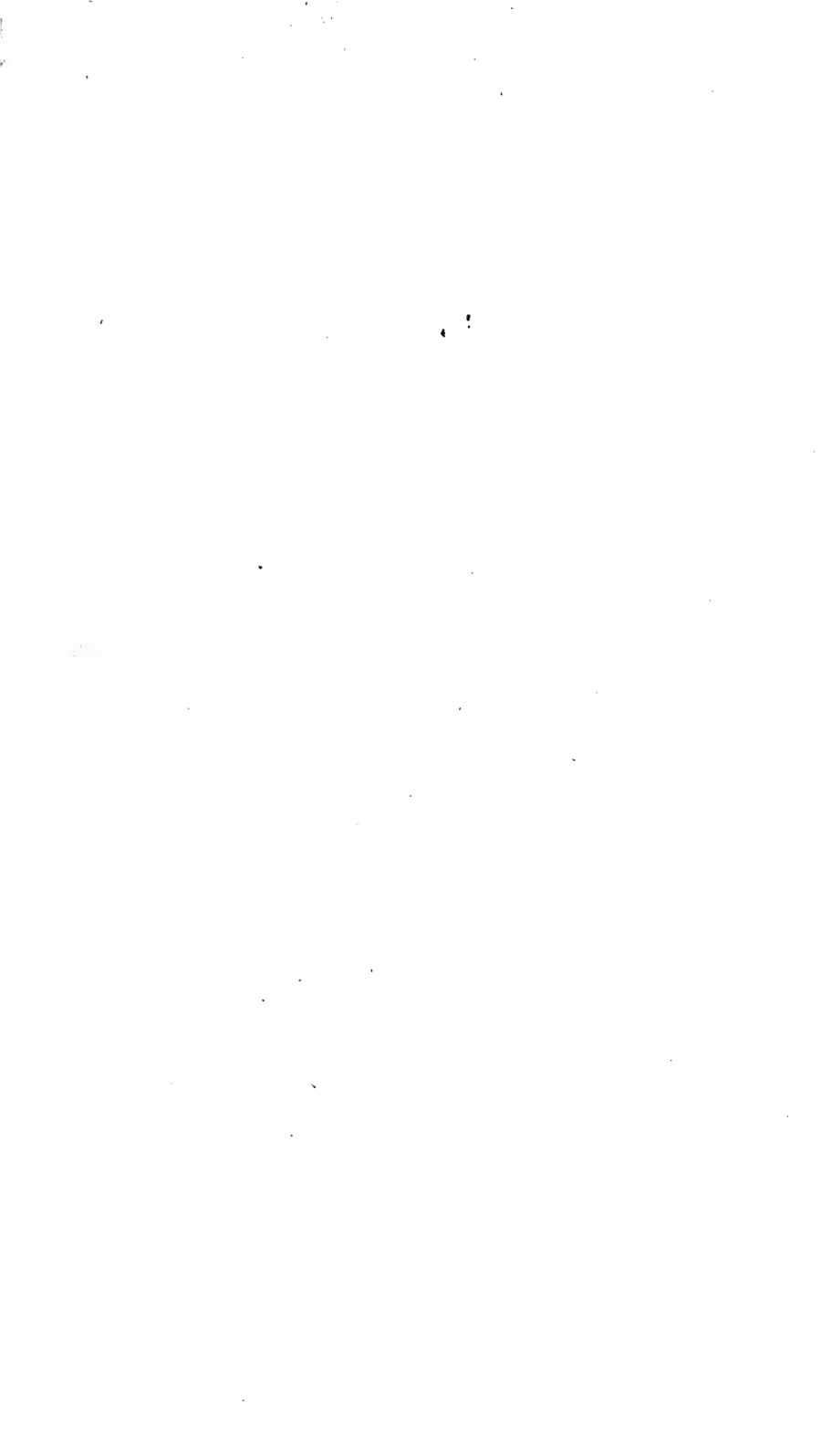




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Joseph C. Livingston

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# SERMONS,

EVANGELICAL, DOCTRINAL,

AND

PRACTICAL.

BY ELIHU THAYER, D. D.

Late Pastor of the First Church in Kingston, N. H.

EXETER :

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1813.

**NEW-HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT, ss.**

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HANNAH THAYER, of said District, widow of the late DR. THAYER, of Kingston, in said District, hath deposited in this office the title of a Book, the right whereof she claims as Proprietress, in the following words, to wit...“Sermons, Evangelical, Doctrinal, and Practical, by ELIHU “THAYER, D. D. late Pastor of the First Church in Kingston, N. H.”

In conformity to the Act of the Congress of the United States, entitled “An Act for the encouragement of learning, by securing copies of Maps, Charts and other books, to the Authors and Proprietors therein mentioned.” And also “An Act for the encouragement of learning, by securing copies of Maps, Charts and other Books to the Authors and Proprietors therein mentioned, and extending the benefit thereof to the arts of designing, engraving and etching historical and other prints.

**R. CUTTS SHANNON,**  
*Clerk of New-Hampshire District.*

*A true copy of Record.*  
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# SERMON I.

ON CREATION.



PSALM, XIX. 1.

*The heavens declare the glory of God ; and the firmament showeth his handy work.*

THE honour and happiness of a creature consist in the knowledge and enjoyment of God. But notwithstanding this, great ignorance of God has prevailed in all ages among mankind. In some ages, and among some nations, this darkness has been great indeed; almost without a ray of divine light. Such is the blindness of the human mind, and such the wickedness of the heart, that some in every age have denied the being of God. Others who have acknowledged his existence, have yet been in a state of doubt and uncertainty respecting his natural and moral perfections. Various have been the opinions of the heathen, who have acknowledged a Deity, respecting his character, which diversity of opinion has given birth to as many schemes of religion. For every sect will form a system of religious service conformable to their views of the

divine character. Hence "every one will," as the prophet remarks, "walk in the way of his God." For the design of all kinds of religion is to please God and find acceptance with him. Should we look into the more enlightened parts of the world, we shall find, in every period of time, that mankind have embraced notions of the Deity, extremely diverse from each other. This diversity of opinion, on a subject so all-important, proves a deficiency some where; for either mankind have not sufficient evidence of the being and perfections of God, or they have been, and still are criminally inattentive to the evidence, which is exhibited before them. God requires mankind to know and love him; and considers ignorance of himself a great sin. But according to all our natural notions of equity, that is an unreasonable law, which requires love to a being we do not know, and at the same time are destitute of those means of information, which are absolutely necessary to form just conceptions of him. But where there is full and abundant evidence of any truth constantly held up before our eyes, particularly of the being of God, our reason and conscience must condemn us for not knowing and loving him. The apostle has given a divine sanction to this sentiment in these words, "For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they, (that is the heathen) are without excuse,"—Truly without excuse "in changing the glory of the incorruptible God into images like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and



fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.” The Psalmist had the same sense of this matter. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy work.” On this very principle it is, that the apostle condemns the heathen world for their idolatry, because the visible creation, the sun, moon, and stars, and indeed every object they beheld, were displays of Almighty power—of infinite wisdom and goodness.

### DOCTRINE.

The visible heavens afford abundant evidence of the being and glory of God.

My design is to show how the heavens declare the being and glory of God, after having shown what is here meant by *heavens*, and what by *glory*. By the word *heavens*, we are to understand that vast expanse in which the sun, moon and stars are disposed; and the word *heavens* is often used to denote space and the objects with which it is replenished. These objects “declare the glory of God.” They exhibit his glory to the inhabitants of this earth. This is the meaning of the inspired author of the text, for he adds, “day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge; there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.” That is, the firmament with its shining furniture of suns and stars.—These are eloquent preachers of the being and perfections of God. But this cannot be said of the heaven of heavens, the presence chamber of God and glorified saints, for these are seen only with an eye of faith, through the medium of revelation. It is the visible heavens which

declare the glory of God. And if they manifest the glory of God, they of consequence manifest his being. For a manifestation of his being is necessarily implied in a manifestation of his glory. By the glory of God is meant his wisdom, power, and goodness. These perfections constitute the glory of the divine nature.

1. The being of God is manifested by the visible creation. These glorious works discover to the eye of reason the existence of their great original. It is by the eye of reason, that God is seen and acknowledged through the medium of his works. The existence of the sun, moon and stars proves the existence of a God; for it is a plain dictate of reason, that visible things are not self-existent, but depend on something without themselves for their being. The visible creation is evidently destitute of the essential properties of eternal self-existence. It is evidently mutable, and all mutable being is limited, and has a cause for its existence and change. Independent existence, is unchangeable existence. But we have the fullest evidence with respect to ourselves, and every thing about us, that both we and they are dependent. It is as evident as it can be, that some Almighty being has existed from eternity, who gave existence to the visible creation, the order and harmony of whose parts exhibit his wisdom. Indeed nothing is more plain, that no being, creature or thing can be the author of its own existence, but must be either the effect, the production of some other being, or is itself self-existent. There is evidence, which is convincing to a thinking mind, that no visible object, whether animate or inanimate, is

self-existent. And therefore every visible object leads the mind to an invisible, independent, self-existent God. I would observe

2. That not only the being, but the glorious perfections of God are declared by the visible heavens. "They show his handy work." The sun, moon, and stars exhibit to intelligent creatures, the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, and the vast expanse, in which they are disposed and arranged like gems, his handy work—work which God performs without study, as man performs his daily business, of which he has perfect knowledge. But how do the heavens declare the glory of God, or manifest his wisdom, power and goodness, which are his glory?—I answer, by their magnitude, their immense distances, their regularity and mutual harmony. They are all striking manifestations of these perfections, in the same way as the magnificence and richness of a building discover the wisdom, and ability of the builder, who furnishes materials, and defrays the expense of the whole. As the beautiful symmetry, and exact proportions of all the parts of a curious machine display the wisdom of the contriver, so do the heavens declare the glory of God. When we see a complicated, curious machine adapted to some useful purpose, we admire the wisdom of the contriver. We judge of his skill by his work. When we see a stately edifice rising under the hands of many workmen, on which great sums have been, and must be expended, we very naturally infer the opulence of the owner. We also judge of the opulence of a prince, by the number, and magnifi-

cence of his cities, and the multitude of his people. But what is all the glory and pomp of this world, displayed in the magnificence of princes, compared with the riches and glory of God, displayed in creation? What is the skill of the most ingenious man, compared with the wisdom of God, displayed in the laws by which all its parts and revolutions are governed? "When I consider thy heavens," saith the pious, contemplative psalmist, "the sun, moon and stars, which thou hast ordained:" what is man! When we consider the magnitude, the rapid, yet regular motions, and immense distances of the heavenly bodies—all the handy work of God—all constantly preserved by him, and their various revolutions adjusted by him with the greatest exactness, continuing from age to age, without the least discord; how are we amazed at his wisdom and power! Compared with these, what is man with all his affected greatness and wisdom! How do the riches, the pomp and splendour of princes vanish from our sight in the surprising contrast!—The immense distances of the fixed stars from our earth, and from one another, says an ingenious writer,\* is of all considerations the most proper for raising our ideas of the works of God. Indeed who can behold the sun, which is the centre of our system, and consider his bulk, which must be at least a million times larger than the earth on which we live; and reflect on the beneficial influence of his rays, though placed, according to modern discoveries, more than ninety millions of miles from him; at the same time affording sufficient light and heat to the other planets of this system, though

\* FERGUSON, from whom several passages in this discourse are borrowed.

some of them are ten times further from him than the earth—I say when we reflect on this, what an exalted idea does it give us of the majesty, power, and wisdom of God! But notwithstanding the vast extent of the earth's orbit round the sun, which according to the most correct calculation is more than one hundred and eighty millions of miles, yet the distance of a fixed star is not sensibly affected by it; that is, the earth is really in one part of her orbit, one hundred and eighty millions of miles nigher to this fixed star, than in another part, yet the star appears no larger.—Mathematicians have computed the distance of the nearest fixed star to be so great, that a cannon ball flying with its usual velocity would not reach it in seven hundred thousand years. Should it be asked, how can we discover the distances of the heavenly bodies? I answer, upon the same principles, that a person but moderately acquainted with figures, can measure the height of a steeple, or the distance of any inaccessible object. Nor can that be justly esteemed vain philosophy which tends to exalt our views of the wisdom, and works of God.

The fixed stars being at such immense distances from the sun, cannot be supposed to receive so strong a light as they seem to have, nor any brightness sufficient to make them visible to us; they must therefore shine with their own unborrowed lustre, as the sun does; and as each star is confined to a particular part of space, it is reasonable to conclude they are of the same nature with the sun. It can hardly be thought probable that the Almighty, who always acts with infi-

nite wisdom, should create so many glorious suns, fit for so many important purposes, placed at such distances from each other, merely to give a faint glimmering light to the inhabitants of this globe; especially since there are many more stars, which require the assistance of glasses to discover them, than are visible to the naked eye. Though it must be confessed, that it would not become us to conclude they were made in vain, even on the supposition, they were designed for the benefit of this earth only. "For it is evidently worthy of God, (as one remarks) that he should, as it were, take state upon himself in his appearance upon a theatre where such great and marvellous designs are carrying on, as are transacting in our world; and where the principal character in the grand drama is no less than the Son of God. It would seem proper and suitable to his dignity, that the scene should be hung with symbols and ensigns of majesty fitted to awaken the respectful awe, and engage the solemn attention of the spectators of so sublime and noble an action." But since this design is perfectly consistent with the supposition, that the fixed stars are the centres of as many systems, and that they communicate light and heat to innumerable rational creatures, it seems most natural to consider them in this light. And upon this position, instead of one sun, and one world only in the universe, we are presented with such numbers of suns, worlds and systems, disposed through boundless space, that should our sun with all the planets belonging to him, be annihilated, they would be no more missed by an eye that could take in the whole creation, than a grain

of sand from the sea shore. Though the most distant of our planets, in its revolution round the sun, forms a circle of more than four thousand millions of miles in circumference, and some of our comets, says our author, make excursions of many millions of miles beyond the limits of these planets, and yet at that amazing distance, they are incomparably nigher the sun than to any of the fixed stars, as they do not get beyond the commanding influence of the sun's attraction. From what we know of our system, it is reasonable to suppose, that others are contrived with equal wisdom, situated and accommodated for rational inhabitants. And as there is reason to conclude, that the fixed stars are prodigious globes of fire like our sun, and at immense distances from one another, as well as from us, it is reasonable to conclude, they were made for the same purposes, each to bestow light, heat and vegetation on a certain number of inhabited worlds which surround them. What an amazing conception does this view give us of the works of God! Thousands and thousands of suns, arranged above and beneath us, at inconceivable distances from each other, attended by ten thousand times ten thousand worlds, all in rapid motion, yet calm, regular and harmonious, invariably keeping the paths prescribed them, and these worlds peopled with myriads of intelligent creatures capable of progressive and endless happiness! And if such wisdom, power and goodness are displayed in the material creation, which is the least considerable part of the universe—If these things be his handy work—if these be but an inconsiderable part of his

ways, how great are his designs, and how mighty are his wonders!—And O how great and glorious must He be, who made and governs the whole!—How infinitely great is that being whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain! How vast his power who created these glorious luminaries, and all their attendant worlds with his word! How boundless his essence, whose right hand meted out the heavens! And how great that power which governs them with a nod! How immaculate is his purity, in whose sight, even the clear shining heavens are not clean! And who can doubt his infinite goodness, who animates and cherishes, as well as supports such worlds of intelligent beings! Who can consider the heavens in this instructive point of view, as the work of his fingers, (as the pious psalmist expresses it) the moon and stars which he has ordained—and contemplate the vast extent, and harmony which pervades the whole, and not adopt the language of the text, and devoutly acknowledge, “that the heavens declare the glory of God?—Who can contemplate himself, and all things around him, and yet pronounce them self-existent and eternal? Who can contemplate the order and harmony of the natural system, and pronounce it the effect of blind chance, or undesigning accident? Who can look on creation with the contemplative eye of reason, and not see the signatures of intelligence impressed on every part? What mind can survey this vastly complicated system, and bound his thoughts by any thing short of an infinitely wise original? And further, who can believe the existence of an independent God, and who of con-



sequence cannot be tempted to do wrong, either from within or from without himself, and yet hesitate with respect to his infinite holiness? And is this the God who reigns in heaven, and doth his will among the inhabitants of this earth? This is He to whom the whole creation leads the reflecting mind. Why then do men who behold his work, object against an unreserved, unconditional submission to his will?

### *IMPROVEMENT.*

1. How abundant is the evidence of divine existence. Every object which we see on the earth; each of those shining wonders, which the night reveals to our eyes, is a witness for God. Though silent, yet they are eloquent preachers, whose instructions extend to every nation, tribe, family and individual on the earth. And the reason why all mankind are not enlightened, and recalled from idolatry is not for the want of evidence laid before them. The formation of the human body—the construction, and location of the several parts, is sufficient to convince every mind, which ever inhabited such a curiously organized body, that it is a piece of divine workmanship. Many anatomists have held, that an examination of the eye was a complete cure for atheism. The inspired author of the xciv psalm addresses this argument to infidels in his day, who said, “the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.” “Understand ye brutish among the people, and ye fools, when will ye be wise?” “He who planted the ear, shall he not hear?” “He that formed the eye, shall he not see?”

“He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know?” Shall he not hear all your profanations of his name, who gave you the faculty of hearing? Shall he not see all your wickedness, who gave you the sense of seeing? Is it supposable, he should communicate to you, what he does not himself possess? Has he given you a mind capable of knowledge, and is he void of it? Or can you suppose, that these faculties of body, and capacities of mind are enjoyed by you without a cause? Every sense you possess—every nerve and fibre, which gives motion and sensibility to your frame—every pulsation of your heart, by which the crimson current is circulated through your veins, is an evidence of the divine existence; and not only so, but of his presence and agency with you. “In him we live, and move, and have our being.” The divine existence and wisdom are displayed as much in the smaller, as in the greater works of his hands. On what part—on what object in creation, can you cast your eyes, where the name of God is not written? And written so legibly, and in such capitals, that you can read it in the distant star, as well as on your own frame. How unreasonable then is speculative atheism? How wicked is practical atheism? Dare you sin when such a God is present with you?

O may these thoughts possess my breast,  
 Where'er I rove, where'er I rest;  
 Nor let my weaker passions dare,  
 Consent to sin, for God is there.

2. This subject gives us a general view of the blindness and wickedness of the human heart. Amidst

all this light—under these heavens which declare the glory of God, there are some of the human race—some, not in the deserts of Africa—not in the trackless forests of America, but in the civilized, highly cultivated, and even christian portions of the earth, who deny the being of God!—Could you suppose this possible, where the sun shines, and the heavens move round? Yes, they tell us, they see no evidence of a God. And what is still more wonderful, some have told us this, while they were measuring the heavens, or calculating an eclipse.—They have told us that there is nothing in the universe which leads them to conclude there is a God of infinite perfection and glory. Think not this impossible, nor let it confound you. Do you not know that a wicked, proud *heart* can shut the *mental* eye on all this light?—Did you not know, that it is a very undesirable thing to a wicked heart, that there should be an holy, sovereign God on the throne of the universe?—When such a character is denied, and in the sinner's mind displaced, will he not feel more at ease in sin? And if he love sin, will he not wish to pursue it, without being distressed with the awful apprehension of future punishment?—Did you not know, that men readily believe what they wish might be true? Indeed, when the fool—the wicked man once begins fondly to whisper in his heart, “there is no God,” that wish will soon grow into a persuasion, and this persuasion into evidence, and then his lips will publish as a truth, the lie of his heart. Did you not know, that the man “who loves darkness rather than light,” is the blindest of all creatures?—

Suppose both the eyes of a man to be extinguished, yet with an humble pious mind, he would find in his own sensations more evidence of a God, than the proud philosopher would find, looking, with both his eyes, and all his glasses, into the remote regions of the universe, and bringing home intelligence from the most distant star. Of so much importance is an humble, teachable heart to learn of God. There is still a greater number who, blind to the moral perfections of God, live without fearing or hoping any thing from him as a moral governor. Such have no impressive conviction of his infinite Holiness, Justice, Goodness and Truth. How common is it to find men who profess to believe these perfections of God, who yet live quietly in their evil ways?—The practice of such is not improved by their speculative belief. If men regard not God as their moral governor and judge, it is the same, as to all religious purposes, as if there were no God. And as to any final advantage, men may as well deny God in words as in works. Indeed, practical atheism is as absurd, and will be as destructive as when combined with speculative. Vain will be men's opinions about God, if they live as if there were none. Of what advantage is the profane man's belief in the being of a God, when that belief does not prevent him from trampling the name and law of God under his feet? Of what advantage is the unjust man's professed belief in the Justice of God? Of what use is it for a man to profess his belief in the Omniscience of God, when he lives in secret sins? Instead of exculpating, will not

such a belief aggravate these offences, and give to sins of all kinds deeper stains?

“When men grow bold in wicked ways  
And yet a God they own ;  
My heart within me often says  
Their thoughts believe there’s none.”

3. This subject is adapted to abase the pride of man. How often does the worm, man, swell with a fond conceit of his own power and wisdom!—he feels that he deserves a large portion of the divine attention and regard—that the works and ways of God should be adapted to promote his personal welfare. Consider, thou vain creature, “the heavens, which are the work of God’s fingers,” and then, inquire, am I such an important being—such a considerable part of the universe as to deserve very great attention—much respect? When I consider these things, “what is man” that he should call the divine power, wisdom and goodness in question? “What is man” that he should rise in opposition to the Creator of the universe, and arraign his Justice? “What is man” that he should think it too much for him to submit to God—too much to be ruled by his laws—too much to be entirely devoted to his service and glory?—How exceedingly incorrect is that man’s opinion of himself, who imagines himself to be of great consequence in the creation of God; when in fact he is but a mite in creation—an atom of an atom world; so inconsiderable a part of the whole creation, that were he and his whole species blotted from the creation, they would scarcely be missed by any eye, except the Omniscient.

4. How criminal is ignorance respecting God. This is true even in heathen lands. Were men even there disposed to seek after God, every object would become an instructor, every star would guide them to him. Were they disposed to inquire for evidence of his existence and infinite Greatness, the heavens over their heads would afford them abundant proof. The creation declares his boundless Knowledge and Power—the exact order and harmony of the natural system, his Wisdom ; and the existence of rational creatures, with advantages for endless improvement in knowledge and happiness, his Goodness. Every particle of matter glows with evidence of the being of God, so that it is for want of proper attention to the evidence which is offered, that any are ignorant of this fundamental principle of natural religion. So full of evidence are the works of God in all places and at all times, “that they are fools and without excuse,” who know him not. But how unspeakably is their guilt increased, who live in lands of light, where there are the best means of acquiring knowledge of God—where, in addition to the instructions of God’s works, they enjoy his word, and yet are inattentive and ignorant of God !

5. See the danger of wicked men. They are rebels against God—the God of heaven and earth ! The whole host of heaven obey his word. What can a poor particle of dust promise himself in a contention with the Almighty ? “Who ever hardened himself against God and prospered ?” O wicked man, cast your eyes on the heavens, and consider, against whom do you oppose yourself. “He is not a man as thou art.”

He is the Eternal, Almighty Jehovah, against whom you contend! "Listen to the voice which goeth out of his mouth, which he directeth under the whole heaven." But there is no need, that God should arm against you his thunder—that he should open the earth to swallow you up—that he should marshal against you the host of heaven. Your breath is in your nostrils—you are sinking into hell without any act of his power, and nothing will prevent it, but an act of his mercy. And instead of supplicating his mercy, will you provoke his wrath? "O that you were wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your latter end!" "Because there is wrath, beware, lest he take thee away with his stroke, then a great ransom cannot deliver thee."

6. May we not infer, from the power and goodness of God, the safety of all his friends? Yes, rejoice, O ye people of the Most High; you are not overlooked in the number and grandeur of God's works around you. No, while God is governing worlds and systems, the smallest insect which creeps upon them is not forgotten of him. Beside, you are not only the creatures of his power, and the inhabitants of his universe, but the children of his grace, the heirs of that spiritual kingdom, for which he made the natural creation. Consider, thou friend of God, the ordinances of heaven—the covenant which God has made with the earth.—This covenant ensures to the earth, while it remains, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. How regular are day and night! "Thus saith the Lord, if you can break my covenant of the day, and

my covenant of the night, that there should not be day and night in their season," (then may his covenant with you be broken.) "Thus saith the Lord, if my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then will I cast away the seed of Jacob." When therefore you look abroad on the works of God, and see his covenant with day and night faithfully observed—when you look on the peaceful bow in the cloud, remember that sure—that everlasting covenant, God has made with you—a covenant well ordered in all things, and sure, which is all your hope and salvation.



## SERMON II.

### ON SINFUL HABITS.

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JEREMIAH, xiii. 23.

*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good who are accustomed to do evil.*

THESE words may be considered as proverbial. They exhibit a truth extremely interesting, whether applied to nations or individuals. This proverbial expression was addressed by the prophet to his people, who had long been favoured with means of improvement, and yet continued to sink deeper and deeper in sin and stupidity. The truth contained in our text is not the less solemn and affecting when applied to an individual, who has long enjoyed the gospel of Christ. Its invitations—motives, warnings, and threatenings have in vain been displayed before him. Surrounded with all these impressive realities, he has continued to increase in security and hardness of heart, as he has increased in years. Little hope indeed, can be enter-

tained of the repentance and reformation of such an one, who has long been accustomed to do evil.

The natural meaning of our text is this,

That the reformation of those, who have grown old in sin is very improbable.

This is the most favourable construction which can be put upon the words of the text. We know, that it is not in the power of man to make one hair white or black; much less is it in the power of the Ethiopian to change his complexion, and become white. He can no more do this, than he can create himself anew. It is not therefore to be expected, that the Ethiopian will change his skin, or the leopard put off his spots; yet according to the representation in the text, when this becomes a probable event, then, and not till then, may we expect to see those who have been long accustomed to evil, learn to do well. The truth of the doctrine then, is confirmed by the assertion in the text.

In prosecuting this subject, I shall show why there is little reason to expect, that they will be reformed who have been long accustomed to sin.

1. There is but little prospect of the reformation and conversion of old sinners, because all habits, and consequently sinful ones, strengthen with time and indulgence. There is a natural propensity, in the depraved human heart, to sinful ways; which is noticed by the Psalmist, "we go astray from the womb." Mankind discover a depraved mind, as soon as they are capable of discovering any moral quality. And this wrong propensity strengthens with time and grat-

ification. And hence it is always easier to break in childhood, any vicious practice, than in any following period of life. A child who has had his own way, and been under no controul until he has reached man's estate, is with great difficulty, if at all, brought under subjection. The oak, which hardly any force can bend, could easily have been bent into any form when but a slender twig. The will of a little child may be easily subdued, and brought into subordination; but if he is let alone until he becomes a man, it is a wonder, if discipline does not rather serve to increase his obstinacy, than subdue it. This is manifestly true of every passion and propensity of the human heart. The drunkard's appetite is increased, and becomes insatiable by repeated indulgence. The thief by indulgence acquires such a habit of stealing, that he will take what is of no advantage to him. There is of consequence much less hope of his reformation after long practice, than there was in the commencement of his evil course. The same is true in the case of the drunkard. We do not expect to see a person, who has long indulged himself in any vice, whether drunkenness, theft, injustice, profanity, or any other, become sober, upright and virtuous. And the foundation of this calculation is this, whether we advert to it or not, that vicious propensities strengthen by indulgence.

2. Another reason why there is but little hope of the reformation of old sinners is, that the oftener a crime is committed, the less criminal it appears to the agent. That this in fact is true, will not, I conclude,

be disputed. When therefore a man first commences a thief, it is commonly with a trembling hand, and fearful heart. He considers it a great crime, and his conscience renders him extremely miserable. And hence he begins with little things, and presumes not to steal articles of great value. The crime appears to him too great; but after he has been long accustomed to this vice, he commits it, with little or no remorse of conscience; and will even venture to steal, when he is in imminent danger of detection. The reason is, the vicious habit is strengthened by indulgence, and the sense of its evil is diminished. So it is with the murderer, who has often shed the blood of the innocent; he was probably more alarmed once with the thought of premeditated murder, than he was afterward by the commission of the horrid deed. The profane swearer, the blasphemer, the sabbath breaker, and the adulterer were each shocked at the first, with his wickedness; but after the same wicked act had been often repeated it gave him but little compunction of mind. The unclean person, by the repetition of his crime, has destroyed all sense of its vileness and destructive tendency. Fornication and adultery are, in the eye of God, crimes of the deepest dye. They are numbered among those sins, which are peculiarly offensive to God; and which expose the offender to his wrath and curse. Persons may be trained up with right views of the vileness and guilt of these sins, and if they fall into them, the reflection gives them great uneasiness; but after they have continued in them for a time, they loose a sense of their guilt and danger.

And when a person has arrived to this state of stupidity, with respect to any sin, there is but very little ground to hope for his reformation. It can no longer be expected, that the evil of his crimes should now drive him from them, when they appear nothing in comparison of what they did when he first become guilty. And this is the true reason why those, who are the most abandoned to iniquity, are the most thoughtless and secure. They have so often violated the remonstrances of conscience, that they have almost, if not altogether, lost all sense of sin and danger arising from it. And this perhaps may be assigned as the principal reason, why people are commonly less affected with sins of the heart, than with those of an open nature. There are those, who have probably indulged themselves a long time, in hatred and malice against their fellowmen, and whose conscience is quiet in such indulgence; and yet their conscience would probably be greatly alarmed should they actually take away the life of a fellow-creature, though the unerring oracles declare, "that he who hateth his brother is a murderer." And there are those, who entertain blasphemous thoughts of God, who notwithstanding would be surprised, should they express their feelings in words. The reason why conscience is alarmed in one case, and not in the other, is because they have often been guilty in one case, and not in the other. And this proves that sin is of a stupefying nature; and that the repetition of crimes serves to render them less criminal in the view of him who repeats them. Every day therefore, a person lives in sin of heart or life, the prospect lessens, that he will ever be

reclaimed. The oftener a crime is committed, the greater is the probability, that it will be repeated; and for this reason there is but little reason to expect the reformation of the old sinner.

3. Another reason why the reformation of an old sinner is improbable is this.—The longer a person enjoys the light of revelation and rejects it, the less influence will it have upon his mind and heart. Truth loses its influence by being resisted. Such is the constitution of the human mind, that new things act most sensibly upon it; and we are more deeply impressed with some interesting and important truth at first hearing than afterward. You are doubtless sensible of the truth of this observation, in some instances at least. You have probably read, or heard things, which appeared vastly interesting, and you were affected with them; but when the same accounts come to be frequently repeated, they had no such influence upon your mind. The fact represented was as interesting as at first; but it did not affect you as much, though you gave full credit to the relation. And this is usually the case with regard to divine instruction. Those important and interesting truths which used to affect the mind, rouse the conscience, and awaken the affections, after being often repeated and resisted, have at length almost, if not altogether, lost their effect. The truths which revelation brings into view are most solemn and impressive, and as such should always affect the mind. Such are the instructions respecting God—his character and designs. Such are the instructions respecting the character, sinfulness and mis-

ery of man. And such are the instructions of revelation, respecting Christ—his meditorial office and work, and the way and manner of the sinner's salvation by him. And many persons have had their minds much exercised in the early part of life with the descriptions of the divine holiness, and abhorrence of sin; with their own sinfulness and exposedness to the wrath of an infinitely holy God; and have been much affected with the descriptions of the wonderful condescension and sufferings of Christ for the guilty sons of men; and when these things were set before them, either in reading or hearing God's word, they have been much moved, and perhaps partially reformed. But after a time these same persons have felt little, or no influence upon their minds in the view of the same solemn things. The same may be said in respect to every part of God's holy word. When they heard God speaking to them in his word, they feared to disobey. Though they did not approve and love the divine precepts, and cordially comply with them; yet such a sense had they of their purity and holiness, and of their danger in disregarding them, that they would pay some outward respect to them. Yet these same persons after a time could hear the same precepts, and totally disregard them without any fear or concern. Thus with regard to the divine threatenings, they alarm the consciences of those, who have not, by long resisting the truth, become callous and unfeeling. The heart of the sinner is indeed always hard; but his conscience is not always seared. Divine threatenings are alarming; and it is only by a course of sin, that

persons get beyond the fear of these threatenings. A stupid conscience is acquired by a course of sin, in opposition to the threatenings of God. This habit of sinning fearlessly, in the face of the terrors of God's law, is acquired by some sinners, earlier than by others. Some persons arrive at such degrees of wickedness, and are so unapprehensive of danger, that they go on in their sinful ways, with but little fear while young. But with sinners in general, the longer they disregard the divine threatenings, the less fears they have, until at length they can mock at the most awakening truths, and defy all the terrors of the Lord. Are there not some among us, who think it beneath them to be restrained from the commission of any sin, which their wicked heart prompts them to commit, by any threatenings revealed in the bible against sinners?—If such there be, they are evidences of the truth of the doctrine under consideration. Such stupidity of conscience has been acquired by a course of sinning against the truth. That there is but little hope of the reformation of old sinners, is supported by scriptural testimony, and confirmed by the observation and experience of all generations of men. True, there has been here and there an instance; but they have been seldom, and not brought about by common means, and cannot therefore be considered as an objection against the truth of our doctrine. They indeed show, that sinners never get out of the hand of God. That the conscience is never so stupified, but that God can awaken it, and bring the sinner to consideration, and pluck him by his grace from the pit of destruction. Such instances are doubt-



less designed to display the sovereignty and efficacy of divine grace—to make it appear that the grace of God, and the merits of Christ are sufficient for the greatest sinners; and so to keep the sinner, whose conscience is awake, from total despair of the mercy of God. But notwithstanding all this, it follows from the spirit of the text, and the natural tendency of sin, when indulged, in opposition to repeated calls and admonitions, that there is comparatively no hope of the reformation and salvation of old sinners.

But to this it may be objected, that God is as able to convert an old sinner as a young one—that it is no more in the power of means to change the heart of the young sinner than of the old—that success in both cases depends on divine efficacy. To this it may be answered, that though it be true, as it doubtless is, that it is not in the power of the best means ever used to change the heart; that this is effected by the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit—and though it be granted further, as it ought to be, that divine power is as sufficient to conquer the opposition of the greatest sinner, as of the least—I say, granting all this, which is agreeable to declarations of scripture, yet it will by no means follow, that the reformation and salvation of old sinners are as probable as others. Which appears

1. From the express declaration of the inspired preacher in the text.

2. The conclusion from the objection is contradicted by experience and observation. We do not see the reformation of old sinners, as we do of others. Do we not see persons, who contract vicious habits, and in-

dulge in them until the decline of life, generally carry them to their graves? If a man has been a careless, inattentive hearer of the gospel until old age, do we see him become otherwise? If he has disregarded the sabbath until then, he generally does until he dies. If he be a profane man—a dishonest man—a false man until he becomes old, how rarely does he reform!

3. To conclude that it is as likely, that old sinners will be reformed, as others, because God is able to prepare them for heaven, is as unreasonable a conclusion from the power of God, as to suppose, that stones shall be turned into children of Abraham, because God is able to do it. If we speak simply of strength, God can as easily turn a stone into a christian, as he can change the heart of a sinner, and make him a saint. But every one can easily see, that they are events not equally probable, because they are equally objects of power. But

4. The conclusion, that the reformation of old sinners is as probable as that of others, because divine power is the cause of both, is unreasonable; because it implies that God will in fact do, what he has power to do. Is there not a mode of divine operation, both in the kingdoms of nature and grace?—Will the husbandman plant his corn in autumn, or winter, because God *can* produce a harvest?—Or will he scatter his seed upon the hard, unbroken soil, because God *can* cause it to spring?—Is there not a season when every purpose, or work may be attended to, with the most probability of success?—God is bountiful; but will his bounty secure the husbandman a crop without

seasonable labour and attention? God alone can give the increase, and yet does not the hope of a crop diminish just in proportion, as the proper season of planting is neglected? Has not the indolent husbandman, less and less reason to expect an harvest, every day he neglects his planting, after the proper season? Little indeed can be expected from unseasonable attention in any pursuit. If youth is suffered to pass away, in idleness, and neglect of the means of education, the proper season to acquire information is lost; and little hope remains that it will ever be sought or obtained. So the longer a person is surrounded with the means of conviction and remains stupid, the less hope there is, that his conscience will ever be awakened, and his heart impressed, and he led solicitously to inquire, what he shall do to be saved; and therefore less prospect of his ever becoming a new man.

These reasons are abundantly sufficient to account for the assertion in the text; and to show, that there is but little hope of his becoming a servant of righteousness, who has long been a servant of sin.

One solemn consideration more may be added, which is, that sinners by long resisting the means, which God uses with them in his word, and providences, expose themselves to be given up of God to a reprobate mind, and final impenitency. By often resisting the strivings of the divine Spirit, they grieve him to forsake them utterly; and this, we are informed, has been the case with obstinate sinners. This was the case with many of the Jews in the time of our Saviour, who persisted in rejecting the clear light of

the gospel, and the evidences of the divine mission of Christ. And could we see things as they are, and look intuitively into the states of men at this day, we should probably see some going about, wholly forsaken of God, and given up to an hard, reprobate mind. There is greater reason to conclude this is the case with those, who go on in sin, in open defiance of all the means which the gospel affords, than of those, who acted in opposition to the instructions granted to mankind in former ages. As our privileges are greater, much greater, and the sinner's duty more clearly pointed out under the christian dispensation, than under the Jewish; so the guilt of the gospel sinner increases faster, and the measure of his iniquity is sooner full. The superior advantages of the gospel sinner, if abused and perverted, tend awfully to hasten divine judgments, and ripen him for destruction.

#### *IMPROVEMENT.*

From the whole view, which we have taken of this subject, we learn something of the danger of the old sinner. Indeed we are able to conceive but very imperfectly of the danger and misery of any sinner; much less of his, who has long hardened his heart against God, and the kind instructions, reproofs, and exhortations of his word. If what we have said on this subject be just, those who have long enjoyed divine light, and have as long resisted the truth, are awfully increasing in guilt and hardness of heart every day. They are every day sinning against an infinite God, and trampling upon infinite mercy and grace.

They are every day offering an affront to Jesus Christ, who died to save sinners. And every day, the time of their probation, and of God's gracious visitation, is drawing to a close. And every day lessens the hope of their ever being converted, and turned from the paths of sin to the way of holiness and salvation. They have lived all their days under the glorious dispensation of the covenant of grace; and with them *the harvest is past, and the summer is ended*, and the last golden sands of life are running, *and they are not saved*. Sin still reigns in its full force, and their hearts have become exceedingly hard, and their consciences seared. So that neither the word, nor providences of God affect them. The encouragement to use means with them, to their advantage, seems almost at an end. Many old people have had almost all kinds of means used with them, and yet they have been growing worse and worse all their life. What little hope is there, that those means, which have been used, and resisted thousands of times, should now awaken their conscience, and convince them of their sin and danger. If the powers of medicine have been tried in vain upon a patient, and notwithstanding every suitable application, his disease increases, his case is justly considered as desperate. All that can be said of him is, that while there is life, there is a possibility that God may spare and restore him. And this is all we can say of the old sinner, on whom all means have proved ineffectual to awaken him; and who has grown more and more stupid, and become harder under them all. The situation of such an one is truly alarming, and calls for the

compassion of every benevolent heart.—Such are in the hands of an angry God, whose laws they have long violated, and continue with stupid boldness, daily to violate: whose authority they disregard, and whose mercies they live upon, and yet abuse: whose Son, they have rejected from the days of youth, and continue to reject in old age. O how shall I express my concern for them, and my sense of their danger! “Is not God angry with the wicked every day?—If he turn not, will he not whet his glittering sword—and will not his hand take hold on vengeance?” If men shall give an account for every idle word, much more for years of sin and stupidity. How great must be that load of guilt, which has been accumulating through every day of a long life! Has not its cry long since reached unto heaven? The situation of the old sinner, under the gospel, is dangerous on several accounts; his iniquities are aggravated in a number of respects; he has long sinned against great light. It is dreadful to live wickedly among heathen, much more so, to live wickedly under the clear light of the gospel. They must be very deaf, who will not listen to the voice of reason, nor attend to the light of nature. But they must be much more so, who will not listen to the voice of revelation; who will not be influenced by all the soothing, softening, and awakening motives, which the gospel sets before them. They are in an awful condition, who are going on in sin ignorantly; but who can describe their condition, who are going down to the pit in opposition to all the instructions, calls, warnings, and promises of the gospel? And

what is peculiarly affecting in their case is, the little probability there is, that they will now listen to that instruction which they have so long disregarded. Such have the utmost reason to fear that terrible denunciation in the proverbs—a passage peculiarly applicable to aged sinners—and which will soon, without repentance, be awfully verified with respect to them. *Because I have called and ye refused—I have stretched out mine hand, and no man regarded—but ye have set at nought all my counsels, and would none of my reproofs—I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind.* And is it not just matter of astonishment, that such a declaration from the mouth of him, in whose favour only is life, should be no more regarded? And is it not just matter of surprise and lamentation, that the nearer the sinner approaches death, the less he is concerned about the solemn consequences? His stupidity increases with his years, until every fear and apprehension is banished from the mind of the old sinner. It is an easy thing to find old people, who will readily acknowledge, that holiness is essential to salvation—that death is certain, and they are unprepared to meet the solemn hour; and who, yet will be ready enough to tell you, their days are almost finished, and do this without the least emotion or concern. *Lord what is man!* It is not improbable, that some of my hearers have here met with their own character; and would you only consider it, you must acknowledge your case is dreadful; but, I would hope, not utterly desperate. Jesus is

mighty to save ; his spirit can subdue the most inveterate habits of sin ; and his grace can pardon the greatest offences. The gospel which you have hitherto despised, is full of the power of God to salvation. The blood of Jesus, on which you have so long trampled, “ speaks better things than that of Abel,” and has virtue to cleanse those, “ whose sins are as scarlet and as crimson, and to make them white as snow and as wool.” You yet live, criminals condemned, but still reprieved. And by repenting and humbly throwing yourselves at the feet of divine mercy, you may escape the execution of the dreadful sentence. But if you do not, know assuredly, that wrath is coming upon you to the utmost ; and you will shortly find, to your unspeakable confusion, that *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Christ told his disciples, that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. The disciples concluded that the case of such was absolutely desperate—*who then can be saved?* And if the same conclusion is inferred from the text—if the Ethiopian can as well change his skin, and the Leopard his spots, as the old sinner cease to do evil, and learn to do well, who then of this class can be saved? The answer of Christ to the former inquiry is equally an answer to the latter—“ with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” God has, in some instances, sanctified and saved old sinners, to display the riches of his grace, and preserve old sinners, if awakened, from total despair. But it is evidently beside the



common, and ordinary course of God's operation, thus to display his grace toward old sinners, who have long abused his mercy. But a few such instances, comparatively, have been seen in any age of the church. Some instances of this kind have occurred in times of great revivals of religion, when sinners have more evidence, at least more sensible, affecting evidence, of the importance of religion, than at other times. Such seasons, though greatly desirable, are not common. Many aged persons live and die, without ever seeing such seasons of revival in the place where they have lived. Here and there an instance of an old sinner, waking up, has occurred in seasons of great revival. And this leaves a bare—*who can tell*—but God may add efficacy to his word, and make his gospel like the fire and the hammer, which breaketh the rock in pieces. This is your only hope; and yet when we consider how seldom this power is displayed, this gleam of hope seems to die away almost into total despair. My aged hearers, how affecting is your situation, unless you are real christians? Jesus, in the days of his flesh, wept over sinners, whose ruin was fast approaching, and who might have known, in the day of their gracious visitation, the things which belonged to their peace. And how well does the tear of compassion become the eye of a christian minister, when addressing his aged hearers, who are yet without God and without hope? I will only add, that there is hope in your case—if to-day—*this day*, you will hear his voice, and no longer harden your hearts.



## SERMON III.

ON HYPOCRISY.



JOB, xxvii. 10.

*Will he always call upon God?*

**T**HE calamities of Job, recorded in the introductory parts of this book, were peculiarly distressing when contrasted with his former prosperity. In the former part of life, God had remarkably blessed him, both in his basket and store. This tide of prosperity was considered by his friends, as a sure evidence of his piety in the sight of God. That God prospered the righteous, and visited the wicked in this world with want and misery, was the false principle on which the reasonings and criminations of his friends were grounded. Had this principle been just, their suspicions and charges against Job would have been correct. They laid it down as a first principle in all their discussions, that good men, under the government of God, were secure from temporal evils. Were this sentiment true, their charges of hypocrisy would have been sub-

stantiated. On this principle, his former prosperity was an evidence of his piety, and was so considered by his mistaken friends, whose conclusions were all drawn on this principle. But when they saw their friend, suddenly thrown from the summit of earthly glory, to the depths of human wo; they considered this, as a full refutation of his pretensions to piety and a convincing evidence of his dissimulation in his former professions of friendship to God.

In this chapter, Job avows his sincerity, and vindicates his religious character, upon the principle of his constancy and sincerity in the service of God. "All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness will I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live." Job here vindicates his character upon the same principle, on which the Apostle believed himself the friend of Christ. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." This was the evidence, on which Job concluded himself a pious man; and this evidence of piety, he plainly intimates, no hypocrite ever had. "Will he always call upon God?" The mode of expression implies a strong negative; and is fully equivalent to an explicit declaration, that the hypocrite differs from the truly godly in this respect, that he does not always call upon God—that he does

not comply with the spirit of the command “Pray without ceasing;” while it is the character of every truly godly man to comply with the spirit of this, and every other divine requirement; or to “have respect to all God’s commands.” I shall show

I. What is here intended by calling upon God.

II. In what sense it is true, that hypocrites do not always call upon God.

III. Give the reasons why, they do not always call upon God.

1. We are to show what is here to be understood by calling upon God. Calling upon God, is only another phrase for prayer. Prayer is often expressed in the sacred oracles, by calling upon God; and persons are often directed to call upon God, when prayer is the duty intended to be enforced. In this language the shipmaster addressed Jonah, “What meanest thou, O sleeper, arise and *call* upon thy God.” In the same style, God says to his church, “*Call* upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee.” The direction in both cases, is to pray to God for help and deliverance. So the prophet directing to the duty of prayer, says, “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, *call* upon him while he is near.” But *calling* upon God, is so common a phrase to denote prayer, that it is thought unnecessary to multiply instances.

I would observe, that the prayer of which Job speaks in the text, is not the effectual, fervent prayer of which the apostle speaks, as availing much with God. For this is a kind of prayer peculiar to righteous men. It is a kind of prayer, which hypocrites never

usc. The hypocrite is never classed with saints ; but commonly with the greatest sinners in the sight of God. Our Saviour pronounced the heaviest woes upon hypocrites, as being among the most offensive in the eyes of God. Hypocrites are saints in profession, and outward appearance only. That which denominates a person a hypocrite, is affecting to be godly, without any religion at heart. A person cannot be a hypocrite, in the sense of scripture, unless he be a wicked man ; and from the same authority it is evident, that the prayers of such are not accepted with God. The effectual, fervent prayer of faith is peculiar to good men—the friends of God ; and this only is prayer, in the strict sense of the word ; but in this sense hypocrites never pray ; for they never pray in faith. The very notion of a hypocrite excludes the idea. But the text implies, that hypocrites do pray—do call upon God ; but denies that they pray always. And as they do not pray in faith, it is evident Job meant to speak of that kind of prayer, which a person may use, and yet be a wicked man—a hypocrite. Hence it is evident, that Job here speaks of the form of prayer, which hypocrites may, and often do use in publick and private : and which would be really good and acceptable to God, did the temper, and desires of the heart correspond with the language of the lips. It is in some sense necessary, that the words of prayer, or the external part of prayer, should be used by a person, in order to his coming under the denomination of a hypocrite ; for a hypocrite, in the sense in which the term, as before observed, is commonly used, is a

person who pretends to religion, but has none—one “who has the form of godliness, but denies the power.” Now prayer is so manifestly a duty, so often inculcated in the word of God, that there seems to be no foundation, for a person to build any, even the least hope upon, that he is a christian, who disregards so manifest a duty. The neglect of this duty, is so evidently inconsistent with the christian character, that there seems to be no room for others to be deceived; and esteem him the friend of God, who is a known neglecter of this duty. The prayerless man is, in the view of scripture, destitute of all right affection of heart towards God, and exposed to his wrath and curse. True religion includes the form of godliness, as the greater includes the less; and therefore though there may be the external part of prayer without the spirit, which is holy desires of heart—the very life and soul of the action, yet where there is not even the form, or external expression, we may conclude, there is not the spirit of prayer. Not that words uttered are always essential to prayer; they are not necessary to secret prayer; for Hannah prayed in spirit and truth, without uttering words aloud. Words were doubtless formed in her own mind, which expressed the desires of her heart. Even in secret prayer, some words must be framed in the mind, in which, as in the smoke from the altar, the incense must ascend. Not that God may understand us; but that we may understand ourselves. By this and other expressions of religion, people sometimes deceive themselves, and often others, and hence fall under the denomination of hypo-

cr̄ites. It is this form of godliness expressed in prayer, which is intended by *calling* upon God, in the text. It is manifest, that in appearance, hypocrites as well as saints call upon God; and the only distinction between them is, one prays in faith, the other does not. When the saint and hypocrite pray, they appear alike to men, who judge by outward appearance; but very differently do they appear to God, who searcheth the heart. Both *call* upon God—both use the words of prayer.

The way is now prepared to show

II. In what sense it is true, that hypocrites do not always call upon God. The text implicitly grants that they do sometimes call upon God, and intimates that they may do this often; but in this they are distinguished from the truly godly, they do not always call upon God. From this it appears, as before remarked, that sincere and acceptable prayer is not here intended; for in this sense it is not true, that they ever call upon God; and therefore the words must be understood to import, that hypocrites do not persevere in the external part of prayer. They may assume the form, and continue the practice of publick, private and secret prayer, for a length of time, but not always. In respect to publick prayer, hypocrites are often as forward and zealous, and sometimes more so, than the true saint. They often make the highest professions, and pray with great apparent zeal. It is remarked of the Pharisees in our Saviour's time, whom he calls hypocrites, that they prayed often and long; and chose to pray in the most publick places—in the synagogues



—at the corners of the streets. As the basest motives may, and often are the prompters to this kind of prayer, persons may persevere in the outward performance of it, so long as they place their happiness, in any considerable degree, in being thought pious by others—or think this disguise necessary to gain the confidence of their fellowmen, in order to gratify a worldly, or covetous spirit. This was at the bottom of the great apparent zeal displayed by the Pharisees in the minor parts of religion. They cloaked their covetous practices, with an uncommon appearance of religion. And it is probable, they made use of this appearance, as long as it contributed to promote their wicked designs. Indeed we have no intimation, that they ever relinquished this practice of calling upon God. Hence a person may keep up a form of devotion in the eyes of the publick, and perhaps impose on others by a hypocritical show, until the day of his death. But as there are many motives to publick, and even family prayer, which there are not to secret, it is very natural to understand the text as referring principally to secret prayer. And it is generally true of the hypocrite, that while he is comparatively steady, and even fervent in publick and social worship, yet as the applause of men is the idol at whose altar he lays his gifts, so while he stands on this publick ground, he may preserve the outward form of religion; but when he retires from this, into solitude, there is no motive to this duty, which arises from worldly considerations. And it is natural to conclude, that many, who make a high profession of religion, and often appear very

devout in their publick conduct, who yet never make a practice of secret prayer. Not that such persons never pray in secret, but they are inconstant, and commonly, after repeated intermissions, wholly discontinue the practice. It is evidently implied in the text, that there is a sense, in which it is true of all hypocrites, that they will not always call upon God. And as there are fewer motives to influence the hypocrite to secret, than to publick prayer, the words of the text may be considered as literally and strictly true in this sense. This is a sense in which hypocrites do not always call upon God, and by this they are distinguished from the sincere friends of God. This is a real, though not a publick distinction. It is not a mark by which persons can determine the religious character of others, but their own. We cannot determine what passes in the bosom and closet of another, but we can in our own. And this is a mark, designed to assist every man, in determining his own character. One obvious advantage attending this mark is, that every person is conscious of the fact. He knows whether he is, or is not a stranger to secret prayer; and he may, according to the testimony of conscience, conclude whether his religion is formal or sincere; whether his hope is the hope of the hypocrite, or of the true friend of God. That this distinction does in fact exist, between saints and sinners of all classes and descriptions, is manifest from this; christians, or the *real* followers of Christ, are characterised in scripture as persons of habitual prayer. It is said of Cornelius, whose prayers and alms had come up for a memorial before God, "that

he prayed to God *always*." Observe the distinction here made: he prayed to God *always*. This was an evidence of his sincerity; and that his character was essentially different from that of the hypocrite, who will not *always* call upon God. On the other hand, sinners of all descriptions are characterised, by refusing to call upon God—or calling upon him only when in distress—in danger; therefore they are inconstant, at best, in the performance of this duty. Much is said in scripture to impress this truth on the mind of every one, that pious men, are men of prayer—that it is a duty in which they persevere; and that the fact is different with hypocrites. Why it is so, is our third inquiry.

III. Under this head we promised to give the reasons why hypocrites do not always call upon God.

1. The hypocrite does not delight himself in the Almighty. He does not love God; he has no delight in the divine character and perfections. Hence Job demands, in the words immediately preceding the text, with respect to the hypocrite, "will he delight himself in the Almighty?" This mode of expression amounts to a full declaration that he will not. And this seems to be introduced as a reason, why he will not always call upon God. The disaffection of sinners to God is the reason, why they do not always call upon God; as the sincere love of saints is a reason, why they persevere in this duty. Prayer is the medium, or way in which the pious heart converses with God; and it is natural to suppose, that they who love God should delight in the duty of prayer; because it is the way in

which they converse with the object of their affections. It would be very unnatural to suppose, that a person should love God, and not delight in communion and intercourse with him by prayer; and hence it is agreeable to reason, as well as scripture to believe, that the heart which loves and delights in God, should desire to be near him. And this is the simple reason, why good men are men of prayer. Take away their love, and you take away every thing, which can attract and bring them near to him. And it is because hypocrites, and all wicked men, do not love God, that they neglect it. Prayer considered in itself, is a delightful employment to none, but a renewed man. Hence when wicked men pray, it is out of fear, knowing it to be a duty, the neglect of which God will punish; or they pray from a hope of obtaining some selfish good; for it is absurd to suppose, they delight in it for its own sake. They do not love to draw near to God, nor are they delighted with a sense of his presence, and are willing to think but little of him, and to converse but little with him. Though hypocrites may be excited to call upon God by the hope of reward—by the desire of applause, or the fear of punishment, yet being destitute of an heart to commune with God, they do not persevere in this exercise. Did hypocrites really love God, they would continue to call upon him; for men will persevere in cultivating an acquaintance with those whom they love, and in whose society they delight. This brings into view the second reason, why hypocrites do not always call upon God.

2. The business in itself is unpleasant. As they have no delight in the object of prayer, so they dislike the duty itself. The heart of the hypocrite is a proud heart. It loves independence, and naturally aspires after it. But prayer is an expression of dependence; strictly speaking prayer is *begging*. But the proud heart can have no pleasure in this, let the favours which he begs be ever so rich and necessary. Prayer is a confession of our poverty and dependence, and therefore must ever in its nature be unpleasant to an unhumble heart. This may properly be considered as a very important reason, why the hypocrite does not continue to call upon God, particularly in secret prayer.

3. Another reason why the hypocrite does not always call upon God is, because he has no proper sense of his sin and danger. The hypocrite has never had such a discovery of these, as to excite him "to lay hold of the hope set before him in the gospel." Instead of smiting upon his sinful heart, like the Publican, and crying "God be merciful to me a sinner," the hypocrite is ready to give thanks that he is not like other men. A sense of danger often sets wicked men to call upon God. This made the heathen, who were in the ship with Jonah, cry every man to his god. This made the people of Israel, when surrounded, on the one hand, with the red sea, and on the other, with the Egyptian armies, to cry unto the Lord. Thus with sinners under conviction of their sin and danger, the first effect produced by such conviction is, they are led to call upon God in secret prayer; and while

their sense of danger continues, they continue in this practice; but when this impression wears away, they commonly become careless in this exercise, and frequently in the end wholly abandon it. There is, perhaps, nothing, but a sense of imminent danger, which will excite the wicked man to constancy in secret prayer; and even this will not make him love it. Hypocrites have commonly but little sense of danger; and hence are wont to be very negligent in secret prayer, even when they display the greatest zeal for God in the view of the world.

4. Another reason why hypocrites do not always call upon God is, they are commonly very blind to their wants. They are not sensible, that they are poor, miserable, undone creatures, without the help of God; but feel spiritually rich and in need of nothing. They have never attended to the kind advice of Christ to all such characters, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed." But the importance of prayer is not seen, is not felt by him who sees not, that he is in a perishing condition, and that God alone can save him from ruin. There must be, on the heart an habitual sense of our spiritual necessities to lead us daily to the throne of divine grace to obtain mercy, "and find help in every time of need." The appetite for food given to man, daily excites him to seek a supply. O how precious is the cool, refreshing stream, to the thirsty, fainting pilgrim, travelling in a dry and thirsty land. Take away his thirst—his sense of want—with what indifference would he pass

over the stream—even by fountains of living water? The hypocrite, like this traveller, feels no want—never hungers nor thirsts after righteousness—never felt the desires of an ancient pilgrim, and can hardly understand his meaning when he hears him crying out—“as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee O God, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is.” He therefore draws no water from the wells of salvation. He lives on himself—warms himself with the sparks of his own fire which he has kindled. But alas! this will be his portion, he must lie down in sorrow.

We have now assigned the reasons why the hypocrite will not always call upon God. A few reflections will close.

### *IMPROVEMENT.*

1. Here then, my brethren, you and I have a standard by which to examine and judge ourselves. Are we men of prayer? And is this the delightful business of our lives? The conscience of each can, and will inform him whether prayer is his daily business; and whether it is an employment, that is agreeable to his heart. If you are strangers to this duty—if it be unpleasant to you, what is the conclusion? Need I tell you? To be real christians, you must pray—you must pray in faith—you must always call upon God. If this be now your character, you are indeed christians; be “not weary in well doing, for in due season” you “shall reap if you faint not.” But if this is not your character now, and should it never be—

you are now lost, and you will be lost in the most dreadful sense. What hath the Lord said? will he not pour out his wrath on them that call not on his name? Brethren, if our conscience condemn us not in this, then have we confidence toward God.

2. This subject may teach us the importance of *praying* in our *prayers*, in opposition to merely repeating the words of a prayer. Hypocrites may often say the words of prayer; but their hearts are destitute of its spirit. They are not humble beggars. Let then the feelings of our hearts correspond with the words of our lips; so shall we find acceptance with him who requireth truth in the inward part.



## SERMON IV.

### GOD'S REGARD TO THE RIGHTEOUS.

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GENESIS, xviii. 32.

*And he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry; and I will speak but this once. Peradventure ten shall be found there; and he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.*

**T**HE conduct of God towards mankind from the beginning evidently proves two things.

1. That God is fixedly and unalterably opposed to sin; or to that temper and conduct in his creatures which are inconsistent with, and contrary to universal goodness; and that he really delights in those, who are actuated by a spirit of universal justice and kindness. And indeed it is necessary, that a being of absolute perfection should approve of those moral qualities in creatures, by which they resemble him, and be displeased with the contrary.

2. God's conduct towards mankind shows that he considers himself the moral governor of the world;

whose proper business it is to examine the conduct of creatures, and whose office it is to treat every one according to his deeds. A remarkable instance of this, we have in the history of Sodom and Gomorrah, of which our text is a part. These were neighbouring cities, situated upon that spot of ground which now forms the dead sea. These cities, long before this, had received signal favours from the hand of Abraham; particularly their salvation from the Assyrians, who were leading them away captive, when Abraham who followed them, with his household servants only, destroyed the Assyrians with a great slaughter, and delivered their captives. After this, they lived in peace, and increased in wealth and numbers. The prophet mentions idleness and fulness of bread as the sources of their corruption. Both sacred and profane history has marked their character, as infamous for unnatural lusts toward each other. The very name of their city, has given a name to a crime which I shall forbear to mention. On account of this and other abominable corruptions, God determined to destroy them in the most terrible manner. He therefore made their punishment as awful as their crimes; and has made them an example to all succeeding generations of his indignation against sin. And while God determined to show his abhorrence of the wickedness,—the peculiar vileness of Sodom and Gomorrah, by destroying them with fire from heaven, and even burning up the very earth on which they stood; so he has here given a peculiar display of his kindness and affection for all who love and fear God. “And the Lord said shall I

hide from Abraham, the thing which I do," that is, in destroying Sodom. The love of God to Abraham is discovered in letting him know what he was about to do with Sodom. God thus gave him an opportunity to show his benevolence and concern for sinners, and doubtless designed to show him, and all the friends of God, the efficacy of importunate prayer. It is natural for friends to communicate their designs and purposes to each other; and thus the infinite God condescends to treat a worm of the dust, who is friendly to his Maker. "And the Lord said because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, and if not I will know." Not that we are to suppose, that there was any uncertainty in the divine mind, what the character and conduct of Sodom were. In this place, and in many others in scripture, the holy one of Israel speaks of himself after the manner of man.

The angels, who appeared to Abraham, and were probably the executioners of divine wrath, upon this awful occasion, went their way towards Sodom. Abraham, who possessed a heart tenderly affected both for the honour of God and the interest of his fellow-men, seems to have been alarmed at this just, but awful determination of God, lest he, in this case, should make no distinction between the righteous and wicked, but bury them in one common ruin. For the threatening was against the cities in general, without any exceptions. And Abraham doubtless believing that Lot, his nephew, was a pious man, and, as a god-

ly temper is always a charitable temper, he hoped that there were others there of the same character; and therefore concluded, that should God destroy the righteous with the wicked, mankind would take occasion to blaspheme the name of God, and say, that he did not regard the righteous any more than the wicked. Abraham was, no doubt, sufficiently acquainted with human nature to conclude that such an improvement would be made of the promiscuous destruction of both these characters; and was ready to say, as Moses said on a similar occasion, "what will become of the glory of thy great name?" We are informed that when the angels had departed from Abraham, he drew near to God,—doubtless in prayer, as this is the way in which sinful creatures approach him; and said, "wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou also destroy, and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?—And the Lord said, if I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, I will spare all the place for their sakes." But it seems, that Abraham was doubtful whether such a number could be found there; and therefore was desirous of interceding for the city, even if the number of godly persons should be but very small. Being sensible, he was in the presence of his Maker,—the Judge of all the earth, and impressed with a solemn

sense of his majesty and glory,—and with a deep sense of his own littleness and unworthiness, to be permitted to have such intercourse with God in prayer, he introduces his next petition with this observation, expressive both of his sense of the majesty of God, and his own unworthiness, “behold now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes; peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous, wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, if I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto him yet again and said, peradventure there shall be forty found there; and he said I will not destroy it for forty’s sake. And he said unto him, Oh, let not the Lord be angry and I will speak; peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, behold now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord; peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said I will not destroy it for twenty’s sake. And he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but this once; peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said I will not destroy it for ten’s sake. And the Lord went his way as soon as he had left communing with Abraham, and Abraham returned unto his place.” I would here observe, that this whole narration gives us the idea of a personal conference, and leaves no room to doubt; but that he, who is here called Jehovah, was the same who afterwards in human nature said, “I and the Father are one,” and “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” Hence we infer, that this was an anticipation of the future in-

carnation of the Son of God—"God was manifested in the flesh." In this conversation with Abraham, God discovered his love to him as an individual saint, and in his gracious answers to his petitions, he manifested his love and care of the righteous in general. God taught Abraham, and indeed all the succeeding friends of God, that such is his delight in the righteous, who, considered in themselves, are fallen, guilty creatures, yet because they have "a little strength," he will restrain his anger from falling upon the wicked, rather than a few righteous persons should suffer in the calamity. For the sake of ten righteous persons, God would have spared all the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, consisting of many thousands. These words therefore contain the two following propositions,

I. God has a peculiar love to, and care over the righteous.

II. Such is God's love to the righteous, that the wicked are often spared, and their punishment delayed for their sake.

1. God has a peculiar love, and care of the righteous. This implies, that there is a real difference between the characters of those who are called *righteous* and *wicked*. This moral distinction of character is the foundation of that love and regard, which God has ever felt and expressed towards the one, and of that displeasure, which he has felt and expressed towards the other character. Some have supposed that there is no such thing as true religion, that all the professions of love to God, for his excellency and glory,

are deceitful, and hypocritical. But our text, and indeed the whole bible, clearly hold up this difference, and the whole is false, or there is an essential distinction between the characters of men. There are persons, who really and truly love God, above every other object, and place his honour and the interest of his kingdom uppermost in their hearts. And there are others, who not only have no love to God; but in heart are unfriendly to him. His true character is the object of their aversion. The following is the character of all the impenitent world, "The carnal mind is enmity against God, is not subject to his law neither indeed can be." This is the source of all the wickedness in the world. This like a full fountain is continually pouring itself into a multitude of streams. Sin consists in an unfriendly heart to God, the fountain of all being, and sum of excellence and perfection. But were mankind universally friendly to God, they would of consequence be friends to holiness, and enemies to sin; and therefore would be objects of the divine approbation and delight. And in proportion to the degree of their love to God, sin would be banished out of the world.—But when we attend to facts—the words and actions of men, we shall find, that in general, they are possessed of a very different character. Truly in many things all offend, and come short of that perfect love to God, which is his due; yet notwithstanding the great and general wickedness of the world, there always have been, and always will be those who love God sincerely and supremely. Such persons are the objects of the divine complacency and

care. That this is indeed true will appear from two sources of evidence.

1. From divine testimony. The precious promises made to all such characters are evidences of the love and approbation of God. The whole body of the godly in every age compose the church of God; and every good thing, which is any where promised in Scripture to the church, as a collective body, every pious man has an interest in; especially in all those promises of spiritual good things secured by promise, to the church. So on the other hand, in every thing of a spiritual nature, promised to any particular person, as a believer, the whole church is interested. This love and care of God for the righteous are exhibited in the titles which he gives himself, or in what he is to them. To the church in trouble he says, "Fear not for I am with thee, be not dismayed for I am thy God." When God entered in covenant with Abraham; this was its condition, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." By *perfect* here is not meant legal perfection; if so, no flesh living could ever comply with its condition. But in a gospel sense, a man is said to be perfect, when he has a sincere and governing respect to all parts of duty, pointed out in the divine commands; though the degree and intenseness of his affections, with respect to their objects, fall short of the requirements of the law in every instance. And this kind of perfection is required of mankind, in order to their becoming parties in the covenant of grace. To such as comply with this condition of the covenant, God hath said, "I will be a God unto thee." This im-



plies, that God will defend them by his power, and make every thing in this world work for their good, and at length will receive them to glory. This is the sum of what God promised to Abraham; and the Apostle considers the gift of Christ, and all the glorious blessings resulting to the church through him, as the fulfilment of this promise. There is no good thing promised in the bible, which is not implied in this promise, "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee."\* In this promise, the church, in all ages, has had great support and comfort. In this sense God is not the God of the wicked. They have never taken hold of his gracious covenant, and have no part in its promises.

2. The love and care of God for the righteous may be inferred from the relation, in which he stands to them, which is that of a Father. A father has a peculiar affection for his children, and is never more happy, than when providing for the safety, health and happiness of his family. He lays up wealth for his children, and when he dies, makes them his heirs. God is the father of the righteous, and loves them with infinite tenderness; and the love of the kindest earthly parent can never equal the love of God to his people. Hence God says, "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" a thing very unlikely, yet not impossible; "yet will not I forget thee." "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." He has set his people "as a seal upon his arm, and as a seal upon his heart." For this reason he warned Pharaoh of the danger of detaining

and oppressing Israel in Egypt, "Israel is my son, even my first born, and if thou wilt not let him go, that he may serve me, I will slay thy son, even thy first born." A tender parent is very sensible of injuries done to his children, because he is more tenderly affected towards them than others. And such is the love of God to his people, that he says of them, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."

3. God has expressed his love and care for the righteous, not only in his word, but in his conduct. Love is manifested by a constant and careful attention to the beloved object, when in danger; and a readiness to afford assistance in seasons of difficulty; and the strength, or degree of this love is discovered, in the things it will do for the good of its object. See this love and care of God, toward the righteous, displayed in the salvation of Noah and his family, who were the only righteous persons on the earth, when he brought the flood upon the world of the ungodly. When God had determined to destroy the world for its wickedness, he acquainted Noah with his design, and pointed out to him the way and means of escape. Thus God took peculiar care of Abraham, that no man should hurt him; and reprov'd kings for his sake; and made him great and prosperous in a strange land. See the love and care of God strikingly exhibited in the preservation and exaltation of Joseph in Egypt; and in the deliverance of Israel from their bondage in that land. But I must not pass over the tender expressions of divine love to Lot and his family. It is very evident, that Lot was the only pious man in

Sodom; and some of his family shared in his deliverance, because of their connexion with him. How remarkably was the care of God displayed towards righteous Lot, when he would no longer bear with the wickedness of that people! The destruction of Sodom seems to have been committed to two angels, who after they had left the tent of Abraham, called, in the evening on Lot, who lived in Sodom, and acquainted him with their commission, and directed him to fly with his family to the mountain, without the limits of the dreadful conflagration. Lot believed that the city would be destroyed, and therefore went out and "spake unto his sons in law; but his words seemed unto them as one who mocked." Why have good men believed, and why do they still believe, that God will destroy the wicked? Is it because they have no benevolence? Read over again the intercession of Abraham for Sodom, and say, whether he discovered a want of feeling for the wicked. Why then did Abraham and Lot believe, that God would destroy the wicked, while the men of Sodom, disbelieved it. The reason is, Abraham, Lot, and all pious men have different views of the evil of sin, from the wicked.

And while Lot lingered, desirous of persuading his friends to go with him, "the angels laid hold on his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful unto him." The angels assured him, they could do nothing until he was gone; that is, they could not destroy the city, while one righteous man remained in it. God's regard to one true saint was sufficient to restrain

his anger from falling on this wicked city. When the angels had led him out of the city, and directed him to fly to the mountain, the natural apprehension of danger, from being left defenceless in the wilderness, among wild beasts, took possession of his mind; and he requested, that he might retire to Zoar, a little city in the confines of Sodom, which, with the cities of the plain, was to have been destroyed. Lot said, "Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life, and I cannot escape to the mountain lest some evil take me, and I die; behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one. Oh let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live." Though Lot might have rested sure that God, who had taken care to save him from the destruction of the city, would have protected him in the wilderness; yet God, in condescension to the natural infirmities of human nature, not only grants his request, but saves the city on his account. "And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken." I might multiply instances almost without number, in which the love of God has been manifested to his people, all along through the Jewish dispensation; in the time of Christ and his apostles; in the miraculous preservations they experienced, and their inward supports and comforts under their trials: but this is unnecessary. We have already in some degree anticipated our

II. Head, which was to show, that such is the love of God to the righteous, that he often spares the wicked for their sakes. This observation is true of the world at large. That God may accomplish his designs of mercy to his church, is the only reason, why the world is continued. God saves the world of sinners from destruction, for the sake of his people, who are scattered up and down in it. Were it not for these, God would soon destroy the earth. This may be argued, from what God has done in times past, when the world universally, (Noah and his family excepted) had become wicked. God provided for their safety, and the world was immediately destroyed. While Lot continued in Sodom, it was spared; but as soon as he departed, the flame kindled. When he entered Zoar, this little city had a pledge of its safety. And had there been only ten such characters as Lot found in these cities, they would have been saved for their sake. How often did God spare the Jewish nation, for the sake of a pious few, who were among them! This was particularly the case in the time of Elijah; God had then reserved unto himself seven thousand, who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal; and the nation was saved for their sakes. The prophet Isaiah confirms this sentiment, that God spares the wicked for the sake of the righteous among them. In his day, that nation were extremely corrupt, and he assigns this as the reason, why they were not destroyed, like Sodom and Gomorrah. "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto

Gomorrah. These brief observations may be sufficient to bring to your recollection, a truth abundantly taught in the word of God. Some useful remarks will now close.

### *IMPROVEMENT.*

1. This subject teaches us the meaning of Christ's words to his disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth." Christians preserve the world from ruin—from greater degrees of corruption, as salt does those substances, with which it is mixed. God saves the world for their sakes; and by their example, influence and prayers, the world enjoys many blessings. When God bestows temporal blessings on the wicked, he does it in answer to the prayers of the righteous. And when he bestows spiritual blessings, it is done in answer to prayer. When Zion travails, in prayer to God, she brings forth spiritual children.

2. This subject teaches us, that there are yet those in the world, who love and fear God. God spares the wicked, and bestows innumerable mercies upon the world. This is an evidence that there are righteous men in the world. Though we have reason to fear, that their number is comparatively small, yet doubtless, God now has a seed to seek him, and a generation to serve him, on whose account the wicked receive favours, while God is gathering in his people.

3. This subject shows us, that the wicked have no reason to conclude, that it is out of regard to them, that God bestows favours on them. God is angry with the wicked, while he bestows his favours abund-

antly upon them. The rich man in the gospel dropped into hell amidst the temporal blessings of God. It is the manner of God to bestow favours on sinners in mercy to his people. These favours are distributed among mankind generally, that his own people, who live among them, may be comfortable. Were they all removed, as they were from Sodom, you who disregard God, and your duty, might expect to receive very different treatment. This consideration should teach you, not to judge of your state by the common mercies of divine Providence; for in these, God lets the wicked share with the righteous, and indeed for the sake of the righteous.

4. This subject shows us that the wicked, in opposing and persecuting, in all ages, the people of God, have acted directly contrary to their own interest. "He that is upright in his way is an abomination to the wicked." The wicked are unfriendly to the people of God. See this exemplified in Sodom. How did the vile inhabitants of this wicked city treat Lot? They reviled him, they assaulted his house; and would have committed the vilest abuse, had he not been defended by his heavenly guests. How directly against their interest did they conduct! Lot was their only defence; yet how did they abuse him! This spirit of opposition, had it an unrestrained influence, would extirpate the people of God from the earth. This spirit has risen to great heights at particular periods, of the world. Rivers of blood have been shed to destroy the church of God, while the persecutors little thought, that for the sake of the

righteous, they were suffered to live, and enjoy the comforts of life; and that had they obtained their wish, it would have been their own destruction.

God's love and care for the righteous may well make them thankful, watchful, and humble. *Thankful*, because, it is by grace they are, what they are—*watchful*, that they do nothing to offend so kind and gracious a preserver. *Humble*, that they serve him with so much inconstancy, and with no more ardency of affection. Think on this and be humble.



# SERMON V.

YOUTH ADDRESSED.



PSALM, CXIX. 9.

*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?  
By taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

**T**HE hopes of a nation, with respect to their future prosperity, depend much upon the rising generation. And parents themselves may calculate upon much satisfaction or sorrow, according as their children grow up in habits of virtue or vice. A virtuous youth will be a dutiful and affectionate child, when his parents become old. He will be an useful citizen, and a promoter of the good of church and state, when he comes to be a man; and his usefulness will probably increase with his years and influence. But the child, who grows up in habits of vice, and in the indulgence of youthful vanities, gives reason to fear, that he will prove undutiful, and unkind to his aged parents; and, instead of a blessing, he will prove a curse to the age in which he lives, and to that society of which he is a

member. The human mind in its present fallen state is prone to vice. Of this truth we have the plain and repeated testimony of Scripture and observation. The mind of youth, however, is as capable of virtue, as of vice ; and much care is necessary in forming the young, impressible heart, to a sense of duty ; and in directing it to an habitual course of virtuous action. Upon the principle, that the minds of children may be formed to a virtuous course of conduct, that divine injunction to parents is founded ; “ Train up a child in the way he should go.”

David and Solomon have in nothing discovered more knowledge of mankind, than in addressing such a large portion of their instructions to youth. By the wise and observing, this has always been considered the most important period in the life of man, for forming the manners, cultivating the mind, and regulating the heart. These inspired teachers, above their predecessors, seem deeply sensible of the importance of early instruction ; and that the young should remember their Creator in the days of their youth. They say much to warn parents of the evil consequences, to themselves, to their children, and to the world, of neglecting to give them a pious education. They say much to encourage parents to expect, that pious, persevering, parental instruction and discipline, shall be attended with the divine blessing, and prove the means of making them truly good and happy. They say much to young people, to dissuade them from youthful vanities, and sinful practices. They set before them the evil effects of a vicious life, the

probable, fatal consequences of a youth, devoted to sinful courses. They say much to urge them to devote their youth to the practice of piety, because it is the best time; and because they knew, that vicious habits contracted in youth are seldom broken, and, like almost every thing else, gather strength by time and indulgence. Hence we find them exhorting the young to give God their hearts; to put away sorrow, that is sin, from their heart, and evil from their flesh.

The text contains an inquiry how this can be done, and a sure direction how this may be effected. "How shall a young man cleanse his way?" A man's way doubtless means the habitual temper of his heart, and the general tenor of his conduct flowing from it. The question then is this; How shall a young man regulate his temper and govern his conduct, so as to please his Maker? The answer to this inquiry we have in the text; "By taking heed thereto according to thy word." The word of God is here proposed as the only sure guide to truth and happiness. It is the rule—the standard, by which the temper of all hearts, and all actions will be tried at the day of Judgment; "For God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness according to my gospel." The word of God points out what temper, and what conduct are agreeable to the will of God; and what temper, and what conduct are contrary to it. It points out to us, what is right and acceptable to God in thought, word, and deed. And at the day of Judgment, the whole character of every man will be

unfolded, and compared with this rule of duty; and they, whose character is found such as the word of God requires, will be justified and accepted. This discovers how important it is, that the young should keep their eye upon the word of God; and conduct their lives according to its sacred precepts. The reason is, that by it you are taught, how you are to feel, think, speak, and act, both toward God and man. He whose heart is actuated by the temper which the word of God requires, possesses the character of the pure in heart, and shall see God's face in peace; and from such a pure heart will flow such conduct, as denominates the hands clean; and therefore such shall be admitted, according to the sacred standard, to dwell in God's holy hill. This statement exhibits the Scriptures in a very interesting and important light. If they be the rule by which all our thoughts, words, and actions will be tried in the day of Judgment, then, it is plain, that the study and knowledge of the Scriptures are important, and a temper and practice founded upon the precepts of God's word are as necessary, as it is that we should appear at the day of Judgment with safety, and hear from the mouth of our Judge this happy sentence, "Come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

My text naturally leads me to address the young man—the young woman; and point out to them their duty and danger. And I address them, not because, they only have need of cleansing their way. David addressed the young, that they might have a portion

of divine instruction in season ; and because he knew, they were more likely to regard his counsels, than those who had grown old in sinful ways. Nor do I address my young hearers, because I suppose them more devoted to youthful vanities in this, than in other towns ; but because I wish they may be fully convinced of the evil of sin, and thoroughly and universally reformed, so as to be a shining example *of whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, to all around them.*

How shall “ a young man cleanse his way ? ” We have observed that a man’s way means his course of life, including his thoughts, words, and actions, which form his moral character. From the propensity of the human heart to sin, arises the great danger of our running into error in principle, and vice in practice. We then observe

1. Would a young man cleanse his way, he must be careful to form his principles by the word of God. This is very important, because your conduct will be much influenced by your opinions. *Every man will walk in the name of his God ;* that is, men will conduct in life, according to the ideas they form of God. Can the same conduct be expected from that man, who disbelieves the being and perfections of God, as from him, who is impressed with them ? Will that man who does not believe in a future state, be likely to conduct like one who does ? Will that man who believes himself not accountable, conduct like him, who expects to give an account of the deeds done in his body ? Can we expect the same conduct from that

man, who believes that sinfulness is no sin, as from him, who believes it is detestable in the sight of God? Will that man, who believes that it is his duty to love others as himself, conduct upon the selfish, contracted plan with him who believes, he owes no duty towards others? Can we expect the same conduct from him who believes, he owes no duty to the poor, as from him who believes, he ought to be kind and charitable? Did we know a man, who believed that it was not wrong to rob and murder, should we trust our life and property in his hand, with the same confidence, we should, did he conscientiously regard the commandments of God? It is natural for a man to act according to his sentiments. He, whose principles are fluctuating and erroneous, cannot be expected to act uniformly and uprightly. View that man who believes nothing about religion, will he live and act like one, who believes in the doctrines of the gospel? Were we to look into societies and towns, we might learn their sentiments from their conduct. Are they inattentive to the sabbath? Is divine worship neglected? Are they profane and immoral? Is the tavern more frequented than the house of God? What opinion do you form of this people? Do you not conclude them a people of no religious principles? Or, if they have any, that they are as erroneous as their conduct is irregular? Where people are not careful what they believe, we expect to find them as careless how they practise. If the religious sentiments of men had no influence on their practice, why should so much be said in Scripture on the importance of their embracing

the truth? Why should principles be laid down in Scripture, if it were indifferent what we believed? Such is the darkness of the human mind, and the wrong bias of the heart, that, if we form any principles in religion without our eye upon divine revelation, it will be a wonder, if they do not prove false.— But as it is natural for mankind to form some scheme of sentiment as soon as they begin to think of God—their relation to him, and of a future state; and as they are often in the way of that instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge, they have great need of divine instruction, and should often compare their religious sentiments with the holy Scriptures; and so cleanse their minds from false and dangerous principles. Should you be tempted to believe, that death will put an end to your existence; and therefore you have nothing to fear beyond the grave; the Scriptures will teach you that this is a foolish and dangerous error. Some have embraced this opinion, and have taken encouragement to live as though there were no God. But the Scriptures teach you that the wise and the fool die, and the godly and ungodly in this respect are alike. Both return to their dust, and are not in their bodies distinguished from the beasts; yet both these characters are distinguished from the beasts as to their spirits. The spirit of a beast goeth downwards, or perishes with the body; but the spirit of a man goeth upwards; or as it is elsewhere expressed, *returns to God who gave it*. Both die, and herein are not distinguished from the beasts; yet their bodies shall be raised and fitted for a state of immortality, while

that of the beast will be seen no more. When the Scriptures are properly attended to, and understood, they, like a refiner's fire, will purge the mind from delusive and dangerous errors.

Are you tempted to depend on future opportunities, for forsaking sinful ways, and preparing for heaven? Take heed to the Scriptures, and they will teach you, that such an expectation is presumptuous. They teach you, that your life is swifter than a weaver's shuttle;—that you may die soon—and your expected opportunity be lost forever.—Boast not thyself of to-morrow, is the direction of wisdom. A dependence on future time is a fatal rock, on which thousands have been lost. It is a delusion to which young people are peculiarly exposed. You ought therefore to pay a particular regard to what the Scriptures say of the vanity and uncertainty of your life, and the guilt and danger of relying on opportunities, which you may never enjoy.

Do you delay present duty upon the principle, that you will be more disposed to forsake your sins in some future time, than you are at present? The sacred Oracles expose the danger and fallacy of this expectation. They teach you that sinful habits, instead of losing, gather strength by indulgence; and that your danger will be greater, and the probability lessen every day, that you will ever reform.—They teach you, that sin is of a blinding nature, that it hardens the heart, stupifies the conscience, and that every step you take in sin, the less disposed you will be to forsake her destructive paths.



Are you disposed to believe your sins small, and that the mercy of God will secure you from future punishment, though you should not repent? The Scriptures will teach you, that all sin is against God, an infinite being, and that every sin deserves his wrath and curse; and, though the mercy of God be infinite, yet those will not be benefited by it, who live and die in sin; and, that the impenitent and unbelieving, notwithstanding all the merits of Christ, and all the grace of the gospel, shall have their part in the lake which burn, with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. These are a few of the many false principles to which you are exposed, and from which you may cleanse your mind, by regarding the word of God.

But you are not only in danger from false principles; but from vicious practices. I shall proceed to lay before you some of those evil practices to which the young are peculiarly exposed.

1. *Falsehood*, or a habit of lying, is a vice to which some are addicted; and those, who are addicted to this vice, commonly contract the habit in childhood and youth. Those, who are accustomed to speak the truth at these periods, seldom become habitual liars; and they, who have acquired this habit in youth, seldom recover themselves from this snare of the devil. Lying, is speaking with an intention to deceive. Such an intention is evidently wrong and wicked; and therefore lying is always a vice. It is a vice which is seldom of any advantage to the person, who indulges it; and often proves his ruin. When once a person is known to be a habitual liar, his reputation is gone—

his word gains no confidence—his promises no reliance ; and he is not believed even when he speaks the truth. But he often deceives and disappoints those, who know not his character, and have put confidence in his word. Lying tends to destroy the use of speech. The bestowment of this noble faculty was designed to enable man to convey his ideas, and communicate truth unto others ; and is of no further use to mankind, than as it is used for these purposes. How many thousands have been ruined in their reputation, their estate, and their comfort, by a lying tongue ? What scenes of human misery have proceeded from false and deceitful promises—of pretended lovers and friends ! How many young people have been undone, both as to their character, and future peace by means of a lying tongue ! The evils to civil society from this vice, are innumerable and indescribable ; and sooner or later bring the curses of the deceived upon the guilty head of the deceiver, and clothe him with shame and disgrace. A lying tongue is one of those seven abominations mentioned by the wise man, which God peculiarly abhors ; and God has expressly declared that all liars—those who indulge their tongues in falsehood, and persist in it, shall have their part—their portion—where my hearers ? Where ? why in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. Let the young think on this, and learn to speak the truth, every one with his neighbour. Avoid this abominable practice in your dealings—in your conversation ; and remember, always remember, that the ways of men are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.

2. *Profaneness* is another vice by which the soul is polluted, and on which a peculiar stamp of guilt and infamy is fixed by the word of God. It is a vice to which the young are exposed, and which, at the present day, exhibits an alarming appearance, with respect to the rising generation. Man is the offspring of divine goodness, and all his faculties the gifts of God; and will not this teach us the proper use of our tongues? What then shall we say to those persons, who employ that tongue to blaspheme and dishonour that Being, who gave it to them, that they might praise and adore him; and to pollute and corrupt the society, in which they live? What shall be done to thee, O thou devouring tongue?—No vice has less to plead in its favour, than this—and none is more solemnly forbidden, none more formally condemned throughout the whole Bible. Prophets, apostles, and the Son of God have all opposed their authority to this heaven daring sin. Said Christ,—“But I say unto you, swear not at all.” So great did this sin appear in the eyes of an inspired apostle, that he says—“Above all things, my brethren, swear not.” Above all listen to the voice of Jehovah from the midst of the thunders of Sinai—“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain”—Will you provoke the Lord to anger?—Are you stronger than he?—What motive have you for this? Has he ever injured you?—Nay, is he not thy father, that bought thee, and established thee? The swearer beside dishonouring God, injures men—like the plague, he

pollutes the very air he breathes,—and spreads death, by his example all around him. This vice is productive of neither profit, honour, nor pleasure; but certainly exposes a person to the hearty contempt of every good man. Let me then adjure all, who are conscious of guilt in this respect, by all they hold dear, to give these observations their due weight. Nor consider these remonstrances as mere words of course; but the effect of real concern for your future and eternal well being.

How shall a young man cleanse his way in this respect, but by taking heed thereto according to God's word?

3. *Lewdness* in speech and behaviour is a vice by which the soul and body are polluted. There is no sin, perhaps, to which the young are more exposed, and of the guilt and danger of which they are oftener warned.—And certainly there is no sin, that has a more direct tendency to harden the heart, and stupify the conscience, and bring on a complete state of moral insensibility than this. The Scriptures tell us that this sin takes away the heart, that is the moral feelings. Hence so many exhortations given to youth to flee from this sin.—We are assured, that it is a decree of Heaven, that neither whoremongers, nor adulterers, nor fornicators shall inherit the kingdom. Hence the apostle exhorts the young to fly youthful lusts, and assigns this as the reason, that they “war against the soul.” How pathetically does Solomon exhort the young men to avoid the house and company of the harlot, and he founds his exhortation upon the dreadful

and generally fatal consequences of such indulgence. "Her house is "emphatically" the way of hell, leading down to the chambers of death : none that go to her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life." The meaning of which is, that the consequences of indulging in this sin are generally fatal. What a solemn consideration to awaken the consciences of the guilty, and deter others from entering this forbidden path !

4. *Mispending the sabbath* is a vice, which, I fear is growing into practice among all ranks, particularly among the rising generation. God has honoured this day above all the rest, and he expressly and particularly requires us to regard it as a day of holy rest. It was instituted for our benefit ; by being particularly devoted to the interest of the soul ; and it is peculiarly vile and ungrateful in us to spend that time in vain amusements, in idleness or business, which God has enjoined us to spend in public worship, in reading and meditating upon his word, and in secret devotion. God has set it apart with a direct view, that we might be prepared for the endless and sublime enjoyments, and refined pleasures of heaven. The fourth commandment is a part of the moral law, and of perpetual obligation. It expressly requires, that one seventh part of our time should be religiously devoted to holy uses. The law from Mount Sinai pointed out the seventh day of the week for the sabbath ; and from several prophecies respecting gospel-times, and the practice of the apostles, it is sufficiently evident, that it is the will of God, that the first day of the week should be

observed by us as a sabbath. That mispending and profaning the sabbath is a heinous sin, appears from the threatenings of God, against the Jews, in case they should break the sabbath, and the dreadful judgments brought upon that whole nation for this sin. The Babylonish captivity is ascribed to this sin, as its procuring cause. No doubt God is now visiting us with national calamities and judgments for this sin. Can we suppose, that there would be such a great and general prevalence of other vices, if the duties of God's house and worship were properly attended to, and discharged?—Would there be so much ignorance, which opens a door for many corruptions? I think it can hardly be supposed.—Sabbath breaking is a sin attended with many aggravations.—It is big with ingratitude to God; and implies a disregard to all those glorious things, in memory of which it was instituted. It is a waste of precious time, the parent of spiritual poverty, and the first in the train of many ruinous vices. Persons who disregard this day, not only injure themselves; but often ruin others by their example. Such persons generally seek companions in this sin; and often gather about them many idle, wicked men, who contribute to support each other in this vice. This, my hearers, will appear, at the day of Judgment, among the vilest and most general abominations of this land at the present day. And you, my young hearers, have special reason to take heed to your ways, that you be not found among that class, upon whom God will pour out his wrath. The present degenerate state of the French nation, should be a warning to us.

They renounced the sabbath, and with it all religion. They altered the usual way of reckoning time, and made the week to consist of ten days, with an evident design, if possible, to blot the memory of the sabbath from under heaven. They have had great success in their wars, and God has suffered them thus to scourge the wicked nations for their sins. The height of pride and power to which they have risen, will prepare them for a more dreadful fall. And, if we may judge any thing of God's future dealings with mankind by the past, we must conclude, that their present flood of prosperity will terminate in deep adversity and wretchedness; and, I fully believe, the present generation will live to see it. Let the rising generation then, as they value their own present and future peace, and the prosperity of future generations, carefully avoid that conduct which tends directly to bring on such a state of things. For, what the moral state of this country will be, twenty or thirty years hence, depends much upon the present conduct of the rising generation. Should you disregard the sabbath, and teach others to do the same, you may easily see from what has taken place in this land in a few years past, that this country will be ripe for a publick and formal rejection of the sabbath—of publick worship—and of every religious institution. But, I would hope, there are but a few so lost to all sense of the importance of religious institutions, as not to be shocked even in the prospect of such a state of things. Then cleanse your ways from every vice, which tends to bring forward such a state of things, “by taking heed thereto according to God's word.”

5. There is another vice, which I would mention in this connexion, and against which I would solemnly warn you—a vice which is sufficiently branded by every mark of infamy in its destructive effects upon individuals, families, and society in general. The vice to which I refer is *card playing*. Whether this vice prevails among us—or to what degree it may prevail, I know not. But if it be not an innocent amusement, but a ruinous vice, then those who do, and those who do not practise it, ought to be aware of its consequences, that the one may reform his conduct in this particular, and the other be more guarded against it. That this practice ought to be ranked among vices, and among vices the most dangerous and destructive, I think, will appear from the following consideration. It is a practice, in which time is consumed, which, even the card-player himself being judge, might be spent, quite as agreeably, and to much better purpose, in improving conversation and reading; where the mind would not be subjected to such anxieties, and frequent disappointments, as it must at the gaming table.

Beside, the practice is a perpetual temptation to falsehood and deception. Every person, who knows, or is in the least acquainted with this practice, is sensible that it is a constant temptation to cheating and lying. Are we not directed to pray, “Lead us not into temptation?” Then surely it is wrong to run into it ourselves. He who places himself in the way of temptation, places himself on the devil’s ground, and may naturally expect to fall into those vices to which his situation exposes him. Beside all this, it is of a be-



witching, infatuating nature. The more time one spends in this practice, the more he wishes to spend. And many spend not only their time, but their property. And this is not all—many constitutions have been destroyed by devoting day and night to the card table—many families have been reduced to beggary, and many self-murders committed in consequence of an attachment to this ruinous practice. So that this practice stands condemned as sinful—as dangerous—by the sad experience of thousands—by reason and the word of God.

I have now mentioned a number of those vices to which the young are exposed, and from which they who are guilty must be cleansed, to be useful members of society, and to enjoy the blessings of God's kingdom. A number more might be mentioned, had I time and strength; but he, who regards God's word in these particulars, will, of course, be guarded against every particular, whereby God is dishonoured, and the interest of the soul endangered. He, who studies the word of God with a view to practice, will be daily gaining knowledge of God's will, and of his duty; and will not be likely to remain long ignorant of any important duty; nor of the nature and tendency of any practice.

I think, I have made it appear, both from Scripture and observation, that all these things are contrary to the word of God, and ruinous in their effects. Let me then entreat you to give these observations their due weight in your minds. The truths set before you, this day will never be forgotten. They are now record-

ed in heaven. I must give an account of this day's preaching, and you must give an account, how you have heard—and how you improve it. You may go from this house, and forget, and disregard all the important truths, you have this day heard.—And upon a dying bed, you will recollect these truths with this bitter reflection—“How have I hated instruction and my soul despised reproof.” It is, however, certain that these truths will be brought to your remembrance, when you and I shall stand at the Judgment seat of Christ. But if you give what has been said its due weight, and form your lives according to the rules of the gospel, then, should these things be recollected upon a dying bed, they will afford you comfort, in the certain prospect of meeting your minister, who gave you these warnings, with satisfaction.

“Finally, brethren,” of whatever age—“whatsoever things are true—whatsoever things are honest—*just*—pure—lovely—of good report—if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”<sup>2</sup>

## SERMON VI.

### INCONSISTENCY OF SINNERS.

LUKE, vii. 33, 34.

*For John the baptist came neither eating bread, nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.*

**J**OHAN was the forerunner of Christ—sent to prepare his way before him. He, not from any religious scruple, but probably with a view to recommend himself, and his preaching to the Jews, practised a most abstemious and simple way of living; and appeared in the plainest dress and humblest deportment among men. “He came neither eating bread nor drinking wine.” Another Evangelist tells us, he was clothed with a coat of camel’s hair, which was a coarse sort of manufacture, “and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.” At first multitudes flocked after him, but when he, in the

plainest manner called on his hearers to repent of sin, when he began to expose the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and demanded of them the reason of their following him in this pointed manner, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" "Bring forth, therefore fruits worthy of repentance and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: For I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham;" This, with other doctrines which he delivered, stung them to the heart, and they industriously sought objections against him. But as his life was irreproachable, and they determined to reject his instructions, they laid hold on his simplicity of life; and because he did not indulge himself, as others did in eating and drinking, they tried to persuade themselves and others, that he was possessed with an evil spirit. "They said he hath a devil." This was a most unreasonable objection; but unreasonable as it was, they persuaded themselves, that John was not a true prophet, and therefore rejected the truths which he delivered.

Not long after this, Christ appeared as a publick instructor; and in his manner of life accommodated himself to the innocent customs and manners of the Jews. He ate and drank with them, hereby preventing those prejudices, which they had conceived against John. But as Christ confirmed John's ministry, by bearing publick testimony in his favour, and preaching the same doctrines, they were more engaged to find objections against Christ, than they had been against

John. But they were obliged to attack his character in a different manner ; a manner which displayed their wickedness and determined opposition to his doctrines. When John preached to them the necessity of repentance for the remission of their sins, and no doubt laid open the depravity of the human heart—their great criminality and imminent danger ; notwithstanding all their fond conceits of their own goodness, they said, to avoid the force of all this, “ He hath a devil.” The evidence of this was, he neither ate bread nor drank wine. What a reason ! Immediately after, when Christ came and confirmed John’s doctrines, they cried, “ Behold a gluttonous man, a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” All this outcry against him they made, because he did not abstain from lawful meats and drinks ; and because he noticed publicans and sinners, which was agreeable to his design in coming into the world to save such. He came into the world to save sinners ; and went into their company to instruct and call them to repentance. These objections and aspersions of the Jews against Christ and John, discovered their great perverseness, and determination to find fault with those who told them the truth. But this is a spirit not peculiar to the Jews ; but common to impenitent sinners of all generations. They will be guilty of the greatest self-inconsistency to evade the force of truth ; rather than believe their criminality and danger. This rejection of John, as a mad man, because he neither ate bread nor drank wine, and their ready charge against Christ, as a drunkard and a glut-

ton, because he did ; showed that they were determined to receive no man as a prophet sent from God, who preached such doctrines as John and Christ preached. Is not this a proof that the sinful heart is disposed to make use of any, even the most inconsistent and unreasonable methods to avoid conviction ? Sinners will condemn the wise and benevolent methods of God to instruct and reform them ; and even ascribe them to the agency of the devil, rather than comply with the calls of the gospel. “ John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and they said, He hath a devil ; the Son of man is come eating and drinking ; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.”

These words manifestly contain this doctrine, *viz.*  
*Sinners are very inconsistent with themselves.*

This will appear to be true by comparing them with themselves in a number of particulars.

1. The most obvious inconsistency, which appears in sinful men, is that, between their profession and practice. There are but a few, especially among those who enjoy the advantages of the christian revelation, who do not believe the being and perfections of God. So abundant are the evidences of this most important truth, from the works of nature, the laws, order, and harmony which appear in the natural system, that those “ who say there is no God,” “ are fools and without excuse” for their blindness and stupidity. Yet it is a common thing for those, who acknowledge the existence of an infinitely holy God, and, that they are accountable to him ; to deny his being in their practice, all their days.

The man who lives without prayer and thanksgiving to God, who neither asks him for the blessings which he needs, nor thanks him for what he bestows, who neither looks to his bounty for good, nor to his mercy for protection from evil; the man who trusts not the promises, nor fears the threatenings of God; who uses his tongue in profaneness, and his hands and other faculties without regard to any rule, but that of his own inclination, such an one lives, as if there were no God: his practice says there is none. Many there are, who thus live without God in the world. In words they acknowledge God, but in works deny him. How inconsistent is the man, who with his lips acknowledges a God, and in his daily practice says there is none! The man who, makes confession of his sinfulness before God, and prays for pardon, and at the same time indulges himself in any known sin, as all impenitent sinners do, is inconsistent. His praying is a declaration that he desires to be holy, that he wishes to avoid sin; but his practice notwithstanding is a declaration directly to the contrary. The temper of the heart, and the habitual practice of the impenitent sinner, are both a direct contradiction to all his prayers, if he accustom himself to use the form of prayer, which doubtless is true of many who assume the outward badge and appearance of saints. The hearts and tongues of hypocrites are always at variance; and so are those of all impenitent sinners, who pretend to pray to God; for they acknowledge that in words, which they neither approve in heart, nor admit as true in their practice.

2. There is great and constant inconsistency between the hearts and consciences of sinners. The consciences of sinners, particularly of those who enjoy the advantages of revelation, inform them of what is right. Their reason and conscience dictate to them, that there is a God of infinite glory, and that it is a most desirable thing in itself that there should be such a God, who can govern the world, and order all the affairs in it in wisdom; and reward and punish moral agents according as they are holy or sinful. But this is all contrary to every feeling of the natural heart. The fool, the sinner, hath said in his heart, there is no God; and the secret wish of his heart is, that there were none. He is not pleased with the idea, that there is a God who will treat him according to the impartial decisions of justice. The selfish heart revolts against all laws binding it to exercise extended benevolence, and therefore the perfections and moral government of God, when revealed, are of all things the most displeasing to the selfish, proud heart of the sinner. His reason and conscience pronounce it to be his duty to love and serve God, and indeed his highest interest, and his supreme happiness. But his heart objects to these dictates. The language of his heart is, that almost any thing is more deserving of love than the glorious God, and his practice which is ever dictated by the present inclinations of his heart, declares that even the vilest lusts are more to be desired than the enjoyment of God—that his happiness consists in living at as great a distance from God, and having as little to do with him as possible. The heart



and conscience of the sinner are at constant war with each other. What the heart approves, the enlightened and well informed conscience always condemns; and what the reason and judgment approve, the heart rejects; I mean as to moral things. The reason of man approves of holiness, and disapproves of all sin; but the wicked heart loves sin, and rejects with abhorrence the ways of God. Thus is the sinner inconsistent with himself: he is perpetually doing what he is perpetually condemning. There is great wickedness in the heart, which opposes reason and conscience; and this evil, wicked heart, we observe

3. Makes sinners inconsistent in their reasonings respecting moral subjects. This wicked heart will, in many instances, blind the mind, and so pervert the understanding, that darkness will be put for light, and light for darkness, evil for good, and good for evil. All errors of judgment in moral subjects proceed from the heart. For if the heart were right, men would never be hasty and rash in judging: they would not conclude upon the truth or falsehood of a proposition without evidence, nor would they decide further upon any subject than they had real evidence. Were the heart really impartial and honest; were it disposed to admit real evidence as sufficient proof of the truth or falsehood of a proposition in one case, it would be disposed to do the same in another. But the dishonesty and wickedness of the heart blind the judgment, and lead sinners into the greatest inconsistency in things of a religious nature. It is owing to this, that men frequently mistake will and passion for

conscience. The worst of men are as ready to profess to be led and governed by the dictates of conscience, as those who are truly conscientious; and to plead conscience for doing this or that; or, for not doing things, when in fact conscience has nothing to do in the business, but they are led by their inclinations, or driven on by their passions. That which a man is unwilling to do, he will persuade himself he ought not to do; and what he wishes to do, let it be ever so contrary to the dictates of reason and the word of God, it is a wonder, if he does not find some plea on which he will ground an argument, to prove the innocence or lawfulness of such conduct. When wicked men pretend to be ruled by conscience, they but act the part of hypocrites; for it is their lusts, not their conscience, by which they are governed. For if a person conscientiously avoids any act or practice, on the principle that it is sinful, he would upon the same principle avoid another, indeed every practice which is sinful. But it is the character of all wicked men, that they act contrary to the clearest dictates of conscience; at least when conscience is properly informed respecting those things of which they judge. This proves that the wicked, who walk according to the desires of their hearts, which is true of all impenitent sinners, and yet pretend that they are acting according to the dictates of conscience, are either deluded themselves, or are endeavouring to impose on others, and so acting the part of hypocrites. This class of men will, however, judge and reason well, and infer just conclusions respecting their temporal concerns, who yet, in the affairs

of religion, will infer contrary conclusions from the same principles. With regard to their temporal concerns, they act like wise men. In seed time they will sow, upon the principle, that the opportunity will be lost, if not improved, and that there is no reason to expect a crop, without using the appointed means of obtaining it. With respect to their worldly interest, they are careful not to miss any opportunity of securing what they have, by a sure title, and of acquiring more: and this carefulness is founded on the principle, that opportunity lost, cannot be recalled, and therefore that delays are dangerous. But mark the same persons in their reasonings and consequent conduct, respecting the interest of their souls, and they appear to have no idea or sense of the truth of the above mentioned principle; they do not appear to believe that delays are dangerous, or that the opportunity of obtaining an interest in the riches of heaven, can be lost—that there is any danger in delays of this kind, and therefore, while they are careful to embrace every opportunity to secure their temporal interest, totally neglect the necessary means of securing the salvation of their souls, and are wholly at ease and quiet about it. This is truly the case among careless secure sinners, and is a proof of great inconsistency in their conduct; for while they are rising early and setting up late, to secure their temporal interest, they wholly neglect things, which they acknowledge of the highest importance, for the sake of what is comparatively of little worth. All sinners are guilty of this obvious inconsistency between reason and conduct. For they know,

and will generally acknowledge, that the interest, the well being of the soul is an object of more importance than the body, as eternity is longer than time; and that opportunity is as liable to be lost in the one case, as in the other. This is a great inconsistency between the head and heart, to pursue principally what the judgment pronounces a less good, to the neglect of one infinitely greater, and which is as liable to be lost as the lesser.

4. Another instance of the inconsistency of sinners is the different manner in which they will reason from the divine prescience, or foreknowledge of God, respecting temporal and spiritual things. It is generally acknowledged by those, who believe the absolute perfection of the Deity, that from eternity, he foresaw all events which take place in time, and that certain foreknowledge implies the certainty of the events foreknown. For it is a manifest contradiction to say, that an event is certainly foreknown, and yet, that it may never take place. But this previous certainty does not, in the opinion of those who admit the doctrine, preclude the necessity and propriety of using means, in order to obtain desirable ends with respect to temporal things. No man who believes the foreknowledge or decree of God, respecting a future harvest, will neglect to plough and sow, upon the principle, that it is foreknown that he shall have a crop, and therefore he shall have it whether he ploughs and sows, or uses the means or not. His reason, in this case tells him, that the means are connected with the end, and necessary in order to obtain it. No man, but a

deluded Mahometan would think his life as secure in the face of every instrument of death, as when at a distance from the field of battle, on the principle that the time and manner of his death were appointed. Nor would he refrain from his ordinary food, on the principle, that he should live as long without it. And yet many of these very persons will reason in this way, respecting the salvation of their souls, and say, "if I am to be saved God knows, and has determined it, and the event is certain, and upon this principle my state is fixed, let me do what I will: There is no need of my taking any thought about it, or striving to secure the object; for all I can do will not alter the case one way nor the other." Here the conclusion from the same principle is directly the reverse from what it was in the instance of ploughing and sowing, in order for a crop. Here the sinner appears inconsistent with himself. For, if we may rest our salvation on the divine foreknowledge, or decree of God, without using means, it is equally proper and safe to trust the success or prospect of a future harvest to the same principle; for both are equally the objects of divine foreknowledge and determination. If it be improper to depend upon the foreknowledge of God for a harvest, while we neglect the appointed means of it; it is equally improper to expect salvation upon the principle, that the foreknowledge or decree of God, without our care and concern, will infallibly secure it. This unreasonable conclusion, from divine foreknowledge, as it respects the interest of the soul, does not arise from incapacity, as is evident from their being able to argue

justly from the same principle, with respect to temporal things; but it springs wholly from criminal disaffection to the truth. Duty is a burdensome employment. Sinners dislike the business of religion, and therefore try to separate what God hath joined together, (I mean, means and ends,) in order to quiet themselves in the neglect of duty. In all other concerns, except those of religion, the determinations of God are considered as no discouragements to exertion. Does the man who objects against the divine appointments in the concerns of religion, and who excuses himself in the neglect of the means of grace, does this man feel any discouragement in ploughing and sowing, because the God of nature has fixed the seasons, and determined that seed time and harvest shall never fail? Suppose no appointment, no fixed laws in this case, but an entire uncertainty whether there would be a seed time and an harvest, where would be the encouragement to cultivate the earth?—Is not the encouragement in this case in exact proportion to the fixedness, or stability of the divine determination and promise?—Indeed all the encouragement the husbandman has to plough and commit his seed to the earth, arises from the connexion which God has established between means and ends. Destroy this connexion, and every motive to exertion must cease to operate. By the determination of God, he that plougheth, may plough in hope, and feel his exertions invigorated from the decrees of God. This decree of God does not render the husbandman's labours languid in the field. He does not conclude, that, if God has fixed the

seasons of the year, and established a connexion between means and ends, therefore he may as well slumber away the spring and summer, as to labour. Why then does this man, as soon as he steps on religious ground, leave these conclusions, and draw others directly the reverse from the same general principles? Indeed, had God established no connexion between means and ends, in the concerns of religion, all encouragement to attend on the means would cease, from the moment this was known. Is there not then reason to believe, that men draw such conclusions from the determinations of God, to support and quiet themselves in the neglect of the means of grace? The same men who objected against John, because he did not eat and drink like other men, objected against Jesus Christ, because he did. How inconsistent! The reason was, they disliked the doctrines and duties, which these preachers exhibited. And the principal reason, why men object to the determinations and purposes of God in the things of religion, is, they wish for some excuse in their negligence, or to raise some objection against the preacher of these doctrines, that they may, like the hearers of Christ and John, set aside all their instructions.

### *IMPROVEMENT.*

1. May we not, in the view of this subject, see the difference between saints and sinners? Their characters are represented as different in the sacred oracles. And the difference is displayed in this; the saint is generally consistent with himself in those things, in

which the inconsistency of the sinner chiefly appears. It is indeed true, that saints are not perfectly consistent with themselves, in those things, in which we have seen the inconsistency of sinners. And they never will be, until they arrive to a state of perfection. But still there is a wide difference between the saint and sinner. They may both believe the being and perfections of God; but the saint loves the true character of God; he feels and acts habitually under the impression of these important truths; which is never true of the impenitent sinner. The heart, conscience, and reason of a saint are consistent and harmonious. All these agree in justifying, approving and loving the truths of God; and the general tenor of his life bears publick testimony to their excellency. Regeneration reconciles the heart to the truths of God, when seen and understood, as well as to his character. The saint can reason as correctly respecting spiritual things as temporal; for he is willing to know the truth. The veil is taken from his heart, and this removes the darkness, which attends the understanding of the sinner in reasoning upon divine things. What his reason and the word of God dictates, his heart approves; and the language of his heart and tongue is the same. His heart feels and approves what his lips express in prayer, and all his other expressions of friendship to God and man. There is therefore an essential difference between the saint and sinner in point of consistency.

2. This subject will help us to see the reason of that divine declaration, that at the last day, "Some



shall rise to shame and everlasting contempt." Self inconsistency breeds contempt, because in general it argues a depraved heart. For this reason, there is nothing, which men more carefully conceal, and of which they are more ashamed when exposed. There is scarcely any thing, which they are more unwilling to see and acknowledge than self inconsistency. But, at the day of judgment, the heart, conscience, reasonings and conduct of the sinner will appear; and he will see it, and the world will see it; and he will know that they see it, as he sees it. He has professed to believe in an omnipresent God, yet indulged secret sins. In numerous instances his professions and practice have been at variance. His wickedness and inconsistency in these things will be seen and felt in the most sensible manner. He will be covered with the deepest confusion, and at the same time know, that he is an object of the contempt of all holy beings. His mouth will be stopped, and he obliged to join issue with his Judge in his own condemnation. There is nothing which can save the sinner from inconsistency, from shame and contempt, but a compliance with the requisitions of the gospel. This reconciles man with himself, with duty, with God. The love of God, and nothing short of this, will lay a foundation for self consistency, self approbation, and the approbation of his judge at the last day. A wicked, impenitent heart will lead the sinner into perpetual inconsistencies, which, at last, will necessarily bring him to shame and contempt. But the love of God shed abroad in his heart, will render him consistent, when

he prays—consistent, when he confesses his sins to God—consistent, when he asks him for favours—consistent, when he thanks him for mercies. His heart, his conscience, and his lips will harmonise in these exercises; but they will forever contradict each other, if the heart be estranged from God. - All he says, all he does to cover and excuse his sins, will, when all things shall appear as they are, only serve to increase his confusion. How important is the religion of Jesus! It is adapted to save men from the love and practice of sin; which is a state of inconsistency with conscience, reason, and the word of God. Hence the wicked are said to be like the troubled sea whose waters cannot rest. The wicked heart is at war with conscience—with reason—with God. What a state is this! But when the gospel is embraced, it says to this wicked, agitated bosom, as its blessed Author said to the tempestuous sea, “Peace, be still.” The heart ceases to contend with conscience. For the first time, they become friends. Reason is no longer employed to frame objections against the doctrines and duties of the gospel; but she is now employed as the handmaid of faith; and the man finds the saying of David true, “Great peace have they that love thy law.” The gospel is “the word of reconciliation.” When this is embraced, heaven is begun. God and the sinner are friends—friends forever. Happy state! May you all know it here, and enjoy it hereafter.

## SERMON VII.

### ON THE LOVE OF IDOLS.



I SAMUEL, v. 7.

*And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us; for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our God.*

THE revelation contained in the holy oracles is the greatest blessing ever conferred on this guilty world. This revelation has clearly ascertained our duty and discovered a new and living way, by which we may enjoy the favour of God, whom by our sins we have offended. This revelation was first committed to writing and delivered to the twelve tribes of Israel. The divine law was written by the finger of God, and is generally believed the first alphabetical writing ever known in the world. This law was written upon two tables of stone and laid in the ark. The people were taught to consider this, as the most precious deposit; and good men did indeed consider and treat it as the most valuable possession. They used to carry it with

them to war ; and were particularly careful to guard and secure this, above every thing else. This they had with them when they went out to war against the Philistines ; and, upon a particular time, they were smitten, and the ark of God taken. This was so grievous a stroke, that good old Eli, whose heart trembled for the ark, while the event of the battle was unknown, that when he came to hear that the ark was taken, the news entirely overcame him ; and he fell from his seat, where he was setting and waiting for tidings of the battle, and died. And now the Philistines had that in their possession, which Israel considered as their greatest privilege. In this chapter we have a particular account, how they treated the ark of the God of Israel. They set it in the temple of Dagon, their God. But the ark of God could have no fellowship with idols. In that heart, or in that temple where this law is, idols can no longer maintain their place. Dagon falls down on his face before the ark of the Lord. And when they came to the house of Dagon on the morrow, behold Dagon was fallen on his face before the ark of the Lord, and they took him up and set him again in his place." That holy law wherever it came said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." But Dagon could not stand before this holy, this idol consuming law. The judgments of God were sent upon the Philistines, for their iniquity in placing the the holy law of God in the idol's temple ; probably in way of derision, as if their god had now in his power, that in which Israel trusted as a security against their enemies. It seems that the Philistines supposed,

that Israel trusted in the ark, as they trusted in Dagon ; and they placed it by their idol, by way of comparison and triumph. But when they saw that their idol could not stand before the ark of the Lord, they determined it should not remain among them. Here let it be observed, that the spirit and temper of mankind are naturally the same in all ages, and nations ; there is the same sinful, depraved heart in man now, as in Samuel's time ; and the same in America, as in Gath and Ekron ; and the ark, the law of God, has in general been treated by wicked men, in all ages since it was given, in the same manner. On this text of Scripture we may notice

1. The manner in which the Philistines treated the ark, which contained the law of God ; they determined that it should not abide among them.

2. The reason of their resolution ; because if it did, it would destroy their idol. Hence the doctrine

*They who love idols reject the law of God.*

This doctrine may be reduced to the following propositions

I. The law of God tends to destroy idolatrous worship.

II. Wicked men set up idols ; therefore

III. They reject the law of God.

Our first proposition is, that the law of God tends, wherever it comes, to destroy idolatry. The truth of this is evident from a consideration of what the law is ; the first precept of which strictly forbids our setting up any object before, or above God in our hearts ;

or worshipping him under any similitude in heaven or in earth. This command, as explained by our Saviour, requires us “to love the Lord our God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength.” That, in the language of Scripture, is a person’s god on which he chiefly places his affections; whether this object be the God of Israel, or any other object, it is his god, his chief good. When a man’s heart is fixed on any thing, as the object of his supreme love, if this object be not God, he is an idolater in the view of this law. This divine law requires us to love and serve God supremely, and make every thing subservient to his glory. According to this law, our Maker is to have the first and chief place in our hearts; and therefore the law is directly and fully against all kinds of idolatry. Its natural and direct tendency is to bring all to the knowledge and worship of the living and true God; and the worship of idols has actually ceased in all places, exactly in proportion as this law has been known and obeyed. Into whatever temple or heart the law of God enters, from that is idolatry banished. The law is so contrary to an idolatrous heart or temple, that they can have no communion with each other. No man can serve God and mammon; no temple, no heart can contain both. The law opposes every lust—every corruption—every idol of the heart; and they who love them cannot be friendly to the law of God. But

2. Wicked men set up idols. They do not all worship images, as did the Philistines, but all, without exception, have some object, beside

God and his glory, on which their hearts are set, and which they seek as their chief good. There is a natural propensity in the human heart to idolatry, wherever this law is unknown; and wherever it is known, and not written on the heart, there idolatry prevails. Truly in countries, enlightened by divine revelation, the absurdity of image worship is acknowledged; but there ever has been a disposition in mankind, like the Philistines, to send away the ark of God from them. This is the simple reason, why all men have not, at this day, the revelation of God among them. Whole nations, who were once enlightened with divine truth, have through this propensity relapsed into idolatry. "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imagination, and their foolish heart was darkened, and they changed the glory of God into images made like unto corruptible man, to birds and four footed beasts, and creeping things." Hence the earth has, in every age been in a measure overrun with idolatry. The practice of mankind has clearly shown, that their hearts are opposed to the holy law of God, and in love with some minor object. From the apostacy of man; from the day in which he blotted from his heart the inscription of this holy law, his heart became a temple of idols. And for fifteen hundred years, there were but a few, who were not idolaters both in heart and practice. The waters of the flood could not wash from the heart this spiritual pollution. It again spread over the earth, and at the time God called Abraham, and established his covenant and his worship with him and his seed

after him, idolatry prevailed in every country and nation under heaven. Indeed it was not long before this favoured people discovered an aversion to the worship of God, and a desire after idols. Thus it was in the wilderness, notwithstanding all the signs and wonders God wrought before their eyes in Egypt, at the red sea, and in their journey to Canaan. Even when the thunderings and lightnings of Sinai had scarcely ceased, they made them an idol, and worshipped it. And thus it was, age after age, until the days of Jereboam, when ten tribes out of twelve went over to idolatry, and set up images, and bowed down and worshipped gods which their hands had made. By this voluntary defection from the worship of God, they openly rejected him as their God. And is it not the character of all sinners as drawn by the pen of inspiration, that they love other objects more than God? Image worship is not essential to idolatry. Nothing more is necessary to constitute idolatry, than to place the heart on any object more than on God. Man may make this object his farm, his money, his titles, his pleasures, and when he finds his idol endangered by the ark of God, he rejects it with all his heart. The external form of worship, even of the true God, is in no degree inconsistent with idolatry; that is, placing the heart supremely on something beside God. And a man may be really an idolater, and yet openly profess to love and worship the God of Israel. This very man, when brought to the test, and he must give up one or the other, will retain his idols, and send away the ark of God. When called to part with his sinful pleasures—



his goods, if he possesses an idolatrous heart, he will discover it, and reject the law of God, and retain his idol. When man's heart is prevailingly fixed on forbidden objects, he will openly reject the divine law rather than part with objects, which he loves supremely. And he may become an open enemy to the law and worship of God, when he finds, that by regarding the one, and attending on the other, he must part with his idols. Thus the servants of God, who loved him supremely, have in a comparative sense hated their own lives, when they could not retain them except upon condition of rejecting the true God. All the martyrs of Jesus have been brought to this trial, and have parted with their lives, rather than their religion, because they loved them less, than they did God. On the other hand, when wicked men, who have enjoyed gospel privileges, and have united in the external worship of God, have been brought to this test; or to one far less trying; only perhaps to part with the applause of men, or a little of their worldly interest, or to deny Christ, forsake his people and worship; they have openly opposed the cause of Christ, for the sake of one or the other of their darling objects. And the language of their hearts is like that of the men of Ashdod. "The ark of God shall not abide with us, for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god." This brings me to the

III. Thing proposed, which was, that wicked men who set up idols in their hearts, reject the law of God. By rejecting the law of God, I mean rejecting it as the rule of life. The idolatry of the heart, and the

worship of images imply a total rejection of the law of God. And it has been shown that mankind are disposed, both in heart and practice, to break the first and great command of God, which forbids idolatry. It is indeed a necessary consequence from their love of idolatry, that they reject the law of God ; for they can no more love both, than they can serve two masters, whose characters and commands are directly opposite.

Here I would point out some of the ways in which wicked men discover the same temper with respect to the law of God, which appeared in the men of Ashdod. Though there may be but few, who openly say as they said, “ The ark of God shall not abide with us ;” yet many feel dissatisfied with it, while others declaim as openly against the bible, which contains this law, as the men of Ashdod did against the ark which formerly contained it. They endeavour to persuade themselves and others, that it is no privilege to have the bible among them. A general disregard of the scriptures is, at the present day, apparently increasing, and deism and infidelity gaining ground ; and many are endeavouring to make themselves and others believe, that the bible is not the word of God ; and would put it far from them, and banish the knowledge of it from the land. Such persons by their practice say, we will not have the ark of God to abide with us. A wicked heart, one that is opposed to the law of God, has a greater interest, in such efforts than some imagine. Here I would observe, that the increase of deism is considered by some as an argument against the

divinity of the sacred scriptures. But can any person, in the exercise of his reason, suppose that an argument can be drawn against the scriptures from the opposition they meet from wicked men? Nay, in every degenerate time, when they have more opposers, than at other times, can this be an evidence against them, when it is considered, that it is the very spirit of a wicked heart to reject their authority, and if possible, become persuaded they are not divine. This is so far from being an argument against the truth of the scriptures, that it is indeed an argument in their favour. It can certainly be for the interest of no character, but the sinner, that the bible should prove false; and no other character can wish this; and no other character will attempt to prove it so. It was no evidence that the ark did not contain the law of God, because the idolaters of Ashdod would not have it abide with them. This law condemned their God and all who worshipped him. Could they then wish to have it among them? It is generally acknowledged, that this is a day of great degeneracy, a day in which sin of every kind abounds; and it is also a notorious truth, that in general, those who call in question the truth and divinity of the scriptures are persons of loose and vicious characters, whose interest it is that the scriptures should not be true. They who openly reject the scriptures are commonly persons of great wickedness and stupidity in their lives—profane, intemperate, and, in other respects, such as shall not inherit the kingdom of God. And it is observable that as wickedness increases among a people, a disposition to re-

ject the bible appears among that people ; and it is agreeable to reason and scripture it should be so. This is one way in which wicked men would send away the ark of God.

2. Another way is by paying little regard to it in conduct. May it not be said of multitudes, who live in a land of gospel light and grace, as it was said of the people of Israel, " They hear the word of the Lord, but will not do it." How many live from day to day regardless of the duties which the law of God requires ? And as they live themselves, so they train up their children and servants. Heads of families, who live unmindful of the law of God, take the most direct way to banish the law and fear of God, from the hearts of all who are under their instruction, or feel the influence of their example. Such conduct tends directly to reduce succeeding generations to the state of heathen, who perish for lack of vision. The language of the sinner's practice, who disregards and breaks God's holy law from day to day, is, that he means to reject it as a rule of life. When a servant openly and habitually disobeys the orders of his master, he says in his practice, that he will not have that man to rule over him ; he rejects him as a master. So in the case before us, when the sinner disregards the known will and law of God, he rejects God as a law-giver, and his will as the rule of his life. This is true of every class of sinners.

He who sets his heart upon riches, and is disposed to increase them by every means in his power, makes an idol of them, and consequently rejects the law of God. This law opposes him in every unlawful meas-

ure which he takes to obtain them, and as he goes forward, he rejects the law of God in every step of his course. The law of God would restrain him from his unlawful measure—and its hand is against his idol, hence he will reject it. Suppose his riches lawfully obtained, the law of God obliges him to charity and munificence—to contribute of his substance to promote the interest of religion, and should his heart be set more upon his wealth than on duty, he will reject the law of God; and say as the men of Ashdod did, “the ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us, for his hand is sore upon us, and upon our god.” The man who sets his heart upon worldly pleasures and sensual delights, sets up idols in his heart, and rejects the law of God. This man will not have the ark of God to abide with him; he cannot wish to retain the knowledge of that law, which would destroy his idols. The intemperate man has his idol—his temple, to which he frequently resorts, and sacrifices his precious time, his property, his reputation, his health and soul to his idol. He rejects the law of God, and indeed we need not select instances, for the same is true of all sinners. The law of God strikes at the life of every sin; and therefore all impenitent sinners who have some idol set up in their hearts, unite in practically saying, “we desire not the knowledge of God’s ways.” “We have loved idols, and after them we will go.” It is indeed true, that reason and conscience teach men better; and there are comparatively few who openly declare this, yet it is evident that every wicked man—every impenitent sinner loves something—some idol more

than the God of Israel; and therefore rejects his law. As soon as a man submits to this law, receives it into his heart, every idol falls before it. He then loves the ark of God; his heart, like Eli, trembles when he sees it in danger, and he had rather be deprived of every temporal enjoyment than part with it. All the pious people in Israel sat a high value upon the ark, because it contained the holy law of God; and every good man ever has, and will put a high estimation upon the holy oracles of God. Though sinners may permit the law of God to be among them, yet when they see its claims upon them, and their idols, they cry out against it; and their practice shows that they reject the law of God.

#### *IMPROVEMENT.*

1. From what has been said on this subject, we learn, that every one who is an enemy to the law of God, or disregards it in practice, is in love with some idol. He has some wrong propensity to gratify; some forbidden object which he wishes to obtain; nothing else will dispose him to reject the law of God. Nothing but the love of some idol can create disaffection to the divine law, and dispose men to put it from them. This law forbids nothing, but what is unreasonable, and requires nothing, but what is perfectly suitable. How reasonable to love God with supreme affection and worship him as our God!

2. We can see in the light of this subject, what disposes mankind to reject Jesus Christ. He came into the world to honour the law of God, and to call sinners to repentance for their disobedience. He ex-

plained the nature, and stated the requirements of the divine law, and insisted on the obligation under which all men are to love and obey this law; and expressly declared, that heaven and earth should pass away, before this law should, in the smallest degree be relaxed. Love of idols leads men to reject the law, and of consequence Jesus Christ, who justified and enforced its obligation. Hence every one who rejects the law of God, rejects Jesus Christ. No man can reject the law and yet be a friend to Christ, whose business into the world was to condemn all wrong affection—all false worship, and bring all men to the true worship of God, as his law required. So no man can love Jesus Christ, and yet disregard the law of God as a rule of life. Love to both is always united. Hence a man may be certain, that he is an enemy to Christ, if he disregards that law which Christ died to support. The heart which rejects the law as a rule of life must reject the gospel. The whole gospel scheme is built upon this principle, that the law is holy, just, and good; and that Jesus Christ is worthy of love and confidence, because he magnified, and made this law honourable. What love—what confidence could be placed in Christ had he not obeyed his Father's law?

Some are ready to imagine, they are friendly to the Saviour, and his gospel, while they disregard the law of his heavenly Father. How vain is such an imagination. He that loveth Christ, loveth his Father also; and he, that loveth not the character and law of the God of Israel, is equally destitute of love to Christ, "who is

the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person." It is a truth not to be overlooked, that they who reject the law of God as a rule of life, are enemies to the true character of God; for the law is a transcript of his perfection, and the very expression of his heart, and can never be broken without a heart which is unfriendly to its blessed and glorious author.

3. This subject may afford matter for self examination. What are our feelings with respect to the bible, which contains the mind and will of God? Do we esteem it a privilege to have it in our hands?—A distinguished favour, that God hath cast our lot in a land where God's law and gospel are enjoyed? And if so, how do we manifest our esteem of the ark of God? The only way to make it evident that we esteem this a privilege—a peculiar favour, is to attend to it as a rule of duty, and be careful to conform our hearts and lives to it. Nothing short of this will prove us sincere friends to the word of God. Vain indeed will be every other pretence! What propriety is there in the expostulation of Christ, "why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I command you?"

Are there no idolaters present? It is not necessary that a person should set up a molten image in his house, to denominate him an idolater; for he may set up idols in his heart, if not in his house. And this is common, even in a land where people do not set up idols of wood or stone. Every one of you, who loves any thing more than the true God has set up idols in his heart;



and such reject the law of God. This may be, and in fact is your character, if there be any object you love and pursue in preference to the glory of God. You are considered by the God of Israel as an idolater, and unfriendly to his law. Whenever your hearts go after their covetousness, you forsake God, and worship Mammon.

We are the professed worshippers of the living God; yet we cannot suppose, but that there are multitudes, who love other things more than God, their Maker; and are therefore guilty of idolatry. And the apostle expressly declares, "that such shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Where is your treasure? Decide this question, and you may know where your heart is—your love is. Look then carefully into your hearts, and critically examine your prevailing inclinations, and from these learn to what object your heart is devoted. You may determine whether you are in love with idols, by ascertaining your views and feelings with respect to the word of God. Do you esteem it as your necessary food? Do you make it the man of your counsel; study and meditate upon it, and regard it as the rule of your life? Are you willing to govern your wishes and inclinations by its dictates? Have your idols, fallen before this holy law, like Dagon from his seat? And are you willing the ark of the God of Israel should abide with you—be with you when you go out and when you come in—abide with you in your shops—in your fields—in your intercourse and dealings with others? Do you carry it with you in your bargains—

your promises, and in the fulfilment of those promises? Is it with you when you buy, and when you sell—when you measure, and when you weigh? If not, you, like the men of Ashdod, have sent it away—you have rejected it, because you have set up some idol in your hearts.

## SERMON VIII.

### ON POVERTY OF SPIRIT.



MATTHEW, v. 3.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.*

THESE words are a part of Christ's sermon on the mount, in which, he clearly pointed out to his disciples the true spirit, and absolute importance of that religion, which he was about to introduce. And one great end he had in view, was to represent and enforce the nature of true spiritual worship, and to show that it consists in right exercises of heart, and not in mere external actions. This directly contradicted the prevailing notions, and popular instructions of the Scribes and Pharisees, who taught a scrupulous attention to the minor duties of the law, and "passed over judgment, and the love of God."—Christ introduced his discourse by pronouncing a blessing upon the poor in spirit; because no other character would embrace his instructions, and imitate his example. He had notice-

ed, in the teachers of that day, a very different spirit, and found their instructions adapted to inspire their hearers with pride and vanity, rather than with humility and self abasement. When he, therefore, became the preacher of his own heavenly religion, the first words which fell from his lips, were these, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of God." This humble spirit he recommends as of great importance to the christian life, and essential to the character of those who are the heirs of the kingdom of God. The proposition which I shall illustrate is this,

That no one can be an heir of the kingdom of heaven, unless poor in spirit. We shall

I. Describe this disposition. And

II. Show its necessity and importance.

First then, I am to describe this disposition. Here it may not be improper to observe, that there are many things which are mistaken for it, which in reality are nothing like it, and are no evidence of it.

A man may have a great conviction, or high sense of the divine perfections—the holiness, justice, goodness, and infinite power of God, and of his own dependence on him, as the God in whose hand is his breath, and whose are all his ways; and yet not be poor in spirit. Reason teaches, that we are dependent creatures, absolutely so, for our existence and for every mercy which renders this existence desirable; but this rational conviction of dependence is a thing essentially different from poverty of spirit.

Again, a man may have a great conviction of his sinfulness, and of the goodness of the divine character.

and yet have no true humility. Natural men may have great convictions of sin, yea, it is probable, the conscience of the sinner may be so awakened, that he may be fully sensible that there is nothing good in him, that he is indeed "dead in trespasses and sins," and has nothing of which he can be proud, feel his mouth stopped, as to any complaint against the justice of God, yet his heart be entirely destitute of humility, and even opposed to it. Thus it is with sinners, who have had great convictions, but have embraced fallacious hopes, and in the exercise of false religious affections, they have been prouder after their supposed conversion, than they were before, and more under the government of a self justifying spirit. The reason is, nothing short of the regenerating influences of the holy Spirit will effectually destroy the pride of the "carnal heart," which "is enmity against God." Mere convictions of conscience have no tendency to make a man "poor in Spirit," in the sense of the text. By the law is the knowledge of sin, and by the law a man may see, that he is a sinner in so complete a sense, as to have nothing of which he can make a righteousness, and yet his pride be unmortified. And in this sense no doubt satan, the grand enemy of God and man, now knows, that he is a sinner, and has no just cause to oppose God; and also all sinners will have the fullest conviction at the day of judgment, that they are sinners; and yet, it is certain, this conviction will not destroy their opposition and pride of heart; but they will continue in their full strength while the sinner sees himself without excuse; and his conviction, instead of bringing

him to submit to God, will fill his mouth with blasphemies against him. A person may then have this conviction without the least degree of poverty of spirit. Many sinners have, under conviction, seen it reasonable to love God, and aim at his glory in all their exercises and conduct; and yet set themselves, their own private interest, above God and his glory. How many have mistaken legal conviction, for evangelical holiness, and have supposed, when they were brought to see that God would be just in their condemnation, that they then had true religion? But it is certain, that they who are only brought to see the justice of God in executing upon them the penalty of his law, and get no further, have no more religion than all sinners will have in eternity, who will clearly see the justice of God in their final condemnation.

3. Sinners may be convinced of their utter insufficiency to help, or recommend themselves to God by anything they can do, and yet be of an unhumbléd spirit. They may on this account be in great anguish of spirit, and cry mightily to God, that he would save them from that amazing wrath, to which they see themselves exposed, and yet their uncircumcised heart be in no degree humbled; nor in any measure reconciled to God. A disposition to justify self, in not loving God with all the heart, will actually die, and the contrary spirit take place only in proportion as God appears amiable to the soul. Nothing short of this will incline us from the heart, to debase ourselves and exalt God. I am now prepared to say,

1. That true poverty of spirit implies such a sense of our vileness, as to lead us, from the heart to condemn ourselves, before God. This temper of heart, supposes such a view of God, as an infinitely perfect, and amiable being; and of his law as holy, just, and good, as will destroy a self righteous and self justifying disposition. Then the sinner will give up every sin-extenuating plea, and take the whole blame to himself, and confess with the returning prodigal, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." The same humble temper was expressed by Job, when he said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." "God be merciful to me a sinner" is the constant language of the humble, contrite heart. This temper led David to lament his wickedness in the matter of Uriah, in this expressive language, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest." Contemplate another instance of this temper. "And behold a certain woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts and cried unto him, saying, have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou son of David—but he answered and said, it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs; and she said, truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table."

2. To be poor in spirit is to think lowly of our religious attainments. The humble man keeps his eye

upon the rule of duty ; thinks not so much of what he has attained, as what he has yet to do. He does not attend so much to what he is, as what he ought to be ; he forgets the things that are behind and presses toward the mark of perfection. When he compares himself, with the divine law, that standard of right ; he sees how far, very far he is from what he should be ; he necessarily appears vile to himself, and his religious acquirements appear small in exact proportion as his views of the beauty and glory of the divine character enlarge. The more clearly he sees the excellency and glory of God, the more he will see the reasonableness of the divine law, which requires him to love God with all his heart, and consequently the deeper impressions will he have of the evil of sin, and of his own vileness in particular. With these views he thinks lowly of himself, “and becomes dead to the law, that he might be made alive unto God.” Real grace always humbles the man, and leads him in lowliness of mind to prefer others above himself. Grace never exalts a man in his own eyes ; and therefore it is a very sure indication of its want, when he thinks highly of his religious attainments. Attend to the voice of Christ to the church of Laodicea, “Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” On this passage I would observe, how greatly people may be deceived as to their religious state—and that when a person entertains a high sense of his spiritual attainments—that he has advanced far beyond other christians in the divine



life—such an opinion is itself, a very sure evidence, that the person has no religion. Humility never fails to make a man poor in his own eyes; poor in the view of his love to God and to his cause, compared with what he ought to be. A christian may hope that he has more love to Christ than his neighbour; and yet his own sinfulness appear so much greater to him, than the sinfulness of his neighbour possibly can, that he will conclude that his character, all things considered, is more vile than that of his neighbour. This appears to have been the case with St. Paul, who knew that he loved Christ with a supreme and ardent affection, even so as to cheerfully die for the name of Jesus; and was doubtless persuaded that he loved God more than some other christians; yet this was far from making him proud, or to think himself better than they. He had such a clear sense of the beauty of the divine character, and of his sin in persecuting the church of God, that he was disposed to view himself “less than the least of all saints.” His sins appeared to him so much greater than the sins of other christians, that it seemed to him but reasonable, that he should love Christ so much more than others, as his sins had been greater than their’s. Our Lord once proposed this question to a particular person, A certain man had two debtors, one owed him five hundred pence, the other fifty, and, in as much as they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both, which of them will love him most? The answer was, “He to whom he forgave most.” Paul, viewing the matter in this light, concluded that he was far from answering the obligations laid upon

him by the pardoning mercy of God. This is always the certain and necessary consequence of true spiritual light. A view of the glory of God, is ever attended with a lively view of the evil of sin, which directly tends to destroy pride, and make the subject humble, and poor in spirit. And his humility will increase exactly in proportion to the clearness of his perceptions of the beauty and glory of the divine character. For a man therefore to rise in his opinion of his own goodness is a very certain evidence, that he is indeed a stranger to true godliness.

3. To be poor in spirit is to have a temper, that will dispose us to be constant beggars at the throne of grace. A poor man, who has nothing of his own, and is unable to procure a subsistence, depends on charity for his daily support. The poor cripple gets his living by begging. He can earn nothing; and he is wholly dependent on charity. So it is with the poor in spirit. Such feel that they have nothing but what they get by begging. You will understand me to mean prayer. Such, like the beggar, will be frequent and importunate in their addresses for the supply of their hourly wants. And every benefit they receive will appear as the fruit of God's boundless mercy to ill deserving creatures. They know that their old stock of grace will not support them in future, as the beggar knows, that the food which supported him yesterday will not supply him to day. Hence the reason why real christians are persons of prayer. They cannot live without deriving daily supplies from their father's house.

4. To be poor in spirit is to have our own interest appear inconsiderable compared with the glory of God. God is a being of infinite worth and dignity, and has indeed made all things for his own glory; because his glory and happiness are infinitely the most important objects in the universe, and therefore to have made any thing to serve some other purpose only, would have been infinitely beneath his wisdom and goodness. God is the sum of all real worth and excellence; nay could he cease to be, the whole creation would sink into nothing in an instant. In him is every thing truly valuable, and without him, nothing would be so. Angels and men might cease to be, and their loss would be like taking a few sands from the sea-shore, or a few drops from the ocean; but were it possible for God to withdraw himself from the universe, the whole creation would be an infinite evil. Are not then the glory and kingdom of God to be loved and sought after, more than our own private interest? This is our indispensable duty; and the contrary conduct is altogether unreasonable; for it is, in effect, to say that my interest is of more importance than the glory of God. This is pride—this is selfishness, which disposes us to think more highly of ourselves and interest, than we ought to think. It is therefore, impossible for a person to be poor in spirit, and yet think his own interest worth much, compared with the glory of God. Moses, who was a distinguished servant of God, was willing to give up his interest for the glory of God. And it is evident from his conduct, that he was more anxious for the honour of God,

than for his own private good. When God threatened to destroy Israel in the wilderness for their sins, and proposed to Moses to make of him a great nation, he replied, "what wilt thou do for thy great name? For the Egyptians will hear of it," and will take occasion to speak dishonourably of the power and wisdom of God. On this ground he intercedes for them, and discovers his high regard to the honour and glory of God. His interest appeared so small and inconsiderable, compared with the welfare of his people and the glory of God, that he was willing to be blotted from the book which God had written, rather than these objects should be injured. "Yet now, said he, if thou wilt, forgive their; sin and if not, I pray thee, blot me out of the book which thou hast written."

5. To be poor in spirit is to be of a temper which will dispose us to be silent, should not God grant us the favours which we ask of him. Instead of granting our requests, should God visit us with afflictions, and grievous trials, the poor in spirit will be still and know that he is God. This spirit tends to make us resigned under all the dispensations of providence, and approve of God's righteousness and faithfulness in afflicting us. Afflictions commonly wear a different aspect when viewed in relation to others, or ourselves. Wicked men can approve of God's judgments when inflicted on others, but the humble only can accept the punishment of their iniquities, and say, "not my will but thine be done." Humility always produces this effect. This temper was manifested by good old Eli, when Samuel came and told him the destruction which

God would bring on his family for the sins of his sons. He had not one word to reply by way of complaint, but justified God, and said, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." We have an instance of the same temper in David, when he went out against his rebellious son, Absalom, he said, "if the Lord hath any delight in me, he will bring me back and show me both it and his habitation, that is, the ark and tabernacle which was its habitation; but if he hath no delight in me, here am I, let him do with me as seemeth him good." This temper refers all to God, to do with me and mine as he pleases.

6. Poverty of spirit will make us humble in our deportment among men. Poor men behave more submissively among their fellow-men, than the rich are accustomed to do. Let a poor man come into company with the rich and honourable, and if he have any thing to request of them, it will be, at least, with an air of modesty and submission. On the contrary, the rich man when among his poor neighbours, will conduct with an independent, and often with a haughty spirit. Solomon had remarked this, "the poor useth entreaties, but the rich answereth roughly." But this temper, which I am describing, disposes a man to esteem himself, in a religious sense, poor and unworthy, when compared with others, and in lowliness of mind to esteem others better than himself. He, who hath a proper view of himself, will naturally think humbly of himself, and heartily comply with the apostolic precept, "Be kindly affectionate one to another in brotherly love, in honour preferring one another."

Thus I have attempted to describe poverty of spirit; but before I proceed to the second general head, it may be proper to consider a question which may be proposed by some, “Whether there is not such a thing as christian confidence and boldness in prayer?”—To which I answer; there cannot be any such thing in opposition to the temper above described. A beggar is humble, at least he puts on the appearance of humility, when he asks alms; and he makes his own great necessity, and the benevolence and ability of the person of whom he asks, the professed ground of his petition, his confidence, and boldness. So true christian confidence in prayer arises from such a view of the infiniteness and sufficiency of Christ, and of the greatness of the divine mercy, that he is encouraged to go and ask mercy of God. He is persuaded that the grace of God is sufficient to triumph over all his unworthiness, he therefore pleads the forgiveness of his sins, and an interest in the divine favour; not from any thing he sees in himself, but from what he sees in God; hence he is led to pray, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

II. I come to show the necessity and importance of such a temper, as has been described. It will appear necessary and important if we consider

1. That without this temper, no man can be a christian. This disposition constitutes an essential part of the christian character. All other attainments are of no avail without this. For until a man is brought to see himself poor and worthless, he will never give up his own interest for the glory of God, but will prefer his own before all others. Unless we

are brought to this in the temper of our heart, we cannot be the disciples of Christ. "He that forsaketh not all that he hath cannot be my disciple," said the Son of God. The christian life is therefore a life of self denial from beginning to end. The first step in this life is to deny self. "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."

2. This temper is necessary, because without it, no man is prepared to answer the purpose of God in the salvation of sinners. God's design in saving sinners is to glorify himself; and every thing is so arranged in the work of redemption, from beginning to end, in every view, as to make it appear, that all the glory is his due; and he prepares the hearts of his people to ascribe all the glory to him. Sinners must be poor in spirit—feel that they are wretched, and miserable, blind, and naked—see that they have nothing of their own, in order to exalt God. A rich man will not beg; neither will a sinner look upon the grace of God as sovereign and free, and the only ground of his hope, until he is deeply sensible that he has nothing of his own. This temper is necessary then, in order that a person answer the design of God in saving sinners.

3. Without this temper no one can take satisfaction in God—in his glory and exaltation. Until pride is brought down, we can never be willing that God should be exalted, and have all the praise of our salvation. Until we see that we have nothing of our own that is valuable, we shall never see that God is all

in all. To this temper we must be brought to enjoy God in this and in the coming life. It is a contradiction to suppose that we can enjoy a being whose character and designs are not pleasing to our hearts. Enjoyment of God consists in being pleased with his character and operations, and having an heart to rejoice in his independent glory and happiness; that is, in having our hearts conformed to God's moral character, and so disposed according to our finite capacity, to view things and feel towards them as God does. God loves himself supremely, not from selfish views and motives; but because it is infinitely reasonable that he should; and he looks upon sinners as infinitely vile and worthless, because they are such; and unless we are poor and worthless in our own eyes, we cannot be pleased with, and love that God supremely, whose character it is to look upon us as infinitely unworthy of his favourable notice and regard.

4. Without poverty of spirit, no man will apply to the mercy of God for salvation. No man trusts in mercy until he sees himself poor and miserable, and wholly destitute of every thing to commend him to God. Truly a man, who is wholly destitute of this temper, may acknowledge himself dependent on mercy, yet never feel from the heart, that he is indeed so. Men may speculate correctly on this and other religious subjects, while their hearts are unreconciled to the humiliating truths of Christ.

5. By this temper alone, sinners can become the heirs of the kingdom of heaven. "The kingdom of God consisteth in righteousness, peace, and joy in the



Holy Ghost ;” that is, in pure, disinterested benevolence—“in that charity which seeketh not her own,” as a separate interest. It is easy to see therefore, that a disposition to set up self, and a selfish interest in opposition to the general good (as every proud unhumbléd heart does) is inconsistent with this righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, in which the happiness of the blessed consists. I will only observe, that this temper is the qualification—is the condition of our enjoying the kingdom of God—“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their’s is the kingdom of heaven.” [Language plainly purporting that the contrary temper is inconsistent with it.]

### *IMPROVEMENT.*

1. Learn how inconsistent pride and self-sufficiency are with the christian character. It directly tends to dethrone God, and set up self in his place. It supercedes the necessity of a Saviour, and renders his atonement of no use ; for could God, consistently with justice, have granted us any relief, or showed us any favour, on account of our worthiness, the gospel is in fact overthrown, “for if righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”

2. Learn why real christians are humble. They see that God is infinitely amiable, and that he possesses every thing truly valuable in the universe. They see that they have nothing but what they receive from him. All their favours are the fruits of his boundless mercy in Christ, through whom they have received forgiveness. This view of God and themselves keeps them humble before God.

3. This subject teaches us, that it is an evidence of the want of this temper to be dissatisfied with the ways of God. To fret and repine when things go contrary to our inclination, is an evidence of a haughty unhumble spirit. A poor man, who is sensible of his poverty, takes up with any thing ; is satisfied with coarse fare and will bear denials without complaint. So it is with the poor in spirit. The language of their hearts is, “ Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins ?” Hence they can imitate their divine master, “ who when he was reviled, reviled not again.” As patience and submission under trials are evidences of the christian temper ; so impatience, and complaint, which lead either to despise the chastening of the Lord, or to faint under his rebukes, are strong evidences that we have not the spirit of Christ.

4. This subject teaches us, that christian fortitude and boldness consist principally in subduing ourselves. To be bold in Christ’s cause, is to have courage to endure trials for him—to suffer for him—to bear contradictions and provocations for him, and yet in patience to possess our souls. The christian warfare, therefore begins at home—lies principally within ; and he has the most true courage, who can conquer himself. Hence saith the wise man, “ He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty ; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.”

To conclude—inquire whether you are poor in spirit in the above sense. Remember, without this temper, you cannot be the disciples of Christ. You

have not yet taken the first step in the way of duty—in the path to heaven. Have you prevailing such views of God, as an infinitely perfect and glorious being—of his law, as holy in all its requirements—reasonable in all its demands, as to make you appear infinitely vile in your own eyes? Have you in any measure, had the views of God which the Prophet had, and have you had a portion of that humility, and self-abhorrence, which he had, as the effects of these views? Have you like Job, in the view of the divine perfections, been led “to abhor yourselves, and repent in dust and ashes?” Like the Apostle in the view of the divine law, do you feel yourselves to be carnal, sold under sin? And are you ready to cry out like him—“O wretched man, that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Do you live a life of self-abhorrence—of godly sorrow—of repentance—of brokenheartedness for sin—of hungering and thirsting for righteousness—of watchfulness—of prayer—of fighting against sin—of striving—running—wrestling for the prize? Is it easy for you to bear injuries, and in lowliness of mind to prefer others above yourselves? To render honour, to whom honour is due, and, as much as in you is, to live peaceably with all men? If this be your character, happy are ye, “for the spirit of the Lord resteth upon you.” You are happy because to love God, and his law supremely, and feel every answerable affection toward Jesus Christ; to present our bodies and souls to him, as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable,—to love the people of God—to love all mankind—even your enemies—to

go about the common business of life in the fear of God, as his servants—heavenly minded—of a meek, quiet, humble spirit—satisfied with God—pleased with his ways and instructions—This is the happiest way of living on this side of heaven. The exercises of love, gratitude, submission are all delightful to a humble heart. “Wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” In a word, a humble, broken, contrite heart, mortified to all sublimary things, fortified against all earthly evils—an eye fixed on heaven—communion with God, these are attended with pleasures unspeakably preferable to all this world can boast.—This is the life—these are the pleasures of a christian. Do you know them by experience? O come and taste that the Lord is good.

Here Sinners you may heal your wounds,  
And wipe your sorrows dry ;  
Trust in the mighty Saviour’s name,  
And you shall never die.

## SERMON IX.

### THE GOSPEL RECEIVED IN VAIN.

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#### II CORINTHIANS, vi. 1.

*We then as workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.*

**I**N the preceding part of this chapter, the apostle brings into view the glorious dispensation of the covenant of grace. He shows that God is on a treaty of reconciliation with mankind; that he and his fellow-apostles were sent forth to publish this treaty, and invite sinners in Christ's name to accept the gracious proposal. "We then are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God." He then concludes as in the text—"We then as workers together with him, beseech you, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain."—This mode of expression denotes that there is danger, that sinners, to whom the grace of God is revealed, will receive it in vain.

My present design is to show

I. What we are here to understand by the grace of God.

II. What it is to receive this grace of God in vain.

III. Point out the danger of those persons, who receive the grace of God in vain.

I. On this part of the subject, a few words only are necessary. By the *grace of God*, we are undoubtedly to understand the gospel, which reveals the grace of God to a guilty, ruined world. The love and goodwill of God to sinners revealed in the gospel is his grace, as it is all free and undeserved. All God's gracious works, by which a door is opened for the salvation of sinners, together with the way, in which they may come to the enjoyment of God, are revealed in the gospel, and the arguments, proper to excite them to accept this great salvation, are set before them; all of which is the effect of the rich grace and mercy of God. Hence the gospel, which reveals these things, is (by a usual figure) called, "The grace of God." These observations prepare the way to show,

II. What it is to receive the grace of God in vain.

1. They receive the grace of God in vain, who neglect to study the gospel, that they may improve in the knowledge of God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ. The design of the gospel is to make us wise, good, and happy; but it can be of no advantage, unless we diligently study and understand it. This grace of God is unthankfully received, when it is put into our hands for our instruction, and little or no improvement is made in the knowledge of it. The scriptures are a peculiar talent, with which we are entrusted, and when serious enquiries are not made into their design and meaning, we treat them as the wicked servant used

his lord's money, who wrapped it in a napkin, and hid it in the earth. We might as well be without the scriptures, as to suffer them to lie in our houses without study. Should we not remember, that the slothful servant, who neglects to inquire after his master's will, when he has all proper advantages to know it, deserves to be beaten as a wicked servant?—Are there not many of this character in this land of gospel light, who, while they have the revelation of God in their houses, “which is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness,” yet remain unacquainted with its most plain and important truths, and are none the wiser, nor better for all which is revealed? Such truly receive the grace of God in vain.

2. They receive the grace of God in vain, who do not embrace it as coming from God. They, with whom the scriptures have not the authority of a divine revelation, cannot be supposed to regard them in their practice. And indeed, the scriptures are of no more authority than the writings of Plato or Socrates, only upon the supposition of their being a divine revelation. Unless they are received in this character, they have not the force of a law, even admitting them to be a good system of morality. He therefore, who does not believe them to be from God, must undervalue and treat them with comparative inattention, let his opinion of them, in other respects, be as it may. Every honest mind, on proper inquiry, will see the evidences of their divinity. For is it not inconsistent with all just ideas of God to suppose, that he has given

us a revelation of his will and our duty, and yet that it is not attended with sufficient evidence, that it is from him? And indeed, attended with such evidence, as to leave those, who enjoy it, inexcusable, if they disbelieve it. Inexcusable they could not be, were they not furnished with sufficient evidence of its truth and divinity. It is wholly inadmissible to suppose, that God requires his creatures to receive that as a divine revelation, which is not sufficiently attested as such; but he does require our attention and obedience to the gospel, and has suspended our everlasting welfare on the manner in which we treat it. They, therefore, whose wicked hearts lead them to reject this grace of God, receive it in vain in the most emphatical sense.

3. They receive this grace of God in vain, who read, or hear it preached with carelessness and inattention. The careless hearer of the word, hears it without profit. For though the truth is delivered, and indeed clearly held up for the consideration and improvement of the hearer, he receives no edification, because he has not given his attention to it. The great ignorance of many persons, even of the most plain and important parts of scripture, with respect to the meaning of which, there is little dispute in the christian world, and even of those, who have attended the stated worship of God, and have heard the word preached for years; the ignorance of such is a full proof of their great and surprising inattention to the word. There are some persons, who are frequent in reading the word of God, and punctual in their attendance upon the word preached, who yet make no dis-



cernible progress in the knowledge of the scriptures. This must be owing to great carelessness and inattention, both in reading and hearing the word of God; and is a full proof of great and criminal want of thought and interest in this great concern. It is owing to this, that some old men and women, who have enjoyed the advantage of hearing the gospel all their days, know less about the doctrines and duties of christianity, than others, who have enjoyed the same means of instruction, but a few years. Surely such receive the grace of God in vain, who hear in so careless, inattentive a manner, as not to know what they hear. How can he be instructed and profited by the word, whose mind, while he is in the house of God, is taken up with this, or the other object; or is meditating upon things which have no relation to the word of life? It cannot be expected, that a person should be instructed by the best means, without attention.

When we consider the great advantages of this land of gospel light, and the very great and stupid ignorance of many respecting the truths of the gospel, this conclusion is forced upon our minds, that they have been, to a surprising degree, careless and inattentive to the things, which the gospel reveals. They have seen many things; heard many things; had a capacity for knowledge, and yet, in the midst of instruction, they are ignorant. A glorious method of salvation is revealed, duty is made plain; but through inattention all is lost. Such hearers, with respect to themselves, disappoint the kind designs of Christ in instituting the gospel ministry; and therefore receive its grace in vain.

4. They receive the grace of God in vain, whose attendance upon the word is not accompanied with prayerful endeavours to be profited. Prayer consists in offering the desires of the heart to God for things which we need. But what reasonable hope is there, that a person will properly attend to God's word, and be profited by it, if he have no desire for this? That hearer only has reason to expect advantage from hearing the gospel, who desires and seeks after it. "He that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth." Is it not natural to suppose, that he who has no heart to go to God in prayer, and intercede with him, that his blessing may accompany his word, has no proper sense of the importance of hearing in such a manner that his soul might live? Nor can it be truly said, that he desires to be profited by the word preached; for prayer essentially consists in desire; and it will be no strange thing, if the *prayerless* hearer of the word is a careless hearer. And if he be a careless hearer, will he not receive the grace of God in vain?

5. They receive the grace of God in vain, who do not meditate upon the word. That kind of reading or hearing the word, which leaves no impression upon the heart and memory, is in vain. The word of God is given us to be the rule of our faith and practice; but he who does not meditate upon it, cannot regulate the exercises of his heart, nor the actions of his life by it. It is therefore of the same consequence, that we meditate upon the word, as it is that we make it the rule of our life; and on this principle it is, that the

Apostle exhorts us to take heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip. Meditation upon the word of God, with the view to retain and practise it, has been the habit of pious men in every age. Said one, "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day." The same is still the practice of all, who love the truth, and receive this word of grace not in vain. That rule can be of no benefit to a person, which is out of sight and out of mind. What renders this a necessary duty is that proneness of the heart to forget the precepts and instructions of the divine word. And the only way to retain the remembrance of duty and instruction, which we have been taught, is often to reflect upon it, and make it familiar to our minds, by meditation. It is necessary, that we meditate upon the word of God, in order to understand it; and, that we may be able to try, by this standard, those doctrines which are preached to us. On any other principle, how shall we discriminate truth from error? To compare things, or doctrines, we must be able to bring them to some rule or standard. No person is obliged to receive any doctrine, taught by any one who comes in the name of the Lord, upon the authority of his word, be he ever so great and good; for the best and wisest of men are fallible, and not to be relied on implicitly. And as it is dangerous to embrace the errors, which a preacher may deliver; so it is dangerous to reject the truth, when delivered. And hence the necessity, that every hearer should be able to examine and compare what he hears as the word of God, and determine

whether these things are so. But this could not be done without attention to the scriptures, and to the word preached. For this ability and disposition were the Berians commended by the Apostle, who, though he could justly claim a superiority over all his successors, yet did not wish them to receive his instructions, without comparing them with the divine word. A careless reception of every thing, is little better, than a bold rejection of every thing; both dispositions are to be avoided. Imitate the experienced husbandman, who neither rejects all, nor receives all for seed, but makes a prudent selection.

6. They receive the grace of God in vain, who do not hear the word with a view to practice; or whose practice is not influenced by it. The scriptures were not designed to furnish topicks of speculation and controversy, nor merely to rectify our judgments, and lead us to a theoretical knowledge of divine things; but to direct the heart, and govern the practice. As holy practice is but the natural expression of an obedient temper, we may justly suppose, that hearing of the gospel, which does not influence the practice, does not impress the heart. And need I say, that speculations which have no influence on the life; or that meer hearing and talking about religion, which are never carried into practice, contain no portion of the religion of Jesus Christ. The way to heaven is a way of holiness; of universal righteousness; and all, "who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that kingdom, and to stand before the Son of man," must walk in this way. To reveal this way is the glorious de-

sign of the gospel, which is given us as our guide ; the only sure guide to direct our feet in the way of God's testimonies. And the precepts and instructions of the gospel, (*this grace of God,*) must be reduced to practice, or *we shall receive it in vain.* We might as well be without it, as not to practise upon it, or act according to its dictates. When a glorious way of salvation is opened, which has its foundation in the infinite mercy of God ; and repentance and faith in the great Mediator, and a careful observation of the laws of Christ, are proposed as the necessary conditions of this salvation, it is plain, that all will be in vain to that man, who disregards these requirements. The gospel can savingly benefit none, but those who obey it. Can it be expected that the gospel, considered as a rule, should be followed, unless heard with this intention ? and can it be thought that a person should carefully attend to the word of God with a design to practise it, yet his practice not be influenced by it ? it cannot be expected, that he will practise agreeably to the word, who hath no such design, when he hears it. It is the early duty of every person to examine, and settle with himself the important question, *Is the Bible from God ?* But surely it cannot be supposed, that the word of God is attended with such obscurity of evidence, that it is necessary, a person should attend to this subject year after year, without coming to a conclusion. They, who do thus, are to be ranked with those mentioned and condemned by the apostle, "who are ever learning and never come to the knowledge of the truth." However, nothing is more evident, than that they receive

the grace of God in vain, whose temper and practice are not improved by it. Certainly they, who have enjoyed the advantages of gospel light, year after year, and are furnished with capacities to understand the doctrines and duties of the gospel, and yet remain halting between two opinions, whether to receive or reject them ; whether to regulate their lives according to the word of God ; such have received no benefit from the grace of God. However frequent a man may be in hearing the word, he receives the grace of God in vain, if his temper and practice are not improved by it. Have we not reason to fear, that many flatter themselves, that they are real christians, because they are frequent in hearing the word ; while they indulge in practices, which are contrary to the very spirit of the gospel ? Some persons, because of their orthodoxy, their zeal, their frequency in hearing the word preached, have high claims to religion ; while they live in malice, in envy, in strife, with their fellow men. And in addition to these things, we shall find an almost total want of regard to their word, promises, and engagements among men. Alas ! how vain to receive and hold the truth in unrighteousness. This leads me,

III. To show the danger of thus receiving the grace of God in vain.

1. They, who receive the grace of God in vain, will fail of the salvation which it offers. For on the supposition, that God may, and does reveal himself to some who are not favoured with the gospel ; and, that he prepares their hearts for an holy salvation in an immediate way, yet surely they who enjoy revealed truth,

have no reason to expect, that they shall be saved upon any other plan, than a compliance with the terms of the gospel. Christ will be the author of salvation to those only who obey him.

2. It is dangerous to receive the grace of God in vain ; because such a reception of the gospel will make it the occasion of a more terrible destruction. The gospel, by being heard and disregarded, becomes a savour of death unto death. The person who lives in a christian land, surrounded with all the advantages of the gospel dispensation, yet lives like a heathen, cannot die with his share of guilt ; but the light under which he has lived, the instructions, motives, and arguments, which he has disregarded, will aggravate his condemnation to such a degree, that it will be more tolerable for an inhabitant of Sodom, than for him. Surely this is reasonable, “ that where much is given, much should be required.” Surely “ when a servant knows his master’s will, and prepares not himself, nor does according to his will,” he may be beaten with many stripes. Surely when the most invaluable price to get wisdom is put into his hand, and he has no heart to improve it, he is deserving of a singular punishment. I will add, that this must from the nature of the case, be the dreadful consequence of receiving the grace of God in vain ; because every one, who does not grow into a conformity for heaven, under the means of grace, becomes daily more a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction. “ This is their condemnation, that light has come into the world, and they have loved darkness rather than light.” Our Saviour told the

Jews, that had he “not come and spoken unto them,” opened a glorious door of hope and salvation, “they had not had sin.” That is, their sin and danger would have been nothing, in comparison of what they then were, in consequence of their having the offer of pardon and mercy made to them, and their rejection of it. No wonder then, that the benevolent apostle should beseech sinners, that they receive not the grace of God in vain; nor lose the great and glorious blessings revealed and offered to them in the gospel; and expose themselves to the most dreadful destruction by their own carelessness and folly. In this view, we can admire the wonderful condescension of Christ in sending his apostles to beseech, to beg, to pray sinners to attend, receive, and obey his instructions; and not add to the guilt of the infidel, the tenfold damnation of slighting Christ and his great salvation. This is a sin, greater, unspeakably greater, than any which heathen can commit. It is full of the blackest ingratitude to God, the greatest, and most bountiful benefactor in the universe. Nothing tends to awaken the divine anger like despising goodness, particularly the riches of his goodness revealed in the gospel. Sinners therefore who receive this grace of God in vain, will of all sinners be the most miserable in the eternal world, when they will receive the due reward of their deeds. Let me then conclude with beseeching you, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

#### *IMPROVEMENT.*

This subject furnishes us with the reason of the great coldness in religion, which prevails at the present



day. It is because the glad tidings of the gospel are not properly regarded. Mankind are engaged in religion, in proportion as they are engaged to attend, and improve the gospel of the grace of God. Every person, who loves God, is engaged in attending to his word. He hears it with diligence and pleasure; he reads it with sweet satisfaction of soul; he drinks it in, as the thirsty land drinks in the rain and dew of heaven. He believes it; he reads and studies it, with a view to practice; and it quickens him in the way of holiness. He highly esteems the word of God as the rule of his faith and practice, and makes it the man of his council, and the standard of his daily conduct; and thus this divine seed becomes fruitful. But where there is inattention to the word of God; where the sacred duties of the gospel are neglected; true religion is indeed low in that place. When a person or people are cold and indifferent to the truths and duties of religion, we may be sure, that person, or people, have received the gospel to little or no advantage. They do not give their attention and hearts to divine instruction; “and the word does not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that hear.” Engagedness in the things of religion will ever be in proportion to the success which the gospel has among a people. If this be received in vain, the very form of religion will die away, and almost disappear. But it is easy to perceive, at this day, that the gospel of Christ is greatly slighted and abused by the greater part, even of those who hear it. Happy should we be, my hearers, if none of the number of its de-

spisers could be found among us. That this matter may be determined, let each one examine himself by the above mentioned marks, by which those who receive the grace of God in vain may be distinguished.

God has done great and marvellous things for the salvation of sinners ; he has given us the good word of his grace, to guide our feet into the paths of life ; he has instituted sabbaths, and the gospel ministry, for the quickening and edification of his church and people ; and how are they received and treated ? How is the word of God received by *you* ? Is it your practice to examine the scriptures, with a view to edification, and to learn the evidence, on which their credibility is founded ? And has the result of your inquiries been a settled belief of their truth and divinity ? And in consequence of this, have you heard the good news of the kingdom with diligence and attention ? Are you accustomed to accompany your attendance upon the word with prayerful endeavours to retain, and make it profitable to your souls ? Do you meditate upon it, that it may not be forgotten and lost ? Do you read and hear the gospel with a particular view to practice ; feeling that every other attainment without this will be in vain ?—If these things be not true with respect to you, you have indeed received the grace of God in vain. All the grace of the gospel, as to any saving benefit, has been thrown away upon you and lost. And this is not all ; as your privileges and opportunities have been better than those, which many others have enjoyed, and your hearts and practice have been uninfluenced, unimproved by them ; so your guilt is vastly increased,

far beyond the guilt of heathen ; and you had much better, never have been born in a land of gospel light, if you continue to receive the grace of God in vain. Will not hell be “ moved to meet thee at thy coming ? ” Will not heathen sinners inquire, from what land you came ; From a land of gospel-vision, are you come, to take up your miserable abode with us ? But justly is a lower place in this hopeless mansion assigned to gospel sinners, who have received the grace of a bleeding Saviour in vain. I must repeat it again to you, that it has been, and still is received in vain, notwithstanding every other consideration, if it do not influence your temper and govern your practice. What will it avail a man to say, that he is satisfied as to the truth of the gospel ? has often read and heard the word preached ; if he be not a better man ? I testify to every such man, that Christ shall profit him nothing.

## SERMON X.

ON THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

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LUKE, ii. 10.

*Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy.*

**I**N this chapter we have the account of Christ's birth, and the extraordinary circumstances attending this glorious event. Agreeably to the prediction of the prophet, he was born of a virgin, and laid in a manger. Though his birth was attended with indications of indignity, yet a multitude of the ministers of God's throne descended from heaven, and were the first to spread and rejoice in the news of a Saviour's birth. At this important hour, one of these heavenly messengers appeared to the shepherds who were watching their flocks by night; and while they were terrified at his appearance he dispelled their fears by addressing them in these words, "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born, this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord." These words imply

I. That the incarnation of Christ is a very joyful event. We shall

II. Show why it is joyful.

1. The birth of Christ is a joyful event. On this branch of the subject, I shall briefly observe, that we may conclude the birth of Christ is a joyful event, from the character of the beings who rejoiced in it. From the whole history of Christ's birth, and other passages of scripture, it is plain, that this event filled the world of light with peculiar joy. The pure and benevolent spirits in glory were enraptured at this, and expressed their joy in communicating the information to the Shepherds. It is natural to desire to communicate the joys of our hearts to others; and there is in the human mind, a degree of impatience attending great joy, to convey the tidings of that which occasions it to our friends, and to all who are interested in it. We ourselves love to be the bearers of joyful tidings. When we are full of joy, on account of any event, we naturally wish to be the first to publish it; and our joy is increased by communicating it to others. And this is a propensity, which seems to be common to all intelligent creatures. Accordingly the holy Angels lost no time, but flew to carry the news which filled their own hearts with joy. Nor was this an event, which occasioned joy among those only, who announced the happy tidings to the Shepherds; but immediately after publishing the news to the ears of mortals, a multitude of the heavenly hosts united in expressing the overflowing joy of their hearts in an anthem of praise, and the Shepherds heard them sing,—“Glo-

ry to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Christ's birth was to them, like the morning of creation. It was indeed the morning of a new and more glorious creation than that of the material system. When the heavens and the earth were finished, we read, that "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." But here is an event, which fills heavenly minds with greater joy, and which they express in more exalted strains—"Glory to God in the *highest*." Now these are wise, as well as holy beings. They have correct, as well as enlarged views of God's works and ways. Their joys are the joys of wisdom and benevolence; and those events which, in themselves, are the most desirable and important, are the events, which raise their joy and praise the highest. We may correctly argue the desirableness, the importance of an event, from the joy, which it excites in the hearts of wise and benevolent beings.

Not only Angels, but wise and good men have greatly rejoiced in this glorious event. Abraham and other ancient saints, according to their light, rejoiced in this. In what exalted strains of joy does Isaiah speak of it? He calls upon every part of creation to rejoice in the salvation of God. "Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it. Break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree, therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob and glorified himself in Israel." When this Saviour was born and brought into the temple, good old Simeon took him in his arms, and in a transport of joy, at the sight of the infant Saviour, breaks out,—“Lord now lettest thou thy

servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen thy salvation." And Anna, a prophetess, at the birth of Christ, gave thanks to God, and spake of him to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." That which gives joy to the benevolent heart of men; and raises the voice of angels to the highest note of praise; must be a very desirable and joyful event. All benevolent beings, both in heaven and earth, have, and will continue to rejoice and praise God for this. But why did angels rejoice at the birth of Christ? Why did holy men of old look forward and rejoice in this approaching event? Why did those who lived at the time rejoice in it? Why did they all consider and treat it as so important and desirable? This will lead me

II. To give some reasons, why the birth of Christ is such a joyful event. There is one grand principle which deserves our attention in treating this part of the subject. Every reason, why the incarnation of Christ is a joyful event originates from this, or stands in connexion with it. The principle is this; that by the incarnation of Christ and its attendant events, a foundation was laid for the fullest display of the perfections of God, and the greatest happiness of the universe. This leading principle deserves illustration. Jesus became incarnate to glorify God in the salvation of sinful men. Sinners of the human race, were the objects of his mediation; yet such is the effect of this work, that it increases the happiness of all created, holy beings. The happiness of angels in heaven is increased by the incarnation of Christ. For, by the work of redemption, the divine character is exhibited

to the view of angels, as well as to men, in a light vastly more clear than ever it had appeared before, or perhaps could have appeared. And as the happiness of angels as well as all other holy creatures, consists in the knowledge, love and enjoyment of God; and the more they know of God, the more they will love him, and their happiness is consequently increased; hence to a holy mind, every medium of knowing God, becomes the means of increasing the happiness of that mind. That work, that event, which serves to display the glorious perfections of God in the clearest manner is, to a holy mind, the most joyful. But the incarnation of Christ, with its inseparable concomitants and effects, will, the most clearly, exhibit the divine character, and promote the greatest happiness; so it will answer the ultimate wish of a benevolent mind. It is in itself greatly to be desired, that the perfections of God should be displayed, known and admired. For if the existence of those perfections be desirable, the display of them is desirable; and the knowledge of them, is the most important to creatures. This knowledge is as important both to angels and men, as it is that they should love and enjoy God; because without this knowledge of God, creatures could neither love nor enjoy him. Now by the incarnation of Christ, with its attendants, the perfections of God, are more clearly displayed than in all his other works, especially his love—his benevolence to sinners. That attribute of the divine nature, called mercy, appears in the face of Jesus Christ, and is seen in no other way. Indeed all the divine perfections are here displayed with pe-



cular lustre. Here the wisdom of God appears, in opening a way in which God can be just, and justify the believing sinner.

Here the holiness of God is displayed, as it never could have been, in any other way. Never did his hatred of sin appear as it did in the sufferings of his incarnate Son. Here he demonstrated to all intelligent creatures his irreconcilable hatred of all sin.

The truth of God, both in his promises and threatenings is manifested in a singular manner and degree, in the face of Jesus Christ. God showed, by giving his Son to become incarnate, that not only "heaven and earth should pass away," but what is infinitely more, that the life of his eternal Son should be sacrificed, before one jot, or tittle of his violated and dishonoured law should fail of its complete fulfilment. But above all, hath God displayed his mercy and love by the incarnation of Christ. His mercy was never before seen, until it appeared in the work of redemption by Christ. There was no exercise of mercy in the conduct of God towards apostate angels. His justice, but not his mercy was displayed. His goodness appeared in giving angels being and happiness. It also appeared in creating man in a holy, happy state. But in the incarnation of Christ, God hath shown that he can exercise mercy to those who deserve his eternal wrath; that he can show favour to those who have risen up in rebellion against him, and are still his enemies; that he can exercise such good will to them, as to do greater things for them, than he ever did for angels.

I have already observed, that by the incarnation of

Christ, the divine perfections are peculiarly displayed; that the happiness of angels and men consists in beholding the glory of God; and hence the divine perfections must be a delightful object of contemplation to all holy beings. It is so to saints on earth, and much more so to angels in heaven; for the more holy, any being is, the greater is his delight in beholding the perfections of God. This display in the incarnation of Christ, must be exceedingly delightful to angels. It constitutes their happiness. Hence we have this representation in the revelation, "And I beheld and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." These ascriptions were made to Christ, by the angels, because he became incarnate and died on the cross. Though in one respect, the incarnation of Christ was particularly designed and adapted to the advantage of fallen creatures; yet angels share in the benefits resulting from this display of the divine perfections.

Further to show why the incarnation of Christ is a joyful event, I would observe, that by this act he became the head of angels and of redeemed sinners. Said an inspired Apostle, "Ye are complete in him," that is Christ, "who is the head of all principality and power." This is greatly to the interest both of saints and angels, because they are laid under advantages for a more intimate intercourse and communion with

God, through Jesus Christ. The divine nature is infinitely distant from all created natures ; and it is therefore for the advantage of angels as well as men, that God should come down to them in a created nature, and become, in this nature, their head. By the incarnation of Christ, saints and angels are gathered into one society, “of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” Angels rejoice to see this family enlarged ; even the addition of one sinner, by repentance, to this family gives joy to the angels of God. The heavenly society is rendered more complete by the accession of saints, and they will mutually contribute to each other’s happiness.

Another reason why the incarnation of Christ is a joyful event is, that Satan will be wholly disappointed of his end in tempting man to sin. By procuring the fall of man, Satan designed to disappoint God of the glory he intended in the creation of man ; and at the same time to gratify his envy in the total destruction of the human race. But by the incarnation of Christ, he is disappointed in both these ends. God will be greatly glorified in man. His wisdom, his justice, and his mercy have been, and will be wonderfully displayed ; and an innumerable company of sinful creatures are restored to the divine favour here, and will be brought to his presence hereafter. And though many of mankind are left to suffer the just demerit of sin, yet this does not answer Satan’s design, for even by this, God will be glorified. That there should be opportunity for God to exhibit *all* his glorious perfections in the brightest manner to the intelligent creation ;

that all creatures must have the best advantages to see what being God is, and have the best advantages to love, admire and praise him, is peculiarly desirable. That sinners might be redeemed from sin and misery and brought to a state of perfect holiness, in a way, which serves above all others to display the perfections of God, and completely to frustrate all the malicious devices of Satan, are events greatly to be desired ; and both will be obtained by the incarnation of Christ. But had he not appeared in our nature, all the wisdom, goodness, and grace which now appear, must, for what we can conceive, have been concealed from all intelligent creatures forever ; and all the human race have been the victims of total and eternal despair. From all which it appears, that the incarnation of Christ is the most glorious event that ever took place. The observations which have been made will, we hope, show why it is so. Well therefore might the Angel address the shepherds saying, “ Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy.”

#### *IMPROVEMENT.*

1. From this subject, it appears that the work of redemption is the most glorious of all God’s works. This is the work, by which all that glory is brought to God, and all that good to the intelligent system, of which we have spoken. In this work, God has displayed more of himself than in any other work. The work of creation is great and glorious, full of indications of wisdom, power and goodness. But this work was designed only to aid the work of redemption.

Creation will last, comparatively, but a few years; while the work of redemption is “a building of God eternal in the heavens.” In redemption the moral perfections of God are peculiarly displayed; and angels are exalted in knowledge and happiness, far beyond what they would otherwise have been; and great, yea vast numbers of the human race, are actually delivered from the dominion of Satan, and the power of a wicked heart, and disposed to love and praise God, both on earth and in heaven. Now the excellency of every work consists in the wisdom and goodness displayed in it, and in the good resulting from it to creatures. That is evidently the most excellent work, from which result the most glory to God, and the most good to the created system. Does it not appear from our subject, that by the work of Redemption, glory in the *highest* redounds to God, and the greatest good to his intelligent creatures? This great work is built on Christ, as the chief corner stone, and all the glory of redemption is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. He is the medium, and the brightest, through which creatures can see God; and here God is seen in a much clearer manner than he is, or can be in any other. Indeed Christ is the only medium through which redeeming love is, or could be displayed. As this work opens a way for clearer views of God; a way for God to exhibit himself in all his perfections; a way to communicate of his fulness to creatures, and by communicating, to raise them to the highest degree of happiness of which they are capable; such a work must above all others be important. To give

being to things, even to creatures is not so great and glorious a work, as to make them happy in a way which reflects the highest honour on their Maker. As redemption does this, it is a greater work than creation.

2. If the incarnation of Christ is a most joyful event, then it follows, that the gospel contains the best tidings. For the gospel is a history of redemption. It informs us that "God was manifest in the flesh." That "He was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." That unto us "A Saviour is born, who is Christ the Lord." Is not this good news? Indeed the very name, *Gospel*, signifies good news. News to be good, must be true; and this gospel is a "faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." News to be good must bring us information of something to our advantage. The gospel is good news from a far country; from heaven. It is good news, as it reveals a way in which "God can be just and justify him that believeth in Jesus;"—as it opens to view the divine perfections in the recovery of sinful, and hell deserving creatures. If the provision of a Saviour is a joyful event, then the gospel, which brings us the news, is glad tidings. The gospel assures us of the important fact, that Jesus Christ became incarnate, and informs us of his design, to open a way for the honourable exercise of grace to sinners. The gospel is therefore the best news which was ever heard in our world. For this reason the feet of them, are said to be beautiful, "who bring these

tidings, and who publish peace to mankind, and say unto Zion, Thy God reigneth."

3. If the incarnation of Christ be a joyful event; an event of so much importance as we have heard, then it should be attended to, and received with joy by all mankind. The hearts of all intelligent creatures ought to be affected with excellent things, and they ought to attend with joy to the discovery of them. If it were desirable, that this event should take place, it is desirable, it should be known and rejoiced in, by every creature in heaven and earth. And how can it be known and received with joy, unless the means, by which it is communicated, be attentively regarded? Need I say, that the gospel is the only medium, by which the excellent things of redemption are conveyed to us; and it is of great importance that the report of the gospel should be regarded with gratitude and joy? Though it be a most joyful event, that Christ came in the flesh, to open a way for the salvation of men, yet final salvation is limited to those who love and obey him. "But how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" They therefore, who feel no interest in this report; not so much as to excite them to attend to the gospel, have no reason to expect salvation by Christ. Of all the creatures in the universe, none are so interested in these glad tidings as men. "Unto you," shepherds, to you, men, said the Angel, "is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." "Verily he took not upon him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham." Angels were happy and

would have continued so, had not a Saviour been born. But without him, what would your situation be? Would it not be now as hopeless as that of apostate angels? Are you not fallen creatures, condemned by the holy law of God, exposed to his wrath, and liable to sink into hell? The birth of a Saviour for you is the only thing, which renders your salvation more hopeful, than that of fallen spirits. The gospel brings you this information, and calls upon you to embrace these glad tidings. Should a poor guilty malefactor condemned to die, have the news of pardon brought to him, with what transport of joy would he receive it? But would this news be so important and interesting as the gospel brings to sinners? From what is he delivered? From a momentary pang—from a short scene of suffering; yet the messenger who brings the glad tidings is welcomed; every word of his message is heard with the deepest attention and interest. But the gospel reveals a way of escape from a death infinitely more dreadful. Why then will you not seriously and attentively regard the glad tidings of the gospel?

4. If the incarnation of Christ is such an important and joyful event, we discover, in an affecting light, the stupidity and wickedness of sinners who disregard it. Gospel sinners discover vast blindness and stupidity of mind; for the scheme of redemption is particularly calculated for their advantage, and should gain their attention, and excite their joy and gratitude to God, above every other part of his creation. But instead of this, of all parts of God's creation, they are the least



affected with it; least regard it and learn the least from it. Angels in heaven, study this wonderful scheme with admiration and delight, and are constantly increasing in the knowledge of God, and praising him for the displays of his wisdom and grace in redemption. For a time, they left their bright abodes and came down to learn the mysteries of God in the little city of Bethlehem. Redemption contains those "things into which they desire to look." Devils are attentive to this marvellous design. When the Saviour appeared in the world, they were as much engaged to tempt and destroy him, as the angels to proclaim his birth. Though they do not rejoice in this work, yet they regard it with deep attention and concern. Indeed we have no reason to doubt, but the eternal state of every rational being will be sensibly affected by redemption. Heaven itself to all eternity will, in consequence of redemption, be a different place; different in its inhabitants, its employments, and its happiness; and hell will be infinitely more dark and gloomy. Deeper sighs and lamentations will fill the abodes of despair. Sinners alone conduct as though there were no wisdom, nor grace displayed in the gospel; and as if they had no concern in it. Sinners treat Christ, as if all that he had done was of no importance to them. They feel no interest in those glad tidings in which angels rejoiced. How little do sinners consider the consequences of living under the gospel—that it will raise them high in glory, or sink them low in hell. O how criminal is blindness, to the glory of redemption, and indifference to

its objects and consequences. All this blindness and indifference to the wisdom, holiness and mercy held up to their view in redemption arise from wickedness of heart. Were not the heart exceedingly sinful, it would be impossible for sinners to be insensible to the glory and importance of the gospel. This wisdom, which is emphatically called the wisdom of God, is accounted foolishness with men. O dreadful effect of sin! All this stupidity and blindness in sinners, who live under the light of the gospel, are the effects of sin. It can be nothing but a wicked heart which can blind men to the glory of the richest and brightest displays of Jehovah; displays which angels admire. Are there not multitudes even in lands, where the beams of the Sun of righteousness shine in full splendour, "who see no form nor comeliness in him why they should desire him?" Blessed be God, there are some whose eyes are open to see, their ears to hear, and their hearts to understand, and love Christ and his salvation. But multitudes are wholly blind, by reason of sin, to all the wisdom of God in the manifestation of Christ in the flesh. They see nothing in this scheme of grace that is any way wonderful and glorious. Though angels admire and sing, "glory to God in the highest," yet multitudes of men who enjoy the gospel here on earth, take but little notice of it. So it was in the time of the apostles, "the preaching of the cross was to them that perish, foolishness," and so it still is. But it was then, and still "is to them that are called, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." Many who hear the gospel

all their days never see any peculiar wisdom and grace in it. It never gains their attention nor affects their hearts. The wisdom of God displayed in redemption to the surprise of angels, is neglected by poor perishing sinners, who can have no hope, but through this infinite grace. O sinners embrace these glad tidings—join with angels in their love and praise to the Saviour, and through him, you shall be their companions in the songs of eternity.

# SERMON XI.

## CONVERSION JOYFUL.

ACTS, viii. 8.

*And there was great joy in that city.*

THIS chapter commences with an account of a grievous persecution, raised against the church of Christ, which was at Jerusalem, in which, young Saul, afterwards the holy Apostle Paul, was a principal instrument. By this persecution there was a dissension of the saints who dwelt in Jerusalem. From this place Philip went down to Samaria, and preached the gospel unto them; and great and wonderful were the effects. "For the people with one consent gave heed unto those things which were spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did; for unclean spirits crying with a loud voice came out of many who were possessed with them, and many taken with palsies, and that were lame were healed." Then follows the text, as the consequence, *And there was great joy in that city.* The occasion of this great

joy was, they had heard and embraced the gospel. They not only heard the gospel with their ears; but they had attended to it, and received it into their hearts, and become conformed to it. Not that we are to suppose that this was true of every individual; but this was the case with a great number, or the greater part.

The doctrine which I shall illustrate from these words is this.

*The conversion of sinners is a sufficient reason for great joy.*

This was manifestly the great joy of the Samaritans. The gospel came to them not in word only; but accompanied with the power of the Holy Ghost. He opened their hearts to receive the truth in the love of it. Before this they were idolaters. The city of Samaria was settled long before the days of the apostles, with a people whom the king of Assyria transplanted there, when he carried away the ten tribes captive. To this people, the disaffected Jews attached themselves; and this country became a receptacle for those Jews who exposed themselves to public censure. Then in combination with those heathen, erected a temple upon mount Gerizim in opposition to the temple at Jerusalem; and unitedly worshipped the God of Israel in conjunction with the gods of those countries, from whence these transplanted people came. This occasioned the question by the woman of Samaria to our Saviour; whether the proper place of worship was in this mountain, or at Jerusalem? She supposed Christ a prophet, and therefore capable of de-

ciding this long religious controversy. On this and other accounts, the Jews and Samaritans hated each other, and had no dealings together. Until this visit to them by Philip, they were a faithless, deceitful people, sometimes pretending they were Jews, at others, when Israel was invaded by their enemies and in trouble, disclaiming all kindred with them; for which they were so despised and hated by the Jews, that by a law, they made it criminal for a Jew even to trade with a Samaritan. But when Philip preached the gospel to them, great multitudes of them were truly converted; and from being the worshippers of the gods of the heathen, they became the humble worshippers of the only living God. This occasioned the joy spoken of in the text. For the illustration of the doctrine, I shall show how it appears that the conversion of sinners is a reason for great joy. It will be necessary to show in a few words what conversion is.

Conversion is a change of heart, from sin to holiness; and is an effect produced by the spirit of God, attending the plain preaching of the gospel. This was precisely the case with the people of Samaria. They were a company of Idolaters in heart, and but little better in the external form of their worship. But the spirit of God attending Philip's preaching, their hearts were detached from the love of sin, to love and obey the true God. For we are not at liberty to suppose, that they or any other people were truly converted, and renewed in the spirit of their minds, by the word, without the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. I said we were not at liberty to suppose

this, because it is the voice of inspiration, that Paul may plant, and Apollos may water to no purpose, unless God give the increase. This increase however is not to be expected, where the gospel is not heard, and even if heard, not regarded. Because conversion, according to the method of divine operation, follows true conviction, which is founded upon a knowledge of God, and our own sinful, lost state. Both these discoveries are made to us in the gospel; and we accordingly find, that revivals of religion, in all ages of the church, have taken place in consequence of attending to the gospel. And where the gospel has not been preached, or has not been attended to, nor regarded, there security in sin has universally prevailed. This would appear clearly by considering the state of mankind, when destitute of, or inattentive to the gospel. So that, though the conversion of sinners, from the love of sin to the love of holiness, is the work of the Spirit of God; yet this is not to be expected, where the mind is not first enlightened by the gospel. By the gospel I mean divine revelation. That such a moral change in the state of sinners is a reason for great joy, may appear from the persons who rejoice in it. These are angels in heaven, and saints on earth. We are expressly and repeatedly taught by inspiration, that, "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth;" that "there is joy in the presence of angels over one sinner that repenteth." All holy beings rejoice in the conversion of the sinful, lost children of men. This proves that their conversion is an event in its own nature highly desirable and joyful. For wise and good beings re-

joyce only in those events, which are joyful and desirable; and the universal attention and joy of holy beings, even the inhabitants of heaven, at the conversion of one sinner, proves that this is a very joyful event. We may certainly infer, that those things are important and desirable, on which the attention of the heavenly world is fixed, and in which they rejoice. They estimate things according to their worth and importance. Hence great joy in them, on account of any event, is an evidence of its desirableness. The conversion of sinners, not only gives joy to angels, but to saints on earth. This appears from the text, and many other passages of scripture. These observations may be sufficient to show, that the conversion of sinners is a joyful event.

We shall now point out the reasons which excite this joy.

1. God is glorified in the conversion of sinners. God is the most glorified in that work, in which his perfections are the most clearly exhibited to the view of intelligent creatures. God is a being of infinite excellence; and it is of the highest importance, that these perfections of Deity, which constitute his character, should be displayed, seen and admired. But the perfections of God are no where seen with such clearness, as in the work of redemption, considered in its principles and effects. The way of salvation by Christ is the effect of infinite Wisdom, Holiness, Justice and Mercy, and the conversion and salvation of sinners presented an occasion for the display of all these perfections, in such a manner as they never before were exhibited.



Were no sinners converted and saved, all that Christ did, in the character of Mediator to open a way for this, would have been in vain, and therefore, God would not have been glorified. Had God made the heavens and earth, and formed no creature to behold and enjoy them, they would have been in vain. Here could have been no display of God, because there would be none to behold it. So in redemption, the whole world would have been useless without the conversion of sinners; like an elegant building without an inhabitant, or spectator to admire it. But this building of God has inhabitants; it has spectators who admire it. These inhabitants are converted sinners, called the church of God, the family of God. It is in the church, as in a glass, that the glory of God in redemption is seen. And therefore by the conversion of sinners, by which the church is continued and built up, God glorifies himself, or displays his perfections. On this account the conversion of sinners gives occasion for great joy. It is a most desirable thing, that the glorious perfections of God should be manifested; and those are the most desirable events, which exhibit the divine character in the clearest and most amiable light. As the conversion of sinners exhibits a most striking manifestation of the divine perfections, so it is a very joyful event.

2. God is glorified in this world in exact proportion to the increase of true religion. He is no further honoured by creatures, than they love, reverence and obey him. They who do not love God, do not obey him; for the law is fulfilled in love. All unconverted

men are destitute of the love of God. They neither serve, nor glorify him. All the honour therefore, which God receives from this world, is from those, who are truly converted from sin to holiness. No man takes one step in the way of duty, or in the way to heaven, before he is converted. Then the prodigal returns to his father. Then he begins to love and obey him. Before this, he was a wanderer, going astray in his own delusions. When the prodigal returned, what joy filled his father's house? "It was meet" said the father, "that we should rejoice and be merry, for this my son was lost, and is found; was dead, and is alive again." Before this he dishonoured his father. His conduct, and probably his conversation were a reproach to his good father. He preferred the husks on which he fed, to the full table of his father; and the company of harlots, before the society of his father's family. But when he returned, confessing his sin, and seeking a humble place in his father's family, he honoured his father. The church is the temple of God's glory. God is glorified in his saints, and admired by all them that believe. And they only among men glorify God, by acknowledging his authority over them, and in their hearts and conduct, giving him his place. Such practically acknowledge, that God is worthy of all love, honour and respect, by loving him supremely; and mourning before him for their imperfections. How joyful then is the conversion of sinners, by which they are brought to do this?

3. Not only is great glory brought to God, by the conversion and obedience of sinners, but great good is secured to themselves. "What is this good? Who can describe it? "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." By conversion, a foundation is laid for increasing and endless happiness. The salvation of one sinner is an object of inconceivable magnitude and importance, because it implies deliverance from endless ruin, and the actual enjoyment of endless felicity and glory. But this evil can be avoided, and this good obtained, only by conversion from sin unto God, through Christ. For except a man be converted and become as a little child, he shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.

As the conversion of the sinner lays an actual and sure foundation for him to inherit eternal life; and is indeed the beginning of eternal life in the soul; so it is the earnest, the pledge of the future inheritance of the saints. Therefore the conversion of the sinner is as joyful as his salvation.

4. The conversion of sinners is a joyful event, because, by this the works of the devil are destroyed. The introduction of sin into this world is the work of the devil. "For this cause was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." "He that committeth sin is of the devil." It is sin which disposes mankind to listen to Satan in his suggestions, and to imitate him in his attempts to dishonour God. It is this that constitutes them his children.

This spirit of opposition to God, and his law, Satan labours, by all possible means to cherish and diffuse among his subjects. This is his grand end and business in this world. But in conversion, sin receives a deadly wound; its power is broken; and Satan loses his influence; the captive is rescued from his hand, and he is disappointed in all his attempts to destroy the soul. In this way his wicked designs become the occasion of advancing the divine glory, which is the chief object he has ever tried to prevent. In the conversion of sinners, Satan is completely disappointed of his ends in tempting them to sin; sinners are saved and God is glorified. Satan intended to dishonour God, by leading men into sin. He intended to fix an indelible blot on the divine character. Merely to abolish sin would not destroy the works of the devil, unless the sin and misery, which he has occasioned, be turned to the glory of God. For were we to suppose, that, at any period in eternity, sin and misery were to be totally abolished, yet Satan would have cause to triumph, on account of the sin and misery which he had occasioned, unless they were made to subserve the divine glory. When this is done, Satan is defeated; his head is bruised; his works are destroyed.

5. The conversion of sinners is a joyful event, because Jesus Christ receives the fruits of his sufferings and death. It was promised to Christ, that if he would make his soul an offering for sin, he should see his seed; he should prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand; that he should see of the travail of his soul, in such a degree,

that his benevolent heart should be satisfied. This was the joy which was set before him, for which he endured the cross and despised the shame. And every converted soul is a part of this fruit of Christ's sufferings. In them Christ's glory as Mediator is seen; for his object, was to redeem them from sin and ruin; and when sinners are converted, they become monuments of the wisdom, power and efficacy of his grace. These are the images which reflect his glory. It is greatly to the honour of Christ, that his death is productive of such wonderful effects as the turning of sinners to God. And the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, appearing in those who were the servants of sin, are greatly to the glory of divine grace. It is greatly to the praise and honour of Christ, that his spirit should be exemplified in those hearts, which had been the abode of sin. This displays the excellent tendency, and blessed effects of divine grace. Jesus Christ would have no honour as Mediator without a converted, redeemed people. Indeed his appointment to this office, and his sufferings and death would be of no use without this. All the honour Christ receives, as Mediator, arises from the conversion of sinners. What a joyful event then is the conversion of sinners!

### *IMPROVEMENT.*

1. Learn why the divine attention has, in all ages, been fixed on the church. The true church is composed of converted sinners. God has chosen the church, as the place where his perfections should, the

most clearly be displayed. All the love, praise, and obedience, which God has received from this world, have been from the church. The name, the worship, and oracles of God have been preserved in the church. The church has ever been the ground and pillar of the truth. Revelation was gradually given to the church of God. Holy men, age after age, spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. These communications were made and committed to the church, and by her labours and efforts, the knowledge of God has been spread in the world. The church is continued by the conversion of sinners; and in every conversion, God is glorified. God created, and continues to uphold the world for the sake of the church; and when the whole number of his people is gathered from the ruins of the apostacy, he will no longer regard it. From the days of Adam, to the present, the church has lived, and will, until the consummation of all things. The deluge could not drown her, the flames of Sodom and Gomorrah could not consume her, the Egyptian oppression could not waste her, because God was in the midst of her.

2. Learn why God threatens and executes judgments upon the enemies of his church. Those who are opposed to the word of God, to the ordinances of God, are opposed to the church of God; because by the word and ordinances of God, sinners are converted; the church is edified and prepared for glory. To oppose the church, is to oppose the glory of God, the most wonderful and transcendent display of all his perfections. When a man speaks against the word

and ordinances of God, he opposes the conversion of sinners; he opposes the church; he opposes the glory of God; he opposes the honour of Christ, the effect of his sufferings and death, and the salvation of sinners. When Elymas, the sorcerer sought to turn away the deputy from the faith, he opposed the conversion and salvation of sinners; the increase of the church, and the glory of God. This was a great sin; therefore Paul addressed him and said, "Thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" God destroyed Egypt, when she oppressed and destroyed his church. "He will contend with them, that contend with her." How dangerous to contend with God?

3. We are here taught, that such as are engaged in spreading the word of God, and in promoting the conversion of sinners, are labouring for the glory of God. Fix your attention on Philip, the effect of whose preaching is recorded in our text. A severe persecution was raised against him, and the other apostles in Jerusalem; he therefore complied with the direction of his master, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another." He went down to Samaria, carrying with him the gospel; he preached to this people, and multitudes of them were converted, "and there was great joy in that city." And not only in that city; but in all the churches of God; and not only in all the churches of God, but in heaven, among the angels of God. See then how the labours of one

man contributed to glorify God. He, who is the favoured instrument of converting but one sinner, not only saves a soul from death; not only covers a multitude of sins; but advances the glory of God, and creates joy in heaven.

4. In the view of this subject, we are enabled to understand the meaning of this petition in the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come." In Samaria, this petition was explained; was realized. When we use this petition, we pray for the spread of the gospel, the conversion of sinners, and the manifestation of the divine perfections. In Samaria, there was great joy, because they embraced the gospel. There the kingdom of God was set up. Here we see the words of the Apostle explained. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." In that city; in that family; in that heart, where this kingdom is set up, there is great joy; and indeed the joy is not confined to that place, and that heart.

5. Our subject shows us, that those, who are labouring for the conversion of sinners, are labouring for the happiness of the universe. Indeed, so far as such are successful, the happiness of the universe is in fact increased: The perfections of God are displayed; angels are happier; and saints in heaven and earth are happier. What a cause are such engaged in? How extensive its connexions! How desirable its prosperity!



6. How ought we then to pray for the conversion of sinners? We have shown that this is a very desirable event, in all its connexions. The prayers, conversation and conduct of saints should daily remind sinners of the excellency of religion, and the misery and danger of their state.

## SERMON XII.

GOD HAS NO DELIGHT IN THE DEATH OF SINNERS.

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EZEKIEL, xxxiii. 11.

*Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.*

**H**ow true is it, that the foolishness of man first perverteth his way, and then his heart freteth against the Lord. The text gives us an amiable representation of the divine character. This representation is the more satisfactory as it is given by God himself. It was made, because the wicked in the days of this prophet insinuated, that they were punished for the sins of their fathers; and that the calamities which they suffered, were inflicted on them without a just discrimination of characters. Rather than admit their ways to be unequal, they were willing to suppose there was an error in the divine administration; and that God had pleasure in punishing, and making his creatures miserable. That they were punished by the hand of

God, they did not deny; but the justice of it, they called in question. In this chapter God vindicates his character from such aspersions, and after a disclosure of his conduct, he appeals to the reason of mankind for the justice and equity of his proceedings. He then inquires for the ground of their conclusion, that his ways were unequal, or that he had any pleasure in the punishment of the wicked. "Have I any pleasure at all, that the wicked should die?" This certainly did not appear from his conduct. He then in a more explicit and solemn manner asserts, that this is not the reason why sinners die. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." In these words the following things may be observed.

I. This passage contradicts that opinion, which supposes, that the punishment of the wicked is a proof that God delights in misery. How strongly do these words oppose the sentiment of those who believe the fact, that God does, and will punish the wicked, and from hence, infer that God is unrighteous, who taketh vengeance? This was the complaint of sinners in the days of Ezekiel, and it has not altogether ceased from the lips of sinners in this day.

II. Another error guarded against in the text is, that which supposes, that because God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, he therefore will not die, or be finally miserable. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the *death* of the wicked." Which words render it certain, that the

wicked do die, and that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. How could the Lord God say, that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, if the wicked did not die? But before we proceed any further on this subject, it is necessary to make some remarks on the death mentioned in the text.

1. I would observe, that the death here mentioned is not a temporal death, or the death of the body. For the Lord declares, “that if a man do that which is lawful and right, he shall live, he shall not die.” But temporal death is the common lot of all men, both of the righteous and wicked. If a man do that which is lawful and right, it will not secure him from death. The wise man and the fool die alike in this sense; which shows that the death intended in the text is not the death of the body.

2. The death mentioned in the text is not that kind of death, which is common to all sinners, a death in trespasses and sins. This is a death, under which all men lie, who are not regenerated and quickened by the Spirit of God. But the death in the text is the final result of spiritual death, or of sin; a death, which in the new testament is called the second death, which consists in being “cast into the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.” The text therefore has immediate reference to the punishment of the impenitent in the eternal world. For if it mean neither the death of the body, nor the depravity of the heart, which is called death in the scriptures, it can be no other, but the death of the soul—a death which a soul only can die. And in this death, God says in the

text, he has no pleasure ; that is misery in itself considered is an object in which God has no complacency, and therefore nothing like this can be the cause, or reason why the wicked die, or suffer punishment in the eternal world. All evil is contrary to the divine nature ; that is, there is nothing in God like pain—like sin. Nothing in him can ever exist, which can reconcile him to misery or sin, for their own sakes. Natural evil is really as contrary to the nature of God as moral ; yet it is a fact, that both exist in the universe. None who believe the existence of a God of infinite perfection, can doubt but he hates sin ; and yet who can question its existence ? Can we prove that sin does not exist, because God has no pleasure in it ; or because he is infinitely opposed to it ? He, who would deny the existence of sin, must not only deny the scriptures, but all distinction between right and wrong, and contradict the opinions and feelings of mankind in all ages of the world. And indeed every man, let his speculations be what they may, feels a difference between love and hatred, and is conscious of a difference between that temper which seeks the good of others, and that which opposes their happiness and prosperity. To pretend to reason against the existence of sin, is to set up empty speculation both against revelation, and the universal sense and feelings of mankind. And should there be any, who think it impossible that there is any such thing as sin, because it is contrary to the nature of God, who is infinitely holy and able to prevent it, such would find as much difficulty in vindicating the goodness of God in implanting, universally

in mankind natural notions of good and evil, of sin and holiness. To account for these impressions on the human mind, (were there no distinction between right and wrong) would be as difficult, as to account for the existence of that which is contrary to the divine nature. And what has now been said of moral evil is equally applicable to natural evil, or misery. This, being contrary to the divine nature, does not prevent its existence. Every man knows, by experience, that there is such a thing as pain, as misery; yet God delights not in it. And it is a fact, which none can question, that God hath, in the course of his providence, brought many and great evils upon mankind, as punishments for their sins. He drowned the old world; burnt Sodom and Gomorrah. He has sent famine and pestilence, which have swept away mankind by thousands, but all this will not prove, that God delights in the misery of his creatures. Would a reasonable man conclude, that the judge who pronounces sentence of death upon a criminal, or that he who executes this sentence, takes delight in the misery of mankind? Would not a judge in any human court feel himself injured, should such an inference be drawn from his condemning a criminal to the pillory or gallows? On the other hand, it would be very unreasonable for a subject to conclude, that under the administration of a just and benevolent prince, he might transgress with impunity, upon the presumption, that if his prince did not delight in his misery, he never would punish him according to his desert. But the delight which a good prince has in the happiness of his sub-

jects, instead of protecting, endangers offenders. His delight in happiness, and aversion to misery are in no degree inconsistent with his inflicting punishment, even capital punishment on proper objects. And if a human prince may, consistently with his love of happiness and hatred of misery, punish the guilty; so may the great Ruler of the universe punish sinners, yet have no delight in their death. Punishments, in certain circumstances, are the genuine effects and natural expressions of love to the body, over which the prince presides. Love to the publick happiness, will induce a ruler to be a terror to evil doers.

They who conclude that God will not punish sinners in another world, because he delights not in their death, might conclude upon the same principle, that he never punishes them in this world; that there are no such things as pain and misery in this world. For if there be such things; such sensations as these, they are the effects of sin; they are punishments which God has annexed to disobedience. For if it be contrary to the divine nature, to make sinners miserable in a great degree in a future state, it is equally contrary to his nature to punish them at all. A change of worlds alters not the nature of things, nor reconciles inconsistencies. If then any degree of punishment, under the divine government be consistent with his infinite happiness and benevolence, then the eternal punishment of sinners who deserve it, is also consistent with his benevolence. And if God can, consistently with his love of happiness and hatred of misery in itself, punish the guilty one day, or one hour, there can

be no difficulty in supposing, he may punish sinners as long as they deserve it; and there is no force in that argument which supposes, that because God is infinitely benevolent, he will not punish sinners in another world. But whether he will, must be decided by divine declaration. That God does punish sinners, or inflict pain and misery upon them in this world, and is notwithstanding perfectly happy, is readily granted. And that these things are consistent, is not only evident from the fact, that they do exist together; but the reason of this may appear by considering, that God, the great moral Ruler of the universe, takes as real delight, and enjoys as real happiness in all his acts of justice, as in his acts of mercy. His infinite happiness consists in the proper increase and display of all his perfections, and in the accomplishment of all his wise and glorious purposes. God aims at the happiness of the universe, and his punishing the wicked is an act of justice to them, in which he manifests his love of justice, and hatred of the contrary. All his acts of justice to the disobedient, are acts of goodness to the universe, and as such God and all his faithful servants rejoice in them. So that, though God do not delight in misery in itself considered, yet he takes infinite delight in those acts by which all his perfections are displayed. The fact, therefore that God does punish the wicked, either in this, or a future world, can, with no reason, be urged against his delighting in the happiness of his creatures; nor on the other hand, can his love of happiness, as declared in the scriptures, be improved reasonably as an argument, that the sinner



will escape the punishment of his sins. It is easy to conceive, that God should take pleasure in the exercise of all his perfections, and that the suspension of any one, would be an everlasting diminution of the divine happiness and glory. God has in redemption, and by the dispensations of his providence, given striking evidence of his regard both to his justice and mercy. Even in redemption, where his mercy shines, his regard to justice is in a manner, the most impressive. While, in redemption, the regard of God to the happiness of mankind appears in the most amiable light, his justice, holiness and hatred of sin appear equally bright on every page of the gospel.

Since then God delights not in the death of the wicked, it is still a question of importance in this subject, why then do sinners die? That the wicked do die is as necessarily implied in the text, as it is that God takes no delight in their death.

The reason why sinners perish, is not because there is no provision made for their salvation. The reason why mankind die a temporal death is, there is no provision made to avoid it. Were there the same necessity, that sinners should perish, as that they should die a temporal death, vain would be every exhortation and call. But there is not; for the work of redemption provides a way of deliverance for sinners, from eternal death.

Nor do sinners perish, because salvation was provided for some, but not for all. The truth of this observation will appear by considering the nature and design of the atonement. The atonement of Christ

had its expedience in the sin of man. And therefore by attending to the nature of sin, we may learn the nature of the atonement. Mankind, by sin, had practically denied God's right to universal love, and perfect obedience, by which they had defamed the holy One of Israel; and this became an insuperable bar in the way of the sinner's salvation, until something was done to wipe away this vile aspersion from the divine character, and make it appear that God claimed but his own right, his just due, when he required perfect love and obedience; and of consequence that the sinner never had any reason to become his enemy. This difficulty, this bar must be removed; in other words, "the law must be magnified and made honourable," in order that God might extend mercy and not implicate his own character, or acknowledge the charge which the sinner had, in practice alleged against him. The Apostle expressly informs us, that this was the design of the atonement. "Whom, he hath set forth, to be a propitiation, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." And this bar, which was in the way of God's showing mercy to sinners, Christ, by his sufferings hath actually removed. The design of Christ was not to take sinners, while impenitent, out of the hand of justice; but to make it consistent for God to show them mercy. What Christ has done does not render sinners less sinful or guilty, but simply opened a way in which mercy might be extended, consistently with justice, and the sacred rights of the divine character and government. From this view, it is easy to see, that the

atonement of Christ is as sufficient for all as for any, and has as effectually removed the obstacle which lay in the way of the salvation of every one, as of any one individual. For the difficulty of one, was the difficulty of all. That which, antecedently to the work of redemption, was an objection against extending the offer to all, was equally an objection against extending the offer to any. And therefore, that which would be sufficient to vindicate the divine character in showing mercy to one, would be sufficient to vindicate his character in offering it to all. The death of Christ has effectually removed the difficulty, which was in the way of the salvation of any one of mankind, and this is as fully removed to all, as to any one. In this sense Christ died for all men; “finished transgressions, and made an end of sin.” As this atonement consists in opening a way of salvation, something beside this is necessary in order to the actual salvation of any. The way to heaven is a way of faith and holiness; “and God gave his Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” From this it appears, that the reason why the wicked die, is not, because there is no way in which they can be saved. Nor is it, because this salvation is offered to some and not to all. From what has been said, it appears that the salvation provided for sinners by the atonement of Christ is a common salvation. And accordingly it is offered to all. The commission given to the apostles by the author of this salvation, was expressed in the most extensive language; “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

So unlimited was their commission. The prophets and apostles declared, that "whosoever would, might come and take the waters of life freely," and therefore every one who is willing, who accepts this invitation shall be saved. And none can fail of this salvation, but by a continued neglect, and wilful refusal of it, until the close of life. Were it not, for the inexcusable wickedness of men in opposing the gospel; in neglecting to spread its glad tidings over the earth, every one would soon come to the knowledge of Christ and be saved. Were there not a way opened for this, and the other, and indeed for every sinner, it would be difficult to vindicate the divine sincerity in offering them salvation on any terms whatever. The reason, then, why the wicked die, is not because salvation is not sincerely offered.

Nor do sinners die, because the salvation, which is offered in the gospel, is not worth their acceptance. Such is the worth and importance of this, that the gift of the whole creation is nothing compared with it; which appears from this single consideration, that it contains a deliverance from hell, and a title to the riches of heaven.

Nor do sinners die, because this salvation is obtained by a great price. Truly this salvation cost Christ his life. It was purchased and is offered on the part of Christ, at great expence, yet it costs him nothing who accepts it. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Nor will sinners

under the gospel die, because the truths which are necessary to their salvation are but obscurely revealed. In the sacred scriptures the character of God; of Jesus Christ; of his Holy Spirit—the character and conditions of the sinner; the terms of his acceptance with God, are all plain. He who can understand the difference between love and hatred, may understand the terms of his acceptance with God. Neither this, nor all the particulars above mentioned are the reasons why sinners die. If God has no pleasure in their death; if the atonement is sufficient for all; and the offer be made to all; if this be a great salvation; and yet is freely offered, and the conditions on which it may be enjoyed are plainly stated; if these be all truths, why do sinners die? I answer positively, that the true and only reason why sinners die, is their opposition to the way of salvation. Sinners dislike the salvation of Christ, and therefore live in the voluntary rejection of it. This is the account of the matter both in the old and new testaments. “O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself,” is the language of the old, “And ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life” is the language of Christ in the new. The salvation of the gospel most essentially consists in a deliverance from the power and dominion of sin; but the sinner loves the ways of sin, and has no disposition to forsake it. The terms of the gospel salvation are repentance, faith, and an holy life, flowing from these evangelical principles; and were these agreeable to the sinner, no reason could be given why he should delay, one moment, his compliance with them. Did

the sinner like this great salvation, nothing more would be necessary to bring him to the exercise of faith, than to hold up before him the character of Christ, and the nature and tendency of sin. This, however, is wholly insufficient to lead the sinner to renounce the ways of sin, and to love and walk in the paths of holiness; and this shows that the sinner is, in fact, opposed to a salvation, which consists in a deliverance from sin, as essential to the enjoyment of God. And as his rejection of the salvation of Christ is his own voluntary act, the sinner has no reason to charge his ruin to any being, but himself, and therefore in the day of judgment, his mouth will be stopped, and every sinner become guilty before God. Life and death are set before him; and the infallible connexion between sin and death, holiness and happiness clearly stated, and every motive and argument used with him, to induce him to forsake the foolish and live. In these things the sinner has his choice; he is called upon to decide this important question, whether he will live or die. Has he not his choice, whether he will live a wicked life, and die miserably; or comply with the terms of the gospel, and die in the favour of God? If then, he chooses sin and death, can he say, that God delights in his death? What more could God have done to his vineyard, that he has not done in it? And if it bring forth sour grapes; judge between God and his vineyard. If the ground on which his sun shines, and his rain falls, brings forth briers and thorns, is it not justly nigh unto cursing whose end is to be burned?

*REFLECTIONS.*

1. How important and satisfactory is the declaration, in the text. What the moral character of God is, must be of infinite concern to every rational, immortal creature in the universe; because every being is entirely dependent on him. When our reputation, property, or life depend on another man, it becomes important to us to know, what the character of that man is. If we become satisfied, that he is governed by no moral principles; that he is unrighteous in his proceedings, and has a degree of satisfaction in distressing those who depend on him, we are immediately alarmed, and feel insecure. In this situation, innocence is no protection. Were it uncertain what the intention of God is; what his designs are toward mankind; whether he has delight in their happiness or misery, human existence would be the most undesirable. But from the conduct and declarations of God, we have the most satisfactory evidence of the benevolence of God. No being will be miserable, because God delights in his death; none will be miserable, but through his own choice; that is, by his choosing the way which leads to death. Is it not matter of unspeakable joy, that such a being as God, fills the throne of the universe? This is the only reason, why we should, and can be thankful for existence. "God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn and live."

2. No creature will be miserable, but through his own choice. I do not mean, that misery is ever chosen for its own sake by any rational creature. But sinners

are said to choose and love death, when they choose and love the way which leads to hell. The intemperate man does not directly choose poverty and premature death ; yet he impliedly chooses them, by choosing intemperate habits. The God of nature has connected these evils with intemperance, and we know that this connexion is established ; when therefore a man chooses the cause, he may be said to choose the effects. It would be unreasonable for the intemperate man to complain under his sufferings, that he was miserable without his choice.

Sinners in hell will clearly see, that the reason why they have sunk into that place of despair, is not because God had any delight in their death. God has connected sin and death ; and he has connected holiness and happiness, and he holds up to the view of sinners this connexion, and assures them, that it is inviolable, and will in every instance take effect. When a man chooses holiness, he chooses happiness ; and when a sinner chooses sin, he chooses death. God sets before men life and death, and tells them to choose their portion. You are now just such creatures, in a moral view, as you choose to be, whether saints or sinners. If you are this moment, stupid, careless sinners, you choose to be so. If you are serious, watchful, prayerful christians, you choose to be so. You will never go to heaven, without choosing that as your portion ; nor will you sink into hell, without choosing it. Inquire only which *path* you choose ; this will decide what *portion* you have chosen ; and should you



continue in this choice, you may certainly know what your portion will be.

Sinner, remember that the reason why you perish, should this be your awful case, is not found in heaven. It might alleviate your misery, mitigate the pangs of your aching heart, could you charge your ruin on God.—No, its cause you will find in your own breast. It is your chosen portion. You will sink into ruin with this distressing reflection, that you have, with your own hand, opened the gates of death. O what an additional sting will this be to the gnawings of the never dying worm ! Remember, every step you take, in the way of death, is voluntary. You choose to live stupid, careless and prayerless. You choose “to live without God, and without hope in the world ! Where then is the blame ? “I call heaven and earth to record against you this day ; that I have set life and death before you ; therefore choose life, that you may live.”

## SERMON XIII.

### SEVEN ABOMINATIONS.

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PROVERBS, vi. 16, 17, 18, 19.

*These six things doth the Lord hate ; yea, seven are an abomination unto him ; a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood ; a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations ; feet that be swift in running to mischief ; a false witness that speaketh lies, and him that soweth discord among brethren.*

THE law of God, which was given at Mount Sinai, was written by the finger of God upon two tables of stone. The first table contained the four first commands, which pointed out our duty to God. On the second, were written the six last, which contain our duty to our neighbour. The violation of any of these commandments is sin ; and every sin, whether immediately against God, or our neighbour, is exceedingly great, because it is the violation of the law of Jehovah. Yet some sins are more aggravated than others. And of such, those are to be so considered, which are a violation of the first table of the law ; this, doubt-

less, is the reason, why they are placed first. Sins against God, such as idolatry, blasphemy, &c. are in themselves more heinous, than those of the second table, because they more immediately respect God; and therefore it is the voice of inspiration, "If a man sin against his neighbour, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against God, who shall intreat for him?" Implying as much as this, that some sins are more aggravated in the sight of God than others, and that those which most directly reflect upon him are the most aggravated. But all sin is great, because directly, or implicitly against God. And I would remark, with respect to the text, that the Spirit of inspiration is not here comparing sins against God directly, with those more directly against man; or those of the first, with those of the second table, and representing the latter as the greatest; but is representing sins against our neighbour as very hateful in the sight of God; and enumerates seven particular sins, which are peculiarly so. "These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination to him."

In treating on this text, I shall say something on each of the sins mentioned, and then show why they are an abomination to the Lord.

1. I am to notice each of the sins here mentioned.

The first abomination is a *proud look*, which is here used to express the general deportment, and appearance of a man. Pride has its seat in the heart, as have all virtues and vices. This denominates all our actions, which are of a moral nature, either good or bad. The look, or countenance is here mentioned, because

the face is that part of man, which especially discovers the temper, and inward feelings of the heart to others. Love, hatred, desire, joy, grief, confidence, despair, admiration, contempt, *pride*, modesty, cruelty, compassion, and all the other affections are expressed by the countenance. These feelings of the heart, are often strongly expressed in the countenance, and is a kind of language which is understood even by children. A proud look is therefore hateful, as it is the index of a proud heart, and the natural expression of its feelings. This is the reason why a proud look is hateful to God and man ; it shows pride at heart. A proud, haughty, disdainful heart, which thinks, feels and acts, as if vile *self* were better, more worthy of the notice of God and man, than others, is a most base, sinful temper. Pride is a spirit of self exaltation, by which a person is led to think too highly of himself and too meanly of others. Hence it displays itself in envying superiors, and in treating equals and inferiors with contempt. It is a disposition to esteem self, though ever so little and vile, better and more deserving than any other being ; hence it refuses to give God his place, or to take its own. But how despicable and vile must that worm of the dust appear in the eyes of the infinite Majesty of heaven and earth, who is swollen with pride and self conceit ? “God hath made of one blood” all men ; and it is a selfish partiality in any, to esteem himself better by nature than others. There are those among mankind, who are distinguished by natural endowments, this is a reason why they should be thankful ; but not why they should be proud. Such

are indebted to God for all they have. And for a man to be proud of any thing he has more than his neighbour, is overlooking the hand from whence he received it. And this is one principal reason why pride is so hateful to God, because it is a spirit of independence, and involves the basest ingratitude; and is of all things the most unsuitable temper for a poor, dependent, vile creature, whose proper place is the dust, out of which he was taken, to which he belongs and is rapidly hastening. As well might one worm swell with pride, because he is one hair's breadth longer than his fellow worm, as for a man to cherish a spirit of pride, because he knows a little more, or has a little more of this world's goods at his disposal, than another.

The second abomination mentioned in the text, is a *lying tongue*. The proper notion of lying is, the using fixed signs out of their common use, with an intention to deceive. Speech is an excellent gift of God, the design of which is to convey to others the ideas of our own minds, and to be a bond of union, and a mutual comfort and advantage to mankind. But to use our tongues to deceive and impose on mankind, and lead them into error and mistakes, is a direct perversion, and vile abuse of language, and directly tends to destroy the end for which it was given. Words often are used aside from their common use, or to convey different ideas from those, with which they are connected by custom, through ignorance, and others are deceived by them. But he who deceives others ignorantly and undesignedly is rather to be pitied, than blamed, es-

pecially, if he has not had advantages to know the use of words. But no excuse can be made for him, who uses language contrary to established use, with an intention to deceive his neighbour. This is lying in the strictest sense, and cannot be done without a wicked heart, and is directly contrary to the command of God. "Let every man speak truth with his neighbour." Truth is likewise a part of natural justice which we owe to one another. For whenever we lie to our neighbour, we lead him into wrong notions of persons and things, and mistakes in either may prove very injurious to him. So that to speak truth to our neighbour is a branch of that justice by which we are obliged to do no man any wrong. Society could not exist without truth, because a false and lying tongue destroys all confidence, and tends to dissolve every bond of union. Such a tongue is vile, because it proceeds from a false, deceitful heart. It is from within, out of the heart, that this evil comes; and a deceitful, false heart, commonly discovers itself in a lying tongue. That such a tongue, and such a heart are an abomination to the Lord, is sufficiently evident from the dreadful doom of all liars.

The third abomination mentioned in the text is *hands which shed innocent blood*. The sin here intended is murder; which consists in taking away the life of a person unjustly. He therefore, who takes away the life of an innocent person, one who has not forfeited his life, according to the laws of God and his country, is a murderer. And he who takes away the life of one who deserves to die, if, at the same time, he be

not convicted by proper evidence, and condemned by competent authority, and is not himself authorized by a proper delegation, comes under the same description. He who should, in a private capacity, kill a murderer, unless in self-defence, would be guilty of murder, because the sword of justice is not committed to him ; and by the laws of God, all private revenge is strictly forbidden. This sin is so universally acknowledged great and heinous in the sight of God, being a direct violation of the sixth commandment, and the idea of which is so generally shocking to the feelings of mankind, that little need be said to expose its evil. I would only remark that our divine Lord hath said, "Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer," because he indulges that temper which displays itself in shedding innocent blood. And this consideration, that God considers him a murderer, who hates his brother, should have a restraining influence upon us, not to indulge a spirit of hatred, ill will, or revenge in our bosom. For God will judge the secrets of men's hearts, and not determine their character merely by external actions ; but by the state of their hearts. He therefore is a murderer in the view of God, who is possessed of a murderous disposition, which he only can be thus denominated in human judicatures, who actually sheds innocent blood. Guard then not your hands only, but your hearts. Let not a spirit of malice and revenge abide in your bosom. And this should be the more carefully regarded, because, though murder, in the former sense, is yet rare in this land ; yet in the latter sense, we have reason to fear

it is frequent. And such a disposition will prove as fatal to the soul as the act itself.

4. The next abomination specified in the text is *A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations*. “The imaginations of the heart,” is an expression used in scripture to signify the first ideas, purposes, and motions of the soul. Thus it is used, Gen. 6. 5, “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every *imagination of the thoughts* of his heart was only evil continually.” And the word *device* as used in scripture denotes a *stratagem, a plan, an evil contrivance*. The heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, is a heart whose first thoughts and meditations are upon some contrivance which tends to mischief. This seems designed to point out those persons, who take pleasure, and spend their time in contriving mischief. There are some persons, who take particular satisfaction in wicked devices, and seem never easy unless they are engaged in something, unlawful and injurious to others; in whose hands, a persons character and interest are never safe. This description includes those, who employ their time in laying plans to over-reach and take advantage of others in their dealings with them; and who support themselves in idleness, or which is worse, in stripping others of their earnings. Some persons make this a calling. Their minds are as much employed in contriving means to live in this way, as honest men are in carrying on their trades with advantage to themselves, without injuring others. Such a calling, were it proper so to denominate it, is



in all respects unlawful. The practice itself is but a specious kind of robbery and is a great evil, as it implies selfishness and deceit. This description also includes those, whose minds are intent on contriving and prosecuting means of revenging real, or supposed injuries. Wicked men often spend much time in devising ways and seeking opportunity to revenge themselves on those from whom they have, or suppose they have received injuries. The heart which deviseth such things is a wicked, stubborn heart. It acts directly contrary to the commands of Christ; contrary to his example, and to the very spirit of his religion. Such a temper is even condemned by the sinner himself, when he sees it in others. These things are all contrary to the word of God, and to that love and good *will* we owe to our neighbour, and therefore very hateful to God. This is a species of iniquity practised by many; and commonly with but little sense of its evil, and yet in the text is numbered among the most heinous crimes.

5. The next abomination mentioned, is *Feet that be swift in running to mischief*. The expression denotes a more than common readiness to engage in any thing that is sinful, or injurious to mankind. For even among wicked men, there is this distinction, with respect, to this outward conduct, some are good members of civil society, indulgent parents, and masters, obliging neighbours, honest dealers, and generous to the poor. Such members of the civil community as these, may be found among men, who have no regard to God, or their own souls. For morality does not necessarily in-

clude true religion. On the other hand, some men there are who are set on mischief. They are pests in civil society, and are either committing some crimes, or suffering for them from the hand of justice. Of such persons it may be literally said, "they sleep not except they do mischief." Such persons seem to take a malicious satisfaction in outrage and confusion, and delight in evil for evil's sake. They are the fools spoken of by the wise man, "whose sport is to do mischief." Such persons will frequently commit injuries on others, without any prospect of private advantage, except the present gratification of a wicked heart. This is true of some thieves, who have such an insatiable propensity to theft, that they will steal whenever opportunity presents, even articles which can be of no use to them. So it is with persons who addict themselves to lying, they will utter and propagate falsehoods, merely to injure others, without advantage to themselves. How vile is such a heart, which can break the laws of God, and injure others, when not even any private advantage can be proposed. In short this description includes all those, who readily and hastily enter upon any evil course, and pursue it without consideration.

6. The next abomination mentioned in the text is that of *Bearing false witness*. "*A false witness that speaketh*" is here distinguished from *a lying tongue*, which imports lying and falsehood in general; but by bearing false witness we are to understand that species of falsehood denominated *perjury*. When a person gives testimony in a case contrary to his own light and

knowledge, after he has taken a solemn oath to speak the truth, and nothing but the truth, he bears false witness in the sense of the text. This is indeed an aggravated sin, and so confessed by all who are not atheists ; particularly on two accounts.

First, because an oath is a deliberate, solemn act, by which we call on God to witness the truth of what we affirm, for the ending of strife and controversy. This is a religious act, and should be regarded as the most sacred and solemn transaction ; and hence perjury is the more vile and criminal, as it is an appeal to God for the truth of what the false swearer knows to be false, or at least does not know to be true. This is treating the great and dreadful God, as profligate sinners sometimes do their companions, who will utter lies, and call upon them to witness the truth of what they have said. It implies a most awful contempt of the divine authority, and defiance of his wrath. Hence saith God by his prophet, respecting this class of sinners, "I will come near to you to judgment, and will be a swift witness against false swearers." God requires that oaths should be taken, when the importance of the matter demands them, with suitable fear of his majesty. And when we speak or act under this solemn obligation, we should do it with peculiar caution. Another aggravation of this sin, is that it affects the interest, and reputation of others more than common falsehood. Religious oaths should not be taken except upon important occasions, and therefore they cannot be falsified, without injuring the innocent, or clearing the guilty. Oaths are of such solemnity, that

judges in human courts are bound to act, upon what people declare upon oath ; and this institution is founded upon the principle, that all persons who understand the nature of an oath, must be lost to all sense of duty to God and fear of his wrath, who will dare to utter falsehood under such a solemn obligation. The lives, fortunes and characters of men depend upon the fear and observance of oaths. Let us all then remember the solemnity of an oath ; and, that bearing false witness, is a crime of the deepest dye in the sight of God.

7. The last character in this black catalogue is, "*He that soweth discord among brethren.*" By *brethren*, here, we may understand, members of the visible church, or brethren by birth, and, in a larger sense, members of the same community. The term is often used in each of these senses. Discord is often introduced into churches, families, and neighbourhoods by false and groundless suggestions, propagated by idle, envious persons, properly denominated *talebearers*. The private interests, the public opinions of men frequently engender strife ; but in the greater part of instances, discord and animosity are excited and perpetuated by whisperers, who separate between chief friends. Evil minded persons have many ways to raise discord among brethren. But by whatever means a person creates and promotes division, discord and contention among neighbours ; whether it be by misrepresenting their words and actions respecting one another ; or inventing falsehood and spreading it, as the report of another ; or credulously receiving and propagating slanderous reports ; all such come under the de-

nomination of sowers of discord. And little indeed need we add to many things innocently done, and friendly spoken of another, to give it a very different appearance, either as to matter or manner, and make it appear like the fruit of envy or malice. Indeed, how often are families and neighbourhoods embroiled, and their peace and happiness destroyed in this way? Great and lasting contentions are often the effect of jealousies excited by those, who have delight in meddling with other men's matters; and they who are the designing cause of contention, should remember, that, in every important sense, they must answer for all the evils which they occasion. Our

II. Head was to show why these practices are peculiarly hateful and provoking to God. But I have in a great measure anticipated this proposition, by what I have said under each particular. But in general, it may be observed, that we ought to be impressed with this evil, because it is declared in the text, that they are an abomination to the Lord. When God declares in his word, that these seven things are an abomination to him, we are not to suppose, that these are the only practices, which are hateful to him, and which he will punish; but the meaning is, that they are crying sins, which deserve and will receive signal expressions of his displeasure. These sins are great, because they are open and flagrant violations of his great law, which requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves. Here is the radical defect. All these sins may be traced up to this criminal, this inexcusable defect in the heart. Such an heart is not

right with God—not under the control of his law—not actuated by love to others. The habitual indulgence of either of these sins is wholly inconsistent with the love of God, and of man, and consequently with the christian character. Let this subject then be addressed to each individual in this assembly, by way of

#### *APPLICATION.*

Let every one carefully examine himself respecting each particular in the text, and determine the matter, if not determined, whether he is guilty or not. Should you find yourself guilty, consider that it is your immediate and indispensable duty to forsake these sins. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord who will have mercy upon him.” The first particular, respecting which we should examine ourselves, is *pride; a proud look*. This is the fruit of a proud heart, and is no otherwise sinful, but as it proceeds from, and is the natural expression of a self exalting spirit. The only way to determine, whether we belong to this class of sinners, is to attend to the state of our minds, and the temper of our hearts. Every one is under better advantages to determine his own character, than any other man is to determine it for him. For every one knows what passes within him; what his feelings are respecting others; whether he is actuated by a proud, selfexalting spirit. The apostle defines pride, as consisting in “a man’s thinking more highly of himself than he ought.” And this a person may do, both on account of supposed religious attainments above others, and on account of natural and acquired abilities; and

also of worldly possessions. The first of them is called spiritual pride, and is indeed the worst sort of pride. This was the spirit of the pharisees in the time of our Saviour. They considered themselves as righteous, "and despised others." And their language is, "stand by thyself for I am holier than thou." We may see how Christ views this spirit, by the heavy woes which he denounced against persons of this spirit. It is worthy of remark, that it is not the man who is really good, who is disposed to think himself better than others, but it is the empty, boasting pharisee. Some esteem themselves better than others on account of their natural talents, or acquired abilities, and despise others whom they consider below them in these respects. Hence proceeds that air of superiority and contempt, which often appears in the intercourse of men with each other. Others value themselves upon their worldly possessions above others, and despise the poor, because they are poor, all which betray a proud unhumble heart. Let us remember that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the lowly."

In the second place, let each one examine himself, whether he uses his tongue with an intent to deceive and impose on his fellow creatures; and whether private advantage is a sufficient inducement with him to disregard the truth. Some persons will not scruple to break that law by which they are obliged to speak the truth to their neighbour, provided they can gain any private advantage to themselves, or avoid an inconvenience. Others again will indulge themselves in this sin, from a spirit of envy and revenge, who would

not on other occasions. When a man yields to any particular temptation of whatever kind, he is in the way to disregard truth on all occasions. It ought also to be carefully noted that God's indignation is expressed in the text against falsehood, and a person may be guilty of this without using his tongue. This evil he may commit by the cast of his eye, the motion of his hand or his head, by significant signs, and as effectually deceive, as if he had used his tongue. Such a man is as really chargeable with deception and falsehood as he could be with his tongue. To this way of dealing in falsehood, the wise man refers when he says, "A wicked man walketh with a froward heart, he winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers; frowardness is in his heart; he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord." This is often the most injurious kind of falsehood, because when some evil thing is thus hinted of a person, accompanied with significant gestures and looks, people are led to think the worst; as it gives scope to the imagination to frame the worst ideas of the person hinted at. This should be carefully examined and guarded against, would we avoid the awful doom of liars.

The next thing mentioned in the text is "*Hands that shed innocent blood.*" But with regard to this there is probably none present who need self examination, being consciously innocent. Still in the sense in which our Saviour uses the term, murder, there is important reasons for self inquiry. "He that hateth his brother is a murderer." That is, he possesses the temper from which the outward act of murder proceeds.



Who then is free from this charge? Do any of you indulge a spirit of ill will and hatred to your fellow creatures? What leads you to rejoice in their misfortunes; to grieve in their prosperity? What disposes you to depreciate their good qualities, and magnify their imperfections? What disposes you more readily to circulate evil reports, than take pleasure in the reputation of others? Is this your character? You are then “verily guilty concerning your brother,” and may certainly conclude, that you are destitute of the favour of God, and a title to eternal life, being destitute of that brotherly love and charity, which constitute an essential part of the christian character. The apostle lays it down as an undoubted maxim, that he, who is the enemy of man, cannot be the friend of God. For love to God is the first commandment, and love to man the second; and he who disregards the second, and in some respects the lesser, can he be supposed to regard the first and the greater? “He who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” And whether you are in fact friends to your neighbours is best determined by your practice. Have you a readiness to do them good, both by words and actions, on all proper occasions? Let each one examine himself, on this ground. Remember, that the determination of this question will go far towards settling the next inquiry; whether you have a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations. For he who does not hate his brother, will not imagine evil against him. The Apostle tells us “charity thinketh no evil.” Persons are not apt to put the worst

construction upon the words and actions of those they love, much less are they disposed to devise mischief against them. Evil thoughts and devices are the genuine fruit of an evil heart. Another method by which we may determine whether we love our fellow men is by inquiring, whether we are in the habit of saying and doing things which are prejudicial to them, without stopping to inquire, or consider the consequences of speaking and acting. Some persons are of so viciated a temper, that they will do mischief for its own sake, and without thought say and do things very injurious to the reputation and interest of others. When persons become habituated to any course of conduct, they do and say things without any set purpose. Thus the common swearer often takes the name of God in vain, without thinking what he is doing. This is an evidence of a very wicked heart, when a person can employ his tongue and hand in that which is sinful and injurious to others without thought. Such have acquired so much facility, that they do mischief without even the labour of meditation. Such indeed have "feet which are swift in running to mischief." Are any of you among the sixth class of sinners who speak lies? Have you solemnly regarded an oath, when you have been called to speak and act under its obligation? Have you been careful in all cases, where the property and reputation of others might be affected by your words and actions? Lastly, inquire particularly, whether sowing discord is any part of your business. This particular calls for more strict inquiry, because the fact may not be so evident in this case, as in some oth-

ers. In general I would remark that persons, who are often meddling in matters which do not concern them, frequently occasion discord and confusion among neighbours. Persons who neglect their own business to pry into that of others, commonly occasion much discord by their imprudent interference. It was an exhortation worthy of the Apostle, that we should be careful not to "Suffer as an evil doer, or a busy body in other men's matters." Let all then, examine themselves with respect to each of the above mentioned sins, remembering that the habitual indulged practice of either of these evils, denominates a person the enemy of God, and an heir of his wrath. For the indulged practice of any one sin is inconsistent with the life of religion. There is no sin so small, but if persevered in, will destroy the soul. And the reason why any kind of sin, when persisted in, will destroy the soul, is because there is no sin, but deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this and the future world; and further, all sin, as to its general nature and direct tendency, is the same. Every sin is a violation of the law of God, and disqualifies the soul for his service and enjoyment. And the indulgence of any one sin is an evidence, that no sin is hated because it is sin, and no virtuous practice loved and pursued because it is right and proper. If, upon examination, with respect to these sins, you find that you live in the commission of any of them, your situation is criminal and dangerous. Nothing but your love of sin hides your danger from your own eyes. Sin is so common a thing in this world, that it is but little feared, and by

multitudes wholly overlooked. God who made the world, and constantly upholds it by his power, is, as it were, banished from his own world by sin, and his law, which ought in reason to be made the standard of all human actions, is disregarded. How many, under all the advantages of revelation, may be found of whom it may be said "God is not in all their thoughts?" Some of their sins are doubtless common, and this makes them appear small to the sinner. The frequency of sin has a great tendency to blind the mind against the evil and destructive tendency of it. And this greatly increases the danger of continuing in sin; for the longer sin is indulged, the more likely it is that the sinner will persist in it until the end of life. Let every person, who indulges himself in any evil practice, consider the truth of God's word, and learn to judge of the nature and tendency of sin by that, and not by the uneasiness which sin gives him at present. It is common for sinners to judge of the evil of sin by the latter, and those practices which gives them little pain in reflection, are considered by them as indifferent, or at most as venial. But this is a very dangerous rule by which to judge of the evil of sin, or of our danger. The practice of sin, as observed, tends to stupify the conscience, and indeed to destroy it. All sin will end in sorrow, either in the sorrow of a broken heart in this world, or in eternal sorrow in the coming one. And the only way to avoid the future punishment of sin, is to forsake it in this life; and this is, in effect, and the only important business in this world; especially as turning from sin, implies a

turning to God. This, my brethren, is the great end of life, and should be our daily concern. Nothing short of this will give you any hope, when you look beyond this momentary life. It is indeed the one thing needful, without which you are miserable, undone creatures forever. All sin, and sinners as such, are hateful to God. Evil cannot dwell with him. He has opened a way, in his infinite mercy, for sinners to be washed from the pollution of sin, and escape its awful punishment. This is by Christ. And now he is inviting, entreating and warning sinners to flee from the wrath to come. He is saying to you, "behold now is an accepted time, behold now is a day of salvation." The time is fast coming when you and I must "give an account for the deeds done in the body" to a righteous Judge, who will render to every man according to his works." "To them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality, eternal life. But unto them who are contentious and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish on every soul of man that doeth evil." The sinner must change his course, become a new creature, or he is ruined forever. Happy is that man, and he is the only happy man, who imitates Christ in his spirit and practice.

## SERMON XIV.

### THE DANGER OF THE UNGODLY.



PSALM, lxxiii. 18.

*Surely thou didst set them in slippery places.*

THIS is the observation of David on the situation of the ungodly. In the preceding part of this psalm, he describes his distress of mind while contemplating the dispensations of providence, toward the righteous and wicked. He saw the wicked in the height of prosperity, and the righteous in the depth of adversity ; and how to reconcile this with the moral rectitude of God, he knew not. The house of God was the place, and probably his word the means of removing his wrong apprehensions, and his distress of mind. “ When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me ; until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places.” Here he learnt, from the word of God, the end of the wicked. This unfolded all the mysteries of God’s dispensations toward them in the present life. When through the medium of divine revelation, he came to see, and understood the end of the wicked, he

made this solemn reflection, "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places ; thou castest them down into destruction." These words in this connexion bring up to our view this solemn truth which we shall illustrate.

That the situation of the ungodly is an exceedingly dangerous situation, notwithstanding all present appearances to the contrary.

It is a certain fact, that the real situation of mankind is very different, even in this world, from what it appears to be on a partial view. Some persons appear to be very rich ; live in the pomp of independent magnificence, when the truth is, they are very poor. Some men appear to be at peace in themselves, and to enjoy an undisturbed tranquillity of mind, while their bosoms are torn with corroding cares and vexing disquietudes. Our views of men and things are very partial, and from such partial views, we are exposed to draw false conclusions. We are apt to judge both of men and things according to present appearances. Thus we are apt to judge of the state of the wicked, according to their present appearance. When we see them apparently at ease, in possession of an abundance of the common good things of providence, we are ready to pronounce them happy. To temporal enjoyments much is commonly attached ; hence the rich, the honourable, the prosperous are considered the only happy ; when perhaps at the same time, they are the enemies of God, and have no treasures, but of a worldly nature ; no pleasures, but such as the uncertain and unsatisfying enjoyments of

this world can bestow, which at best, and upon full experience have been found to be vanity and vexation of spirit. Should we judge of the religious circumstances of mankind by their present appearance, we shall err exceedingly ; nor is there less danger of mistake, if from the same things we judge of our own. It is not from present circumstances, but from the word of God, that we are to learn the real situation of saints and sinners. One great end of the christian revelation is to exhibit the character, and situation of both saints and sinners. And in this revelation, the character and danger of the sinner are faithfully described. This is one argument of the divinity of that book, we call the Bible ; there is nothing in it that is calculated to flatter sinners, or to conceal from them their guilt and danger. And this is, at the same time, an evidence of the goodness and benevolence of God toward sinners. For certainly it is an evidence of friendship to a person in great danger to inform him of it ; to show him what it is ; how great it is ; from whence it arises, and to point out the means of avoiding it, if such there be. Truth is precious, and sinners, as well as saints ought to be willing to hear it. They should know and be impressed with their danger. This is important, because until they are sensible of their danger, they never can see their need of a Saviour. Without this impression of danger, they cannot appreciate, nor embrace the means of deliverance. It is those only who are sensibly exposed to evils that seek for deliverance from them. “The whole have no need of the physician.” These considerations



show, that the descriptions of the sinner's guilt and danger, found in the book of God, are real expressions of divine benevolence. As this knowledge of danger is necessary to excite the sinner to escape from it, I shall endeavour, as far as I am able, to describe this danger to sinners.

Indeed, to describe, fully the danger of sinners is beyond the power of language. We can have no adequate conception of the evil of sinning against an infinite God. We can, at most, conceive but little of the evil of lying forever under his wrath and curse, and therefore can have but a very partial idea of their danger who are constantly exposed to this evil. Notwithstanding this, we can, through the medium of divine revelation, clearly see, that their danger is very great. We can see, that the misery to which the sinner is exposed is very great; and also that his danger of actually falling into this misery is indeed great.

The danger of the sinner will, in some measure, appear when we consider his obligations and character. The sinner is made capable of loving and serving God. This God requires; because he is infinitely excellent. This law of God which requires perfect love is broken by every sinner, and that continually. This is an infinite evil; for the evil of sin is in proportion to the creature's obligations to the contrary. The sinner's obligations to love, honour and obey God are in proportion to the divine excellency and the creature's dependance on God. These are unlimited and entire; and therefore to withhold his love from God renders the sinner infinitely guilty. The law of God, there-

fore, threatens an infinite, or endless punishment to sin, as its proper wages. This curse lies upon every impenitent sinner. To this punishment every sinner is justly exposed; and to this punishment every one might have been sent without a reprieve. But God in rich mercy saw fit to provide a Saviour, who has made an atonement of such a nature, that he could consistently pardon the repenting sinner, who accepts of Christ as his Saviour. By Christ, every difficulty on the part of the divine government is removed; so that there is a door opened for the sinner to come to Christ and be saved. This is the only way in which sinners ever will be saved. The atonement of Christ opens a way for the sinner to escape from deserved punishment; but does not remove his guilt in the smallest degree. Nor does this door of mercy, this way of salvation in the least remove his danger; his exposedness to punishment. The sinner's exposedness to punishment ceases only by his union to Christ by faith. The gift of Christ, and the work of redemption by him, afford not the least security, or protection to the impenitent, unbelieving sinner. He lies as nakedly exposed to the penalty of the law, as if Christ had not died. The atonement of Christ alters the ground of the sinner's danger, (if I may so express it) but not the danger itself. Antecedently to the consideration of redemption, the case of the sinner was hopeless, because there was no way to save him honourably from the curse of the law; but now his danger arises from his rejecting the only remedy. Sinners are prisoners of hope; condemned, but for a time reprieved. A

strong hold is provided, to which they may fly and be safe. But this does not take away the guilt, nor abate the danger of those who refuse to repair to it for protection. Though there be balm in Gilead, and a Physician there ; yet the sinner's disease and danger are not removed without a personal application. These general remarks will lead me to state the following particulars.

1. The sinner deserves eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord. This is the proper wages of sin. Every moral agent is bound to love God supremely, and continually ; and when he withholds this love and obedience, he becomes infinitely guilty before God.

2. Such a punishment is actually threatened in the law of God against every transgressor. "The soul that sinneth shall die." What is meant by the death of the soul?—Not its extinction, but its separation from God, whose favour is life, whose loving kindness is better than life. The law pronounces a curse on every one "who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." The impenitent sinner has no interest in Christ ; he is therefore under the law, a perfectly holy law, which he has broken every hour of his life. "For as many as are of the works of the law are under its curse."

3. There is nothing in the nature of Christ's redemption, or in the constitution of the covenant of grace, which takes away the sinner's criminality, or secures him from the punishment threatened against sin. This clearly appears from this consideration, that the sinner, notwithstanding the atonement of Christ, actually re-

mains under the curse of the law, until he believes in Christ. "He that believeth not on the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." And if the wrath of God abideth on such as believe not, and if such are actually in a state of condemnation, then it is plain, this guilt is not taken away by the atonement of Christ. "Christ is not the minister of sin." There is nothing more repugnant to the whole tenor of the gospel, than the idea, that the work of redemption by Christ affords any protection to the impenitent sinner; any otherwise than as God, out of respect to this, grants the sinner a reprieve, and makes him the offer of pardon upon his repentance. The design of Christ in redemption was not to take away the ill desert of the sinner, nor to abrogate the law by which he stands condemned, nor was it to afford him encouragement and protection in sin; but to open a door for the free pardon of the penitent; to save from sin, and in this way only from its punishment. The sinner therefore, while without faith—without repentance is as truly without hope from Christ, and under the curse of the law, as really, as if Christ had not come into the world. Thus the sinner, notwithstanding the way of salvation by Christ, stands on slippery places; for he is "an alien from the commonwealth of Israel; a stranger to the covenant of promise, without God and without hope in the world." And his danger will further appear when we consider

4. That he is naturally opposed to the method of salvation by Christ. The almost universal neglect

which the gospel has met with in every age, can be accounted for upon no other principle. A way of salvation is opened, and this salvation freely offered "without money and without price;" all things are ready, and nothing is wanted but the sinner's consent. This being true, were the sinner willing to be saved in the way which the gospel prescribes, there would be no rejecters of Christ found among men. They do not need arguments to persuade them to accept of those things which they love, when freely offered to them. But the universal rejection of salvation, when offered in the gospel by the impenitent, shows that their hearts are opposed to it. So our Saviour represents this matter; "they all with one consent began to make excuse." A salvation from sin, is unpleasant, it has no charms to a sinful heart. The humble, holy, self denying path of the righteous is of all things the most disagreeable to sinners. They therefore decline walking in this way. They are in heart opposed to the humbling doctrines of the gospel, and that way of salvation which requires them to deny themselves, and take up their daily cross and follow Christ. If this be not true, how can the sinner's present neglect of the gospel be accounted for? There can be no other account given. Accordingly the scriptures account for their disregard of Christ on this principle. They ascribe it to disaffection of heart to God, and the way of holiness. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." "Ye will not come to me," said Christ, "that ye might have life." When therefore the gospel is preached, and they are invited to come to the gospel

feast, "they begin to make excuse." They are unwilling to attend to calls of this nature. Sinners are then evidently in great danger from their opposition to the way of salvation. "Go thy way for this time" is the language of all sinners to the messengers of Christ. This danger will still appear, when we consider

5. That sinners have no assurance of life under these offers of grace. This all men know. They who die rejecting Christ sink immediately into hell, where there is "no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." The sinner is therefore in as immediate and great danger of falling into hell, as he is of dying. The uncertainty of life increases his danger, because the present time is the only accepted time, and day of salvation. There is nothing between the sinner and the burning pit, but the brittle thread of life; when this is separated, he sinks in a moment; and this is supported by the abused mercy of God alone.

6. Another consideration, which shows the great danger of the sinner, is, that God is not under the least obligation to bring him to a compliance with his calls. God has already done infinitely more for him than he deserves, in providing a Saviour, and opening a way for his return to God, and in making him the offer of salvation, and calling upon him time after time to accept it. To all which the sinner has no claim. And God hath laid himself under no obligations to the sinner by promise or in any other way. There is not in all the Bible any promise of God to the sinner who rejects Christ, that he will spare his life another day—grant

him another offer, much less that he will make him an heir of eternal life, and bestow upon him the joys of the heavenly state. The bible contains many great and precious promises, but they are all out of the reach of the impenitent sinner. These promises belong to Christ and his followers. The ungodly have no portion in them. The threatenings are theirs; but God's covenant mercy is the portion of the righteous. This must be the case; for to suppose that the sinner is entitled to the promises of God, would be to suppose; either that he is a saint, or that he is the subject both of the curses and blessings of God's word, which would be absurd. Now since the sinner deserves God's wrath and curse, and they now lie upon him; and since it is also true, that he is opposed to the salvation which is provided and offered to him, and is voluntarily walking in the way which leads down directly to ruin, in opposition to all the friendly admonitions of God; and as it is also true, that God is under no obligation to stop him in his way—to continue his life, and use means with him—nor given him any promise that he will—and since the sinner by refusing the calls of God, to repentance, and by rejecting Christ as a Saviour, is daily increasing in guilt—Since all this is true, let any person judge—judge yourself, O sinner, whether your state is not dangerous and dreadful! These are solemn, and ought to be awakening considerations to all impenitent sinners; for you have nothing to rest upon in your present situation. The long abused and uncovenanted mercy of God, which you have all your days trampled upon, alone supports you.

Should that withdraw, you are irrecoverably lost ; and how long this may be extended to you is the most uncertain.

But there are other things beside those which have been stated, which render the situation of the sinner very dangerous. For

7. Beside being in this ruined state ; condemned and hastening to destruction, he is very insensible of his danger. The sinner is naturally blind to his ill desert, and consequently inattentive to the evils which threaten him. Danger is greatly increased, when not apprehended nor feared. That the impenitent are very blind to their danger, appears from the general security which prevails among them. It is no uncommon thing to see persons, who in their own view are destitute of true religion, quiet and unconcerned. Careless, secure sinners may be found in every place, professing themselves accountable, and designed for immortality, who live in the known and open contempt of the laws of God, and yet think but little about their present state, and scarcely bestow one serious thought upon the consequences of living without God, and without hope. Such instances are to be found among the aged, who are tottering over the pit. And such instances are common among the middle aged and the young. A very great part of mankind, even of those who live under the light of the gospel, are evidently pursuing worldly enjoyments and possessions, as their chief good, and do not even profess any concern for the interest of their own souls ; but live as if all would be



well with them, and they had nothing to fear from the nature and tendency of sin. Such persons are in imminent danger of falling into hell. Their danger is greatly increased by their security, and they discover too, evident marks of a reprobate mind and scared conscience, which nothing will awaken but the light of eternity. The peculiar danger of such persons arises from their security under the means of grace. The sinner must be convicted of his sin and danger, or he can never be recovered. Convictions are necessary even to show the sinner the need of a new heart, and of a Saviour from wrath. It is not the manner of God to convert the sinner before he shows him, in an impressive manner, his guilt and danger. The truths of the gospel must be attended to, and in some measure understood, before the sinner can have correct views of himself and of a Saviour.—They therefore who disregard the gospel, are in no way to become the subjects of right affections, which are founded upon correct apprehensions of truth. The secure, careless sinner is opposed to such convictions, and willingly avoids the means of such impressions; and that company, and those places where he is likely to meet the just reproof of his sins, are unpleasant to him. And if at any time, he is in some measure impressed, he will try various methods to silence the accusations of his conscience, and hush all his fears to sleep. Now this is an awful, though common case. The sinner, who is careless and secure, who avoids the means of conviction, is not likely to discover his guilt and danger, and consequently will not escape to the

strong hold. So that if men are not first convinced of sin, and truly awakened to a sense of their criminality and danger, we are not to expect, they will ever be converted to God. From all which it appears that sinners are in imminent danger ; that they stand on slippery places, and the time is fast hastening when their feet shall slide. This soon will be their dreadful state, unless they are awakened, converted and turned to God by repentance ; and the probability of this is diminishing every day. The longer they live in sin, the more insensible they become to their guilt and danger, and the less hope there is that the means, under which they have long lived securely, will ever profit them. How affecting is the situation of sinners ! danger seems to surround them on every side. How evident is it, “ that there is no peace to the wicked.” Standing on slippery places, they are in danger every day, of falling into hell. This is the state of every sinner in this assembly. “ O awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee life.”

#### *IMPROVEMENT.*

1. If the situation of sinners be thus dangerous, we can see the folly of indulging an envious spirit towards them, even in their highest state of worldly prosperity. David was guilty of this folly, and wickedness. “ For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” This he confessed with shame and humiliation before God. “ So foolish was I, and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee.” There is nothing

in the situation of sinners to excite envy, but every thing to call forth the compassion of every child of God. Look at the situation of the most prosperous sinner through the glass of revelation ; view attentively the situation of the rich man in the gospel, drawn by our Saviour ; see his wealth flowing in on every side—not even room to bestow his goods. See Lazarus lying at his gate, poor, friendless, sick and dying : “ The rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day.” Look attentively at these two men. What do you see ? Much, you say, in the state of the rich man to be desired ; much to be deprecated in the state of Lazarus. Look again, examine the picture which Christ has drawn of these two men. You see one setting down amidst his abundance, and saying to himself, “ soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; eat, drink and be merry.” You see death lie concealed from his view, like the serpent under the flowers of the garden. You see death in some unexpected moment strike the fatal blow ; the curtain drops, eternity opens, and you see this rich man fall from his affluence, his security, his elevation into hell. In the same picture, you see Lazarus, poor, but satisfied with his lot ; sick, but patient ; waiting “ all the days of his appointed time till his change come.” “ After having suffered according to the will of God” he falls asleep, and is carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom. You are ready to exclaim, “ O let me die the death of the righteous ; let my last end be like his.” Christian, never envy the

sinner, should you see him “clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day.”

2. If the situation of sinners is so dangerous, how reasonable is concern for the soul. Concern for an object implies danger. If a man ever acts reasonably, it is when anxious that his soul be not lost. The man who can think that such anxiety is unreasonable, gives the greatest proof of his own stupidity. The world would not think a man unreasonable who had a large estate in danger, if he were anxious to secure it. The world would not think the merchant unreasonable, who had a large property on the seas, were he anxious. The world would not think a sick man unreasonable, who should send for a physician, and anxiously inquire, what he should do; No man’s conscience, however stupid he lives, will allow him to say, that the world is of more value than the soul. If it be reasonable for a man to inquire, what he shall eat, what he shall drink, how he shall live a few years in this world, how much more, that he should be anxious, how and where he shall live through an eternity. The question, which the poor distressed jailor proposed to the Apostles, is the most reasonable, that a man can ask, “Sirs, What shall I do to be saved?” And should the most careless sinner in this assembly, for a single moment, see the worth of his soul, and its danger, he would instantly join with the anxious jailor in his reasonable question.

How can you excuse your neglect of your souls? You are concerned for your bodies, how you shall feed

them, how you shall clothe them ; when sick, how you shall heal them, and yet have no concern for your immortal soul. This was the case with the rich man in the gospel, he was anxious, but it was for the world. Perish not like him. Your soul is in danger, and will perish, unless you attend to its everlasting concerns. While it is called to day, hear his voice, that your soul may live.

## SERMON XV.

A FAMINE OF THE WORD.

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AMOS, viii. 11.

*Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.*

THE prophet Amos lived in a time, when the kingdoms of Israel and Judah enjoyed great religious privileges, and when they were exceedingly undervalued and abused. The prophet Isaiah lived about the same time; a man whose mind was more enlightened in the things of Christ's kingdom than any other prophet. How plainly does he speak concerning the birth, the life and sufferings of Christ? The ministry of such men was a peculiar privilege, which should have excited the gratitude of a whole people; because they were placed under advantages of becoming a wise and happy people. The people of Israel were distinguished above every other nation, in having committed to them the oracles of God, and by the mission of the

prophets, who spake to them in the name of the Lord. Spiritual barrenness in them was a sin attended with peculiar aggravations. It is one of the most reasonable things, "that where much is given, much should be required." And it is reasonable and proper, "that the kingdom of God should be taken from a people, who undervalue and abuse it, and given to a people who will bring forth its fruit."

How plain is it, that, in the divine estimation, the word of God, the ministry of reconciliation is a peculiar favour, and that the abuse of it is a sin, which God will not long tolerate? When the Sabbaths of God become a weariness, and his ordinances are neglected and despised; when his prophets, and messengers are persecuted and rejected, as they were in the days of Amos, we may be sure, such a people will not long be indulged with their spiritual privileges. A famine of the word is threatened in the text, as being not only of the nature of a judgment, but the greatest of a temporal nature, which could be inflicted on a people. There cannot be a greater evil inflicted on a rebellious child, than to leave him to himself, to gratify him in his unreasonable desires, and to deprive him of the advantages which he has abused. So in the text, God threatens to punish the neglect and abuse of his word, by taking it away. It had been given as one of the greatest privileges, and therefore God considers the deprivation of it, as the greatest judgment. Our text therefore implies

I. That God considers the ministration of his word the greatest privilege to a people.

II. That he therefore considers the removal of gospel privileges from a people as the heaviest judgment.

III. That the neglect and misimprovement of the word and ordinances of God will be attended with their removal.

I. God considers the ministration of his word, the greatest privilege to a people. There are perhaps but few who have any considerable acquaintance with the scriptures, and who give their assent to their divine authority, who will deny them to be a privilege. God always taught the people of Israel to consider themselves distinguished from all other nations, by having his word and ordinances among them. And it is evident that pious men among them did consider their nation greatly distinguished by their peculiar privileges. But the things, they were taught to consider as privileges, and which pious men did so consider, resulted to them from divine revelation. Their advantages above the heathen about them, consisted in the institutions, both moral and ceremonial, which they received from God. The single institution of the Sabbath was to that people a privilege of inestimable worth; as it gave all classes an opportunity of hearing the law of God read and inculcated upon them. In this connexion, hear the words of Moses to this nation. "Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard and live; or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs and by won-



ders, according to all that the Lord thy God did for you in Egypt before thine eyes? Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the Lord, he is God. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice that he might instruct thee." That people were distinguished from others by divine institutions only. Unto them "pertained the adoption, the giving of the law and the promises, the glory and the covenants." The Apostle, in answer to this inquiry, "What advantage then hath the Jew," above other nations? answers, "Much every way, chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God. From these and other passages, it appears, that God considers his word not merely as a privilege, but the greatest, a people can enjoy. It was on this account, that Christ represents "Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida as exalted unto heaven." And why God taught Israel to consider his word, as a peculiar privilege, and why we are bound to treat it as such, will appear from the following remarks,

1. In the divine word we have the character of God revealed to us. Need I say, how much concerned men are to know the character and designs of him, on whom they now depend, and from whom, they are to receive their final sentence of retribution. Has the character, I might say, even the being of God been known, without divine revelation? Let the condition of the heathen world in all ages be received as an answer to this inquiry. Creation is a display of God; but how little knowledge have mankind derived from this display? Such is the natural blindness of the

human heart in consequence of the apostacy, that they need a clearer discovery of God ; a brighter medium in which they may see God. This is evident to a demonstration from the universal gross ignorance of God, which always has prevailed among those nations, whose reason has not been assisted by a particular divine revelation. Though they have always had the book of nature open before their eyes, yet they have always been Idolatres ; and not one nation is to be found upon the earth, which has preserved any tolerably just ideas of God, without divine revelation. They have not even preserved the unity of God, but have multiplied almost beyond calculation the objects of their worship. And this has always been the case in those lands and among those nations, which once enjoyed the advantages of revelation, but have been for their abuse, deprived of them. This was the case with the descendants of Adam, of Noah, of Lot, of Abraham and others. This is the situation at present of most of those places, where the Apostles travelled and planted christian churches. And this would no doubt soon be the situation of this land, should it be deprived of gospel ordinances. As it is a fact, that gross idolatry has reigned in all places, where the advantages of divine revelation have not been enjoyed ; so wherever the gospel has been received, it has destroyed idolatry ; this must be ascribed to the superior light, which the gospel affords, above the light of nature, to discover the character of God, and the nature of true religion. For this reason the gospel ought to be considered, the most important privilege. Reason teaches us, that the

knowledge of God's character is necessary, in order to the knowledge of his will, and the way to please him ; and that the happiness of a creature absolutely depends on his obeying and pleasing his Creator.

2. The word of God is an important privilege, because it discovers the character of man. Next to the knowledge of God, in importance, is the knowledge of ourselves. A true knowledge of God acquired by his word, is essential to our obtaining just views of our own characters. This is evident because whenever people have been destitute of the assistance of revelation, and so ignorant of the character of God, they appear in fact ignorant of themselves. Some among the heathen philosophers taught, that man perished like the beast ; others that man was superior in many respects to the immortal gods. But in the word of God, the character of man is most clearly pointed out ; so that with regard to this important kind of knowledge, we have greatly the advantage of the heathen. In the word of God, man appears a reasonable, accountable, guilty and endangered creature. The consciences of mankind have indeed, in all ages suggested to them that they were guilty creatures, and that God was angry with them for sin ; and this impression has put them upon offering sacrifices to appease their gods and atone for their sins. But notwithstanding this general notion of guilt, yet the heathen have always been very ignorant of the nature of sin, and their exposedness on its account. But in the word of God, we learn the apostacy of man, a truth they could not know without it. Man here appears an undone, lost creature. The

law of God by unfolding duty, has unfolded the nature and evil of sin. This law plainly teaches us, that duty essentially consists in loving God, with such an affection, as sets him above all other beings, and in exercising a kind, friendly affection to all mankind ; an affection which implies benevolence even to enemies, and forbids envy, hatred and every other sinful passion. And no where is there to be found, such a clear revelation of God's wrath against the sinner, as we find in the sacred oracles. Here the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men. To become acquainted with our sin and danger is of the highest importance, provided, there is any way of deliverance. This will lead me

4. To say, that the word of God is the most important privilege, because it discovers a remedy for the sin and misery of this guilty world. For all the knowledge we have of a way of escape from divine wrath, due to us for sin ; and of coming to the enjoyment of God, we are wholly indebted to divine revelation. Man by reason and experience may discover, that he is a sinner and exposed on its account, but his reason never could discover a sufficient remedy. It is the glory of the gospel to unfold a consistent way of divine communication between God and sinners ; that alone can teach, how God can be merciful and yet just. It seems a dictate of nature, that some atonement is necessary ; " that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." Without the word of God, who can answer this important question, " Wherewith shall

I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" "He hath shown thee, O man, in his word, what is good." Is it not then evident, that the word of God is a precious privilege; the greatest which God can bestow on a people? If this be a truth, then

II. The removal of gospel instruction, and gospel ordinances is a heavy calamity, a dreadful judgment on a people. The loss of any privilege is a calamity. And if it be taken from us, because we have misimproved it, is it not a judgment, and a manifest token of divine anger? The greater any privilege is which we have enjoyed, the greater is the calamity in being deprived of it. It hath been shown, that God considers his word, including gospel ordinances, a great privilege. It is placed first in the catalogue of external advantages. In this way, God reveals more of his character than in any other. Here we may see more of his wisdom, goodness and grace than in all his other works. Here it is that we learn his gracious designs towards sinners. It is kindly designed to help our ignorance and discover to us, our sinfulness and danger, and the way in which we may escape deserved ruin, and obtain that everlasting life, which is brought to light in the gospel. Now it is very manifest, that to be deprived of such a privilege is the greatest temporal calamity which can befall a person or a people. It is more calamitous, than a natural famine. For the body to be in want of proper food and nourishment is a small evil, compared to the condition of a soul starving for want of instruction. Of such infinite importance is the happiness of the soul, compared with that

of the body, that it is of little comparative consequence, what state the body is in, whether full or hungry, if the soul be in health and prosper. If this has suitable nourishment, and a relish for its proper food, the man has a most desirable portion, even if his body be in pain and want. To live in poverty, destitute of the comforts, and necessaries of life, is a great calamity; but to be in ignorance of God, and of the way of salvation by Christ is an unspeakably greater calamity; in the same proportion is it greater as the interest, the everlasting happiness of the soul is more important than the temporal ease and comfort of the body.

And it may further be observed, that a famine of the word is not only always a calamity, but is often a judgment, and a direct proof of God's anger against those who have enjoyed those privileges, and abused them. They who are once favoured with these advantages never loose them, but in consequence of their misimprovement, and abuse of them. There are many nations, who, in ages past, have been indulged with gospel privileges, who at this day are destitute of the knowledge of the true God, and the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. And where is the nation or people, who have enjoyed these privileges and are now without them, but have lost them through their own fault? Such an instance is not to be found. Many have been the attempts of heathen princes to destroy these privileges from among conquered nations, but they never could do it without their consent. These privileges were enjoyed by the ancient Jews, and while they prized them, they retained them, and by despis-

ing lost them. So it was with the churches in Asia planted by St. Paul, they gradually lost the knowledge of Christ, by neglecting and abusing the privileges of the gospel. So it has ever been ; and God will continue to punish a wicked, unthankful people in a way suited to the nature of their crime. The loss of these privileges is a terrible judgment, as it is an evidence of the wickedness of a people, and of God's righteous indignation against them. When a people do not like to retain God in their knowledge, he gives them up to delusions, to believe a lie ;—A fearful prelude of approaching destruction.

III. We come to show, that the misimprovement and neglect of the word and ordinances of God, will be followed with their removal.

This is the punishment threatened in the text. And it is threatened as the heaviest judgment, God has in store for a people who have enjoyed, but abused his word and ordinances. God had often brought on the Jews the sword and the pestilence as punishments for their sins ; but when they would not be reclaimed by common judgments, he threatens them with a famine of the word ; he would leave them to that state of ignorance which they chose. He would leave them to perish for lack of vision. The evils of this state have, in some degree, been described ; but on this part of the subject, we shall be more particular. Need I stay to prove that the removal of privileges will be the consequence of abusing them ? Has not this threatening been carried into effect against Israel ? Let me refer you to a passage in Isaiah, from which you will learn what is im-

plied in this threatening. "And now go to, I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard, I will take away the hedge thereof and it shall be eaten up, and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down, and I will lay it waste. It shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds, that they rain no rain upon it." And the prophet Jeremiah, describing the miseries of Judah and Jerusalem, which were a fulfilment of the prediction and threatening in our text, says, "the punishment of the iniquity of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown as in a moment. And did not our Saviour, by cursing the barren fig tree, design to hold up a solemn lesson to mankind? Do not imagine that these passages are applicable to the Jews only. Does not the Apostle plainly teach us, that they apply to the Gentiles as well as Jews? Hear his memorable words—"If God spared not the natural branches," when unfruitful, "take heed lest he spare not thee." "Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high minded but fear." I now return, and say, that the judgment threatened in the text is the natural and necessary consequence of neglecting and abusing the gospel. Knowledge of the christian system, as well as of other useful subjects, is acquired and preserved by attention to the proper means. Is there any subject in which people will be informed and correct, without attention? And are not persons found ignorant in the things of God in proportion to their inattention? And when it becomes a mat-



ter of indifference with a people whether they have the word and ordinances of God among them, or whether they attend upon them, that people are fast preparing for their removal. Is there a single privilege, civil or religious, which will long remain with a people when perverted and abused? Hence as a people become ignorant of the gospel, they fall into errors and delusions of almost every kind, both in principle and practice. It is an observation of Christ, that he that walketh in darkness, knoweth not whither he goeth. He is exposed to stumble at every obstacle in his way, and to mistake his path at every step. Are not these remarks supported by facts? The removal of the gospel from a people is the natural consequence, under the divine government, of abusing it. And God has in fact, executed these threatenings upon every people, who have greatly undervalued and neglected the gospel of his grace. How impressively has this threatening been executed on the Jewish nation, to whom God sent his word by the prophets, and his gospel by Christ and his apostles, "rising early and sending them?" And likewise against all those Gentile nations in Asia, who were once favoured with the gospel, and despised it. Is it not plain that they who treat the word of God, his day and ordinances, as those nations did, really expose themselves to the same judgments which have come on them? they are at this day, standing monuments of God's indignation against the abusers of his gospel. In this respect there has been a visible uniformity in the divine conduct toward those who are favoured with his word. And it has fared with

them, as they have treated their privileges. Among such nations, none have abused greater privileges, than the nation of Israel; and the curse of God has fallen on them in the heaviest degree. And other nations, to whom the gospel has been sent, and yet have not liked to "retain God in their knowledge," "he has given up to strong delusions to believe and worship gods which their hands have made." God began to publish his word to the eastern world, and the gospel has been now travelling westward for ages; and every nation where the gospel has come has been deprived of this inestimable privilege, left in ignorance, and given up to all the judgments naturally involved in such a state, in consequence of greatly abusing the word of life. From all which, we come to this natural conclusion, that when a people neglect and greatly undervalue gospel privileges, they expose themselves to the awful calamity and judgment of losing them. This is the sinful and dangerous situation of a people among whom degeneracy and a careless inattention prevail under the means of gospel instruction. The guilt of such is great; for they abuse the wonderful mercy of God in furnishing them with the means of knowing their duty, and the way of salvation by a crucified Saviour. Such a people are in a more dangerous condition, than the inhabitants of those places where the gospel has never come. It is God's usual method, when he sends his word to a people, to furnish all proper means, and make a full trial of privileges with them; and if they finally abuse them, he leaves them, and will visit them no more with such advantages. Where

is the nation which once were reclaimed from idolatry, and brought to embrace the gospel, and have greatly abused and finally lost their spiritual advantages, who have a second time been favoured with them in any considerable degree? we find that God has passed by such communities, who have sinned away their privileges, and left them under mahometan delusion, or in absolute heathenism. It is with societies and nations as with individuals, who having stifled and sinned away the strivings of God's Spirit; such are far less likely afterward to be the subjects of such influence, than those who have not been thus favoured. How impressive are the words of our Saviour, applied either to an individual, or nation?—"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man, is worse than the first. So shall it be with this generation." What is the plain import of this passage? Is it not, that a people who are in some degree reformed, but afterward relapse into sin and stupidity, are indeed in a more hopeless situation than before?—From the course of providence, this appears the fact with publick bodies. Of such God says in his providence, as he said of Ephraim in his word, "let him alone." And what the apostle says of apostatizing christians may justly be affirmed of all such, even

that they had “better not have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” It may be further observed under this head, that if it be a general truth, that those who despise gospel privileges, are exposed to the judgment threatened in the text, then it follows that a people who come within this description, are thus exposed to this great judgment. In whatever age, or country they may live—whether in the days of Amos, Paul, or in the present period—whether they inhabit Asia, Europe, or America ; all impenitent sinners under the gospel, are exposed to have the “kingdom of God taken from them, and given unto others.” Should it be granted, that our text had a primary reference to the Jewish nation, and pointed out the evils coming upon that people for their abuse of God’s word and ordinances ; yet it is not to be understood as confined to them ; but equally implicates other nations and societies, who enjoy these privileges, and conduct as they did: They were broken off from their olive tree, through unbelief ; and thou, standest by faith ; “Be not then high minded, but fear.” Is not this reasoning forcible ?—May not then the text be considered as an admonition and warning to all future generations, who enjoy their privileges, to avoid their sins and plagues ? Those divine threatenings, which point out the sin and danger of any one individual or society, equally point out the sin and danger of any other individual or society, which comes within the like description. These remarks

may be sufficient to show, that this prophecy and threatening may be as applicable to other communities, as to ancient Israel; and therefore is a subject in which you, as a people, are as deeply interested as they were. Hence a diligent and faithful improvement of your privileges, is the only ground on which you can expect long to enjoy them. "For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he spare not thee."

# SERMON XVI.

## A FAMINE OF THE WORD.

THE SUBJECT CONTINUED

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AMOS, viii. 11.

*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.*

**T**HE improvement of this important subject is now before us.

1. Are the word and ordinances of the gospel great privileges to a people? Then may we learn the distinguished advantages of this land. No people ever enjoyed the word of God, and its attendant privileges in an higher degree, than they have been enjoyed in this land, particularly in New England. Here we have had, not only the writings of Moses and those of the prophets, but of Christ and his Apostles, even the canon of scripture complete, to direct us in the way of duty and salvation. And not only the bible, but a multitude of other books which are of great use in un-

derstanding the scriptures. And here we have enjoyed the great advantages of Sabbath and sanctuary opportunities, and schools and seminaries of learning, designed, in a particular manner, to diffuse divine knowledge among the people. All these have been enjoyed under the most favourable circumstances. We have for the most part enjoyed them in peace, and under the auspices of civil power. Our constitution of government has not only protected us in the enjoyment of religious privileges, but extended its patronage to the virtuous and inquisitive, in every department of science. It has often been the case among other nations, that the civil powers, instead of protecting have deprived people of them, and done all they could to extirpate them from the land. So that those, who make the word of God the rule of their faith and practice, must do it at the peril of their lives. Many christian nations have not been permitted to have the bible in their own language, which is in effect to be deprived of it.

We, at this day, have all those external advantages, which arise from a full and clear revelation of the divine character, and of our own, of our duty, sin and danger, and of the method of divine grace in our recovery ; so that of all people we have the least ground to attempt to excuse sin by the plea of ignorance. Such are the means of knowledge in this land, that no one is under the necessity of being, or remaining ignorant of those things which "pertain to life and godliness." If any therefore be found ignorant in this land, it must be owing to criminal inattention to the means of knowledge, and

consequently such ignorance is wholly inexcusable. That any should be found, in such a land of light as this, ignorant of God, of the character, offices and design of the Mediator, and indeed, I may add, of every doctrine and duty contained in the scriptures, must be the effect of great and criminal neglect. Have we not reason to conclude, that such love darkness rather than light?—

2. Are we not, if the gospel be so great a privilege, under every obligation of gratitude to God for his word and ordinances?—The least reflection may convince any one, that God is under no obligation to bestow upon us these privileges, any more than upon those nations who do not enjoy them. That he should be under any obligation to any is impossible. Neither we, nor any of our sinful race deserve any favour from the hand of God. We deserved to have been left without a Saviour, and consequently without the gospel, which publishes the great things of redemption. But how deplorable would have been our situation, had these favours been withheld? It would, however, have been a treatment corresponding to our personal character. We cannot deny that we are fallen, guilty creatures, without contradicting the universal experience and consent of all generations, as well as the declarations of scripture. And if mankind, indeed, be in this sinful state, it is plain, that the provision of a Saviour is wholly a gracious provision; that justice would have called for no such expedient. Admit then, that God had conducted towards men on principles of justice, then compare this supposed situation of man



with his real circumstances in general, and with those who enjoy gospel light in particular, and you will readily discover the obligations of gratitude lying on the latter especially. In consequence of redemption, pardon is offered, which, without this, could not have been done. Sinners now, though prisoners to the justice of God, “are prisoners of hope.” “What then shall we render to God for all his benefits?”

3. Is the gospel a great privilege, then learn the great guilt of those who enjoy and yet despise it. Who they are who despise the gospel has been shown already; they are such as have it, and profess to believe it, and yet do not use all proper means to understand it—who though they admit its truth and divinity, yet refuse to comply with its precepts. In a word, all impenitent sinners, under the light of the gospel, are rejecters and despisers of it. And is there not reason to conclude, that there are many such characters among us?—Are there not some, who do not even give their assent to the truth of the scriptures, and who consider any profane history more worthy of their attention and belief? Are there not others who, though they acknowledge the truth of the sacred books of scripture, have never given their attention to the subject? That there are many such characters in this land of gospel light is beyond all question. They are to be met with in every congregation; men who can give no good reason why they are professed christians rather than Jews, mahomedans or pagans; and who amidst abundance of light, can give but little better account of the christian system than children. Are there not

others who, though they have paid such attention to the gospel as to embrace it on rational evidence, yet refuse to comply with its important requirements, faith, repentance and an holy life? Are there not many such characters in this place? I would be understood to mean those who pay little attention to the bible; and who manifest but little conformity to it in their lives. How many among us, though not absolutely ignorant of the principles of christianity, yet whose knowledge is no way answerable to the means they have enjoyed, who really know but little about God and the things of his kingdom, compared with what they might have known, had they diligently improved their means of knowledge? The thinness of our publick assemblies, especially when any excuse can be found from cold or foul weather, proves that God's word and ordinances are not respected here as they ought to be, and as in fact they are, by people who consider them a privilege. It is with peculiar pain, that I reflect upon the apparent carelessness and increasing inattention of people to the Sabbath and worship of God, especially in this place. It is a reflection which must affect every sober mind, that this evil, should it increase a little longer, will put an end to the publick worship of God, and leave this house totally deserted; and God will write *Loammi* upon you, the melancholly memorial of departed glory. This is what I expect during my life, or soon after my decease. Such treatment of the gospel is attended with great guilt. It is manifest that such people undervalue and despise one of the greatest privileges

God ever bestowed on a people; and with this sin God will not long bear. "He will remove your candlestick out of its place" soon "except ye repent." Lightly to esteem these things is lightly to esteem infinite wisdom, love and mercy. Such conduct displays a temper full of baseness, and vile ingratitude. It discovers a want of a proper sense of our infinite obligations to God for providing a Saviour to redeem us from hell. It discovers the want of all right affection of heart to Jesus Christ. It also discovers a disregard to our own interest, for this conduct is the direct road to perdition. There are many ways to ruin, but the most direct and certain way is to despise Christ, and the way of salvation revealed in the gospel. This is the way in which all are travelling who neglect the word and worship of God, and live stupidly and wickedly amidst all the advantages offered them of becoming "wise unto salvation." Is not a man's, is not a people's guilt in proportion to the light which he or they oppose, and under which they sin? Is not this reasonable "that to whom much is given, much will be required?" There is no spot in the creation, where sin is so aggravated, where sinners are so inexcusable, as where the gospel shines, and is slighted. As wicked as hell is, it was never committed there. And does not this sin uncommonly prevail in this place? What will be its consequences? I mean not in a future, but in the present life. Our

4. Inference will answer this question. God will deprive us of gospel privileges. Is not our danger great? We have shown in the course of this subject, that they,

who abuse gospel privileges, are in great danger of losing them. And that this is an evil which prevails among us, is too evident to be denied. Our danger therefore is but too manifest to the eye of reason. We are verily guilty in this matter, and that to a great degree. We deserve the punishment threatened in the text. God has threatened it, and there is nothing to secure us more than others. The gospel secures the penitent and obedient, but none others. And it has been shown, that the loss of gospel privileges is the natural and even necessary consequence of neglecting and abusing them. Even did this neglect and abuse imply no moral evil, were it attended with no guilt, were it no token of divine disapprobation, this consequence would follow. The neglect of any privilege soon ends in its loss. But we have seen, that this is a crime, and a sin of the deepest stain, which God will punish. Has it not been shown, that leaving a people to spiritual blindness, and ignorance is an awful judgment, and the heaviest, that God ever sends on a people in this world? And we know that this judgment has been sent on many nations in past ages, who enjoyed, but abused these privileges; and by their loss have suffered a greater calamity than the evils of war, famine and pestilence. And what reasons can be assigned, why we shall not suffer the same privation, the same judgment? If our crimes are of the same nature, and as aggravated as theirs, on whom this judgment has been inflicted, why may it not be expected?—No sufficient reason, I presume, can be given why it may not. It is no argument that the threatening does not

reach us, because we live under a different dispensation. God is always the same, and religion is in all ages and places essentially the same. Sin is always the same in its nature, and must therefore expose the sinner, in every age, to the anger of God ; and expose him in proportion to the aggravation of his crimes, which will ever bear proportion to the light against which he has sinned.

The gospel dispensation differs from the Jewish ; but the difference does not consist in this, that ours is a dispensation of grace, and theirs is not. Nor does the christian dispensation afford the sinner any security in sin, nor tend to encourage it any more than the Jewish. But the essential difference between the two is this ; the gospel affords much greater light to discover the nature of duty, and our obligations to perform it ; and also the nature and consequences of sin, than the former dispensation did. And while it more clearly discovers our duty, and obligations, it is the occasion, consequently of increasing greatly our guilt in case its light be resisted. “ If while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin ? God forbid.” “ And if they who despised Moses’ law, died without mercy, under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God ?” and if it be a certain fact, that God, and his word are treated with indifference and neglect by us, our living under the gospel dispensation is so far from affording us any security, that our guilt and danger are greatly enhanced on this very account.

But how can it be reasonably supposed otherwise, than that we should be exposed to the heaviest judgments, when the privileges we enjoy, and the conduct of many under them are considered? There can be no dispute, but that the gospel is, at this day and in this place, greatly undervalued. It is our sin and reproach, my hearers, that such inestimable blessings, as the Sabbath, the house and worship of God, with the ordinances of Christ, should be disregarded and slighted as, in fact, they are in this place. There is a number of things which increase my apprehensions of danger on this ground.

1. The great coldness of professors. This is so general a thing as to threaten the desolation of the churches. But comparatively few of the multitudes in this highly favoured land, have even the outward form of godliness. And but a few of the small number who have, appear rationally and steadily engaged to support the bleeding cause of Christ in the world. Of the number of professed friends to Christ, a large proportion discover no hearty attachment to the cause of the Redeemer, but are cold, dull and indifferent, wanting life and spirit to stand up for God against evil-doers. This is a sin very provoking to God, and exposes a professing people to be given up of him, which is evident from what is said of the church of Laodicea, which professed friendship to Christ, yet manifested none. She did not openly oppose Christ, yet did nothing for him, but barely to assume his name. Christ reproves and condemns her in this pointed, expressive language, "I would thou wert cold or hot ;

so then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." It is a great reproach to Christ when professors walk contrary to his instructions, and live careless of their duty. Such conduct more deeply wounds the cause of Christ, and brings it into contempt, than all the attacks of infidels. For them to manifest a selfish, worldly spirit, an engagedness after the vanities of the world, more than for the honour of God, and the advancement of his kingdom, has the most direct tendency to bring the profession of Christ into contempt among men.

Though the scriptures teach us, that there will be hypocrites in the church, that we are not to judge of religion by the practice of its professors, but by the doctrines and duties which it teaches and enjoins, yet it is a fact, that the world have in all ages taken occasion, from the irregularities of false professors, to think and speak lightly of religion. Nothing is more common than so to judge; and nothing is more hurtful to those by whom this judgment is drawn; yet religion is, and will be so judged of by mankind at large. Hence the danger to the world, and the church from the unchristian walk of professors. How many stumble at the sins of professors; how many are encouraged, "to cast off fear and restrain prayer before God," by seeing professors do this?—How many are encouraged to live careless lives, not regarding the day and house of God, because they see some professors do this?

Let professors then remember, that they will, in a measure, be accountable for the evil which is done to

the souls of men, and the cause of Christ by their sins. And that every consideration calls on all, "who have named the name of Christ, to depart from iniquity." Nor is this the only way in which the cause of Christ is injured by professors. For while some are a standing reproach to religion, by their coldness and apparent indifference in the things of their salvation, there are others, who bring religion into contempt by great apparent zeal, with little knowledge of the gospel, and whose conduct, taken together, discovers no more real engagedness in religion, than that of luke-warm professors. Zeal for God, which is according to knowledge, cannot be too great; but zeal without knowledge is enthusiasm. Zeal in building up a party, is not christian zeal, but delusion. That zealous party spirit, which now so much prevails among some professed christians, is an anti-christian spirit, wherever found, and is an evil which threatens greatly the churches of Christ at this day. Among those who profess the greatest zeal for God, and regard to his glory, there is just reason to fear, that many are more engaged to make proselytes to a party, a particular sect, or denomination, than to make converts to Christ. There is no religion in this; so far from it, that it tends to bring religion into disgrace, by setting its professed friends at variance among themselves, and by the disorder and confusion, which prevail in their worship. When those, who have been so zealous in their religion, become in a few years indifferent, then forsake all worship, and live more careless than ever, which



often happens, many are led to conclude there is no reality in any profession of religion. Some of these persons and preachers are very much engaged, filled with zeal while dividing and distracting societies and churches; but when the object is effected, their zeal cools, and seems to languish, until excited by some similar enterprise.

2. May not a prevailing negligence in the duty of prayer be reckoned among the evils, which look with a threatening aspect on our American Zion? True religion is preserved in the world by the outpourings of the Spirit of God. Without these, religion would disappear with the present friends of God. Nothing short of the regenerating and sanctifying influence of the divine Spirit is sufficient to commence religion in the hearts of others. Human means and efforts, without these, will not effect this important end. And is it not a truth confirmed by the whole current of revelation, that it is God's manner to build up Zion in answer to prayer? All the remarkable revivals recorded in scripture were in answer to prayer. God has established a connexion between asking and receiving. But if God, by his Spirit, revives and maintains religion in answer to prayer, then an increasing attention, among a people, to prayer, is an evidence, that God is about to build up Zion. On the other hand, when people become negligent of this duty, it is an evidence of the decay of religion, and a prelude of approaching judgments on the church. Am I mistaken, when I say, that this duty is greatly neglected, in this

place, and that the number of prayerless families and souls is increasing every day? Each one can witness for himself, how this duty is regarded by him and others. But if it be true, and few I believe will question it, that family and secret prayer are rapidly declining; is it not a sad evidence that religion is departing from us? Though a form of prayer, constantly kept up, is no certain evidence of religion in the heart, yet we may certainly conclude that where there is no prayer, there is no religion. Prayer is the very life and breath of religion. It is the language of dependance and humble confidence in God. It is the expression of faith, repentance and gratitude. It is as natural for the child of God to pray, as it is for a child to ask his parent for food. When therefore prayer declines among a people, or in an individual, it is a decisive evidence, that religion is on the decay with that people and person. Each one present knows whether he contributes to the general danger by neglecting this duty; or whether he is daily lifting up his soul to God to have mercy on Zion, and save us from the judgment threatened in the text.

3. I am constrained to add, that the inattention of the rising generation, in this place, to religion, is a sad omen that the religion of Christ, which is our glory is departing from us. The fathers are gone, and going from the stage of action, and the middle aged are crowding after them, and what will become of the ark of the God of Israel, if the young are regardless of its safety? How can religion remain among us, if it be not encouraged and supported by you, who are to fill

their places? How can the name and profession of Christ continue with us, if you refuse to become followers of him? How can a visible church continue here, if you refuse to submit to his laws and to become real and visible christians? This is a day with us, when few young people indeed, I might say none, are willing to make a publick profession of Christ; and it is indeed a melancholy consideration, as it is a sign that there is little religion among them. This is a plain command; and if you are the friends of Christ, you have no excuse for your neglect. And if professors dishonour Christ by an unchristian spirit and walk, there is the more need of your professing him, and convincing the world by a holy life, that you are sincere, and that the religion of Christ is an important reality. But if you have no religion, and are therefore ashamed of Christ, how awful is your situation, and how gloomy the state of this place. Remember what Christ says of such, "He that is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of man be ashamed." No man's danger is lessened by the danger of others; nor can the negligence of others afford the least excuse for neglecting duty ourselves. But the more general any evil becomes, the greater is the publick danger. This consideration shows our danger in particular.

4. Ignorance of the doctrines of christianity, which is the natural consequence of inattention, is another thing by which we are endangered. In the course of this subject we have shown, that ignorance of the christian system, in those who enjoy the means of knowledge, is very criminal. The knowledge of the chris-

tian revelation is necessary to the knowledge of our duty. There are many sciences which a person may not understand, and yet be acquainted with the duties of his occupation ; but he, who is ignorant of the leading doctrines of the Bible, is of consequence ignorant of the leading duties of religion. He must be ignorant of the character of God ; of that of Christ ; of his own, and of consequence sees not his danger, nor the motives which the gospel sets before him to “ flee from the wrath to come.” Besides, ignorance of the doctrines of the gospel, exposes a people to delusions ; to false schemes of religion ; “ and to be carried about with every wind of doctrine, and the craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive.”

Over all these evils, my heart bleeds. They are strong indications of the approaching calamity in our text. It will come upon you in a short time. But is there nothing which can be done ? Nothing to avert this evil ? I will hope, that you are led to make this inquiry ; that you see the impending calamity, and desire to know how it may be avoided. I would say

1. Attend to the word preached. The preaching of the gospel is appointed of God as one important mean of knowledge. And he has made it your duty to attend on it with this design. By this, the ignorant may be instructed, the secure awakened, and the humble comforted. And it is often blessed of God for all these important purposes. It is the principal instrument, by which sinners are instructed, awakened and brought home to God. Hence it is said, “ faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Therefore carefully improve the sabbath, in attending upon the worship of God in his house ; and spend not the Lord's day in idleness on your beds, in your fields or shops ; nor in idle visits, and vain amusements. Make conscience of attending ; and when you come, come with a desire to obtain good. People loose the benefit they might receive from coming to the house of God, by coming without any design or desire to receive advantage. Come, seeking after the knowledge of God, and your duty, and then you will attend diligently to what is spoken in God's name. And when you hear, labour to treasure up the word in your mind. Spend not your time in the house of God in gazing upon this and that object and person ; nor in thinking on your weekly concerns ; say to all such, when you leave your home, as Abraham said to his servants, when he went up the mountain to offer his son, " abide ye here while I go and worship yonder." Something may be gathered from every discourse you hear. Comply with the kind advice of Solomon, " keep thy feet when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to offer the sacrifice of fools."

2. Meditate on what you hear. This is every way important after hearing the word of God preached ; both to retain it in mind, and compare it with the sacred oracles, by which every hearer should compare what is delivered. Then his faith will not stand on the opinion of another, but on his own knowledge of the doctrines and evidences of the gospel. The word of God is designed to direct our faith, and govern our practice ; but how can that direct our faith and govern our practice, which is, either not understood or forgotten ?

Some think they have done well if they set and patiently hear a sermon. And as soon as the preacher is done, they have done too; for they neither think nor speak of it more. They join their companions immediately, conversation follows, no way connected with the duties of the sabbath, and by the time they get home, the fowls of the air have picked up all the seed which was sowed in their hearts. This is one reason, why amidst so much instruction, so many remain ignorant and wicked. Instead of carrying it home with them, they leave it where they heard it, or loose it by the way. Be directed then, when you have heard the word of life, to recall it to mind; to meditate upon it, and compare yourselves by it. Say, such a sin has been reprov'd to day, am I guilty of it? Such a duty has been urg'd upon me, do I practise it? Such a grace was recommended, do I possess it? Such a rule was prescribed me, do I govern my conduct by it? By such a method, you would find that the word of God preached is not a vain, unprofitable thing. Then the painful labours of ministers would be attended with an increase of knowledge and grace among their people.

3. As you would avoid the just imputation of despising the word of God, and the evils threatened in the text, make private reading of the scriptures, and other books which tend to promote useful knowledge, a part of your daily entertainment. This method would be productive of great good, as it would inspire a taste for improvement, and open sources of innocent and christian entertainment. There are but

few in this favoured land but can read, and the things contained in the Bible are of common concern, and of the highest importance to all. It contains the things which concern our everlasting peace." It is the compass to direct our course in safety, through this tumultuous, fluctuating ocean of life, to the haven of eternal rest. This shows the importance of duly reading the scriptures. Should the mariner neglect his compass, he would soon lose his course, and probably strike upon the rocks and shallows.

The reasons why all should study the Bible are obvious. It contains a system of truth, the most important to all; and is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished to every good work." None may excuse themselves in the neglect of this duty, by the plea, that they have not time. Is it not a fact that people can find time for amusements, in which they delight? Do not most people spend more idle time every day, than would suffice, were it diligently improved, to make them well acquainted with the doctrines, and duties of the gospel? There is perhaps no calling so full of care, but would, were persons disposed, afford time every day for religious employments. And there is this encouragement to this duty, that the most important truths, and useful duties are the most obvious, and the most easily understood. So that the honest inquirer may rationally expect to find both truth and duty.

In particular, accompany reading with humble prayer to God, that he would open your understanding to give you the knowledge of himself; that you may see the wonderful things of his law—and the precious truths of his gospel; that so you may become wise unto salvation.

Lastly; Be directed to repent and believe the gospel. This will save you from the threatening in the text. This will put you beyond the reach of fatal errors. Then will “your heart be established with grace.” Then will the word of God be to you a never failing source of entertainment and delight. When you yield a cordial obedience to the divine will, “you shall know the doctrine whether it be of God.” Then every truth will contribute its portion to prepare you more and more for the great and glorious, and solemn scenes, which death and judgment will soon open to your view.

But while you remain impenitent, your danger is great; for should you escape every error in speculation, and clearly understand every doctrine of the gospel, you hold the truth in unrighteousness; you will perish. The greatest knowledge which is merely speculation, accompanied with the fairest profession, will avail you nothing, in point of acceptance, without a broken, contrite heart; and an unfeigned love of the truth. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” This is the only way to escape the dreadful doom of those who despise the word of God—of those who know not God, and obey not the gospel of our



Lord Jesus Christ." Have then your eye open to read—your ear to hear, and your heart to receive the word of God. To this join fervent prayer, that you may know and practise your duty. When you shall find that the gospel is indeed a privilege—a blessing—a Saviour of life unto life to your souls, you will find that the "merchandize of wisdom is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold." "That her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths peace" "And happy is every one that retaineth her." Therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding."

## SERMON XVII.

A NEW YEAR'S SERMON.\*

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HEBREWS, X. 3.

*But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.*

**I**N these words the Apostle has reference to the Jewish sacrifices, especially on the great day of atonement. Their sacrifices were repeated yearly, as the text informs us; on which day, Aaron the high priest remembered and confessed over the head of the victim, the sins of the people, for the past year, which confession implied a resolution to amend their ways, and avoid the like crimes for the future. This was a reasonable, and indeed an essential part of their duty; for what good purpose would it answer to them, or any other people to recollect past sins, unless with a view to repentance and reformation? Though the external actions prescribed in these sacrifices were of a ceremonial nature, and therefore ceased with that dispensation, yet the temper of heart implied is the same as

\* January 1, 1794.

the gospel now requires. Therefore the text may naturally point out the duty of mankind under the more clear dispensation of gospel grace.

We are this day entering upon a new year, and I can sincerely wish, that it may prove a happy year to you all. But this fond wish, in the way it is commonly understood, can hardly be indulged in a world designed for a state of trial, and when the dispensations of providence are accommodated to answer this important purpose, and improve the mortal state of fallen man. We know nothing of what lies under the awful veil, which covers futurity, any further than God has lifted it by prophecy, declaration and promise. Any thing more is uncertain, and merely conjectural. The final state of the righteous and wicked, can be clearly seen through the medium of divine revelation.

But whether the year, we have now entered upon, will prove to us a season of prosperity or adversity—a scene of sickness or health—or a mixture of both—whether we and our friends will live until another new year, or die before it arrives, are particular events with a thousand others, which time alone will disclose. These are events which may happen, or may not. With respect to these, it will be yet as God is pleased to ordain. However great the uncertainty is, as to these events, yet this truth is clear, and established by the whole current of revelation, with respect to every individual present, that he will be in heaven or hell, or more ripe for these states, before another year. We may die this year—some doubtless will. This has

been the event with respect to some of our neighbours and acquaintance, ever since we have lived. And we have no reason to expect, that all of us shall be exempted from death another year. And all who shall die this year will ascend to heaven or sink to hell. And each individual of those who shall live, will be either better than he now is, or worse. More prepared for heaven, or for hell. For there is no person living, but is in the road to the one or the other—traveling to a fixed and final abode; and as he advances to this state, he is ripening for it.

The christian is growing in grace, and in divine knowledge, becoming more and more “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. They who wait on the Lord, renew their strength; and they who have clean hands, wax stronger and stronger.”

But the wicked are daily adding sin to sin, and accumulating a load of guilt; and when their iniquities are full, “their feet will slide,” and they will fall into hell.

This will doubtless be the dreadful case with some sinners this year. And is it not to be feared, that this will be the awful portion—the miserable condition of some in this place—in this assembly? You have often been informed from the authority of God, that this will be the certain consequence of a life spent in sin; and you are now warned of it, with the painful expectation, that the warning will be disregarded.

The reason why this has been the case and will probably continue to be the case, is owing doubtless to a combination of criminal causes. And as we are now

entering upon a new year, we shall do well to make a solemn pause, upon its threshold, and consider what events may take place with respect to us this year; the necessity of being prepared to meet them, and particularly to look back, and call to remembrance the sins of the past year. Solemnly consider, I entreat you, the sins you have committed—the days you have misimproved—the sabbaths you have neglected—the offers of mercy you have slighted, that you may enter on this year with new resolutions, and improve it better than you have any which are past.

Remember, if you do not improve it better, you will abuse it worse. Let it be impressed on the conscience and heart of every impenitent sinner in this assembly, that if you do not improve future time better than you have improved the past, the longer you live, the more wicked you will grow, and the more dreadful will be your destruction. You had better die this year, than to live an hundred years in sin and die emphatically accursed.

It has been said that this year you may die. It is probable, that a number of us, before the year shall close, will be numbered with the great congregation. In twenty years past, I have recorded one hundred and ninety deaths in this place, which on an average is almost ten a year; and yet through the goodness of God, there has been no uncommon mortality during the whole of this period. From the general course of providence then, we may naturally expect that with respect to some present, this will be the last year of their state of probation. And indeed who can

say with any degree of assurance, that he shall have the opportunity of another sabbath, or of hearing another sermon? There have been repeated instances of persons who have been in this house of worship on one sabbath, and in their graves before another. This shows the importance of improving this year, this day, since we know not what a year, a day may bring forth.

This may be a year of prosperity to some, and of great and distressing adversity to others. You may enjoy an uninterrupted scene of health in your persons and families, and your worldly pursuits may succeed beyond your expectations. Or you may be just on the borders of distressing sickness, in which wearisome days and nights will measure off the remaining span of life. Some will probably form new connexions, in which they may promise themselves much happiness, and indeed enjoy it. Others may meet with bereavements of friends--losses in their interest--their habitations may be turned into ashes, and they and their families reduced to want and misery. But whatever circumstances await us, one thing will always be needful, I mean true religion. Without this you will increase in pride, and hardness of heart, should you enjoy health and prosperity. Without this, you will "despise the chastening of the Lord," or "faint when you are rebuked of him." In short, you will grow worse and worse, whether God smiles, or frowns upon you in the course of his providence. On the other hand, they who possess christian grace, are habitually prepared for whatever may happen. Should they enjoy health, they will be thankful; if sick or in affliction, they will

be humble. Should they meet with losses and disappointments, they will be patient; and the various scenes of life will strengthen and confirm their grace. Should they be called to meet death, they will be found in peace of their Judge. For such to "live is Christ, and to die is gain." These observations show the pressing importance of religion, which is the only preparation to meet God in his providences.

We may therefore lay it down as an undoubted truth, that whatever tends to divert the minds of people from the concerns of their souls, and render them less thoughtful and attentive to the doctrines and duties of real religion, is of a dangerous and fatal tendency; and must be avoided, would we be the subjects of lasting happiness. There are many things which contribute to a state of carelessness and security in sin, and to settle persons down in a state of inattention to the great end for which they were made.

When we see a person, or people going on secure in sin, unmindful of God, the consequences of a stupid life, we may find, on examination, a number of criminal causes which have contributed to this. It is a known and acknowledged fact, that one sin leads to another, and often to many. Thus ignorance opens the door to a great many evils, and this ignorance is a real crime, when means of knowledge are at hand. This opens a door for persons to do many things which should not be done, on the principle that these things are innocent; and also to omit many things which are dutiful. Ignorant persons are commonly very inattentive to the consequences of present conduct. They

often do things, which are followed with the most destructive consequences to themselves and others, without thought or design. But a wise, understanding man considers his way, determines the propriety of any proposed action, by the certain, or probable good or bad consequences to himself and others, while "the simple pass on and are punished." Ignorance is the parent of superstition, and false schemes of religion among a people.

Through ignorance of the clear light, and abundant evidence there is of the truth and divinity of the holy scriptures, many fall into infidelity, and sink down into total neglect of all the means of grace. It is on this principle that ignorance leads persons into destructive errors, and blinds them to truth and duty, that God says "my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee." The ignorance here complained of, was among a people who had the advantages of divine revelation. They were not heathen, but Jews, unto whom were committed the oracles of God. This destructive evil when found among those who live in a land of gospel light, is generally owing to one or the other of these causes; either to ignorant, false teachers, or to great and criminal inattention in a people who enjoy proper instruction. When there are abundant means of knowledge, and a people remain ignorant, their ignorance must be imputed to them as a sin, and they are chargeable with all the evil consequences resulting from it.



Strife and contention among a people, either political, or religious, tend to banish serious consideration, and take off the mind from the value and importance of improving time to its great purpose. Especially do they unfit the mind for the public and social worship of God, and of consequence tend to put an end to the practice of this duty, among a people thus at variance among themselves. Not only so, but these evils display themselves in acts of revenge and violence; and prompt the parties to spend precious time in contriving how they shall counteract and frustrate the designs of their adversaries. Hence the Apostle tells us, and the experience of ages has confirmed his observation, "that where strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." It is impossible in the nature of things, that religion should prevail in a society where these prevail; for they directly and powerfully tend to make a thoughtless and secure people more thoughtless and secure, and to banish even the form of religion from a place. Fire and water, light and darkness are not more contrary to each other, than strife and contention to love and peace. How unprepared is a people to improve time, to meet God in his providences, whose hearts and lips are filled with revenge and strife! How unprepared is the proud, contentious man to make the humble prayer which Christ taught his disciples! The person, who is sensible that these prevail in his life, must feel the absurdity of expressing with his lips what is so foreign from his heart. Nothing quenches a spirit of prayer among a people more effectually than variance and strife. The man whose bosom is agitated with these unsocial passions,

feels himself totally unfit to unite in prayer with others, or to enter into his closet. Such men like Cain who was wroth, will rather like him go out from the presence of the Lord, than assemble with his people. All these sins must be sought out, and guarded against, if we would rightly improve time. And it is owing to the prevalence of these evils, that so many, (and doubtless the number in every place is great,) are wholly unprepared to enter on a new year, with any reasonable ground of expectation, that the blessing of God will attend them through all its changing scenes. This certainly should be our great concern; and therefore it is of the greatest consequence to every individual, who finds himself unprepared to enter on a new year, with an heart reconciled to God, and his fellow-creatures, and with a fixed resolution to spend it in his service, to enquire this day, in what sins he is living;—in what evil habit he is indulging himself, and to lay them aside on the threshold of this new year. How criminal, is it to carry old sins and vicious habits into a new portion of precious time, which should be devoted to him who gives it, and gives it for the most important purpose! In what sin then do you live?—What are the particular and prevailing sins of the past year? No question but upon faithful examination, the Achan may be found;—the accursed thing which is in the midst of you may be discovered. Individuals may discover their secret sins—may bring them to remembrance and repent of them before God. Such must be referred to the conscience of the guilty subject. Should any still attempt to conceal them from his own view

and indulge them, remember that the curse of God will follow you into this year, and you may be cut down as a cumberer of his ground. Should you be continued, you will continue to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath."

The state of religion in general, is in a melancholy situation at this day. It is a season of great dejection, as to any concern for the honour of God, and the prosperity of his kingdom in the world. An uncommon degree of stupidity and inattention seems to prevail in almost every place, particularly in this part of our country. One season and year after another is passing away, "and we are not saved." Scarcely can we hear with us, of one poor captive soul, who is enquiring with engagedness "what he shall do to be saved." Irreligion, profanity and infidelity prevail more and more; and there is no present prospect of the abatement of these evils; but rather that the world will grow worse and worse. That this is true, is too evident to need proof. It is lamented by all sober, thoughtful people. And you need not be informed, that this is remarkably the case in this place. You are all sensible that the religious state of this people is such as to give just reason to fear, and even to conclude that without a reformation, and return to the doctrines and practices of our fathers, there will be no visible regard paid to God and the things of religion. I hope I may be mistaken, but from present appearances, I think God will send among you "a famine, not of bread, but of hearing the word of the Lord." The religion of Jesus is the glory as well as happiness of a people;

and is not this evidently on the decay in this and the neighbouring towns? This has been in years past eminently the glory of New England. The time has been when New England was the most distinguished of all the christian world for a general, strict and zealous regard for the pure doctrines and duties of religion—for purity in principle, union in doctrine, in church discipline, worship and manners. The time has been when divine institutions were sacredly regarded, and he was considered as a monster of wickedness, who dared to speak lightly, or treat disrespectfully the word and ordinances of God. And should infidels of the present day, tell you, that all this was the effect of ignorance and religious bigotry, it would be sufficient to reply, that all serious regard for God and concern for the soul, is only bigotry and superstition in the view of such people. But can any reasonable person suppose, that a religious regard to God—to his institutions, which makes men just, sober, kind and friendly to all around them, and peaceable members of society, is only bigotry and superstition? If this be superstition, would to God it more abounded. The remark admits of no question, that truth, justice and friendship, in short, peace and good order have prevailed exactly in proportion as a regard to the doctrines and duties of christianity has prevailed. We may then be sure, that a careful conformity to the doctrines and duties of religion is not superstition, since they produce the best effects on social life. But this glory is departing from us, and it seems the prevailing language of the practice of men, at this day, “let it

go." The glory of God is not the object of man. Their language is, "what profit is it that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts." This evil I have often contemplated with an aching heart, and I doubt not but it has been so with others. And at times, I almost despair of ever seeing a spirit of serious enquiry prevailing among us.

I have now entered on the twenty-first year of my ministry in this place. I am sensible, that I am not possessed of that easy address, and commanding eloquence with which many preachers of the gospel are furnished. And I am also sensible, that I have been greatly deficient in zeal and engagedness of spirit, considering the infinite importance of the cause which I am called to plead. I seldom attempt to preach without great mortification, before God, for my coldness and indifference. But I think I can say, in the presence of God, who searcheth my heart, that I have uniformly studied and preached with a view to your advantage. I have ever preached what I verily believed to be the "truth as it is in Jesus." It has been my main design, in preaching, to unfold the great doctrines, and inculcate the important duties of christianity. And I have dwelt the most on those, which I believed the most important to you ; and which you and I must embrace, to meet the approbation of God. I have preached that holy law of God as the rule and standard of duty ; and by which you and I must be judged. I have laboured to unfold the nature and benevolent design of the gospel of the grace of God. I entertain not the least doubt of the truth of those

doctrines which I have preached to you; and feel that I can safely die, resting my eternal all upon them. Considering my feeble constitution, and frequent infirmities, I have been supported longer, and enabled to preach more frequently, than I expected when I settled with you. And I desire to acknowledge with gratitude to God, and you, that I have enjoyed a degree of personal respect and friendship among you, in general, far exceeding my expectations. It has often been a matter of wonder, and what I could not sufficiently account for, that while many of my brethren in the ministry, more deserving than myself, have fallen into broils and difficulties with their people, that I should live in peace with mine. I can say, what I believe can be said with truth, but by few ministers, that for more than twenty years, the whole time of my acquaintance with this people, I have scarcely had occasion to complain of personal abuse, or designed ill treatment, from an individual, old or young. And I have often had substantial testimonials of your respect and friendship, in repeated instances of liberality, from individuals, for which I give you thanks.

But still, I have reason to complain. My complaint is of the heaviest and most discouraging nature. You cannot be at a loss to know what it is. I have had the mortification, which has often been distressing, of apparently labouring, almost, if not wholly, in vain. The gospel has had but little visible effect in this place for many years. If this be owing to my unfaithfulness, I can say, here am I, "let him do with me what seemeth to him good." If I am a stumbling block—if I

stand in the way of his merciful designs to you, I can only request him "to send by the hand of whom he will." I must tell you, that I have but little hope that the gospel will be more successful in time to come. For those evils prevail here, which have the most powerful and direct tendency, to prevent the success of the gospel. I will mention two, which are publickly known and generally noticed. I mean religious contentions and divisions, and a neglect of publick worship. These evils tend to increase each other, and open a wide door to almost every other evil. Occasions of strife and contention have been multiplied among us; and have had the most destructive influence on the peace of families and neighbourhoods. They have alienated the affections of neighbours and friends from each other, and dissolved the strongest bonds of society. A society divided against itself, is as surely brought to desolation as a family. This evil has had a dreadful effect on religious order in this place. These things have destroyed a serious regard to the ordinances of God, and filled the minds of many with deep, and I fear, lasting prejudices. People at variance, are no ways prepared to unite in the worship of God, and they often sensibly feel it; and hence it is often the case that persons offended with their neighbours, or with the society of which they are members, will for that very reason absent themselves from the house and worship of God. This shows the pernicious influence of strife and debate on the minds of people, and the religious interest of society. As this

is an evil which has prevailed more than usual among us, so you should be more guarded against it.

I must also say, that a disregard of the Sabbath, and neglect of the worship of God, the naturally attending evil, does also awfully prevail. The worship of God in publick, is as plain a duty as any in the whole circle of revealed truth. The Sabbath, and publick worship were instituted for the benefit of man. And if any say, he gets no good by attending, it must be his own fault. Certainly he has no reason to expect any from staying at home, when God requires him to attend on his worship in publick.

And when we consider that it is God's usual manner to meet his people, when in the way of duty, is there not encouragement for this ? But notwithstanding the plainness of the duty, it seems more and more neglected in this place. I cannot describe to you the mortification I feel, to be obliged to preach so often to bare walls, which is generally the case when the weather is cold or stormy, or even the appearance of either. Certainly people who are well, had they a proper regard to the authority of God, and the good of their own souls, would attend, and not let such weather keep them from the house of God, as would not divert them from their usual employments. But is it not true, that the same weather which would not prevent people from attending on their worldly business on a week day, will confine many on the Sabbath to their houses ? What is the import of this, in the eyes of God and man ? Is it not this ; the worship of God, and the instructions of his word, are of little



or no importance? How can you answer it to Christ, who died to give you the gospel, when you consider this gospel not worthy of your regard? Let me ask you, my hearers, do you not believe, that if there were as great and prevailing inattention among this people, in making provision for their bodies, as for their souls, that multitudes would be in a starving condition; and that poverty and distress would stalk through our streets? I presume, you will all answer in the affirmative. Have we not then just cause to be alarmed with our own, and the stupidity of others? Has not Christ taught us to pay no regard to the body, compared with our concern and engagedness for the salvation of our souls?

These evils, you are sensible prevail among us in a lamentable degree. And what shall I say? Can I set before you stronger motives and arguments than I have repeatedly done? I can only call you again to repentance, and assure you, without this, you cannot enter on this year with any hope of the presence and blessing of God. Years multiplied and improved, in this manner, will do you no good. Should you commence this year without consideration—without reformation, is there any probability you will improve it well, should you live to spend it? Every year you misimprove is an evidence, a pledge that you will continue to misimprove them. And I now solemnly declare to you, in the name of the great God of heaven and earth, that unless you repent of these great and prevailing evils, that should God give you prosperity in your worldly affairs this year, he will send his curse

with it. He will curse your very blessings. Remember "the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked," let its other circumstances be what they may.

I do not complain of personal injuries. Your kindness to me, I readily acknowledge. And yet if I know any thing of my own heart, could I see a spirit of inquiry after God, and a desire to be instructed in the way of salvation—could I hear you inquire "what shall we do to be saved," it would afford me greater pleasure—open to my heart a richer fountain of joy, than any temporal riches you could bestow on me or mine. Such are habitually my feelings respecting you. My poor, discouraged heart would then rejoice; and I should come to you in this house with a satisfaction which God hitherto has denied me. I feel unworthy of this satisfaction. But in such a case, you, my hearers, would be the principal gainers. Such an event I cannot even hope for, until you put away these evils from you. The heavenly dove will fly far from regions of strife; and before God converts sinners in this place, his house will be filled. You will here come and earnestly implore his mercy. His Sabbaths will not be days of unholy idleness with you, but you will consider "one day in his house better than a thousand."

Must I again say, how far we are from this? How little hope is there, that these joyful appearances will be seen among us?

Your years are passing away, never to return. O that this year might be a year of release to many souls

in this place. It is probably the last year with some. The last golden sands are dropping. Pass not over lightly what has been spoken, nor be offended with my liberty of speech. What I have said, is the expression of my concern for you. I know they are words of truth and soberness. God hath said, "those who honour me, I will honour, but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

## SERMON XVIII.

ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

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II CORINTHIANS, V. 10.

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good, or bad.*

**M**ANKIND by the fall lost the image and favour of God, and all their hope of a happy immortality. The sentence pronounced in case of disobedience was death. This included, doubtless the death of the body, and the separation of the sinful soul from the presence of God. "But God, who is rich in mercy, hath begotten us again unto lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Life and immortality were purchased by him, and are "brought to light by the gospel." Of this all true christians are now heirs, and will finally be the happy possessors. The certain prospect of this, animated the primitive believers under all their trials; and the Apostle Paul in particular under his uncommon share of sufferings. This blessed

hope led him to adopt the language of the context, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And in expectation of which, he informs us, that he "laboured to keep a conscience void of offence, both toward God and man." Wherefore, saith he, "we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him," and he speaks of being in the body, as a state of absence from the Lord. It is so comparatively, for saints, while in the body, see through a glass darkly; but when the veil of flesh shall be removed, "they will see him as he is." "Therefore" he says in another place, "knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." What the Apostle intended by the words immediately connected with the text is, that he laboured to be accepted of Christ, whether in the body or out; whether in this state or the next. He then adds the text, as the reason of his concern and labour, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good, or bad."

In these words, two things are observable,

I. That there will be a day of judgment.

II. One particular design of it, "that every man may receive according to the deeds done in his body."

The first idea suggested in these words is, a day of general judgment. I said, general judgment, in distinction from the particular judgment, which will pass on every one at death. "For we must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

In these words, it is more than intimated, that there will be a day of general judgment, and final retribution ; and that Jesus Christ will be the Judge of all men. Both these doctrines being embraced by the primitive christians, as solemn, indisputable truths, they are only brought into view here, by a phrase of general import. In these words, the doctrine of the resurrection is taken for granted ; for how shall we all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, unless raised from the dead ? The doctrine of the resurrection is essential to that system of divinity which supposes a general judgment, and a state of future rewards and punishments.

The Apostle Paul professedly enters on the proof of the resurrection in his first epistle to the Corinthians, and shows its certainty from the resurrection of Christ ; and hence in his second epistle, this doctrine is assumed as proved. But as the resurrection of the body is an important article in the christian system, it may be proper to consider, with what force of argument the Apostle proves it, in opposition to some teachers among them, who had perverted the gospel, by teaching that there would be no resurrection of the dead. By denying this and some other important doctrines, “they had overthrown the faith of some.” This error was probably derived from the Sadducees, a principal sect among the Jews, who denied the doctrine of the resurrection, and the existence of angels and spirits, and consequently the rewards and punishments of another life. Against this sect of heretics, our Saviour proves the resurrection from the books of Moses, which they professed to believe. “That the dead are raised up,

Have ye not read what God said to Moses at the bush, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, he is not the God of the dead, but of the living !”

It seems that this heresy had so far affected the minds of some of the Corinthians, as to lead them to doubt of the certainty of Christ’s resurrection, which seems to have been the reason, why the Apostle particularly addressed them on this subject. He asserts, in the first place, the resurrection of Christ. This assertion he establishes by proofs, which no reasonable person would reject, that is, by living witnesses, who saw him alive after his crucifixion. “First he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve Apostles, after that, he was seen of about five hundred brethren at one time.” These men had no sinister end to answer by bearing witness to a falsehood in a case of this kind ; they had the best opportunity of knowing the truth ; and the greater part were then living and ready to declare what they saw and knew. After this, he tells them, he was seen of James, and last of all by himself. Here was complete evidence ; for he, who will not believe a fact upon the testimony of five hundred credible witnesses, who declare, they were eye witnesses of a plain fact, must renounce every thing which rests on human testimony, and even their own senses. The Apostle, therefore, having laid before them the evidence of Christ’s resurrection, considers it established, and reproves them for their incredulity in so plain a case. “Now if Christ be preached, that

he rose from the dead, how say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead?" "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is not Christ risen." But he had proved, that Christ was risen, and hence the conclusion was unavoidable, that there would be a resurrection of the dead. This was not only possible, but certain, as a revealed truth. From the certainty of Christ's resurrection, the Apostle goes on to declare the happy resurrection of all his followers. "For Christ died, arose and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." The certainty of the resurrection of the saints, he proves from Christ's being their head, and representative. In other passages, he asserts the resurrection both of the righteous and wicked; and the other inspired writers of the New Testament, are very express on this interesting subject.

He, who is the resurrection and the life, has declared, "that the hour is coming, when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth. They who have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." "There shall be a resurrection both of the just, and of the unjust," saith another inspired teacher.

Indeed, scarcely any doctrine is more frequently brought into view in the gospel than this. And the doctrine of a general judgment seems necessarily to imply a resurrection. It has been taught and believed in the church in all ages. "Enoch, the seventh from Adam," prophesied of this day, saying, "Behold the



Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all; and to convince all that are ungodly, of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." Solomon says, "God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Paul declares "that God has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained." The Apostle John saw, in that great, glorious and solemn day, "the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." These passages, without any comment, literally speak the language of the text; and establish the doctrine of a judgment to come.

The next consideration suggested by the text is, that Jesus Christ will set as judge on this great and decisive day. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." He is constituted the Judge of the world. "All judgment is committed unto the Son." He is perfectly qualified for this great, and all-important business. Such is his character, as God and man, that there can be no objection to him in this capacity. As God, he perfectly knows the worth and excellency of the divine character, the rights of God, the malignity of sin, and the desert of the sinner. He knows how to proportion the punishments of sinners to their crimes

respectively. He knows the power of all moral agents, and is perfectly acquainted with the heart, and whole character of each individual. He knows how to adjust the punishment of the heathen, who have sinned against the light of nature only, to their guilt; and likewise, what degree of punishment is due to those who have lived in rebellion against a written law. He knows what has been done to save sinners, and the obligations they are under for redeeming love, and therefore what a sore punishment they deserve, "who have trodden under foot the blood of the Son of God." He, being a man and having all the feelings of perfect humanity, knows how to pity the infirmities of human nature, and will not impute those things to men as their crime, which are their infirmity or calamity only. He knows also how to dispense rewards to the righteous, so as in the best manner to display the wisdom and grace of God. The general design of "this great and notable day of the Lord," is to dispense rewards and punishments, in the most open and publick manner; to close the scenes of providence and grace to the sons of Adam; to fix the state of every person for eternity; to wipe away forever, every aspersion which has been thrown on the divine character by a sinful world. The reasons of many dispensations of providence lie now concealed; and the apparently unequal distribution of rewards and punishments in this life has led many to speak evil of the ways of God; but this day will clear up the whole, and unfold the present seemingly inexplicable windings of providence; so that God will, by the consciences of saints and sin-

ners, "be justified when he speaks, and clear when he judges." The day of judgment is not designed, that God might explore what is secret, that he might know what is just; but to manifest to all what is just. Hence it is called the day of the "revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

But my view at present is, to attend to the particular design of the day of judgment suggested in the text; which is thus expressed, "that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." This was the

## II. Thing proposed.

Here it is plain, that by "the deeds done in the body" is meant the character formed by our successive actions during the present life, which will fix our state for eternity. Every moral action contributes its portion to form the character, and so prepare the man for the decision of that day. The process of the day of judgment is, in many respects, made very plain. Christ himself has given us a very striking and particular description of this day in the twenty fifth chapter of Matthew; and the same for substance we have in various other places. The trumpet shall sound, the graves shall be opened, the dead shall hear, awake and rise. Adam with all his posterity, whether they have been buried in the sea, swallowed by earthquakes, or devoured by wild beasts, shall be called forth to judgment. The judge shall appear in the clouds of heaven, attended by an innumerable company of angels, "and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate

them, one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats ; then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.* Then shall he say unto them on his left hand, *Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*” This is the process of that day “of decision and despair” given by Christ himself ; and all may therefore know assuredly, that these things will take place as if the day were now present.

From this representation, it appears, that there will then be found two classes of men, and but two ; and that the retributions of these will be infinitely different. From which it appears, that there now is, and will then be found, an important and radical distinction in their moral characters. On this difference, will be founded the distinction and sentence of the Judge. This, in his account, will be rewarding them according to their works. By which we are not to understand their external actions simply, but their real character formed by the temper of the heart, expressed in outward conduct. There is no morality in mere action, without any design or intention of the heart. The state of the heart is always brought into view, when it can be, in forming our judgments of the desert of human actions. And there is the same reason, and propriety, that God should express his approbation and love of those holy exercises of the heart, and acts which flow from them, as that he should express his disapprobation of an unholy heart and its fruits. When works are spoken of

in scripture, as good and bad, rewardable and punishable, the exercises of the heart, of which external actions are only the expression, are always intended; as without them no external action can be either good or bad, in a religious view. Since mankind are to receive according to the deeds done in the body, it is manifest, that all their moral actions are noted down in the book of God's remembrance; so that not one of all our thoughts, words and deeds will then be forgotten; but weighed in an impartial, unerring balance, and have their weight of influence in determining our character and proportioning our respective retribution. For if any of the moral actions of men were not brought into judgment, it could not be said of such persons, that they received according to the deeds done in the body. Moreover, there is the same reason, that men should give an account for every moral action, as for any one. We may as well suppose, that none of the sinner's crimes will be brought into judgment against him, as that any of them shall be left out of the account; and that he will escape punishment entirely, as that any one sin will pass unpunished, which it would, if in his future account any sin should be omitted. Beside, such a supposition would defeat one great design of the day of judgment, which is to manifest the righteous judgment of God. But this could not be done, unless the real and whole character of the sinner were displayed, which can be done only by exhibiting all his sins. If God will cause "every one to receive according to his deeds," which is asserted in the text, and in many other passages, then he will

punish the sinner according to the nature, number and aggravation of his crimes. And if so, then they must all appear, or how will his punishment be “a revelation of the righteous judgment of God?” If all his sins, in all their aggravations do not appear, and yet he is punished according to this rule, the day of judgment will serve rather to fix a blot on the divine character, than to wipe off all aspersions from it, and establish his justice, and impartiality in the view of rational creatures. But if all the sins of the wicked shall appear, and they are punished accordingly, then the righteous judgment of God will be manifest. And as this is one design of that great and dreadful day, we may be sure, that all the sins of men will be brought into judgment. Accordingly we are informed in the oracles of truth, that this will be the solemn fact. “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account of in the day of judgment.” “In that day, God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.” Solomon, warning young persons, (who are ready to imagine their youthful follies will be overlooked,) against youthful vanities of every kind, enforces the warning by, “Know thou that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment.” O youth, remember this in all your vanities and sins. Let it be engraven upon the table of your hearts. Your secret sins will all be exposed to view.

From the nature of sin, the object against whom it is committed, and the final sentence which Christ has told us he will pronounce on the wicked, we may certainly conclude, that the punishment of the impen-

itent will be infinitely dreadful. And as the works of the righteous are of a different nature from those of the wicked, so their reward will be totally different in its nature; as appears from the final sentence to be pronounced upon them.

Thus it appears, from the current voice of scripture, that there will be a day of judgment, in order to which there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust; and that every one of Adam's race will appear before God. You and I, my hearers, must stand before the dread tribunal of Christ, and there be judged, and have our state fixed for eternity, according to our real characters. For Christ will judge the secrets of our hearts according to his gospel, and then hold up the hearts of saints and sinners to publick view.

Then will the openly profane and immoral sinner, receive according to the deeds done in his body. Then will the painted hypocrite be exposed, and his sins be set in order before him, in such a convincing light, that his mouth will be stopped, and the righteous judgment of God clearly appear. All sinners will see the justice of God in their final condemnation. It is important that God should convince ungodly men of their guilt; because without such conviction, it would forever appear to them, that God is unjust, and that they suffer wrongfully from his almighty hand. If ungodly men shall be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord," it is necessary for the honour of God, that they feel it to be just. Should God cast the vilest sinner into hell, and give

him no other views of sin, of his law, and of his holy character, than he now has, he would forever lift up his eyes to heaven and say, God is unjust. Should ungodly men always have the same views they now have, God would always appear unjust, and they excusable. Sinners in this world do not feel deserving of God's wrath; and he will never punish them without giving them different views of sin. Sometimes, when God awakens sinners in this world, and gives them just apprehensions of his holy law, and the desert of sin, they are astonished that God should keep them out of hell. They feel that they deserve it, and could not complain of God, should that be their awful portion. But the day of judgment will produce clearer conviction in the conscience of the ungodly, than any sinner ever had in this world. No sinner ever had his sins set in order before him, as God will then set them in his view; and God's character will appear as spotless, and his throne as guiltless to the ungodly themselves, as to saints and angels in heaven. Sinners will sink into hell with overwhelming convictions of its justice. No ungodly soul will ever look up to the abode of God, and say, God is unjust in my destruction. Conviction will silence every murmur against God. This is all agreeable to scripture, and perfectly rational. Sinners are reasonable creatures, and feel that they act freely. It is agreeable to reason, that there should be a day of judgment, and a state of retribution. So that the scriptures, by revealing a day of judgment, and a state of rewards and punishments, make that certain, which appears reasonable in itself.



*IMPROVEMENT.*

1. From the design of the judgment day, it is very desirable, as well as solemn. It is desirable as a vindication of the divine character. How much reproach, and dishonour are cast on God in this world? Many thousand years, ungodly men all over the earth, have been speaking, and acting against God. Thousands, every moment blaspheming his name, and with boldness rising up, and trampling his honour in the dust, in a thousand different ways. God suffers one generation after another to rise up and act out their hearts. Some denying his being—others speaking against his government. Some slaying his people—others crucifying his Son. Some denying, and others ridiculing his gospel, and saying his ways are unequal. The infidel boasts and says, “where is the promise of his coming?” Ungodly men take courage and join hand in hand in sin. It seems very undesirable that all these reproaches should lie forever on the character of God. Were there no day of judgment—were ungodly men never to be “convinced of their ungodly deeds,” how would it appear, that God is a holy, righteous God? I have frequently thought, that it was not strange, that a man, ignorant of a judgment day, should conclude, that God concerned not himself in the conduct of men. When he sees the honour of God trodden under foot, and his arm not lifted to avenge the wrong, what must he conclude? But revelation saith, “behold he cometh.”

Place a holy being, in this world, who knows nothing about a judgment day, and let him look round on mankind, and how dark would the whole appear? Lift

up the veil, and let him see ungodly men convinced before the bar of their Judge ; how solemn yet satisfying is the prospect ?

2. Does not this subject cast a particular gloom on the future state of sinners ? There is no room to hope that sinners will escape the righteous judgment of God. Some flatter themselves, that all will be well with them hereafter, though they live to themselves, and disregard the commands of God. But there is no ground for such a hope, either from reason, or scripture. Such will certainly meet with disappointment and confusion in the end.

We may now as certainly determine how Christ will treat all swearers, drunkards, whoremongers, fornicators, thieves, liars, and all impenitent sinners, as if we now stood before his bar, and heard him say, “depart, ye cursed into everlasting fire.” Only admit that there will be a judgment day, and there cannot remain a doubt, whether God will put a distinction “between him who sweareth, and him who feareth an oath ; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.”

3. Since these things are so, “what manner of persons ought we to be ?” This is the pathetic conclusion of the Apostle in the view of a day of final retribution for the righteous and the wicked. And how natural and important is the inference from such a subject ? For in the view of these things, we are constantly acting for eternity—forming characters for the day of judgment. There is not a thought, word, nor action, but is big with its consequences. It is plain,

that our great, and main business in life should be to prepare for this grand event. This is an object, we should never lose sight of in any of the employments of life. Then we shall be tried—and tried for what? Remember, eternal things depend on the issue of this trial. He, who is then found “holy, will be holy still,” and “enter into the joys of his Lord.” These infinitely exceed all present conception. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” “And he that is unholy, will be unholy still.” He, will enter upon his state of lamentation and woe, which knows no abatement nor end.

I say, if these things be so, how surprising is it, they are not more realized, both by old and young? Especially since we have both reason and scripture daily proclaiming their probability and certainty. How surprising is it, that so many old people, who are just ready to launch into eternity, live thoughtless of these things, which are just before them, and do not seem to realize, that in a few days, they must enter into the world of spirits, and be fixed in happiness or woe, according as their character shall be! Alas, what shall I say to such? Do you consider that your day—your precious day of probation is almost closed?—That you must soon depart to be here no more? Do you daily remember, that there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge in the grave? If you think but little about these things, is it not an evidence, that you are indeed unprepared? You do not think about death; about standing before the Son of man. Wonderful stupidity!

Is it not the character of the Godly, old and young, that they are “looking for,” and, by a realizing view of the shortness of life, “hastning to the coming of Christ.” And how surprising is it, that any of you, who are in the decline of life, should be insensible of the near approach of death, and judgment, and their eternal and fatal consequences to you, if unprepared for this day ! Especially to find any of you less thoughtful of these things, than you were in youth ! It is often the case, that old people are less apprehensive of death—less concerned about the result of the day of judgment as to themselves ; less solicitous to be found of their Judge in peace, than in youth. This is a certain mark of increasing hardness of heart. O how melancholy ! how dismal—how almost hopeless is the case of such !

What shall I say to my young hearers ? You are to give an account of all your conduct. You know not but you may be called to do this before the aged. Do you believe, that you are accountable—that the religion of Jesus is necessary for you, to appear in safety before the bar of God ? Why then do you not feel this, and daily act for that day ? God will bring you into judgment, for every vanity—for disregarding his word ; for neglecting and profaning his Sabbath—for presumptuously depending on future time. You will assuredly stand before him, and how soon your day of grace will close, you know not. And you must appear either on his right hand, or his left. You will be justified or condemned. There is no other alternative. Pursue the ways of sin, live unmindful of God, and of this great day ; nothing more is necessary to

make it a day of despair. Should you do this, I testify to you, in the name of the Judge, that you shall in that day call in vain, “to the rocks and mountains to fall on you, and cover you from the face of him, that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.”

## SERMON XIX.

ON REPENTANCE.

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MARK, vi. 12.

*And they went out, and preached that men should repent.*

IN the preceding part of this chapter, we have the account of Christ's sending his twelve disciples to preach; and he doubtless gave them particular directions what to preach.—On what doctrines to insist. And may we not, from the manner of their preaching judge of the tenor of his directions to them on this subject? “And they went out, and preached that men should repent.” Christ had told them the nature and importance of the commission with which they were charged, and informed them, “that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city which should refuse to hear them.” And as they went forth, preaching repentance, it is reasonable to conclude, they had been thus instructed by their Lord and master, and that he con-

sidered this a cardinal doctrine of his gospel which his disciples were to publish. In discoursing upon these words, it will be natural to describe in the

I. Place, the nature of this important duty.

II. Show its extent. And,

III. Point out the motives by which this should be enforced.

I. What is repentance? It is taken for granted in all passages of this kind, that man is a fallen, guilty creature. For they who have never offended their Maker by sin, have no reason for repentance. "Just persons have no need of repentance." When therefore Christ orders repentance to be preached to the world, it implies that the world is in a fallen, guilty state. To preach repentance to a creature not guilty would be impertinent; it would be an imposition. But Christ has commanded repentance to be preached to all nations, and "he commands all men every where to repent." This he tells us was one important branch of his own business into the world; "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," Repentance is an essential part of the religion of a sinner; and therefore it becomes very important to distinguish true repentance from every counterfeit appearance. You will then give me your attention while I endeavour to display its nature. And I would first observe, that repentance is an exercise of the heart, not of the intellectual part of man. It is a moral exercise, for it is connected with the divine approbation; and it is certain, according to the constitution of the covenant of grace, that all broken hearted penitents shall inherit

the kingdom of heaven. There is therefore something more in true repentance, than a conviction of the understanding and conscience of the evil of sin. Repentance according to the original, is a change of mind; and is called repentance towards God; doubtless because it is a turning from the love of sin, to the love of holiness. All holy exercises are of the same nature, but are called by different names, as they respect different objects. That peculiar exercise of heart, which is denominated repentance, has for its immediate object, the evil of sin; and essentially consists in a heart-affecting sense of one's own character as a sinner. Repentance, consisting in a sense of the vilenes of our own characters as sinners, necessarily implies godly sorrow, which consists in a sense of the evil of sin, as opposed to the pure and holy nature of God. God hates sin, because it is opposed to the good and happiness of the universe; and he, who has godly sorrow for sin, hates it for the same reason. And repentance implies both a sense of the hateful nature of sin, and of our own vileness on account of the sinfulness of our nature; and this is so essential to the character of a true penitent, that there can be no such thing as true repentance, when there is no sense of self-pollution and defilement. This appears from the examples of repentance recorded in scripture; and the manner in which true penitents have expressed the feelings of their hearts. Job expressed the penitent exercises of his heart in the following language, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee?" "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee.



wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." David expresses his repentance in this confession, "I have sinned against the Lord;" "Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight." See the same temper of heart exhibited by the prodigal son, when he returned to his father. "Father" said he, "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." See in the publican the same exercise expressed in these words, "God be merciful to me a sinner." True repentance, as appears from these passages, does not consist in wishing I had never sinned, but in self abhorrence on account of it. This being the nature of repentance, it appears that the love, and allowed practice of any sin are inconsistent with a truly penitent temper. All sin is of the same nature, and therefore to suppose that a true penitent may love any kind of sin, and allowedly live in the practice of it, is a contradiction; for it is supposing, that he approves of that, which by the supposition he abhors and forsakes. True repentance is therefore of such a nature, that the subject of it, breaks off his iniquities of heart, lip, and life. Light and darkness, may as consistently be supposed to prevail in the same place and at the same time, as that the love and practice of any known sin can prevail in the heart, which is the subject of true repentance. They cannot exist together; and when the love and practice of any sin is habitual, there is reason to fear, and I believe I may safely add to conclude, there never was any true repentance in that heart. For grace in the heart is an immortal seed, and does not forsake the

ground in which it hath taken root, but grows and spreads its branches, and finally triumphs over the noxious weeds of sin, which spring up spontaneously in the natural heart. From the nature of true repentance, and from the nature of sin, it appears, that no person can truly repent of one sin and yet remain impenitent, with respect to others. For all sin being of the same nature, that exercise which may be properly called repentance with respect to any one sin, is in its own nature hatred of all sin. A person may have his mind much upon some particular sin, which he has committed, and be deeply affected with a view of it, while there are many others of which he is guilty, which are not so immediately in his view; yet as all sin is of the same nature, that which is of the nature of true repentance of one sin, is repentance of all sin. From these observations it also appears, that no person has any reason to think he has true repentance of any one sin, while he lives in the indulgence of any corruption; or that he is in a pardoned, justified state, while he finds any sin agreeable to him. For repentance is before forgiveness; which is plain from this single consideration, that all the impenitent are in a state of condemnation. It has been shown, that repentance is inconsistent with the love and allowed indulgence of sin of any kind. They therefore who love and habitually indulge in any known sin are not in a justified, but in an impenitent and condemned state. Whatever they may imagine, they are under the curse of the divine law, and the wrath of God abideth on them. He that sinneth allowedly knoweth not God.

True repentance is a compliance with the gospel, by which the guilty escape the wrath and curse of God due for sin; and every such person sees sin in its hateful nature, and feels in some degree properly toward it. In short he sees himself, and is humbled to the dust on account of his own vileness. He sees that he may properly abhor himself, and he does abhor himself. This is the character of the humble, contrite heart. As to the extent of this duty which was the

II. Thing to be considered. We may observe, that the Apostle informs us "that God now commands all men every where to repent." Which words imply that repentance is the immediate duty of all men. No man, no sinner, can live a single day, a single hour without repentance without violating this command of God. Nothing is more plain than that an impenitent temper of heart is exceedingly criminal; it is impossible it should be otherwise; for were we to suppose, that a temper to love sin were not criminal, sin would change its nature and be no longer sin. But the love of sin is in its own nature wrong, hence it follows, that repentance, which is a turning from sin to God is always a duty, and there never was nor can be a sinner found, who ought not immediately to repent, or in other words, hate sin and turn from it. The obligation to repentance results from the reasonableness, that God should be loved and obeyed by his rational creatures, and from the odious, destructive nature and tendency of sin. It must be the duty of every moral agent who has sinned, to exercise the temper of a penitent. So long as all moral beings are under indis-

pensable obligations to love God and hate sin, so long it will be their duty, when sinners, to repent and love their Maker. The command to repent is not to be considered in the light of a mere positive precept which makes something our duty, which before was not a duty. A gracious attendance on the supper of the Lord is a duty resting on a positive command, and was not a duty before it was thus commanded. But the obligation of sinners to repent is not of this nature; but results from their relation to God as his creatures; and repentance was a duty antecedent to any express command in the case. The command, requiring repentance of all men, is only a declaration of what was right and suitable in the reason and nature of things. It was always proper, and indeed an indispensable duty for all creatures to love God, and hate sin, and for the same reason it is the duty of every sinner to return to God by repentance. The express command of God does not in this case alter the nature of duty, nor make that now a duty, which was not so before, but only expresses what is in its own nature right. It is however true that sinners are under greater obligations to repentance, since the light and grace of the gospel have appeared, than before. They now know their Master's will, by an express revelation; their obligations to this duty are more clear and urgent; and they are more criminal in living in impenitence. For guilt ever increases according to the light and evidence against which a creature sins. On this principle it was that our Saviour said, "the servant who knew his master's will and prepared not himself, nor

did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

Besides all who live impenitently under the light of the gospel, cast open contempt on the authority of the great and blessed God, “ who now commands all men every where to repent. Such persons virtually despise all the grace revealed in the gospel, that new and living way of salvation for sinners. God can consistently pardon the penitent only for the sake of Christ. Repentance is then an important, reasonable and necessary duty, from which no man is, or can be exempted. It is binding on all sinners in all places, and at all times, especially upon the sinner who enjoys the superior advantages of gospel light. I shall now in the

III. Place, according to the method proposed, show the reasons which urge this duty.

1. It is the duty of sinners to repent because of the evil of sin. Repentance, you will remember is a turning from sin to God. Sin is an infinite evil, it is fraught with infinite mischief, and in its own nature tends to destroy all the holiness and happiness in the universe. All the misery in the universe proceeds from sin, and could it have its unrestrained influence, it would dethrone God, and destroy his kingdom. This is evident from what in fact takes place in every heart where sinful affections predominate. Here it dethrones God and sets up some detestable idol in his place; and this is the tendency of sin universally. This being the tendency of sin, it is in its nature infinitely hateful, and repentance is the most reasonable

service. When a man repents and forsakes sin, then, and not till then does he act reasonably ; and feel suitably toward God, and the interest of his kingdom. The evil of sin is therefore the proper motive to repentance.

2. God commands sinners to repent. This is another reason of the duty. There is no sinner who hears the gospel, but hears God, his rightful Lord and Sovereign calling him to repentance. This is a cardinal doctrine of the gospel, and so essential to the christian system that no person can be said to preach the gospel, who does not in the name of God call sinners to repentance.—But is it reasonable for a creature to obey God? Then it is the sinner's duty to repent, for God commands it.

3. Another reason why sinners should repent is, that there is no such thing as receiving the benefits of the gospel without it. The final benefits of Christ's redemption are reserved for the penitent only. Hence Christ thus declares his commission, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek ; he hath sent me to bind up the broken in heart, and to comfort all that mourn." This is only another expression for the penitent ; and it is in fact contrary to Christ's design to comfort impenitent sinners. The peculiar promises and comforts of the gospel belong to the penitent only. The impenitent sinner has no share in them ; nor could he enjoy them.—They are as far out of his reach, while an impenitent sinner, as heaven is. No sinner can receive Christ as his Prophet, Priest and King, and

cordially approve of his character as Mediator, till his heart is humble and broken for sin.—Until sin, which Christ came into the world to condemn, appears to him exceedingly sinful. No man can love the character of Christ who condemned sin in all its forms, until he himself disapproves and forsakes it. Without repentance then, no advantage can be derived from Christ. What an important and pressing motive is this, to repentance ! And this brings into view a

4. Reason why sinners should repent, which is, that without repentance they must perish. They who fail of the benefits of Christ's redemption are lost and undone forever. On this subject there can be no question. Jesus Christ has decided this in language as express as could be used. "Except you repent ye shall all likewise perish." If Jesus be the faithful and true witness of God the matter is fixed. There is no way of salvation provided for the impenitent, remaining such. Christ has opened a way for sinners to repent, and for the penitent to be saved ; but none to save men without repentance. Let no man then deceive you with vain words ; vain words indeed which lead sinners to hope to be saved in their sins ; without repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Did Moses ; did the prophets ; did Christ ; did the Apostles encourage men to hope that they would be saved without repentance and holiness of life ?—I need not tell you in what manner they preached : you know their united voice is :—without holiness no man shall see the Lord. How then can you hope, if you are strangers to repentance which is the first

step in the way to heaven. Such an hope cannot be founded on the gospel, and if it be not founded there, it can be nothing but presumption. You can know whether you have ever had evangelical repentance or not; you can know whether you live in the commission of any known sin; in the omission of any known duty. If so, you may be confident you never had that repentance which is unto life, that needeth not to be repented of. Let me entreat you not to hope, that you are in a state of security without repentance. I can say no more than Christ has said; Except ye repent ye shall all perish. These are all very important reasons why sinners should repent and turn to God through Christ; I say through Christ, for there is no other way of returning to God; he is the way and the only way to heaven for a fallen, guilty creature. And this discovers to us how inseparable the connexion is between repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He who turns from sin, turns to God, and the turning of a sinner to God is through the Mediator and implies faith in him. It is the very spirit of repentance to lead the soul to embrace a holy Saviour, and comply with the requisitions of his gospel, as they are made known to him. Hence we find in the time of the Apostles, when once sinners were brought to repentance, they embraced Christ, received the ordinance of baptism and were admitted into the church. A truly penitent heart will lead a man to cry out as Saul did, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?"



Thus I have attempted to illustrate and explain the nature of gospel repentance, which consists not in hating misery but in hating sin. Not in wishing I had never sinned and exposed myself to the penalty of the divine law; but in seeing its evil against God, and forsaking it. And this we have shewn is a duty incumbent on all men, especially upon all who are under advantages to see the evil of sin. And that the motives to repentance under the gospel are more clearly discovered, and therefore press this duty more urgently on sinners under the advantages of gospel light and grace.

We have also offered some reasons for the duty of repentance which are of the highest importance and concern to all men.

### *IMPROVEMENT.*

1. Let us notice the great importance of the duty on which we have spoken. Indeed repentance is the first step in the path of duty, in the way to heaven. No duty can be rightly performed without this temper of heart. We can therefore see the reason why Christ and his Apostles preached repentance to sinners as their first and immediate duty. Without a penitent heart no man is accepted in any duty.

2. If repentance be so important, should we not be careful lest we are deceived? A mistake as to the nature of repentance, leads men into mistakes in almost every thing else. When repentance is made to consist in passion; in terror; in fear of punishment; such religion will continue as long as passion, fear, and terror last. Such persons are led into this mistake, that they may have religion and lose it.

3. The subject shows us, that all impenitent sinners, old and young, are in a criminal, dangerous state. Such possess a heart which is infinitely hateful in the sight of God. They are the willing servants of sin, and live in the open violation of a command which we have shown to be the most reasonable ; a command which must be obeyed, or the sinner must be an outcast from the favour of God forever. And all this time he is exposed to death, which will close his period of probation and fix his state for eternity. Who can describe the danger of his situation ? It is indescribable ! yet O how insensible are sinners of this.—

## SERMON XX.

ON HUMILITY.

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ISAIAH, vi. 5.

*Then said I, wo is me ! for I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips ; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.*

**I**N these solemn words, spoken on such a solemn occasion, there are several things worthy of particular notice.

1. The opinion which the prophet entertained of himself, an undone creature, justly exposed to the anger and wrath of this great and terrible *God*. “Wo is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips.” The expression implies a deep, affecting sense of the wickedness of the human heart, and the great criminality and danger of sinning against a *God* of such glory and terrible majesty.

2. The words express his opinion of the human heart in general. He considered himself in a guilty and undone state, and awfully exposed, because he was

a man of unclean lips ; and he saw this to be true of others, hence he says, “ I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.” His confession amounts to this ; man is in a dreadfully guilty and dangerous state. I am a poor miserable sinner myself, and dwell among a multitude as guilty and undone as I am.

3. The words show us the cause of this exclamation, or confession of the prophet. The reason why his heart was so much affected, and his conscience so particularly oppressed with a sense and conviction of his own sinfulness, and the sinfulness and undone condition of others, at this particular time, because he then had an extraordinary sight of what God is, of his greatness, excellency and glory, “ Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.” This made him cry out, “ wo is me, for I am undone.”

4. It is worthy of notice, that the person who made the confession in the text, was the prophet Isaiah, a holy man of God. One of the most devout, faithful, humble men that ever lived. Yet this man, when he had a discovery of the divine glory, had also a deep conviction of his own vileness. The words, in this connexion, present us with this doctrine, *That saints increase in a sense of their own vileness in proportion to the clearness of their discoveries of the divine excellency and glory.* In other words, the clearer the discoveries are, which saints have of the divine character, the clearer and deeper sense will they have of their own vileness. Their sense of sin in general, and of their own sinfulness in particular, will be answerable to their sense, and conviction of the majesty and glory of God.

In this doctrine, two things are taken for granted. First, that true saints have discoveries of the divine glory. They have all "seen the King in his beauty." They have not only seen God exhibited in creation and providence; not only have they correct speculative views of him, as the Jews, who, our Saviour says, "had both seen and hated both him and his Father;" but they have had their hearts affected with a sense of the excellency of the divine character. This excellency Moses saw, in answer to his prayer, that "God would show him his glory." A portion of the same divine excellency all pious men must see in God. This appears from the words of the Apostle, "but we *all* with open face, beholding, as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image." This sense of the excellency and glory of God, which, in scripture, is called *beholding* the glory of God, is something peculiar to saints; and it is common to them, and to them only. The impenitent see it not, as is asserted by the Apostle, "The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not." Here the awful fact is asserted; and he, immediately after, shows the reason why believers do see the excellency and glory of God. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Here you will observe that the heart is the seat of this blindness of unbelievers; and God by shining into the heart, removes this blindness, and "gives the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. It is therefore

evident, that the godly have a discovery of the excellency of the divine perfections ; and it is also evident that the “ natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.”

The second thing taken for granted, in the doctrine, is that all true saints have a heart affecting sense of sin ; of sin in general, and of their own sinfulness in particular.

It is manifest from innumerable scripture examples, that religion does not destroy a conviction of sin, nor in any degree take away a sense of ill desert. The true penitent does not consider himself innocent in consequence of pardon. Though he considers himself absolved from the just punishment of his sins, he sees himself deserving still, in point of justice, the wrath of God. Pardon removes a criminal's danger, but not his ill desert. This is agreeable to the common sense of mankind. If a person convicted of murder, upon the fullest testimony, should, after condemnation, be pardoned by his prince, his pardon would save him from death, but none would suppose that the pardon took away his ill desert. It would still remain true, that he, in strict justice, deserved to die, just as much as before he was pardoned. Thus inspired saints have viewed themselves in relation to God. This is evident from their declarations and confessions recorded in scripture. “ If thou, Lord, should mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand ? ” This sentiment of David is not peculiar to him, but pervades the inspired writers, and is deeply incorporated with their prayers.

thanksgivings, and religious experience. The Apostle Paul, who was one of the holiest of mere men, long after his conversion, and after he had the highest assurance that God had forgiven his sins, was distressed, with the most affecting sense of his own vileness. This led him to exclaim, "I am less than the least of all saints ;" "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death !" From these and numerous similar passages, it appears that a persuasion of pardon from God, does not take away a sense of guilt. This is taken for granted in the doctrine, and is a distinct idea from that which I propose to illustrate, which is that the greater and clearer views saints have of the divine character, the more clear and affecting will be their views of their own sinfulness and ill desert.

The truth of this proposition will appear both from reason and revelation.

I. It is reasonable to suppose that the clearer discoveries any one has of the greatness and majesty of God, the clearer views he should have of his own ill desert. This must be reasonable, when we consider what is implied in true religion ; which radically consists in right affection ; in feeling towards objects according to their nature and importance. But in order to this, there must be a knowledge of those objects suited to excite religious affection. Truth must be seen, to be loved or hated. Love and hatred necessarily suppose some object in the view of the mind, toward which, they are exercised. And religious affections, which are genuine, always imply

some correct views of God. Hence there can be no true religion without true conviction, which is nothing more nor less than a discovery and realizing sense of truth. He who has a correct and realizing view of the character of God, and sees his own character in a true point of light, who sees sin in its nature and tendency to be what it is, and who consequently views his real and relative state with respect to time and eternity, may be said to be a subject of true conviction. Hence it follows, that conviction is necessary to conversion. In other words, conviction is necessary for right affection. Conviction of truth respecting God, is necessary in order to right affection toward him. And a conviction of the truth with respect to our own character ; with respect to sin, and the Saviour, is necessary to right affection towards these objects. Right affection with respect to any object, involves true conviction ; and therefore it is reasonable to conclude, that he, who is not the subject of true conviction, is not the subject of right affection. From this we may not infer, that every one, who is the subject of true conviction, is likewise the subject of right affection. For there is no necessary connexion between a conviction of truth and a cordial approbation of it. Hence the most wicked beings may have the clearest conviction of truth, and yet remain enemies to it. This is now the case with satan, the great enemy of God ; and this will be the case with all the impenitent at, and after the day of judgment. They will have the clearest and most painful conviction of truth respecting God.—They will see sin and their



own characters in a true light, and yet remain not only destitute of right affection, but full of the contrary. Though conviction be a necessary foundation for right affection, yet it is entirely a distinct thing; as distinct as the perception of truth is from the love of it. But it is a truth, that every one who is truly godly is the subject of right affection. He loves those objects which ought to be loved, and hates those which are hateful. This is essential to a good man. For persons are called godly, in distinction from others, because there is some real conformity in their hearts to the moral image of God.

Let us now consider a number of truths, with which it must be supposed the godly man is acquainted, and consult the dictates of reason with respect to what his views and exercises must be in the contemplation of them.

It is a truth, with which every pious man is acquainted, that God is a being absolutely, and infinitely glorious and amiable. And since the love and honour, which are due to any being, are in proportion to the greatness and goodness of that being, it is therefore a reasonable conclusion, that all men are under the greatest possible obligations to love and obey God. Accordingly God requires, by an express law, all men to love him with all the heart. This law, all have broken; and as the demerit of sin is in proportion to the violated obligation, so no bounds can be set to the ill desert of the transgressor. Accordingly, death, consisting in a separation of the soul from the favour of God, is annexed to this law as its just penalty.

This is the desert of every sinner. And those who are now reconciled were once "enemies in their minds, by wicked works." Such are sensible, that they were once wholly unconformed to this law, and that even now they are far from entire conformity to it. This want of conformity involves inexpressible guilt. Saints, as they grow in their acquaintance with divine things, see more of the purity and holiness of the divine law and feel more this want of conformity to it. The more they discover of the excellency and glory of God, which is the foundation of the divine law and their obligations, the more clearly will they see their own deficiency, and will increase in this as they increase in their knowledge of God and of his law. And it is further evident, that the ill desert of sin is a thing which never wears out. He who once deserved punishment, will forever in point of justice, deserve punishment. Truly in consequence of the atonement of Christ, it is consistent with justice, to pardon the penitent sinner. But justice does not require it. It is not justice, but mercy which pardons the sinner. This pardon saves him from punishment, but not from the desert of it. He is in himself, and considered without relation to Christ, as ill deserving after pardon and justification as before. We can easily perceive that absolving a criminal from deserved punishment does not render him innocent. And as a pardon does not destroy the ill desert of the pardoned criminal, so neither does his repentance make any atonement for his past crimes. His repentance may be a security against future transgression, but has not the least tendency to expiate his

sin, or make any alteration in what is past. His present obedience is no more than his present duty, and cannot, in the least degree, make any satisfaction for his former sins.

Now these being established and unquestionable truths, and it being also a truth, that all godly persons are subjects of right affections, founded upon a conviction of truth, or have correct views of God and his law; it will follow, that every pious man entertains a deep sense of his own vileness and ill desert. For it is a truth, that he is ill deserving at the hand of God; and it is perfectly reasonable that the more he sees of the divine perfection, the clearer he should discover his imperfection. This being true, how can it be otherwise than that a sense of vileness should increase, in every being who has sinned, in proportion as his sense of the excellency of God increases. And should this creature be a penitent, pardoned sinner, this will not alter the case, for the reason already given, that pardon does not expiate sin, but only save him from its deserved punishment. It is reasonable to suppose, that the truly godly, who behold the divine glory, who see the true reason why God is to be loved, should upon every discovery of the divine glory, have a proportional discovery of the evil of sin, and of their own vileness in particular. And that they who have the highest, and most heart affecting sense of the glory of God, and so the highest exercises of true religion, should have the deepest impression of their sinfulness. For this is only to suppose, that they have clearer views of God and themselves, than others; or that they view

things more according to truth than others; or than they themselves did when they had less light. For if any child of Adam, even the holiest saint who ever lived, was to see things as they really are, he would plainly discover that in the eye of the law, that impartial rule of rectitude, he deserves eternal destruction; because he would see that his present holiness is nothing compared with what it ought to be.—That he is far, very far from that entire conformity to God which he is bound to possess, yea that his love, compared with what it should be, is but a drop to the ocean. And he would further see, that he is in fact much nigher a state of perfect sinfulness than of perfect holiness; or that his present sinfulness is great, vastly great, compared with his present holiness. This will certainly be the case, because every sinful exercise is an infinite evil, as it is in its nature opposition to an infinite God; infinite perfection and holiness. Sin is great in proportion to the glory and excellency of that being against whom it is committed. And an act of sin deserves more blame, than an act of obedience can deserve praise; yea infinitely more. Hear the decision of Christ on this subject, “when ye have done all say we are unprofitable servants.” He who sees the truth in this matter will see and acknowledge this to be the fact. Let the pious man have ever so clear evidence of his love to God, and acceptance with him, this has not the least tendency to conceal his sinfulness, but on the contrary to increase his sense of the evil of sin; and the fuller and clearer evidence will he have that nothing but sovereign grace can save him.

This perfectly corresponds with the account which the scriptures give of the views and feelings of the truly godly. There is nothing in all the bible which gives the least intimation, that true religion, tends in the least degree to destroy, or diminish, in the subject, a sense of ill desert. Nor indeed to lead him to think himself the less ill deserving than he was before his pardon; but numerous passages to show that the contrary is true of every real saint. That the more love he has to God, the deeper conviction he has of the evil of sin, and of his own just desert of eternal destruction. Accordingly we find the most eminent saints whose characters are delineated in the sacred oracles, often expressing a lively sense of their own sinfulness and guilt in the sight of God. And this, even at the time when they had the most sensible love to, and communion with God. We further find, that when they had any extraordinary discovery of the greatness, majesty and glory of God, they were then the most affected with a sense of their exceeding vileness. These remarks shall be confirmed by bringing to your view a few instances, from scripture, exhibiting the feelings of distinguished saints. Hear the confession of Jacob, at a time when he had the highest evidence of his pardon and acceptance with God, and also a lively sense of the glory of God; he breaks out in this language, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercy, and truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant." So it was with David, who was distinguished for his piety. How pertinent are the words of Job, who appears in the first chapters of that book rather

too much disposed to vindicate and justify himself; but when God made singular and clear discoveries of his infinite majesty and glory before him, he was filled with the deepest sense of his own deformity and sinfulness before God. He therefore says, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself." But why did a sight of God; a discovery of his glory lead Job to abhor himself? Because it discovered his own vileness. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel might be introduced to illustrate this truth. When Daniel had fasted and prayed, God was pleased to favour him with an assurance of his love, and a disclosure of his gracious designs towards his people. And what was the effect? He tells us, "And there remained no more strength in me. For my comeliness was turned into corruption, and I retained no strength." When persons or people have little, or no sense of the glory and excellency of God, they may retain their good opinion of themselves. The view which Daniel had of his own moral deformity swallowed up all sense of the little beauty which he had. He had some real comeliness in proportion to his love to God, which, at this time, was great compared with that of any other saints, or compared with his own love at other times. The same effect had a remarkable discovery of the divine glory upon the prophet Isaiah, which produced the humble exclamation in the text, "wo is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."

From thesein stances it clearly appears that true, spiritual sight is always attended with a deep impression of human vileness; and the greater discoveries saints have of God, the more they see of their own sinfulness and pollution. Thus I have attempted to show the truth of the doctrine, which was, that saints increase in a sense of their vileness in proportion to the clearness of their discoveries of the divine glory.

What has been said opens the way for a number of important and useful

### *REFLECTIONS.*

1. If it be true, that the godly increase in a sense of their vileness, as they increase in their knowledge of God, or in proportion to their discoveries of the excellency and glory of the divine character, then it will follow, that those who think they have religion, and are growing in grace, and yet do not find an increasing sense and conviction of their own vileness, have the greatest reason to conclude themselves deceived. If they who are godly do see, or have a sense of the excellency of God, and if this be attended with an answerable sense of the evil of sin, then it is an unavoidable consequence, that those who consider themselves as subjects of extraordinary illumination, and this is not attended with an increasing sense and conviction of their deformity and sinfulness, do but deceive themselves; especially if these discoveries cherish a spirit of pride and self conceit. This is indeed an evidence, that the true character of God is not the object of their discovery; but that they are actuated by a vain, blind and wicked heart. They who have not had a deep

and heart affecting sense of their totally ruined state by sin, and of their desert of God's wrath and curse, have never seen his true character nor their own. For this is indeed the truth with respect to every sinner. On this, and no other principle, did Jesus Christ come into the world to save them. And they who have never felt this to be the truth, have never yet been the subjects of true conviction. They are so far from being converted, that they have not been convinced.— They are so far from having complied with the gospel, that they have not yet seen themselves condemned by the law. So far are such from having embraced Jesus Christ as a Saviour, that they have not yet seen their need of him. For Christ is needed as a Saviour, only on the principle that sinners are lost and undone. They therefore who are not sensible, that they deserve that punishment from which the gospel proposes to deliver, cannot possibly see their need of such a Saviour as Jesus Christ. It cannot therefore be supposed, without an absurdity, that such have ever accepted him as offered in the gospel. As true conviction tends directly to discover our guilt, and our need of an infinite atonement; and as true religion implies both correct views of God and ourselves; with corresponding feelings, it is plain, that those supposed discoveries, which do not serve to increase our sense of sin, are but delusion. This will serve to distinguish between true and false religion. True religion invariably tends to make the subject of it humble, because it shows him the character of God and his own ill desert; and the latter will invariably increase, as his



views of divine truth enlarge. Sin will appear more and more hateful, and himself more and more vile, and consequently the man more and more humble. Will this man be likely to think himself better than others? Will he feel that he knows more? Will he erect himself into a teacher, and proclaim his own goodness? The feet of Jesus will be his chosen place. A sense of the infinite holiness of God, the purity of his law, the evil of sin, his own deficiency in every grace, will kill that pride and religious vanity, which some discover as soon as they imagine they possess religion. Instead of running from place to place to proclaim his own goodness, the pious man feels more like the publican, who would not enter the temple, but stood a great way off "and smote on his breast saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." As this spiritual perception of the glory and excellency of God, when first revealed, begets humility, so we may be confident it will, as it increases, produce greater degrees of the same grace. Their humility will be in proportion to their sense of divine things. Religion being what it is, it is impossible in the nature of things, that a person should have any true spiritual light, and yet have no humility; and as impossible that he should grow in the knowledge of God, and not grow in humility. For it is evident from the nature of religion, that the more a person has of it, with remaining corruption, the less will his holiness appear compared with his remaining sin. Sin will appear more exceedingly sinful than ever; and he will find it in the defects of his highest and best affections, and brightest experiences.

But it is the nature of false religious affections to hide the deformity of the heart, and make it appear to those who are the subjects of these affections, that all their sin is gone, that they live almost, if not wholly without sin. This is indeed a sure evidence that their discoveries are darkness and not light. It is darkness and not light which hides from men their pollution. Light let into the heart will always discover deformity more than sufficient to keep the man humble ; he will even groan under its burden. “O wretched man, that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death !” This is his language. Some have been unable to account for this exclamation of the Apostle ; or to reconcile it with their views of religion. They have therefore supposed that these words are not descriptive of Paul the Apostle, but of Saul of Tarsus. In other words, that the Apostle here expressed his sense of himself before his conversion. This singular construction is put upon his words, to support the opinion, that when a man is converted, his sense of sin is taken away, and that he has no remaining corruption. Strange ! Is it not evident from all the writings of the Apostle, that he viewed himself vastly more vile and unworthy than he ever did before ? Indeed there can be no doubt on this point. When a person rises in importance in his own eyes, and esteems his religious attainments great, we may be confident the poor man is under a delusion. His self esteem and pride is a sure evidence, that he is “poor and miserable and blind and naked.” For it is manifest from what has been said, that the true saint

is by no means disposed to think his religious attainments great. He may indeed have reason to think he has more love to God, than some other christians, or than he formerly had ; but such is the nature of grace, that he will “ esteem others better than himself.” And instead of speaking of himself in a way which may lead others to think him a christian of the first order, he will be more disposed to cry out, my leanness, my leanness !—It may therefore be laid down as infallible truth, that the person, who is apt to think that he, compared with others, is an eminent saint ; much distinguished above others in christian knowledge and experience, in whom this is a first thought, a thought which rises of itself, and readily offers ; he is certainly mistaken. He is no eminent saint, but under the prevailing dominion of a selfish spirit. And if this be habitual with the man, and is steadily his prevailing temper, he is no saint, but a self righteous, self deluded pharisee. This is the real character of all those whose religion elevates them with a fond conceit that they have remarkable discoveries, and distinguished experience in the divine life. For true spiritual knowledge is of such a nature, that the more a man has, the more sensible he is of his ignorance. “ He that thinketh that he knoweth any thing, knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.”

2. We may see that there is more truth and propriety than we may first suppose in this expression, *that saints grow downwards*. The meaning of which is, as grace strengthens, and grows, they increase in lowliness of mind, and are more and more disposed to

take the lowest place. The more they know of God ; of his law and themselves, the more reason will they see to be humble before God. And every additional degree of light serves to bring them lower, and to make them feel more sensibly the burden of sin.

3. If saints who have some conformity to God are so vile and unworthy, what is the state of sinners ? How truly may every sinner exclaim, “ wo is me for I am undone.” His lips and heart are wholly unclean. “ From the crown of the head to the sole of the foot” he is polluted with sin. Sinners, think of your lost condition, and your present desert of God’s endless wrath and curse ; the infinitely glorious God, your Creator, Perserver and Governor deserves to be loved, lived to, and delighted in with all your hearts. God knows at the same time, that you love your sins more than you love him. Your heart is wholly and at all times opposed to God, to his law, and the way of salvation by a crucified Saviour. And should not God interpose you will continue to reject God as your portion, and Jesus as your Saviour. You will perish, unless God have mercy on you, and give you a new heart. He is under no obligation to do this ; he may leave you to perish in your chosen way. How truly may you exclaim, “ wo is me, for I am undone.”

## SERMON XXI.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

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LUKE, xxii. 19.

*This do in remembrance of me.*

**I**N the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew, we find it thus written, "and as they," Christ and his disciples, "sat down to meat, Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it. For this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The same thing is repeated, nearly in the same words, by St. Mark. The Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, gives substantially the same account.

In the text, we are more particularly taught the end and design of this holy ordinance, and its perpetuity, and obligation on all the followers of Christ. It evidently appears from the various accounts of its institution, that it was the design of Christ, that it should be observed in his church until his second coming. "As

often, saith the Apostle, as ye eat of this bread and drink of this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death, until he come." And its important design, is to be a standing memorial of his infinitely benevolent death, and our redemption by it.

"Do this in remembrance of me." This precept Christ gave to his disciples, the night in which he was betrayed.

In discoursing on these words I shall endeavour,

I. To show what is implied in this command; or what it is to observe the institution of the Lord's supper in remembrance of him.

II. Answer some objections.

I. We are to attend to the import of the direction in the text.

We may remark, that here is a plain direction, to a particular duty: A direction extending to all christians, and making it their duty to remember Christ in this institution. The observance of this ordinance, is as plain a duty as any in the whole circle of revealed truth. But who are they, who are laid under obligation, by this precept to observe this ordinance? All the friends of Christ are, in particular, bound to the observance of this positive injunction of Christ. They can consistently keep the feast; for the language of their practice is the language of their heart. And there can be no objections in the mind of a true Christian against this command of his Lord; for he has those qualifications, which are necessary, to attend acceptably on the supper of Christ. And so long as the impenitent are under indispensable obligations to exercise

a friendly temper towards Jesus Christ, they can have no excuse for neglecting this duty, which an unfriendly temper only renders unacceptable to God. It is the immediate duty of the sinner to exercise "repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," and attend on this ordinance "in remembrance of him." In other words, to become a real christian; and feel and act in all respects like the friend of Christ. And therefore, we do not find two kinds of duty pointed out in the word of God; one for saints and one for sinners. All mankind ought to be of the same temper, and the same temper is required of all. The want of a suitable temper, therefore, to comply with the command of Christ in the text, can be no excuse, because a wrong temper of heart is that alone which renders any one unacceptable to God in this ordinance.

Many persons appear to feel that no blame is, or can be attached to them for being destitute of those qualifications which are necessary to attend acceptably on this institution. But it is easy to see, on a little reflection, that this is no excuse; because what is plead as an excuse is in itself a sin. Men have no excuse for being destitute of those qualifications, which would enable them to perform this, and every other duty. They might as well say, we are excusable for neglecting prayer, because God requires us to pray in faith; that we are under no obligations to worship God in any form, because we have not an heart to "worship him in spirit and truth." Men may excuse themselves in the neglect of every duty, on this principle. Sinners have therefore no more excuse for neglecting

the command in the text, than for neglecting any other duty revealed in the word of God.

He must either plead, that this is not the command of Christ, or if it be his command, yet it is not worthy of his regard, or that he is not prepared to comply with it. The two former, none but infidels will make; and the latter is a plea, which makes one sin an excuse for another. But still, there are objections in the minds of many against obeying Christ, which, however unreasonable, keep multitudes from this plain duty. These objections in the minds of sinners, principally arise from a cold, unbelieving heart. They see "no form nor comeliness in Christ, why they should desire him. And as his person is lightly esteemed, so are his commands. There are others, I would charitably hope, whose objections do not arise from disaffection to Christ; but from groundless fears, that they do indeed possess a heart unreconciled to God; and a sense of the inconsistency, and impropriety of professing that with their lips, to which their hearts are strangers, and an awful sense of the solemnity and holiness of this ordinance, keep them from it. Such should remember, that there is no excuse for neglecting known duty; and that to wait on the Lord, in the way of his commands, is the only reasonable ground on which they can expect to have their faith and hope strengthened. Christ will never "break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."

But the reasonableness of complying with the direction in the text will appear, by considering the im-



port of remembering Christ in this ordinance. To this I now return.

For the illustration of this part of the subject, it must be observed, that all acceptable words and actions, in our intercourse with God, imply the affections of the heart. God is said, in scripture, not to know the wicked; because he disapproves of their temper of heart. So when we are commanded to know the Lord—to remember our Creator—to acquaint ourselves with him, we are not to restrain the import of these words to mere speculation, or memory; but consider them as implying right affection. What virtue can there be, merely in believing there is such a person as Christ, who lived in Judea, in the days of Pontius Pilate; was betrayed by Judas, condemned by Pilate, and crucified by the Jews; that he died to make atonement for sin; and recollect the particulars of this tragical scene? What is there in doing this, that can be useful to ourselves, and acceptable to God, unless there is correspondent affection of heart? Does not God look on the heart, and will he not accept us now, or reject us according to this?

To remember Christ in the sense of the text, comprehends the affections and holy devotions of the heart. The object, which this ordinance is designed to exhibit to our minds, is Christ crucified; and it is designed to exhibit him, not merely as an object of speculative knowledge, but principally as the object of our love, faith, hope and joy. These are the affections of the heart, which this institution is adapted to excite. And a view of Christ crucified, emblematically set forth in

the holy supper, is perfectly adapted to move every pious affection in a grateful heart. Because mankind, antecedently to the gift of Christ, and the work of redemption by him, were lost and undone. They were both helpless and hopeless. Sin had wholly obstructed the way to communion with God, and the enjoyment of his favour and gracious presence. Christ, by the blood of the cross, "hath opened a new and living way." Hence he declares, "that no man can come to the Father but by him." This shows the reason, why they who reject Christ must perish. "There is no other name given under heaven, among men whereby we must be saved."

The atonement, which he made upon the cross, is the only meritorious ground of the sinner's salvation. It is out of respect to this, that God offers pardon and eternal life to sinners, upon any conditions whatever. This atonement we must plead in all our addresses to the throne of grace, as the only ground of our hope of being heard and accepted. For the sake of this, God can pardon—"he can be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

We are to remember that Christ suffered the pains of the cross, "despising the shame" to open a door of mercy for us. We may therefore look to the cross of Christ, and see the most wonderful love displayed, which ever appeared in any part of the creation of God. The strongest, and most disinterested affection, is here set before us. Christ died—and died for the ungodly. "Even while we were enemies, Christ died for us." And the holy supper was instituted in com-

memoration of this godlike and glorious act. While we consider the design of Christ's meditorial character and death, who can take the memorials of his love, and not feel his obligation to love his Saviour? Whose heart will not burn, like that of the two disciples, when he thinks on these things? When we take the elements in this ordinance, we handle the emblems of Christ's bitter sufferings. His body was broken, and his blood poured out, that we might be "saved from the wrath to come." Surely none can partake of these lively emblems, without having his heart sensibly affected with the sufferings they represent, unless his heart is dead to God, and all those feelings which become his situation as a sinner. The affections of our hearts will be ardent, if they in any measure correspond with the love of Christ, and our obligations to him.

Here we may observe, that several particular exercises of heart are implied in remembering Christ in this ordinance.

1. Faith, comprehending both a heart-affecting sense of his excellency, and a cheerful reliance on his all-sufficiency. In the holy supper, our minds are directed to a person of transcendent benevolence—"The chiefest among ten thousand" and one "altogether lovely." As an atoning Saviour, "he is able to save unto the uttermost, all that come to God by him." When he died, he laid an immoveable foundation for the salvation of sinners, both honourable to God, and destructive to the kingdom of satan. "By that one offering, he has perfected forever them that are sanctifi-

ed.” / “ He had power to lay down his life,” and no man could take it from him without his permission. He who could, with his word, calm the raging sea, and compose the tumultuous elements, could easily have checked the rage of his enemies. “ How then could the scriptures have been fulfilled,” and the merciful designs of redemption be accomplished ? Though the work of redemption be greater, and more difficult than the work of creation, yet we are presented with a Saviour, in whom “ all fulness dwells ;” who is able to “ finish the work” which he undertook. In this view, Christ is an object of entire confidence ; and we should attend on the supper of the Lord, to increase our faith in his atoning blood.

2. We should remember Christ at his table, in the exercise of repentance for sin. Our affections in the view of his cross, would be very unsuitable without this. For here the odious and infinitely malignant nature of sin is exhibited in the most impressive manner ; and our vileness and desert of divine wrath, are evidently set before us. Sin was the occasion of all Christ's sorrow ; and shall we not then loathe ourselves and repent in dust and ashes ? How reasonable that we should “ look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first born.” Should not our hearts be broken, and forever weaned from sin, which produced such dreadful effects ? This certainly is reasonable ; and to contemplate the death of Christ in the celebration of his supper, and not have our hearts deeply affected with

the vileness of all sin, and with our own in particular, is wholly unsuitable to our own situation as sinners, and the nature of this ordinance, and to the import of the precept in the text.

3. Another sentiment, which the holy supper is well adapted to excite, is gratitude to Christ. At the table of the Lord, sorrow and joy should mingle. Sorrow for sin, which occasioned such sufferings ; joy and gratitude to Christ for his unparalleled condescension in drinking that bitter cup, which was prepared for the sinner, for opening a way for his eternal salvation. We should ever remember, that we are utterly unworthy of such a favour, and for sin deserved to suffer the penalty of the holy law of God. It was not because God was under the least obligation to provide a Saviour, that Christ died. Man, while innocent, owed his Maker all the love and obedience which his powers could reach. He was not then profitable to God ; how much less in his state of sin ?

We should remember the great disparity between the Redeemer, and the sinful creature. “ He suffered the just for the unjust.” The master for the servant, the king for the subject, the Creator for the creature. These things should excite us to thankful rejoicing in the Lord our Saviour ; and to adopt the grateful language of the pious Psalmist, “ What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me ? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.”

And I would further observe, that a believing, penitential and thankful remembrance of Christ, com-

prehends sincere and ardent love to him, which excites to communion with him, and delight in his word and ordinances. Hence the church can find no name for Christ, so expressive of her feelings, as “him, whom her soul loveth.”

These are the principal things implied in receiving the supper of the Lord “in remembrance of him.” We designed

II. To reply to some objections, or difficulties which may exist in the minds of some.

They say, “the supper of the Lord is a solemn ordinance, and requires such a profession as none can consistently make, but true christians ; and I have not that evidence that I am a friend to Christ, and cannot make the profession, and I am afraid to come least I should “eat and drink judgment to myself.”

This excuse is doubtless made by different characters, and from different motives. I doubt not, but it has been made with an aching heart—anxious to know duty, and fearing to act the odious part of the hypocrite. While others, probably, make it to get rid of a duty, which to them is disagreeable. The objection however deserves particular attention. Let us consider each part distinctly.

It is true indeed, that making a profession, and coming to the Lord's table are solemn transactions. Nothing we do in life requires a more conscientious and upright mind. And suppose, that you, who make this objection, have no proper regard for Christ, and his commands ; in this case, you are, it must be confessed, unprepared for this solemn duty.

But it is true also, that if you are really unprepared for this ordinance, you are unprepared to obey every other command; for no other qualifications are necessary to render you acceptable at the table of the Lord, than in the performance of any duty required of you in the whole book of God. If you are unprepared for the Lord's table, you are unprepared to pray acceptably; to sing the praises of God acceptably; you are unprepared for death; unprepared for heaven; you are liable every moment to sink into eternal ruin. Your situation is dangerous beyond all description; and you have the greatest reason to inquire, with the utmost solicitude, "wherewith shall I come before the Lord;" or to say with the convicted jailor, "what shall I do to be saved." You are indeed, unqualified to do this in remembrance of Christ. You are unprepared to meet him at his tribunal; and how soon, you may be called to this, God only knows. Be therefore persuaded to consider your case, and make speedy preparation for both.

But if there be any present, who are tremblingly anxious, with respect to their duty in this case; who realize the nature and importance of the duty enjoined in the text, who dare not say, they have no friendship to Christ; and yet are filled with fears, that all their hopes are vain, and therefore think it unsafe to profess Christ, until they have clear evidence of their cordial friendship to him; to such it may be observed, that full assurance of faith is no more made a term of communion, and acceptance with God, than perfect holiness. Christ accepts the smallest degree of true

friendship to him, therefore the least degree of preponderating evidence, that you love Christ, and wish to honour him, ought to encourage you to attend on the supper of the Lord. If you are indeed fearful of dishonouring Christ, it is a hopeful evidence that you have a spirit of friendship to his cause ; and this ought rather to embolden, than discourage you. Have you not greater reason to expect to be accepted in going forward, than in remaining in your present state of neglect ? “ By waiting on the Lord,” have you not reason to hope, “ that you shall renew your strength ?” In what way are you to gain evidence that you love Christ ? By neglecting duty, or performing it ? If you tremble at the threatenings against unworthy communicants, have you not equal reason to fear the doom of that servant “ who prepared not himself to do the will of his Lord ?” If Christ will say to some who call him, Lord, Lord, Depart from me for I never knew you ; will not those, who never professed “ to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ?” Where then is your safety in neglecting this duty ? Are you desirous of remaining in a situation, where you hope to sin at the least expense ? You “ know your master’s will, and if you do it not, neither prepare yourself to do it, you will be beaten with many stripes.” Therefore expect no safety on this ground. The great design of the bible is to point out the way of duty and safety, not how and where, men may sin with the least guilt.



Suppose you cannot say with the confidence of Peter, "Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee," yet upon careful examination, if you find preponderating evidence, that you love the honour of Christ, and the interest of his kingdom, you ought to profess it, and remember Christ in this institution.

The low and declining state of Zion in this place, should awaken your attention to her interest. The professed friends of Christ in this place, have been called away in rapid succession, and it is with you to determine whether their places shall be filled or not, and the name of Christ be kept here in remembrance. You will consider that the cause of Christ here, calls loudly upon you to afford a friendly hand in building the walls of Zion, by appearing for Christ, against evil doers. You well remember, that woe which is pronounced against those "who are at ease in Zion," and "who are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph," or the visible church of Christ. Be then persuaded, if you have any regard for the honour of Christ, to realize the importance of openly and steadfastly espousing the expiring cause of Christ in this place; and while the open enemies of the cross, are longing to see the end of gospel institutions, are seeking for objections and stumbling blocks, and are glad when the cause of Christ is betrayed by the miscarriages of those who profess to be his friends, as the Jews were, when Christ was betrayed by Judas; and while some are falling away, and others rejoicing thus to see Zion laid waste; while every thing which should be dear to you so loudly calls, be convinced of the importance of your

coming to a decisive determination in this matter, and like Joshua resolve, that you "will serve the Lord."

Remember, you must not come to this ordinance unprepared, neither must you stay away. In Jesus Christ, there is safety for the sinner, but destruction and misery await him every where else.

This subject will be closed by an address to professors and non-professors.

1. Let professors be admonished to attend upon this holy ordinance according to its divine import. Remember, that your profession is an acknowledgment, that "you are bought with a price; not with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." You are therefore bound "to glorify God in your bodies, and with your spirits which are his." O be careful so to live, that it may appear, that Christ is precious to you, "as he is to every one that believes." This will render your profession honourable in the view of the world, and Christ will be honoured in the house of his professed friends. True love to Christ will render his ordinances, and his memory precious to you. This will make you a welcome guest at his table, and render this ordinance both profitable and pleasant to you. Friendship to Christ will assure you of his gracious presence, whenever you assemble at his table. He has declared, that he will be in the midst of those who meet together in his name. In the exercise of friendship to Christ, you may expect to hear him whisper to your hearts in the melting language of love, saying, "Eat O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly O beloved." By remembering him

in his ordinances with a friendly heart, you will be more and more prepared to meet him, "when he shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation, to all them who wait for his appearance." You will then receive a joyful welcome into the blessed society above, where you shall have no more need of such memorials of the love of Christ, but shall be with him, and forever enjoy the fruits of his sufferings in "an exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

But remember, that the mere outward form and profession of religion will not ensure these happy fruits of Christ's death. Calling Christ, Lord, Lord, or making the highest professions, will avail nothing without real love to him in heart. It is real friendship to Christ, which unites the heart to him, and which through grace, gives a title to the glorious benefits of his sufferings and death. By a sympathetic heart, you must be made partakers of Christ's humiliation, in order to become partakers of his exaltation. "If you suffer with him," in this way now, "you shall also reign with him."

2. Let non-professors be admonished, by this subject, of their duty. If Christ has instituted the supper to perpetuate the memory of his love, death and sufferings; and you need, and are in fact daily reaping the benefits of his death in ten thousand common favours; and over and above all these, you have salvation offered to you, through his atoning blood, are you under no obligations to Christ? How can you excuse yourselves in neglecting so reasonable, so plain a duty? Christ has already done great things for you;

and you doubtless hope that he will still do greater, and bring you to heaven at last; and can you be ungrateful? Can you forget his death? Can you, from one season of communion to another, turn your backs on this melting expression of his love, and contract no guilt; discover no ingratitude, no wickedness? Let conscience decide this question.

You may perhaps say, that some who profess Christ before men, give the world reason to believe they are hypocrites, and instead of honouring, do but dishonour him by a profession. It must be acknowledged, that this is a melancholy fact. But does this make your obligations to Christ one degree less? Ought this ever to come into your consideration, as an objection to duty? Ought it not rather to be considered as a reason, why you should, by a christian profession and life, heal the bleeding cause of Christ? Ought you not to show the world the inconsistency of their conduct, by a sincere and hearty adherence to the doctrines and duties of Christ? The death of Christ is as deserving of your remembrance, according to his appointment, as it would have been, had all the world beside ever been the professed followers of Christ, and acted up to their profession. The sincerity or hypocrisy of others, alters not the nature, nor importance of duty. The only question, in this case, with you is this, does Christ require me to remember his death with love and gratitude? Joshua determined, whatever others did, "he and his house would serve the Lord." Because other nations and families worshipped idols, would

he have been excusable in withholding his love and service from the God of Israel.

Consider only one passage of scripture ; “ whosoever therefore shall confess me before men ” with sincerity, “ him will I confess before my father and his holy angels. ” Is not this an encouragement ? Has it not the force of a thousand arguments ? You will remember what Christ has subjoined to this promise ; “ whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in the glory of his father and of the holy angels. ”

## SERMON XXII.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF DYING IN THE LORD.

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REVELATIONS, xiv. 13.

*And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.*

IT is a common thing to call this and the other person happy while living and enjoying an abundance of the good things of this world. But here the inspired author of this book informs us, that he was directed by a voice from heaven, the abode of truth and holiness, to write the *dead* happy. Not indeed all who die, but a particular class, or description of the *dead*. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” These words very naturally lead to two inquiries, which are of great importance to us who are soon to become the prey of death. If there be any thing which will render us blessed, how important is that to every child of Adam! Our

I. Inquiry is what is meant *by dying in the Lord*.

II. Why such as die in the Lord are pronounced blessed.

I. What is meant by dying in the Lord. Under this head, I shall notice a number of particulars.

1. In these words it is taken for granted that there are those who die in the Lord. Whatever is to be understood by dying in the Lord, it is plainly implied in the text, that there are those who die in him and are blessed.

2. Dying *in the Lord* is the very circumstance which constitutes them blessed. To die in him, is a state essentially necessary in order to die happy. And this blessedness is, in the text, restricted to those "who die in the Lord." If all who die be entitled to this blessedness, there would be no propriety in limiting this blessing to those who die in the Lord. Or if dying in the Lord, was a state common to all who die, the mode of expression must appear equally improper; evidently tending to hold up a needless distinction, where, in fact, there is none. That there are those who die in the Lord and are blessed, and that there are others who do not die in the Lord, are truths lying on every page of revelation, and generally admitted by those who receive the gospel as the word of God. Yet while these solemn truths are admitted, we have great reason to fear, that they are realized but by few. Were they realized, might we not expect a more general inquiry, what is implied in dying in the Lord, and more concern and engagedness to secure this blessedness? But it is natural to "the fool who saith in his heart there is no God," to say there is no such thing as religion, and to live and act, as if he had nothing to hope from it, nor to fear from the want of it. But listen to

this voice from heaven, which assures you of the reality of both. I now proceed to show particularly what is implied in "dying in the Lord."

It is well known to every one, in any measure acquainted with the scriptures, that *Lord* is a title frequently given to Christ. It is said, "that all power is given to Christ that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living;" "That every tongue shall confess him to be Lord;" and we read of "being in Christ;" "of the dead in Christ," all which expressions make it natural to understand the term, Lord in the text, as having a particular reference to Christ. And when the dead in the Lord are spoken of, it is natural to understand the same by it, as when we read of the dead in Christ; and being in the Lord at death, the same as being in Christ. And thus it is generally understood, and doubtless justly. What, then is it to die in Christ? This, as already observed, is the same thing as being in Christ when we die; and no man is in Christ at death, unless he was so in life. Being in Christ then implies a change in the temper and feelings of the heart. Mankind are not naturally, in the sense of scripture, in Christ, and cannot die in him without a change in their state. The Apostle therefore expressly informs us, that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," but no man can be properly called a new creature, nor can it be affirmed of him, "that old things are passed away, and that all things are become new," when his temper of heart, his views, and his tenor of life are unchanged. They therefore, who are not thus changed, are not new crea-



tures, nor are they in Christ, in the scriptural meaning, whether living or dying. And it is well known, that being new creatures, believing in Christ, being in Christ, and being born again, are all used to express the christian character, in distinction from those who are not christians. The christian is called "a follower of Christ," whose spirit, he imbibes, whose example he imitates, and by whose laws he is governed. While there are others, who in the course of their lives, are actuated by a different spirit, who really are, and who really act in opposition to his laws and example. The Apostle tells us, "that he who loveth is born of God, and that he dwelleth in God, and God in him." The truth contained in these words is, that a spirit of divine love dwells in saints, by which they are united to God. Living in the exercise of this temper, is living in Christ, and dying in possession of the same, is dying in Christ in the sense of the text. Let it then be remembered, that dying in Christ is the consequence of living in him. A change of heart, a change from sin to holiness, is essential to dying in the Lord. Let no man then expect this blessedness without holiness. This will bring us to our

II. Inquiry, which is, why such are pronounced blessed. They who live in Christ, are happy above others in a variety of respects; but at death they are blessed in an emphatical sense. In life they are blessed above others, in having their hearts reconciled to God, to his government, to the dispensations of his providence toward them and theirs. They derive much satisfaction from contemplating the works of God;

from seeing the evidences of his being, and the displays of his perfections in creation. The moral government of God over his creatures, is a sentiment, which inspires their mind with joy and gratitude. While the consideration, that an infinitely holy and just being, is at the head of the universe, as the Lord and governor of all things, gives pain to the sinner. The pious man meditates with pleasure upon the law of God, and he derives great comfort from the promises of God. But the precepts of the law are disagreeable to the wicked, because they require that of him in which he has no pleasure, and forbid that in which he delights. In the gospel, there are great and precious promises; but they are all made to the righteous, and none other can derive support and encouragement from them. These are indeed blessings, which belong to christians in life; and I have made these observations to show, that there is not only a difference between the characters of saints and sinners, but that saints have many advantages, over sinners even in this life, for happiness. And indeed these are not small advantages. They afford to pious men more peace and enjoyment, than all the world can give without them. These consolations are granted in this life, for the support of believers, while passing through this state of darkness and imperfection. Like the manna which fell from heaven, and the waters which flowed from the rock; both were given for the support of Israel in the wilderness, and both ceased when they reached the promised land. So the hope on which the believer now lives, which is now his anchor amidst the storms and convulsions of this world, will then ter-

minate in possession. His faith, by which he has lived, and brought "distant prospects home," will be converted into sight. These are blessings, by which the friends of God, and the Redeemer, are distinguished from sinners in this world. They are of an inward and invisible nature; and therefore christians are not distinguished from sinners, in the eyes of the world by them. Their joys are of that nature, "that a stranger intermeddled not with them." But in many respects saints and sinners in this life fare alike. Both have afflictions, and share in the calamities of this world. But at death the righteous will rest from their labours, their toils and sufferings in this world, and "their works" of faith, love and obedience, "will follow them."

They who die in the Lord are blessed in the following respects.

1. That holy character, which was begun in this life, is then completed and prepared for glory. This is an event, for the accomplishment of which, all the conduct of God has been regulated. God, by the kind influence of his Spirit, has laid the foundation of this completely holy character in this world. This holiness of heart has ever been increasing by the gracious influence of the same Spirit. To form this complete character, God furnished the saint with all those instructions, means of knowledge and spiritual improvement, which are adapted "to make the man of God perfect." God hath given him his holy word, "to be a light to his feet and a lamp to his paths." He has revealed unto him the nature and employment

of that heaven to which he is travelling. He has favoured him with those institutions, which bring into view his dependance on, and his obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ, with a design to complete that character, which has been begun by implanting holiness in his heart. This is that holiness, which “like a well of living water, is springing up to everlasting life.” And the gracious influence of God, like rain upon the grass, is continually bringing this holiness to perfection. His path, his character continues “to shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.” This holy character is, in no saint completed in this life. “By patient continuance in well doing, he is seeking for glory, honour and immortality.” And by being “faithful unto death,” he is crowned with eternal life. God has wisely fixed the day of his trial, in which he must labour with his body of sin, and groan under the weight of his spiritual burdens. Most gradually is he gaining the victory over his enemies, and forming that completely glorious character, a spiritual conqueror; the character of one who conquers not kingdoms, but his own corruptions. This character he is continually perfecting. “He is laying aside every weight; and the sin which doth so easily beset him, and running with patience the race that is set before him.” He is now “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” The smallest degree of that character, which the saint is forming, is lovely in the sight of God. With delight does God view the beginning and increase of this holy character. It is the fair blossom of that fruit, which will be matured at death. And

the fruitful plant, on which it grows, will then be transplanted into the paradise of God. If then the beginning and increase of holiness be pleasant in the sight of God, much more when completed. In this world, the saint is an imperfect character. Sin and holiness are contending for dominion in the heart. God looks with pleasure on the spiritual warrior, and in his sight the day is blessed, when he "shall come off more than a conqueror." Then sin will be wholly exterminated, and perfect holiness forever reign in the soul. When death comes to close his state of trial, this perfect character will commence. How blessed that period, when the once lost image of God, shall be wholly and beautifully impressed on that heart, from which it shall never be effaced, but continue to shine with increasing lustre in eternity.

2. The death of the saint is blessed, because he then returns home to his father's house. This world is not his home. Still, even in this world, he is not absent from the Lord, in the same sense in which the sinner is. The sinner is far from God, and loves that distance well. "He wanders, and loves to wander." Though invited, he refuses to return. "He has loved strangers and after them he will go." Not so the saint; his face is Zion-ward; and he is travelling through the wilderness, "leaning on his beloved." Too long did he feed on "the husks which the swine did eat." Pinched with hunger, and pale with famine, he arose, and is now returning to his father. He is now ready to confess himself "a stranger and pilgrim on the earth, and is seeking a city which hath foundations, whose

builder and maker is God." Though far from his father's house, still he loves it, and is constantly fed from his father's table. Still he is in a foreign land, but travelling homewards. His father knows he is in a strange land, that he has to travel there many years. For the mansions of his father's house he is not prepared, without thus travelling and acquiring the graces of his father's court. He is the king's son, and must be so disciplined and improved as to become his father's court. That he may acquire these princely virtues and accomplishments, he is sent out on his travels in this world. He is furnished with instructions from his father, how to conduct; what should be the great object of his attention and pursuit; what are the virtues and accomplishments which it concerns him to acquire. To travel with improvement, he must always have these instructions with him, and frequently must he consult them. His father has expressly informed him, that he cannot receive him home, until he is possessed of the necessary qualifications, and therefore he entreats him to improve with all possible diligence his time and instructions. His travel is short, yet supremely important. To how many dangers and temptations is he exposed on his way? Though his treasure is in heaven and his heart much there, yet too well does he love this foreign land; too much disposed is he to comply with the manners and customs of the enemies of his father's kingdom. With these he is commanded, by his father, not to comply, as disqualifying him to live and reign with him. With the tendency and inclinations of his heart, his

father is acquainted, and therefore constantly watches and admonishes him of his danger and duty. The danger and folly of setting his affections on the country and objects through which he is passing, are pointed out in his instructions. With all his imperfections his father loves him, and is constantly reminding him of his relation to, and interest in his father's kingdom. And this, with design to animate him in his preparation for the enjoyment of that kingdom. His father has wisely appointed the place, circumstances and duration of his travel, and with much pleasure anticipates the happy period when his travels, in this foreign land of sin and danger, shall be accomplished, and he kindly admitted to the everlasting embrace of his father, in those mansions "prepared for him before the foundation of the world." The saint is never out of danger in this world. As a traveller he is passing through an enemy's land, and is constantly exposed to the seduction of the great enemy of his father's kingdom, and to enter those paths which would lead him into eternal exile from his father's presence. While from his father, he is liable to dishonour his father, and to bring up an evil report against his kingdom, and its subjects; and to fix his father's enemies in stronger opposition. How often has this been done? Though he does nothing with this design, yet in his travels, he finds many disposed to misconstrue and indeed intentionally to misrepresent his words and conduct; so that in some unguarded moment, he undesignedly injures that interest, which of all others, he wishes to see honoured and advanced in the land through which he

is passing. In the land of his pilgrimage, he meets many objects which try his love to his father, and his kingdom. He is invited and urged to take up his abode in the land; to say "this is the place of my rest." All the inhabitants of the country, through which he travels, are satisfied with their portion; pleased with their bondage; pleased with their prince, and wish others to be equally satisfied. The saint has no wish to become a subject with them; he dislikes the language, the manners and amusements of these people. He has no wish to become one of their number; to partake their pleasures, nor share with them in their inheritance. Our traveller abhors their prince, his policy and government; hates the despotism by which he rules, "and leads them captive at his pleasure." In short our traveller dislikes every thing which belongs to this kingdom. Every thing in this kingdom is contrary to that kingdom, which consists in "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Hence his father has commanded him "to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them." How important, how happy the day when the saint shall return home to his father's house! Had you a beloved son, who was travelling in a distant land, among enemies who were constantly watching his steps to ensnare, betray and ruin him; sometimes terrifying, sometimes flattering and persuading him to dwell with them, to disregard his father's instructions, to forget his house and relation to him; were this your son, how anxious would you be, and how happy the day on which he should return!



3. We may exclaim, "blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord," because then there is a complete accomplishment of all God's gracious designs in the grand scheme of redemption. The accomplishment of some great and benevolent enterprize must give pleasure and satisfaction to every good mind; and the day on which it is accomplished may be called blessed. We may rationally suppose that the creation of the universe, the complete organization of all its parts, might give pleasure to the mind which planned and executed it. Hence we find, when this magnificent building was finished, God, with a voice of satisfaction pronounced it all "very good." How much rational pleasure might that man enjoy, who by much labour and constant exertion, has given liberty, order and happiness to a whole nation! To redeem one fellow creature from hard and cruel servitude, and bestow upon him the sweets of liberty and independence, would be a luxury to a benevolent mind; and how blessed the day of redemption to the slave! How much more important is the arrival of one rational, immortal soul to heaven, than the creation of the world, disconnected from redemption. The period of death is the accomplishment of all God's original designs in redemption, as they respect that particular saint. He is one of those "lively stones" which compose that grand, that glorious building of God, which rests on Jesus Christ as the corner stone. At death, the saint is gathered in, and becomes a pillar in the temple of his God. Then takes place the accomplishment of Christ's incarnation, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension and

intercession, so far as they respect a part of the great whole. All these are the golden grades by which the saint ascends the abode of God; links in that grand chain which secures the salvation of the believer. By this he is upheld, and by this he rises to his father's right hand. In death the design of all these important transactions is fully accomplished. Then all the operations of God in providence, and his communications of light and grace terminate in one luminous point, form one grand result; the salvation of the soul.

Fair fruit indeed is the saint in death, growing, yet fully matured, on Christ the tree of life. Without such fruit, Christ as Mediator would not appear lovely and beautiful. His sufferings and death are lovely only as connected with the eternal happiness of his people. When some grand enterprize is so far accomplished, as that the projector gathers in the effects, he is pleased. God promised his Son, should he "make his soul an offering for sin, he should see his seed; see the travail of his soul and be satisfied." This constituted doubtless, an essential part of "that joy which was set before him, for which he endured the cross, despising the shame, and set down at the right hand of God."

4. The saint is blessed in death, because then he is united to that celestial throng who join in singing praises "to him who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever." God merits and will forever have all the praise of the saint's salvation. His hand has interposed, and brought forward a system of grace founded on the death of his Son, for man's redemp-

tion. And while the saint enjoys heaven, he will be completely sensible, and happy beyond all conception in feeling that all the glory belongs to him "who loved him, and washed him from his sins in his own blood." Then will commence those countless ages on which he will look forward with increasing joy, as they roll away. At death he launches on this shoreless ocean, which will be as serene as it is boundless. We now have no means of tracing his progress on this unfathomable deep. We can only say in the language of the prophet, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Was it not then worthy of being proclaimed from heaven, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."

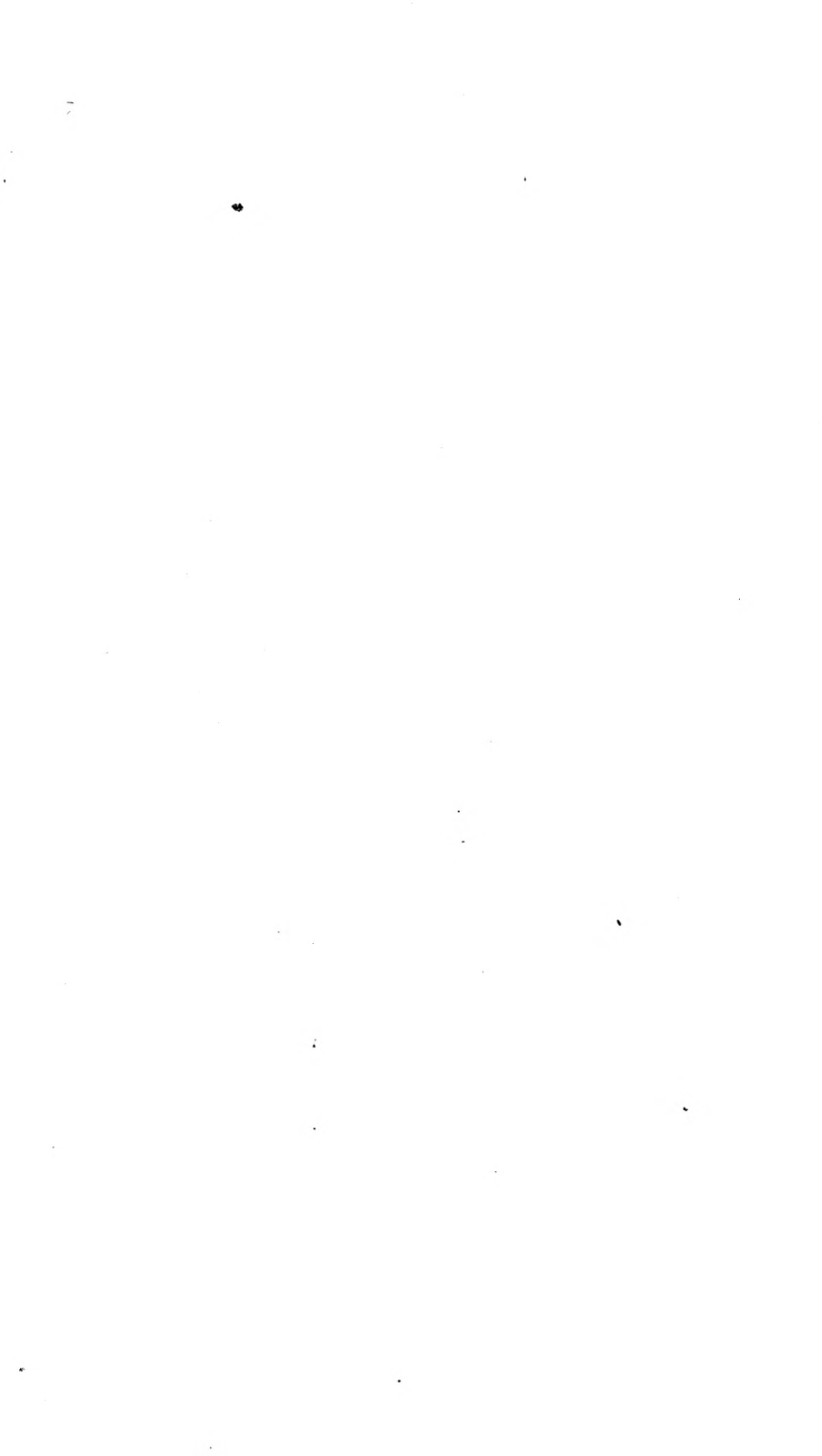
#### *IMPROVEMENT.*

1. If the death of the saint is blessed, then we have reason to congratulate him on his departure from this world. In many points of view, death to a saint is gloomy; but in every essential point, it is happy and joyful. His complete discharge from sin; the perfection of his holy character; his return home to his father's house; his entrance and eternal establishment in glory, are consequences following his departure, which are happy. These considerations may console us under the loss of friends who are Godly. They "enter into peace."

2. Let these considerations reconcile saints to death. Do you wish to be perfectly free from sin? Then be reconciled to death. Is the period joyful, when a completely holy character shall be yours? Think on

death. Do you wish to return home to your father's house; and after the toils of the wilderness, to set down at rest, with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God? Death will accomplish this. Why then consider him as your enemy? If he be an enemy, he is a conquered one. Christ triumphed over him openly. From his cold embrace, you shall ascend to his Father, and your Father; and with him on the resurrection morning, sing the conqueror's song, "O death, where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory!"

*FINIS.*











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**ERRATA.**

**PAGE 72**, top line, for *sinfulness* read *selfishness*.  
166, line 10, for *dissension* read *dispersion*.  
186 line 16, for *increase* read *exercise*.

Some errors of less consequence the reader will correct.

