remember, that this spiritual city of which we possess the glorious immunities, is denominated *holy*; prepared with all Christian virtues, as a bride adorned for her husband. The new Jerusalem came down from God, and its inhabitants are to be qualified in this life for a glorious ascension into the more immediate presence of the great Lord of all. All its institutions are expressly designed to separate us from sinners, and make us holy and harmless in all manner of conversation. Whatever, therefore, our religious employment may be; whether we listen to God's word, or celebrate his sacraments; whether we be engaged in prayer or in praise; let every service tend to a more complete sanctification of our polluted nature, in soul, body, and spirit. Let holiness unto the Lord be our badge of distinction; let it declare to all the world, that we are his people; let it shine like the star over the babe of Bethlehem, and signify that Jesus is here; that God himself is with us; that he is our God. And, let it be remarked, in the last place,

That this consideration should lead us to walk circumspectly and with holy reverence before him. If the tabernacle of God be with men; if he dwell with us, and we be his people, let us fear to offend him; let us steadfastly rely on his merciful protection in every time of danger and trial; let us patiently follow whithersoever his word and providence direct our way, as the Israelites in the wilderness pursued their journey according to the guidance of their Almighty Protector, who went before them in a cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night. Whether our journey through life be long or short; whether it be pleasant or painful; of this we may rest assured, that if we prove not dis-

obedient and refractory, he will conduct us to the land of everlasting rest and felicity.

How happy is the condition of that people who thus have the Lord for their God; of whom it may be said, in the language of the text, that in every stage of their earthly pilgrimage, "God himself is with them, and is their God!" In every difficulty, to him they apply for direction; in all trials and dangers, to him they fly for consolation and support; trusting in the Lord Jehovah for ever, they have an everlasting strength; in trouble, they recollect that he chastiseth those whom he loveth; in sickness, they are preserved from the temptations of the enemy, they are blessed with patience under their affliction, and are comforted with a sense of the divine goodness; and when they pass through the valley of the shadow of death, God is still with them; he sustains them in the last trying moments; he gives them here that peace which passeth all understanding; and at last receives them into his glory.

Let us, then, be duly sensible of these exalted privileges. Let us make this good and powerful Being our Friend and our Guide, by entering into the courts of the new Jerusalem with thanksgiving and praise; by holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering; by walking worthy of the holy vocation wherewith we are called; by maintaining peace and love with all men; and by living continually before God in pious fear, and humble obedience to his laws. Great peace and tranquillity will those persons have, who thus love and fear God. Nothing will so far offend them, as to destroy their comfort, or turn them from the performance of their duty in this life; and nothing shall deprive them of that exceeding great

reward which is laid up for them in the mansions of glory. That all who now hear me, may be found, at last, in this happy number, God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits and mediation of the same compassionate Redeemer; to whom be all praise, honour, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXXI.

Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.

MATTHEW xx. 8.

So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

IN the parable, of which these words are a part, the Church of God is represented by our blessed Lord under the emblem of a vineyard, and particular believers under that of labourers who are engaged, at different times, by the lord of the vineyard, to perform certain services for a stipulated reward. It is said, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.” For the same purpose, at different periods in the course of the day, he goes out; and even at the eleventh hour, or at five o'clock in the afternoon, when he found some standing idle, he saith unto them, “Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.” When the evening was come, and the labours of the day were completed, the labourers are called to receive their wages. As we are too apt to overrate our own ser-

vices, and to undervalue those of others, some of them murmured against the good-man of the house, because, in the distribution of their hire, their fellow-labourers were made equal unto *them*. He repels the charge of partiality and injustice with these unanswerable observations:—"Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?"

This is a summary of the parable now before us; and, like our Lord's other discourses of this nature, it is fraught with religious instruction: under these objects of sense, much spiritual meaning is conveyed to the attentive mind of the humble believer. And,

1st. Here we are taught to entertain a just conception of the nature of the Church of God: It is represented under the image of a vineyard, strongly enclosed, cultivated with care, and thus made to abound with pleasant flowers and salutary fruits—with whatever is grateful to the eye, and good for the sustenance of man. The rude and uncultivated wilderness is a just emblem of the natural state of mankind. By the transgression of our primitive parents, misery was entailed upon all their descendants: ignorance and depravity overspread the earth. God did not, however, abandon his fallen creatures to utter despair and universal ruin. He never left himself entirely without a witness in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation: there was always a company of the faithful: he had always a church in this degenerate world—a vineyard in the midst of the surrounding wilderness. His

messengers were employed from age to age, to invite wandering mortals to come in, and join the happy society of true believers. Seth, and Noah, and Abraham were preachers of righteousness. Moses and the succeeding prophets were faithful advocates for the name and worship of the one living and true God. Christ and his apostles called men from darkness to light—from Gentile ignorance and Jewish superstition, to the knowledge of the glorious Gospel. Thus the householder went out at different periods—at the third, and the sixth, and the ninth, and even at the eleventh hour—and said to those who were regardless of their duty, “Why stand ye here all the day idle? Go ye into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.” And hence we are led to remark,

2dly. That in the revolutions of time, at whatever period we may enter into the service of our Lord; when he comes to take account of our conduct; when the labourers are called to receive their hire; to every man will he give in proportion to the work performed.

But here it may be objected, “that in the transaction before us, this equitable rule seems to have been violated: *they* who were called early into the vineyard, complained, and surely not without reason, that those who had wrought but one hour were made equal unto *them* who had borne the burden and heat of the day.” This objection may be obviated by observing, that more work may be performed by the industrious in a single hour, than is accomplished by the indolent in the course of a whole day; and that when the lord of the vineyard comes to reckon with his labourers, he will reward them in proportion to their *industry*, and not to the *time* in which they were employed

in his service :—That in the eternal world, the smallest degree of celestial happiness will be more than a sufficient compensation for any services which we may perform here upon earth ; and, therefore, whatever may be the condition of others, we shall have no reason to murmur at our own lot. But more especially, the seeming difficulty here alluded to, may be explained by remarking, that this figurative mode of expression is never to be subjected to the most rigid interpretation : that in this part of his parable, our Lord intended to correct the unreasonable jealousy and envy of the Jews against the Gentile nations of the earth. *They* were God's ancient people ; they entered into the vineyard early in the morning ; they supposed themselves entitled to particular consideration ; they therefore murmured against the good-man of the house, because the heathen were admitted to the same privileges which *they* enjoyed, and, by the gracious dispensation of the Gospel, would be entitled to the same reward. This malignant prejudice our Lord severely reproveth, by introducing the householder as addressing the labourer with this unanswerable remonstrance—“ Friend, I do thee no wrong : didst not thou agree with me for a penny ? Take that thine is, and go thy way : I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own ? Is thine eye evil, because I am good ? So the last shall be first, and the first last.” That is, as the apostle afterwards expressed it, “ the Gentiles shall be fellow-heirs with the Jews, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel.” Thus, in this wonderful dispensation of mercy, the middle-wall of partition is broken down ; and Christ

is the light of the Gentiles, as well as the glory of his people Israel. When the law of Moses was superseded by the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, *they* who from among the heathen nations were admitted into the Church by the ministry of the holy apostles, were received into equal favour with the faithful descendants of God's ancient servant Abraham—they came from the east and from the west, and with the holy patriarchs they have been exalted to the kingdom of heaven. The stream of divine mercy and loving-kindness has flowed down through every age, and *we*, upon whom the ends of the world are come, may now approach and participate with our predecessors, to the endless refreshment of our souls. What though at a late hour in the gospel-day we have been called into the service of our divine Master? Let us perform our allotted task with diligence and fidelity, and we shall in no wise lose our reward. When the great Master of the household comes to take account of his servants, as members of that Church which, throughout the world and in every age, has maintained the profession of the true faith, we shall be associated with the good and faithful of all countries, nations, and languages. Before the awful Dispenser of punishment and reward, we shall stand with the goodly fellowship of patriarchs and prophets, with the glorious company of the apostles, and with the noble army of martyrs. This, it must be confessed, is a very dignified society. What rational being, what professing Christian can be insensible to the honour and felicity of such a pure and exalted association? To this happy state we can reasonably expect to arrive only by a diligent discharge of all the duties which are now enjoined us in the Gos-

pel of our blessed Redeemer. For, we may take occasion from the parable before us, to observe,

3dly. That they who are not engaged in the *service of God*, are employed to no valuable purpose: they are here represented by our Lord as absolutely idle—
 “Why stand ye here all the day idle? Go into the vineyard, and work; for otherwise ye cannot expect a reward.”

If the doctrines of Christianity be true—and it is to be hoped that none of us are inclined to dispute the truth of them—if we be immortal creatures, destined for an eternity of existence either in happiness or misery; and if our future portion entirely depend upon the use which we make of the present season of probation; how wonderfully absurd to every considerate mind must appear the general conduct of heedless mortals! What is the business that most engages their thoughts and affections? Is it to lay up treasure in heaven? to make provision for their everlasting welfare? to obtain what unerring wisdom calls *the one thing needful*? Look round the world. All that noise, and hurry, and confusion which is perceptible on every quarter, arises merely from the desire to make provision for the flesh, in order to fulfil the lusts thereof. One is going to his farm, and another to his merchandise. One is prepared to dig for riches with Mammon, and another to follow ambition up the steep ascent of power. In the mean time, what relation has all this anxiety and toil to the advancement of their everlasting welfare? As to the proper business of immortal creatures, they are entirely idle; nay, many of them are in a much more deplorable condition than that of idleness and inactivity; for the holy apostle has declared, that

men confirmed in their native degeneracy, are dead in trespasses and sins; that he who liveth in pleasure, is even dead while he liveth.

Let us then consider the magnitude and difficulty of the task assigned us. Let us work out our eternal salvation with fear and trembling; and, to accomplish this important purpose, let us without delay rise and be doing. Let us attend to the call of our Master. Let us work while it is day, for the night cometh, when no man can work. Having gifts differing according to the grace of God that is given to us, let us, in our respective stations, do our duty faithfully from the heart; not as men-pleasers, but as the conscientious servants of God. Let him that teacheth, wait with zeal and diligence on his teaching. Let him that ruleth, consider himself as appointed to be a terror to evil works, but the minister of God for good to those who do well. In whatever way we may be enabled to promote the welfare of our neighbour, let us give with simplicity to the relief of both his temporal and spiritual necessities. Let mercy, on all occasions, be showed with cheerfulness. In a word, let love to God and man be without dissimulation, and we shall not be slothful in the proper business of rational and immortal creatures; we shall be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

And what service can be more honourable, or more advantageous? If there be any among us who have hitherto refused to comply with the invitations of this bountiful Master; who are now totally immersed in the business or the pleasures of the world; let me with the utmost seriousness exhort them to consider, that the evening of this day of trial is fast approaching: that the mighty hand of death will soon rend from their

fond embraces all those temporal possessions, to which they are now cleaving with such ardent affection: that in this awful hour, without a title to the joys of heaven, the acquisition of the whole world will be of no significance. What melancholy deprivation must surround that immortal spirit; what terror and dismay must overwhelm it, when launching forth into the eternal world; if no provision be made for its future well-being—no prop to sustain it, no refreshment to repair its decaying powers, no friend to minister consolation? Let heedless mortals be persuaded, while the accepted time and the day of salvation continues, to guard against the assaults of these terrible evils. Why stand they idle, all the day, when so much work is yet to be done, and such are the awful consequences of inattention and idleness? If they believe the Gospel, and their practice has hitherto been so inconsistent with their principles; let a sound faith from this moment have its due effect, and begin to be productive of a holy life and conversation. As the apostle exhorted some of the primitive believers—“ Let the time past of your life suffice to
“ have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when ye
“ walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, re-
“ vellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.
“ Soon shall ye be called to give account to him that
“ is ready to judge the quick and the dead. The end
“ of all earthly things is at hand; begin, therefore,
“ immediately, to be sober and to watch unto prayer.”

Surely, the longest life that is commonly allotted to man here below, ought not to be deemed too long a period to be devoted to the service of God, if we may thereby attain a happy immortality. Are there any, who, having been dedicated to Christ in their infancy,

have endeavoured to serve him with fidelity from their early youth? Let them go on their way rejoicing. Let nothing seduce them from the paths of that heavenly wisdom, which they know from happy experience to be full of pleasantness and peace. Are there any, who, having lost many of their first years in vain amusements, corroding cares, or vicious gratifications, began at a later period to serve God in truth and sincerity; who have entered, at the sixth or in the ninth hour, into the vineyard of their heavenly Master? Let them by future industry compensate for past neglect. Let them endeavour, by increasing diligence, to redeem the time that has been mispent. And then, they may rest assured, that the labourer will not be disappointed of his hire: whatsoever is right, *they also* will receive in the hour of general retribution.

We serve a gracious Master. He giveth liberally to every man, and upbraideth not.—Let us learn,

4thly. From the passage of Scripture now under consideration, to ascribe the reward that will hereafter be given to God's dutiful people, to his mere bounty and unmerited loving-kindness. The wages of sin is death; but eternal life is *the gift* of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is lawful for him to do what he will with his own—to offer the perfect felicity of heaven upon any terms that may seem best to his infinite wisdom: highly, then, does it concern us, to inquire diligently what his will is, respecting this momentous subject. This is sufficiently revealed to mankind, in the Scriptures of everlasting truth. Here we are taught; that by wilful disobedience, man was precluded from the benefit of God's promise, and forfeited his title to life and immortality: that the com-

passionate Parent of the universe was graciously pleased to enter into a covenant of mercy with his fallen creatures, through the mediation of a Redeemer: that after man might have been justly abandoned to the effects of his own perverseness—to sin and to consequent misery; he is now wonderfully restored to the capacity of obtaining eternal salvation: that the appointed means of accomplishing this great end are repentance for our guilt and depravity, hearty faith in the merits of our Redeemer, and a sincere desire to be obedient to all his laws prescribed in the blessed Gospel. These are the instituted terms of attaining to immortal life and joy; and, in every view of the subject, it must be acknowledged that the Lord is good. It was goodness alone that devised a method of restoration to the divine favour. It is mere goodness that induces him to bestow the least reward upon our most perfect services, who, after we have done all, are to *him* unprofitable servants. For ever blessed be his abundant grace and mercy, that our everlasting salvation is not now suspended upon the condition of entire obedience to the divine law; for, upon these terms, in the present degenerate state of our nature, were God to be extreme in marking what we do amiss, who could stand justified before him? The economy of redemption by Jesus Christ is a dispensation of mercy provided, not for perfect creatures, but expressly calculated for the relief of penitent sinners. In this situation, let us labour in the vineyard of our Master; let us be as industrious, as careful to maintain good works, as if the happiness of heaven were to be merited by our own exertions: but, when we come to receive our reward, our language will be—“Not unto

“ us, O Lord; not unto us; but unto thy name ascribe all the praise!” And to produce this disposition of mind, it may be remarked,

In the last place, that the day is far spent: with every one of us the hour of retribution is at hand: are we ready to meet our Master, cheered with an humble reliance on his promise, with a steady expectation of approaching bliss? If the time past of our life has been wasted in unprofitable indolence, or what is worse, in active wickedness; let us remain no longer idle, as to the most important business which immortal creatures were sent here to perform; but let us listen to the invitations of the great Householder of the whole family in heaven and earth, and cordially engage in his service. Why should we stand all the day idle? It cannot be said, that no man is willing to hire us. The Son of God persuades, exhorts, commands us to abound in works of righteousness, under the comfortable assurance of an ample recompense for all our labours—by patient continuance in well-doing, we may obtain glory, and honour, and immortality. After a few fleeting years, of what avail will be all the heaps of vanity which the children of this world are now gathering round them? How will the workers of wickedness, the proud infidel, the impious scoffer; the stupid sensualist, then lament their folly, for remaining amidst the thorns and briars of the wilderness; when they might have been engaged in the dignified employment of serving the most bountiful Master; when they might have regaled themselves, even here, with the pleasant fruits of his vineyard; and have been entitled hereafter to a joy unspeakable and full of glory?

To conclude: the Church of Christ, the spiritual Zion, opens wide her gates, day and night, to afford a happy asylum to distressed mortals. Let this be our place of refuge, in the midst of a wicked and miserable world. Associated with the blessed company of all faithful people, let us humbly beseech our heavenly Father, so to assist us with his grace, that it may be our chief delight to continue in that holy fellowship, and our great concern to do all such good works as he has prepared for us to walk in. Thus shall we be protected by infinite mercy and resistless power. Like the happy family that was admitted into the ark, we shall escape that vengeance of the Almighty, which will be poured upon incorrigible sinners: we shall pass in safety through the waves of this troublesome world; and, being steadfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, come finally to the land of everlasting life.

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SERMON XXXII.

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On the Parable of the Sower.
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MATTHEW xiii. 18.

Hear ye, therefore, the parable of the sower.

THE Evangelist informs us, in this chapter, that great multitudes were gathered unto Jesus to hear his divine word, and that he spake many things unto them in parables. In one of his figurative discourses delivered to the people, on this occasion, he represents his heavenly doctrines—the reception which they met with—and the effects which they produced in the world, under the image of a sower going forth to scatter the grain over the face of the ground; some of which was entirely lost, and some yielded a plentiful increase. The good seed fell by the way-side, and was devoured by the fowls of the air; or in stony places, where it soon sprang up, and as soon withered under the scorching heat of the sun; or among thorns, which springing up with it, immediately choked it. And some fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit with various degrees of fertility.

prudence, if their stores be not continually increasing. If they are thus faithful in the unrighteous mammon, surely they ought to be equally diligent in the use of the true riches. He who without intermission is augmenting his stores of useful knowledge; who is daily subduing the vicious propensities of his nature; who is advancing in holiness, adding to his faith, virtue; and to virtue, temperance; and to temperance, brotherly kindness and charity. He who is thus diligently engaged in attending to the means of grace and the practice of goodness, with the blessed expectation of glory, may in truth be said to have laid up much goods in store for many years to come: when death and judgment approaches, when his soul is required of him, these durable treasures will not be taken away.

Let hard-hearted politicians, and visionary philosophers, say in their hearts, there is no God: let them endeavour to banish from the minds of men all notions of a day of future retribution, when the great Lord of the universe will call unto him his servants, that he may take account of their conduct: it is *our* duty to pity the folly of such inconsiderate men, and to pray for their reformation. Our Lord has received the kingdom, as a reward for his great humiliation; and the steadfast expectation of his returning to judge mankind for the deeds done in the body, is the strongest, the only never-failing security for the preservation of both private and public virtue. Let this important principle of Christianity be, therefore, deeply impressed upon the hearts of men; and whatever their station in society may be, they will not be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. When he

callesth unto him the servants to whom the money has been given, that he may know how much every man has gained by trading, what account will they be able to render of themselves? What account will the rich and luxurious give? How have they employed the wealth of which they were appointed only the stewards? How much have they expended in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, soothing the cries and pains of the needy orphan, and causing the widow's heart to sing for joy? What proportion of their wealth have they distributed in promoting the religious instruction of the poor, and prompting them to honest industry? How much of it, which ought to have been employed in works of general utility, has been wasted in riotous living; in making the understanding dark, and the heart more and more corrupt and obdurate?

Let those who are invested with authority seriously consider: Have they exerted their power to protect the weak, and justify the injured; to diffuse the blessings of peace and unanimity through a world so easily incited to discord and confusion? Have they employed all their influence to raise modest virtue from obscurity, and to dash the bold front of iniquity, with punishment and disgrace, to the earth?

Let men who are so ready to boast of their superior knowledge reflect in time: Have their extraordinary abilities been prostituted to serve the pernicious purposes of vice; or to support the declining cause of virtue, and to spread the light and spirit of true religion among the children of men?

Let even the poor and wretched consider, with what

temper of mind they have borne the calamities with which God has been pleased to prove them: Have they exhibited a noble example of fortitude and resignation, so as to compel a giddy world to acknowledge the heavenly efficacy of pure religion? To *them* it has been given to suffer for the name of Christ: Have they let patience have its perfect work, from the happy expectation that the short affliction of a moment will be succeeded by an eternal weight of glory?

In a word; let us all remember this solemn truth—
“That much will be required of those to whom much
“has been given.” Favours not acknowledged, blessings unimproved, will increase the condemnation of the ungrateful and negligent: the servant who knows his master’s will, and does it not, will be beaten with many stripes. But *he* who has been blessed with superior knowledge, and has deemed himself happy in doing what he knows, will be advanced to a higher seat of honour in the mansions of bliss; “for as one
“star differeth from another star in glory, so also is
“the resurrection of the dead.” Let it be our endeavour, therefore, to make a due improvement of all the merciful dispensations of divine Providence. Let prosperity fill us with gratitude, and adversity cause us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Let the means of grace, with which we are so abundantly supplied, be diligently used to the cherishing and strengthening of the blessed hope of glory. Let every Sabbath render us more devout, every communion more holy, and every sermon more zealous in the discharge of our duty towards God and our neighbour. Thus, when our Lord comes to take

account of our improvement, we shall be found in that happy number, to whom he will say—"Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

SERMON XXXIV.

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An Ordination Sermon.
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MALACHI ii. 7.

For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

IN compliance with established usage, on the solemn occasion of the ordination of a minister for the Church of Christ, I shall this morning discourse on some of the duties which are intimately connected with the priestly office. But, although the priests of the Lord are more immediately concerned in the observations which I am about to make, they are applicable in a more remote degree to Christians of every description. The priest's lips should, indeed, keep knowledge, because he is appointed to be the teacher of God's people: but the people also ought to be able to give a reason of the faith that is in them; to be prepared to defend the ark of God; and, more especially, at a season when scoffing infidels, with unusual confidence, attempt to wound not only the *discipline* of the Church,

but the fundamental *doctrines of Christianity*. Let me, then, entreat your attention to the observations which I shall now lay before you.

That there is a supreme, intelligent Power, who superintends and directs the universe, is a sentiment universally prevailing among mankind; and, from the general testimony of history, we learn, that in every nation of the earth which had attained to the smallest degree of civilization, a particular order of men was set apart and devoted to the services of religion. The legislators and rulers of the earth have always been sensible, that *religious fear* is one of the strongest bonds of peace and good order in civil society; and that this pious reverence and fear of God can never be effectually maintained and diffused among the people, without a settled priesthood. The heathen who knew not the will of God as it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, had their temples and their priests; and their religious services, though commonly depraved with many absurd and abominable ceremonies, were, nevertheless, performed with great pomp and solemnity.

When God selected the posterity of Abraham to be his own peculiar people, in order to correct the delusions of idolatry, and to keep alive in the earth the knowledge and the worship of the one true God, he revealed his will to the children of Israel, and instituted a priesthood to minister in his name; and it is said—
“The Lord separated the *tribe of Levi*, to bear the
“ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the
“Lord to minister unto him, and to bless in his
“name.” In some of the preceding verses of this chapter, whence the words of the text are taken, the

dignity and importance of the Levitical priesthood are represented in very expressive language—"Ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts. My covenant was with him of life and peace. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips. He walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts."

When the Son of God assumed our nature, and came to introduce the new dispensation of the Gospel, and to establish his Church in the earth; he continued the same necessary order of things; he commissioned and sent forth men to preach his word, to administer his sacraments, to intercede for, and to bless his people. He directed them to ordain others, and invest them with the same ecclesiastical powers; and promised to be with *them* and their successors, to the end of the world. Accordingly the Christian Church has never been destitute of a regular priesthood. Christianity could not otherwise have existed and been transmitted through successive ages. For without a priest, there could have been no sacraments; and without the sacraments, there would be no Christian religion. The economy of Moses is, in every view, far inferior to the institution of the Gospel. "The law was indeed given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Christians have more ample promises, and more exalted expectations; and with much greater propriety it may be said, that under the dispensation

of the Gospel, “*the priest’s lips should keep knowledge,*” since he is engaged in the work of communicating instruction on subjects of the highest importance; and that the people should “*seek the law at his mouth,*” since he comes to them with a commission from on high; “*he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.*”

From the words of the text, I am naturally led, in this discourse, to dwell upon the following important considerations:—

That he who undertakes to teach others, should endeavour to be well instructed himself—“*The priest’s lips should keep knowledge;*”

That the Christian priest, in the execution of his office, appears in the most dignified character which it is possible for a frail mortal to sustain; for he is the messenger of the King of kings, and Lord of lords; he is employed about matters which relate to nothing less than eternal salvation; And, therefore, that the people should gratefully receive the message which he brings; cheerfully attend upon his ministrations; and affectionately seek instruction in the law of God, at *his* mouth.

The minister of the word of God should, first, endeavour to acquire an extensive knowledge of the *Holy Scriptures*. *These* contain the revelation of the divine will; the whole scheme of redemption through a suffering Saviour; all that we are to believe and do, in order to render this short life a preparatory state to an eternal existence in perfect felicity. The Scriptures contain inexhaustible treasures of wisdom and knowledge. As we cannot, by searching, find out the nature of God to perfection; so, it is probable, that

with our utmost application, we shall never perfectly comprehend the divine word; for, we are told, there are mysteries, which even the angels desire to look into. This sacred volume contains the most ancient history now to be found among all the records of preceding ages. It contains frequent allusions to the customs and manners of every nation with whom God's peculiar people the Jews were at any time connected. It comprehends many astonishing prophecies; of which, some have already received their entire completion; some are now accomplishing; and others will hereafter be accomplished in the world. It affords the most sublime representations of the attributes of Almighty God, and the most ravishing prospects of the felicity of heaven. It inculcates, under the most powerful sanctions, all the duties required of us, as men and as Christians, which are comprehended under the three great branches of *sobriety* with respect to the regulation of our own appetites and passions; of *righteousness* in our dealings with other men; and of *godliness* in our deportment towards our Creator. Here is an ample field which invites our most diligent researches; here is a vast variety of subjects, which can never be exhausted by our most intense application. The man who undertakes the duties of a Christian minister without a competent knowledge of the sacred Scriptures, goes forth, without his armour, to combat a host of foes. All Scripture, being given by inspiration of God, is good for doctrine, for correction, and instruction in righteousness; and it is only by the diligent study of this sacred record of divine truth, that the man of God can expect to be perfect in his ministry, and thoroughly furnished unto all the good

works of his heavenly vocation. Destitute of weapons, how shall he assault and beat down the strong holds of error and vice? How shall he repel the attacks of *enthusiasm*, on the one hand, and of *infidelity* on the other? The apostle has, therefore, commanded us, to have our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, and to take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; and he has assured us—"That
" this word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper
" than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the
" dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints
" and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and
" intents of the heart." Thus, Timothy, the first bishop of Ephesus, is commended for having devoted himself, from a child, to the study of that sacred book, which was able to make him wise unto salvation; and the eloquent Apollos was fervent in spirit, and taught diligently the things of the Lord, because he was mighty in the Scriptures. These are examples which the Christian minister of the present day is constantly to hold in view, and with assiduous zeal to emulate.

2dly. If the priest's lips should keep knowledge, that he may effectually discharge the duties of his station, he ought to devote a very particular attention, so far as he possesses the means of doing it, to the writings of the primitive fathers of the Church, the immediate successors of the apostles. From these, he is to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the Christian doctrine and discipline, as they were maintained in the first and purest periods of Christianity. The safest, the most rational method, to understand the Holy Scripture, is to consult the general sense of the Catholic writers in the uncorrupted ages of the

Church. The current of Christianity, flowing and descending down to us through a long course of time, has been more or less adulterated with foreign mixtures of human invention—the nearer we approach to the fountain-head, the more pure will the stream be found to flow. The practice of the holy fathers, who, for the most part, belonged to the noble army of martyrs, is certainly the best comment, the surest interpretation of the sense and meaning of the sacred Scriptures. From this source we obtain a strong confirmation of our faith, and a sure guide to direct our behaviour in the Church; for they who conversed with the inspired apostles, must certainly be supposed to be well acquainted with the mind and will of God.

Why do we believe the books of the Gospel to be the writings of those persons whose names they bear? Because they were universally received as such, in the first age of the Church, when Christians had the best opportunity of ascertaining their authenticity; and in that character they have been transmitted down to us.

Why do *we Christians* celebrate our Sabbath on the *first* day of the week, and not on the *seventh*, according to the original institution, and the invariable practice of the Jews? Because it is intimated in the Gospel, that the first day of the week, or the Lord's day, was set apart and sanctified for religious worship; and some of the fathers, who wrote within forty years of the death of St. John, expressly declare—"That on Sunday, "because it is the day of our Lord's resurrection, all "Christians met together in city or country; that the "writings of the prophets and apostles were then read "to them; that they gave alms, united in prayer, "and received the sacrament; and that the presiding

“clergyman made a sermon to the assembly, to exhort them to imitate, and perform the things which they had heard.”

Why do we receive *infant baptism* as an ordinance of divine appointment? Because, since St. Paul calls baptism the circumcision made without hands, it must be concluded, that infants are as well qualified to be admitted now into covenant with God by the *spiritual*, as they were before by the *carnal* circumcision; and in confirmation of this opinion, we find that it was a constant usage in the purest ages of the Church to baptize infants, and sign them with the sign of the cross.

And, lastly, why do we believe the Episcopal government of the Church to rest upon divine authority? Because, in the Scriptures, the ministers of God's word and sacraments are evidently distinguished by different names and degrees of power; and, in the primitive writers, this distinction of name and office is most pointedly marked and clearly ascertained. To mention only one instance—St. Ignatius, who was a disciple of St. John, a bishop of Antioch, and a martyr for the truth, expressly mentions the distinct orders of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, no less than sixteen times in seven short epistles. I shall, therefore, conclude this head of my discourse, in the language of Job—“Inquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to search of their fathers. For *we* are but of yesterday, and know nothing. Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?” Thus instructed by the glorious company of the apostles, and the noble army of martyrs, we shall be steadfast in the *true faith*, and lovers of the *primitive discipline*. We shall stand forth to oppose,

in the meekness of wisdom, the principles which are too prevalent in this licentious age, when men would sometimes be Christians without baptism, and priests of their own ordination; when they would explain away all the sublime doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, and the atonement which he offered for the sins of mankind; and thus vainly attempt to reduce the mysteries of faith down to the feeble standard of human reason and comprehension.

3dly. In order to inculcate effectually the doctrines of the Gospel, and to recommend them to the affections of the people, the priest of the Lord should endeavour to become acquainted with the complicated system of human nature, and with every avenue to the heart of man. For consider, to what various inclinations and capacities his instructions are to be communicated; in what different situations he may be called to the exercise of his office. The infidel is to be convinced, and the enthusiast moderated; the steadfast are to be applauded, and the doubtful directed; the prosperous are to be warned, and the afflicted soothed; the meek are to be encouraged with tenderness, and the captious and passionate to be treated with discretion. In a word, virtue must be so inculcated, as to be rendered amiable; and vice so corrected, that the vicious may not be more confirmed in their errors. The wise observation of St. Paul is ever to be held in view—
“ Seeing we have this ministry, as we have received
“ mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden
“ things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, not
“ handling the word of God deceitfully, but by mani-
“ festation of the truth, commending ourselves to every
“ man’s conscience, in the sight of God.”

All the sciences have mutual connexions, and serve to strengthen and support each other, whichsoever of them may chance to take the lead; as the rays of the sun, when collected and brought all to operate in one direction, act with more intense heat, and with almost irresistible energy. The minister of the Gospel may turn every branch of secular knowledge to aid the promotion of the Christian religion. From treatises of morality, from examples recorded in history, and from many other sources, he may derive information with respect to the complicated movements, and various affections of the human mind. Thus instructed, he is certainly better qualified to teach, to exhort, to persuade, to manifest the truth in such a manner, as to commend himself to every man's conscience, in the sight of God. Thus furnished with knowledge, his zeal will be tempered with prudence; his admonitions will be ever suited to the occasion; and he will convince the judgment, while he gains the affections of the heart.

In the last place; if even St. Paul, an inspired apostle, and a worker of miracles, found it necessary to exclaim—"Who is sufficient for these things!" let the Christian minister be deeply impressed with a serious sense of his own infirmity; of the importance of his office; and of the truth and excellency of that religion, which it is his duty to explain and inculcate. Influenced by such sentiments as these, he will not be a novice lifted up with pride; he will preach the Gospel with that earnestness which becomes a teacher of truth—of that *divine truth* by which men are made wise unto salvation; and he will be sensible of the necessity of requesting continual supplies of heavenly grace, that

he may be made strong out of weakness; that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of men. But however humble the priest of the Lord may be, let him never degrade the dignity of his character, by grovelling sentiments or sordid behaviour: let him always remember, that he acts not from his own authority; he is commissioned from on high; "he is the Messenger of the Lord of hosts."

And this is the next circumstance which deserves the consideration of the Christian minister, and which should inspire him with steadfastness and a holy confidence, in the execution of his important trust. Let him declare the *whole* counsel of God; his precepts, his promises, and his threatenings. The faithful messenger must deliver the message, as he has received it, without diminution or addition. He will hereafter be required to give an account of his embassy; whether he has maintained the honour of the Prince who sent him; whether he has made a faithful representation of the terms upon which God will be reconciled to his rebellious creatures. And doubtless, the punishment inflicted on that messenger will be dreadfully severe, who, through indolence or viciousness, has betrayed the trust that was reposed in him, has misled his fellow-men, and sacrificed the interest and honour of his Lord and Master.

If such be the difficulty and danger, as well as importance and dignity of the *priestly office*; let me conclude with the last thing proposed, which was to remind and exhort the people, gratefully to receive the message which is brought by the priest of the Lord, and diligently to seek instruction at his mouth. He comes to you with terms of reconciliation from an

offended God; with precepts of virtue and piety, on which the happiness of rational creatures entirely depends; and with the gracious offers of eternal salvation. Would it not be folly and presumption, in the highest degree, to disregard the merciful invitations, and to despise the undeserved goodness of God? He will undoubtedly vindicate the authority of those whom he has invested with power to act in his name. The ministers of the word are not, indeed, sent to be lords over God's heritage; but still, they are *his* messengers; they are *his* officers in the Church, appointed to dispense the means of grace, by which the whole body of Christians are to be trained up, and prepared for the enjoyment of immortal glory.

The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and the people should seek the law at his mouth, because it is *his* business, and *his* alone, to preach the Gospel with authority, and to administer the holy sacraments. *He* therefore that despiseth the priesthood, and resolves to request no foreign aid in his progress towards heaven, despiseth the ordinance of God, and consequently has too much reason to be apprehensive of the divine displeasure.

Say not, that we magnify our office beyond measure. Of ourselves, we are nothing; we have no peculiar privileges and powers; but our sufficiency in the Church of Christ, is altogether from *him*, the great Head and Ruler of it. Our authority was imparted for edification, and not for destruction; it reaches neither to person nor property, but is entirely of a spiritual nature; it is altogether persuasive, and not compulsory. In the language of St. Paul—"We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you

“ by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye recon-
“ ciled to God. For all things are for your sakes, that
“ the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving
“ of many redound to the glory of God. Although
“ we are the ministers of God, yet are we your servants
“ in Christ Jesus.”

In these sentiments, I am persuaded, that I have the hearty concurrence of my respected brethren of the clergy who now hear me. And on this solemn occasion; at this interesting period of your lives, I doubt not, but that these important truths have made a particular impression upon *your* minds, who are now to receive authority, for the office and work of priests, in the Church of God. My brethren, you are now going forth into a refractory and vicious world, in the dignified character of messengers of the Lord of hosts. Doubtless, you have seriously considered the magnitude and difficulty of the task, to the performance of which you are most solemnly to be engaged. The obligations into which you are about to enter, will remain ever fresh upon your minds. You will be wholesome examples to the flock of Christ. You will be diligent in reading the Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the understanding of the same; ever remembering, that the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, or he cannot instruct with efficacy. You will be faithful in banishing and driving away erroneous and strange doctrines. In a word, you will give all diligence, *so* to minister the doctrine, and sacraments, and discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this Church, to which we have the happiness to belong, hath received the same. And in all your ministrations, may the blessing of heaven descend

upon you; that you may be clothed with righteousness, and that the word spoken by your mouths may have such success, that it may never be spoken in vain.

To the members of this congregation I cannot forbear to express my congratulations, on the settlement of another minister among you, of whom you may entertain the pleasing expectation, that he will repair the grievous loss which you have lately sustained. My last address to you from this place was occasioned by the sudden and much lamented death of your worthy pastor;* of whom it may be truly said, that they who best knew him, loved and respected him the most. He now rests from his labours; and we may affectionately exclaim—"Blessed are the dead, which die in the Lord!" While you lament past misfortunes, forget not to look forward to future blessings; while you cherish in your bosoms the remembrance of *him* who is now no more, recollect the duties which are due to his successor. And, I am perfectly persuaded, while he treads in his predecessor's steps, you will not fail to treat him with similar respect and esteem. You will support him with decency; view his whole conversation with liberality and candour; and receive all his ministrations with gratitude and devout attention. Thus will *he* be induced to perform his task with a joyful heart and a willing mind; and *you* will continually grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour. In the last day of general account, *he* will be considered as the blessed instrument of turning many unto righteousness; and *you*

* Rev. Mr. Bloomer.

will be rewarded as good and faithful servants, who not only *knew* your Master's will, but also diligently *performed* it. And let me seriously entreat you all, of every rank and denomination, to consider the goodness of God in sending, from time to time, labourers into his Gospel harvest; how abundantly *you* are supplied with the means of grace; and how continually you are invited to the practice of virtue and piety, by the blessed hope of glory. The lines have fallen to you in pleasant places; yea, you have a goodly heritage. The word of the Lord runs, and is glorified; and, with the strictest propriety it may be demanded—"What more could have been done for the vineyard of the Lord of hosts, that hath not been done for it?" Let it ever be impressed upon your minds, that the servant who knows his master's will, and does it not, will be beaten with many stripes. Brethren, by devout attention to every Christian duty, give all diligence to make your calling and election sure; so shall an entrance be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

SERMON XXXV.

The Repentant Sinner.

LUKE xv. 8, 9, 10.

Either what woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

THIS familiar, yet instructive parable, is a part of the Gospel for the last Sunday. It was delivered by our Lord, in order to correct the asperity of the Pharisees and scribes, who murmured against him, because, when the publicans and sinners drew near unto him for to hear him, he had kindly received and tenderly instructed them. For the more perfect comprehension of this passage of sacred Scripture, it may not be unnecessary to give you a concise account of the characters which are here introduced.

Not long before the coming of our Lord, the Jews had been entirely subjugated by the Romans, and had

become tributary to them. *They*, who in the Gospel are denominated *publicans*, were the persons employed to levy the taxes. This employment was attended with great temptations. It was in itself an odious business to the Jews, who with great reluctance submitted to the smallest impositions of a foreign power; and the publicans rendered it still more disagreeable by the manner in which they executed their office. They too often pushed matters to extremities; were rigorous in the discharge of their duty; frequently exacted more than was due; and enriched themselves by the spoils of the people. Hence, this class of men became the objects of universal hatred; and hence, they were commonly ranked with the vilest sinners. But, although they were in general bad men, some among them were of a different character. Zaccheus was a person of great probity, charity, and piety; and, we may suppose, that Matthew the Evangelist resembled him, who was sitting as a publican at the receipt of custom, when he was called by Jesus to become one of his disciples. The *Pharisees*, you know, were a *sect* of the Jews, zealous of the traditions of the elders, extremely attentive to the ceremonial parts of the law, conspicuous for their outward austerity; but, at the same time, were corrupt in their manners, hypocritical, covetous, and proud.

By the term *scribes*, the Evangelists do not mean to designate any particular *sect*; but they were called so from their original office, which was to transcribe the sacred Scriptures. When Ezra, after the Babylonish captivity, made his famous reformation in religion, and settled the canon of Scripture, he was assisted by a number of writers; and he ordered matters so, that

they and their successors were thenceforth employed in multiplying the copies of the sacred volume. From being thus conversant with the Holy Scriptures, they acquired a singular knowledge of them, expounded them to the people, obtained the title of teachers, and were consulted on all difficult points of faith. Hence, they are said by our Lord, to sit in the chair of Moses; and hence also, an able minister of the New Testament is called *a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*. It is probable, that some of them were attached to one sect, and some to another. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read of the “scribes that were of the *sect of the Pharisees;*” hence we have reason to conclude, that some of them belonged to that of the Sadducees also. Their vices are reprov'd by our Lord with great severity, in many of his discourses to the people. What effect his discourse, delivered at this time, had on them, we are not informed. But, surely, *we* cannot attend to the conclusion of it, without experiencing an elevation of soul to the blessed abodes of angels; an union of sentiment with those benevolent and exalted spirits. See the merciful Saviour of sinners seeking by his admonitions and precepts, and saving by his meritorious death and passion those who were lost. Hear him affectionately declaring to us, that *our* salvation is a matter in which all the hosts of heaven are concerned; that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over even one sinner that repenteth. And can we forbear to exclaim with holy wonder and gratitude—“Ye benevolent spirits who encircle the throne of the Most Highest, dwelling in the perfection of felicity and glory; are *ye* thus tenderly concerned for the welfare of man? Does the re-

“covery of a sinful mortal from the error of his ways,
“heighten the joy, and give new life to the rapture even
“of heaven itself? In what an important point of view
“does this consideration place the human race! How
“speedily ought every sinner to turn unto God by
“sincere repentance! How emulous ought all Chris-
“tians to be of this unbounded benevolence of the
“angelic host, by endeavouring to promote the virtue,
“and by rejoicing in the happiness of each other!”

The sacred Scriptures afford us the most sublime representations of the power and majesty of God. He sits enthroned amidst myriads of intelligent creatures, who all adore him as the universal Parent; as their common Creator and Lord. Some are admitted to a nearer view of his ineffable greatness and glory; and some at a greater distance confess his wisdom and goodness. Even in this remote situation, in this little portion of the universe, to man also it is given to know God; and *his* voice must join the universal chorus of rational beings, in ascribing unto him who sitteth on the throne, glory and honour, majesty and dominion. This honourable employment is more particularly the business of us *Christians*. *We* are said to have come to an innumerable company of angels, by virtue of our high calling in Christ Jesus; and of *him* the whole family in heaven and earth is named. The angels, we are taught, rejoice in *our* repentance, goodness, and felicity; and we are commanded to emulate *their* purity, and zeal, and activity; to do the will of God on earth, as it is done by them in heaven.

In order to apprehend the full force of the words of the text, it will be necessary to consider the occasion on which they were delivered. In the beginning of

the chapter, the Evangelist informs us—"That the publicans and sinners drew near unto Jesus for to hear him." They were graciously received; for *he*, who was a Teacher sent from God, never refused to communicate religious instruction to any persons who were desirous of receiving it. The proud Pharisees murmured at what they deemed an unbecoming condescension in one who claimed the authority of a divine Prophet. To correct their unreasonable prejudice and pride, our Lord immediately addresses them in two striking parables; in one of which, he represents the conversion of a sinner from the error of his ways, under the image of a shepherd recovering one of his sheep which had strayed from the fold; in the other, the same sentiment is delivered by an allusion to a woman, who having ten pieces of silver, and losing one, seeks diligently till she find that which was lost. The former parable, our Lord concludes with this declaration—"I say unto you, that joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance;" and he impresses the latter upon the minds of his audience by concluding it in the words of the text—"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." As benevolent friends and neighbours came with their kind congratulations to the man who recovered one of his flock which had strayed away, and to the woman who found the money which she had lost; so the compassionate angels of heaven rejoice at the restoration even of one sinner. And if this be a matter of such high importance; if even the inhabitants of heaven be affected by such transactions on earth; shall the haughty and im-

penitent Pharisees presume to censure the Saviour of the world for receiving these lost publicans and sinners, and endeavouring to reclaim them to the love of virtue and true religion?

In this passage of sacred Scripture several difficulties occur, which it may be necessary to remove, before we proceed to draw from it any practical improvement. It may be objected—"Is it not unreasonable to imagine that the blessed inhabitants of heaven can be so far interested in the affairs of men, as to be affected with joy on the restoration of a wicked man to the love and practice of his duty?"

We have no knowledge of those exalted spiritual beings who inhabit another world, but what is derived from the word of God; and here, their existence, and their benevolent intercourse with mankind are most expressly and repeatedly declared. Every reflecting person might rationally conclude, that there are many other intelligent creatures, of various ranks and degrees of perfection, existing between the great Supreme and us, the inhabitants of this lower world—these conclusions of human reason have been entirely confirmed by the declarations of Holy Scripture. It will be needless to adduce particular passages. They are universally represented as ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of glory; and we are informed, that they have been frequently despatched on benevolent embassies to man. Gabriel was sent to make Daniel understand the vision which had been revealed to him; and the same ministering spirit came to Zacharias to foretell the birth of John the Baptist; and to the blessed Virgin Mary, to announce the conception and nativity of a Son and a Saviour, who is Christ the

Lord. How they perceive, and know, and communicate intelligence to each other, we are not, in our present imperfect state, able to explain. But, that they still take an interest in the concerns of men, our Lord expressly assures us in the text; and St. Paul, in his directions to the Church at Corinth, insists upon a reverent behaviour in Christians, during the time of public worship, "*because of the angels*"—because those holy and devout spirits are supposed to be more particularly present in the assemblies of worshipping saints.

It may be again inquired—"Why should there be more joy among the inhabitants of heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance? Surely, to the lovers of virtue and piety, the persevering goodness of so great a number ought to be a matter of more joy and exultation, than the recovery of one vicious man from a state of wickedness."

Our Lord, in the parable before us, represents divine things under allusions to the manners of men, and the modes in which the affections of the human heart commonly exert themselves. His intention was to set the conversion of a sinner, the recovery of an immortal soul from wickedness and misery, in the most striking point of light. Now, universal experience teaches us, that the human heart is much more elated with joy on obtaining what we have long desired, or recovering what was supposed to be irretrievably lost, than in the quiet and uninterrupted possession of what is equally valuable, and what in reality we hold equally dear. The affectionate parent experiences a transport on account of the recovery of one child from a dangerous

illness, which the uninterrupted health of many other children cannot convey. In the one case, the mind is tranquil, and rests in quiet possession of the blessing; in the other, its fears are removed, and its hopes gratified: in the one case, there is indeed the actual possession of pleasure; in the other, this pleasure is heightened by recent deliverance from exquisite pain. And if the benevolent angels are concerned for the felicity of man, may we not suppose that they experience some such sensations as these, when they behold a wretched sinner rising from the pollutions of vice, and thus escaping from misery and death eternal?

A question may once more arise—"What are we to understand by the ninety and nine just persons which *need no repentance*? Do we not all offend seven times in a day? Are not the most righteous in many respects culpable? Is not repentance continually necessary? and ought they not to begin their devotions, both public and private, with *confession of their sins*?"

It is true, when the Lord looketh down from heaven, and beholds the children of men, there is none perfectly innocent, no, not one. But still, there is a vast distinction between the ungodly and the upright man. The one worketh all manner of wickedness with greediness: it is the sincere desire of the other to subdue the power of error and vice; to grow in grace; to be continually advancing towards the great standard of all moral perfection. Now, although the man who is habitually upright and pious will constantly cherish a penitent frame of mind, *his repentance* must be very different from that of the profligate sinner who is just beginning to turn from the error of his ways. The *former* has

only to entreat the compassion and forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ, for inadvertent errors and unintentional faults : but, with respect to the *sinner*, there must be a total *change* of his principles, his dispositions, and his practices : and this was undoubtedly the distinction which our Lord had in view, when he speaks of the repenting sinner, and of the just person who needeth no repentance.

Having thus removed the difficulties which seemed to lie in our way ; let us proceed to draw some practical improvement from this portion of Holy Scripture.

And, 1st. We have reason to remark, how deplorable is the depravity, how obstinate the stupidity of many profligate sinners, who can persist in their wickedness, notwithstanding all the methods which are employed by a merciful God to reclaim them to virtue and piety. The eternal Son divested himself of his celestial majesty and glory ; assumed our nature in the degraded form of a servant ; with infinite condescension instructed the vilest publicans and sinners ; subjected himself to the scoffs, and murmurings, and cruel persecutions of the perverse and hypocritical Pharisees ; and at length became obedient unto the death of the cross. And why was all this degradation and misery endured ? It was to bring sinners to amendment of life—that repentance and remission of sin might be preached in his name to all the people.

The blessed angels who surround the throne of the Majesty on high ; who drink at the fountain-head of that fulness of joy, of those rivers of pleasure which ever flow at the right hand of God. Even these benevolent spirits, who are so exalted and so happy,

are nevertheless concerned for the welfare of us, miserable sinners. At the nativity of our Redeemer, they descended with songs of congratulation, proclaiming peace upon earth, and good-will towards men. And even now, they rejoice at the conversion of a wicked man; who, having been dead in trespasses and sins, determines to save his soul alive, by turning away from his wickedness and doing that which is lawful and right.

And can the sinner withstand all these powerful motives to reformation of manners? Will the drunkard persist in his intemperance, the swearer in his blasphemies, the cheat in his dishonesty; when the Son of God suffered and died to reclaim them; and when the glorious host of angels, the heavens and all the powers therein, would rejoice at their conversion? Let them not be so lost to every generous sentiment of gratitude and divine emulation. But, if these more liberal motives cannot prevail, let them at least reflect, that there are malignant spirits standing ready to seize them; that they who reject the felicity of heaven, the society of that blessed place, must go to the abodes of misery prepared for the devil and his angels.

2dly. Hence we may learn to cultivate a spirit of tender sympathy for the distresses of each other; an ardent desire to promote the happiness of all mankind. Although fixed for a short season in this remote place of our earthly pilgrimage, we are not unconnected with other beings. We are associated with the spirits of just men made perfect, with an innumerable company of angels, and with Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant. We are objects of such importance as to awaken the benevolent regards of the inhabitants of

heaven. And if *they* are solicitous for our welfare, can we be regardless of the welfare of *each other*? Let us not stand and look on with cruel unconcern, while our brother is rushing headlong down the fatal precipice which leads to the gulf of perdition. Let us call aloud to apprise him of his danger. Let us stretch forth our hand to stop him in his mad career. Let us strive to enhance the joy of angels, by bringing one sinner to repentance. Let not pride restrain our kind exertions in behalf of those for whom Christ suffered, and to whom angels minister.

The moral obligation of exercising universal benevolence is seldom controverted; but, among Christians, the Gospel of Jesus Christ renders this obligation much more forcible, by representing them in a new and most interesting point of light. Giving directions to Christians, St. Paul says—"Through thy knowledge," that is, "by the abuse of thy knowledge, shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." Our Lord declares—"That every act of kindness performed to one of the least of his disciples, he will receive as done unto himself; and, he charges us, to take heed that we despise not one of his little ones; for," continues he, "I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." Great is our happiness as well as dignity, to be thus associated; to be connected with holy angels, who are fellow-servants with us of the most high God; and with Jesus Christ; who is the Head of that mystical body of which we are members. Let us, then, cherish the most affectionate regard for the

felicity of each other. In consoling the distressed, in ministering to the necessitous, in correcting the vicious, let us emulate the benevolence of the blessed inhabitants of heaven.

Sdly. Let the prevailing disposition of our souls be humility and contrition. Too much reason have we, whenever we assemble in the house of God, and prostrate ourselves before him, to begin our devotions with humbly acknowledging—"That we have erred and "strayed from his ways, like lost sheep." But, does the faithful and tender Shepherd leave us in this lost and forlorn condition, without an effort to extricate us from it? No; he goeth after that which is lost; he seeketh diligently for it. Happy are they who do not perversely wander farther, and still farther in the wilderness of error and vice; who are found by him who came from heaven expressly for the purpose of seeking and saving those who were lost.

Hear his friendly voice, ye who are going astray from the path of virtue and piety. He calls you to return, by his word, his Spirit, his ministers, his ordinances, the merciful and the afflictive dispensations of his providence. Consider the dangers of the wilderness which surrounds you. Ye are wandering in barren and dry places, where there are no refreshing waters. Come to the good Shepherd of the flock. Under his tender care and protection ye will lack nothing. He will feed you in green pastures, and lead you forth beside the waters of comfort. His loving-kindness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life.

Lastly; when our hearts are oppressed with sorrow, and we are tempted to pour forth bitter complaints on account of the sin and misery which so universally pre-

vail in this region of vanity, this vale of tears, let us lift up our eyes to the heavens, to those blessed mansions inhabited by pure spirits, who know neither sin nor sorrow. Let us listen with the rapt apostle to the voice of many angels who stand round about the throne of God. The number of them is ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; and their song is on that subject, in which *we* ought to join with the utmost power of our souls; for they sing—“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” Their virtue shines in her full lustre: there is no vice, no disorder, no misery: there, the kingdom of God appears in the perfection of glory. To the glorious company of the apostles, to the goodly fellowship of the prophets, to the noble army of martyrs, to the angels who cry aloud in strains of enraptured adoration and praise, to the heavens and all the powers that are therein, *we* frail children of the dust are invited to aspire—with united voices they seem to say—“Come up hither!” Let the sinner repent and live. Let the good man renew his zeal and activity. Let us, with the holy martyr Stephen, see the heavens opened; and surely we shall be impelled to exclaim—“Lend your wings! that we may mount, that we may fly; for our souls have a longing desire to enter into the courts of the Lord.”



