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S E R M O N S

O N

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

B Y

ROBERT WALKER,

LATE ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE
HIGH CHURCH OF EDINBURGH.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR,

By HUGH BLAIR, D. D.

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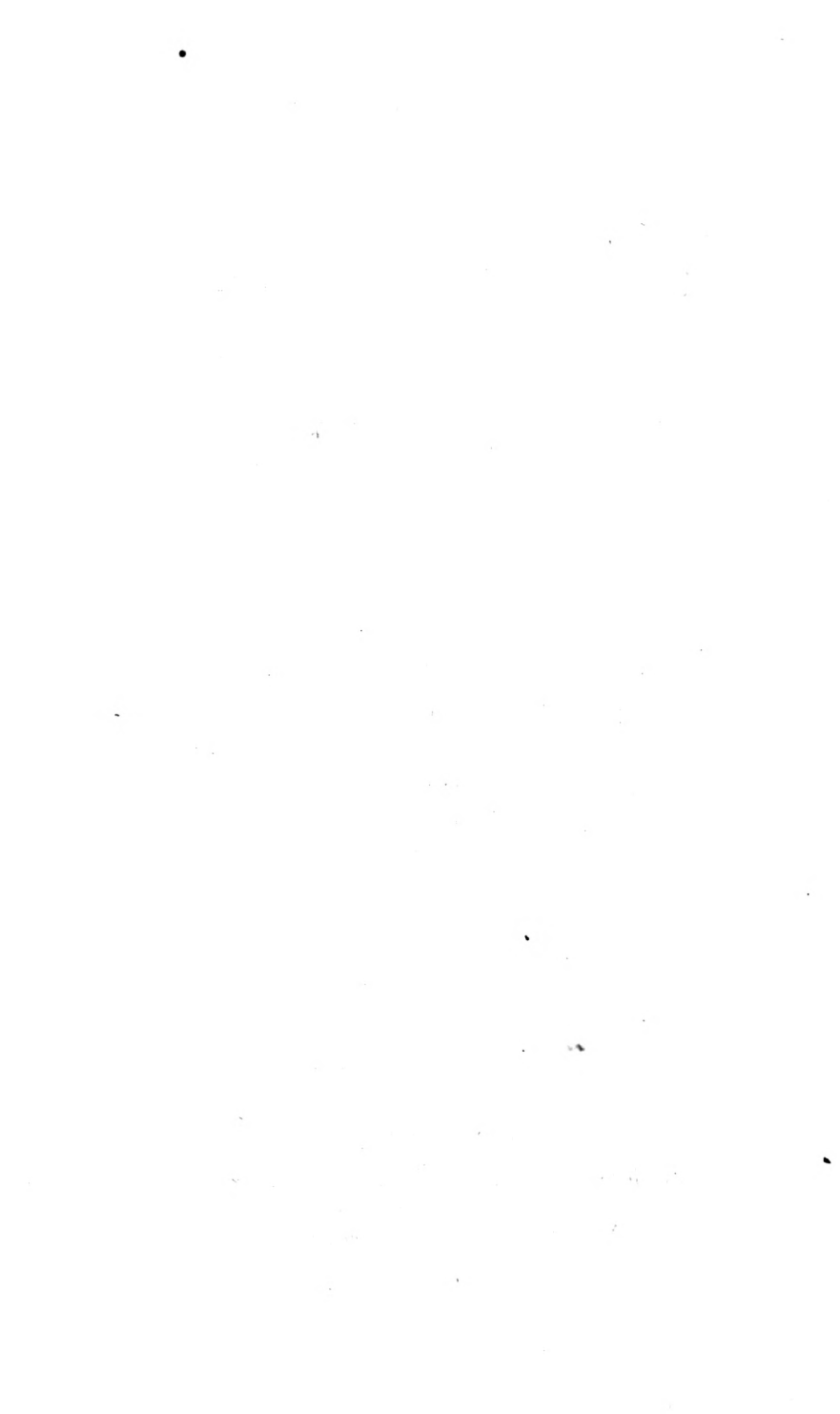
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S E R M O N I.

I THESSALONIANS ii. 4.

But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

WHEN we compare ourselves with the primitive Christians, we are obliged to confess, that, in every respect, we fall greatly short of their attainments. We seem to be creatures of a lower rank, incapable of reaching the same degree of perfection with them: And indeed it is to be suspected, that through a false and vicious modesty, we look upon these ancient worthies as examples which, though we ought to imitate, we can never hope to equal. Hence we rest satisfied with any distant resemblance we can attain, thinking that if we are not altogether unlike
to

to them, it is all that a modern Christian can expect.

This is a gross and most pernicious mistake. The gate of heaven is no wider now than it was seventeen hundred years ago. The law of God extends as far as it did when the Apostles lived; and I know of no indulgence granted to us which did not exist in the earliest times of Christianity. The church of Rome indeed hath taught, that some eminent Christians have done more than was strictly necessary for their own salvation. But no such doctrine is to be found in Scripture: Nay, on the contrary, we are told, that when we have done all, we are still unprofitable servants, and have done no more than what was our duty to do. To this day, therefore, we are bound to the same strictness and purity, to the same mortification and self-denial, to the same zeal and steadfastness, which distinguished the primitive Christians; and it is impossible to devise any excuse for our degeneracy from their bright example. They were all men of like passions with ourselves: they had the same corrupt nature to strive
against,

against, the same temptations to resist, the same enemies to overcome. Their advantages for performing their duty were not greater than ours: on the contrary, besides all that they possessed, we have the benefit of their example and experience. God's hand is not shortened, the blood of Christ hath lost none of its virtue, his intercession is no less prevalent, nor is the power of his Spirit in the least impaired by length of time or constant exercise. "He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever:" So that we are entirely without excuse, if we do not both aim at, and actually attain the same degrees of holiness and purity with any of those that have gone before us.

Let us then consider all those persons celebrated in Scripture-history, as examples which we not only ought to copy after, but may, through God's grace, hope to equal: and, instead of being dazzled with the lustre of their virtues, let us search into the principles which influenced their conduct, that, by cherishing these, we may be animated to go and do as they did.

The Apostle mentions, in the text, one of

distinguished efficacy, which I propose to make the subject of this discourse;—A supreme desire to please God, who trieth the heart, without regard either to the praise or censure of men. It was this which supported him under the ignominious treatment he met with at Philippi, which he mentions in the second verse of this chapter, and encouraged him to persist in preaching that gospel which he had received in trust from God. It was this which rendered the first Christians superior to adversity in all its frightful forms: and it is the same divine principle, which, if once it got the entire possession of our hearts, would be a constant spring of holy obedience, and enable us, by the blessing of God, to follow the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, through the most rugged paths of virtue, untainted with that meanness and inconstancy of behaviour, which are the reproach of so many professing Christians in our days.

I propose, therefore, through divine assistance, 1st, To open the nature and extent of the divine principle mentioned in
my

my text; *2dly*, To represent the happy effects which would flow from our being animated with this steady and prevailing desire. After which I shall conclude with a practical improvement of the subject.

I begin with opening the nature and extent of the divine principle mentioned in the text. And to prevent any mistakes on this head, it may be needful to observe, that our making the approbation of God our principal aim does not exclude all regard to the opinion or judgement of our fellow-creatures. We are certainly bound by that great law of our religion, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," to make the pleasing of our brethren, by every lawful means, an object of attention, and a subordinate end of our conduct. And as our neighbor is commanded to love us as himself, both reason and religion teach us to render ourselves as amiable to him we as can, that so we may facilitate his performance of that important duty.

Neither, on the other hand, are we wholly to disregard the censures of men, or be al-

together unconcerned, when our reputation is blackened by injurious calumnies. "A good name is better than precious ointment." It is a special blessing which we are to receive with thankfulness from the hand of God: and it is our duty to preserve it as carefully as we can. Without a good name, no man can be useful in the world. To neglect it therefore, where it does not proceed from a consciousness of guilt, is certainly, in most cases, a very culpable indifference. Thus far, then, the judgement of men is to be regarded: but then we must please our brethren, only so far as it is pleasing to God. In every case we must state the matter thus: Whether is it wiser to obey God or man? to fear those who, after they have killed the body, have no more that they can do; or to fear him who, after he hath killed, can destroy both soul and body in hell? We must not only contemn the favour of men when compared with the approbation of God, but learn to value it among those transitory things, which are only desirable as means for attaining a higher end.

In

In like manner, the displeasure of men, if unjust, must be reckoned among our light afflictions, which are but for a moment. In such circumstances, it must appear a small matter to us to be judged of man's judgement: "We have one that judgeth us, even "God." That prophecy of our Saviour must be constantly remembered, that the world will hate us; and his example must be ever before our eyes, who condescended to be scorned, and buffeted, and slandered as an impostor and blasphemer; who made himself of no reputation, but endured the cross, and despised the shame, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. In a word, God must be pleased by all means; his approbation is the one thing needful: he is now our Witness, and will, ere long, be our Judge; and in these two characters we ought constantly to set him before us.

This is the temper which the Apostle expresseth in the text.—I proceed now, in the

Second place, To represent the happy effects which would flow from our being ani-

mated with this steady and prevailing desire of pleasing God.

And, in the 1st place, This would make us ready to every good work, by removing all those grounds of hesitation and suspense, whereby double-minded people are perplexed and retarded in their way. A man must be very slow in his motions, when every step is burdened with such questions as these: What will men think or say of me, if I act in this manner? Will it endanger my reputation, or hurt my interest, or prevent my rising in the world? You will easily see that a considerable time must elapse before all these difficult points can be settled. Whereas the man whose single aim is to please God, is at once freed from all these incumbrances. He no sooner discovers the will of God, than he proceeds immediately to action; and whilst the other is bewildered with numberless conjectures, he goes cheerfully forward, leaving all his temporal concerns in the hands of that God by whose law he is governed, and to whose disposal he is entirely resigned. And is not this an unspeakable advantage, towards

towards abounding in the fruits of righteousness? How free is the mind of such a man? how firm are his steps? He walks straight forward, without deviating into by-paths; and whilst his conscience tells him that he is accepted of God, he enjoys a pure and unmixed tranquillity, which the world can neither give nor take away.

A 2d happy effect that would flow from our being animated with a steady and prevailing desire of pleasing God, would be, that our conduct would thereby become consistent and uniform. God alone is invariable. What pleased him yesterday, pleaseth him to-day as well; and though his commandments are exceeding broad, yet they perfectly agree among themselves, and make one beautiful and harmonious system. Whereas men not only differ from one another, but, at times, from themselves also, and require opposite and contradictory things; which makes it absolutely impossible to please any number of them at one time, or even to continue long in the favour of any one of them, without the most disgraceful inconsistencies in our conduct.

But he whose single aim is to please God, in some measure resembles the Father of lights, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."—"His path is as the morning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." His character is still brightening; he advanceth from one degree of grace to another; and is every moment drawing near to the enjoyment of that God whose approbation he constantly sought.

In the 3^d place, The divine principle mentioned in my text, would produce an universal obedience to the laws of God, because they are but various ways of compassing the important end at which it aims.

The man who is truly animated with it, will, like David, have a "respect to all God's commandments;" and instead of complaining that they are grievous, will rather rejoice in being furnished with such a variety of opportunities for promoting the glory of his heavenly Father. This divine principle will have influence upon him in the most secret retirement, as well as when he acts in the open view of the world.

The

The hypocrite, who courts the approbation of men, may be very exact and punctual in the outward exercises of religion: but he who seeks to please God, will not rest in these. He knows that his Father seeth him in secret; he rejoiceth in the thought of it, and therefore omits no duty that bears the stamp of his authority: Yea, his heart is as much engaged in the severest acts of self-denial, as in those instances of obedience which are accompanied with the most immediate pleasure and advantage. — And this leads me to observe, in the

4th place, That a sincere desire of pleasing God, would likewise lessen the difficulties of obedience, and support us under all the sufferings to which our duty may at any time expose us.—Perhaps our duty may be accompanied with much pain and trouble in the world: perhaps, like Paul, we may be shamefully intreated, and, like the rest of the Apostles, looked upon as the filth and offscouring of all things. But still the Christian reasons thus:—‘ What are these
 ‘ things to me? Is it not better to please
 ‘ God, than to indulge this corrupt flesh,
 ‘ or

“ or to seek the approbation of man, “ whose
“ breath is in his nostrils?” Should I
“ please men, I could not be the servant of
“ Christ. Those hardships and difficulties
“ which I now suffer, will soon be at an
“ end: and though my good things are not
“ in this life, yet hereafter I shall be com-
“ forted in that state, “ where the wicked
“ cease from troubling, and the weary are
“ at rest.” ‘ Was I not forewarned by my
“ blessed Saviour, that the way to his king-
“ dom lay through many tribulations; and
“ shall I now faint, because I find it to be so?
“ Where can I enjoy so good an opportunity
“ of showing my regard to my Lord, as by
“ serving him, now that I am brought to the
“ test? He is now saying to me, as once
“ he said to Peter, “ Lovest thou me, more
“ than these?” Awake then, O my soul,
“ and answer with that Apostle, “ Thou
“ Lord, who knowest all things, knowest
“ that I love thee;” and I adore thy good-
“ ness in granting me this opportunity of
“ testifying the strength and sincerity of my
“ love, to thy glory and my unspeakable
“ comfort.’ Such will be the sentiments of
the

the man whose single aim is to obtain the approbation of God. He will continue firm and unshaken, amidst the greatest sufferings; whilst the hypocrite, like the base multitude who followed Christ only for the loaves, will be offended, and fall off, when a day of trouble comes. — I shall only add, in the

5th and *last* place, That this divine principle will make a man easy and satisfied, whatever be his outward condition in the world. He knows that his lot is appointed by God, and his only anxiety is to perform that part which hath been assigned to him: being fully assured that God, who is no respecter of persons, will graciously accept his sincere endeavours to please him, whether his station be high or low, whether his circumstances be rich or poor. His only concern is, that Christ may be magnified in his body. Like a determined traveller, he takes the road as he finds it, and makes no complaints, provided it lead him to the end of his journey.

These are some of the advantages which would flow from a sincere and steady desire
of

of pleasing God, and him only.—But to set these advantages in a more striking light, let us a little examine the opposite principle, and take a view of the man whose great aim is to obtain the approbation of his fellow-creatures.—Consider then,

1st, To what a drudgery he subjects himself, and what a strange and inconsistent part he must act. He makes himself the servant of every man, whose censure he fears, or whose praise he covets. He renounceth his own will and reason; and to whom? Not to God, who requires nothing but what is holy, just, and good; but to creatures like himself, ignorant, perverse, and capricious. He who is resolved to please men, must follow them through all their jarring inconsistent humours. He must undo to-morrow what he does to-day; he must assume a different appearance in every company; he must be the servant of servants, contemptible in the sight of God, and often despised by those very men whose approbation he courts. For it is to be observed, that respect and esteem are sooner found by an honest indifference about them,

than

than by an anxious pursuit of them. They who are satisfied with the approbation of their heavenly Father, who seeth them in secret, are for the most part rewarded by him openly, according to what the wise man saith, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Whereas it holds almost universally true, that men lose respect in proportion as they are observed to court it with anxiety, and sink thereby into greater contempt than otherwise they would have done. But,

2dly, Let us suppose that they obtain what they covet so earnestly; How trivial is the acquisition! "Verily," saith our Lord concerning men-pleasers, "they have their reward." Ah! poor reward! to obtain the favour and friendship of dying men, instead of the approbation of God, and the testimony of a good conscience; to remember, in hell, that they were well spoken of on earth, and that the sentence of their Judge was the first thing that undeceived their fellow-creatures as to their true character. This is the whole amount of their gain, even
supposing

supposing that they succeed in their pursuit.
—But I must now add, in the

3^d place, That this is only a supposition; for so great is the difficulty of pleasing men, that, after all your pains, it is ten thousand to one but you shall fail in the attempt. The very number of those whom you would please, renders it almost impossible to succeed in it. We cannot at one time observe all who observe us, and expect to be pleased by us. We are like a person who has but a few pieces of money in his pocket, and a crowd of beggars about him. If, according to his best judgement, he divides the whole among the most needy, that he may please God, he is sure of attaining his end. But if he attempts to manage so as to please them, he will be miserably disappointed. For though the few that shared of his bounty, may possibly be satisfied with their proportion; yet the rest, who got nothing, will revile, and perhaps curse him, as penurious and unmerciful. Besides, the different parties and interfering interests of men, makes it impossible to please all. If, in any case you join with one party, the other, of course,
will

will be offended : if you keep yourself disengaged from either side, you will probably incur the resentment of both : or, if you think to keep the good-will of both by trimming, making each believe that you are on their side, besides the baseness of the practice, which must set a man at irreconcilable variance with himself, you must live in a perpetual fear of a discovery ; and when you are detected, both will hate you worse than they do each other.—Nay, in the

4th place, Should you give up the idea of obtaining universal favour, and content yourselves with pleasing a few ; yet such is the mutability of mens tempers, that your success, even in this limited attempt, is very precarious. For how variable is the mind of man ? ever shifting about, and alternately pleased and displeas'd with the same thing. When you have spent the best of your days in building upon this sand, one blast shall throw down the laborious fabric in a moment. For difficult as it is to gain the favour of men, it is still more difficult to preserve it, or to regain it when it is lost. Serve them as submissively as
you

you can, yet some cross accident, some failure in gratifying their unreasonable expectations, may suddenly turn all your honours into disgrace, and leave you to complain, as Cardinal Wolsey did, ‘ Had I served God as faithfully as man, he would not thus have forsaken me in my old age.’ Nay, the perverseness of many is so great, that they require contradictions ere they will be pleased. If John come fasting, they say, “ he hath a devil:” If Christ come eating and drinking, they say, “ Behold a man “ gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of “ publicans and sinners.” If your judgement and practice be accommodated to your superiors, some will call you supple and temporising: if it be otherwise, you will perhaps be reproached as discontented and seditious.

Thus, you see, that it is impossible to please all men, or even any considerable number of them at one time. Nor have we cause to wonder at this, when we consider, that our blessed Saviour himself, notwithstanding his perfect innocence and wisdom, was more reviled than any man. Can you

do more to deserve the favour of men than Christ did? or can you expect to please those who are displeas'd with God himself? For is not God daily displeas'ing men in the course of his providence? and what is there that they quarrel with more bitterly than with his word? In fine, how can we expect to please any number of our fellow-creatures, when we cannot even please ourselves constantly? And for the truth of this, I appeal to your own experience. You must be singular indeed, if you never fall out with yourselves; I mean singularly inattentive, (to give it no harsher name), for with the best I am sure there is too often just cause for it. If then we are not able to preserve our own esteem at all times, how can we expect to preserve the approbation of other men?

And now what is your judgement upon the whole? Is not man-pleas'ing both a mean and fruitless attempt? Is it wise to have for your aim a thing so disquieting, and so very precarious? Is it not by far the wiser course to seek the approbation of God, who trieth your hearts, whom you please

most effectually when you pursue your *own* best interest? He is not variable in his affections, like men. Whom he loves, he loves unto the end. "Neither death, nor life, nor
" angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor
" things present, nor things to come, nor
" height, nor depth, nor any other creature,
" shall be able to separate us from his love,
" which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Let me then address you in the words of this same Apostle on another occasion, "Ye are bought with a price, be not ye the
" servants of men." Remember what our Lord said to his disciples while he was on earth; "One is your Master, even Christ." To him you owe all your homage: him only you are bound to please. And is not his favour a sufficient portion? Did he suffer, and bleed, and die, that your hearts might be his, and will you refuse him that which he hath so dearly bought? Where can you find a better Master, or one that you can be so certain of pleasing, if you apply yourselves to it? He requires no contradictory or impracticable services. He hath left you in no uncertainty about your
duty.

duty. You need not say, “Wherewith shall we come before the Lord? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what he requires of you,” even in his written word, which he hath given to be, “a lamp to your feet, and a light unto your paths.” He makes also the most gracious allowances for your infirmities. The willing mind is accepted by him; and although through weakness you fall short of your own good purposes, yet he will say to you as he did to David, when he purposed to build him an house, “It was well that it was in thine heart.”

Who then would not apply himself to gain the approbation of such a Master? This aim, well established, would be a constant principle of holy obedience, and make us to abound in all those fruits of righteousness, which are through Christ to the praise and glory of God. Let this henceforth then be our sole ambition, to approve ourselves to him, by whose sentence our final condition must be determined. And let it be our constant request at the throne of grace, that God by his almighty Spirit may exalt our

souls above every mean and fordid view, and enable us always so to speak and act, "not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts."—Then the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus: and amidst all the changing scenes of life, we shall have this for our rejoicing, even the testimony of a good 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.

S E R-

S E R M O N II.

ACTS xi. 23.

—And exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

IT is not easy to conceive a more complete or amiable character than that which is given of Barnabas in the following verse: “He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith.” And as a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things; so this faithful minister of Christ, who had been sent by the church in Jerusalem to visit the new converts at Antioch, having seen those real effects of the grace of God among them, of which he had formerly heard the agreeable report, was filled with joy; and, like a true “son of consolation,” which his name signifies, he “exhorted them all, that with

“purpose of heart they would cleave unto

“the Lord.”—My design in discoursing from these words is,

1st, To explain the exhortation contained in them; *2^{dly}*, To enforce it by some motives and arguments; and, *3^{dly}*, To offer some directions which, through the blessing of God, may be useful to those who are desirous of complying with it.

I BEGIN with explaining the exhortation contained in the text.—And,

1st, It is obvious, that it supposeth those to whom it is directed to be already entered upon a religious course of life. Barnabas addressed his discourse to persons who were real converts to Christianity. It appears from the 21st and 22^d verses, that the tidings which had come to Jerusalem concerning them, expressly affirmed, that a “great number had believed and turned “unto the Lord:” and Barnabas, soon after his arrival at Antioch, received full conviction that this report was true; for he “saw the grace of God, and was glad.” The form of his exhortation indeed sufficiently distinguisheth the character of those

to whom it was addressed; for such as had never been joined to the Lord could not, with any propriety, be exhorted to cleave or to adhere to him. And as this exhortation, when addressed to us, supposeth that we have already chosen the ways of God; so it implies also, that our choice is the fruit of mature and solid consideration. “This purpose of heart,” with which we are to “cleave unto the Lord,” is not a blind and obstinate bigotry, which pusheth men headlong in a way which they know not. Persons of this character may have a fair show in the time of prosperity: but when they are brought to the trial of adversity, they will relinquish against reason what they began without it; and will turn as violent in opposing religion, as ever they seemed zealous in promoting it.—In the

2d place, The exhortation in my text requires the habitual exercise of all the graces of the Christian life; the constant performance of every commanded duty. It is not enough that we draw near to the Lord on some stated occasions, or have some transient flashes of devotion, like the Israelites

of old, concerning whom it is said (*Hosea* vi. 4.), that their goodness, like “the morning cloud and early dew,” appeared for a little, and then “vanished” away. We must cleave to the Lord at all times; devotion must be the prevailing temper of our minds; and our habitual practice must correspond to it. It must be our fixed design, and sincere resolution, to keep all God’s commandments, at all times, and in all places and circumstances.

Some there are who lay down resolutions for the performance of *certain* duties, with a designed exception of others: Or perhaps they purpose to perform all the branches of duty for a particular season, with a secret reserve, that when that time shall be elapsed, they will then return to their former course of life. But all such resolutions are an abomination to God, as being hypocritical and insincere; and plainly show that the first step in religion is not yet taken. For at the least, it is essential to the character of a true Christian, that there be a fixed and peremptory design to adhere to all duty, at all times. Grievous failures
and

and fins there may be, even where there are such honest and upright purposes; but if these are wanting, our profession of religion must be altogether vain.—In the

3^d place, The exhortation in my text requires that we make an open and honest profession of our adherence to the Lord.—And I mention this, not only because of the importance of the thing itself, but also on account of the shameful and pernicious failure even of some good people in this matter. Instead of confessing Christ boldly before men, they take as wide steps as their consciences will allow them, to speak the language, and to act the manners of a corrupt generation, from the dread of appearing singular, or of incurring the charge of ostentation or hypocrisy. But this method of concealing, or rather indeed of giving away a part of our religion, to secure the reputation of the rest, is neither honest nor wise. Honest it cannot be; for it is just as fraudulent to impose upon men, by seeming worse than we are, as by seeming better: And surely it is not wise; for if we resolve to have the appearance of no more religion

religion than corrupt minds will allow to be sincere, I am afraid we must give it up altogether, and preserve the opinion of our honesty, by appearing to have no religion at all. Hypocrisy is a bad thing, not because it wears the form of religion, but because it wants the power of it; and the way to avoid hypocrisy, is not by doing less than the hypocrite, but by doing more, and better. Our Saviour, who spent whole nights in prayer, cannot be supposed to condemn the Pharisees for praying long; but for making their prayers a cloak to cover their covetousness and oppression. He does not find fault with them for their outward beauty, but for their inward pollution and deformity. If holiness be really within us, we have no occasion to dread any harm from its appearing outwardly. It will at length overcome the malice of the world, and prove its divine original, both by its native lustre, and its powerful influence upon those who behold it.—Once more, in the

4th place, The exhortation in the text requires, that we persevere in our adherence

to

to the Lord to the end of our lives. It is not sufficient that we begin well, and continue faithful for a while. We must hold on our way, and wax stronger and stronger as we proceed. We must not be wearied with the length of the way, but “lifting up the hands that hang down, and strengthening the feeble knees,” we must “run without wearying, and walk without fainting, pressing towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” We must not give up religious exercises, either because of the frequent repetition of self-denying duties, or of the bodily decay which old age brings on, or of the increasing infirmities of the mind. We must not give over our work in despondency, because of the slowness of our progress, the smallness of our success, or the number and strength of our enemies.—For all these discouragements will soon be over, “and in due time we shall reap, if we faint not, a glorious and everlasting reward.”—Having thus explained the exhortation in my text, I proceed now, in the

2d place, To enforce it by some motives and arguments.—Consider then,

1st, That the same reasons which at first determined you to choose the ways of God; are equally forcible for inciting you to persevere in them to the end. Upon what grounds did ye embrace your religion at first? Why was it that ye ratified, when ye came to years, that profession into which ye were baptized? Was it because of the divine authority upon which your religion rests? This reason surely still holds, to make you adhere to it amidst the strongest temptations: for divine authority is always to be obeyed, whatever difficulties lie in the way; nay, though the commands of the highest powers on earth should interfere with it. Was it concern for your eternal salvation, and a conviction that “there is
 “no other name under heaven, given a-
 “mong men, whereby you can be saved,
 “but the name of Christ?” and does not this reason bind you as much to cleave to the Lord, as to come to him at first? “The
 “Lord is with you while ye be with him,
 “and if ye seek him he will be found of you;
 “but

“ but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.”
“ He that endureth to the end,” saith Christ,
“ shall be saved.”—“ But if any man draw
“ back, my soul shall have no pleasure in
“ him.” Nay, the case of apostates is repre-
sented every where in Scripture as incon-
ceivably more dreadful than that of any
other finners. Once more, did you enter
upon a religious course of life, because
your consciences would not suffer you to
be at peace till you had done so? This
reason also binds you to persevere as you
have begun; for the more faithfully you
cleave to the Lord, the more stedfastly
you resist temptation, the greater peace and
tranquillity you will have in your own
minds. Nay, the obstacles which now make
your progress difficult and painful, will
gradually disappear, and at length you shall
find, that “ wisdom’s ways are ways of plea-
“ santness, and that all her paths are peace.”
In a word, whatever good reason we had to
set out in the Christian course, the same
reason will hold for our perseverance in it.
If we began it from bad or from worldly mo-
tives, our religion is but an empty profession,
without

without any reality. In this case we are not yet Christians; and therefore the exhortation in the text doth not belong to us.—
Consider, in the

2d place, That all the bribes which can be offered, in order to seduce you from your adherence to the Lord, are vain, precarious, and unsatisfying. How often have men “made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience,” for a mere shadow of expectation which was never realized to them? But though you should obtain all that this world can present to you, yet how bitter is that advantage which is purchased at the expence of inward peace and tranquillity? Nay, how vain and precarious are the enjoyments of this world at the best? “Riches often make to themselves wings and flee away;” and then they leave the person much more unhappy than they found him, under the dominion of inflamed appetites, without the proper objects to satisfy them. The joy of the wicked is like the “crackling of thorns under a pot;” vain whilst it lasts, and soon at an end. Balaam loved the reward of unrighteousness,
and

and he obtained it ; but what did he reap from it at last ? he returned to his own country loaded with riches, but all his enjoyments were embittered by “ an evil conscience,” and he himself was soon after brought to an untimely end by the victorious arms of the Israelites. So deceitful are the offers with which this world would seduce you from your adherence to the Lord. But in cleaving to the Lord, you can never be disappointed in your expectations ; for he hath said, “ I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”——Consider, in the

3^d place, What obligations you lie under to this Lord to whom you are exhorted in the text, to “ cleave with purpose of heart.” He it was that befriended you in your greatest necessity, and that brought salvation with his own arm, when there was no other eye to pity you, nor any other hand that could help you. Think on the greatness of the love of Christ, and on the costly proofs he gave of it, in condescending to become a man, and “ a man of sorrows,” and at last to die under the bitterest agonies, for the redemption of your souls ; and then
let

let gratitude suggest to you what returns may reasonably be expected from creatures so infinitely indebted to him as you have been. Did the Lord Jesus, without any importunity from us, and even contrary to our desires, persist in his gracious design of saving us, till he could say upon the cross, "It is finished?" and shall not we persevere with steadfastness in our duty and allegiance to him? Surely, if his heart clave to us, when we had nothing to merit or invite his love, much more should our hearts cleave to Him, who is not only infinitely amiable in himself, but, which is still more interesting, infinitely kind and gracious to us.—Once more, in the

4th place, Consider that this duty, although difficult, is by no means impracticable. Thousands of our brethren, all men of like passions with ourselves, have persevered to the end in cleaving to the Lord, and are now enjoying the glorious reward of their steadfast adherence to him. All necessary aid is provided for you, and ready to be conveyed to you as often as you shall ask it. For "God is faithful, who will not
" suffer

“ suffer you to be tempted above what ye
 “ are able to bear, but will with the tempta-
 “ tion also make a way to escape, that ye may
 “ be able to bear it.” Indeed, had you no
 other strength but your own, to exhort you
 to “ cleave unto the Lord,” would only
 be to mock your misery. But help is laid
 for you on One who is mighty, and is no
 less willing than powerful to support you
 under all your trials. He can perfect
 strength in your weakness; and whilst you
 are stretching forth your feeble arms to
 embrace him, he will inclose you in the
 arms of his Omnipotence, and work in you
 effectually; “ both to will and to do of his
 “ good pleasure.”

Having thus explained the exhortation in
 the text, and endeavoured to enforce it by
 some motives and arguments, I proceed now,
 as was proposed, in the

Third place, To offer some directions,
 which, through the blessing of God, may
 be useful to those who are desirous of com-
 plying with this exhortation.—And, in the

1st place, Labour to have your minds as

richly furnished as possible with true Christian knowledge. Study the nature and the reasons of the religion which you profess, that you may be able to confute gain-sayers, or at least to withstand their attempts to seduce and pervert you. Knowledge must lie at the root of our steadfastness; otherwise, let the cause in which we are engaged be ever so good, our adherence to it is nothing else than obstinacy of temper; which can neither please God, nor bring any real advantage to ourselves. In such a case, if a man is in the right, it is merely by accident: he might as readily have been in the wrong; and it is very possible, nay extremely likely, that some new "wind of doctrine" may seduce him, and that he may become as violent in his enmity to the gospel, as he was once warm in supporting it. It is true, indeed, there may be a great deal of sound knowledge in the head, where there is no real grace in the heart. A foreigner may learn to speak the language of Zion so well, that it will be difficult to distinguish him from one who is "an Israelite indeed." But, on the other hand, it is absolutely

absolutely certain, that grace cannot consist with gross ignorance: For the first operation of the Spirit of God is to open mens eyes, and to turn them from darkness unto light: Consequently, where there is no light, it must be concluded that there is no grace. Some exceptions there may be; and there have been examples of persons, in whose temper and practice the lineaments of the New Creature could plainly be discerned, who, by reason of their natural dulness, were incapable of acquiring any distinct knowledge of the principles of religion, or at least of expressing what they knew to the satisfaction of others. This rule of judging must not therefore be extended to those whose understandings are visibly weak, and unapt to receive or to retain instruction; for out of the mouths of such babes and sucklings, God may, and often doth, perfect his praise. But when men are quick enough to learn other things, and yet remain ignorant of the great truths of Christianity; when they discover no anxiety, nor use any proper endeavours, to acquire the knowledge of them; this voluntary ignorance,

whatever they may pretend, is a plain proof of an unconverted state. Let none who acknowledge and lament their ignorance, and who use the means to have it removed, be discouraged at what I have now said; for they are not the persons concerning whom I speak. But if I could meditate a reproof of more than ordinary sharpness, I would address it to those who, amidst Bibles and Sermons, and other excellent helps for their spiritual improvement, remain stupidly ignorant of the most essential points of Christianity, without any shame and concern. And, alas! what numbers of this description are to be found among us? How many claim the peculiar privileges of Christians, who know little more of Christianity than the name? Nay, is it not to be feared, that many who partake of the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper, are so grossly ignorant of the nature of that ordinance, that, with respect to them, the communion-table itself may bear the same inscription which Paul found upon the altar at Athens, "To the unknown God." This, my brethren, yields us a very melancholy prospect: for
surely

surely they are not likely to prove stedfast Christians, who know so little of Christianity, that it is hard to find out upon what grounds they are Christians at all. I would therefore recommend it to you, with the greatest earnestness, to study the principles of that religion which you profess. Spare no pains that may be necessary to get a thorough acquaintance with them, and then you will be in less danger of forsaking them when an hour of trial comes. "They that know their God," said the angel to Daniel, "shall be strong and do exploits." "For understanding shall keep thee," saith Solomon, "to deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things, who leave the paths of uprightnes, to walk in the ways of darkness." But,

2dly, Besides the speculative knowledge of divine truths, you must also labour to acquire an inward experience and relish of them. Did we truly feel their influence upon our own hearts, it would serve in place of a thousand arguments to prove their divine original. He would be a cunning

sophister indeed, who could persuade a man that honey was bitter, whilst he tasted the sweetness of it in his mouth. It is an experimental conviction of the truth of the gospel, which fortifies the true Christian against all the arts of seducers. He hath a witness within himself, and can bring a proof from his own heart, both of the truth and excellence of the religion which he professeth. It was a stubborn question which Athanasius put to the heathens of his time, who denied the resurrection of Christ. ‘If Christ be not alive,’ said he, ‘how doth he yet destroy your idols, and cast out devils, and convert and subdue the world to himself? Are these the works of a dead man?’ In like manner can the sanctified soul say, ‘Have I felt Christ opening my blind eyes, binding the strong man, and casting him out? Have I felt him stamping his image upon my soul, and bringing me with boldness into the presence of that God whom I had offended? And after this, shall I doubt whether there be a Christ, or whether this Christ be able to save me?’ Thus can the true believer, who hath felt the

the power of Christianity, bring unanswerable arguments for its truth from his own experience: Arguments which neither the temptations of Satan, nor the cavils of wicked men, will be able to overthrow.

3dly, If you would cleave with steadfastness unto the Lord, attend constantly to the inward frame and temper of your hearts. Make conscience of watching over your most secret thoughts. Suffer them not to wander without controul, or to spend their strength upon things which cannot profit you; otherwise you will open a wide door to the enemy, and even furnish him with weapons which he will not fail to improve against you. I am afraid the importance of this direction is too little considered by the generality of Christians. We commonly think ourselves secure when out of the way of external temptations, and suffer our minds to roam at large wherever fancy presents an amusing object. Whereas we ought to consider, that whatever inflames our passions, or gives them an improper direction, is equally hurtful to the soul, whether the cause be real or imaginary. Nay, I am per-

suaded, that the tempter doth often make greater havock in our hearts, by mingling his poison with the suggestions of our own minds, than by all his other methods of temptation. If we would keep our hearts indeed, we must watch their motions as carefully when we are alone, as when we are abroad, and in the midst of danger. The presence of God should constantly overawe our most secret thoughts, and have equal influence on us in our retirement, as when we act in the open view of the world.

—A

4th direction I shall give you in the words of the Apostle Paul, (*Rom. xi. 20.*) “Be not high-minded, but fear.” Remember what our blessed Lord said to his disciples, “Without me ye can do nothing.” Nothing is more offensive to God than pride. When our hearts begin to swell with a high opinion of our own strength, he is provoked to withhold his grace from us; because all that is poured into the proud soul runs over in self-applause, and so is like water spilt on a rock, with respect to any good that it doth to a man himself, or any glory which

it

it brings to God. The proud heart, like the towering cliff, is never fruitful. If we would in due time be exalted, we must first humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. This is the way to obtain fresh supplies of his supporting grace. "Happy is the man," saith Solomon, "who feareth always." A holy diffidence of ourselves is the true temper of a Christian, and will both serve to keep us out of the way of temptation, and teach us to act with the caution of men who perceive their danger, and are careful to shun it.

5thly, Avoid, as much as possible, the fellowship of wicked men. This is an advice which I am inclined to repeat as often as I can find occasion for it; and indeed it is scarcely possible to insist upon it as much as its importance deserves. A man who is careless of his company, disregards his own soul. If therefore you would cleave unto the Lord, imitate the holy Psalmist, and give charge to evil-doers to depart from you. Let the saints, the excellent ones of the earth, be the men of your counsel. We stand much in need of all the assistance which
we

we can derive from our fellow Christians: “Wo to him that is alone when he falleth,” saith the wise man, “for he hath not another to help him up.” Whereas, when Christians join together in holy communion, like trees planted in a thicket, they shelter and defend one another. They have boldness to face their adversaries, as well as strength to baffle their attempts to seduce them. “Let us then exhort one another daily, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Like brethren, let us dwell together in love and unity, having all our spiritual goods in common, being “ready to distribute, willing to communicate,” according to the measure of gifts and graces which it hath pleased our heavenly Father to bestow on us.—In the

6th and *last* place, If we would obey the exhortation in the text, we must beware of neglecting the instrumental duties of religion. Let us carefully read the Holy Scriptures, which God, in mercy, hath given us to be a “lamp to our feet, and a light unto our path.”—“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony
“ of

“ of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”——To reading you must join the hearing of the word preached; that powerful ordinance which God hath so remarkably countenanced in all ages of the church, and made effectual by his blessing, both for the conversion of sinners, and for the establishment of his own people. Under this head I would particularly recommend to you a devout attendance upon the holy sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, which is so peculiarly calculated to strengthen our faith, and to build us up in holiness and comfort, unto eternal life. This hath been found, in the experience of all the saints, to be a most blessed institution, which hath in every age enabled men to hold on their way with alacrity and joy, and in every situation hath assisted them to renew their strength. To all this we must add constant and fervent prayer to God. By this we maintain correspondence with the “ Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift.” Prayer is the messenger which he hath appointed for conveying to us help in every time of need.

He

He hath promised his Spirit to them who ask it. Let us “ask and receive, that our joy may be full.”

Thus, my brethren, I have suggested to you a few plain directions which, through the blessing of God, may be of use to assist you in maintaining that firm adherence to the Lord, which my text recommends. All that now remains is, that I intreat you to reduce them to practice. And what motive can I represent to you so powerful as the consideration, that “to them who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will render eternal life.” “To him that overcometh,” saith Christ, “will I grant to sit down with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne.” The time draweth near, when you shall be placed beyond the reach of temptation, when your warfare shall be accomplished, and your struggles at an end; and who would not sustain a short, though it were a sharp, conflict, that he might obtain a triumphant victory? Some of us perhaps have but a

few

few more efforts to make, and a few more assaults to sustain, before Christ shall call us home to receive the enriching reward,— a reward not of debt but of grace ; even that exceeding and eternal weight of glory, with which our light and momentary afflictions are not worthy to be compared. Let us all then be persuaded, “ with purpose of heart “ to cleave unto the Lord.” Let us count all things but loss, that we may win Christ, and be found in him, not having our own righteousness, but that everlasting righteousness which he hath prepared for them who “ cleave to him.” Let us go from this place, saying as Peter did, only with more humility, “ Though all men should forsake “ thee, yet will not we.” And “ now unto “ him that is able to keep you from falling, “ and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy : “ To the only wise God our Saviour, be “ glory and majesty, dominion and power, “ both now and ever.” *Amen.*

S E R M O N III.

MICAH vi. 3.

O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me.

IT is impossible to predict what impression the same truth will make upon the different minds of men. That word, which will pierce one man, to the “dividing asunder of the soul and spirit,” may have no edge at all when addressed to another. But, were I to judge from my own feelings, I should think, that all the terrors of God could not more effectually overawe the heart of a sinner, than the passage of Scripture which I have now read. It strikes my ear like the last sound of God’s mercy. Doth the Almighty command and threaten? I fear and tremble: yet I have still some expectation, that his compassion may interpose in
my

my behalf.—But, doth he put off his terrible Majesty, and, instead of vindicating the authority, condescend to plead the reasonableness of his law? then I am sure that his forbearance is almost exhausted, and that my day of grace is drawing near to an end. For as he neither wants power to punish, nor provocation to justify the punishment he might inflict, his design in stooping so low, can only be to render my condemnation consistent with the utmost extent of his mercy.—In the words of the text, the Supreme Lord of heaven and earth appeals to sinners themselves, for the mildness and equity of his government; and challengeth them to produce one instance of undue severity towards them, or the least shadow of excuse for their undutiful behaviour towards him. “O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me.” And doth the infinitely wise God condescend to be tried at the bar of human reason? Can it then be supposed, that his cause is doubtful, or that he runs the least hazard of being cast in judgement? Have we not reason

to conclude, that the evidence of his goodness must be clear and irresistible, when he offers it to trial before the most partial tribunal, and submits his vindication to those very persons who cannot justify him without condemning themselves?

But as sinners are naturally disposed to shun the light, and to turn away their eyes from every thing that hath a tendency to humble and abase them; it may be of use to bring this cause to a fair and open trial: Which, through divine assistance, I propose to do,

1st, By giving you a direct proof of the goodness of God, and of his tender concern for the welfare of his creatures.

2^{dly}, By examining some of the most plausible objections which are urged against the mildness and equity of the divine administration.

I will then conclude with a practical improvement of the subject.

I BEGIN with giving you a direct proof of the goodness of God, and of his tender
concern

concern for the welfare of his creatures. This appears, in the

1st place, From the unwearied patience which he exerciseth towards transgressors. How easily could he arrest them in the midst of their mad career, and hurry them to judgement with all their provocations on their heads? Might not God have seized thee, O sinner, in the very act of sin, with a curse or a lie in thy mouth, and have stopped that breath with which thou wast insulting his name and his laws? How often might he have summoned thee to his dread tribunal in a fit of drunkenness; and made thee sober in that place of torment where there is not a drop of water to cool the thirsty tongue? Ah, how easy a matter is it for the Almighty to bring down the proudest of his foes? to silence the profane injurious railer? to bind the hands of the oppressors, and to make them know that they are but worms? We read of one angel destroying in one night, an hundred and fourscore and five thousand Affyrians: and myriads of angels stand continually before his throne ready to execute what-

ever he commands. He is the Lord of Hosts, “ who doth according to his will in “ the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.”—How easily can he throw thee into a bed of languishing? and waste thy strength under such a pining sickness, or racking pain, as to make thee cry for mercy to him whom thou blasphemest, and even beg the prayers of those whom thou wast wont to scorn?—But God hath as yet done none of these things. By his merciful visitation, he preserves thee in the land of the living, and in the land of hope. He supplies all thy wants, and loads thee with unceasing benefits. He gave thee that breath which thou hast breathed out against him, and every moment of that time which thou hast squandered away in idleness, sensuality, and the works of the flesh. Why doth he yet wait to be gracious, if he were not tenderly solicitous for thy welfare? Surely his sparing mercy must be intended to bring thee back to himself: He restrains his wrath, that his goodness, like coals of fire, may melt down thine impotence, and thy hardness of heart: “ The
“ Lord

“ Lord is not slack concerning his promise,
 “ (as some men count slackness,) but is
 “ long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that
 “ any should perish, but that all should come
 “ to repentance.” But,

2dly, The goodness of God, and his tender concern for the welfare of his creatures, is still more illustriously displayed in the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom God sent into the world for this very end, “ that whosoever believeth on him,
 “ might not perish, but have everlasting life.” There we see a proof, the most strong and convincing that God himself could give, of his having “ no pleasure in the death of
 “ the wicked, but rather that he should re-
 “ turn from his way, and live.” Would he have ransomed sinners at so costly a price as the blood of his only begotten Son? would he have astonished angels with so wonderful an act of condescension, as to send Him who was the “ brightness of his
 “ glory, and the express image of his per-
 “ son,” to assume the likeness of sinful flesh, to submit to the infirmities of our low nature, nay, to the ignominy and pain of the

cross? had not our everlasting welfare been an object of his tenderest concern. This surely, if duly considered, must remove all suspicions of his goodness, and destroy the jealousies even of the most distrustful mind. Behold Christ weeping over the impending fate of Jerusalem, and bemoaning the hardness of heart of those who attended his ministry; view him in his agony, and in his conflict with the powers of darkness; hear him on the cross praying for his enemies — and then suppose, if you are able, that your ruin can be pleasing to him who hath done so much to prevent it. But, in the

3^d place, The various means which God employs for reclaiming men from their ways of folly and vice, afford another proof of his goodness, and of his tender concern for their welfare. He is not only the Author of the gracious plan of our redemption, but he hath likewise set before us the most powerful motives to persuade us to embrace his offered favour, and to comply with his designs of mercy. Every consideration, which can be supposed to work, either

ther on our hopes or our fears, is set before us in the most striking light. The veil is removed from the invisible world; the joys of glorified saints, and the torments of despairing sinners, are made the subject of a clear revelation. How affectionately doth he invite men to turn unto him and live? "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool." "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live." Even the threatenings of God are not so much the thunderings of his justice, as the loud rhetoric of his mercy. He shakes the rod over us, that, by a timely submission, we may avert the stroke. And when all the methods used to reclaim a sinner have proved ineffectual, with what reluctance doth he at last execute his threaten-

ed vengeance? “ How fhall I give thee up,
 “ Ephraim? how fhall I deliver thee, If-
 “ rael? how fhall I make thee as Admah?
 “ how fhall I fet thee as Zeboim? Mine
 “ heart is turned within me, my repentings
 “ are kindled together.” Nay, after the
 fiercenefs of his anger hath confumed the
 tranfgreffors, what regret doth he exprefs,
 that they fhould have extorted from him
 their own punifhment? “ O that my peo-
 “ ple had hearkened unto me, and Ifrael
 “ had walked in my ways!” He utters
 thefe word, as it were with a figh, lament-
 ing the folly and perversenefs which had
 compelled him to fuch meafures of feverity
 againft them: Not that God is influenced
 by any human paffions; but becaufe he
 could not otherwife communicate, in a
 manner intelligible to us, the deep concern
 which he takes in our welfare.

Nor are thefe mere expreffions of kind-
 nefs, which are unaccompanied with deeds
 to prove their fincerity, and to render them
 effectual: he hath instituted an order of
 men to carry the glad tidings of falvation
 to every corner of the earth; to befecch fin-
 ners,

ners, in his name, to lay aside their enmity to him, which can only hurt themselves, and to return to that Almighty Being, who, though he stands in no need of them, is most sincerely willing to receive them into his favour, and to bestow on them everlasting happiness. “ We are ambassadors for
 “ Christ, as though God did beseech you by
 “ us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye
 “ reconciled to God.” We are commanded to “ preach the word,—to be instant in sea-
 “ son and out of season,—in meekness in-
 “ structing those that oppose themselves, if
 “ God peradventure will give them repent-
 “ ance to the acknowledging of the truth.” And to excite us to be diligent and faithful in the exercise of this office, he hath assured us, “ that when the chief Shepherd
 “ shall appear, we shall receive a crown of
 “ glory that fadeth not away.”

Is not this then an unanswerable proof that God hath no pleasure in the death of sinners? What stronger evidence of it could he give, than to send to them so many messengers, to beseech them in his name to turn and live? to employ on this kind

errand, creatures of the same nature with themselves, subject to the same passions, exposed to the same temptations, who have the advantage of familiar intercourse with them, and who are always at hand, to help, to comfort, and to quicken them? Nay, he hath made it the duty of every man, in his place, to do all that he can for the conversion of others. “Exhort one another
“daily,” saith an Apostle, “while it is call-
“ed to-day, lest any of you be hardened
“through the deceitfulness of sin.” “Bre-
“thren,” saith the Apostle James, “if any
“of you do err from the truth, and one
“convert him; let him know, that he which
“converteth a sinner from the error of his
“way, shall save a soul from death, and
“shall hide a multitude of sins.” Nor shall
this labour of love pass without a reward; for
“they that be wise shall shine as the bright-
“ness of the firmament, and they that turn
“many to righteousness as the stars for
“ever and ever.” But that nothing may
be wanting to beget in us the firmest per-
suasion of the goodness of God, and of his
tender

tender concern for the welfare of his creatures, let it be observed, in the

4th and *last* place on this head, That he hath selected some of the most notorious offenders in the different ages of the world, to be monuments of the riches of his grace; that the chief of sinners might be encouraged to apply to him for pardon and eternal life; who, without such examples, might have been ready to look on their case as desperate. How many, who were once sunk into the lowest degeneracy, are now in heaven, singing that grateful triumphant song, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." There is Manasseh, one who used enchantment and divination, and who deluged the streets of Jerusalem with innocent blood. There is Saul, once a blasphemer and a persecutor, who thus testifies of himself, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should

“ should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.” There are some of those Corinthians who were once the scandal of their country, and the reproach of human nature (1 Cor. vi. 11.); but being “ washed, and sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God,” are now walking in white, following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and contemplating with wonder and joy the extent of that love “ which passeth knowledge.” Nay, there are some of the murderers of the Lord of glory, three thousand of whom were converted by the ministry of Peter in one day: and now they are rejoicing in the presence of that Jesus whom they crucified, and ascribing their eternal salvation to that blood which was shed by their own wicked hands. In one word, with such examples as these the Scripture is replenished; and God every where appears like the father in the parable stretching forth his arms to the prodigal son, and delighting to display the riches of his grace.

Such then are the positive and direct evidences

dences of the goodness of God, and of his tender concern for the welfare of his creatures.—I proceed now, as was proposed, in the

Second place, To examine some of the most plausible objections which are urged against the mildness and equity of the divine administration.

Say, then, O sinner, wherein hath God dealt rigorously with you? and what cause he hath ever given you to charge him with severity? “Testify against him,” in what respect he hath shown himself an enemy to your happiness?

1st, Is it the holiness and perfection of his law that you complain of? Hath he given you too accurate a rule of life? and laid too many restraints upon your natural inclinations?—This complaint is both foolish and ungrateful. The law of God requires nothing, but what tends to make us happy; nor doth it forbid any thing which would not be productive of our misery. The very design of it is to describe and recommend that holiness, “without which no man
“shall

“ shall see the Lord :” So that the perfection of it is no less a proof of the goodness, than of the wisdom of its Author. Were holiness indeed unnecessary, or were vice the road to happiness, the objection would in that case be just. But as there is an inseparable connection between sin and misery ; and as holiness is indispensably necessary, to qualify us for the enjoyment of God ; it must follow, that to find fault with the purity of his law, is to find fault with it for being too much adapted to our interest. It is not therefore less absurd, than if a scholar were to blame his master for the excellence of the example which he had given him to copy ; or than if a traveller should quarrel with his guide, for directing him with too much exactness in the way.

2dly, Do you complain of the threatenings with which this law is enforced ? Doth God appear severe, because he hath said, that the wicked must either turn from his evil ways or die ? This complaint is surely as unreasonable as the former. Shall God be reckoned an enemy to your happiness, because he useth the most effectual means to promote it ? Can he be supposed to desire
your

your misery, who so earnestly warns you of your danger, and who so warmly pleads with you to avoid it? Should one find you running towards a precipice in your sleep, would you blame him for stopping you, though perhaps he might interrupt you in the enjoyment of some pleasant dream? Were you ready to sink in deep water, would you not reckon that man your friend, who should save you from drowning, even though he dragged you out by the hair of the head?—This is the very purpose, or the friendly design of all God's threatenings. He publisheth them, that they may never be executed; he makes them terrible, that the terror of them may persuade men to avoid them. Had God published a law, and concealed the importance of it, with respect to our happiness or misery; would not the objection, in that case, against his goodness, have been far more just and rational?—If his threatenings prevail with you, never shall you have cause to complain of their severity: and if they do not prevail, with what face can you allege, that the penalties are too high, when at the same time, your
own

own practice confutes you, and proves, that they are not high enough to restrain you from incurring them. But,

3dly, Perhaps your objection doth not lie so much against the publication of the threatenings, as against the final execution of them. You see their use to overawe mankind in this world; but you think that it would be cruel in God to inflict them in good earnest, and to punish men eternally, for sins committed during the short period of their abode on earth. Now, in answer to this, let me only ask you, whether those threatenings would be of any use at all, if the sinner knew that they would never be executed, or even if the execution of them were in the least degree doubtful? He who can make subjects believe that their governor means only to frighten them with his penalties, will easily make his laws of no effect, and set offenders loose from every restraint. The belief of the execution is therefore absolutely necessary to the efficacy of the law, which otherwise could only be an engine to work upon fools. And if it be necessary in all cases that subjects should believe

believe that the law will be executed, then it follows, in the present case, that the threatenings of God shall certainly be executed at last. For God cannot lie, nor make it the duty of mankind to believe a lie. He has no need of such base means to keep the world in order. If the penalties, as they are described in the law, be consistent with the goodness of God, the inflicting of them at last cannot in reason be sustained as an objection against it.—Say then, O sinner, what farther hast thou to allege against God? The appeal is made to you in the text, and a challenge given to you to bring forth all your objections against his laws and government.—Do you blame him, in the

4th place, For the temptations you meet with in the world, and those circumstances of danger with which you are surrounded? Let us consider a little the justice of this complaint. The strongest temptations, you must allow, have no compulsive efficacy; all that they can do, is to solicit and entice us: And are there not addressed to us far more weighty arguments and solicitations

to forsake sin, and to walk in the paths of wisdom? If we cannot resist the devil and the flesh, how can we refuse what God demands, who pleadeth with us by infinitely stronger motives than they can present to us? for he sets before us the endless joys, or the endless torments, of a future state of existence. Doth not the undefiled inheritance of the saints in light, infinitely transcend all that earth or sense can promise us? and yet shall we pretend to justify ourselves, when, contrary to all reason, we prefer the pleasures of sin, which are but for a moment, to the eternal happiness and glory of the world to come?—Once more, in the

5th place, Do you object that you cannot reclaim or convert yourselves? that man can do nothing towards his conversion, unless he shall receive power from on high? that therefore you are excusable until God shall impart his assistance? and that if you perish, it is not your fault?

My brethren, we must not speak falsely even for God; nor suppress or disguise the doctrines of his word, however they may

may be abused by carnal and obstinate finners.

It is true, that man, in his natural state, cannot do any thing that is spiritually good: for “they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” It is equally true, that God is a debtor to no man, but is the free disposer of his own grace, giving it when and to whomsoever he pleaseth. But it is no less true, that there are certain means of his appointment, in the use of which alone we have reason to expect his aid; and he who doth not improve these faithfully, complains with a very bad grace, at least, and is justly chargeable with his own damnation.

You cannot convert yourselves;—but cannot you forbear to curse and blaspheme the name of God? Cannot you restrain yourselves when your nature is duly refreshed with meat and drink? Cannot you keep at a distance from evil company, and avoid many occasions of sinning, and temptations to sin? It is certainly in your power to perform many of the external acts of religious worship. You can go to church, if

you are so disposed, as easily as you can stay at home, or ride abroad for your amusement. You can go to your closet as easily as to the tavern. What hinders you to read your Bible, as well as any other book? to meditate on what it contains, and on its vast importance to your everlasting interest?

Have you then done these things, or have you not done them? Have you avoided the tempting occasions of evil? Have you used the means of grace, and attended seriously upon the ordinances of God's worship? — If you have neglected to employ the powers you possess, whom can you blame for it, that you have not obtained more extensive powers? God will make you one day to know, that it was not he who carried you to the haunts of riot, intemperance, and lewdness; that it was not he who tempted you to swear profanely, or to rail at goodness, or to quarrel with the Word that should have saved you; but that all this was owing to the voluntary and obstinate wickedness of your own corrupt hearts. And, whatever excuses sinners may now feign to themselves, they must all stand speechless at last. None shall be able to plead,

plead, ' Lord, I applied to thee for con-
'verting grace, but it was refused me.'
No, God will be clear when he judgeth;
and every mouth shall be stopped in that
day when he passeth sentence on an assem-
bled world.

Thus have I examined and endeavoured
to refute some of the most plausible objec-
tions which are commonly alleged against
the mildness and equity of the divine admi-
nistration; and from all that has been said,
I hope it now appears, that nothing can be
more unreasonable or blasphemous, than to
lay the blame of the sinner's destruction
upon God. " The foolishness of man,"
saith Solomon, " perverteth his way; and
" his heart fretteth against the Lord.' (*Prov.*
xix. 3.) This is the true account of the
matter. The sinner destroys himself by his
own wilful and obstinate folly, and then he
accuses God, as if he were the cause of his
misery; although God hath done every thing
to save him, which could have been done by
the righteous Lawgiver and Governor of the
world.

The lying lips shall ere long be put to si-

lence. The workers of iniquity shall stand self-condemned before the awful tribunal; and all their vain and impious pretexts and excuses, instead of availing them in that day, will only serve to increase their shame and confusion. With what inconceivable remorse and anguish will the sinner then review his past conduct? How contemptible will those temptations then appear to him, which he once magnified so much, when he shall compare them with the powerful motives and encouragements to a holy life, which were in vain so often and so plainly set before him? When he shall recollect the various means and instruments which were employed to save him from ruin; the full and free offers which were made to him of pardoning mercy, and of sanctifying grace; the earnest calls and invitations which he received to turn from his evil way, and live: When he shall view that precious fountain, in which thousands, as guilty as himself, have been washed and made clean; and shall reflect that all these advantages are for ever lost;—how shall he then hang down his head, and smite his guilty and despairing

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ing breast? saying in the bitterness of his soul, "How have I hated instruction, and
" my heart despised reproof? and have not
" obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor in-
" clined mine ear to them that instructed
" me?" (*Prov. v. 12, 13.*) Then shall all
his complaints be turned against himself;
and, instead of resting on his wonted ex-
cuses, he shall then call, but call in vain,
" on the mountains and on the rocks to fall
" on him, and to hide him from the face of
" Him, who sitteth on the throne, and from
" the wrath of the Lamb." O that men
were wise, and would consider these things,
so as to prevent, by a timely repentance,
the horrors of that awful day which is haf-
tening fast to surprize a sleeping world.

My brethren, I have represented your
danger to you as plainly as I could. I have
endeavoured to expose the weakness of those
pitiful evasions by which many of you en-
deavour to support a vain hope, or at least to
lessen the awful apprehensions of a judge-
ment to come. I have spoken to your ears:
God alone can speak to your hearts; and to
his mercy and grace I commend you.—Al-

low me, before I conclude, to beg your attention to the following considerations.

Consider, that to be your own destroyers is to counteract the very strongest principle of your natures, the principle of self-preservation. Every creature naturally desireth its own felicity; and will you obstinately rush upon manifest ruin, through all the obstacles that are placed in your way? Assistants you may find in accomplishing this desperate purpose: but without your own consent and active concurrence, it never can be accomplished, even though the whole world, and all the host of apostate spirits, were combined against you. Will you be worse than devils to yourselves? What pity can you expect to meet with, who have no pity for your own souls? The unfortunate are objects of compassion; but wilful self-destroyers, neither deserve compassion, nor can expect it. — Consider what an aggravation this will be of your misery in a future state? How terrible will it be to recollect, in the regions of everlasting wo, that ye have brought all your misery on yourselves? that you were forewarned, repeatedly

edly and awfully forewarned, of the fatal issue of your conduct, but without effect? that Christ and eternal salvation were freely offered to you, but were contemptuously despised and set at nought? These considerations will add a continual fuel to the tormenting flames, and will make them burn with insufferable violence. O then be wise in time: “ Seek the Lord while he
 “ may be found, and call upon him while he
 “ is near. Let the wicked forsake his way,
 “ and the unrighteous man his thoughts,
 “ and let him return unto the Lord, and he
 “ will have mercy upon him, and to our
 “ God, for he will abundantly pardon.”——
 To conclude: Ponder the wholesome advice recorded in *Prov.* viii. 33.—36. “ Hear in-
 “ struction, and be wise, and refuse it not.
 “ Blessed is the man that heareth me, watch-
 “ ing daily at my gates, waiting at the posts
 “ of my doors. For who so findeth me, find-
 “ eth life, and shall obtain favour of the
 “ Lord. But he that sinneth against me,
 “ wrongeth his own soul. All they that
 “ hate me, love death.” *Amen.*

S E R M O N IV.

| GALATIANS vi. 4.

Let every man prove his own work.

BEFORE I enter upon the subject of this text, it may not be improper to mention some of the reasons which have led me to it at this time*.

*I*f, As many, who call themselves Christians, discover so little of Christianity in their lives, that we are often at a loss to reconcile their conduct with their professions; I thought it might be of use to those who are in any degree distinguished by their religious conduct, if I could lead them into such a scrutiny of themselves as this text suggests to us; or persuade them to inquire, whether their works, which are apparently good, are such as will abide the test: whether they proceed from the Spirit of God,

or

* Preached on the evening of a communion-sabbath.

or from the spirit of the world: whether they are animated by a "simplicity and "godly sincerity," or by the unhallowed principles of self-love, and the desire of recommending themselves to the esteem of men.

2dly, It is evident from Scripture, that a man may go far in the outward performance of his duty, and yet be actuated by such motives as afford him greater cause of grief and of shame than of that rejoicing which is mentioned in the clause following my text. I read in the preceding verse, that it is possible for a "man to think himself to be something when he is nothing." I find in fact that the Laodiceans imagined themselves to be "rich, and increased with "goods, and having need of nothing," when, in truth, they were "wretched, and "miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." And there are too many reasons to suspect, that, like those, multitudes of this present generation are "pure in their own "eyes, and yet are not washed from their "filthiness;" have a "name that they live," while "they are dead;" and have "the
"praise

“praise of men,” while “their hearts are
“not right with God.”

3dly. I foresee the time when thousands shall wish that they had followed the Apostle’s advice in my text. “Yet a little
“while, and he that shall come will come,
“and will not tarry.”—“The Lord him-
“self shall descend from heaven with a
“shout, with the voice of the archangel,
“and the trump of God; to judge the
“world in righteousness. In that day
“many shall say to him, Lord, Lord, did
“we not eat and drink in thy presence,
“have we not prophesied in thy name,
“and in thy name done many wonderful
“works?” But when they receive that awful reply, “Depart from me, I know
“you not whence ye are,” with what inconceivable anguish will they then cry out, Oh! that we had tried and proved those specious works in which we trusted.—We thought them good and acceptable to God; alas! too late, we find our unhappy mistake. The time was, when this discovery might have profited us: but now the doom is passed; our state is fixed; and nothing remains for us but a fruitless remorse, and
the

the galling remembrance of our former sloth and security.—And,

Lastly, When I considered that I was to speak to communicants, who have this day sealed either their friendship or their enmity with Christ at his own table, it determined me to address to you a pressing and earnest call to prove this part of your work in particular; that such as have been properly employed in this holy service, may, after trial of themselves, lay hold of the comforts which belong to them; and that others may receive such a view of their guilt and of their danger, as, by the grace of God, shall constrain them to have immediate recourse to that injured, but compassionate Saviour, whose blood, instead of crying for vengeance, pleads for mercy to the chief of sinners. On all these accounts let me intreat, not only the hearing of your ears, but the attention of your minds, whilst I endeavour, through divine aid,

1st, To explain the full meaning or import of the Apostle's exhortation——“ Let every man prove his own work.”

2^{dly}, To give you some directions with regard

gard to the manner of conducting the inquiry to which the exhortation relates, and then to point out to you the practical improvement of the subject. — I begin with the exhortation itself, “Let every man prove his own work.”

There is a particular emphasis in these words, which must not be overlooked. It is his *own* work that a man must prove. We are sufficiently ready to examine, and to pass sentence upon the works of others. We are often abroad; but are seldom at home, where our chief business lies. Like some travellers, who are well acquainted with foreign countries, but shamefully ignorant of their own; we know more of others than we are willing to know of ourselves; and persuade ourselves, that the study of our own hearts is a dull and melancholy business, which may incite within us many uneasy thoughts, and can give us no pleasure at all.

Alas! how low are we sunk by our apostasy from God! and with what little and false consolations may a degenerate mind be soothed! Instead of looking inwards for
positive

positive evidence of our favour with God, we learn to regulate our judgement of ourselves, by what we perceive in the characters of other men. If the image of the devil is more visibly formed on others than on ourselves, we have little anxiety to discover the image of God upon our own hearts. The bulk of men think it enough to know that some of their brethren are worse than they are, as if their characters would rise, in proportion as the characters of others are debased.—We must relinquish this false rule of judging, if we would either enter into the spirit of the exhortation in the text, or would not be fatally disappointed at last. We must learn to rejoice in ourselves, and not in others; and we must call in our thoughts from the state of other men, and “prove every man his own work.”——“Every man,” saith the Apostle, “shall bear his own burden.” Each of us shall give an account of his own conduct to God, and shall be judged according to his own personal behaviour, without regard to any comparative goodness or attainments which may belong to him.

But

But here, perhaps, some may ask the question, To what works do you refer? If they are works of a doubtful nature, we acknowledge that they ought to be tried, and that those are highly to blame who neglect to try them. But are there not other works, so eminently good and excellent in themselves, that the person who doth them, may conclude, without hesitation, that they are certainly pleasing and acceptable to God? This, my brethren, is a rock upon which thousands have made shipwreck. It would make one sad to think what multitudes will be surpris'd with the everlasting burnings, who, in consequence of this very opinion, flatter themselves, while they live, with the hopes of heaven. You must therefore allow me to retort the question, and to ask, What are those works which are so eminently good and excellent, that there is no need to prove them? or rather, Are there any duties of an external nature, which an hypocrite cannot perform as well as you? Do you frequent the church, and attend upon the preaching of the word? So did the impenitent

nitent Jews in the days of the Prophet Ezekiel, with as much decency, perhaps, and apparent devotion, as are seen in you. For thus said the Lord unto that Prophet, “ They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.” Are you strict observers of the Sabbath? We read of some who persecuted our Saviour for working a miracle of mercy on the sabbath-day: and surely you pretend not to a greater degree of strictness than this. Do you pray? So did the Pharisees; they made long prayers, and they prayed with a loud voice. Do you fast before the observation of the Lord’s Supper? The Pharisees did more: They fasted twice in the week. Do you partake of that holy sacrament? Many think that Judas did so too: we know at least that he was present at the passover, which was also a solemn rite of religion: And therefore no certain conclusion

sion can be drawn from the outward exercises of religious worship.

Where then shall we go next? Will we judge with more certainty from the duties of the second table of the law of God?

Here, my brethren, the matter may be brought to a very short issue. We read of a young man who professed, in the presence of our Lord, that he had kept all these commandments from his youth:—and yet we learn from the sequel of his story, that he preferred the possessions of this earth to the enjoyment of God; for he refused to sell his lands for the relief of the poor, although our Saviour had assured him of treasure in heaven.—But you have perhaps to say for yourselves, that you are charitable and kind to the poor; and ask if this is not a duty applauded in Scripture? I confess it is much applauded. But were not the proud and hypocritical Pharisees also charitable? They gave alms: and more liberal alms than most of us; otherwise, I suppose, they would have founded the trumpet as little as we do.—We may therefore conclude, that none of all these outward deeds are sufficient, by themselves,

themselves, to distinguish us from the hypocrite: But the question will return, May we not join all these works together? and in that case, may we not draw from them a certain conclusion?

My brethren, If I were now speaking of the judgement which others ought to form of your characters, from what they see in your actions, I would certainly say, that those favourable appearances ought to persuade them that you are real Christians. But as I speak of the estimate which you are to make yourselves, I must tell you, that all this fair show may certainly consist with a heart that is not "found in God's statutes." For Amaziah, the king of Judah, was not far short of this, of whom we read (*2 Chron. xxv. 2.*), that he "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord;" "but (observe what follows, he did it) not with a perfect heart." What a promising appearance was here blasted! Amaziah gave God every thing but his heart; the very thing which God valued, and without which all that he could give besides was insignificant. Does not this shake the

foundation of your confidence, and make you, like one newly awakened out of a flattering dream, summon up all your attention to see whether you are in the unhappy situation of Amaziah, or are really in the circumstances in which your own fancy hath represented you? This, my brethren, is the very thing which I have been aiming at. I foresee the day, when many who were something in their own eyes, and trusted in themselves that they were righteous, will present their specious roll of outward duties to the heart-searching Judge, saying, Lo! this is the life which we spent in the flesh; who will not be able to add, This life was "by the faith of the Son of God." Methinks I hear the Judge say to them, These are indeed the duties which I enjoined; but where is the spirit which should have animated them? These are the sacrifices which I appointed; but the strange fire with which you offered them, can find no acceptance here. Ye have not served me, but yourselves. "I never knew you." And therefore ye can receive no reward.

What

What hath been said may be sufficient to explain the Apostle's exhortation; and to show both the reasonableness and the necessity of proving even our best works. I proceed now,

Secondly, To give you some directions with regard to the manner of conducting this important inquiry.

Now, before a man can be qualified for proving his own works, two things are indispensably necessary. The

1st is, That he should be well acquainted with the holy Scriptures: for it is by the Scriptures alone that we know with certainty what is good and acceptable to God. "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?" said David. The answer is, "By taking heed thereto according to thy word." Scripture is that unerring rule which points out to us the road of duty, and which discovers to us the straightness or the crookedness of our own paths. A considerable degree of acquaintance with it, is therefore absolutely necessary to enable us "to prove" and to judge of our own works. But,

2dly, It is also requisite, that we should be constant and diligent observers of what passeth in our own hearts; for "out of the heart are the issues of life." The heart is the fountain from which all our actions flow, and from which alone they can be truly denominated either good or bad. I observed formerly, that there is no outward duty which a hypocrite may not counterfeit: And we have a remarkable example (2 *Kings* x.) of the same action being good in one man, and bad in another, from the different dispositions with which it was performed. We find two men riding in the same chariot, and both of them engaged in the same expedition, Jehu and Jonadab. But though the work they were executing was the same, the different ends which they aimed at, made that which was an excellent duty in Jonadab, an act of mere cruelty, and of vile hypocrisy in Jehu. Jehu was impelled, not by zeal for the Lord, but by ambition to wear a crown. We must therefore retire into our own breasts, and carefully observe the various operations of our minds. We must consider the motives that

that influence our conduct; the ends we propose in our actions; and the temper and frame of spirit with which every duty is performed. For in vain do we know the rule, unless we also know the thing to which it must be applied; in vain do we read and study the Scriptures, unless we likewise read and study our own hearts. The duty I am recommending, consists in comparing them together, that we may discover how far they agree, and wherein they differ. This is indeed a work of great difficulty; but, though difficult, it is not impracticable. He who gave the command, will likewise grant his assistance to those who, in a humble dependence on his grace, apply themselves heartily to this necessary duty. Let it then be your

First care, to get your minds thoroughly awakened when you enter upon this work. Never was time put to a higher improvement: never were thoughts spent upon a more important business. Compared with this, the trial of men for their lives at a human bar is a mere trifle; for here nothing less than an eternal interest depends on the

issue. Summon up all the powers of your souls, bring your thoughts to the subject as intensely as you can, let your minds be divested of every other care; and above all—O be honest with yourselves, and resolve to pass an impartial sentence, as the evidence shall appear, whether it should be in your favour, or against you. Remember that your great Judge knows the truth of your condition, and that therefore you can gain nothing by hiding it from yourselves.

When your hearts are once seriously engaged, then fall down before God, and plead the assistance of his good Spirit, to enlighten and direct you in the knowledge of yourselves; to keep you from mistakes, both on the one hand and on the other; and to guide you to a just and an affecting view of your true condition.

Having thus prepared yourselves by meditation and prayer, proceed immediately to the inquiry itself, before your hearts begin to cool, or the impressions of the divine presence are effaced. Set the word of God before you as the rule, and then put the question, Do my actions and dispositions
correspond

correspond to this rule, or are they inconsistent with it? Take your actions, and the sources of them, one by one, and bring them to this standard; suffer not your hearts, in any case, to start aside, till they have given an explicit answer: lay the command of God upon them, and charge them to obey upon pain of his wrath.

When, by these means, you have discovered the truth, then pass the sentence on yourselves, and labour to have your hearts properly affected with it. Do not think it enough to have discerned your true condition, but endeavour to feel what God hath made you to know. If you find, that you have been all along formal and hypocritical in your obedience; that instead of serving God, you have been serving yourselves; that instead of seeking his approbation, you have been courting the applause of men; that instead of sowing to the Spirit, you have been sowing to the flesh; O lay this conviction home to your hearts. Think what a dreadful state you are in; unpardoned, un sanctified, and, if death should now surprize you, ruined for ever.

But, whilst you thus endeavour to know the very worst of your condition, beware, at the same time, of giving way to gloomy and desponding thoughts. Let none of you say, "Because I am ungodly, I shall die so; because I am an hypocrite, I shall continue so;" for such despondence is no less unwarranted than your former presumption. You have another work to do, which is to flee speedily to Christ, and to break off your hypocrisy and wickedness by repentance. If you find that you have been hitherto out of the way, do not sit down and despair, but make the more haste to turn into it. Christ is still in your offer, and you cannot be more willing to receive him, than he is to accept of you.

But, on the other hand, if you find reason to conclude, after a strict and impartial examination, that you have been sincere in the practice of your duty, that your inward dispositions have corresponded to your outward actions, and that both have been according to the rule of Scripture, take the comfort of so happy a discovery. This is a good evidence that you are sanctified and renewed

renewed by the Spirit of God: This is a proof that you are united to Christ, who is "the true vine:" for none but those who are united to him, can bring forth such good fruit. Consider into what a blessed state the Lord hath brought you; to be his children and his friends; to be pardoned and sanctified, and sure of being saved. What more can you desire? Doth not the assurance of such a blessed condition deserve all the labour and pains which the inquiry can cost you? One caution, however, I must give you. Do not trust so much to one discovery of this kind, as to give up all further trial. No.—"To prove your own works," must be your daily employment. Renew the inquiry often; make frequent proof of yourselves; compare the result of your observations at different times, and let them serve to rectify one another.

Thus, my brethren, I have given you the best directions which I could think of, with regard to the method of conducting this important inquiry. And here it might be proper to subjoin some of those Scriptural marks or characters by which "every man
" ought

“ought to prove his own works.” But this would lead me beyond the limits of one discourse. I mean therefore at present to confine myself to the circumstances or marks by which you ought to try the important duty in which you have been this day employed.

Allow me then, in the conclusion of this solemn service, to put a few plain, but necessary questions to you, and to call on you to answer them, as you hope to speed at the bar of God’s judgement.

1st, By what motives were you determined to come here this day? Was it by a sense of duty, and in obedience to the command of a crucified Saviour? Was it from a mind “hungering and thirsting” after Christ and his righteousness? Or was it only in compliance with the custom of the country, and from a desire of appearing religious in the eyes of men? Would to God there were less cause than there is for this question, gross and reproachful as it may appear!

2^{dly}, What pains were you at in preparing yourselves for this near approach to God? Were you careful to stir up in yourselves

elves those holy and humble dispositions which constitute “the wedding garment” of those who are bidden to the feast? Or, have you, without any previous examination, or any regard to the awful fence which surrounds this table, fearlessly taken your seat among faithful disciples, without asking the Master’s welcome, or dreading his displeasure?

3dly, What benefit did you propose to reap from your attendance upon this solemn ordinance? Did you only wish to pacify your natural conscience, by doing what you apprehended to be an acceptable duty? Or did you mean to offer an outward compliment to the Almighty, in order to induce him to pardon what is past, that you might sin, as it were, on a new score? Or, on the other hand, did you come here in the hope of meeting him whom your souls love, to take upon you “his yoke which is easy, and his burden which is light?”—to implore, over the pledges of your Saviour’s love, his mercy to pardon, his Spirit to sanctify, and his grace to strengthen you? Did you come, that this holy service might
have

have some influence to assist you in crucifying “ the old man with his deeds,” and to confirm the image of God on your souls?—

Once more,

4thly, How were you employed while you sat at this holy table? Did you seek the Lord with your whole hearts? Did your “ souls follow hard after him?” And if any vain intruding thought arose within you, did you instantly check it with abhorrence, and renew your repentance for that mixture of infirmity in your holy service? When you heard these affecting words, “ This is my body broken for you, “ this is my blood shed for the remission “ of your sins,” were your hearts wrung with grief for the sins which were the cause of the Redeemer’s sufferings? Did you give yourselves entirely up to him who gave himself for you an offering and a sacrifice to God? Did you accept of him as your only peace-maker with the Father, and resolve to build all your hopes of happiness upon the merits of his sufferings and obedience? Did you renounce all his enemies, and devote yourselves entirely to his service,

service, to be governed by his laws, as your only Lord and King ?

Finally, Was all this done from a deliberate and confirmed choice, and not from a mere transient flash of devotion ? Then, indeed, you have been well employed ; and we desire to give glory to God on your account.

But if, on the contrary, your hearts have been cold and insensible, and your thoughts have been wandering without controul, upon the mountains of vanity ; if you have felt no grief for sin, no love to the Redeemer, or only such a grief and love as a moving tale might have occasioned ; if what you have felt hath not led you to bind yourselves irrevocably to the service of that Redeemer who encountered the wrath of God for you — this was not to eat the Lord's Supper. Alas ! my heart bleeds for you. Ye have been mocking him who declared that he will not be mocked with impunity ; and who, unless you repent, will certainly convince you of this in another world.

These are all the questions which I shall
put

put to you at this time ; and in whatever way you may find reason to answer them, the inquiry must turn out to your advantage. If, upon search, you discover the un-soundness of your hearts, even in that very sad discovery, you have the greatest advantage for salvation that you have ever had in the course of your lives. For now, your vain confidence being overthrown, you lie open to a deep and effectual conviction, which is the mercy introductive of all other mercies to your souls. Your chief danger lies in judging too favourably, or in judging falsely, of yourselves. But if you do so, how severely will you suffer for the short-lived deceit, when God shall himself prove your works, or when he shall say to you, as he said to the carousing king, “ Thou art weighed in the balances, and art “ found wanting !” How confounded will you be if this sentence shall be pronounced ? and how passionately will you then wish for such an opportunity of “ proving your “ own works” as you now enjoy ?

But if, on the other hand, you can, upon good grounds, conclude, that notwithstanding

standing many imperfections in your holy service, you have been sincere and upright on the whole, how great may your comfort be? For God will not cast off the upright man. That which is the terror of the wicked will be your joy. As the son of a king rejoiceth in his father's power and magnificence, so may you rejoice in those displays of the divine Majesty, which scare a guilty world. How comfortable will the thoughts of a Saviour be, when you can say, "My beloved is mine;" when by faith you can, like Thomas, "put your hand into his side, and your finger into the print of the nails, and say unto him, My Lord, and my God?" With what joy will you read the holy Scriptures, as the charter of your future inheritance, and ponder that "exceeding and eternal weight of glory," which you shall one day possess? With what holy boldness may you approach the throne of Grace, when you can address God as your reconciled Father in Jesus Christ? How cheerfully may you endure affliction? How calmly may you leave this world?

If then any of these comforts are dear to
you ;

you; if you would enjoy them in a sound state, or would have a clear and lively impression of them, let me beseech you to comply with the Apostle's exhortation, and to "prove your own works." So shall ye have your rejoicing in yourselves, and never be ashamed. *Amen.*

S E R-

S E R M O N V.

JAMES iv. 17.

Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

THE unfruitful lives of professing Christians is a very general and a just complaint. But few of those who retail this complaint, are heartily inclined to remove the cause of it. We are melancholy examples of that which we pretend to lament; and we cease not to strengthen the interests of a party which we condemn. David, when he was treating with Araunah the Jebusite, for the purchase of his threshing floor, in order to rear an altar to God, refused to accept of it without a price, because he would not “offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord his God, of that which cost him nothing.” But, alas! our general

ral contest seems rather to be, who shall be most penurious in his offerings to God, and who shall purchase heaven with the easiest service. Many have unhappily deceived themselves into an opinion, that nothing but positive acts of rebellion will subject them to punishment. They place much confidence in what is called a harmless in-offensive life, as if it were virtue enough not to be abandoned to vice. They seem to aim at nothing higher, than that of which the Pharisee made his boast, when he gave thanks to God that he was not as other men, nor even as the humble publican. But, in the passage which I have now read to you, the Apostle directs us to a much safer test of our conduct; a test which leaves us no room for mistake. The question is not, What vices have you forborne? but, What virtues have you practised? You say that you are not idolaters.—Well,—but do you reverence and love the true God? You are not adulterers;—but do you study temperance and sobriety in all things? You are not slanderers;—but are you as tender of your neighbour's good name as of your own?

If

If ye are strangers to these positive virtues, then all the advantage ye can pretend to is this ; ye are sinners of a lower order, than if ye had added positive transgressions to your neglect of doing good : but still you are sinners ; for, according to the Apostle, not to do good is sin.

This text evidently contains the two following propositions :

1st, That men sin, not only when they positively transgress the law of God ; but also, when they do not fulfil the duties which the law requires to the utmost of their power.

And,

2dly, That our guilt is more highly aggravated, when we neglect the duties which are known to us ; or when we decline opportunities of doing good, though we know that it is our duty to embrace them.

These propositions I will endeavour to illustrate and confirm ; and will then conclude with a practical improvement of the subject.

First, I begin with showing you that men sin, not only when they positively transgress the law of God ; but also, when they

do not fulfil the duties which the law requires, to the utmost of their power.

Were we to look upon God as an austere and selfish Being, who employed his laws only as a fence about his own private interests; then indeed, not to violate them might be considered as sufficient to comply with their design. The kings of this earth are forced to enclose their little allotment of honour, and to use their authority as a flaming sword, to ward off insults from their prerogatives. But it is not so with God. The Creator of heaven and of earth can have no dependence on the workmanship of his own hands. His prerogatives cannot suffer, nor can his glory be impaired by the feeble and impotent attempts of his creatures. His laws therefore could never be intended for his own security, but for our benefit. They are expressions of his goodness, rather than of his sovereignty; and his great view in enacting them, seems to have been, to bind us by his authority to consult our present interest, and to render ourselves capable of everlasting felicity. Judge then whether a law which hath in view this kind

kind and generous object, doth not challenge our most cordial acceptance and entire subjection; and whether gratitude, as well as duty, should not prompt us to fulfil every part of it to the utmost of our power.

Indeed, if we consider God as a severe taskmaster, as I am afraid too many of us do; in that case, whatever he enjoins, will appear to be an hardship or a burden. But if we view him in his true character, as a wise and good parent, who in every thing consults the real advantage of his children, then his yoke will appear to be easy indeed, and his burden to be light. The cords of love will draw us on to obedience; and gratitude, which is ever ingenious in finding out ways to express itself, will constantly prompt us to the most dutiful observance of his will.

Show me the man whose ingenuous mind, not only expects a future reward, but feels a present joy in the service of his God: and to that man I will address the words of unfeigned salutation. I will say to him, "Hail thou favoured of the Lord," thine is the true "spirit of adoption," which de-

vifeth liberal things; thine is that foul which is born from on high, and which doth not commit fin; thine is that love which fulfilleth the law, and which perfecteth the faints.

But fhew me the man whose fervile foul is moved only by the fear of punifhment, to yield a grudging and penurious fervice to his Maker; and to that man I muft be fparing of confolation. I muft remind him, that it is the heart which God requires; that God hath refpect to the offering of a liberal giver; but that he hath no regard to the churl, or to his offering.

Thus far I might argue upon general principles, that we ought not only to abftain from what the law of God prohibits, but alfo to fulfil, to the utmoft of our power, what the fpirit or intention of the law requires. But as I fpeak to Christians, I will now refort to an authority which they muft acknowledge to be valid, and fufficient to decide the queftion.

The propofition which I have laid down then, is not deduced by remote inference, neither does it depend upon a fingle testimony;

mony ; but is both supported and illustrated by a multitude of clear and express declarations of Scripture.

We are commanded, not only to “ depart from evil,” but “ to do good ;” not only “ to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,” but also “ to perfect holiness in the fear of God.” Christ is proposed to us as our example ; and what was his character ? “ He went about doing good, and persisted, till he had finished the work which was given him to do.” Nay, he saith himself (*John ix. 4.*), “ I must work the works of him that sent me.” And if he, who voluntarily came under the law, was bound to this active and extensive service, shall we, who are its necessary subjects, plead an exemption from it ? Paul, in his epistle to Titus (*chap. iii. 11.*), informs us, that “ the grace of God, which hath appeared to all men, bringing salvation, teacheth us not only to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, but to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world ;” and that Christ gave himself for us, for this end, “ that he might redeem us from all ini-

“quity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

These passages of Scripture need no commentary, all of them point out the necessity of a positive and an active obedience.

But this is not all. Our blessed Lord, who well knew what was in man, seems to have directly calculated some of his discourses, to prevent the possibility of a mistake on this subject. The parables of the rich man and Lazarus, of the talents, and of the barren fig-tree, plainly appear to have been delivered with this view.

We are not told that the rich man was in any respect injurious or oppressive to Lazarus: his guilt lay in his not extending his kindness to supply his wants. The unprofitable servant was cast into outer darkness, not for losing or squandering away his talent, but for hiding it in a napkin, and neglecting to improve it. And the fig-tree was cut down, and cast into the fire, not for producing bad fruit, but because it produced no fruit at all. But lest the allegorical dress of these instructions should leave men at too great liberty to explain away the force of

of

of them, this wise and provident Teacher, in a serious and awful discourse on the process of the last judgement, resumes the same argument, (*Matth. xxv. 31.*—). There he tells us expressly, that men shall not only be punished for doing evil, but also for neglecting to perform active service; and in particular, for neglecting to perform the offices of humanity to their brethren. For the charge runs in these words: “ I
“ was an hungered, and ye gave me no
“ meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no
“ drink; I was a stranger, and ye took
“ me not in; naked, and ye clothed me
“ not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited
“ me not ”—“ For in as much as ye did it
“ not to the least of these my brethren, ye
“ did it not to me.” And then follows the doom to be pronounced on those against whom this charge is brought: “ These
“ shall go away into everlasting punish-
“ ment.”

From these passages of Scripture, we learn with assurance, that unless life is filled up with good works, death, which introduceth us to judgement, must approach to us with a
dark

dark and gloomy aspect. When conscience, awakened with the dawning of an everlasting day, shall prompt us to inquire, What we have done? How we have improved our time, our talents, and the means of grace with which we have been favoured? If in this review of ourselves, we shall be able to discover nothing but the traces of vanity and impertinence, how must we shrink back, and tremble to venture on the awful state before us? If God will judge every man according to his works, alas! what must become of the unhappy sluggard, who hath no works to show; who hath slept, and trifled, and squandered away all his time? “O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!”——“How long, O ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?” How long, O sinner, shall that precious time on which eternity depends, be wasted in the pursuit of lying vanities? O think, how swiftly it passeth away, and how passionately thou wilt one day wish to recal it. Who can assure thee that the decree is not already gone forth against thee, “Cut him off, why
“cumbereth

“cumbereth he the ground.”—“Thou fool, this night thy foul shall be required of thee.”

Pardon me, then, if I speak to you as short-lived, or as dying creatures; some of whom I may never see again, till we meet before the judgement-seat of God. Under this impresson, let me deal freely with you, and call on you to review your past conduct, as if the Lord himself were demanding an account of it.

Say, then, hath it been suitable to the rank you hold in life? Hath it even been rational? such as became those high intellectual powers by which you are raised above the beasts that perish? Would you consent to have it published before this congregation? Or rather, are there not some parts of it which you would wish to hide from your most intimate friends; lest, partial as they are to you, the knowledge of them should quench their affection, and render you contemptible in their eyes? Are you then ready to appear in judgement, and to have all your thoughts, and words,
and

and actions laid open and canvassed before an assembled world?

I shall not suppose you guilty of gross acts of wickedness. Perhaps the influence of education, the power of natural conscience, and the restraints of Providence, have hitherto kept you back from these. I at present charge you with nothing worse than the omission of duty, and the neglect of opportunities for cultivating and improving the talents which God hath given you. You have been thoughtless and inconsiderate, unmindful of the God who made you, and of the Redeemer who bought you with his blood. You have forgotten the end for which you was sent into the world. You have suffered the cares and pleasures of the present life, the business or amusements of this fleeting scene of vanity, to divide your hearts, and engross your time, as if the soul had been destined to serve the body; or as if this earth had been designed for your only residence and portion.

Can you then review such a life without blushing and shame? When you think of it, doth it not appear mean and despicable
even

even in your own eyes? And can it then be pleasing; or rather, must it not be highly offensive to that Almighty Being, who gave you a nature fitted for the performance of nobler services, and for the relish of higher enjoyments, than any with which you have been hitherto acquainted?

For the Lord's sake open your eyes, and take a serious and impartial view of your condition. Blessed be God, it is not yet too late. The door of mercy is still open; and though, like the prodigal son, you have hitherto been feeding upon husks; yet when, like him, ye shall return to your Father's house, and to the faithful and affectionate duty of children, your past wandering and unprofitable life shall be forgiven, and ye may yet enjoy the honours and privileges of your Father's sons.

Having thus confirmed and illustrated the first proposition contained in the text, namely, that men sin, not only when they positively transgress the law of God; but also, when they do not fulfil the duties which the law requires to the utmost of their

their power;—I proceed now to show you, as was proposed,

Secondly, That our guilt is more highly aggravated, when we neglect the duties which are known to us; or when we decline opportunities of doing good, though we are convinced that it is our duty to embrace them.

He who doth not seek for opportunities of doing good, is a sinner; that is, he counteracts the obvious intention of his Maker in sending him into the world: and therefore shall be dealt with as an unfaithful servant, who hath not applied his talents to the purposes for which they were given him. And, if this is the case, then surely the person who hath a known opportunity of doing good, and yet wilfully neglects it, must contract greater guilt, and be liable to a severer punishment. If that man be culpable, who is careless of doing all the good which by an exertion of his talents he is able to do; is not that man much more culpable, who presumptuously omits to do the good to which he has opportunities to solicit him?

But

But why should I spend time in establishing so plain a truth, especially when it is already confirmed by the highest authority? Our blessed Lord himself expressly tells us, (*Luke* xii. 47.), that “the servant who knew his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

The only question that remains then is, Whether this be a supposition that can be made? Is it to be thought, that any man is capable of deliberately resisting his own conviction, and of declining obedience to a law which he both knows and believes to be binding on him?

I confess, indeed, that a superior Being, if we could imagine him to be altogether unacquainted with human affairs, might reject this supposition as improbable. But surely *we* have no cause to object against the representation as forced, or beyond the life. Our own observation, unless we have been extremely inattentive, cannot fail to furnish us with numberless proofs of this determined neglect of duty. We need not go from home, to bring our examples from
persons

persons in high and public trust, who have been known to sacrifice the acknowledged interest and honour of a whole nation to their own private resentment or personal advantage. They are farther seen, for no other reason but because they are placed higher. The importance of their station renders their faults the more conspicuous, while a groaning community points out, as with the finger, the authors of its distress. But let each of us look into his own breast; and if conscience is not asleep, it will say to us as Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man." Thou thyself hast neglected the fairest opportunities of doing good, when thou hadst the strongest conviction that it was thy reasonable duty.

I mean not to pry into the secrets of your hearts, any more than to divulge the secrets of my own. But I speak from a thorough conviction, that all of us pass too slightly over our omissions, even in the most serious review which we take of our conduct. We are, alas! too fruitful in excuses, and too ready to gloss over our most culpable neglects, with the specious colour of ignorance

ignorance or incapacity. But God, to whom the night shineth as the day, knows the conviction of mind against which we sin; and our most dexterous arts of concealment cannot screen us from his penetrating eye. A just impression of this would prevent many fatal mistakes in our conduct.

I have now, for example, an opportunity of doing good: and my conscience tells me, that I ought to improve it. On the other hand, I have many strong temptations to neglect it. It would put me to too much cost or trouble; it would involve me in a train of action against which my indolence revolts; or it would divert me from other employments more agreeable to my inclination. On which side shall I resolve? May I not so manage it, that the neglect shall escape the observation of my neighbour? Or if he should perceive it, may I not put a good face upon it, and find out some excuse to save me from his censure?—Ah! but here is the check. The Searcher of hearts knows my present conviction. In vain shall I attempt to prevaricate with him. I may elude the censure of man; but I never can escape

the just judgement of that God who is greater than my heart, and knoweth all things. Such reasoning as this, if it were once become habitual to us, would be a constant and powerful incitement to all holy obedience; and would prevent the deep guilt of neglecting to do good, even when we know the extent and obligation of the law of God, and are convinced that it is our duty to comply with it.

Having thus endeavoured to illustrate and confirm the two propositions contained in my text, I proceed now to the practical improvement of the subject.—And,

1st, This subject administers a sharp reproof to those who, in any case, attempt to evade their convictions of duty. “To him that knoweth to do good,” saith the Apostle, “and doth it not, to him it is sin.” For, consider what kind of disposition this conduct betrays. Is it not evidently the disposition of a slavish and mercenary mind? You do no more in the service of God than you suppose to be necessary, in order to escape eternal misery; and this is the
only

only consideration which deters you from open transgressions of his law. You have therefore no regard for him, but only a concern for your own safety. Your plan of conduct is to offend God as far as you can, without incurring his vengeance: So that any appearance of goodness about you is nothing more than the effect of a natural timidity. Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Doth this goodness challenge no better return from you, than merely to refrain from acts of open rebellion against him? Consider, I beseech you, the baseness and ingratitude of this conduct; and if your hearts retain any spark of ingenuity, you will surely be persuaded to yield him a more faithful and generous service in time to come. But,

2dly, This subject administers reproof also to the slothful and inactive servant, who rests contented with low attainments in religion. You perhaps flatter yourself, that although you are remiss in seeking out opportunities of doing good, yet you are not unfaithful to any known obligation. But in this case you greatly deceive yourself:

For, is it not a known obligation, that we should aim at as much perfection as we are capable of attaining? But you have renounced this desire altogether. In other words, you have deliberately left off that work to which our Saviour hath expressly commanded us to devote ourselves. For, are not these his words? “Be ye perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.”—Once more,

What hath been said on this subject ought to quicken the zeal and activity even of those who have made the greatest progress in the good ways of God.

The declining state of religion calls loudly on all who are its real friends, to exert themselves to the utmost, in order to revive its influence in the world. Nothing, be assured, will be so effectual for accomplishing this desirable object, as the bright and exemplary lives of professing Christians. Are you then zealous for the glory of God? be “zealous of good works.” Let it appear that your religion gives authority to your conscience, by your being more just, and humane, and generous than other men.

“Ye

“ Ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the
“ light of the world.” Your divine Master
hath intrusted you with the honour of that
religion which he taught on earth, and ex-
pects that you should display it in an amiable
light. But surely a mere negative degree of
virtue will never convince men that your
principles have any excellence superior to
their own: and that professing Christians
satisfy themselves with a virtue of this sort,
is, I am afraid, in no small degree the cause
to which the rapid growth of infidelity in
these times must be ascribed.

If this is at all the fact, doth it not af-
ford us a subject of the most serious la-
mentation? “ It is impossible but that of-
“ fences will come, but wo unto him thro’
“ whom they come. It were better for him
“ that a millstone were hanged about his
“ neck, and he cast into the sea.” O then
study to adorn the doctrine of God your
Saviour in all things. “ Let your light so
“ shine before men, that they may see your
“ good works, and glorify your Father
“ which is in heaven.” — “ Whatsoever
“ things are true, whatsoever things are ho-

“ next, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report. and if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things,” and do them. This will administer to you true pleasure in life, and solid hope in death; and hereafter the sound of the last trumpet, the terror of the negligent and unfaithful servant, will be the triumphant signal of your release from the grave, and the summons of your Lord to enter into his joy. *Amen.*

S E R M O N VI.

PROVERBS vi. 6, 7, 8.

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.

MAN was created with more understanding than the beasts of the earth: But our minds are so debased by our apostasy from God, that the meanest creatures may become our teachers. And accordingly, the Spirit of God, in the Scriptures, doth frequently send us to learn our duty from the example of the beasts of the field, and of the fowls of heaven. Thus, ingratitude is reprov'd by the example of those animals which are accounted the most stupid and untractable, (*Isaiab* i. 3.) “ The

“ ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his
“ master’s crib; but Israel doth not know,
“ my people doth not consider.” An inat-
tention to the conduct of divine Providence,
and a neglect of the proper seasons of acti-
vity, are in like manner condemned by the
example of the fowls of heaven. “ The stork
“ knoweth her appointed times, and the tur-
“ tle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe
“ the times of their coming; but my peo-
“ ple (saith God) know not the judgement
“ of the Lord,” (*Jerem. viii. 7.*) To cure
us of excessive carefulness and anxiety, our
Saviour sends us to “ consider the ravens:
“ they neither sow nor reap; they have
“ neither storehouse nor barn; yet God
“ feedeth them: How much more,” saith
he, “ are ye better than the fowls?” (*Luke*
xii. 24.). And in my text, to cure us of
negligence and sloth, Solomon sends us to
a creature of the smallest size, but of most
wonderful activity. “ Go to the ant, thou
“ sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise:
“ which having no guide, overseer, or ruler,
“ provideth her meat in the summer, and
“ gathereth her food in the harvest.”

In

In discoursing on these words, I will,

1st, Consider the character of the person whom the wise man here addresseth.—

And,

2^{dly}, The counsel or advice which he gives him; and will then conclude with a practical improvement of the subject.

I begin with the character of the person to whom this advice is address'd. "Go to the ant," saith Solomon, "thou sluggard:" and the character of the sluggard is so minutely described in this book, and in the book of Ecclesiastes, that any of us may soon be acquainted with it.

Solomon observes in general, that sloth casteth into a deep sleep; and he represents the sluggard in this state, in the verses immediately following my text. When it is said to him, "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?" instead of being affected with the just reproach, he begs earnestly for farther indulgence, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep."—"As the door turneth upon its hinges,

“ hinges, so doth the slothful man upon his
“ bed.” At length, when sleep itself hath
become wearisome, and he hath risen from
his bed, he hath changed his situation only to
give a new indulgence to his sloth. “ He hi-
“ deth his hand in his bosom,” and will not so
much as “ bring it to his mouth again.” He
spends his time in fruitless wishes: The soul
of the sluggard “ desireth, and hath not.” To-
morrow is always a day of labour, to-day is
always spent in idleness: And thus “ the desire
“ of the slothful killeth him, because his hands
“ refuse to labour.” He is discouraged by
the least opposition: “ The way of the sloth-
“ ful man is as a hedge of thorns.” Every
difficulty furnisheth him with an excuse for
his idleness: “ The sluggard will not plow
“ by reason of the cold.” Nay, rather than
want an excuse, he creates imaginary dan-
gers to himself: He saith, “ There is a lion
“ without, I shall be slain in the streets.” At
length, “ By much slothfulness the building
“ decays, and through the idleness of the
“ hands the house droppeth through.”——
“ His field and his vineyard are grown over
“ with thorns: nettles cover the face there-
“ of:

“ of: and the stone-wall is broken down.”
Thus, “ Poverty cometh upon him like one
“ that travaileth, and his want as an armed
“ man, till drowfiness at last clothes him
“ with rags.”

Such is the picture which Solomon draws of the sluggard; and the features are so strongly marked, that there is no room to doubt that it was drawn from the life.

Whether there are persons in the present state of society to whom all the parts of this character agree, is a question which every man will answer to himself, either from his knowledge or experience. The charge is indeed so complex, that it might be difficult perhaps to prove it in its full extent against any one individual.

We know well who they are whose hands refuse to labour, who are clothed with rags, and make poverty not only their complaint, but their argument. But though the idle vagrant is plainly described and condemned by these articles, there are other parts of the charge against which he might offer a plausible defence.

He might answer to the charge of excess
five

five sleep, that he riseth as early, or at least is as soon abroad, as any from whom he can expect an alms: and that he is so far from hiding his hand in his bosom, that he stretcheth it forth from morning to night, to levy contributions from every passenger he sees. Nay, to strengthen his defence, might he not argue, that as the Preacher was a king, persons of a higher rank were far more likely to be the objects of his attention, many of whom eat the bread of idleness, and labour as little as the beggar? And as he speaks of fields and vineyards, that this shows him to have had fluggards of a superior order in his eye, who originally possessed some property, and held a station above the lower tribes of the people. By this defence, he will certainly elude some articles of the charge. Enough, however, will still remain to evince his right to the character in the text. And what he throws off from himself doth not fall to the ground, but will bear hard on the idle and voluptuous in the higher ranks of life. At the same time, there are some articles in the charge, to which those of a better station would

would no doubt object in their turn. They might attempt to evade the charge of fluggishness, by alledging, that though indeed they apply themselves to no active business or employment, yet the fatigues of dress, of ceremony, and of equipage; the anxieties of gaming, and the attendance on fashionable amusements, render the pursuit of pleasure in the present age, as toilsome and laborious as any mechanical employment whatsoever. And that so far from being clothed in rags, which Solomon makes the badge of a fluggard, the fact is, that Solomon himself, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of them.

Were this a controversy of any importance, it would be an easy matter to detect the fallacy of these reasonings, and to show, that the defences on both sides are weak and frivolous. But this would be an idle waste of time; for as neither of the parties can deny that some parts of the description apply to them, it is of little consequence to which of them the larger share of it belongs.

But sloth is not confined to the common affairs of life, nor the character of a fluggard

gard to men in any particular station. There is sloth in religion, as well as in common life; and the description in my text applies to all, without exception, who, however active and industrious in their secular employments, neglect the one thing needful, the care of their precious and immortal souls.

The laborious mechanic, the busy merchant, the painful student, and the bustling statesman, are all sluggards in a spiritual sense, unless they are active in the love and service of the God that made them; and unless the advancement of his glory, and the final enjoyment of his favour, are the ends to which all their pursuits are directed.

Here we are only to sojourn for a short time. Our great Creator hath made us for higher occupations, and better joys, than the present world affords us. He hath formed us for the knowledge and enjoyment of himself in an eternal and unchangeable state, and hath instructed us how we may attain this glorious object of our being. And therefore, however busy a man may be for himself, however industrious for his family, however active for the public; yet if all his
views

views terminate in this present life, he is still a sluggard in the eye of God. For he who labours only for the meat that perisheth, doth as fatally counteract the end of his creation, as he that sleeps on the bed of sloth, or as he that fatigues himself in pursuing the vain and fugitive pleasures of this world. — I will add, that even those who have chosen the better part, and who seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness in the first place, do often incur the imputation of sluggishness, by the omission or careless performance of what God hath required of them. For, alas! where is the man who doth “whatsoever his hand findeth to do” in the business of religion, “with all his might?” Where is the man who “strives,” as in an agony (for so the original word imports) “to enter in at the strait gate?” or who “gives all diligence to make his calling and election sure.” We see much activity in the pursuits of the world; but a very small portion of it, indeed, in that pursuit which most requires and deserves it.

I may therefore venture to affirm, that
there

there is not one in this assembly to whom my text is not addressed in one view or another.—And therefore, without questioning the propriety of the description, let us go on, as was proposed,

Secondly, To consider the counsel or advice which the wise man hath given us: “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.”

He directs us to a creature, indeed, of the most diminutive size and appearance, but whose sagacity and unremitting activity strike the eye of every beholder. The ant instructeth us, not by speech, but by actions: and therefore we are called upon “to consider her *ways* ;” how she is employed, and for what ends she is active: not merely that we may gratify our curiosity, or even extend our knowledge of the natural world; but that we may become wiser and better. The wisdom we learn from the ant, is the wisdom of living well: the

the wisdom of acting suitably to our superior nature, and our glorious hopes.

There are three very important lessons which we learn from the conduct of the ant. The

1st is, a foresight and sagacity in making provision for the time to come. The ant gathereth more than she hath present occasion for; and in the summer and harvest lays up a store for the approaching winter. Thus she arms herself against the rigours of the inclement season; and whilst the grasshoppers, that sung and sported in the summer and harvest; nay, whilst many creatures of larger size and greater strength, perish for want of food; she lives on the fruits of her industry, and reaps the reward of her care and providence. O that this wisdom were more common among men! and that we could be persuaded, while the season of action lasts, to “lay up in store for ourselves
 “ a good foundation against the time to
 “ come, while the evil days come not, nor the
 “ years draw nigh, when we shall say we
 “ have no pleasure in them.” How dreary must the winter of life be, when the pre-

vious seasons have been passed in sloth, in idleness, or in folly; when the body languishes under poverty and wretchedness; or when the mind, unfurnished with knowledge, and virtue, and faith, and devotion, sojourns in a crazy tabernacle, tottering to the dust?—A

2d lesson to be learned from the conduct of the ant, is activity and diligence. The ant never intermits her labours as long as the season lasts. In summer, when the weather is hottest, at sultry noon as well as in the cool of the morning and of the evening, this busy creature is continually in motion, either seeking her food abroad, or disposing it in her cells at home. Nay, her labours end not with the day, but, as naturalists have observed, she often takes the benefit of the moon, and plies her work with a surprising alacrity. Happy were it for man, that he as faithfully employed that precious time which is given him, either to render himself useful in this world, or to prepare for eternity. Then would he not be seen encroaching on the day by sloth,
nor

nor turning it into night, by intemperance and riot.—The

3^d lesson which we learn from the conduct of the ant, is sagacity in making use of the proper season for activity. Opportunity is the flower of time; or it is the most precious part of it, which if once lost may never return. This the ant knoweth how to seize with admirable skill. She goeth forth in quest of food when it can be had with ease and certainty: She employs her labour at the time when she knows that it will be effectual. Unlike to man, whose folly prompts him to neglect the season in which his talents might be usefully employed, till he hath lost it for ever; and who spends on trifles the day of his merciful visitation, till the things which belong to his peace are for ever hid from his eyes.

All this foresight, diligence, and sagacity, the ant employs by an instinct of nature, untutored, and unawed. She hath neither guide, overseer, nor judge: There is none to go before and mark out her task; none to superintend and prompt her to her labour; none to require an account of her

industry, or to punish her either for her neglect or miscarriages. This circumstance the wise man mentions with a peculiar emphasis, on purpose to draw the sluggard's attention to it. For surely nothing can be suggested of greater force and efficacy to rouse him from his lethargy, and to convince him that his sloth is not only criminal, but without excuse.

The ant hath no guide ; but we, my brethren, have many guides. " There is a " spirit in man, and the inspiration of the " Almighty giveth them understanding." Our Maker hath endued us with reasonable souls, capable of discerning betwixt good and evil. He hath favoured us with a complete revelation of his will, and hath showed us " what is good, and what the Lord " our God requireth of us."—" The law of " the Lord is perfect, converting the soul ; " the testimony of the Lord is sure, making " wise the simple." He hath sent his Son into the world, to show us the path of life, not only by his doctrine, but by his example *too*. And he offers us his Spirit, to lead us into all truth, to open our eyes, and to
turn

turn us from darkness to light, by taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto us. He hath assured us of his willingness to assist and to guide us. “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.” If men therefore are sluggards, and loiter in their work, they can neither pretend ignorance of their duty, nor the want of a guide to direct them in it.

Again, the ant “hath no overseer:” but man acts under the immediate inspection of him, “whose eyes are as a flame of fire.—“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”—Can any hide himself in secret “places that I shall not see him: do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?”—“Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, O Lord, but the night shineth as the day.” Besides, God hath placed an overseer in our own breasts, which acts within us as his deputy; for the voice of conscience is the voice of God. This bosom-witness marks our steps, reminds us of our duty, con-

demns us when we do wrong, and never fails to render those unhappy, whom it fails to keep faithful to their duty. For conscience at first speaks forcibly to every human being; and many a hard struggle doth it cost even the worst of men, before this awful monitor can be silenced. Thus we have not only a guide to point out the way to us, but an overseer to attend us in every step; and therefore, if we either loiter or turn aside, we must be without excuse: “Our own hearts condemn us, and God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.”

Once more, the ant “hath no ruler” or judge, to call her to account for her conduct. But every one of us must give an account of himself to God. “God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he raised him from the dead.” — “We must all appear before the judgement-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according

“ cording to that he hath done, whether it
“ be good or bad.” And it deserves our
notice, that the fluggard is particularly
pointed out in Scripture as one of those
who shall certainly be condemned in that
decisive day. This is clearly intimated to
us in the parable of the talents. The un-
profitable servant, who is condemned to
utter darkness, is not accused of having
squandered his talent, or of having applied
it to wicked purposes: on the contrary, he
had preserved it entire, and returned it un-
impaired to his master: his crime was, that
he had not improved it. He was a wicked
servant, because he had not been active for
the interest of his Lord: he was in short
the fluggard here addressed by the wise
man: and his doom was just. For it is
only “ to those who, by a patient continu-
“ ance in well-doing, seek for glory, ho-
“ nour, and immortality, that God will
“ render eternal life, in the day when he
“ shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus
“ Christ.”

Thus, then, the ant, which without a
guide, overseer, or judge, labours with such
K 4 diligence,

diligence, sagacity, and foresight for the preservation of a life which must soon come to a final period; instructs, reproveth, and condemns those who, having all the advantages which are denied to her, are yet remiss and negligent in the great business assigned them: on which depend not their present interests only, but the interests and the life of their immortal spirits—of their spirits, which shall survive the dissolution of their bodies, and shall last through eternal ages.

These observations may be sufficient both to illustrate the meaning, and to show the propriety of Solomon's advice. Let me now, as the improvement of the subject, press you to reduce to practice the lessons which I have been considering.—And for this end, I would represent to you,

1st, That the sluggard sins against the very nature which God hath given him. For what are all the high powers and faculties with which we are endowed, but so many tokens that we were formed for active service? The nature of things has evidently
in

in this respect the force of a law; since it is impossible to conceive, that powers and capacities were given us, which were not meant to be exerted and improved. Even in the state of innocence man had his task assigned him, whilst the inferior animals were left to roam at large, without being accountable for their conduct. And as our natures are formed for action, so our inclination evidently prompts us to it. This is plain from the various methods by which those who will not labour endeavour to relieve themselves from the oppressive load of idleness. Their time itself is a misery: and there is nothing so impertinent to which they will not fly, that they may be free of it. The burdens of the most laborious slaves are light, when compared with the burden which the sluggard carries about with him in an enfeebled body, and a vacant discontented mind.

2dly, The sluggard sins against the manifest design of Providence. God hath indeed made a liberal provision for the supply of all our returning wants. But he hath done this in a way that requires industry

dustry on our part, in order to render that provision effectual. The earth, by the blessing of God, is fruitful of herbs and grain for the use of man. But man must be careful to do his part in the labour of the field, that it may yield him a regular or a certain produce. The rough materials of all things necessary and convenient for the purposes of life are laid plentifully at our hands; but the skill and industry of the workman must bring them into form, and render them fit for use. "All things are full of labour." Who then art thou, O sluggard, to counteract the designs both of Nature and of Providence?

But some may say, perhaps, We have nothing to do. Our wants are abundantly supplied from the patrimony which we have inherited; and nothing remains for us but to enjoy what we have. Do you then indeed believe, that any human being can have a right to live idle on the earth? If ye believe this, ye have yet to learn this fundamental principle of common sense, That all obligations are reciprocal. Ye sluggards, why cumber ye the ground? Shall God

God give you all things richly to enjoy, and is there no active service which he requires of you? Must the labour of the husbandman nourish, and the art of the manufacturer clothe you? Must all ranks of men labour for your convenience; and are there no obligations which ye are bound to discharge to them in return for so many, and so important services? For what end then do you live? Your being is an embarrassment and burden to the creation.

“ For if any man will not work, neither should he eat.”—Once more, in the

3^d place, The sluggard sins against the great design of the Gospel. For we have not only a Guide to instruct us, an Overseer to observe us, and a Judge to whom we are accountable; but we have also a great Redeemer, who shed his blood for the ransom of our souls, and who gave himself for us, not to purchase our release from duty, but to “ purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Christ spoiled principalities and powers, “ that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without
“ fear,

“ fear, in holiness and righteousness before
“ him all the days of our lives.” Let us
hear and reverence the language of the Gos-
pel. “ Ye are not your own : ye are bought
“ with a price : therefore glorify God in
“ your body and in your spirit, which are
“ God’s. Work out your own salvation
“ with fear and trembling : for it is God
“ that worketh in you, both to will and to
“ do of his good pleasure. And beside this,
“ giving all diligence, add to your faith vir-
“ tue, and to virtue knowledge, and to
“ knowledge temperance, and to temperance
“ patience, and to patience godliness, and to
“ godliness brotherly kindness, and to bro-
“ therly kindness charity. For so an entrance
“ shall be ministered unto you abundantly,
“ into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord
“ and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Let us then be no longer “ slothful in bu-
“ siness, but fervent in spirit, serving the
“ Lord.” *Amen.*

S E R M O N VII.

JAMES IV. 13, 14, 15.

Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that.

THE obvious design of this passage, is to detect the folly and presumption of those who lay schemes for futurity, without a proper acknowledgement of their dependence on the providence of God. The particular scheme, which the Apostle represents and condemns, is one of the most plausible that can well be imagined. A
 merchant

merchant resolves on a journey to some city, in which he can carry on his trade to advantage. That he may lose no time, he saith, "To-day," or at farthest, "to-morrow, I will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." There is no intimation that he meant to enrich himself by fraud or extortion. The gain he had in view may be supposed to have been the profits of a fair and honourable commerce; the honest reward of his attention and diligence.

I apprehend that none of us would be greatly startled, though we should hear some of our friends talking in the manner which is here represented. There are few of us, perhaps, who have not on some occasions held such a language, without suspecting that it was either presumptuous or wrong. In order, therefore, to discover what is faulty in it, and to enter into the spirit of this text, let us examine with attention,

1st, The form of expression which the Apostle condemns.—And,

2^{dly}, The amendment which he suggests.

gests.—And if it shall please God to afford us the assistance of his Spirit, I am persuaded that several remarks will occur to us in the course of this inquiry, which may be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.”—Let us then attend,

First, To the form of expression which the Apostle condemns. “Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain.”

In general, we may observe, that this language relates altogether to a worldly project. The principal object is gain: “not the true riches;” or “that good part” which shall never be taken from those who choose it; but the gain of this world, the gain which is acquired by buying and selling. They say nothing of the measure of gain that would satisfy them, and nothing of the use to which they meant to apply their wealth. For any thing that their expressions imply, their desires might be without bounds, and their sole aim might be

to

to “ heap up silver as the dust, and fine
“ gold as the mire of the streets ;” or, in the
language of Isaiah, “ to join house to house,
“ and field to field, till they were placed
“ alone in the midst of the earth.”

If this remark is just, we have already discovered one capital error in the expressions before us.—To seek gain by honest industry, either for the supply of our own wants, or to enable us to relieve the necessities of others, is not only lawful but honourable : But to seek wealth for its own sake, and merely for the sordid pleasure of possessing it, betrays a mean and selfish spirit, unworthy of a man, and much more unworthy of a Christian.

Supposing this then to be the end in view, there can be no doubt that it is in a high degree culpable. But as the Apostle is silent on this head, we shall admit, that the persons who hold the language before us, might intend to make a proper use of their riches, and proceed to examine the means by which they propose to obtain them. “ To-day,” say they, “ or to-morrow, we
“ will go into such a city.”—These words
may

may pass in common conversation; but when we seriously weigh the import of them, as at present we are called to do, we shall find that they are chargeable both with folly and presumption.

The great Lord of all has no part in this scheme. These little arrogant words, WE WILL, thrust him out at once, and occupy his place. And for what do the persons here described undertake? They undertake without hesitation, to insure their lives against death, their bodies against sickness, and their effects against every casualty or hazard. They speak of the morrow, as if they had the absolute property of it. They promise themselves, that to-morrow they shall not only be alive, but in health, to set out on their journey; that they shall meet with no cross accidents by the way; that the goods which they carry along with them, shall be protected against thieves and robbers; and that in due time they shall arrive at the city where their plan of business is to be carried into execution. But what follows is still more extravagant. They promise upon life for a full year; "We will continue there a year:"

and not upon life only, but on health of body, and soundness of mind, during all that time. No allowance is made for change of climate, or the fatigues of business: they are always to be in a condition to buy and sell, and to manage their affairs with activity and prudence. Nay, more, they assure themselves of success. "We will buy and sell, and get gain." They undertake, not for themselves alone, but for all whom they shall employ, or with whom they shall have commerce—that they shall have diligent and faithful servants; that they shall have large profits from those to whom they sell, and cheap bargains from those of whom they buy. In a word, they speak as if every thing relating to themselves and others, were so dependent on their will, that they might command the events which they desired, and dispose of all things according to their own pleasure.

Well might the Apostle give this the name of boasting, as he doth at the 16th verse of this chapter; and had it suited the gravity of an inspired writer, he might have examined the different parts of the
scheme,

ſcheme, computed the risks which were plainly againſt them in every ſtep, and thus turned the whole deſign into matter of contempt and ridicule. But inſtead of this, he arreſts them at their very firſt outſet. You talk of “going to ſuch a city, of continuing there a year, of buying, of ſelling, and getting gain:”—“whereas ye know not what ſhall be on the morrow.” The preſent moment is all that ye can call your own. This night your ſouls may be required of you : to-day you *are* ; but to-morrow ye may be numbered with thoſe who *have* been. He would not trifle with miſerable men, who might die whiſt he was ſpeaking to them. He therefore ſeizeth one important truth, the force of which could not be denied, and inſtantly placeth it full in their view. “What is your life?” ſaith he ; “it is even a vapour.” At preſent it appears ; but while I yet ſpeak to you, it may vaniſh away. Ceafe then, vain boaſters, to talk of a year hence, until ye can ſay ſomething with certainty of the ſucceeding day. Thus the viſionary Babel falls to the ground. This plain propoſition, “Life

“ is a vapour,” undermines it at once, and overwhelms the proud builders with shame.

It hath often given me pleasure to observe, that the truths which are best fitted to touch the heart, and to influence the life, are universally the most simple and obvious, and lie so near us, that we need only to stretch forth our hand to take hold of them. God knows, that we have much work to do, and little time to do it in: and therefore, that we may lose no part of it, the most useful and necessary things are scattered around us with the greatest profusion. Were it otherwise; the opportunity of acting might frequently pass away before the means of action were ready. Yet such, alas! is our folly and perverseness, that overlooking what is near, we roam abroad, and always grasp most eagerly at those things which are farthest from us. Thwarting the merciful designs of God, we despise common truths, merely because they are common; and wander in pursuit of abstruse and intricate speculations, which puzzle the understanding, and amuse the fancy, but
leave

leave the heart cold and infensible. How much better was the course which the Apostle took with those who held the language of the text, in order to bring them to a sense of their folly? he doth not go about in quest of remote objects, nor seek to surprize them with new and uncommon discoveries: but he surprized them most effectually, by pointing to an object just at hand, one view of which was sufficient to check their presumption,—an object which stood always before their eyes, though overlooked through the pride, or inattention, or perverseness of their minds.

It hath already been observed, that the matter of the project here represented by the Apostle, is in itself plausible; and that his reproof is chiefly aimed at the form or manner of expressing it. And if he treated this with so much severity, what would he have said, had the end proposed been criminal in its own nature, or the means of obtaining it base and dishonourable? What would he have said to those who puzzle themselves with schemes to get rid of their money, or to throw it away upon the most

ridiculous trifles? who have no higher objects than the superfluities of dress, the luxury of entertainments, the multiplicity of diversions, and all the expensive arts of dissipation and sensuality? What would he have said to those who, in the same presumptuous style, lay deliberate schemes for low vice and debauchery, for drunkenness and whoredom, and other works of the flesh? What would he have said to those who devise methods of making gain by secret fraud or open violence? to those who practise deceit in buying and selling, or who, without either buying or selling, support a useless and pernicious life by the base and infamous occupation of gaming? Compared with these, the scheme which the Apostle condemns is wisdom, and honour, and virtue.

But the Apostle doth not rest in censuring what was wrong. He goes on at the 15th verse to correct what was faulty, and to supply what was defective. "For that ye ought to say," adds he, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that."—This amendment, suggested by the Apostle, was the

Second

Second thing which I proposed to consider.
—And,

1st, It furnisheth us with a rule by which all our undertakings ought to be examined. Whatever scheme we have in view, to which we cannot prefix this preface, “If the Lord will,” we may be assured is essentially wrong, and ought to be abandoned without delay. There is nothing truly good or profitable to us, for which we may not address God by prayer. Let us then convert the views which we have in any undertaking into the form of a petition, and try whether we can, with decency or propriety, offer up such a petition to God. Let us consider, whether the means by which we propose to compass these views are of such a nature, that we may ask or expect the divine blessing to accompany them. Happy were it for us, that all our schemes and projects were brought to this test. We should then be seasonably delivered from that fatal enchantment which first engageth us in unlawful pursuits, and then stimulates us to persist in them against the remonstrances of our own consciences.

We should then escape from those fatal snares into which our rash unadvised plans betray us. For who would dare to say, "If the Lord will, I shall live," and rob and steal, game and defraud, oppress and over-reach my neighbour? Such a connection of thought would startle the mind at the very first conception of lust, before it had brought forth sin. And I am persuaded, that if men were faithfully to practise this one easy and reasonable precaution, they would at least avoid many of those presumptuous offences, which lay waste the conscience, and destroy the peace of the soul.

2dly, This amendment, which the Apostle suggests, teacheth us to consider the shortness, and particularly the uncertainty, of life. "Ye know not," saith he, "what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? it is even a vapour which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Thus David describes the life of man by those things which are most frail and fugitive in nature. "As for man,
" his

“his days are as grafs.” Nay, as if the grafs, which endures for a feafon, were too permanent an object of comparifon, he immediately corrects the fimilitude, “As the flower of the field, fo he flourifheth:”—As the flower of the field, which is expofed to the foot of every paffenger, to the tooth of every wild beaft, to the wanton hand of every deftroyer. It is not by rare and ftriking events only, that the thread of life may be broken. There is no need that the thunder fhould break on you, or that the fire fhould devour you, or that the earth fhould open and fwallow you up. Things far more common and familiar are fufficient for fo eafy a purpofe, as that of cutting off your days. There is not an element fo friendly, nor a circumftance fo trifling, that it may not become the minifter of death. Ought not this manifefit uncertainty of life, then, to cool our purfuit of earthly projects? We are apt to meditate great and complicated fchemes to attain wealth, or power, or honour in the world. But could we penetrate a little into futurity,

we

we might perhaps see our grave opened far on this side of half way to the objects of our keenest pursuit. “ For what is our life? it “ is even a vapour that appeareth for a little “ time, and then vanisheth away. For that “ we ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall “ live, and do this or that.”

3dly, This amendment, suggested by the Apostle, teacheth us to live in an habitual dependence on God, not only for life, but also for activity and prudence to carry our lawful designs into execution. There are two assertions in the 10th chapter of the book of Proverbs, which have a seeming opposition to each other. At the 4th verse, it is said, that “ the hand of the diligent “ maketh rich;” where it would appear, that prosperity, in our worldly callings, is to be ascribed to our own activity and skill. On the other hand, it is asserted at the 22d verse, that “ the blessing of the Lord, it ma- “ keth rich; and he addeth no sorrow with “ it.” These two assertions are not opposed; but the one is subordinate to the other; and the meaning is, that the hand of the dili-
gent, by the blessing of God, is the means

of

of gaining wealth and honour. Accordingly, we find that God gave this caution to his ancient people. “ Beware that thou say
“ not in thine heart, when thy herds and
“ thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and
“ thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou
“ hast is multiplied, My power, and the
“ might of my hand hath gotten me this
“ wealth. But thou shalt remember the
“ Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth
“ thee power to get wealth.” How often
do we see the best laid schemes miscarry ;
while others, far less flattering, succeed in
a wonderful manner ? One man shall toil
with incessant industry, rise early, and sit
up late, and eat the bread of carefulness,
and yet all in vain. Another, who, compar-
ed with this man, had neither a head to
contrive, nor hands to execute, shall prosper
in all his plans. “ I returned, and saw un-
“ der the sun, that the race is not to the
“ swift, nor the battle to the strong ; nei-
“ ther yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches
“ to men of understanding, nor yet favour
“ to men of skill ; but time and chance hap-
“ peneth to them all.” Men are too apt
“ to

“ to sacrifice to their own net, and to burn
“ incense to their own drag.” In great
mercy, therefore, God denies riches to those
who may be said to live for no other end
but to obtain them; while, on the other
hand, they sometimes drop, as it were, in-
to the lap of others, who have no talents
and little anxiety to acquire them. These
observations are not meant to discourage
industry or skill in the management of our
lawful business. For it is still true, not-
withstanding what hath been said, that wis-
dom excelleth folly, as much as light ex-
celleth darkness; and that without proper
means being used, we have no title to ex-
pect the blessing of God upon our affairs.
But they ought to teach us to “ commit our
“ ways unto God,” in well doing, to trust
also in him that he may bring it to pass, to
“ acknowledge him in all our ways, that he
“ may direct our steps.”—In the

4th and *last* place, This amendment, sug-
gested by the Apostle, teacheth us to resign
ourselves entirely to the will of God, and to
submit all our schemes to him, to prosper
or to disappoint them as seemeth good to
him.

him. This is the true spirit of the text. "If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that." Resignation to the will of God frees the mind from a grievous bondage, the bondage of earthly pursuits and expectations. Whatever God wills, is pleasing to the resigned soul; and when a Christian hath, by prayer and supplication, made known his requests to God, then the peace of God which passeth all understanding keeps his heart and mind through Jesus Christ. Then only is life truly enjoyed, when we relish its comforts, at the same time that we are prepared to part with them. The anxieties of the worldly man torment him with the pangs of a thousand deaths. His soul dies within him as often as he conceives the apprehension of losing those good things which he would wish always to enjoy. Whereas he who hath resigned his will to the will of God, "eats his bread with joy, and drinks his wine with a merry heart." Even the thought of his dying hour throws no damp on the joys of his mind. From the contemplation of God's goodness to him in life, he can pass without
terror

terror or amazement to the thought of his protection in the dark valley and shadow of death. Even in that gloomy passage, he fears no evil; but commits himself to the Lord his Shepherd, who will make goodness and mercy to follow him all the days of his life, and at last will bring him to dwell in his house above for ever.

These are some of the instructions which we may derive from the amendment here suggested by the Apostle: “ For that ye
“ ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live
“ and do this or that.”

From what hath been said, let us learn,
in the

1st place, To guard against that extravagance in laying down schemes for the time to come, which, upon cool reflection, appears so unjustifiable in the example before us. Had the persons here described, upon finding it inconvenient to set out immediately, asked themselves this question, What assurance have we of another day? this might have given them a timely check. But their imagination having taken possession

possession

session of the morrow, it carried them forward without the least interruption, brought them safe to the end of their journey, fixed their residence, transacted their business, and reaped the profits of the whole ensuing year. One presumptuous step leads on to another. The first object is near, and appears to be within our reach: but if we assure ourselves of possessing that before it actually becomes ours, then we see another object a little farther on, which appears as near to it again; afterwards a third but a little beyond that: and thus we proceed step by step, till we have passed the utmost bounds of probability, before we begin to suspect that we have gone any length at all. Let us then, in the

2d place, Realize this awful and important truth, That our life is but “a vapour, which
“appeareth for a little time, and then
“vanisheth away.” Die we must, and we know not how soon. Our worldly enjoyments must be relinquished, our worldly plans and projects must perish. “The
“wind shall pass over us, and we shall be
“gone, and our place shall know us no
“more.”

“ more.” Nature will look as gay on the day of our decease as it ever did ; the business of the world will go on as briskly as before ; our habitations will make our successors as welcome as they made us ; and even our names, in a few years, shall perish as if we had never been. What wise man, then, would build his house on such unstable sand ? How wretched must that man be, whose inheritance lies wholly upon earth ? What pangs must he feel at the parting hour ? with what horror must he hear the summons of dissolution ?

Let us then be persuaded to raise our affections above the things of the earth to those things which are above. Let us plan for eternity, and let us choose the unchangeable God for our portion. Knowing that we have here no continuing city, let us seek one to come ; a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Let the Lord Jesus be our leader and guardian ; under his conduct let us presently set out for the heavenly Jerusalem ; and in due time he will bring us safe to the city of the great and universal King, where we shall
continue,

continue, not for a year only, but for ever ; and where we shall get possession of substantial gain, even that glorious inheritance of the saints in light, which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and which fadeth not away. *Amen.*

S E R M O N VIII.

EXODUS xx. 8.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

THE too general and growing abuse of the Christian Sabbath must render a discourse on this subject both seasonable and necessary; and I propose therefore, in dependence on divine aid,

1st, To inquire how far the precept in this text is binding on us.

2dly, To show how this commandment ought to be kept or observed. And,

3dly, To enforce the observance of it by some motives and arguments.

First, I begin with inquiring how far this precept of keeping holy the Sabbath day is binding on us.

Although your stated attendance on this
day,

day, for the worship of God, may be interpreted as a public declaration on your part, that you reckon this commandment binding on you, yet the inquiry I have proposed is by no means superfluous. We are exhorted in Scripture, not only “to sanctify
“the Lord God in our hearts,” but likewise “to be always ready to give an answer
“to every man who asketh us a reason of
“the hope that is in us.” And if we should at all times be ready to declare the grounds of our hope, we should certainly be at least equally ready to explain and to justify the reasons of our practice. Besides, although in the judgement of charity, “which thinketh no evil,” your weekly attendance on this day for public worship may be supposed to flow from a religious principle; yet in our present situation, it is easy to conceive, that something else than a sense of duty may occasion our meeting together in this manner. The laws of our country not only permit, but require, the observance of the Christian Sabbath: so that human authority, the manner of our education, a regard to decency, or even mo-

tives inferior to any of these, may bring people to church who have never seen themselves to be bound by any divine law, to keep holy the Sabbath day. And I am sorry to add, that there is too great cause to suspect this to be the case with many who frequent our religious assemblies, from their defective and partial observance of this holy day. I therefore judge it to be of the highest importance, to set the authority of this precept in a clear and striking light. For until we view the Sabbath as a divine institution, we shall never either pay to it that regard which it deserves, nor reap any spiritual advantage from the most exact outward observance of it.—I suppose it will not be denied, in the

1st place, That some part of our time should be employed in the immediate worship of God. Reason must necessarily teach us, that such homage is due that Almighty Being on whom we depend for life, and breath, and all things. In order to secure the regular performance of this worship, the same principle of reason will naturally suggest the propriety of allotting certain
stated

stated seasons for that purpose. If any shall dispute the necessity of this, they will at least allow us to affirm the expediency of it: for it is a common and true observation, that what is left to be done at any time, is in great danger of being done at no time.—I may likewise take it for granted, in the

2^d place, That the right of determining what proportion of time, or what stated seasons should be employed in divine worship, will be readily admitted to belong to God. This is so evident, that it scarcely needs an illustration. If we can live one moment independent of God, we may call that moment our own, and claim the disposal of it. But if we cannot draw one breath without his aid; if his constant visitation is necessary to preserve us; the consequence is unavoidable, that the whole of our time is due to God, and that his right is absolute to reserve any part of it which he pleaseth for his own worship.—And this leads me to observe, in the

3^d place, That God hath actually interposed his authority in this matter: and by a clear and positive law, part of which I

have now read to you, hath reserved for himself one day in seven; that he hath consecrated or set apart his portion of our time, by his precept, example, and blessing, for a holy rest or cessation from secular employments, and for such acts of religious worship and adoration, as creatures owe to their great Creator.

It is confessed by all who admit the inspiration of the Old Testament, that this law was strictly binding upon the Jews, to whom it was delivered by the ministry of Moses. But some have made it a question, whether it continues to be binding under the Christian dispensation. We maintain that it is still in force, in as much as it contains a declaration of the will of God, that one day in seven, or the seventh part of our time, should be separated from common use, and dedicated to religious purposes. With regard to the particular day to be observed, all days being alike in themselves, the appointment of it must be of a positive nature, and may therefore be varied at the pleasure of the Lawgiver. Accordingly we find, that in this circumstance the law hath received

ceived an alteration. The seventh, or last day of the week, is now become common; and in commemoration of our Saviour's resurrection from the dead, the holy rest is transferred to the first day of the week; which hath ever since been called, by way of eminence, *The Lord's Day*. Whether this remarkable change is sufficiently supported by divine authority, admits of farther inquiry. What I have hitherto said, is only intended to prove our obligation to keep one day in seven holy to the Lord; and for this, I think, I have given you very satisfying evidence. It is a natural principle, that God ought to be worshipped; and as it is highly necessary to secure the performance of such an important duty, reason farther teacheth us, that some stated times ought to be set apart for that end. The right of determining these doth certainly belong to God himself; and he hath actually been pleased to give a plain intimation of his will in this matter, claiming, by a distinct and peremptory statute, one whole day in seven, for the peculiar exercises of religious worship. Thus far, then, the commandment is

strictly moral; and therefore still binding upon us, in as much as it only enjoins a natural duty, and prescribes the most effectual means for securing the performance of it.

Having established this point, the way lies more open to the other subject of inquiry; and I expect to find less difficulty in satisfying you about the alteration of the day. Some Christians, indeed, have maintained, that both days ought to be kept; but I reckon there will be no need to guard you against a mistake of this kind. You will easily convince yourselves that there is but one Sabbath in the week.

As to our practice in observing the first, instead of the last day of the week, which was the Jewish Sabbath, the reasons of it may be reduced under these following heads.

1st, We learn from Scripture, that this was the day on which the Apostles and primitive Christians held their solemn assemblies for the public exercises of religious worship. Thus we read, *Acts* xx. 7. that “upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread,”

i. e. to celebrate the sacrament of our Lord's Supper, " Paul preached unto them, and " continued his speech until midnight:" where it is observable, that their meeting together on that precise day is not spoken of as a thing extraordinary, or merely occasional, but as a stated and ordinary practice. It was their custom so to do; and Paul being on the spot, met with them, and presided in their assembly. It farther appears, that this was the day on which they laid up their public charity, and contributed for the relief of their needy brethren; and this by an express apostolical injunction. For thus Paul writes to the Corinthians, 1 *Cor.* xvi. 1, 2. " Now concerning the collection for the " fairs, as I have given order to the " churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Up- " on the first day of the week, let every one " of you lay by him in store, as God hath " prospered him, that there be no gathering " when I come." In this passage, there is not only a practice of the church described, but likewise the appointment of an inspired Apostle ratifying and confirming it. For if the words extend to the religious obser-
vance.

vance of that particular day, then we have a plain scriptural command for our warrant: or if they refer only to the collecting aims on that day, which is the lowest sense that they will bear, they necessarily imply, that this was a weekly holy day then in use, on which Christians ceased from their worldly business, and met together for the social worship of God: That the Apostle justified and approved of this practice, and thereby testified his opinion that it was perfectly agreeable to the will of Christ.

Besides, we find that this day was, in the earliest times, distinguished by the title of the *Lord's day*: for this appears from *Rev. i. 10.* where John informs the churches, that he "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day;"—that well-known day, sacred to the memory of the Lord Redeemer;—the day on which he triumphed over death, and which he dignified, by his resurrection, above all other days. From these circumstances taken together, it appears, that this change took place in the apostolic age; and that the first day of the week was then esteemed holy to the Lord, and separated from the rest for religious purposes:

purposes: so that though we cannot find any express command, appointing the alteration in so many words; yet we have the most convincing evidence, that it was either part of the instruction which Christ gave to his disciples before his ascension, when he was seen of them forty days, as the sacred history informs us, and spake of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God; or else that it was afterwards enacted by the Apostles, in virtue of their authority derived from Christ, and under the infallible direction of his blessed Spirit.

2dly, There appear to be many great and weighty reasons for such a change. Under the Old Testament, the seventh day was kept holy in memory of the creation, because on that day God rested from all his works: and is it not equally reasonable and fit, that the first day should be sanctified under the gospel dispensation, seeing on that day the great God and our Saviour rested from all the labours of his suffering state, and rose from the dead, in testimony that man's redemption was fully accomplished. Surely the renovation of the world, after sin had
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in a manner broken it in pieces, is a work as glorious and divine as the first creation of it, and as worthy to be gratefully remembered by us.

3dly, It is of some moment to observe, that this day has been uniformly kept as the Christian Sabbath from the apostolic age down to this present time. This fact is proved by the concurring testimony of historians in all the different periods of the church. At the same time, they tell us what hot disputes arose about other matters, particularly about the institution and observance of holy days. We find the Eastern and Western churches so divided with regard to the time of keeping Easter, as to proceed to excommunicate each other: but we hear of no controversy about observing the first day of the week; for in this they were all agreed. Now, what could have produced such perfect uniformity, especially in those ages, when there was no Christian magistrate to interpose his authority, but a clear conviction, and a well-grounded belief, that this was really a divine institution delivered

delivered by Christ, or his Apostles, to the church?—Once more, in the

4th place, God hath remarkably hallowed this day, by many acts of grace done to his people, when employed in the religious observance of it. On this day, when “the disciples were all with one accord in one place,” the Spirit of God descended upon them, insomuch that they were filled with the Holy Ghost, to their own unspeakable comfort, and the admiration of all who saw and heard them. On the same day, “the arm of the Lord was” gloriously “revealed,” in the conversion of three thousand souls, who were brought from a state of enmity to Christ into the bosom of the church, by the plain and powerful preaching of the Apostle Peter. On this day John was inspired with the spirit of prophecy, and had visible representations of the various revolutions in the church of Christ, down to the final consummation of all things. And in latter times God hath signally blessed his people when met together on this holy day; making all his goodness to pass before them, and giving them such
views

views of his power and glory in the sanctuary, that they have been obliged to say with Jacob at Bethel, " This is no other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven;" a foretaste of the everlasting Sabbath, an earnest of that rest which remains for the people of God. And is it to be supposed, that the holy and righteous Governor of the world would countenance his creatures in a superstition of their own contrivance, to the open and weekly neglect of a plain and positive law? No surely: These tokens of the Divine presence and favour dispensed on this day, are sure indications that this is the day which God himself hath made, and which he hath separated, by his authority, for the Christian Sabbath.

Thus have I finished the first thing proposed in this discourse; which was to inquire how far the precept in the text is binding on us: and I hope I have said enough to satisfy every unprejudiced mind, that it is still in force, as to the great scope and design of it: and that the change of the day, which is only circumstantial, bears

bears such evident marks of divine authority, as sufficiently justify the uniform opinion, and uninterrupted practice, of all the Christian churches.—I proceed now to the

Second thing proposed, Which was to show how this commandment ought to be kept or observed, “Remember the Sabbath day, “to keep it holy.”

This, as it is the first, so it is likewise the principal and most important branch of the precept. Nay, the full scope and design of the law is probably expressed in these few significant words. For I cannot help thinking, that the bodily rest or cessation from labour, which is afterwards enjoined, derives its chief value from its subserviency to those spiritual exercises by which the Sabbath is most eminently sanctified; and that it ought principally to be considered as a description of the means to aid us in the duties of religious worship. I think it proper to mention this distinction, because some have contended, that resting from labour is all that is meant by keeping ho-
ly

ly the Sabbath: but surely it cannot be thought that God, who is a pure and holy Spirit, would deliver a law with such solemnity, for so mean and low a purpose as this. He who so frequently declares, that the rites and ceremonies of his own appointment were no farther acceptable to him than as they represented spiritual blessings, and were improved for promoting internal purity, cannot be supposed to take pleasure in mere inactivity, or to have appointed a weekly day of rest, solely for the indulgence of the body. Besides, this expression of *sanctifying* or *keeping holy*, not only imports a separation from common use, but likewise a consecration to a sacred or a religious use. In this sense it is always employed in the Old Testament, either when it is applied to the persons of the priests, or to vessels of the sanctuary; and no reason can be given why it should be taken in a lower sense here, or why it should import any thing less than that the day is set apart for the service of God, and ought to be employed in the duties of religious worship.—I shall, in the

1st place, Give you a general account of these duties. And then we shall see more clearly, in the

2^d place, What things ought to be avoided by us, as inconsistent with the scope and design of this commandment.

In general, then, we are bound to sanctify this day, by assembling together for the public worship of God, that as many as can conveniently meet in one place may join in paying homage to their common Lord; and thus contribute their endeavours to make him glorious in the eyes of the world around them. For this we ought to prepare ourselves, by the more private exercises of family-worship. And because our hearts are naturally indisposed for such divine and heavenly employments, it is both reasonable and necessary, that each person apart should spend a competent time in reading and meditating on the word of God, and implore his presence and his blessing, by humble prayer, in the secret retirements of the closet. It will also be of considerable use, to render these several kinds of religious worship more beneficial to us, that, when

occasion offers, we should discourse together on divine subjects, in order to increase our knowledge of spiritual things, and to fix upon our minds a more lively sense of God and of our duty.

Ist, I say, we are bound to sanctify this day, by a punctual and devout attendance upon the public ordinances of religion, assembling together in the name of the Lord, to offer up the sacrifices of prayer and praise; to hear his word explained and applied; and especially to partake, as often as we have opportunity, of the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the memorial of our Saviour's death, and the pledge of his second coming. In such duties as these, did the people of God in former times chiefly employ themselves on the holy Sabbath. Under the old dispensation, sacrifices were offered, and incense burnt in the temple, and the law was publicly read and explained, both at Jerusalem and other cities of Judea, where synagogues were built for that very end. After the resurrection of Christ, the Apostles and primitive Christians met together stately on the first day of the week,

week, that they might join in celebrating that great and propitious event, and in performing other acts of social religion. And ought not we to sanctify the Lord's day in the same manner? We are blessed with the ordinances of the gospel regularly, and, I hope, purely dispensed. We have places set apart for public worship, and are countenanced in the exercise of it by lawful authority; and therefore it must discover a strange perverseness of temper, and an unpardonable contempt both of God and man, to withdraw from the place of public worship, and, on any pretence whatsoever, to refuse to bear a part in such a becoming and rational service.—But,

2dly, That the public worship may have a greater efficacy, and that our minds may be better disposed to enter into it, it is the duty of each family apart to spend some time both before and after the public service, in reading the Holy Scriptures, and in joining together in prayer and thanksgiving to God. Were this practised in a serious and devout manner, we might expect to see better days, and more fruitful and joyful

Sabbaths than any we have yet seen. A congregation composed of a number of holy families, just come from conversing with God at home, to worship him together in the house of prayer, would be indeed a lovely sight, and could not fail to be honoured with the special marks of divine favour. We have some illustrious examples of family-religion recorded in the Old Testament: but what chiefly ought to engage the attention of Christians, is, that our blessed Lord himself was pleased to become a pattern to us in this matter. In the intervals of his public work, we find him frequently retiring with his little family, praying with them, and teaching them to pray, and instructing them in things pertaining to the kingdom of God; in this, as in all other things, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. Family-religion, therefore, a duty incumbent on us at all times, must be in a very peculiar manner seasonable and necessary on the holy Sabbath. It deserves our notice, too, that this command is particularly addressed to heads of families; and as they are expressly

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ly enjoined to suffer nothing to be done by any under their inspection, which is inconsistent with the due observance of the Sabbath, this injunction plainly implies, that, in their station and character, they ought to employ their natural authority, as well as every other means, to promote the great ends of this holy commandment.—I added, in the

3^d place, That as our hearts are naturally indisposed for spiritual exercises, we ought each of us, by ourselves, to make conscience of the secret duties of the closet. There we ought to meditate on the marvellous works of God; on his glorious perfections, as they are displayed to us, in creation, providence, and redemption; above all, on that great “mystery of godliness, “God manifest in the flesh, justified in the “Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the “Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” In this sacred retirement, we ought to revolve in our minds the various steps of our Lord’s humiliation, from his birth at Bethlehem, to his burial on Mount Calvary. Thence we should proceed to view the triumphs of his cross,

where he bruised the old serpent's head, "finished transgression, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness." To confirm our faith, and increase our joy, our meditations ought to follow this mighty Conqueror, and to contemplate him breaking the bands of death, and rising from the grave on this first day of the week, ascending up to heaven in the sight of his disciples, and sitting on the right hand of God the Father; from whence he shall come, in power and great glory, to judge the world in righteousness, according to this gospel which is now preached in his name. When, by such meditations as these, our hearts are warmed and enlivened, we should then, with all humility and reverence, approach the throne of grace; imploring those mercies which we need for ourselves, and begging a divine blessing to accompany the outward means of grace, that, with our fellow-worshippers, we may be made to taste of the fatness of his house, and may find his ordinances to be indeed the wisdom and the power of God, "the favour of life unto life," to our souls.—The

4th and *laſt* particular which I mentioned, is mutual conference upon divine things. This is of great uſe to make the truths of religion plain and familiar to us. It ſtirſ up our affections, and makes our knowledge more lively and more operative, both on our hearts and lives. It confirms and ſtrengthens our faith, and brings much joy and comfort to our ſouls, by ſhowing us, that as face anſwereth to face in water, ſo doth the heart of one true Chriſtian to that of another. In this exerciſe holy men of old have employed themſelves, and met with ſingular tokens of divine favour and acceptance. At no time ſurely can ſuch conference be more reaſonable than on the Chriſtian Sabbath: and it is owing probably to the neglect of this, that the preaching of the word, and other parts of public religious ſervice, are ſo generally fruitleſs and unſucceſsful. I have thus given you a general account of the manner in which the Sabbath ought to be ſanctified. In the next diſcourſe, I ſhall conſider the prohibitory part of the commandment, and endeavour to enforce the obſervance of it by ſome motives and arguments.

S E R M O N IX.

EXODUS xx. 8.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

[The 2d Sermon on this Text.]

I HAVE already endeavoured to prove, that we are strictly bound by this divine precept to keep one day in seven holy to the Lord; and that the change of the Sabbath, from the seventh to the first day of the week, on which our Lord rose from the dead, bears such evident signatures of divine authority, as are sufficient to justify the uniform opinion, and uninterrupted practice, of all the Christian churches in this matter. I have also endeavoured to explain the commandment itself, and to give you an account of the manner in which the Sabbath ought to be sanctified.—I now proceed to consider the prohibitory part of the commandment,

commandment, and to enforce the observance of it, by some motives and arguments.

The prohibition chiefly respects bodily labour. "The Sabbath-day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God," saith the Supreme Lawgiver; "in it thou shalt not do any work." It is expressed, you see, in very strong and absolute terms, and was for a long time understood by the Jews in a very rigid sense, in so much that they thought it even unlawful to defend their lives when they were attacked by their enemies on that day. So universally did this opinion prevail among them in the beginning of the wars of the Maccabees, that, in some instances, it proved fatal to many of them. But this was afterward, by the universal consent of the learned in their law, declared to be a mistake: and indeed, from the design of the precept, from other passages of Scripture, and especially from our Saviour's instruction and example, it appears, that some kinds of work are perfectly consistent with the rest which is here enjoined. Of this nature are works of necessity, *i. e.* works which

which cannot be done the day before, nor delayed till the day following. Thus, for instance, should a fire break out on the Sabbath, we may and ought to use every mean to extinguish it. Should our enemies attack us, it is lawful to resist them: if we are at a distance from church, we may travel as far as is necessary, in order to hear the word of God, and to join with others in public worship. For, as our Saviour tells us, "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath;" and the means are never to be set above the end; nor is resting on the Sabbath to be interpreted so as to exclude the religious employment of it.

In like manner, works of charity and compassion are lawful on this day. Our Lord wrought many miracles of mercy on the Sabbath, and vindicated his conduct against those who found fault with him, by such maxims as plainly show, that offices of charity are not only allowable but praise-worthy, and are perfectly consistent with the rest which is here enjoined.

But then it is absolutely unlawful to pursue

due our worldly business on this day; because this thwarts the great end and design of the commandment, which ordains the seventh part of our time to be stately employed in the immediate service of God, that we may thereby become better acquainted with him, and may become more fit for an eternal communion with him in heaven. The very intention of the law is to set apart a certain proportion of our time for the care of our souls; which, amidst the hurry of our secular affairs, we are too apt to neglect.

To apply ourselves therefore to our ordinary business on the Sabbath, to talk of it, or even to spend our thoughts on it, is doing what we can to frustrate the gracious designs of the Lawgiver, and must necessarily be of infinite hurt and prejudice to our souls. And if our worldly employments, which are not only lawful, but even necessary on other days of the week, are criminal on this day, you will easily perceive, that sports and recreations must certainly be considered as included in the prohibition: for these are still more opposite to the proper business of the Sabbath,

Sabbath, and have not the remotest pretence either to necessity or usefulness. To have recourse to amusements on this day, is wantonly to throw away our time, without any advantage; and carries in it a plain declaration, that we have no relish for spiritual things; and that, rather than think of God, and the concerns of our souls, we will banish reflection altogether, and study to forget both God and ourselves. It was the judgement of one of the fathers, that it was more lawful to plow than to dance on the Lord's day; and the same thing may be said of all other diversions, which entirely withdraw us from the business of religion, and will not suffer our minds to be serious and composed. If it is criminal to work or to labour on this day, it must evidently be still more so to waste the time in carnal mirth, or in indolence and sloth, or in vain and trifling amusements. In a word, whatever is foreign to religion, or has not a direct tendency to glorify God, and advance our own spiritual interest, ought carefully to be avoided on this holy day, as we regard the approbation

approbation of God, and our own present and eternal happiness.

Having thus laid your duty in this matter before you, it only remains, in the

Third and last place, That I enforce the practice of it by some motives and arguments.—And,

1st, Allow me to observe, that though this commandment were to be considered as a mere positive institution, or only as a test of our obedience and subjection to God; yet the portion of time which is thereby separated from common use, is so very moderate, that we have not the remotest cause to complain of it. I am even persuaded, that were God to refer the matter to ourselves, and, after having represented that he had brought us into being, and would allow us a certain term of life in his world, were to ask us what portion of our time we would freely resign to his disposal, as an acknowledgement of his righteous title to the whole, we should be ashamed to offer so little as he hath been pleased to demand. I am apt to think, that, instead of every seventh day,

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we should have thought every other day, or the full half of our time, the least that could be offered in return for such undeserved goodness. Put the case, that any of you were lying on a deathbed, and God should say to you, How much of your time will you consecrate to my service in future, if I shall now be pleased to restore you to health again? I suppose most of you would reply, without any hesitation, Lord, I make no conditions: I put myself wholly into thy hands: demand of me whatsoever thou wilt. Hear how Hezekiah expresseth himself, after his miraculous recovery from a deadly disease, (*Jf.* xxxviii. 19, 20.), “The living, the
“ living, he shall praise thee as I do this
“ day. The father to the children shall
“ make known thy truth. The Lord was
“ ready to save me; therefore we will sing
“ my songs to the stringed instruments all
“ the days of our life in the house of the
“ Lord.” He doth not limit his resolutions of thanksgiving and praise to the Sabbath day; he thought all the days of his life a tribute of consecrated time small enough in return for the goodness which had rescued him
him

him from the grave. And is it possible, that any of us should judge one day in seven too much, even though the duties required on it were in their own nature disagreeable, and had nothing to recommend them but the mere authority of the Lawgiver? Nay, my brethren, I shall put the case a little stronger. Suppose yourselves in the immediate prospect of death, either by sickness or by some external cause, and that God should say to you in these circumstances, I will save you from this danger, on condition that every seventh day you will quietly submit to the torments of some acute distemper, as long as I shall continue you in the world. Do you imagine that you would reject these terms? God knows, and yourselves know, that you would not reject them; the offer would appear too good to be refused. If God then requires nothing more severe than this, your own reason must tell you that there is no cause to complain. But what are the duties which God requires of us? Are they disagreeable in their own nature? Have they no value or excellence in themselves? On the contrary, they are infinitely
fit

fit and reasonable, and every way calculated to give the truest satisfaction, the most sublime pleasure, to the soul of man.—This I shall state as a

2d argument for enforcing obedience to the commandment in the text. What can be more rational or delightful to a well-formed mind, than to contemplate the wonderful works of God in creation, providence, and grace? What can be more becoming, than to join with others in adoring the perfections of the Father of our spirits, and in ascribing that glory which is due to his name? Can any thing be more pleasant, than to retire from the hurry of a vain world, that without reserve we may pour out our hearts, and lay open the secret desires of our souls, in the presence of that great Being, whose nature disposeth him to pity us, and whose power enables him to bestow upon us, in the fullest and most effectual manner, every blessing that can promote our most important interests? Can any entertainment be more rational, more truly divine, than to read the lively oracles of God, and to converse with our fellow
Christians,

Christians, upon the most interesting of all subjects, the salvation of our souls, and the means of securing an “inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away?” One should think that a bare counsel, nay, even a permission to spend one day in seven in such pleasant and profitable exercises, would be regarded as a singular privilege that deserved our warmest returns of gratitude and praise. The force of this argument is not weakened, because those who are alienated from the life of God have no relish for the pleasures which arise from the exercises of devotion. It is not the reason of the thing which leads the depraved mind to account “the Sabbath a weariness,” or to say, “When will the Sabbath be over?” After six days spent in provision for the body, is one day too long to care for the soul? Nay, after deducing the time which is necessarily employed in sleeping, and eating and drinking, can we not find as much in God, in Christ, and in heaven, as may afford us entertainment for the scanty remainder of twenty-four hours? Alas, my brethren, how shall we employ

an everlasting Sabbath, if one Sabbath in the week is so tedious and burdensome? Can those be candidates for immortal glory, who think one day too long for the work of heaven, unless they relieve themselves, by consuming the greater part of it in idle conversation or trifling amusements?—

My

3^d argument to enforce this commandment, shall be taken from the many advantages which flow from the religious observance of the Sabbath. Hereby we shall obtain the blessing of God, according to that large and comprehensive promise, *Isaiab* lviii. 13, 14. “ If thou turn away
 “ thy foot from the Sabbath from doing
 “ thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the
 “ Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord,
 “ honourable, and shalt honour him, not
 “ doing thine own ways, nor finding thine
 “ own pleasure, nor speaking thine own
 “ words: then shalt thou delight thyself in
 “ the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride
 “ upon the high places of the earth, and
 “ feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy
 “ father; for the mouth of the Lord hath
 “ spoken.

“spoken it.” If we honour God on this separate day, which he claims as his special property, then may we expect to be honoured by him on the other days of the week, which he hath given us for our own use. The truth of this hath been frequently experienced by the people of God; and among these, too, by some of the most eminent character, not only for piety, but also for learning and taste, and knowledge of the world. I shall mention one who was highly respected in his own time, and whose character and writings are to this day universally esteemed. The learned Judge Hales, speaking of his experience on this subject, hath these words: “I have found,” saith he, “by a strict and diligent observation, that a due observing the duty of this day, hath ever had joined to it a blessing upon the rest of my time; and the week that hath been so begun, hath been blessed and prosperous to me. And, on the other side, when I have been negligent of the duties of this day, the rest of the week hath been unsuccessful and unhappy to my secular employments; so that I

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“could

“ could easily make an estimate of my fac-
“ cesses in my own secular employments
“ the week following, by the manner of my
“ passing this day. And this,” adds he, “ I
“ do not write lightly or inconsiderately,
“ but upon a long and sound observation
“ and experience.” — Nay, the right obser-
vance of this duty will procure national as
well as personal blessings: for so God pro-
mised to his ancient church, (*Jer.* xvii. 24,
25.), “ If ye diligently hearken unto me, to
“ bring in no burden through the gates of
“ this city on the Sabbath day, but hal-
“ low the Sabbath day, to do no work
“ therein; then shall there enter into the
“ gates of this city, kings and princes
“ sitting upon the throne of David, riding
“ in chariots, and on horses, they and their
“ princes, the men of Judah, and the in-
“ habitants of Jerusalem, and this city shall
“ remain for ever.” I do not mean by
these arguments to bribe you into a merce-
nary or political observance of the Christian
Sabbath. Should you spend the whole day
in reading, praying, praising, or any other
forms of religious worship, merely, or even
principally from a regard to your own pri-
vate

vate interest, or the public prosperity of the nation to which you belong, I must be so faithful as to tell you, that it would not be accepted. Nay, God would number these hypocritical services among your most provoking sins. For it is the heart which God requires; and if that be withheld, he will accept of no outward homage. But I mention these things to show you, that Sabbath-breakers must be utterly inexcusable, when they transgress a law, which is not only most reasonable in itself, but which hath also peculiar promises annexed to it, of temporal prosperity and happiness.—And with the same view, I am now going to add a

4th consideration for enforcing obedience to this commandment, namely, That the transgression of it is attended with many sad and fatal consequences. God hath frequently punished this sin, by inflicting very awful judgements both upon societies and particular persons. There was an express statute in the Jewish law, appointing the Sabbath-breaker to be put to death, (*Exod.* xxxi. 12, 16.); and this punishment was actually inflicted upon one who was

found gathering sticks on that holy day :
 “ All the congregation brought him with-
 “ out the camp, and stoned him with stones,
 “ and he died, as the Lord commanded
 “ Moses,” (*Num.* xv. 32, 37.). How alarm-
 ing is that threatening, (*Jerem.* xvii. 27.),
 “ If ye will not hearken unto me to hallow
 “ the Sabbath day, and not to bear a bur-
 “ den, even entering in at the gates of Je-
 “ rusalem on the Sabbath day ; then will I
 “ kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it
 “ shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem,
 “ and it shall not be quenched.” Ac-
 cordingly, Nehemiah imputes all the ca-
 lamities which befel the Jewish nation to
 this, as one of the principal causes of God’s
 anger against that people. “ Then, (saith
 “ he), I contended with the nobles of Judah,
 “ and said unto them, What evil thing is
 “ this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath
 “ day ? Did not your fathers thus, and did
 “ not our God bring all this evil upon us,
 “ and upon this city ; yet ye bring more
 “ wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sab-
 “ bath.” And I am verily persuaded, that
 many of the national calamities with which

we have been visited, may justly be attributed to the same cause. Nor is it greatly to be wondered at, when we consider, that this sin is not only an act of rebellion against the authority of God, but also a bold and sacrilegious invasion of his property, in applying to common use that proportion of time which he hath reserved for himself, and set apart for the immediate exercises of his worship.

But besides this, the abuse or neglect of the Sabbath must be attended with pernicious consequences on several other accounts. To this gracious institution it is in a great measure owing that any sense of God, and of divine things, is preserved in the world. Were this day rendered common, the bulk of mankind would soon sink into Atheism or utter profaneness. What would become of the lower ranks in society, whose servitude and bodily necessities oblige them to work hard for daily bread, were it not for this separated day, on which they are invited and commanded to care for their souls? I am even afraid, that the tyranny and covetousness of many masters

would incline them to deny their servants any leisure whatsoever, either for the rest of their bodies, or the improvement of their minds, had not God, in mercy, made a law for one day of rest and liberty in the week. In proportion as this law is despised and neglected, in the same proportion will religion fall into decay, the impressions of God become feeble and languid; while ignorance, brutality, oppression, and all the evils which unrestrained corruption can produce, will prevail, and render this earth the very suburbs of hell.

These are all the arguments which I shall at present use with you, for enforcing the observance of the Christian Sabbath. The proportion of time is so moderate, that even upon the supposition that the duties required were painful, there could be no just cause of complaint. Yet so far is this supposition from being true, that, on the contrary, the work assigned us on this holy day is most pleasant and delightful; insomuch that were our minds in a right temper, we would count it our happiness to spend our whole time, nay, a whole eternity, in such heavenly

heavenly employment. Besides, the religious observance of this holy day is accompanied with many signal advantages, and is a mean of deriving the blessing of God, both upon individuals and communities; whereas the profanation or neglect of it, is in every respect pernicious, both to particular persons and to societies.

And if these things are so, how many who now hear me ought to blush, and be ashamed to lift up their faces either before God or man? But as reformation is the great object which I have in view, I shall spare the reproof which I once intended to give; and instead of upbraiding you for the time past, I shall rather intreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, to behave more dutifully for the time to come. And my exhortation shall be chiefly directed to parents and masters of families, to whom the commandment seems to be principally addressed. It is true, the expression "within thy gates," may relate to the gates of a city as well as of a particular house: and then it would intimate to us this truth, that it is the duty of magistrates to secure the observance of
this

this day, by the exercise of that power and authority with which their public station invests them. But as there would be less occasion for the interposition of civil authority, if parents and heads of families would mind their proper work, to these I shall more directly address what I have to say. And I must tell you in the name of God, that you are strictly accountable, not only for your own conduct, but likewise for the conduct of all within your houses on this holy day. Hear how the commandment runs: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy: six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates." You see that you are charged with the immediate inspection, not only of your children and servants, but likewise of the stranger who sojourns with you, over whom you have no jurisdiction or authority through the rest of the week.

I should be glad to know what those who keep houses of public entertainment think of this doctrine. A respectful complaisance and readiness to serve, are the general duties of your station. But there is one day of the week on which God permits, nay commands you to take rest to yourselves, and to keep your doors shut against the idle and profane of what rank soever, and to restrain such as necessity brings to your houses, from every thing that is profane, either in speech or behaviour. If any shall question your authority, this precept is your charter, vesting you with the same power over the stranger that is within your gates, as over your own children and servants; and even charging you to exercise that power, as you would not incur the wrath of Almighty God. Did you know that you possessed so high a privilege? I hope, for your own sakes, that you did not: and now that I have told you the secret, I pray that God may give you wisdom and courage to improve it.

To conclude: Let all of us be persuaded to pay a proper regard to this divine precept,

cept. If we have any concern for the glory of God, for the honour of our Redeemer, for the welfare of our country, or for our own comfort and happiness, either in this world or the world to come, let us make conscience of the important duties of the Lord's day, that after having finished our course on earth, we may be fixed as pillars in the temple above, and may spend an eternal Sabbath in the presence of God and of the Lamb. *Amen.*

S E R.

S E R M O N X.

2 SAMUEL VI. 20.

Then David returned to bless his household.

FROM the example of this great and good man, I propose to recommend to you the important, but much neglected duty of family-worship. And I have chosen the example of a king, for two reasons.

1st, Because the actions of one in that elevated station are commonly more regarded than those of a meaner person. "The poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard." But if one arrayed in royal apparel make an oration from a throne, the people shall give a shout, saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." This partial regard is indeed a fore evil under the sun: but in the present case, it is possible to bring good out of it, by making
that

that pomp or splendour, which so often covers the deformity of vice, a mean of throwing a lustre upon religion, and of rendering a thing so truly excellent in itself, more respectable in our eyes.

2dly, It is but too obvious, that the neglect of family-worship prevails chiefly among those who either are, or imagine themselves to be of a better rank than others: nay, some who were punctual in the performance of this duty while their station and circumstances were low, have been observed to lay it aside, when, by the bounty of Providence, their state became more prosperous. This presents us with a very melancholy prospect, and threatens nothing less than the utter extinction of family-religion. For if once it becomes a maxim, that this duty is below the rank of a gentleman, then every one who affects to be thought of that rank will forbear it. In this case, it is impossible to foresee where the evil may stop; as there are few people in the world, who do not imagine that they either are, or deserve to be, of equal consideration with their neighbours. I have therefore thought it necessary

fary to pitch upon nothing lower than a royal example, that the vanity of no man may take it amifs when I call upon him to follow it.

We have an account, in the preceding verses, of David's bringing up the ark of God from the house Obed-edom, into his own city. This was done with shouting, and with the found of the trumpet; the king himself, girded with a linen ephod, attending the solemnity, with the highest expressions of thankfulness and joy. When the ark was set in its place, in the midst of the tabernacle that was prepared for it, then David, as we read in the 17th verse, offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord, and afterwards dismissed the assembly with presents which he dealt among all the people, having first blessed them in the name of the Lord of hosts. This he did as the Father of his people. But he did not stop here. The duties of his public office and character did not make him forget what was incumbent upon him in his private capacity: for, as my text informs us, "Then David returned to bless his house-
" hold ;"

“hold;” *i. e.* to pray with them and for them, and probably to offer up his family-thanksgivings for the great national mercy which he had been celebrating in the public assembly.—From this plain and instructive passage of Scripture-history, I shall take occasion, in the

First place, To prove, that it is the indispensable duty of all to whom God hath given families, to worship God publicly in their own houses; or, that every man is bound, according to the example of David, “to bless his household.” In the

Second place, I shall show you the reasonableness of this duty. And then, in the

Third place, I shall represent to you the advantages which accompany the practice of it, and the pernicious consequences which must follow from the neglect of it.

I BEGIN with proving, that it is the indispensable duty of all to whom God hath given families, to worship God publicly in their own houses. This is a truth which even the light of nature doth very plainly teach

teach us. A family is a society connected together by such strict ties, that every argument for the propriety of private prayer, is equally conclusive for that of family-devotion. Of this even the Heathens were sensible: for besides their tutelar deities, who were supposed to preside over cities and nations, and who had public honours paid to them in that character, we read of household-gods, whom every private family worshipped at home as their immediate guardians and benefactors.

But the light of Scripture affords us a more clear and satisfying discovery of our obligations to this duty, as well as of the proper manner of performing it. It reveals to us that great Mediator, by whom we have access to the throne of grace, and through whom all our religious services are accepted by God. It not only represents prayer as a privilege which we are permitted to use, but expressly requires it as a duty which we are bound to perform. Thus we are commanded, " In every thing, by prayer and
" supplication, with thanksgiving, to make
" our requests known unto God; to pray
VOL. III. P " always,

“ always, with all prayer and supplication
“ in the Spirit, and to continue in prayer :”
And it is observable, that this last exhortation is particularly addressed to masters of families, as you may read, (*Coloss. iv. 1, 2.*),
“ Masters, give unto your servants that
“ which is just and equal, knowing that ye
“ also have a Master in heaven.” The Apostle goes on, still addressing them in the same character ; “ Continue in prayer, and
“ watch in the same, with thanksgiving.” In the same strain Paul writes to Timothy, (*1 Tim. ii. 8.*), “ I will therefore, that men
“ pray every where, lifting up holy hands,
“ without wrath or doubting.” And surely, if in all places men ought to lift up holy hands unto God, much more ought they to do so in their own families, which are immediately under their care, and for whose spiritual as well as temporal interest they ought to be chiefly concerned. Accordingly, we learn from the sacred history, that this has been the uniform practice of good men in all ages of the world. The care of the ancient Patriarchs, to keep up family-religion, is very remarkable. We find Abraham

braham rearing up altars wherever he came : And for what end did he this, but that on these altars he might offer sacrifices, and call upon God with his household ? We have another bright example of this in Job, of whom we read, (*Job* i. 5.), that “ he sent for “ his sons and sanctified them, and rose up “ early in the morning, and offered burnt- “ offerings for each of them ;” and lest it might be thought that this family-worship was only occasional and accidental, it is added at the close of the verse, “ Thus did Job “ continually.” Nor was this peculiar to the patriarchal state, when each family was a church by itself ; but the same good practice was continued after the Jews were formed into a national church, and had priests appointed to preside in the public worship. Thus Joshua vowed, not only for himself, but likewise for his house, that they would serve the Lord : which plainly imports a resolution on his part, to use all the means in his power to make his family do so : particularly, to worship God before them, and to take care that none should dwell in his house, who would not join in this holy ser-

vice. The example of David in the text is abundantly plain; for though he had priests and Levites about him, yet he did not devolve the work upon them, but he himself, as head and master of the house, “bleſſed his “household:”

In the New-Testament writings it is very unusual to give private families of devout Christians the name of churches. But surely this would have been a most improper appellation, if God had not been publicly acknowledged, and the daily sacrifices of prayers and praises had not been offered in them.

These, I think, are sufficient intimations of the will of God in this matter; and may serve to convince any man, who acknowledgeth the divine authority of the Scriptures, that it is the unquestionable duty of all who have families, to maintain the worship of God in their houses.—The reasonableness of this duty was the

Second thing which I proposed to show: and this, I hope, will appear from the following considerations.

1st, Families are natural societies, formed originally by God, and held together by his providence. Previous to all civil or religious establishments, families subsisted. All the obligations which are incumbent on communities of any kind, were originally, and still continue to be, incumbent on particular families. Were the present state of society to be dissolved, and the patriarchal state restored, it is evident, that family-worship would be the only worship of God. Is it possible, then, that this original obligation can ever be cancelled? What is there to be pled as a reason for cancelling it? Will you say, that the private duty is superseded by the public ordinances which we have the opportunity of attending? This argument might as well be used to disprove the obligation to secret and personal devotion: and therefore, by proving too much, it proves nothing at all. For can any person seriously be of opinion, that the providence of God hath bestowed these public advantages on us, in order to relax the obligations which we owe to him in our houses, and in our closets?—But,

2dly, As God is the founder, so he is likewise the gracious benefactor of our families. All the blessings which we enjoy flow from his bounty, and depend entirely on his favour. Surely, then, if personal blessings claim the private acknowledgements of the person who receives them, family blessings ought, in like manner, to be acknowledged by united thanksgivings in our household. Were a man, having a numerous offspring, to receive some signal favour from an earthly benefactor, by which his circumstances were changed from meanness and want, to an easy or a decent competence; would it not be a natural acknowledgement for him to bring his family and children in their best apparel, and present them to his benefactor, fed and clothed with his bounty, to offer him their united thanks? Would not such a scene be delightful on both sides? Would it not be enjoyed as a very lovely appearance, even by a mere spectator? And is there less beauty or propriety in the same acknowledgements offered to the God in whom we live and breathe, and who giveth us all things richly to enjoy? Doth
he

he set the hedge of his protection around us, and defend us from the many evils to which we are continually exposed; and shall he yet have no tribute of praise offered up from those houses in which he maketh us to dwell in safety? How disingenuous and unreasonable must this appear to every candid and grateful mind!

3dly, As we receive all our family blessings from God, so we are guilty also of many family sins against him, and ought therefore to join together in the penitent confession of our sins, and in deprecating the judgements which we have deserved. In a word, whatever reason there is for single persons to worship God, there is the same reason for families to do it. As there are personal sins, and wants and mercies, so there are family sins, family wants and troubles, family mercies and deliverances; and therefore it must appear highly reasonable, that the members of each family should unite together in humiliation and prayer, and thanksgiving. Those who sin together, should ask forgiveness together; and those who receive mercies together,

should join in praising their common benefactor.

Thus have I endeavoured to show, that family-worship is not only a duty by virtue of the divine command, but is so fit and becoming in itself, that although the authority binding us to it were less apparent, yet every man who allows himself to think, must immediately be convinced, by his own reason and conscience, that such homage is certainly due to God, and that they are highly criminal who refuse or neglect to offer it.—I proceed now, in the

Third place, To represent to you the manifold advantages which accompany the practice of this duty, and the pernicious consequences which flow from the neglect of it.

1st, Then, the practice of this duty would be of great use to promote even your temporal and worldly interest. I address myself to you who are parents or masters; and surely this consideration must appear in your own eyes to merit some regard. I need not stay to prove to you, that your prosperity, as well as your comfort, depends very
 much

much upon the dutiful behaviour of your children, and the fidelity of your servants. This, I suppose, you will readily acknowledge. Now, it is evident to a demonstration, that nothing can contribute more effectually to this, than the good practice which I am recommending to you. Bring the fear of God into your families, and that will secure your authority better than any thing else can do. The influence of a religious principle will be as powerful and operative, when you are absent from them as when you are present, because God is always present; and consequently the obedience which flows from a regard to him, must in every place, and at all times, be the same. Hereby, too, you will gain their esteem and love; which are the most powerful and permanent of all bonds of duty. There is a certain majesty in the image of God, which commands reverence to itself, even from the worst of men. Thus, we are told of Herod, (*Mark* vi. 20.), that he feared John, because he knew him to be a holy and a just man. And if this wicked prince was so much overawed by the exemplary holiness

holiness of a mean subject, how venerable must a devout parent or master appear in the eyes of his own family, when, besides that authority which his station gives him, they see him adorned with that piety and regard to God, which of themselves would dignify him, and render him worthy of their esteem and honour? How must it endear him to their hearts, to behold his anxious concern for their welfare; to hear him morning and evening commending them to the protection of Almighty God, imploring the pardon of their sins, and earnestly soliciting the same blessings for them which he begs for himself? And how must this esteem and love influence their whole behaviour, and make them not only faithful, but cheerful, active, and zealous in every part of the duty and service which they owe him? I am aware, that many think to maintain their authority in their families by other sort of prayers than those I am recommending: I mean, by horrid curses and imprecations; yea, some are so abandoned as to plead the necessity of these, to render their orders effectual. But this practice must

must appear fo absurd and odious to every thinking person, that, I am persuaded, I need not spend your time in exposing it. Such a vile and impious habit must evidently destroy at once all that esteem and love, which are the only sure and permanent principles of obedience. Their whole authority, therefore, must lean on the precarious foundation of a fervile fear, which God, who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, can remove when he pleases; and then they shall become utterly contemptible, and may curse on without having any person to regard them, till their own curses overtake them. —But,

2dly, As the practice of worshipping God in your houses, would contribute much to your worldly prosperity, in the manner I have just now explained; so it has likewise a manifest tendency to promote your spiritual and eternal interest. It is not only a considerable branch of that homage which you owe to God, but it may be also of great use to restrain you from sin, and to render you cautious and circumspect in every part of your behaviour. A man will be ashamed

to

to do any thing against the honour of that God whom he so publicly acknowledges before his family ; and the very desire of appearing consistent with himself in the eyes of his children or servants, will hardly fail to produce at least an outward decency, and to restrain him from many of those scandalous sins, which he might otherwise be in danger of committing. So that though family-worship served no higher purpose than to hedge in our practice before our household, I should even think that a considerable recommendation of it; and every wise and good man must esteem and value it upon that account. But this is one of the least of its happy effects. The practice of this duty would not only render our outward conduct cautious and decent, but would also tincture our minds deeply with a sense of God, and of divine things. It would give us greater boldness, too, in our secret approaches to the throne of grace. How can that man have any confidence or enlargement of heart in secret prayer, whose conscience reproacheth him with never having honoured that God in public, from whom

whom he is now going to ask the most unmerited favours? It is true, indeed, that our Lord, in great condescension, granted a private audience, in the night season, to Nicodemus, who had not the courage to own him in the face of the day. But no man hath reason to expect the same indulgence now. Nay, however uncharitable it may be thought, I must declare it as my opinion, that the neglect of public duties gives too just ground to suspect, that those of a more private nature are either little minded, or superficially performed. For, did you obtain access to God in secret prayer, and taste the sweetness of holy communion with him in your closets, there can be no doubt that you would thereby be disposed to the duties of social worship.—A

3d advantage of family worship is, That under the influences of the divine Spirit, it is one of the most effectual means of promoting the salvation of all your household. Many godly persons have ascribed their own vital impressions of religion to their living in a devout family: and many a sinner, ruined by vice and evil habits, has too just-

ly laid the blame of it on the wickedness of those with whom he dwelt. What numbers of children and servants have been lost for want of that good example which it was the duty of their parents or masters to have given them? As in a profane and sensual family there are continual temptations to sin, to swearing, lying, intemperance, and contempt of God; so in a devout well governed house, there are continual incitements to a holy life, to faith, love, sobriety, and heavenly mindedness. The authority of the heads of the family, and the conversation and example of all the members of it, are powerful inducements to a religious temper and behaviour. As in a well-disciplined army, even the cowards are constrained to stand to their arms, and to act violently, by the general order of the whole; so in a religious household, a wicked man can scarcely contrive how to live wickedly, but seems to be almost a saint, by being continually among those who appear to be saints. O how easy and well paved (if I may use the expression) is the way to heaven in such a gracious society, in comparison of what it is to those

those

those who dwell in the houses of the profane and sensual! In the former, the advantages of instruction, authority, example, and conversation, are all on the side of God and religion: in the latter, the same powerful circumstances are all on the side of corrupt nature, and push men forward in the broad way that leads to destruction.

If then you would not be guilty of bringing ruin on immortal souls; if you wish to have the blessing of them who are ready to perish for ever, to come upon you; if you desire that your children and servants should be pious and happy; if you would have your whole domestic society blessed; let your household be daily consecrated by fervent prayer to Almighty God.—The

4th and *last* advantage of family religion, which I shall mention, is its tendency to form an holy church and people, and to propagate religion from generation to generation. The public state of religion in the world, must entirely depend on the care bestowed on the cultivation of it in private families. If the nursery be neglected, how

is it possible that the plantation should prosper? Such as the families are, of which congregations, churches, and kingdoms are composed, such will be the flourishing or the decayed state of religion in these larger communities. And consequently it is as clear as noon-day, that the disregard shown to God in our households, is the fatal source of that amazing corruption of manners in the present age, which almost every one pretends to lament, but almost none sets himself in earnest to reform. Would you then put a stop to abounding iniquity, and promote the cause of God and religion, begin at home, and let your Maker have that honour in your families to which he is intitled.

Had we, who minister in the public worship of God, only to lay those stones in order in the building, which parents and masters of families had previously polished, how easy and delightful would be our task? how comely and beautiful would our worshipping assemblies appear? how pure and comfortable would their communion be? But if these shall neglect to
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exert their proper influence ; if the work of hundreds or thousands shall be left to be performed by one or two, what a tedious labour must it prove ? What effect can divine truths, delivered once a-week, have, unless the impression of them be afterwards kept alive by family-devotion and domestic religion ? It is no wonder that a tender plant should wither and die which is seldom visited or watered : and it is as little wonderful, that those should continue wicked and impenitent, who but once a-week come under the influence of a religious ordinance ; and who neither see nor hear any thing of God, but when the stated season of public instruction returns. If religion die in families, how can it live in nations ? Is it not an inevitable consequence, that all our public devotions must in this case dwindle away into mere hypocrisy, and lifeless unavailing forms of worship ?

I have thus endeavoured to represent to you the manifold advantages which would arise from maintaining the worship of God in your families. And I have now only to

add, that though you were willing to be without these advantages, yet this loss is not the whole penalty which must attend the neglect of that duty. This avowed disregard of God will not always pass unpunished. The day is coming, when “ God “ will pour out his fury upon the Heathen “ that know him not, and upon the families “ that call not upon his name.”—“ Con- “ sider this, ye that now forget God, lest “ he tear you in pieces, when there is none “ to deliver.”

I would now conclude the subject by pressing you, with all the earnestness of which I am capable, to the performance of this necessary and important duty, were it not that I think it may be of use to consider some of those excuses by which the neglect of it is commonly defended.

Some plead their rank and station in the world, but on what principles I could never yet discover. I cannot conceive any principle of reason more strong and obvious, than that uttered by our Saviour (*Luke xii. 48.*), “ Unto whomsoever much “ is given, of him shall much be required ; “ and

“ and to whom men have committed much, “ of him will they ask the more.” And certainly if benefits conferred deserve any return, they at least deserve thanks : if God hath placed us in a more distinguished station, we owe to him a more solemn and devout acknowledgement. Riches and honours, instead of setting a man above the obligation of family-worship, rather bind it more strictly on him : and that it is below no man of any station whatsoever to perform this office, appears by the example in my text ; the example of one in the most elevated station known among men, returning from the public worship of God to bless his household.

Others plead, that it has not been the practice of their families, and that they are not inclined to bring a new custom into it. To these I answer, that the reason of this duty is as old as eternity itself, and the practice of it is as ancient as the first family of mankind. In every succeeding age, down to the present day, there have been families in which God was worshipped, and there will be such until the end of the

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world.

world. Nay, I dare venture to affirm, that there are few now hearing me, whose fathers or grandfathers did not at least maintain the form of this duty. For, how ever much it is despised now, it is certain, that it was in reputation about an hundred years ago, and generally practised by men of all ranks. It deserves, therefore, to be inquired into, when, or by whom, and for what cause, this good old custom was laid aside? what was the shameful period in which the worship of God was turned out of doors, to make way for irreligion, and a contempt of divine things? Then, indeed, a most base and dishonourable innovation was made in your families: and therefore it must be your glory to restore things to their ancient state, and to give the worship of God that room in your houses which it formerly possessed.

But if it be really true, that this important duty has been always neglected in your families, believe me it is now high time to introduce it. Your danger is greater than you are aware of. Punishment loseth nothing by delay; the slower it advances,
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the heavier it will prove. And therefore you have reason to fear, that the wrath of God, which has been so long restrained, shall at length break forth with double violence, if it is not prevented by a speedy reformation.

Another excuse, by which some defend their neglect of this duty, is their inability to perform it well. They cannot pray to God in public in so decent a manner as they would incline. In answer to this, I need only observe, that, next to the divine blessing, nothing contributes more to teach men to pray, than frequent practice and use. So that, if upon this account you neglect the duty, your inability can pass for nothing else than a feigned pretence to cover your unwillingness: for, were you as willing to learn to pray, as to acquire the knowledge of any art, you would soon, by diligent endeavours, attain a competent measure of this excellent gift. Besides, if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath: it is the sincerity of your desires which God regards, and not the expressions with which

you clothe them : and if you set about this duty in good earnest, and in the best manner you can, though perhaps you may come short of what you wish, God will both accept and assist you in your humble and well meant attempts to honour him.

Upon the whole, then, may I not hope that you will hearken to what I have said? God is now offering himself to be your guest ; and is, by us, demanding an entrance into your hearts, and into your houses ; and can you resolve on refusing him ? Shall the great King of heaven thus stand at your doors, and knock, and yet meet with a repulse? If the authority of God has any weight with you ; if your reason can prevail with you ; if your own immortal souls, or the souls of those who dwell with you appear worthy of your regard : in a word, if duty, gratitude, or interest, can move you, all these conspire to enforce my exhortation, and to plead the cause of family-worship. And must these powerful advocates plead in vain ? must they turn evidences against you, and appear at last in judgement to condemn you? God forbid. I desire to hope better things

things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak.

May the Spirit of all grace seal these instructions, and powerfully determine you to the practice of this duty, that by the exercise of social worship here below, you may be gradually prepared for the more exalted worship of the triumphant society above, who all with one heart, and one voice, ascribe salvation to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

S E R M O N . XI.

MATTHEW vi. 10. *

—Thy kingdom come.—

THE correspondence between heaven and earth is preserved and conducted by Christ alone: "For no man cometh," or can come, "to the Father, but by him." (*John* xiv. 6.) It is he who presents all our homage to God; it is he who transmits to him all our petitions; and by his hands all mercy and grace are conveyed to us. Our most fervent prayers, the devourest breathings of our souls, must not only be purged from that defilement which cleaves to them, but even in their greatest purity, they must be offered up in his center, in order to their acceptance, and can only ascend by the incense of his sacrifice.

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* Preached before the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge, *January* 4. 1748.

It should therefore be our first care, in all our approaches to the throne of grace, to solicit the favour of this powerful Mediator, and to procure his friendly interposition in our behalf; and then we shall have no cause to dread a repulse; for his intercession is, and must be, always prevalent. The dignity of his person, his relation to the Father, and especially the perfection of that sacrifice upon which his intercession is founded, effectually secure acceptance to us: so that if once we are fully persuaded that our requests are framed according to his will, we need have no distressful anxiety about their success, for he will enforce them with all the merit of his own blood: and therefore we may confidently hope to obtain what we ask, in that time and way which unerring wisdom sees best for us: “For this,” says the Apostle John, “is the confidence which
“we have in the Son of God, that if we ask
“any thing according to his will, he heareth
“us: and if we know that he heareth us,
“we know that we have the petitions we de-
“sired of him,” 1 *John* v. 14, 15.

This, my brethren, is an abundant source
of

of consolation and joy ; and though our desires are limited to such things as are agreeable to the will of our Redeemer ; yet by this very limitation our comfort is extended, and prayer becomes a privilege of infinitely greater value than otherwise it would be. An unconfined liberty in our addresses to God, would, in most cases (to such ignorant and unthinking creatures as we are), amount to nothing better than the choice of the means and manner of our own destruction. (*Eccl. vi. 12.*) “ For who knoweth what is good for man in this life :” Whereas our glorious High Priest, who is perfectly acquainted with our state, can never be at a loss to know what is good for us ; and the costly proofs he hath already given of his mercy and love, leave us no room to suspect his concern for our welfare. The least reflection on his sufferings may easily convince us, that he sincerely intends our happiness, and can disapprove of nothing but what is hurtful to our interest. Neither hath he left it to the uncertain conjectures and doubtful reasonings of our own minds, to find out what is agreeable to him ;
this

this is clearly revealed to us in the holy Scriptures: and to render the discovery of it still more easy to us, he hath furnished us with a short but perfect model of devotion, in this comprehensive prayer which he taught his disciples; by attending to which, we may learn from his own mouth after what manner we should address the throne of grace, and what ought to be the matter and order of our desires. Hereby the surest foundation is laid for our confidence and hope; and whatever is according to this divine pattern, we may ask with full assurance of faith, being confident that he who hath secured for us all the blessings which we need, will certainly listen to those desires which he himself hath excited and authorized. “And if we know that he
 “heareth us,” we may from thence certainly conclude, “that we shall have the petitions we desired of him.”

I shall not detain you with any account of the several parts of this excellent prayer, nor the particular design for which our Lord introduced it in this sermon: Only, to make way for the instructions I propose

to lay before you on this occasion, I shall observe in general,

That prayer is not only an acknowledgement of our dependence upon God for the blessings we ask ; but it likewise imports a sincere resolution on our part, to put ourselves in the way of those blessings, and to use all proper means for obtaining them. Thus, when we pray for daily bread, we do not mean, that God should indulge our idleness, and feed us in a miraculous way ; but only, that he would countenance our honest endeavours, and prosper them by his blessing, which alone maketh rich. In like manner, when we pray, as in my text, that the kingdom of God may come, we certainly intimate our own consent to be employed as instruments in carrying on this design, and must be understood as binding and obliging ourselves, by this petition, to do every thing in our sphere, that may contribute to promote it.

Accordingly, I shall endeavour, in dependence upon the divine aid,

First, To explain and illustrate the petition itself. And,

Secondly,

Secondly, To show what may reasonably be expected from us, in consequence of our using it.—Or rather, indeed, what is absolutely necessary to prove that we are sincere, when we thus pray, “thy kingdom come.”

IT is scarcely to be supposed, that any who read their Bibles, can be ignorant of what is here meant by the kingdom of God. This form of speech was very common among the Jews, especially about the time of our Saviour’s appearance; and was used by them, to signify that grand revolution foretold in ancient prophecy which was to be brought about by the Messiah, their long-expected King. Thus we find the Pharisees (*Luke xvii. 20.*) inquiring “when the kingdom of God should come;” that is, as the context explains it, when the reign of the Messiah should commence? And John the Baptist proclaimed the approach of this glorious Person in the same style; saying, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (*Matth. iii. 2.*) There are several other passages in the New Testament, where

where the same phrase occurs ; from which it doth still more plainly appear, that by the “ kingdom of God ” is meant the gospel-dispensation, in which subjects were to be gathered to God, by his Son, as the reconciling Mediator, and by him formed into a church or spiritual kingdom, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail ; which is to subsist on earth, and enlarge itself in spite of all opposition, till at length it shall become perfect in heaven, and triumph in eternal glory.

Now, this kingdom is either External, comprehending all who make an open profession of faith in Christ, and submit to the ordinances which he hath instituted ; or Internal, consisting in that dominion which he exercises over the hearts of his subjects, converting them by his grace to the faith and obedience of the gospel, enlightening their minds, renewing their wills, and purifying their affections ; filling them with “ righteousness, and peace, and joy in the “ Holy Ghost ; ” that is, with true Christian virtue, and all the blessed fruits and effects of it. And no doubt the petition respects
both

both these views of the kingdom of God: for though the last, *viz.* the dominion of grace in the heart, or the kingdom of God within us, is beyond comparison the most valuable of the two, and therefore chiefly to be desired by us; yet, as this kingdom is introduced and established by means of the ordinances which Christ hath appointed, we ought likewise to be much concerned for the preservation and enlargement of the visible church, or that external kingdom within which these ordinances are dispensed, and to pray for the one in order to the other.

So that this petition may be considered, as directing us to pray for these following things:

1st, That the gospel may be propagated throughout the world, and all nations brought to the knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.

It appears from the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, that no less than universal dominion was promised to the Lord Redeemer. "Ask of me," says God, (*Psal.*

ii. 8.), “ and I shall give thee the Heathen
 “ for thine inheritance, and the uttermost
 “ parts of the earth for thy possession.” It
 was foretold, (*Pfal.* lxxvi. 8, 11, 17.), “ That
 “ his dominion should reach from sea to sea,
 “ and from the river to the ends of the
 “ earth; yea, that all kings should bow
 “ down before him; and all nations should
 “ serve him; that men should be blessed in
 “ him, and all nations call him blessed.”
 And that remarkable passage (*Dan.* vii. 13,
 14.), is a clear and express declaration on
 this head. “ I saw,” says the Prophet, “ in
 “ the night visions, and behold, one like the
 “ Son of man came from the clouds of hea-
 “ ven, and came to the Ancient of Days,
 “ and they brought him near before him;
 “ and there was given him dominion, and
 “ glory, and a kingdom, that all people, na-
 “ tions, and languages, should serve him.”

Now, it is evident, that the extent of his
 kingdom doth not yet equal these magnifi-
 cent descriptions of it. There are still many
 dark corners of the earth upon which the
 Sun of Righteousness hath never arisen;
 others, which were once visited with his
 healing

healing and comforting light, have had their candlestick long removed; and the Jews, whose return to their own Messiah shall so remarkably enrich the church, and give such life and beauty to it, that Paul compares it to a “resurrection from the dead,” (*Rom. xi. 15.*), do still retain their prejudice against him, and obstinately refuse subjection to him.

We ought therefore to pray that the gospel, which hitherto has been confined within very narrow bounds, may gradually spread and extend itself on every side, till at length it obtain possession of the whole earth, and “all the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God, and of his Christ,” (*Rev. xi. 15.*).—But,

2dly, We are more especially to pray for a divine blessing to accompany the means of grace;

That the gospel may come to men, not in word only, but also in power, and prove effectual for turning “them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.”—That where Christ doth already reign in his external ordinances, there

he would also erect his throne in the hearts of men, subduing finners to himself, and training up his faints, by the influences of his holy Spirit, to a meetness for that undefiled inheritance which he hath purchased for them — And,

3^{ly}, We are likewise authorized by this petition to pray, that whatever stands in opposition to the kingdom of our Redeemer, either with respect to the extent or influence of it, may be removed out of the way :

Particularly, that Antichrist, that “ man of sin and son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God,” (2 *Thess.* ii. 3, 4), and hath long been “ drunk with the blood of the faints,” (*Rev.* xvii. 6.), may be brought to the ground, and never arise any more : that the delusions of the false prophet, and blasphemous impostor Mahomet, which have overspread so great a part of the world, may at length be detected, and his kingdom of darkness and violence plucked up by the roots.

And though it doth not belong to us to choose the time, or means, or manner of
doing

doing it, for these must be wholly submitted to Him “ who is wonderful in counsel
“ and excellent in working ;” yet surely it is
lawful for us, to desire in general, “ that
“ God would arise and scatter all his ene-
“ mies,” (*Pfal.* lxxviii. 1.): and even to make
mention of those enemies in particular,
whom he hath described in Scripture by
such plain and legible characters, that we
can be in no danger of mistaking them ;
and to plead, that what he hath purposed
and spoken concerning them may be ful-
filled in the most speedy and effectual man-
ner. In a word, whatever is conducive to
the present glory of the Redeemer, and the
prosperity of his kingdom upon earth, may
justly be comprehended in this petition ;
and it will never cease to be of use in the
church, till all the Redeemer’s enemies are
made his footstool ; and then it shall be ex-
changed for that triumphant song, (*Rev.*
xii. 10.), “ Now is come salvation, and
“ strength, and the kingdom of our God,
“ and the power of his Christ. Alleluia !
“ for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.
“ Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give
“ honour

“ honour to him ; for the marriage of the
 “ Lamb is come, and his wife hath made
 “ herself ready,” (*Rev.* xix. 6, 7.).

Thus have I endeavoured to give you a short account of the sense and import of this petition.—Let us now proceed, in the

Second place, To consider more largely, what may reasonably be expected from us in consequence of our using it ; or rather, indeed, what is absolutely necessary to prove that we are sincere when we thus pray, “ Thy kingdom come.”—And,

1st, It is necessary that we should become the subjects of this kingdom, not in name only, but in deed and in truth, otherwise we cannot wish the prosperity and advancement of it.

This King of Zion, who sways a sceptre of grace over those who cordially submit to him, is likewise armed with a rod of iron, to dash in pieces his obstinate enemies ; and therefore, to all such, his coming must be most terrible ; and neither their inclination nor interest will suffer them to desire it. No man can wish the increase of a power
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which he knows to be opposite to him, especially when the opposition is so great, and the difference so irreconcilable, as that which subsists between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan; for the one must necessarily be built upon the ruins of the other.

Let us then, my brethren, throw down the weapons of our rebellion, and yield ourselves to this gracious Sovereign; and then the increase of his power shall become the matter of our joy. Let us invite him into our hearts, and erect a throne for him there; or rather, let us beseech him to erect one for himself, to cast down every thing within us that would exalt itself against his authority, and to take the full and perpetual possession of our souls. Let us unfeignedly accept of him, in the whole extent of his office as Mediator; that standing related to him as the members of his body, we may derive from him wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and every thing necessary to our complete redemption. Let us secure to ourselves a title to the protection and privileges of his

government, by submitting to the laws and constitutions of it; and then it will become easy and natural to us, to pray for the prosperity of a kingdom to which we belong, and the glory of a Sovereign, who employs all his power and authority for our good.

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2d duty incumbent upon us, in consequence of our using this petition, is to endeavour, by all the methods we can, to persuade others likewise to become the subjects of this kingdom.

Many, indeed, call Christ, “ Lord, Lord; “ but few,” alas ! “ do the things which he “ says:—they profess that they know God, “ while in works they deny him,—being “ abominable, and disobedient, and to every “ good work reprobate.” And shall not this move our pity and compassion? Can we look around us, even within the limits of the visible church, and see human nature exposed in every deformed and sickly shape? Can we behold multitudes of men, who are called by the name of Jesus, counteracting the most sacred obligations of conscience, and even pouring contempt upon
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the only Saviour of lost finners? Can we see all this, I say, and not afford our helping hand? Do we pray that the kingdom of God may come, and will we do nothing to introduce it into the hearts of others, who by nature are not less disposed to entertain it, than we ourselves once were? If we are sincere in using this petition, let us show our sincerity, by our endeavours to obtain what we ask. Let us labour, with all our might, to awaken poor finners to a sense of their danger, that they may fly to the protection of that merciful Saviour, who hath expressly said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out," (*John* vi. 37.).

Various are the means which may be used for this purpose: I shall mention one, which all of us may employ, and that is, a holy and exemplary life. There is grandeur and majesty in the image of God, which exacts homage to itself from every heart. There is something within us, which, in spite of our degeneracy, confesses and approves of what is right; truth in our speech; justice and honesty in our com-

mercy with others ; patience under affliction, and pity to the afflicted ; a generous contempt of the world, and a readiness to do good to all. These are virtues which the worst of men secretly honour, and the practice of them explains them better, and enforces them more, than words can do. Would we then prevail with men to become Christians indeed, let us draw out Christianity in our lives, and make it visible to their eyes, and it will speak for itself more intelligibly and convincingly than we can do : for men, by beholding it, will see at once, that it is not only excellent, but, by the grace of God, practicable too. This is an argument that hath more persuasion in it than any other can have ; and then it is recommended to us by our Lord himself, (*Matth. v. 16.*), “ Let your light
 “ so shine before men, that they may see
 “ your good works, and glorify your Father
 “ which is in heaven.”

3dly, If we sincerely desire the prosperity and advancement of Christ’s external kingdom, we will manifest this by our endeavours to support and maintain it where it

is already established, especially among ourselves.

This is an evidence which may reasonably be expected from us; and, indeed, without it, all our professions of love to the Redeemer, and of zeal for his glory, must pass for vain and flattering pretences, which deserve no credit. We only mock God, when we pray that the religion of his Son may become universal, and fill the whole earth, if at the same time we do not discover, by our conduct, a hearty concern for its continuance in our own land; yea, if we do not actually resist and oppose all attempts whatever to carry it away from us.

It hath pleased God to distinguish us by our religious privileges above most other nations in the world. They were purchased by our fathers, with the expence of much blood and treasure; and it would be highly criminal in us to resign them tamely, but far more to throw them away with our own hands: yet forgive me to say, that they are chargeable with a crime not less than this, who either openly attempt, or secretly wish, to bring one to the throne of these kingdoms,

doms, whose principles oblige him to pull down what we apprehend to be the kingdom of Christ, and to carry us back to that Antichristian slavery, from which we have so happily escaped.

There is such a manifest inconsistency between this petition and the practice of such people, that it is surprising they do not observe it; and it must appear still more wonderful, when we consider that the persons who are chiefly chargeable with this inconsistency among us, cannot be supposed ignorant of the meaning of this excellent prayer, which, by their own ordinances, they oblige themselves to use so frequently, and even press as a necessary form upon others. But surely to pronounce the words of it cannot be of such efficacy as to atone for actions which contradict the sense of it; nor indeed do I suppose that they expect this from it. I rather believe, that inveterate prejudice and strong delusion hinder many of them to perceive this obvious inconsistency.

But let us, my brethren, “ stand fast in
“ that liberty wherewith Christ hath made

“ us

“ us free, and not suffer ourselves to be intangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Let us show our sincerity in using this petition, by resisting all attempts to remove the candlestick from among ourselves: let us bless God for the religious privileges we enjoy, and not suffer them to be violently wrested out of our hands, under any pretence whatever: let us not even expose them to the smallest danger, but guard them as the most valuable part of our property; and especially, let us be careful so to improve them, that we may never provoke God himself to deprive us of them.—In the

4th and *last* place, Let us extend our regards to those dark and miserable corners of the earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty and wickedness.

Let us not only pray, that the gospel may be sent to them; but let us do what we can to make our prayers effectual, by embracing every opportunity which the providence of God affords us, of conveying to them this inestimable blessing. It is our honour and happiness to have a Society for propagating Christian Knowledge erected
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among us by royal letters patent, (and countenanced by an annual donation from his Majesty of L. 1000 Sterling), whose business it is to attend to this very thing. The progress they have already made, is at once a convincing proof of their fidelity, and a manifest token of the divine favour and acceptance: hitherto, indeed, their pious endeavours have been mostly laid out in the remote and barbarous parts of our own native land, though they have not been wholly confined to these. They have been enabled to employ some missionaries abroad; of whose success among the Indians, especially of late, they have received such agreeable accounts, as gives the delightful prospect of a large accession to the kingdom of our Redeemer. The fields are already growing white in those parts, and promise a rich and plentiful harvest, were more labourers employed to gather it.

Here then is an opportunity, which God, in his Providence, affords us of obtaining the answer of our own prayer. By this Society, he demands a proof of our sincerity, and, as it were, offers us the honour to become

come fellow-workers with himself, in gaining new subjects to his Son. Let us with thankfulness embrace the offer, and contribute as liberal an assistance as we can, for carrying on this glorious design.

You must all be sensible, that your substance cannot be employed to a better purpose, nor indeed laid out in a way more truly advantageous to yourselves. This is charity to the souls of men, and, in the noblest sense, “lending to the Lord,” (*Prov.* xix. 17.), who will not fail to repay with usury.

This is a certain way of laying “up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where there is no corrupting moth nor rust, and where thieves cannot break through to steal.” What is thus devoted to the immediate service of the Redeemer, can never be lost to the giver, but shall descend in showers of blessings upon his own head. “The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he who watereth shall be watered also himself,” (*Prov.* xi. 25.).

Such liberality will afford us, in the meantime, a most refined and delicate pleasure; an enjoyment not confined to a day, but
which

which lives and improves by reflection: and then it shall be amply recompensed at the resurrection of the just, (*Dan. xii. 3.*), “When
 “ they that are wise shall shine as the bright-
 “ nefs of the firmament, and they that turn
 “ many unto righteousness, as the stars for
 “ ever and ever.”

Yea, this will bring down the blessing of God upon our land; the vigorous prosecution of this noble design will be a better defence to us than the most potent fleets or numerous armies, as it will engage the Lord of Hosts on our side, “who will be a wall
 “ of fire about us, and the glory in the midst
 “ of us.”

But I hope I need not multiply arguments to persuade you to so reasonable a duty: the glory of the Redeemer, the salvation of precious and immortal souls, our own present and eternal interest, all unite their force in exciting us to it. Let us then, whilst we pray “Thy kingdom come,” do every thing in our sphere that may contribute to promote it; and then shall we triumph in eternal glory, when the body of Christ shall be completed. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XII.

PSALM li. 18.

*Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion : build
thou the walls of Jerusalem.*

THERE is an advice becoming the wisdom of Solomon (in *Eccl. v. 2.*, “ Be
“ not rash with thy mouth, and let not
“ thine heart be hasty to utter any thing
“ before God : for God is in heaven, and
“ thou upon earth : therefore let thy words
“ be few.” To pray to the Most High God
is a very solemn thing, even when we view
him as seated on a throne of mercy. He is
always present with us, whether we think
of him or not : but when we pray, we, by
our own deed, place ourselves in his sight,
and solicit his attention. And is not this a
very solemn and awful thought ? We speak
to one who looks immediately into the
heart,

heart, and who requireth “ truth in the inward parts.” Nay, we appeal to him as the Searcher of hearts, for the truth of every word which we utter before him, and challenge his omniscience to take cognizance, whether what we say doth not express the real sentiments and desires of our hearts. I say, *the desires of our hearts*; for these, and not the language in which we clothe them, are our prayers to God. Nay, the better the words are which we use in prayer, the more insolent is the profanation, if they are not animated by the desires which they ought to express. Too many are apt to imagine, that they have succeeded well in the exercises of devotion, if they have been able to address God by his proper titles, and to recollect those words, indited by the Spirit of God, in which holy men of old expressed their desires, and which they committed to writing for the use of the church. But they do not consider, that the very end for which those accepted prayers were recorded, was, to regulate our hearts instead of directing our lips; and that it is our most immediate business, when such petitions

tions occur to our minds, to try our hearts by them, that we may truly feel what they express, before we adventure to present them to God.

It is the character of hypocrites, whom God abhorreth, that they “ draw near to him with their mouths, and honour him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him.” This is to add abuse and insult to all their other sins; and those prayers which have proceeded from feigned lips, will in the great day of judgement, stop the mouths of transgressors more effectually, than all the other offences with which they shall be found chargeable.

The articles of a man’s belief may not always be present to his mind; or at least the practical inferences which may justly be drawn from them, may not be all so obvious, as to command his uniform attention. To counteract indeed a plain and positive law, is such flagrant rebellion as admits of no excuse: and yet even in this case, the sinner may pretend to plead, in alleviation of his crime, that the law appeared to him so strict and rigorous, that he could

not bring his mind to consent to its demands.

But what evasion can a man find for contradicting his own prayers? Or what shall he be able to answer, when God shall say to him, "Out of thine own mouth do I condemn thee, thou wicked servant?" Every request which we make to God, is not only an explicit declaration, that we highly esteem, and ardently desire the benefits we ask, but likewise implies an obligation on our part, to put ourselves in the way of receiving what we ask, and to use all the means in our own power to obtain it. When therefore we do not endeavour to obtain the blessings which we ask, we plainly declare that we do not heartily desire them. And by asking what we do not desire to obtain, we make it evident that we are presumptuous dissemblers, who use greater freedom with the all-perfect Being, than we dare to use with any of our fellow mortals, who is possessed of sufficient power to resent such unworthy and abusive treatment.

I have just now read to you a prayer of
the

the Royal Pfalmist, which none of us, I suppose, will hesitate to adopt. It consists of two distinct petitions; the one respecting the spiritual, the other the temporal, prosperity of the people over which the providence of God had placed him. And it will readily occur to you, that both these important interests of the nation to which we belong, are recommended to our attention in the royal proclamation which hath brought us together this day*. What I propose in the following discourse, is to make a few remarks,

First, On the matter of David's prayer.

Secondly, On the order observed in the petitions contained in it.

Thirdly, On the temper of mind with which this prayer appears to have been accompanied. I will then shew what is incumbent on those who address the same requests to God, in order to prove the uprightness of their hearts, and that they sincerely wish to obtain what they ask.

* Preached *December 12. 1776*, being the first public Fast after the commencement of the American war.

I begin with the matter of David's prayer: "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

The first of these petitions hath an obvious reference to the tribes of Israel, considered in their spiritual state, as a religious community, or the true church of God. To those who are acquainted with the language of Scripture, it will not be needful to prove, that this is the common acceptation of the term Zion, when it is used in distinction from Jerusalem. Zion was the unalterable station of the tabernacle, the city of David, and the emblem of that spiritual kingdom which David's Son and Lord was to erect in future times. The blessing prayed for by the Psalmist is, that it would please God to do good unto Zion.

This short, but comprehensive request, in the mouth of a British and Protestant Christian, includes more particulars than the limits of one discourse will permit me to enumerate. I shall select a few leading petitions, in which all who come under this description will cordially unite; namely,
That

That God, of his infinite mercy, may establish and perpetuate what his own right hand wrought for us in the days of our fathers, at the two illustrious æras of the Reformation from Popery, and what is justly stiled the Glorious Revolution: That the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified in these lands, as long as the sun and moon endure: That the great truths of the gospel of Christ may be faithfully published, and successfully defended, both against the attacks of open enemies, and the secret artifices of those who lie in wait to deceive: That the ordinances of religion may not only be dispensed in purity, but may be accompanied with power, and rendered effectual for the conviction of sinners, and for building up saints in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation: That the wickedness of the wicked may come to an end, and the just be established: That the spirit of division may cease, and that the whole multitude of believers may be of one heart and one soul, “ following after the things which make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another.” In

fine, that our Zion may be a “ quiet habi-
 “ tation, and a tabernacle that shall not be
 “ taken down, none of the stakes whereof
 “ shall be removed, neither any of the
 “ cords broken: that God may appoint sal-
 “ vation for walls and bulwarks to her, and
 “ be himself the glory in the midst of her:”
 “ Clothing her priests with righteousness,
 “ that all her saints may shout aloud for
 “ joy.” In these, and such particulars, con-
 sisteth the good of Zion. “ Christ loved his
 “ church, and gave himself for it, that he
 “ might sanctify and cleanse it with the
 “ washing of water by the Word, that he
 “ might present it to himself a glorious
 “ church, not having spot or wrinkle, or
 “ any such thing, that it might be holy and
 “ without blemish.” For this end he lived,
 and for this end he died, “ That he might
 “ redeem us from all iniquity, and purify
 “ unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of
 “ good works.”

The other petition contained in the text,
 “ build thou the walls of Jerufalem,” hath
 a reference to the civil state of the Jews as
 a commonwealth or kingdom, and is a
 prayer

prayer for their national safety and prosperity.

This request, like the former, comprehends a great variety of particulars.

It will be readily admitted, that a form of government, by which the natural rights of men are most effectually secured, and in which the impartial administration of established laws guards the life, the liberty, and the property of the meanest individual, may, without straining the metaphor, be included in the idea of *walls* and *bulwarks*, which contribute at once to the defence and ornament of a city. With regard to the “*walls or bulwarks*” of our civil constitution, it gives me pleasure to acknowledge, that they are not only entire, but in several respects more fair and durable than those of any other nation upon earth. In other lands, the walls of government are built on the surrender of some of the most precious rights of human nature: But in this happy country, we have not bought the protection of government at so dear a rate; nor is the hard hand of the oppressor either felt or feared by the meanest member

of the community. And must not the heart of that man then be hard and unfeeling, who doth not wish and pray that such an invaluable constitution may be built up, and preserved entire to latest generations?

But the expression used in the text, calls upon us to look with weeping eyes and sorrowful hearts, upon that awful rent in the British empire, which is the immediate occasion of our meeting together at this time. We have seen a cloud rise out of the west, at first no bigger than a man's hand, but, like that which the Prophet's servant saw, it hath overspread the 'face of heaven, and carried tempest and desolation in its progress. When I mention this great calamity, I do not mean to fix your attention on it as an object which presents nothing to our view but complicated distress and danger. Much as I disapprove of that levity which "despise the chastening of the Lord," I am yet no friend to that despondency which would make us "faint when we are rebuked of him." The same expression in my text, which reminds

us of the alarming breach which we deplore, doth at the same time lead us to look beyond and above it, to him who is able to repair it; to that God who “hath the hearts of all men in his hands, and turneth them as the rivers of water.” With him it is a small matter, not only to fill up the gap which hath separated Great Britain from her American colonies; but if it seem good in his sight, he can, with infinite ease, make this temporary separation the occasion and the means of establishing a firm and permanent union: an union which neither political artifice, nor selfish ambition, nor the pride of independence, will be able to dissolve. This is the desirable issue to which our wishes may lawfully direct us, when we pray in the language of the Royal Psalmist, “Build thou the walls of Jerusalem.”

Having made these remarks on the import of David’s requests, let us attend, in the

Second place, To the order in which they are placed. He begins with praying for the

the good of Zion, and then offers his supplication in behalf of Jerufalem. Nor is this an accidental or arbitrary arrangement. The same subordination of temporal to spiritual blessings, is uniformly observed through the whole of the sacred record, both in the promises of God, and in the accepted prayers of his people: and it deserves our notice, that, in this order, we are called upon by his Majesty's proclamation, to conduct the devotional exercises of this day. For, previous to any particular request respecting the political state of the British empire, we are admonished by our gracious Sovereign, "To humble ourselves
" before Almighty God, on account of our
" sins; to implore his pardon, and to send
" up, in the most devout and solemn man-
" ner, our prayers and supplications to the
" divine Majesty, for averting those heavy
" judgements which our manifold sins and
" provocations have most justly deserved."

It may be remembered by some now present, that in the year 1759, when Great Britain sat as Queen among the nations, we were called together by a proclamation
from

from the Throne, to return public thanks to Almighty God, for the great and public blessings which enriched and distinguished that memorable year.

It was then my object, to warn my fellow-citizens against the criminal abuse of our national felicity, by perverting, into weapons of rebellion against God, the fruits of that success with which he had been pleased to favour us.

Since that time, we have enjoyed a period of very uncommon prosperity as a kingdom. While riches have been flowing to us from all quarters, luxury and dissipation advancing with an equal pace, have proved at once the propriety and the neglect of that warning. Enormous fortunes, suddenly acquired in our foreign settlements, have accelerated that corruption of manners, which is the usual concomitant of prosperity. Successful adventurers, coming home with sums almost beyond the calculation of a moderate mind, produce a disdain of the slow and sober paths of industry: and “men hastening to be rich fall into
“temptation, and a snare, and into many
“foolish

“ foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown
“ them in destruction and perdition.” Our
table hath indeed become our snare: and
the uncommon blessings conferred on us,
instead of heightening our gratitude, have
only caused us to forget the hand that be-
stowed them, and proved the means of alie-
nating our hearts from God.

For this abuse of prosperity, the land doth
mourn this day. They must be blind in-
deed, who do not see the uplifted hand of
God, and even read, on the rod with which
he hath smitten us, our national guilt en-
graved in such deep and legible characters,
that it may truly be said, “ Our own wick-
“ edness hath corrected us, and our back-
“ slidings have reprovèd us.”

Do we complain of the ingratitude of our
American colonies, which flourished so long,
and prospered so much in a state of union
with the mother-country, and as the free sub-
jects of a free state? In what words can we
utter our complaints more expressive, than
those which are pre-occupied, if I may so
speak, by the great Lord of heaven and earth,
in that solemn appeal which is recorded

(Isaiab

(*Isaiab* i. 2.), “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, “O earth, for I have nourished and brought “up children, and they have rebelled against “me.” So that the very expressions with which we would naturally reproach our rebellious colonists, may justly remind us of that more aggravated rebellion, wherewith we ourselves are chargeable against that God, who hath not only planted, but cherished and protected us in a good land unto this day.

Now whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. God is always the same. He is in one mind, and none can turn him. His love to righteousness, and his hatred of sin, are both unchangeable; and therefore, the truth of that assertion must be equally unchangeable, that righteousness exalteth a nation: whereas sin is the reproach, and without repentance must, in the issue, be the ruin of any people. Would we then pray with acceptance for the peace and prosperity of our Jerusalem, let us begin with praying for the good of Zion; that it
may

may please God to pour down the spirit of repentance and reformation on men of every rank. Until we thus turn to God, solid prosperity will not return to our land. There may be gleams of transient success: but these interruptions of calamity will only aggravate our final doom. Whereas, if we sincerely repent of our evil ways, and return to that God from whom we have revolted, he will stay his hand, now lifted up in wrath, “and God, even our own God, shall bless us.”—“Behold the hand of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but our iniquities have separated between us and our God.” We have a most gracious and explicit promise to encourage us, (*Jerem.* xviii. 7, 8.), “At what instant, (saith God), I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and pull down, and to destroy it: if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.”

Here then is a large field, in which every
man

man may labour for the good of his country. In this view, the meanest subject has the consolation to think, that he may become useful to the community with which he is connected. The meanest subject may so order his life and conversation, as to render himself, in the eyes of his Maker, one of the “excellent ones of the earth,” one of that “holy seed which is the substance of the land.” The meanest subject may put up the fervent supplications of a pious, pure, and humble soul, to the throne of grace; and with that holy ardour, which alone will find acceptance, solicit the Supreme Disposer of all events, for blessings and benefits of every kind to his country. The meanest subject can “walk with God” in the duties of devotion, can display the beauty of holiness, and stir up others to imitate the example of his virtue and piety.

Thus far I have considered both the matter and order of the two petitions in my text.—The

Third thing proposed was, To make some practical observations on the temper of mind
with

with which they appear to have been accompanied. And it is obvious, in general, that David had a just impresson of his absolute dependence on God, and that he did not trust in the arm of flesh, but looked for help from God alone. No man possessed larger measures than David, either of political wisdom or warlike skill; but he did not confide in his own talents for building or defending the walls of Jerufalem: He knew, as he expresseth it in another of his Pfsalms, that “except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; and except the Lord watch the city, the watchmen waketh in vain.” He therefore looks directly to the God of Zion, and commits Jerufalem, and her walls, to his keeping, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, even the Creator of the ends of the earth, who fainteth not, neither is weary.

The form of his address doth likewise discover the deep conviction he had of his own unworthiness. He pleads with God, as a humble supplicant, with that penitent and contrite heart, of which he speaks in the verse preceding my text. He claims
nothing

nothing upon the terms of justice, but applies solely to the mercy and free favour of God. "Do good," saith he, "*in thy good pleasure, unto Zion.*"

This expression may be further considered, as denoting that submissive and resigned frame of spirit with which he put up his requests both for Zion and Jerufalem. He did not presume to limit the Holy One of Israel; but left it entirely to his own wisdom and goodness, to grant the matter of his prayer at what time, and in what manner, or by what means, he should choose.

In all these respects, he presents to our view an approved example for our imitation in similar circumstances.

It now only remains, that I should inquire what is incumbent on those who adopt the Psalmist's prayer, in order to prove the uprightness of their hearts, and that they sincerely wish to obtain what they ask.

I observed, in the introduction to this discourse, that every request which we make to God, is not only an explicit declaration, that we highly esteem, and ardently desire, the benefits which we pray for, but doth

likewise imply an obligation and promise on our part to use all the means in our power to obtain them.

As to what concerns the public state of the nation, and the means of building up and cementing the walls of our Jerusalem, these matters I leave to those who have the constitutional charge of them. The best aid I can contribute in my sphere, is to pray for wisdom to direct the public councils, and to do what I can for the good of Zion; and in this you all may and ought to be workers together with me. If, then, we have any love for our country, or any sincere desire of saving her from impending calamity, let us now form hearty and vigorous resolutions of correcting and amending our ways. Let our reformation begin in those points from which our corruption may be traced. Remember, that piety towards God is the best support of all those virtues which form the good man or the useful citizen. Legislators may devise what regulations they please; but if there is no sense of a God or of a providence among the subjects, they will never be able

to execute their plans, or to attain their ends. Let personal reformation, therefore, be our first care; and having given all diligence to make our own calling and election sure, let us, in our respective stations, join heart and hand to discourage vice in every form, and to promote the interests of pure and undefiled religion in our land.—Unless we do this, our national fast, instead of ascending to God with acceptance, will sink down into the measure of national guilt, and will only hasten the execution of that fatal sentence, “Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe, the press is full, and the fat overflows, for their wickedness is great.”—On the other hand, by turning to God through Jesus Christ, and bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, we may not only avert those heavy judgements with which we are threatened, but on scriptural grounds may take encouragement to hope, that God will return in mercy to Zion, and will yet make our Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

Amen.

S E R M O N XIII.

I CORINTHIANS iv. 7.*

Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?

IT is not to be supposed, that any person endowed with reason can be in suspense for a moment about an answer to these questions. I am confident, that there is not one in this assembly who is not ready to reply,—It is God alone who maketh me to differ from any other; and I have nothing which I did not receive from his bountiful hand. No man who believes that God is, will hesitate to confess, with the Apostle James, that “every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.”

Yet

* Preached before the Managers of the Orphan Hospital of Edinburgh, August 7. 1775.

Yet so little attention is paid by the bulk of mankind to the consequences of this commonly acknowledged truth, that I shall make no apology for employing the *first* part of my discourse, in reminding you of the evidence by which it is supported:— I shall *then* lay before you some of those practical lessons, equally obvious and important, which with ease and certainty may be deduced from it:—And *conclude* with that improvement of the subject which hath a more immediate reference to the occasion of our present meeting together at this time.

First, I begin with reminding you, that every blessing we possess is the gift of God, and that we have nothing which we did not receive from him.

That this is the case with respect to natural endowments, will readily be admitted. Men are apt enough to boast of the improvement of their faculties; but the faculties themselves are universally acknowledged to be the gifts of God. “ There is a

“ spirit in man,” said Elihu in the book of

Job, “ and the inspiration of the Almighty
 “ giveth him understanding.” A quick apprehension, a retentive memory, a lively imagination, and other mental powers, these are favours which the great Author of our being dispenseth to whom, and in what measure, it pleaseth him ; and never was any man so arrogant as to pretend, that he bestowed these qualities upon himself.

It is no less evident, that the light of divine revelation is an additional blessing, which flows immediately from the same fountain of beneficence ; according to that grateful acknowledgement of the Psalmist, “ He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgements unto Israel : He hath not dealt so with any nation.” And we must be sensible, that it is purely owing to “ the tender mercy of our God, that the
 “ day-spring from on high hath visited us,
 “ to give light to us, whose fathers sat in
 “ darkness and in the shadow of death, to
 “ guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Nay, we are taught, that the virtue and efficacy of this external light must be wholly attributed to the blessing of God. This is plainly
 plainly

plainly and strongly asserted at the 6th and 7th verses of the preceding chapter: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." — "It pleased God," saith our Apostle, speaking of himself, *Gal. i. 15.* "who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me." And in another part of his writings, "By the grace of God I am what I am." Nor did these expressions of humility take their rise from the peculiar circumstances of his own conversion; for he applies the same principle to the Christians at Corinth, and urgeth it as an argument against every degree of boasting or self-attribution, *1 Cor. i. 26. &c.* "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the

“ things which are mighty ; and bafe things
 “ of the world, and things which are defpi-
 “ fed, hath God chofen, yea, and things
 “ which are not, to bring to nought things
 “ that are : that no flefh fhould glory in his
 “ prefence.” And then adds, “ But of him
 “ are ye in Chrift Jefus, who of God is
 “ made unto us wifdom, and righteoufnefs,
 “ and fanctification, and redemption: that,
 “ according as it is written, He that glorieth,
 “ let him glory in the Lord.”

Were it neceffary to defcend to other par-
 ticulars that might be named, it would be
 eafy to fhew, that all our advantages, of
 what kind foever, whether they belong to
 the body or outward eftate, are equally de-
 rived from God, and dependent upon him.
 Hear what God faid to Mofes, *Exod.* iv. 11.
 “ Who hath made man’s mouth? or who
 “ maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the feeing,
 “ or blind? have not I the Lord?” How
 fublime, and how juft, were the fentiments
 which Hannah expreffed! *1 Sam.* ii. 3. &c.
 “ Talk no more fo exceeding proudly, and
 “ let not arrogancy proceed out of your
 “ mouth: for the Lord is a God of know-
 “ ledge,

ledge, and by him actions are weighed.—
“ The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He
“ bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth
“ up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh
“ rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.
“ He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
“ and lifteth up the beggar from the dung-
“ hill, to set them among princes, and to
“ make them inherit the throne of glory:
“ for the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s,
“ and he hath set the world upon them.”

And with what humble, but elevated devotion did David, in the height of his prosperity, ascribe all that he possessed to the free bounty of God, when he blessed the Lord, and said before all the congregation of the children of Israel, “ Thine, O Lord, is the
“ greatness, and the power, and the glory,
“ and the victory, and the majesty: for all
“ that is in the heaven, and in the earth, is
“ thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and
“ thou art exalted as head above all. Both
“ riches and honour come of thee, and thou
“ reignest over all; and in thine hand is
“ power and might, and in thine hand it is
“ to make great, and to give strength unto
“ all.

“ all. Now therefore, our God, we thank
 “ thee, and praise thy glorious name. But
 “ who am I, and what is my people, that
 “ we should be able to offer so willingly af-
 “ ter this sort? for all things come of thee,
 “ and of thine own have we given thee.—
 “ O Lord our God, all this store that we
 “ have prepared to build thee an house for
 “ thy name, cometh of thine hand, and is
 “ all thine own.”

I might quote many other passages to the
 same purpose; but you have heard enough
 to satisfy you that I am supported by the
 highest authority when I say, that all the
 blessings we possess are the gifts of God,
 the effects of his free and unmerited libera-
 lity.

This doctrine, as I observed in the en-
 trance, hath none of the charms of *novelty*
 to recommend it. But is it on that account
 less needful to be insisted upon? Most as-
 suredly it is not. I believe we shall find,
 upon inquiry, that the most obvious truths
 are universally the least regarded, and there-
 fore have most need to be frequently brought
 in view, that men may be constrained to
 bestow

bestow ſome attention upon them, and to conſider the influence they ought to have upon their temper and conduct. I am afraid that we judge of ſpiritual things in the ſame abſurd manner that we judge of temporal things; I mean, that we put a fanciful value upon them, and do not rate them according to their intrinsic worth and real uſefulneſs.

We ſee every day, that earthly things are eſtimated, not by their uſe, but by their ſcarcity; inſomuch that, in common language, the words *rare* and *precious* are convertible terms; though, in fact, the things that are truly precious, becauſe moſt neceſſary, inſtead of being rare, are ſcattered abroad with the greateſt profuſion. Thus doth God diſpenſe temporal benefits; the beſt, that is, the moſt uſeful, are univerſally given out in greateſt abundance. And it may juſtly be affirmed, that ſpiritual bleſſings are diſpenſed in the ſame way. The moſt comprehensive bleſſing, the *unſpeakable* gift of Jeſus Chriſt, is of all others the moſt free and liberal, being offered, “without
“ money and without price,” to every ſinner

ner of mankind, without exception; and actually conferred upon all who, feeling their need of a Saviour, are made willing to receive and rest upon him alone for pardon, and peace, and complete salvation. In like manner, the great rules of duty, and the truths that are best adapted to purify our hearts and reform our practice, are dispersed as it were around us in the greatest plenty and variety. God, who hath appointed our work, hath likewise limited the season for doing it; and therefore, that we may not lose a moment, the most useful and necessary instruments of action are laid so near us, that we need only stretch forth our hand, to take hold of them. Were they placed at a distance, the opportunity of acting might frequently pass away before the proper means and instruments were got ready. But such wise and effectual provision is made, that no man shall have it in his power to plead this excuse. If any piece of duty be left undone, it cannot be owing either to the want of a plain rule to direct our conduct, or of sufficient arguments and encouragements to move us to action, but

to

to the inattention, or pride, or stubbornness, of our own hearts.

This affords a glorious display of the wisdom and goodness of our great Lawgiver and Judge. But alas! we thwart his merciful intentions. Overlooking what is near, we roam abroad in quest of other things, that lie at the remotest distance from us, and have the feeblest influence upon our temper and practice. Such is our folly and perverseness, that, despising the most important truths, because they are common and obvious, we run away in the vain pursuit of abstruse and intricate speculations, which have no other effect than to puzzle the head, or to warm the imagination, while they leave the heart dark, and cold, and insensible.

To correct this false taste, by recalling mens attention to the most simple and practical truths, ought, in my apprehension, to be the principal aim of a gospel-minister. When these have got full possession of mens hearts, and appear in the fruits of a holy life, then, if we find leisure, we may seek after new discoveries: but surely necessity should

should have the first disposal of our study and labour. Life is short, and souls are precious; and therefore things of eternal consequence ought in all reason to be preferred. They who choose to gratify the curious, by telling them new and strange things, may indeed raise the reputation of their own *invention*; but they do it upon the ruins of a far more excellent thing,—I mean, that *charity* “which vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up, and seeketh not her own;” and as they have no higher aim than to serve themselves, it is but just they should be left to reward themselves as they can.

We are commanded in Scripture, to be “*ready to every good work*;” that is, to be in such an habitual posture for service, that with facility we may enter upon action so soon as an opportunity presents itself. But we shall never acquire this promptness and facility, till the mind be furnished with some fruitful principles of action; and the more simple and obvious these principles are, the more readily will they occur to us, and the greater authority and influence

influence will attend them. Of this kind is the proposition I have been endeavouring to illustrate. The truth of it is obvious to the meanest capacity; and yet such is its fruitfulness and energy, that some of the sublimest duties of the Christian life are virtually included in it, and may with ease and certainty be deduced from it.

To select some of these practical lessons was the second thing proposed; to which I now proceed.

1st, If all the blessings we possess be the gifts of God, the effects of his free and unmerited bounty, then surely we ought to be *humble*. This is the particular improvement which the Apostle directs us to make of this doctrine in the close of my text: “Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? *Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*”

This reasoning is so plain and simple, that a child may understand it; and yet so perfectly just, that it will abide the severest trial;

trial; nay, the more accurately it is examined, the stronger will it appear. Did we keep this single principle in our eye, that it is God *who maketh us to differ*, that alone might be sufficient to give a check to our pride, and to inspire us with humility. Did we view all our present advantages as gifts freely bestowed, to which we had no previous title or claim; then every additional blessing would only remind us of our indigence before we received it; and the greater and more numerous the benefits conferred upon us were, the greater debtors should we judge ourselves, the more deeply should we feel our dependence upon God, and the less disposed should we be to glory in ourselves.

2dly, From the same principle, and with equal ease and certainty, we may deduce our obligation to *thankfulness* and praise. Humility and gratitude, these kindred graces, which constitute the proper temper of a Christian, are inseparable companions. They give mutual aid and support to each other, and both take their rise from the persuasion of this truth. For how can we think
of

of our kind and unwearied benefactor, who condescends to make us the objects of his care, who daily loads us with benefits, though he is altogether independent of us, and can neither be enriched by our services, nor impoverished by the want of them;—how can we think of him, I say, without the most fervent love, and humble gratitude?

3dly, To humility and gratitude, I add *resignation* to the will of God. This was the inference which holy Job drew from the doctrine I have been illustrating: “ Shall
 “ we receive good at the hand of the Lord,
 “ and shall we not receive evil also? The
 “ Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away,
 “ Blessed be the name of the Lord.” Surely if no wrong be done us, we have no right to complain. We ought rather to adore that goodness which at first bestowed the gift, gave us the comfortable enjoyment of it, and continued it with us so long; and to say with the saints of old, when our distress is greatest, “ I will bless the Lord at
 “ all times; his praise shall continually be
 “ in my mouth.”—“ Wherefore doth a li-

“ving man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?”—“It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good;” and, “Good is the will of the Lord.”

4thly, Did we attend to this truth, we should not dare to employ any means that are unlawful for improving our circumstances, or acquiring the good things that belong to a present world: and even in using the means that are lawful, we should constantly look up to God for success, and implore his blessing upon our honest endeavours; remembering, on the one hand, “that the getting of treasures by lying lips, is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death; and, on the other hand, that the blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.” Which leads me to observe,

5thly, The importance of enjoying the blessing of God; with all the gifts which his bounty bestows upon us. From this alone ariseth their value, and nothing else can impart to them that sweetness which renders the possession of them truly desirable. Happiness cannot be extracted from the creatures

tures themselves: they are all broken cisterns that can hold no water: "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, neither is the ear filled with hearing."—"He that loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase." Solomon records it as one of the evils he had seen under the sun, namely, "riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt." And he supposeth it a very possible case, that amidst the greatest abundance of earthly things, "a man may all his days eat in darkness, and have much sorrow and wrath with his sickness." How awful is that threatening, *Mal. ii. 2.* "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings?" And when this threatening is executed upon any, then "their table becomes a snare to them; and that which should have been for their welfare, becomes a trap," inasmuch that their prosperity proves both the occasion and instrument of their destruction: "Whereas the

“ Lord bleffeth the habitation of the juft:” in confequence whereof, “ the little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked.” It is a fignificant faying of David, *Pfal.* xxxvii. 22. “ Such as be bleffed of the Lord fhall inherit the earth.” They hold their portion of it by a different tenure than other men; they poffefs it as the children of him who is Lord of all: and their Father, while he feeds them with food convenient for them, gives them at once the proper enjoyment, and the fannctified ufe of it. This is the peculiar privilege of believers in Chrift Jefus; for “ as many as receive him, to them gives he power to become the fons of God, even to them that believe in his name.” And as the Apoftle Paul reafons, “ If children, then are they alfo heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Chrift Jefus:” fo that, in the moft common bounties of providence, they can tafte the fweetnefs of fpecial love, and may lawfully confider every benefit conferred upon them, as a token of their Father’s affection, and a pledge of that fulnefs of joy that awaits them

them in a future state. How much then doth it concern us, even as we regard our present comfort, "to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure," that on every gift, whether small or great, reading the precious name of him who bestows it, we may have the true relish of the provision afforded us in the course of our journey through this strange country, till we arrive at our Father's house above, where we shall obtain possession of that glorious inheritance of the saints, which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and fadeth not away.

These are a few of the practical lessons, which, with ease and certainty, may be deduced from the doctrine of my text.

Permit me now to apply the subject to the particular occasion of our meeting together at this time.

Hitherto I have been speaking of the blessings we possess as gifts freely bestowed. But there is another important light in which we ought likewise to view them. They are talents committed to us for special

ends and purposes; and it is both expected and required that we be diligent and faithful in improving them, as it becomes those who must one day give an account of their stewardship.—There is an essential difference between God's giving to us, and our giving to our fellow-men. We renounce our interest in what we give to another: it ceaseth to be ours, and becomes the property of the person upon whom we bestow it. But God giveth nothing away after this manner. His giving to his creatures doth not make the benefit conferred a whit the less his own than it originally was. God is the entire and absolute proprietor of all things: they are his, because he made them; and what is stiled *property* among men, must necessarily be derived, limited, and dependent. This dominion is so essential to God, that he cannot divest himself of it. Earthly rulers may resign part of the jurisdiction that belongs to them. Thus Saul proclaimed, that whosoever should fight Goliah the Philistine, and kill him, “ he and his house should be
“ made

“made free in Israel.”—But no creature can be released from its obligation to serve God: for absolute dependence and unlimited subjection are so intimately connected, that they cannot exist separately. As we necessarily depend upon God, so we are necessarily bound to submit to his authority, and to serve him to the utmost extent of the powers he hath given us. No creature can say of any thing he possesseth, This is fully mine, to dispose of it as I please. The benefits conferred upon us, are so far our property, with respect to our fellow-servants, that, unless they can produce an order from the great Master of the family, none of them may take them from us, neither can they righteously possess them without our consent: but, with regard to God, they still belong to him, and are ours only for the ends and purposes he hath appointed. They were not given merely as an alms to the needy, but as instruments are given to a servant for doing his master’s work. This is clearly expressed, 1 *Pet.* iv. 10.

“As every man hath received the gift,
 “even so minister the same one to another,

“ as good stewards of the manifold grace
“ of God.”

The nature of the gifts bestowed upon men plainly show, that they were not intended for pomp, but for use: and it appears from the manner in which they are distributed, that none of them are bestowed to gratify the pride of individuals, but to establish such a mutual connection and dependence, as may render every one in his place useful to the community. We have a lively illustration of this, *1 Cor. xii. 8. et seq.* “ To one is given by the Spirit the
“ word of wisdom; to another the word of
“ knowledge by the same Spirit; to ano-
“ ther faith by the same Spirit; to another
“ the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;
“ to another the working of miracles; to
“ another prophecy; to another discerning
“ of spirits; to another divers kinds of
“ tongues; to another the interpretation of
“ tongues. But all these worketh that one
“ and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every
“ man severally as he will.” Thus each hath his distinct office and use, that, as it is expressed, ver. 25. “ there should be no
“ schism

“ schism in the body ; but that the several
“ members should have the same care one
“ for another,” and maintain mutual love,
whilst all in their way contribute to the
good of the whole.—“ The eye cannot say
“ unto the hand, I have no need of thee :
“ nor again the head to the feet, I have no
“ need of you.” To every one something
is given, to recommend him to the respect
of others ; and from every one something
is with-held, to keep him modest and hum-
ble : for God hath so ordered the distribu-
tion of his benefits, that each may feel his
need of that excellence which he hath not
in possession, and at the same time have the
aid of those gifts, by the ministry of others,
which he himself wants.

“ The rich and the poor meet together,”
saith Solomon, “ the Lord is the maker of
“ them both.” Hence, “ he that mocketh
“ the poor” is said “ to reproach his Maker ;”
that is, he throws an injurious reflection
upon the wisdom and goodness of divine
providence, which hath appointed this in-
equality of conditions among men, for
exercising, on the one hand, the patience
and

and resignation of the poor; and that the rich, on the other hand, may be furnished with constant opportunities of acknowledging their obligations to God, and their dependence upon him for all they possess, by distributing what they can spare from their own necessary uses, for the relief and comfort of their needy brethren. That this is the proper improvement of wealth, and the purpose for which it is bestowed, appears from Paul's direction to Timothy, (*1 Tim. vi. 17.*), "Charge them that are
" rich in this world, that they be not high-
" minded, nor trust in uncertain riches,
" but in the living God, who giveth us all
" things richly to enjoy: that they do
" good, that they be rich in good works,
" ready to distribute, willing to communi-
" cate; laying up in store for themselves a
" good foundation against the time to come,
" that they may lay hold on eternal life."

And how provoking it is to God, when men abuse the gifts of his providence, we learn from that complaint and threatening, (*Hof. ii. 8, 9*), "She did not know that I
gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and

" mul-

“ multiplied her silver and gold, which
 “ they prepared for Baal. Therefore will
 “ I return, and take away my corn in the
 “ time thereof, and my wine in the season
 “ thereof, and will recover my wool and my
 “ flax given to cover her nakedness.”

The application of these truths to the
 purpose for which we are at present as-
 sembled, is so obvious, that I am confident
 it must already have occurred to the most
 inattentive of my hearers. Were we to
 consider the good things we possess, mere-
 ly as gifts freely bestowed, and left entirely
 to our own disposal; yet gratitude should
 prompt us to employ them in such a way
 as might be most acceptable to our kind
 and generous Benefactor. But I am fur-
 nished, you now see, with a more persua-
 sive argument: the plea of gratitude comes
 enforced with the claim of justice, while
 regard to our own interest solicits our com-
 pliance with their united demands: “ For
 “ we must all appear before the judgemen-
 “ seat of Christ, that every one may receive
 “ the deeds done in his body, according to
 “ that he hath done, whether it be good or
 “ bad.”

“ bad.” In that day, “ unto whomsoever
 “ much hath been given, of him also much
 “ will be required:” and the unprofitable
 servant, who did not improve the talent
 committed to him, but buried it under
 a rock, or wrapt it in a napkin, shall be
 cast “ into outer darkness: there shall be
 ‘ weeping, and gnashing of teeth.”

Seeing, then, these things are so, ought
 we not to reckon it an additional ground of
 thankfulness to God, when, besides the fa-
 vours conferred upon us, he is at any time
 pleased to afford us an opportunity of em-
 ploying the fruits of his liberality in such
 a manner as contributes most effectually to
 answer the highest and most important
 purposes for which they were bestowed?
 An opportunity of this kind is just now
 presented to you by the much to be respec-
 ted Managers of the Orphan Hospital, at
 whose desire I address you this day. The
 objects of their care are there placed in your
 view: and surely to provide for the Christian
 education of so many helpless children, and
 for their decent clothing and maintenance,
 till they be trained up to earn a subsistence
 for

for themselves, as it is an exercise of the truest mercy to them, so it cannot fail to be highly acceptable to that God who disdaineth not to style himself the Father of the fatherless.

The peculiar excellencies of this species of charity were fully illustrated, on a former occasion of this kind, from that prayer of the Psalmist in behalf of the Jewish nation, (*Psal.* cxliv. 12.), “That our sons may
 “ be as plants grown up in their youth ;
 “ that our daughters may be as corner-
 “ stones, polished after the similitude of a
 “ palace *.” Then it was shown, That a permanent provision for the Christian education of destitute children, is a charity which tends to prevent misery ; and must therefore be preferable to that which only alleviates present distress, or procures it a short and uncertain relief. This is charity to the souls of our fellow-creatures, and the noblest imitation of Him who came from heaven to earth, to seek and to save that
 that

* Dr Erskine’s Sermon, preached before the Managers of the Orphan Hospital at Edinburgh, *May* 18. 1774.

that which was lost. Besides, it is a charity which, of all others, is in least danger of being misapplied or defeated. This renders the prospect of doing good by it in the highest degree probable. And then its influence is of the largest extent; for while it serves to advance the glory of God, and the interests of pure and undefiled religion in the world, it promotes at the same time, in the most effectual manner, the spiritual improvement and happiness of individuals, and even the temporal prosperity of the nation to which we belong.

To such powerful recommendations any addition would be superfluous. And they who, influenced by these motives, contribute according to their ability for the support of an institution so pious and salutary, may be assured, that what they give is, in the most proper sense of Solomon's words, "lent to the Lord, and that which they give will he pay them again."

Upon the whole, then, let it be our first care, to have our own hearts filled with love to God, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Father in Christ; for unless

less this be the source of our charity to others, our beneficence may be profitable to them, but cannot avail ourselves. And if once this principle be deeply rooted in our hearts, then it will become easy and delightful to us, to communicate good to our fellow-men, in obedience to the command of God, and in imitation of his example. Let us always bear in mind “the
“ grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who,
“ though he was rich, yet for our sakes be-
“ came poor, that we, through his poverty,
“ might be rich.” Let us consider the uncertainty of all earthly things, and this will dispose us to employ them with greater cheerfulness for the relief and comfort of our needy brethren, before they be taken from us, or we by death be divorced from them. Above all, let us beg of God the influences of his Spirit, which alone can vanquish that selfishness which is the great opposer of charity, and inclines our hearts to all those acts of compassion and kindness which adorn our Christian profession, and by their beauty and usefulness engage others to glorify our heavenly Father.

S E R M O N XIV.

JOHN X. 11.

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

THOUGH Christ is in every view precious to them that believe, yet some of the characters which he sustains, present him to us in a milder light than others, and render him comparatively more lovely and estimable. And amidst the variety of titles given him in Scripture, there is perhaps none more expressive of condescension and grace, than that which he is pleased to assume in my text.

As many of the Jews were shepherds by occupation, the language of this description would be obvious to them all. And they who were enlightened by the Spirit of God, would not only perceive the propriety,
but

but likewise relish all the sweetness of this endearing designation.

To us, indeed, an allusion to the pastoral life can hardly appear with equal beauty and strength. Many circumstances of resemblance would strike those who were acquainted with rural affairs, which must necessarily be supposed to escape our observation. But though we cannot trace them all with a critical exactness, yet by the light which the Scriptures afford us, I hope I shall be able to bring as many proofs of our Lord's care and tenderness, as may suffice to illustrate the propriety of the allusion, and show with what justice this title of the Good Shepherd is claimed by our Redeemer.

I begin with that to which our Lord himself appeals in the text. "I," says he, "am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

It was a signal proof that David gave of his care and tenderness, when he ventured his life for the sake of his sheep, and encountered a bear and a lion in their defence.

but though the attempt was hazardous, it was not altogether desperate: he had hope of success, and actually prevailed. Besides, the charge committed to him was his father's property, part of which would one day fall to his own share: so that his personal interest was connected with the preservation of it; for if the flock decreased, his part of the inheritance would have been diminished in proportion.

But our blessed Lord had no inducement of this nature. His interest was in no shape connected with our welfare; his glory and happiness were independent of us. He could neither be enriched by our homage, nor impoverished by the want of it. Besides, we had forfeited all title to his protection, and by the most wicked and unprovoked rebellion had rendered ourselves the objects of his just displeasure. Yet such was his free and unmerited goodness, that he not only hazarded his life in our behalf, but voluntarily resigned it, that we might live through him. "All we like sheep had gone
"astray," says the evangelical Prophet, "we
"had turned every one to his own way."

But

But “ he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities ;” or, in the language of the New Testament, “ He who knew no sin” became a sin-offering for us : the just One suffered for the unjust, “ that he might bring us to God.”

Had our case been merely unfortunate, like that of a weak and harmless lamb seized by a lion, whom it could neither resist nor avoid, pity might have inclined a generous heart to attempt something for our deliverance. But our misery was the effect, not of weakness, but of voluntary wickedness. We chose it in its cause. We sinned, though we were forewarned that death would be the issue. We were not caught by surprise, but deliberately surrendered, or rather sold, ourselves to the adversary. Yet in this situation, when we had nothing to invite, far less to deserve, his regard and affection, did the blessed Jesus fly to our relief ; and descending from the throne, put on the form of a servant, that in our place he might suffer and die on this earth which he had made.

Besides, the fatal deeds which forfeited

our happiness were fins committed directly against himself. It was his own law we transgressed, his own royalty we invaded : we fought against him with his own arms, and joined in confederacy with his most inveterate enemies. So that every obstacle that can be imagined lay in the road of mercy ; the blackest ingratitude, the most outrageous insolence ; in a word, all the circumstances were united which could aggravate our guilt, and inflame the wrath of him against whom we sinned ; and conspired to render our punishment not only a righteous, but even a wise and necessary exercise of severity, for vindicating the honour of the Sovereign, and for maintaining the credit and influence of his government. Nay, as the threatening was published before the penalty was incurred, truth as well as justice demanded the execution of it.

Such were our circumstances, when this Friend of sinners, but the enemy of sin, came upon the wings of love to save us. “ Deliver them,” said he, “ from going down to the pit,” and against me let the sword of justice be untheathed. Here was
goodness,

goodness, generous, disinterested goodness, that never had, and that never can have, a parallel. “ Scarcely for a righteous man
 “ will one die, peradventure for a good man
 “ some would even dare to die ;” but who hath ever heard of one dying for an enemy ? Or if such a prodigy could be found among men, yet the generosity even of this person would fall infinitely short of the example in my text. Such a one might be said to resign a life ; but then it is a precarious, dependent life ; a debt payable on demand ; a lease revocable at pleasure. A mere creature can give away nothing that is properly his own, because he has nothing but what he received. Whereas our dearest Lord not only died in the room of enemies, but by dying resigned a life that, in the strictest sense, was his property : for so he says in the 18th verse of this chapter, “ I have power to lay down my life, and I
 “ have power to take it up again.” He had an estate of his own, (so to speak), an original, and therefore an absolute, right to his life. This, as it gave merit and efficacy to his death, so it qualified him to

exhibit that mystery of love, which angels contemplated with increasing wonder, when he assumed our nature, and became our Shepherd, and in that character gave his life for the sheep.

But did the blessed Jesus stop here? Did he merely restore sinners to a capacity of happiness, by expiating their guilt, and paving the way for their return to God? Or, to carry forward the allusion, does the good Shepherd satisfy himself with rescuing his sheep from the jaws of the lion, and then leave them to their own conduct, to find the road back to the fold from whence they had strayed? No—For, in the

2d place, He also becomes their Guide; and, as it is beautifully expressed in the 23d Psalm, “ He leads them in the paths of
 “ righteousness for his name’s sake.” How amiable does he appear when introduced by Ezekiel, speaking after this manner: “ Be-
 “ hold I, even I, will both search my sheep,
 “ and seek them out: as a shepherd seeketh
 “ out his flock, so will I seek out my sheep,
 “ and will deliver them out of all places
 “ where they have been scattered in the
 “ dark

“ dark and cloudy day. I will seek that
 “ which was lost, and bring again that
 “ which was driven away : I will bind up
 “ that which was broken, and strengthen
 “ that which was sick.” Of the same mild
 and gracious import is that tender repre-
 sentation in the prophecy of Isaiah : “ He
 “ shall feed his flock like a shepherd ; he
 “ shall gather the lambs with his arms, and
 “ carry them in his bosom, and gently lead
 “ them that are with young.” In allusion
 to these prophetic descriptions of the Mes-
 siah, our Lord himself hath declared in the
 New Testament, that “ the Son of man is
 “ come to seek and to save that which was
 “ lost.” And having in this chapter assu-
 med the title of a Shepherd, he says in the
 16th verse, “ Other sheep I have, which are
 “ not of this fold, them also I must bring,
 “ and they shall hear my voice.”

And indeed this exercise of his pastoral
 office is no less necessary than it is kind ; for
 such is the enmity of our hearts, such the
 perverseness of our natures, that after all he
 has done without us, to bring us to God,
 yet if his spirit did not work within us,

none of us would ever think of returning to him. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Accordingly Paul reminds the converts at Ephesus, that till Christ quickened them, they too were "dead in trespasses and sins, and children of wrath even as others." Hear the language of our Lord to his disciples of every tribe of men, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you:" and that assertion of the Apostle which is universally true, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." And does he not merit the designation of a good Shepherd, who not only saves his flock from destruction, and opens to them the door of his sheep-fold, but goes after them into the wilderness, pursues them whilst they are flying from their own happiness, and never gives over his search, till he finds them, and then leads them in safety to a place of rest, where every thing is provided that their necessities require?—For this is a

3d proof of his love to his sheep: Having brought

brought them into his fold, he supplies all their wants, and feeds them with food convenient for them. How sweetly did David sing under the sense of this privilege, “ The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want: he maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.” — “ The young lions may lack and suffer hunger, but they that fear the Lord shall not lack any good thing.” — “ I will feed them,” (said God by the Prophet Ezekiel, chap. xxxiv. 14.), “ I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.” Here peace and affluence are represented in the most striking and agreeable colours. And that this promise has a spiritual meaning, and extends to the gospel church, appears from verse 23d, where the Messiah, under the well-known title of David, is brought fully into view, as the person by whose hand these blessings are dispensed. “ I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall

“ shall feed them, even my servant David,
“ he shall feed them, and he shall be their
“ shepherd. And I the Lord will be their
“ God, and my servant David a prince
“ among them : I the Lord have spoken it.
“ And I will make with them a covenant of
“ peace, and will cause the evil beasts to
“ cease out of the land : and they shall
“ dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep
“ in the woods. And I will make them,
“ and the places round about my hill, a
“ blessing ; and I will cause the shower to
“ come down in his season : there shall be
“ showers of blessing.—And I will raise up
“ for them a plant of renown, and they
“ shall be no more consumed with hunger
“ in the land.” It is not improbable that
our Lord had this prophetic description
in his eye, when he said in the 9th verse of
this chapter, “ I am the door (of the sheep) ;
“ by me if any man enter in, he shall be
“ saved, and shall go in and out, and find
“ pasture.” But how mult it amaze us, to
hear from his own lips, that he is not only
the door by which the sheep enter into the
pasture, but is himself the pasture upon
which they feed ; yet these are his words,
in

in the 6th chapter of this gospel, at the 51st and following verses: “ I am the bread
 “ of life, the living bread which came down
 “ from heaven; if any man eat of this
 “ bread, he shall live for ever: and the
 “ bread that I will give is my flesh, which
 “ I will give for the life of the world:
 “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye
 “ eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink
 “ his blood, ye have no life in you. Who-
 “ so eateth my flesh and drinketh my
 “ blood, hath eternal life: for my flesh is
 “ meat indeed, and my blood is drink in-
 “ deed.” Nay, is not this precious food to
 be dispensed to us this day, in the holy
 sacrament*, under the significant emblems
 of bread and wine, when the good Shepherd
 shall say, and say it with power, to those
 who believe in him, and know his voice,
 “ Take and eat; this is my body broken
 “ for you: and this cup is the New Testa-
 “ ment in my blood; drink ye all of it.”
 I suppose I need not inform you, that these
 expressions are figurative. You have long
 been taught, that the Lord’s Supper is a
 sacrament,

* Preached on a Communion Sabbath.

facrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is showed forth, and the worthy receivers are not after a corporeal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace. This is not the worldling's portion, the whole amount of which is vanity and vexation: no, this is substantial food, even all the blessings of the new and well ordered covenant, the justification of our persons, the renovation of our natures, adoption into the family of God, assurance of his love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost; in a word, all the unsearchable riches of his grace. Thus doth Christ feed his sheep; he invests them with a right to all the blessings of his purchase, and distributes these blessings as their necessities require, till, as Paul hath expressed it, (*Eph.* iii. 19.), "They are filled with all the fulness of God."—But farther, in the

4th place, It belongs to a good shepherd to defend his flock, as well as to feed them. And this office he likewise performs in the
 most

most effectual manner. He watches over them by night and by day; for “ he that keeps Israel, neither slumbers nor sleeps.” —“ Fear not,” says he, “ for I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” Their enemies indeed are many and strong, but he is mighty on whom their help is laid. He makes his grace sufficient for them, and will keep them by his power through faith unto salvation. Hear his own words, in the 27th and following verses of this chapter, “ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father who gave them me, is greater than all: and none is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.” He foresees the trials which are coming upon them; and prays for them effectually, that their faith may not fail. He gives power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increases

increases strength. And when at any time they stumble and fall, he comes seasonably to their relief, lifts up their hands which hang down, and strengthens their feeble knees; and having enlarged their hearts, enables them to run in the way of his commandments. Thus does he conduct them through the slippery paths of life, and continues to be their guardian even until death. Neither does he leave them at the hour of death.—For,

sabbly, When they walk through the valley of the shadow of death, his rod and his staff comfort and sustain them. He fortifies and cheers their departing spirits; and when the evening shadows gather thick around them, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, is sent to say to them, that death as well as life is theirs. Nay, “the good Shepherd
“ himself, who gave his life for the sheep,”
will say to them in this awful hour, “Fear
“ not, I am he that liveth and was dead;
“ and behold, I am alive for evermore, and
“ have the keys of hell and death:—I am
“ the resurrection and the life: he that be-
“ lieveth on me, though he were dead, yet
“ shall

“ shall he live.” What a multitude of faints, who now inherit the promises, have in their last moments experienced the effect of these gracious and joyful assurances! In how many instances hath a lively and unexpected view of the promises of God, and of the great redemption, sustained and even elevated a dying faint, who from the infirmities of the body, or other causes, was, through fear of death, subject to bondage all his life! The sensible presence of the good Shepherd, in these awful moments, will support the most fearful, and the feeblest of the flock. It will enable him that hath no might, to triumph over death, and him that hath the power of death; and, even in the presence of the king of terrors, it will teach him this song of victory, “ My flesh
“ and my heart faileth; but God is the
“ strength of my heart, and my portion for
“ ever.”——“ Thanks be unto God, which
“ hath given me the victory, through Jesus
“ Christ my Lord.”——“ For I am per-
“ suaded, that neither death nor life, nor
“ angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor
“ things present, nor things to come, nor
“ height,

“ height, nor depth, nor any other creature,
 “ shall be able to separate me from the love
 “ of God, which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.”
 It is true, the faints of God have not all the
 same degree of sensible comfort at the hour
 of death. The wisdom of heaven may some-
 times permit them to shut their eyes, with-
 out perceiving the full extent of the blef-
 sedness of them who die in the Lord, or
 without having received those sensible to-
 kens of their victory over death. But,
 “ though weeping may endure for a night,”
 while they are yet struggling to be released
 from the mortal tabernacle, their spirits
 shall awake to everlasting joy. — For, in
 the

6th and last place, When the morning of
 the day that never ends shall dawn, they
 shall again see the good Shepherd stretching
 out his arms to receive them into everlast-
 ing habitations. “ They shall see him as
 “ he is:” they shall “ be satisfied with his
 “ likeness.” The mansions which he is
 now preparing for them will then be ready.
 Each of them shall enter into the blessed
 abode provided for him. “ They shall go

“ no more out for ever ;” and “ the Lamb
“ which is in the midst of the throne shall
“ feed them, and shall lead them to living
“ fountains of water : and God shall wipe a-
“ way all tears from their eyes.” Then shall
they sing together with united gratitude and
joy, the triumphant and eternal song of praise,
saying, “ Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,
“ to receive power, and riches, and wisdom,
“ and strength, and honour, and glory, and
“ blessing : for thou hast redeemed us to God
“ by thy blood, out of every kindred, and
“ tongue, and people, and nation. Salvation
“ to our God, which sitteth upon the throne,
“ and unto the Lamb.”

And now say, my dear brethren, in the re-
view of what you have heard, is not the Lord
Jesus a Good Shepherd indeed ? He redeemed
his flock with his blood, and guides them
by his Spirit, and feeds them with all the rich
fruits of his purchase. He defends them in
life, accompanies them through death, and
conducts them to those regions of light and
love, where they shall dwell in his presence
for evermore, eating the fruit of the tree of
life, and drinking the water of the river of

life, following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.

Thrice happy they who are the sheep of his pasture ; who, allured by his love, and aided by his grace, have returned to him as the “ Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.”

Let me then call upon such ; for of such, I trust, a goodly number are assembled in this place ; let me, I say, call upon them to reflect, with gratitude and joy, upon the proofs they have already received of his care and tendernefs. Remember how he found you wandering in the wilderness, exposed to every beast of prey, insensible of your danger, and unable to avoid it. Remember how he opened your eyes to see your misery, and not only discover the all-sufficient remedy, but powerfully determined and enabled you to apply it. And let these past experiences endear him to your souls, and strengthen your dependence on him, for whatever else may be necessary to complete your salvation.

This is the natural tendency of the representation I have given you, and this is the improvement of it that best suits the occasion of our present meeting. The Good Shepherd is this day to feed his own sheep, in the fattest
part

part of that pasture which his love hath prepared for them. The ordinance now before us, doth not merely exhibit the riches of his grace, but seals and applies them to each believer in particular, that, having this security superadded to the unchangeable promise and oath of God, they may “have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before them.”

With this view, then, let us approach the table of the Lord, and pray, that this gospel-feast may prove effectual, by his blessing, to confirm our faith, to inflame our love, and to enliven our hope; that, by the nourishment it affords, we may be strengthened to pursue our journey through this wilderness, till, having passed the Jordan of death, and arrived at the heavenly Canaan, faith and hope shall become sight and enjoyment, and love, ever growing with the ages of eternity, shall embrace, with increasing vigour and delight, the Good Shepherd, who gave his life for the sheep. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XV.

HEBREWS, xiii. 5.

He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.

THIS comfortable declaration or promise is introduced by the Apostle, to enforce the duty of contentment, to which he had exhorted the Hebrews in the preceding part of the verse. Nothing can be more unbecoming in a child of God, than dissatisfaction with his present condition, or anxiety about his future provision in the world. It is no wonder to see worldly men, whose portion of good things lies wholly upon earth, loading themselves with thick clay, and eagerly grasping every thing which their craving appetites demand. Such persons cannot but be uneasy when they meet with disappointments; because,

cause, having nothing desirable in prospect beyond the grave, in losing their present enjoyments, they lose their *all*. But the Christian, who knows of a treasure in heaven, a treasure incorruptible in its own nature, and which no fraud nor force can take from him, may and ought to look down, with a holy indifference, upon every thing here below, resigning himself entirely to the disposal of his Heavenly Father, who not only knows what is best for him, but hath likewise obliged himself, by covenant and promise, to make all things work together for the eternal advantage of those who love him and confide in his mercy.

It was this argument which Christ used with his disciples, to dissuade them from an anxious solicitude about their temporal concerns (Matth. vi. 31.), “ Take no thought,
 “ saying, What shall we eat? or what shall
 “ we drink? or wherewithal shall we be
 “ cloathed? For after all these things do the
 “ Gentiles seek, and your Heavenly Father
 “ knoweth that ye have need of all these
 “ things. But seek ye first the kingdom of
 “ God, and his righteousness; and all these
 “ things

“ things shall be added unto you.” God will support and maintain his own people, as long as he has any service for them in this world. He knows all their wants ; and as his goodness constantly inclines him, so his power doth at all times enable him, to bestow every needful supply in its season. And can our interest be lodged in better hands ? Who that believes this, would choose to be the disposer of his own lot ? “ The Lord reigneth,” says the Psalmist, “ let the earth rejoice.” And surely they who can say, This God is our God, our Father, and our Friend, have cause to rejoice in every condition, and must act very inconsistently with their profession and hopes, if any thing from without can disturb their inward peace and tranquillity.— I propose, therefore, in dependence upon divine aid,

First, To shew the import of this gracious promise, “ I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

Secondly, I shall inquire who the persons are that may apply the comfort of this promise to themselves.

Thirdly, I shall lay before you some of those

those grounds of assurance on which the people of God may depend for the accomplishment of this promise; and then direct you to the practical improvement of the subject.

I begin with the import of the promise itself, “ I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”—And,

1st, It is here supposed, that all other things may forsake us: for in this promise God plainly intends to distinguish himself from the creatures, by claiming this perfection of constancy or unchangeableness, as an attribute peculiar to himself. Vanity is engraved in deep and legible characters upon every thing below the sun. All things on earth are perishing in their own nature, and so fleeting and deceitful, that they who lean upon them, only secure to themselves a more intense degree of pain and vexation; for sooner or later they will slide from under them, and leave nothing in their room, but the disgrace of a foolish choice, and the bitterness of disappointed hope. History affords us innumerable proofs of this. The wisest men in every age have

observed and lamented the mutability of all earthly things; and we need only keep our eyes and our ears open, to learn this truth, by some fresh example, every day we live.

How often do we see riches make unto themselves wings, and fly away as an eagle towards heaven? What a variety of accidents may suddenly deprive a man of all his substance, and reduce him to the lowest state of poverty and want? A storm at sea, or a fire at land, will in a few hours consume the labours of many years: and he who, whilst I speak, possesseth plenty of all things, and promiseth himself a long succession of prosperous days, may, before to-morrow's sun, find himself stripped of all his substance, and obliged to depend upon the bounty of others for the common necessaries of life. How many, who boasted that their mountain stood strong, have suddenly been thrown down from the highest pinnacle of power and greatness? Even princes, when they least dreamt of it, have been forced to exchange their palace for a prison; and have learnt, by sad experience, that crowns are but tottering emblems of power, and that royalty itself hath no exemption from the vicissitude

viciffitude of sublunary things. Reputation and friends, health and all bodily advantages, yea reason, with all the endowments of the mind, are fo uncertain and mutable, that no man can promise on the poffeffion of them. The faireft character may be fullied with the breath of calumny; our friends may prove falfe, or abandon us through miftake; or, when they are faithful, and in all refpects comfortable to us, yet death may fnatch them from us, one after another, till we are in a manner left folitary in the midft of the earth. Health and ftrength, and whatever elfe belongs to the body, are of all things the leaft durable, and the moft fubject to change. Life itfelf is but a vapour, which, for any thing we know, may vanifh into air the very next breath we draw. We fee frequently alfo, that the mind, as well as the body, is liable to many bad difafters. In fome men, the intellectual powers are fo blunted and impaired, that they feem to be almoft totally extinguifhed; and, in others, fo ftangely difordered, that, inftead of being of ufe to them, they ferve only to render them more completely wretched. In a word, our condition upon earth is liable to

to continual alteration, and there is nothing we can be secure of, so much as for one moment. How foolish, then, are they who promise themselves any durable happiness in this world? Such persons may truly be said to build their house upon the sand; and though, perhaps, they may be allowed to raise it to some height, yet, ere long, some sudden unforeseen storm shall lay it in ruins, and bury all their vain expectations under it.

But what I would chiefly observe upon this head is, that frequently the people of God are exercised with the severest trials, and meet with the sharpest afflictions while they remain upon earth. For this mutability of the creatures, is not the effect of *chance*, but of *design*. God thereby designs to render all those inexcusable, who choose them for their portion: and when his own children are in danger of being ensnared by them, he pulls them, as it were, with violence out of their hands, that they may beware of contracting too close an alliance with them in future. He will not suffer them to continue long in so dangerous an error; and he sends the rod to undeceive them: he frequently repeats the stroke, to remind

remind them that they are only sojourners in a strange land, and to quicken their desires for their Father's house above ; for their Father's house, where alone they shall have fullness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.

2dly, As the inconstancy of the creatures is here supposed, so this promise necessarily implies, that the presence of God with his people is a sufficient ground of consolation in every state and condition of life. David was sensible of this, when he said, in the 23d Psalm, " Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me : " and upon the same principle; the Prophet Habakkuk triumphs in name of the church. " Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall there be fruit in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls ; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. "

We read in the book of Daniel, that after Nebuchadnezzar the king had caused Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, to be cast into
into

into the burning fiery furnace, he was astonished, and rose up in haste, and said unto his counsellors, " Did not we cast three men
" bound into the midst of the fire? And lo,
" I see four men loose, walking in the midst
" of the fire, and they have no hurt: and the
" form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

Is there a man who reads this passage, that does not prefer the condition of these captives, to all the splendours of the Babylonish throne? How little does the trembling monarch seem, though surrounded with his counsellors? How glorious do the three young Jews appear, whilst walking amidst flames with their God and Saviour? How would they rejoice in this exalted privilege? And yet, my brethren, all the saints who have God really present with them, although they cannot see him with their bodily eyes, have equal cause to rejoice in the midst of tribulation. For if God be with them, then he is with them who is infinitely wise, who is perfectly acquainted with all their wants, and can never be at a loss to know what is good for them. He is with them who is infinitely powerful, and can easily perform whatever his unerring wisdom shall

shall suggest. He is with them who is perfectly good, yea goodness itself; who is always disposed to employ his wisdom in contriving, and his power in executing, whatever is necessary for their interest and happiness. Yea, he is with them who hath already bestowed on them the greatest of all blessings, even Jesus Christ his unspeakable gift: and, as the Apostle reasons, “ If God spared not
“ his own Son, but delivered him up for us
“ all, how shall he not with him also freely
“ give us all things?” And is not the presence of such a God sufficient for the comfort of his people at all times? Who would mourn the loss of a taper, who enjoys the light of the sun? All the creatures are nothing without God: whereas he is all in all; “ In his
“ favour is life, and his loving kindness is
“ better than life.” Even Balaam was constrained to confess this truth in the presence of Balak (Numb. xxiii. 23.), “ Surely,” says he,
“ there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor
“ any divination against Israel: for the Lord
“ his God is with him, and the shout of a
“ king is among them.” If the happiness of Solomon’s courtiers excited the admiration of
the

the Queen of Sheba, because they had access to the presence of so wise and magnificent a king, how inconceivably more happy are they who are the friends, nay, the children of the King of kings, who have the infinitely perfect and all-sufficient Jehovah continually near to them?—Which leads me to observe, in the

3^d place, That the constant presence of God with his people, is the blessing expressly contained in this promise, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” All other things may forsake you. Riches may take wings and fly away; friends may desert you, or they may die; your reputation may be blasted; your health and strength may fail and decay; yea, memory, judgment, and all the faculties of your mind, may be weakened or destroyed: “But I will never leave you, I will never forsake you;” my friendship is unchangeable; “And whom I love, I love to the end.” All this, saith the Apostle, God hath said; but he doth not tell us when or where he hath said it, because he hath said it so often, and upon such various occasions, that it is to be met with almost every where in Scripture, and in a manner sounds through
the

the whole revelation of his will. And indeed I cannot illustrate this head better, than by reciting some of those passages where this general and comprehensive promise is particularly applied for the comfort of God's people, under the various trials and afflictions to which they are exposed in this world. All who are acquainted with their Bibles, will remember to have read such passages as these: "When
 " thou passest through the waters, I will be
 " with thee; and through the rivers, they
 " shall not overflow thee: when thou walk-
 " est through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt,
 " neither shall the flame kindle upon thee;
 " for I am the Lord thy God."—"When
 " the poor and needy seek water, and there
 " is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst,
 " I the Lord will hear them, I the God of
 " Israel will not forsake them. I will open
 " rivers in high places, and fountains in the
 " midst of the vallies: I will make the wil-
 " derness a pool of water, and the dry land
 " springs of water."—"The Lord will be a
 " refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in time of
 " trouble."—"The Lord will not suffer the
 " soul of the righteous to famish."—"He
 " shall

“ shall dwell on high, his defence shall be
 “ the munition of rocks. Bread shall be gi-
 “ ven him, his water shall be sure.”—“ The
 “ Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of
 “ languishing. Thou wilt make all his bed
 “ in his sickness.”—“ A father of the father-
 “ less, a judge of the widows is God in his
 “ holy habitation.”—“ Fear, not,” saith he,
 “ for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for
 “ I am thy God. I will strengthen thee;
 “ yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold
 “ thee with the right hand of my righteous-
 “ ness.”

I might quote many other texts, where
 God promiseth to be with his people in every
 case of distress that can be supposed; but I
 shall have said enough to give you some no-
 tion of the vast extent of this comfortable pro-
 mise, when I have added, that it reacheth be-
 yond the grave, and comprehends no less than
 eternity itself. As God will not leave his
 people in life, as he will not forsake them at
 death; so he will at last receive them into
 glory, and make them to dwell for ever in his
 immediate presence. But who are his people?
 Who are the happy persons that may apply
 the

the comfort of this promise to themselves?
This is the

Second thing I proposed to inquire into.

And, in general, this promise is addressed to believers in Christ Jesus, and to them only, exclusive of all others: for this is the order which God hath established. He first gives us his Son; and when this “unspeakable gift” is thankfully received, then, together “with him, he freely gives us all other things.” Men may fancy themselves in good terms with God upon account of some moral qualifications of which they are possessed; and I greatly suspect, that many among us are ruined by this mistake: but I am not afraid to affirm, that no moral qualifications whatever can reconcile a sinner to God, or entitle him to plead any one promise from the beginning of the Bible to the end of it. The reason is plain: All the blessings promised in the gospel were purchased by Christ with the price of his own blood. To him they belong of right; for in regard of “his humbling himself, and becoming obedient unto death,

“ly exalted him,” and “hath put all things
“under his feet, and hath given him to be
“head over all things to the church.” Accord-
“ingly Christ himself says (Matth. xi. 27.),
“All things are delivered unto me of my Fa-
“ther;” and (Matth. xxviii. 18.), “All pow-
“er is given unto me in heaven and in
“earth.” Every good and perfect gift, there-
fore, must be conveyed to us through his
hands; and it is not only a vain, but I may
even call it an impious attempt, to address God
immediately for those blessings which he hath
already given to his Son, and committed to
his disposal as King of Zion, for the behoof
of his true and spiritual subjects. All the
promises in Scripture must necessarily be ex-
plained in a consistency with this great funda-
mental truth: and when the persons to whom
they are addressed are described by any moral
qualification, such as righteousness, merciful-
ness, and the like, it must always be under-
stood, that they are previously in a state of
friendship with God; and that these qualifica-
tions are mentioned, not as the terms of their
acceptance with him, but only as the fruits
and evidences of that faith which unites them

to Christ, in whom all the promises are “Yea and Amen.”

Would any then know, whether they may apply to themselves the gracious and comfortable promise in my text, they must first of all try their relation to Christ. If they are still unacquainted with this great and only Mediator between God and man; if they have never fled to him as their city of refuge, nor accepted of him as the “Lord their righteousness and their strength;” it is certain that they have no part nor lot in this matter. For nothing can be more express than those words of John the Baptist (John iii. 36.), “He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Whereas, on the other hand, if, from a deep conviction of your guilt and misery, you have cordially accepted the Lord Jesus Christ for all the purposes of a Saviour; if you can say without any known guile, that, renouncing all other grounds of confidence, you depend on him alone for pardon and peace, for grace and glory, and every good thing; if you have the evidence of

your faith in Christ, and of your union to him, which arises from the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost on your tempers and your lives, determining you to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in the world; then are you the friends of God, and may lawfully consider yourselves as the persons to whom he hath said, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” And, for your farther encouragement, I shall now go on to the

Third general head, and briefly suggest to you some of those grounds of assurance upon which you may confidently rely for the accomplishment of this promise. Consider, then, *1st*, Who he is that hath said this. “He is not man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent.” These are the words of God himself, who is incapable of deceit, and with whom “there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”—“He is the rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment, a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and true is he.”—“The mountains shall depart, and the hills
“ be

“ be removed ; but my kindness shall not de-
 “ part from thee, neither shall the covenant
 “ of my peace be removed, saith the Lord
 “ that hath mercy upon thee.” And is not
 the word, the promise of such a God, a suffi-
 cient ground of trust ? Yea, he hath not only
 said it, but he hath also sworn it. “ For God
 “ being willing more abundantly to show to
 “ the heirs of promise the immutability of his
 “ counsel, hath confirmed it by an oath, that
 “ by two immutable things, in which it was
 “ impossible for God to lie, they might have
 “ a strong consolation, who have fled for re-
 “ fuge to lay hold on the hope set before
 “ them.” And can our souls desire a better se-
 curity ? What can establish our faith, if this
 doth not establish it ?

2dly, Believers in Christ Jesus are the chil-
 dren of God, adopted into his family, and beau-
 tified with his image : and this is another pledge
 of his gracious promise ; for surely he will ne-
 ver abandon his own offspring. “ Can a mo-
 “ ther forget her sucking child,” saith God,
 “ that she should not have compassion on the
 “ son of her womb ? Yea, she may forget, yet
 “ will not I forget thee.” The affection and

tendernefs of an earthly parent are but faint resemblances of God's paternal love. In him, love is an infinite overflowing fountain of beneficence. And then his love is as permanent as it is extensive. He is always in one mind, and therefore can never leave nor forsake his people.

3dly, The constant intercession of our glorious High Priest effectually secures the accomplishment of this promise. By his death, he obtained the Holy Spirit to dwell in his people, and to abide with them. This he intimated to his disciples for their comfort and encouragement, when they were about to lose his bodily presence (John xvi. 7.), "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." And, in another place, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, who shall abide with you;"—who shall abide with you, and that not for a season only, but "for ever."

With what tendernefs did he recommend them to his Heavenly Father, in his last intercessory

effery prayer upon earth (John xvii. 11.),
 “ And now I am no more in the world, but
 “ these are in the world. Holy Father, keep
 “ through thine own name those whom thou
 “ hast given me.” Is it possible, then, that
 God should forsake those for whom his well-
 beloved Son pleads with such earnestness and
 affection? Especially if it be considered, in
 the

4th and *last* place, That his own glory is
 interested in the accomplishment of this gra-
 cious promise. I mean that glory which con-
 sists in making effectual the purposes of his
 grace towards those whom he hath chosen out
 of the world. For were he to leave or for-
 sake his people, they must fall a prey to their
 spiritual enemies, and yield to the adversary
 of God and man, that triumph which he hath
 fought from the beginning. That apostate
 spirit never deserts his purpose of ensnaring
 and destroying the souls of men. He is ever
 on the watch to seize them in a defenceless
 moment; so that, were God to leave them
 without his protection, they would fall easy
 victims to his artifices. And will he suffer his
 purposes thus to be baffled by his declared foe?

It cannot be; and therefore he never will leave nor forsake his people.

I shall now conclude this discourse with a short practical improvement, addressed to two different classes of people. And the

1st Sort of persons to whom I will address myself, are those who are yet in a state of alienation from God. It is possible, that, at present, you may not see the value of this promise which I have been unfolding. You have never, perhaps, been sensible of the vanity of earthly enjoyments; or, if you have been weary of some of them, you promise yourselves a more permanent satisfaction in others. Alas! this is a delusive expectation; for happiness never can be extracted from the creatures. God hath pronounced an irreversibile decree of vanity upon them all. Ye are therefore pursuing what will for ever fly from you;—ye are feeding upon mere husks, which can neither nourish nor satisfy you. But though you should even be contented with this poor and empty portion, yet you cannot always enjoy it; for what will you do when every earthly prop is tottering and ready to sink under you?—What will ye do at that period,
when

when neither riches, nor power, nor friends, nor any thing that this world affords, will be able to give you the least relief? Let me therefore intreat you speedily to seek the favour of that God who is the only adequate portion of an immortal soul. Listen to that kind exhortation and advice (Isa. lv. 2, 3.),

“ Wherefore do ye spend money for that
 “ which is not bread? and your labour for
 “ that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligent-
 “ ly unto me, and eat ye that which is good,
 “ and let your soul delight itself in fatness.
 “ Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear,
 “ and your soul shall live: and I will make
 “ an everlasting covenant with you, even the
 “ sure mercies of David.” But I now address myself, in the

2d place, To those happy persons who are in a state of friendship with God. To you, then, I say, that this gracious promise should both excite and encourage you to steadfastness in the ways of religion. “ For if God be
 “ with you, who can be against you?”—
 “ Be strong, then, in the Lord, and in the
 “ power of his might.”—All necessary aid is provided for you in the tenor of the well-ordered

dered covenant, and will not fail to be imparted to you in the time of your need. Your help is laid on one who is mighty to save, and who is no less willing than able to support you under all your trials. “Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end.” But the principal improvement which you ought to make of this promise is to put away from your minds all dissatisfaction with your present condition, or anxiety about your future provision in the world. God hath charged himself with the care of providing for you while you are here. He hath not, indeed, promised you an exemption from poverty, hardships, or afflictions. But he hath assured you, that these things are no tokens of his displeasure; nay, on the contrary, that they are intended for your greatest good, and that he is never nearer to his people than when they are in the furnace of affliction. What abundant reason, then, have you to be contented with whatever lot he is pleased to appoint you in the world, and to look beyond all the momentary distresses you now suffer, to that incorruptible inheritance which is reserved for you in heaven.

ven. “ Let your conversation then be without covetousness ; and be content with such things as ye have : for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

S E R-

S E R M O N XVI.

GALATIANS, v. 24.

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.

NO man, who hath experienced the deceitfulness of his own heart, will think the subject of this text improper for the present occasion *. It is true, this day is set apart for thanksgiving; and with the highest pleasure would I enter on the delightful theme of divine love and condescension, which shall employ the praises of the redeemed through endless ages. But a solicitous concern, that your joy may be well founded, hath induced me to propose to you a strict examination of yourselves,

* Preached on a Day of Thanksgiving, after the dispensation of the Lord's Supper.

yourself, whether you have indeed an interest in him, through whom all favour and good will to sinners is conveyed. The text furnisheth us with an infallible rule to direct our judgment in this inquiry. "They that are Christ's," not all who are called by his name, but they who are united to him, as the branches are united to the vine, who are governed by his Spirit, and have a right to the benefits of his purchase, are distinguished by *this* attainment, "They have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts."

In discoursing on these words, I propose,

First, To show what is meant by crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts.

Secondly, To show, that it is the distinguishing character, and the *real* attainment of all who are Christ's, to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts. And then to conclude with an improvement suited to the occasion of our present meeting.

I begin with inquiring what is meant by "crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts." By "the flesh," we are to understand the corrupt nature of man; and by "the
" affections

“affections and lufts,” thofe depraved appetites, which maintain their power within us, until the renewing grace of God implant in us thofe feeds of holinefs, by which the image of God is formed on our foul. When man came firft from the hands of his Maker, his reason, pure and uncorrupted, was the governing principle of his mind. But by tranfgreffing the original commandment, and eating the forbidden fruit, in compliance with a mean corporeal appetite, the fenfitive part of his nature obtained that dominion or predominancy, which it ftill maintains in every unrenewed man. Accordingly, we find our natural condition oppofed, in Scripture, to our regenerated ftate, under thefe metaphorical expreffions of *flefh* and *fpirit*. “That which is born of the flefh, is flefh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is fpirit.” The meaning is plainly this: The temper and difpofitions which we bring with us into the world by ordinary generation, are, fince the fall, carnal and depraved; whereas the temper and difpofitions which we receive by the regeneration of the Holy Ghofth, are, like their original, fpiritual and holy. The fame
idea

idea is expressed in the 17th verse of this chapter ; where it is said, “ The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh ; and these two are contrary the one to the other.” It appears, then, that by the “ flesh, with the affections and lusts,” we are to understand the corrupt state of man’s mind since the first transgression, and all those depraved dispositions and affections which naturally flow from the corrupt principle, and which incline us to seek happiness from earthly things, independent of God. We learn, too, what is meant by “ crucifying the lusts and affections of the flesh ;” namely, that this natural depravity of mind is subdued ; that the carnal principle, like a crucified malefactor, languishes and decays ; until, by degrees, gracious or renewed habits are formed in us, which at last obtain the full possession of our minds.

What hath been said may suffice to give a plain and intelligible explanation of the terms in the text ; and to pursue the metaphor farther, would neither be profitable to you, nor agreeable to myself. The words thus explained, give us a very distinguishing character

ter of a true Christian. He is one who, by the grace of God, hath obtained the victory over his corrupt appetites and inclinations. He is in a great measure rescued from the ruins of the fall, and is no longer a servant of sin, that he should obey it in the lusts thereof. “ He hath put off, concerning the former “ conversation, the old man, which is corrupt “ according to the deceitful lusts ; and being “ renewed in the spirit of his mind, hath put “ on the new man, which after God is crea- “ ted in righteousness and true holiness.”— “ The law of the Spirit of life, which is in “ Christ Jesus, hath made him free from the “ law of sin and death.” Conscience, long dethroned by imperious passions, hath reas- sumed its authority ; and all the faculties of his mind purified and exalted, unite in the pursuit of spiritual enjoyments.

And now, my brethren, let me entreat you to stop your ears for a little against the suggestions of self-love, and let conscience bear testimony, whether you have indeed a claim to this character. Alas ! if you have no claim to it, this can be no day of thanksgiving to you. If you have adventured to approach
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the table of the Lord with all your unmortified lusts about you, ye have been guilty of the body and blood of Christ; ye have sealed the sentence of your own condemnation; and lamentation becomes you better than the voice of praise. You may, perhaps, complain of this as a severe and heavy message; but dare any of you say that it is a message without a warrant? Shall I speak peace to those to whom God hath not spoken peace? Shall I soothe you with false comforts, which might lead you down to the grave with a lie in your right hand? No; I remember too well the wo pronounced against the prophet "who dealeth falsely, and healeth the wound of the daughter of God's people slightly." I should not wish to be an eternal subject of imprecation to hopeless souls, which I should well deserve to be, if I spoke any other language to you than what I now speak.

But you have as yet no cause to complain: I have indeed set before you the danger, but I have not said you must despair. On the contrary, my only object is to prevent your everlasting despair, by awakening your fears ere it be too late, and the door of mercy be shut a-

gainst you. That door is still open, and the call is yet, "To-day hear his voice." O then harden not your hearts against conviction. Decline not an impartial scrutiny into your real state. Let this passage of Scripture inform you, whether you indeed belong to Christ. If you do possess the marks of those who are his, take the comfort of your sincerity, and give God the glory. But if the issue of the inquiry should turn out otherwise, O beware of resting in this dreadful condition. Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eye-lids, till you have secured an interest in that blood of sprinkling which cleanseth from all sin.

Need I enter on a detail of those lusts and affections which flow from a corrupt and depraved principle within? "The works of the flesh," saith the Apostle, at the 19th verse of this chapter, "are manifest; which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before; as I have also told you

“ you in time past, that they which do such
“ things shall not inherit the kingdom of
“ God.”

I am sensible, that, after the recital of so black a catalogue of crimes, the most of you will already have acquitted yourselves of such enormous degrees of guilt. And I am afraid, that this general acquittal from the charge of heinous transgressions, lulls the consciences of many into a fatal security. I will not go so far as to say, that it were better for the unconverted sinner, that his conscience could charge him with some of these glaring iniquities, although our Saviour's saying seems to imply as much, viz. That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before the scribes and pharisees. All that I assert is, that you ought not too hastily to conclude that the flesh is crucified with its affections and lusts, merely because your lives have not been spotted with any of those gross and scandalous sins. In these days of light and knowledge, Satan doth not find it for his interest to push men to the extremities of vice. He rather endeavours to keep the garrison in peace,

by blunting the edge of conviction with the fair shows of outward decency and formality.

Be persuaded, then, to go deeper in your inquiry. Search the very inmost corners of your hearts. Put the authority of God in one scale, and the interests of the flesh in another, and see which of the two weighs heavier in your affections. You frequent the church, you attend on ordinances, and perform the external parts of religion with an apparent relish and alacrity. All this is good; but beware of building too much on it. Consider that these observances do not in any great degree thwart the interests of the flesh. The laws and customs of the land favour you; your estates are not thereby impaired, nor your lives endangered; nor is your reputation hurt, but rather advanced. But suppose the case to be otherwise, and let your hearts give the answer—Would you persist in the same course at all risks, though your estates were exposed to confiscation, though your names were to be branded with every term of reproach that malice could devise; yea, though all the engines of torture lay in the road of duty? Would no prospect of gain, however
secure

secure from human discovery, tempt you to encroach on the divine rules of justice and equity? Can you bless them that curse you, and render good for evil, and forgive the most galling injuries, even when Providence puts your enemies in your power? Did the objects of criminal desire not only tempt but solicit you; were you favoured with every circumstance of time and place, could you check the career of passion, with Joseph's reflection, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" These, indeed, are sure signs that the flesh is crucified, with its affections and lusts. But if, on the contrary, the fear of man's censure or punishment would turn you aside from the practice of your duty, if the prospect of secret gain could tempt you to lie or cheat, or dissemble; if any injury appears too great to be forgiven, or any sensual appetite too importunate to be denied; in a word, if any temptation, be its circumstances what they will, would prevail on you to indulge yourselves in the deliberate omission of any known duty, or in the practice of any known sin; then, whatever your pretences are, the flesh, with its affections and

lusts, is not yet crucified in you. But do not mistake me, as if I meant to assert, that none have crucified the flesh but those who are perfect in holiness. No; the righteous man falleth seven times a day, and riseth again. Nay, there is not a just man upon earth that doth good, and sinneth not. And therefore I speak not of those false steps to which the best are liable through the remainders of corruption; but of known and habitual sins, committed with the full bent and inclination of the will. These plainly betray the predominancy of the flesh, with its affections and lusts; and show, that the person who is under the dominion of them, has no just or Scriptural claim to an interest in Christ. For a worldly Christian, or a carnal Christian, or a dishonest Christian, are as gross contradictions in terms, as an infidel Christian. And this naturally leads me to the

Second thing proposed; which was to show, that it is the distinguishing character and the real attainment of all who are Christ's, to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts. This is so much the uniform language of the New Testament, that one should hardly think
it

it required a proof. The great lesson which our Lord taught his disciples was expressed in these words: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." This he repeated on various occasions, as a subject that ought to employ their constant attention. "He that taketh not up his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."—If any man come after me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters," those nearest and dearest relations according to the flesh, "yea, and his own life also," when the preservation of it becomes inconsistent with the duty he owes to God, "he cannot be my disciple." And again, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath," namely, habitually in affection, and actually too, when God calls him to it, "he cannot be my disciple."—These are the permanent, the invariable laws of Christ's spiritual kingdom, and are equally binding on us, as on those to whom they were originally addressed. For had our Lord ever intended to relax or mitigate them in any degree, he would certainly have done

it in favour of his first disciples, when his church was yet in its infant state, and therefore stood in need of greater indulgence. But these seemingly hard sayings express the true spirit of Christianity, and afford the most convincing proof of its divine original. Man fell by seeking himself, and must therefore be raised in the way of self-denial. He forfeited his innocence and happiness by hearkening to the sollicitation of a fleshly appetite; and, before he can regain happiness, the flesh must be crucified, with the affections and lusts.

Accordingly, we find that our Saviour's meaning was well understood by his immediate followers; and their practice is the best commentary on his injunctions. What he recommended, they laboured to attain. Thus Paul writes to the Corinthians, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." The remainders of corruption within him, made him cry out with all the emphasis of distress; "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death." Nay, so sensible was he of the importance and necessity

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ty of this deliverance, that, as he expresseth it himself, "He counted all things but loss and dung;" first, "That he might win Christ, and be found in him, not having his own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." And next, "That he might know Christ" experimentally, "and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." Nor was this only his *wish*; we find also that it was his real attainment. "I am crucified," says he; "with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." And "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Neither was Paul singular in this. It appears to have been the common attainment of all true Christians in his time. For it is spoken of in my text as the badge of Christianity, the very thing which distinguished
Christians

Christians from all other men. “ They that
“ are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with
“ the affections and lusts.” I have given a
recital of these passages of Scripture, as they
serve to explain one another : and I hope that
when they are compared together, and duly
considered, they will appear to be a sufficient
demonstration, that none whose flesh is not
crucified, with its affections and lusts, can,
with a Scriptural warrant, lay claim to an in-
terest in Christ.

Thus I have endeavoured to explain what
is meant by “ crucifying the flesh, with the
“ affections and lusts ;” and have shown you,
that this is the actual attainment of every true
Christian. Allow me now to conclude this
discourse with a practical improvement of the
subject.—From what hath been said, then,
we learn, in the

1st place, What is the true nature of our
holy religion. It is not a mere bodily exer-
cise, consisting only in external ceremonies or
observances. Earthly rulers can ask no more
but an outward homage : but the Searcher of
hearts challengeth the sincere adoration of the
inner man : he who is a Spirit, must be wor-
shipped

shipped in spirit and in truth. So that to attend the church, to partake of religious ordinances, and to perform the external duties of religion, will be of no avail in the sight of God, unless these outward services proceed from a heart warmed with his love, in which every usurping lust, that would share his place, is vanquished and dethroned. To be a real Christian, therefore, is not so easy an attainment as many seem to imagine. Flesh and blood must be wrestled with, and overcome; “for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.” Every gratification that is contrary to the holiness of the divine nature, although dear to us as a right hand or a right eye, must be denied. Nay, the very inclination to vicious indulgences must be subdued, otherwise our abstaining from the outward acts of them will be of no avail. It is the heart that God requires; and if we deny him this, we can give him nothing that is worthy of his acceptance.

An inoffensive outward deportment may soothe your consciences, and prevent the uneasy feelings of remorse, but will not save you from final ruin. The very interests of the
flesh

flesh may make a man forbear disgraceful sins, and may, for a time, chain up, without weakening the vigour of corruption. You may be possessed of many amiable qualities, by which you deserve well of society, and yet be total strangers to that character of real Christians which is given in this text. If temporary good impressions, or restraints of the flesh for a season, would amount to that character, then Felix, who trembled under conviction. and Herod, who did many things in consequence of the Baptist's preaching, had been real Christians. If the estimable qualities of social life were a proof that Christianity had its full effect on the mind, then the young ruler, who had kept the second table of the law from his youth upwards, would have had an unreserved approbation from our Lord. But Felix and Herod relapsed under the dominion of their lusts; and, through the love of this world, the young ruler fell short of the kingdom of heaven.—In the

2d place, From what hath been said, let each of us be prevailed on to try how matters stand with himself. You see that it is not a point to be lightly taken for granted, that a

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man hath a real interest in Christ. I have already mentioned several things under my first head of discourse, which may serve as hints to direct you in this trial. All that I have further to beg of you is, that you would judge yourselves impartially, as those who expect a judgment to come. Try every ground of hope upon which you have hitherto rested; let every rotten pillar be removed, or else the whole building, however glorious in appearance, will shortly fall to the ground. Self-love may, for a season, blind your eyes: but remember, that it will throw no veil over that impartial judgment which will overtake you at the bar of God. Compare, then, your actions and dispositions with that holy and spiritual law which flatters no man; and then, if conscience gives an unbiaſſed judgment, I have little doubt that numbers in this assembly will discover, that “the flesh, with its affections and lusts,” is not only alive, but in full vigour. Nay, the very best will find cause to conclude, that the corrupt principle is not yet crucified as it ought to be.

As for those of the first class now mentioned, if the text itself does not furnish them
with

with a sufficient motive for crucifying the flesh, I despair of being able to offer any other which will be more powerful. I might tell you, how mean it is to let sense give law to reason, and to prefer the earthly tabernacle to its immortal inhabitant. I might assure you, that you are serving an ungrateful master, whom you can never satisfy; that, while you feed one lust, you must starve another, whose importunate cravings will destroy the relish of your imagined happiness. I might tell you, that the flesh must ere long be reduced to rottenness and dust, and be buried under ground, that it may be no offence to the living. But what are all these arguments, compared with that motive which is implied in the text, that, unless you crucify the flesh, you do not belong to Christ; and if you have no interest in Christ, God is a consuming fire. So that this furnisheth me with an address, to the same purpose with what a brave officer made to his soldiers in a day of battle, "Unless ye kill your enemies," said he, "they will kill you." In like manner, I say to you, Unless ye crucify the flesh, it will be your everlasting
ruin.

ruin. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die."

As for you who are mourning over the remainders of corruption, and struggling to get free from them, I know that you will require no motives to engage you to go on in this opposition to the carnal principle. I shall, therefore, only offer you a few directions, with which I will now conclude.

Keep a strict watch over your senses. Let nothing enter into the soul by these avenues without a strict examination. Avoid with the utmost caution all those things which may inflame your passions, and accustom yourselves to contradict them in their first tendencies to evil. A spark may easily be quenched, which, after it hath kindled a flame, will baffle all your industry. Improve that holy ordinance, which you have been celebrating, to this salutary purpose. The contemplation of a crucified Saviour is an excellent mean to assist you in crucifying the flesh. When your appetites solicit any unlawful indulgence, remember him who had not even the common accommodations of nature. When your flesh requires ease and pleasure, think of him who
pleased

pleased not, or minded not himself, but for your sakes submitted to hunger and thirst weariness and watching, pain and reproach, and at last to an ignominious death. When riches inflame your desires, reflect on the history of Jesus, “ who, though he was rich, for “ your sakes became poor, that ye through “ his poverty might be made rich.” When the desire of applause, or the fear of censure, from man, tempt you to desert the path of duty, then remember him who for you made himself of no reputation, gave his head to be crowned with thorns, and his body to be arrayed with the garb of derision, and was suspended on a cross in the company of malefactors. In all these views, let your eyes be directed to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. Above all, depend much on the grace of God, and pour out your souls in fervent supplications for the Spirit of Promise, by whose assistance alone you can mortify the deeds of the body, and crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts. Principles of philosophy may restrain our evil passions; but nothing less than the Omnipotent power of divine grace can overcome them. Plead, therefore,

fore, earnestly, that he who is now ascended up on high, and hath received gifts for men, may grant you every needful supply in this difficult warfare: that so, when you have fought the good fight, and overcome your enemies, both within and without you, you may be publicly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly happy in the full enjoyment of God for ever.
Amen.

S E R M O N XVII.

PSALM, iv. 6. 7.

There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.

THE chief distinction between a child of God, and a man of the world, lies in the prevailing tendency of their desires. Both of them are engaged in the pursuit of happiness. But the one aims at nothing higher than the present gratification of his appetites, while the other rises above this world, and aspires at the supreme felicity of his immortal nature. The one seeks information from every quarter concerning the object of his pursuit; the other asks the blessing directly from
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the Giver of all good. The one seeks a happiness separated from God : the whole earth, without the light of God's countenance, would appear to the other a barren wilderness, and a place of exile.—I propose, in discoursing on this subject,

First, To make a few remarks on the Psalmist's description of these opposite characters.

Secondly, To illustrate the two following propositions, which naturally arise from the text, namely, That worldly men have little cause to rejoice in the temporal advantages which they possess ; and that the light of God's countenance is sufficient to gladden the heart of a saint in all circumstances whatsoever.

The illustration of these particulars will give rise to a practical improvement of the subject.—Let us,

First, Attend to the description of worldly men in the first part of the 6th verse, " There be many that say, Who will shew us any good ?"—It is obvious, in the

1st place, That this question betrays a

great degree of inward dissatisfaction and perplexity. They speak like men who have no relish for what they possess, and who are utterly at a loss to what hand to turn for enjoyment. They do not ask, who will shew us the *chief good*? But, “Who will shew us *any good*?” any thing to fill up the craving vacuity of our minds: a plain intimation that hitherto they have been miserably disappointed in their pursuits, and that at the time of the question they cannot find any thing in their lot that deserves the name of good. They are unacquainted with happiness, though they have been always in search of it, and neither know wherein it consists, nor how it is to be obtained.—It deserves our notice,

2dly, That the only good which they inquire for is some present sensible enjoyment, which may be pointed out to the eye of sense, and may be immediately laid hold of. “Who will *shew* us any good?” They are strangers to the operation of that faith, which is “the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.” They look not “at the things which are unseen and eter-
nal;

“nal;” their views are confined within the narrow limits of this present life; and they covet no other portion than they suppose may be found in the world of sense.—It may be observed,

3dly, That they make no discrimination of the objects which they seek after. *Any good* will be welcome to them: let it be good food, or good clothing; a good estate by lawful means, or a good estate by any means whatever; a good bargain in business, or a good booty by theft or plunder: no matter what it is, provided it gives them pleasure in the mean time, or relieves them from the irksome labour of thinking on themselves, and on the great end for which they were made.—Once more, in the

4th place, You observe, that amidst all their dissatisfaction with their present state, and their eager desires after something better, they do not turn their thoughts at all to God, but seem rather determined to banish the remembrance of him from their minds. They seek counsel from others, but none from him: they inquire at weak and erring mortals like

themselves, but they neither ask wisdom nor grace from God.

Such is the representation which the Psalmist gives us of the temper and of the language of worldly men. He further tells us, that the character of which he gives this description, was a common one in his time: “ There be many that say, Who will shew
“ us any good?” And it is but too apparent, that multitudes of men do still exhibit the same temper. They have no relish for spiritual and divine enjoyments; their only care is, “ What they shall eat, and what they
“ shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be
“ clothed.”—“ They labour abundantly for
“ the meat which perisheth, but not at all
“ for that meat which endureth unto ever-
“ lasting life.” And though they meet repeated disappointments in every new experiment; yet instead of seeking after happiness where it is alone to be found, they still renew the fruitless search among the creatures around them, and cry out with as much keenness as ever, “ Who will shew us any
“ worldly good?”

Let us now turn our eyes to a different object,

ject, and consider the temper of a child of God, as it is beautifully described by the Psalmist. Whilst others say, "Who will shew us any good?" the language of his heart is, "Lord, lift thou upon me the light of thy countenance." He, too, seeks what is good; for the desire of happiness is common to all.—But you will observe,

1st, That it is not *any* good that will satisfy him: he cannot feed upon husks; it is a real and a substantial good that he seeks after. Nay, it is the chief good. He disdains the thought of having any thing less than this for the portion of his soul. He knows that all other sources of enjoyment are no better than "broken cisterns, which can hold no water;" adapted indeed to supply the wants of the body, but in no respect suited to the immortal spirit, either as the objects of its choice, or the sources of its happiness.—And as nothing can satisfy him but a real and permanent good, so we find,

2dly, That he knows where that good is to be found. He has no need to solicit information from every one he meets. He knows that the favour of God, and the sense of his

loving kindness, are the only sources of true happiness. Here therefore he fixeth his choice, and is perfectly satisfied that he is right in doing so.

The worldly mind is in a state of perpetual fluctuation. Having no determinate object in view, it runs wild in pursuit of every delusive image of good; and when disappointed in one object, only feels a more intense desire to seek its gratification in another.

But the enlightened mind seeth vanity engraved, in deep and legible characters, on all things below the sun; and therefore looks beyond and above them for its portion, saying, with the devout Psalmist, “ Whom have I in
“ heaven but thee? and there is none upon
“ earth whom I desire beside thee. My flesh
“ and my heart faileth: but God is the
“ strength of my heart, and my portion for-
“ ever.”—I observe, in the

3^d place, That a child of God goes directly to God himself, and begs the blessing from him. He loses no time in wandering among the creatures, or in making experiments of sensual pleasure; but takes the shortest

test road to the object he pursues. He flies to the arms of his Father, and implores that he would smile on him, and grant him his salvation. Sensible at the same time of his unworthiness, he claims nothing as a debt; but what he asks, he prays for as a free unmerited gift, fetching all his arguments from his mercy, and pleading with him for his own name's sake, "O Lord, lift thou upon me "the light of thy countenance."—Once more, in the

4th place, It deserves our notice, that the Psalmist, in the name of all the godly, useth this prayer in direct opposition to the carnal language of worldly men, who are continually crying, "Who will shew us any good?" Hereby intimating to us, that a child of God can relish no sweetness in any inferior good, till he be assured of the divine favour; and that when this great blessing is obtained, nothing amiss can come to him. Even amidst the abundance of outward things, he mourns and languisheth, as long as he apprehends God to be at a distance from him. And no sooner doth he behold his reconciled countenance, than he forgets every outward calamity,

ty, and can rejoice in the lowest state of poverty and distress.

In a word, to the spiritual man the favour of God is one thing needful. As to other things, which may be either good or bad, as they are used, he dares not be peremptory in his choice; “For who knoweth what is good for man in this life?” But the favour of his God he cannot want. Here all his desires centre, and here he hath treasured up all the wishes of his heart.

Having thus considered the Psalmist’s description of these two opposite characters in the text, let us now proceed,

Secondly, To illustrate the propositions which arise from this comparison—The

First which I mentioned was, That worldly men have little cause to rejoice in the temporal advantages which they possess.

Stretch your imaginations to the utmost; fancy to yourselves a man raised above all his fellows, enjoying every thing that his heart can wish, obeyed and honoured by all around him; let luxury furnish out his house and table; let prosperity attend his steps, and crown his

his undertakings with glory. Add to these advantages, if you will, the splendid titles of king and hero ; and when you have finished the gaudy picture, say, what doth the value of it amount to ?

I/z, May not all these outward things consist with the present misery of the person who possesseth them ? May not the man who hath reached the summit of earthly grandeur be the wretched slave of his own passions, and suffer all the torments of a diseased mind ? Who have, in fact, held the most complaining language on the subject of human life ? Have not those who have drunk deepest of the cup of prosperity, and whose minds, satiated with pleasure, have become the prey of spleen and disappointment. Unless, therefore, we can finish the description of the prosperous man, by saying, that his soul is as flourishing as his body, and that his eternal interest is as well secured as his temporal advantages seem to be, all that we have supposed him to possess must go for nothing. He is indeed more sumptuously miserable than any of his fellow-creatures, but cannot be allowed to have the least reasonable cause of joy.

God

God seeth not as man seeth. Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God searcheth the heart. Accordingly, he speaks a language very different from the men of the world, and calls those “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,” who think themselves, and perhaps are thought by others, to be “rich, and increased in goods, and to stand in need of nothing.” And will any wise man, then, rejoice in these outward circumstances, which may so easily consist with the real misery of the person who possesseth them?—Especially if we consider,

2dly, That these very things are frequently the means of making men miserable, and of fixing them in that deplorable state. How many have been fruitful in the low valley of adversity, who have proved barren, after they removed their habitations to the high mountains of prosperity? And should any man rejoice, because he must pass to heaven as a camel must pass through the eye of a needle? Is it not difficult enough to keep our hearts and affections above, when even we have little or nothing to confine them below? And should we, who already stumble at a straw, rejoice

rejoice that we have rocks of offence, and mountains of provocation cast in our way? How few are advanced to higher measures of faith and holiness, by their advancement in the world? How strangely doth prosperity transform men, and make them forget their former apprehensions of things, their convictions, their purposes, and their vows; nay, their God, their happiness, and themselves? While men are low in the world and live by faith, they do good with the little which they possess, and have the blessing of a willing mind: Whereas, when they are lifted up, they often lose the inclination, in proportion as they increase in the ability of doing good, and use their superior talents only to bring upon themselves a heavier condemnation. The carnal mind commonly grows with the carnal interest, and the greatest opposers of God have in all ages been the very persons who were most indebted to his goodness. Rejoice not then in the possession of these common mercies for their own sake; and learn to value them only as they are made subservient to your real usefulness, and to your spiritual joy. For, in the

3d place, All these things may end in misery, and leave the owner in everlasting wo. He who to-day “is clothed in purple and “fine linen, and fares sumptuously,” may tomorrow “lift up his eyes in torments.”—“Weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of “teeth” may succeed to his carnal mirth. If this shall happen, he shall then cry out, O that I had lain in medicinal rags, instead of having got this mortal surfeit of prosperity! Alas! are all my pleafant morsels to be for ever exchanged for this gall and wormwood! O deplorable state! O wretched issue of a carnal life!

Think not that I am an enemy to your joy, in urging these remonstrances. My sole aim is to lead you to that fountain, which will at all times supply you with the most exalted delight; the sense of the love of God, and the sure prospect of immortal felicity. Were you in this happy condition, then should I bid you rejoice even in those temporal mercies, as the gifts of your Heavenly Father, the tokens of his love, and the pledges of your future inheritance. I would then address you in the words of the preacher, “Go thy way, eat thy bread
“with

“ with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.” But until you have made sure of this one thing needful, I must be an enemy to your secure and carnal joy. The frantic mirth of a madman is an object that will cast a damp on a mind the most addicted to gaiety; and I appeal to yourselves, whether it be reasonable for a man to rejoice, who, in the midst of all his pleasures, cannot have the smallest assurance that he shall be the next moment out of hell. A wicked man, suffering the horrors of an awakened conscience, is indeed an object of commiseration: but a far greater object of commiseration is that man, who, in the depths of misery, and on the very brink of perdition, still retains his thoughtless and insensible gaiety of heart. This is that laughter of which Solomon might well say, “ It is mad;” and that mirth of which he saith, “ what doth it?” How many are now in sorrow, by reason of this unseasonable and sinful joy? They were too gay to listen to the grave admonitions of God’s word; too eagerly bent upon their delusive pleasures to attend to the motions of his Holy Spirit; and, therefore,

therefore, because when God called they would not hear; so he now laughs at their calamity, and mocks when their fears are come upon them. It is the awful apprehension of this which constrains me to be earnest with you in my present argument. The pleasure which you take in the enjoyments of sense, is that which makes you careless of the pleasures of religion. Could I for once prevail with you to enter into your own breasts, to abstract yourselves from the business and pleasures of this vain world, and to think seriously for one day upon your everlasting state, I should not despair of convincing you, that this earth can afford nothing which can be an equivalent for your immortal souls. But, alas! your sensual dissipated mirth banisheth all reflection, and makes you deaf to the sober voice of reason. When you are confined to a bed of sickness, indeed, or languishing under some painful disease, it is possible for a religious monitor to obtain something like a patient hearing from you: but when your flesh is in vigour, and capable of relishing outward pleasures, this docile season is no more, and all the truths which relate to
another

another world become grating and offensive to your ears, like the found of an instrument out of tune. I have only to add on this head, that were your mirth, such as it is, to endure for any time, I should wonder the less at your rejecting this admonition. But, alas! to be jocund, or even happy, for a day, and then to lie down in endless torment, is a dismal prospect indeed. To see a man laugh and play, and brave it out, in a vessel which is so swiftly running down a stream which terminates in a gulph of endless horror, is a shocking spectacle, and calls loudly on every one who sees it to warn the unhappy person of his danger. This hath been my office to you; and could I be your friend if I did less? If I did not obtest you with all the earnestness of which I am capable, to secure your interest in another world than this, and to derive your joys from something better than the portion of the sensualist?

Let us now turn our eyes to a more agreeable object, and survey those solid grounds of joy which belong to the people of God.—
For the

Second proposition which I proposed to illustrate was, that the light of God's countenance is sufficient to gladden the heart of a faint in all circumstances whatsoever. For this purpose, let us consider from what sources the joys of a faint proceed.

1st, Then, he is possessed of the joy which results from comparing his present happy condition with the misery in which he was once involved. He remembers a time when, like others, he wandered in the vanity and darkness of his mind, still putting the anxious question, "Who will shew me any good?" When, like a sheep, he went astray, in the dark and howling wilderness; when he fed upon mere husks, and spent his money for that which is not bread. "But now he is returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul." He is passed from death to life: the Judge of the universe is at peace with him, and hath cast all his sins into the depth of the sea. He hath got within the walls of the city of refuge, where the avenger of blood cannot enter; the sword of justice is put up in its scabbard; and that Almighty Being, upon whom he constantly depends, hath laid aside
his

his wrath, and beholds him with a pleasant countenance. And, therefore, “ Although
 “ the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall
 “ fruit be in the vines; the labour of the
 “ olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no
 “ meat; the flock shall be cut off from the
 “ fold, and there shall be no herd in the
 “ stalls; yet will he rejoice in the Lord, he
 “ will joy in the God of his salvation.”—

But a

2d Source of joy to a child of God, consists in the actual honours and privileges conferred upon him. He is advanced to the dearest and most intimate relation to God, adopted into his family, and invested with all the rights of a son. In him that life is begun, which, being hid with Christ in God, shall be preserved and improved, till at length it be perfected in the heavenly world. “ Rejoice
 “ in the Lord, O ye righteous; and shout
 “ for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.” To you it belongs to come boldly to a throne of grace, in the assured hope that you shall obtain mercy, and find grace to help you in every time of need: by the blood of Jesus you can enter into the holiest, and in every thing

by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God; casting all your care upon him, because he careth for you. He is yours who possesseth all things, and what can you want? He is yours who can do all things, and what should you fear? He is yours who is goodness and love itself, how then can you be miserable, or what imperfection can there be in your felicity? His faithfulness is pledged to make all things work together for your good. The most afflictive events, like the furnace or pruning hook, shall only purge away your dross, or render you more fruitful. So that you may glory in tribulation, “knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope that maketh not ashamed.” To conclude this detail of the privileges of a saint, hear how the Apostle to the Corinthians describes them (1 Corinth. iii. 21.), “All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.”—Once more,

3dly,

“ come ;” of which every believer may say, They are mine. In this light did Paul behold them, when he said, “ To me to live is
 “ Christ, and to die is gain.—I desire to de-
 “ part, and to be with Christ, which is far
 “ better.”—“ While I am at home in the bo-
 “ dy, I am absent from the Lord. I am,
 “ therefore, confident and willing, rather to
 “ be absent from the body, and present with
 “ the Lord.”—“ O death, where is thy sting ?
 “ O grave, where is thy victory ? The sting
 “ of death is sin, and the strength of sin is
 “ the law. But thanks be unto God who
 “ giveth us the victory, through Jesus Christ
 “ our Lord.”

But it is the resurrection which shall complete the triumph of the saints, when that which is sown in weakness, in dishonour, and corruption, shall be raised in power, in glory, and incorruption. In that day of the manifestation of the sons of God, when our vile bodies shall be changed and fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, “ when this corrup-
 “ tible shall have put on incorruption, and
 “ this mortal shall have put on immortality,
 “ then shall be brought to pass the saying
 “ that

“ that is written, Death is swallowed up in
“ victory.” But how shall we speak of the
glory yet to be revealed, “ which eye hath
“ not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it en-
“ tered into the heart of man to conceive.”
Should I attempt any description of it, I
should only “ darken counsel by words with-
“ out knowledge.”—“ It doth not yet ap-
“ pear,” saith the Apostle John, “ what we
“ shall be : but this we know, that when he
“ shall appear, we shall be like him ; for we
“ shall see him as he is.” Here, then, let us
stop. To be made like the Son of God, to
behold his unveiled glory, and to be for ever
with him : these particulars must surely in-
clude every ingredient which can belong to
the highest perfection and happiness of a crea-
ture. With this great object in our eye, how
well doth it become us to adopt the language
of the Apostle Peter, and to say with fervent
gratitude, as he did, “ Blessed be the God and
“ Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which ac-
“ cording to his abundant mercy hath begot-
“ ten us again unto a lively hope, by the re-
“ surrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to

“ an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and
 “ that fadeth not away.”

These are the peculiar sources from which the godly man derives his joy. And may I not now appeal to you, whether they are not of such a nature, as that no outward distress or calamity can take them away? Even when the heavens shall be rolled together like a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, he will be able to look at the mighty desolation, and say, when all these materials are consumed, I shall have lost nothing; “ God liveth, blessed be my rock.”—“ The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance,” and in him I possess and enjoy all things.

And now, what improvement are we to make of this subject?—In the

1st place, Let us inquire which of the characters described by the Psalmist belongs to us. Are we among the many that say, “ Who will shew us any good?” or are we among the happy few who seek the light of God’s countenance above all things? There is no neutral person in this case. Every man that liveth upon the earth, is either “ carnally minded, which is death; or spiritually minded, which
 “ is

“ is life and peace ;” either a child of God, or a drudge and slave to the world. To which party, then, do you belong ? What are your hearts principally fet upon, and whither do you bend your chief and most vigorous endeavours ? If you can find but little leifure for the service of God, and the care of your souls ; if you can spend whole days without calling upon God, or reading his word ; if the Sabbath appears burdensome to you, and you join in your hearts with those profane persons whom the Prophet Amos describes, as saying (viii. 5.), “ When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn ? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat ?” If you are conscious that it is thus with you, I need scarcely inform you, that you must be classed with those whose language it is, “ Who will shew us any good ?” A

2d Use, therefore, which I would make of this subject, is, to exhort you, who are yet carnally minded, to think seriously of your condition. Ye are pursuing what will for ever flee from you. Ye are combating with a decree of him who is Almighty, even that irreverfible decree which hath pronounced vanity

nity on all things below the sun. Ye are opposing the experience of all who ever made the same trial before you ; ye are struggling with the very feelings of your own hearts, which as yet have never found that permanent satisfaction which they require. O then be persuaded to relinquish those false plans of happiness by which you have been hitherto deluded, and to seek the favour of that God who is the only adequate portion of an immortal soul. Listen to that kind expostulation and advice (Isaiah ly. 2. 3.),

“ Wherefore do ye spend money for that
“ which is not bread, and your labour for
“ that which satisfieth not? Hearken di-
“ ligently unto me, and eat ye that which
“ is good, and let your soul delight itself
“ in fatness. Incline your ear, and come
“ unto me ; hear, and your soul shall live ;
“ and I will make an everlasting covenant
“ with you, even the sure mercies of Da-
“ vid.”

Lastly, Let me call on those who have been taught to value the light of God's countenance above all things, to be humble and thankful.

thankful. Often recollect that mercy which plucked you as brands out of the burning, and set you apart to see the glory of the Lord, and to show forth his praise. Often acknowledge that sovereign grace by which you were arrested in the broad way that leads to destruction, and led to him who alone hath the words of eternal life. “Who made thee differ, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?” If he who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined into your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of his glory, as it shines in the face of Jesus; adore and praise this distinguishing goodness; acknowledge, with humble gratitude, that it was the doing of the Lord. And if you would continue to enjoy the comfort which ariseth from the light of God’s countenance, be careful to abound in all those “fruits of righteousness, which are through Christ to the praise and glory of God.” Our duty and our comfort are wisely and graciously connected together. “Great peace have they that love thy law,” saith the Psalmist, “and nothing shall offend them.”—“The work
“ of

“ of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever.”—“ As many as walk according to this rule, peace shall be on them, and mercy, and on the Israel of God.”
Amen.

S E R-

S E R M O N XVIII.

HEBREWS, ix. 28.

Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.

THERE are two things which we are taught to believe concerning Christ. The *first* is, That he once appeared in this world, clothed with our nature; that he published to sinners of mankind a pure and heavenly doctrine; and after exhibiting, in his own conduct, a fair and unblemished example of holy obedience, at last offered up himself a sacrifice to God, to expiate our offences, and purchase our eternal redemption. The *second* is, That this same Jesus, who was dead, is
 now

now alive, and sitteth on the right hand of the Majesty on high, from whence he shall come at the end of the world, crowned with glory and honour, and attended with all the host of heaven, to judge the quick and the dead.

We were this day commemorating, in the Holy Sacrament of the Supper *, what Christ hath already done for the redemption of his people. There we beheld him “evidently “set forth as crucified before our eyes,” bearing our griefs, and “wounded for our transgressions.” And now, to display the riches of his grace, and our infinite obligations to love and serve him, let us with joy contemplate what he is farther to do, as it is shortly expressed in the latter part of my text: “Unto them that look for him, shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.” The

First thing that claims our attention is the certainty of our Lord’s return. “He shall
“ appear

* Preached on the evening of a Communion Sabbath, *March* 16. 1783, a few days before the Author’s death.

“ appear the second time.” And, blessed be God, this comfortable truth doth not depend upon any doubtful process of reasoning, but is both supported and illustrated by a variety of the most clear and express declarations of holy writ. The Apostle Jude informs us, that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, by faith foresaw this great event, and said, by divine inspiration, “ Behold, the Lord cometh with
“ ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgement on all.” It was Christ’s promise to his disciples, “ In my Father’s house are
“ many mansions ; if it were not so, I would
“ have told you : I go to prepare a place for
“ you. And if I go and prepare a place for
“ you, I will come again and receive you
“ unto myself, that where I am, there ye
“ may be also.” The angels who attended him at his ascension into heaven, bare witness to the same truth. “ Ye men of Galilee,” said they, “ why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? This same Jesus, which is taken up
“ from you into heaven, shall so come in
“ like manner as ye have seen him go into
“ heaven.” Nay, we are told, that the Father hath appointed the very day in which
“ he

“ he shall judge the world in righteousness,
“ by that Man whom he hath ordained.” In
a word, this doctrine is not only frequently
asserted in Scripture, but is so intimately con-
nected with all the other parts of revelation,
that the whole must stand or fall with it. Is
not the Sacrament of the Supper a visible
pledge of our Lord’s return, as well as a me-
morial of his sufferings and death? And do
we not profess an equal belief of both every
time we partake of that holy ordinance. “ For
“ as often as we eat this bread, and drink this
“ cup, we do shew the Lord’s death till he
“ come ;” that is, we commemorate his death
in the faith of his second and glorious appear-
ance.

This, my brethren, is an interesting truth,
and doth justly challenge our most serious
attention. It is not more certain that we are
met together in this place, than that we shall
all meet again at the tribunal of Christ, where
every one of us shall appear in his true co-
lours, without any mask or disguise. At pre-
sent we are but little acquainted with our-
selves, and frequently mistaken by others ;
but the sentence of the Supreme Judge will
rectify

rectify all mistakes, and at once put an end to the presumptuous hope of the hypocrite, and to the fears and anxieties of the humble self-suspecting soul. Whom he then justifies, none can condemn; and whom he then condemns, none dare justify, neither is there any that can deliver out of his hand. What a mighty influence ought this to have on our temper and practice? Were any of us to be tried for our lives at a human bar, I am persuaded that the thoughts of it would so fully possess our minds, as to leave room for almost nothing else. Yet the most that the judge can do in such a case, is to determine the day beyond which we shall not live; while neither he, nor any man in the world, can say with certainty, that we shall live till that day come. One of a thousand accidents may cut us off, and prevent the execution of his sentence; so that the legal date of our lives may be considerably longer than the term which the Author of our lives hath appointed. But the issue of that trial, which we must undergo at the second appearance of Christ, is of eternal consequence to us. Our final state is determined by it; and no power in heaven or on earth

is able to defeat or alter the sentence. And is it possible that we can banish the thoughts of this for one moment, or that we can think of it with cold and unaffected hearts? The

Second thing that deserves the peculiar notice of believers is, the gracious design of our Lord's appearance. "He shall appear the second time, unto salvation." Some may, perhaps, be at a loss to conceive what should remain to be done for the salvation of the saints, after their souls are admitted into heaven. But if we reflect a little, we shall be sensible, that even after the soul's admission into heaven, there are several things to be done by Christ for his people, which will increase their happiness, and render their salvation more perfect. — For,

1st, At his second coming, Christ will raise the dead bodies of his servants, which will, without doubt, be a considerable addition to their felicity. The souls of the saints are represented in Scripture as waiting and longing for the resurrection of their bodies. Hence their flesh is said to rest in hope: and, therefore, when this hope is fulfilled at Christ's second

cond appearance, we may justly conclude, that the joy of the soul shall be heightened and improved; especially when we consider the wonderful change which shall be wrought upon the body itself. When, in the morning of the resurrection, the trumpet shall sound, and the graves shall be opened; when that which was sown in weakness and dishonour, shall be raised in power and glory; when the formerly vile body shall not only be refined, but fashioned like unto the glorious body of the Redeemer, with what triumph and exultation shall that song be sung! “Death is swallowed up in victory.”—“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2dly, In that day the church, which is called the body of Christ, shall be complete; which must add to the happiness of every saint in particular. For the several members of that spiritual body being closely united, not only to the head, but also to one another, each of them must necessarily partake of the happiness and

glory of the whole. Must not every child of God be more joyful when the whole family is assembled in the immediate presence of their Father, and not one member is wanting? If there is joy in heaven at the conversion of one sinner, though afterwards he hath a waste and howling wilderness to pass through, and many a toilsome and dangerous step to take ere he arrive at the end of his journey; how much greater joy shall there be in the heavenly Jerusalem, when the many sons of God are all brought home to glory?

3dly, Then also shall believers be solemnly acquitted by the Judge himself, and publicly acknowledged in the presence of an assembled world. "They shall be mine," saith the Lord, "in that day when I make up my jewels." Having washed them with his blood, and sanctified them by his Spirit, he will not be ashamed to call them brethren, but will confess them before his Father, and present them at his throne, without spot and blemish.
—And,

4thly, To complete the happiness of the saints, then shall there be the clearest discovery of all God's works, and the most full and open

open manifestation of his glorious perfections. When all his great designs are accomplished and brought to their intended issue, then shall the wise order, and harmonious contexture, of divine Providence be clearly discerned, the most intricate and perplexed dispensations shall be explained and vindicated: and it shall then appear, to the full conviction of the whole admiring family of God, that all things have wrought together for their spiritual improvement and eternal felicity. This shall be the day of solemn triumph, the grand jubilee, upon the finishing of all God's works from the creation of the world, upon which ensues the resignation of the Mediator's kingdom. For although Christ shall continue through eternity to be the head of his church, yet the present manner of his administration shall then cease. He shall then deliver up the kingdom to the Father, that God, or the undivided Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, may be all in all. This fact is distinctly asserted (1 Cor. xv. 24.—28.), "Then cometh the end," saith the Apostle, "when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule,

“ and all authority and power. For he must
 “ reign till he hath put all enemies under his
 “ feet. The last enemy that shall be destroy-
 “ ed is death. For he hath put all things un-
 “ der his feet. But when he saith that all
 “ things are put under him, it is manifest that
 “ he is excepted which did put all things un-
 “ der him. And when all things shall be sub-
 “ dued unto him, then shall the Son also him-
 “ self be subject unto him that put all things
 “ under him, that God may be all in all.”

Thus you have heard how Christ's second coming shall complete the salvation of his people, and increase that happiness at the resurrection which commenced at their new birth; and which, though greatly improved by the release of the soul from the earthly tabernacle, was not carried to its full perfection at death.—The manner of our Lord's appearance, when he comes upon this gracious design, is the

Third particular in the text, which comes now to be considered. “ He shall appear the
 “ second time, *without sin*, unto salvation.”
 When in the fullness of time God sent forth
 his

his Son into this world, although he was absolutely pure and spotless in himself, yet then he “bare the sins of many;” and “he who “knew no sin, was made sin for us.” Appearing in the likeness of sinful flesh, he was numbered with transgressors, and treated as if he had been the worst of criminals: But by his sufferings and death, having fully expiated the guilt of sin, he obtained a public and legal discharge, by being released from the prison of the grave, and “set at the right “hand of God in the heavenly places, far “above all principality and power, and might “and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that “which is to come.” When, therefore, he cometh again, he shall appear, “*without sin,*” without that guilt which was charged upon him, while he sustained the character of Surety, and stood in the place of sinful man.

He shall likewise appear without any of the effects of sin, such as pain, poverty, reproach, or infirmity of any kind. It shall not be such an appearance as his first was, when he “made “himself of no reputation, took upon him “the form of a servant,” and submitted to all

the indignities attending that mean condition. He will not come to be buffeted and scourged, and spit upon, and crowned with thorns. He will not come, O careless and ungrateful sinners! to be despised and rejected in all his gracious offers. No; he shall come in the clouds, with great power and glory: he shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels: he shall appear in all the splendour of Zion's King, arrayed with that glory which he had with the Father before the world was. Then shall the reproach of the cross be wiped off, and all his sufferings fully recompensed. In his humble state, he was attended by twelve poor and illiterate men: but then shall he come with "ten thousands of his saints, and
" all the holy angels with him." He was introduced to his public ministry by the "voice
" of one crying in the wilderness:" but then shall his approach be announced by the "voice
" of the archangel and the trump of God." And he who on Mount Calvary was lifted up on the cross between two thieves, shall then ascend his "great white throne, high and lifted up;" from whence, with unerring wisdom, and almighty power, he shall separate the
the

the righteous from the wicked, adjudging the one to everlasting life, and the other to endless misery.

Thus shall he appear, when he “comes the second time, without sin, unto salvation.” And ought not the prospect of this to have a mighty influence upon us in the mean time? “Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” How great will be the confusion of ungodly men, when they see that Jesus, whose grace they despised, coming to fix their everlasting state. The multitude that came determined to apprehend him in the days of his flesh, went backward, and fell to the ground, when, with an air of majesty, he only pronounced these few words, “I am he.” And if the Lamb’s voice was so terrible, how dreadful will he appear when he roareth as a lion? If his voice shook the earth when he published the law from Mount Sinai, how must it shake the hearts of his enemies, when he pronounceth the sentence of the law, and dooms to those punishments which the law hath awarded?

But

But the prospect of this appearance is no less comfortable to believers, than it is terrible to the ungodly. Then shall his own people lift up their heads, and behold his glory with exceeding joy. His coming shall be to them the dawning of an everlasting day. They know that he brings salvation with him, the full harvest of that light and gladness which were sown for them in time. He comes to wipe away all tears from their eyes, to complete their victory over death and hell, and to put their whole persons, souls and bodies, in full possession of that heavenly inheritance, “which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.”

If it is comfortable at present to hear of him, to think of his love, to commemorate his death, and to behold his beauty in the ordinances of his grace; what must it be to see him in all the glory of his exalted state? When a dear relation, who hath been long absent in a far country, returns to his kindred and friends, how do all concerned hasten to meet him, and to express their joy at his arrival? And will not the saints then rejoice at the coming of their Saviour? With what transports

ports of gladness will they cry out, Behold, yonder he comes ! He whose blood hath redeemed, and whose Spirit hath sanctified us. Yonder he comes in whom we trusted, and for whom we have long waited ; and now we see that he hath not deceived us, and that he hath not made us wait in vain. “ Even so come “ Lord Jesus.”—And this leads me to the

Fourth and last particular in the text, which is the character of those to whom this second appearance of our Lord shall be comfortable. They are such as “ look for him.” This short, but significant description, may be considered as including,

1st, A firm belief of this event. One who looks for it in the sense of the Apostle’s words, is as thoroughly persuaded of its certainty, as he is that the sun, which sets to-night, shall rise again to-morrow. His faith is built on the surest foundation, the word and promise of his Saviour himself : and, therefore, his heart is impressed with Christ’s second appearance as much, at least as really, as if he already saw him coming in the clouds of heaven. But,

2dly, The expression denotes the love and
desire

desire of this event. The faints take pleasure in the prospect of it, and accordingly are described by the Apostle Paul (2 Tim. 4.—8.), by this very circumstance. They are such as “love his appearing.” If the faints under the old dispensation longed for the manifestation of our Lord in the flesh, how much more ought we to long for that more glorious appearance which he shall make in the end of the world. The Atheist rejects this doctrine altogether; the profane scoffer says, “Where is the promise of his coming?” Carnal sinners are afraid of it, when alarmed with the rebukes of conscience: as when Paul preached of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled. But to the godly it is not matter of terror, but of delight. Nay, they would even hasten its approach, if it were in their power. A believer, when his heart is right, will say, like the mother of Sifera, when she cried through the lattices, “Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?” At the same time,

3dly, This expression imports a patient waiting for his appearance, in spite of all discouragements.

couragements. Love makes the believer to long; but faith enables patiently to wait for his Lord's coming. What though he dwells in an unkind world, wounded with sharp afflictions, harrassed with temptations, and oppressed with a body of sin and death? Yet all this notwithstanding, he still looks and waits with patience and resignation. He knows that the second coming of his Lord will abundantly compensate all his present delays and discouragements. And "that this
 " trial of their faith, being much more pre-
 " cious than of gold that perissheth, though it
 " be tried with fire, shall then be found unto
 " praise, and honour, and glory." But the most essential part of the character of those to whom the second appearance of our Lord shall be comfortable, is, in the

4th and *last* place, An habitual preparation for this event. They will endeavour "to have
 " their loins girded about, and their lights
 " burning, and themselves like unto men that
 " wait for their Lord, that when he cometh
 " and knocketh, they may open unto him
 " immediately." The best evidence which we can give that we truly look for him with
 faith

faith and love is, our being diligent, that we may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. As the proper improvement, therefore, of all that hath been said, let me address to you this concluding exhortation. “ Give all diligence to make your calling and
“ election sure.”—“ Take heed to yourselves,
“ lest at any time your hearts be overcharged
“ with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the
“ cares of this life, and so that day come up-
“ on you unawares.”—“ Let your whole
“ conversation be such as becometh the gos-
“ pel of Christ.” Never think “ that you
“ have already attained, either are already
“ perfect ;—but forgetting the things which
“ are behind, and reaching forth to those
“ things which are before, press towards the
“ mark, for the prize of the high calling of
“ God in Christ Jesus.”—“ Set your affec-
“ tions on things above, not on things on the
“ earth, that when he who is your life shall
“ appear, ye may also appear with him in
“ glory.” *Amen.*





