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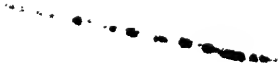
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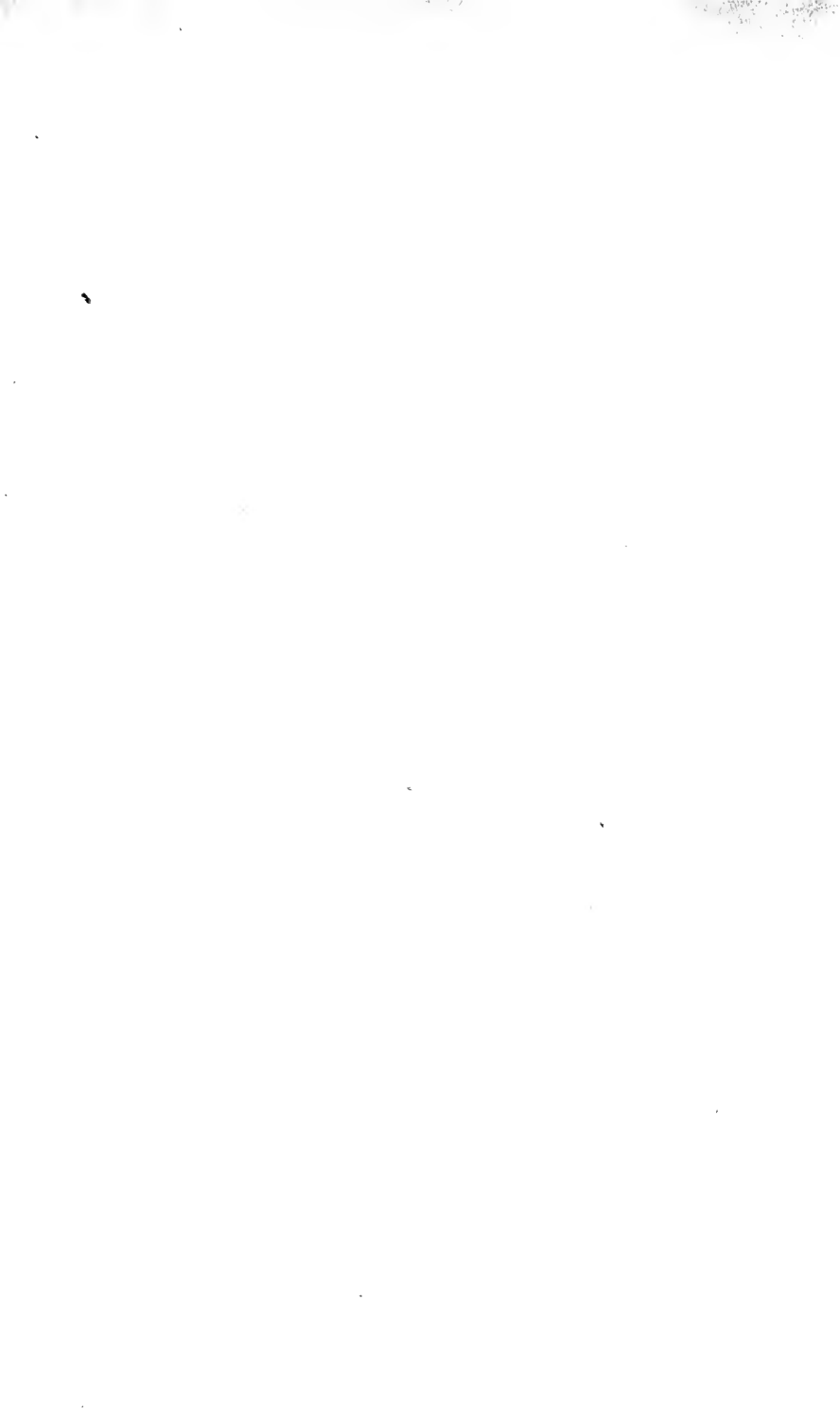
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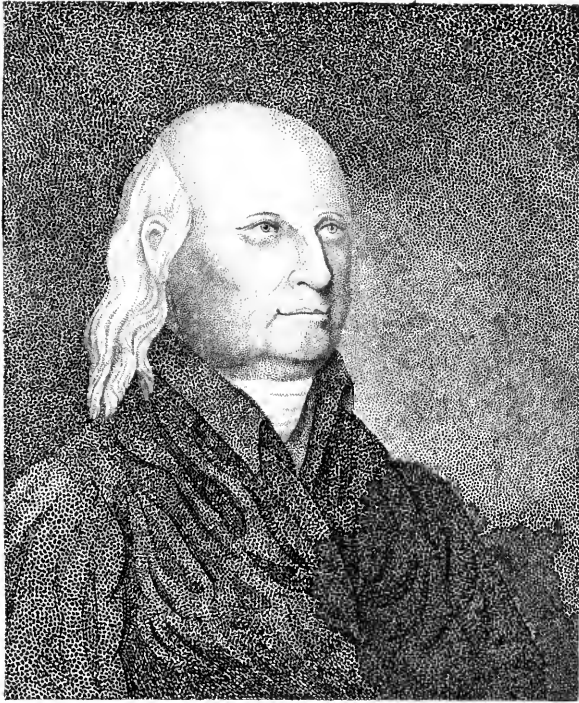
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REV. NATHANAEEL EMMONS D. D.

*Ino Breckinridge*  
**SERMONS**

ON

**VARIOUS SUBJECTS**

OF

**CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AND DUTY.**

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BY NATHANAEL EMMONS, D. D.

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*vol. IV.*

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PUBLISHED BY JOHN MILLER AND JOHN HUTCHENS.

1823.

*Rhode-Island District, sc.*

BE it remembered, That on this nineteenth day of August, A. D. 1823, and in the forty-eighth year of the Independence of the United States of America, John Miller and John Hutchens, of said District, deposited in this office the title of a book, whereof they claim as proprietors, in the following words, viz:—" *Sermons on various subjects of Christian doctrine and duty*, By NATHANAEEL EMMONS, D. D."

In conformity to an act of Congress of the United States, entitled, "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the time therein mentioned." And also to an act, entitled, "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books to the authors and proprietors, of such copies during the time therein mentioned, and extending the benefit thereof, to the art of designing, engraving and etching historical and other prints."

*Witness,*

BENJAMIN COWELL, *Clerk of the R. I. District.*



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# SERMON I.

## THE SABBATH.

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MARK ii. 27.

*And he said unto them, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*

As our Saviour was passing through the corn-fields on the sabbath, his disciples took the liberty of plucking some of the ears of corn. This was displeasing to the Pharisees, who complained of them to Christ. But instead of condemning, he justified their conduct, by referring to a well-known scripture example. He said "have ye never read what David did, when he had need and was an hungered, he and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high-priest, and did eat the shew-bread, which is not lawful to eat, but for the priests, and gave also to them that were with him? And he said unto them, the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." This was a pertinent and full reply to the objection of the Pharisees; and at the same time, implied, that God appointed the sabbath as a standing ordinance, for the benefit of all men in all ages. Accordingly I propose to show,

- I. That the sabbath is a divine ordinance;
- II. That it is a standing ordinance; and,
- III. That it is appointed for the benefit of all men in all ages.

I. I am to show that the sabbath is a divine ordinance.

The sabbath properly signifies a day of rest; but it is only a day of rest from secular employments, and

not from religious duties. It is a holy day to be spent in holy services. The duty of observing such a day would never have been discovered by the light of nature. Though the light of nature teaches men, that they ought to worship their Creator, Preserver and Benefactor; yet it does not teach them, that they ought to worship him in a social and publick manner, one day in seven. This would not have been their duty, had not God positively appointed the sabbath as a holy ordinance. Accordingly we find that he did not leave this duty to human discovery, but immediately after he had made man, he made also the sabbath for him. "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and *sanctified it*: because that in it he had rested from all his work." This was a divine and sacred ordinance. It was *divine*, as instituted by God; and *sacred*, as it was appointed for a sacred, holy, and religious purpose. It is true, the peculiar duties of this holy day are not mentioned in this brief account of its institution. But when it was renewed at Mount Sinai, and placed among the ten commands, the special duties of the day were distinctly enjoined. So that the sabbath with all its instituted duties, is a divine ordinance, enjoined upon all mankind, for their benefit. "The sabbath was made *for man*." It was made by a divine appointment a holy and sacred day. But since none, who believe the Bible, pretend to call in question the original institution of the sabbath, it is unnecessary to enlarge upon this head. I proceed therefore to show,

II. That the sabbath is a standing ordinance and of perpetual obligation. Many of the divine ordinances before the gospel dispensation were temporary, and ceased when that dispensation commenced. The passover instituted in Egypt; and the sacrifices, rites, and ceremonies instituted at Mount Sinai, were all abolished by the gospel. They were all temporary ordinances. But the sabbath was designed to be a standing ordin-



ance from the beginning to the end of the world. This will appear from various considerations.

In the first place, our Saviour says "it was made for man;" that is, for all men, without exception. The appointment of sacrifices was not made for all men, but only for those men, who lived before the death of Christ. The appointment of the passover was not made for all men, but only for one nation. The rite of circumcision was not appointed for all men, but only for the seed of Abraham, until the promised Messiah appeared. But the sabbath was made for all men in all ages, because they would always need to rest one day in seven, and to employ it in the special service of God. The very design of the sabbath argues its perpetuity. There is no reason to be given, why it should be appointed for men in one age or in one part of the world, rather than for all men in all ages and in all places. The sabbath is adapted to the nature and circumstances of all men in their present probationary state, and therefore we may presume it was designed to continue to the end of time.

And this leads me to observe in the *second* place, that the sabbath was not abolished when other positive institutions were set aside. The apostle expressly informs us, that the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic dispensation were superceded by the gospel, and became null and void, after the death of Christ: but none of the inspired writers of the New-Testament give us the least intimation of the weekly sabbath being abolished. And if it were not abolished in the apostolick days, it could not have been abolished since. It must be, therefore, a divine institution, which is still binding upon all mankind. It was not a typical ordinance, and so could not cease by the appearance of an antitype, as the typical sacrifices, rites and ceremonies under the law ceased, by the appearance of Christ, whom they prefigured. There has been no substitute instituted in the room of the sabbath, to supercede it. In a word, there is nothing said in the New-Testament, that

affords the least reason to doubt of the perpetuity of the sabbath.

Besides, *thirdly*, the practice of christians from the apostles' days to this time, is a plain, positive evidence, that the sabbath is a divine ordinance of perpetual obligation. We have an account of the primitive christians meeting together stately on the sabbath for social religious worship. And though christians have since been divided into a great variety of denominations; yet they have all agreed to observe a weekly sabbath, with a very few exceptions. Now, it is not easy to account for this general and uninterrupted practice of christians in observing the sabbath for nearly two thousand years, unless it has been founded upon the first and original institution of it, for the purpose which Christ mentions. If it was made for the benefit of man, this is a good reason why it has continued from the *beginning*, and should still continue to the *end* of time. There are, moreover, new reasons for its perpetual continuance, which have occurred since its first appointment. It was then designed to be a memorial of the creation of the world; after that it became a memorial of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt; and since that period, it has become a memorial of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and connected with a sacrament, instituted to commemorate his death, until his second coming. The sabbath is as inseparably connected with the gospel, as it ever was with the law, and must, therefore, continue as long as the gospel itself continues. There is as much ground to believe the perpetuity of the sabbath, as the perpetuity of the Lord's supper. Accordingly we find none have denied the perpetuity of the sabbath, but those who have denied the perpetuity of gospel ordinances. We may be assured, that the sabbath, which was made for man, will continue as long as it can be of any benefit to man, which will be as long as the human race shall continue in their present probationary state. The last thing is to show,

III. That this standing ordinance is designed and calculated to be of universal benefit to mankind. This Christ plainly suggests in the text. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." Here our Saviour, the Lord of the sabbath, sets it in a much more favourable and important light, than the other inspired writers set the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaick dispensation. Those they call a yoke of bondage, and weak and beggarly elements. In themselves considered they had no intrinsick value, but were rather a burden than benefit, to those upon whom they were imposed. But the sabbath is a peculiar privilege and benefit to all mankind. It is adapted to promote, and not to abridge their present and future happiness. Its nature, design and tendency is to recommend it to the esteem and approbation of the whole human race. For,

1. It gives them a precious opportunity of resting from all their worldly cares, labours, and employments. They were originally formed for labour; and labour is the indispensable duty of every individual, who enjoys mental and bodily strength. It is true, indeed, that all men are not called to the same kinds of labour, but all are bound to be active and diligent in some employment or other; either publick or private, either mental or corporeal, which requires rest. This God knew, who formed men for the labours and fatigues of the present life. And where is the person, who has not found the sabbath desirable as a day of rest from the concerns or labours of the week? There is, perhaps, no lawful calling, which can be pursued with proper activity and diligence, that does not render rest desirable and necessary one day in seven. It has been found by the experience of multitudes, who have been denied the benefit of the sabbath as a day of rest, that both their bodies and minds have been greatly injured. If health and strength and even life itself be highly valuable, then it is a precious privilege to be allowed to lay aside all secular cares and burdens one day in seven.

2. The sabbath gives men a happy season for serious reflections and meditations. The common concerns of life generally absorb too much of their attention, to leave them leisure for thinking about more serious and important objects. It is a great benefit, therefore, to the more laborious and busy part of mankind in particular, to be allowed and even required, to turn their attention from things *temporal* to things *spiritual*, and carry their thoughts forward into that future and eternal state, to which they are constantly approaching, and in which they are to find their long home. All men are capable of reflecting upon things past, of meditating upon things present, and of anticipating things future. And it highly concerns all persons of every age, character, profession, and condition of life, to pause, ponder, consider and reflect, while they are passing through the busy, noisy and tumultuous scenes of this distracting world. The things of this present life appear very different to all persons, in their leisure, retired, serious, and reflecting moments, from what they do while they are eagerly engaged in worldly pursuits. How many, every sabbath day, view the world very differently from what they habitually view it every other day in the week; and how many serious reflections and resolutions do they form on that holy day, which have a salutary influence upon their thoughts, words and actions in their common intercourse with the world? This is certainly true, with respect to those who remember the sabbath and keep it holy from beginning to end; and who seriously and sincerely discharge the appropriate duties of it. And it has a *condemning*, if not a *restraining* influence upon all, who are not totally abandoned to wickedness and stupidity. The sabbath is a most precious and important season for the most pleasant, and most profitable reflections and meditations, whether men improve it for these pious purposes, or neglect and profane it.

3. The sabbath affords men a happy opportunity for that religious society and intercourse, which directly tends to promote their mutual, temporal and

spiritual benefit. Mankind are formed for society with each other, and cannot be happy in a solitary state. Mutual intercourse serves to harmonize and civilize them, and to render them more amiable and virtuous, as well as religious. This happy effect the sabbath has never failed to produce wherever it has been observed. How differently do those feel and conduct towards each other, who usually meet together every sabbath, and apparently unite in the service of the sanctuary, from those who neglect the duties of the sabbath, and only see one another occasionally, as business, inclination, or necessity may require. Both observation and experience prove the civilizing and harmonizing tendency of observing a day of rest and devotion. Those who have observed it, have found sensible advantage from it; and those who have despised and neglected it, have suffered temporal inconveniency and injury from their ungrateful and criminal conduct. The happy influence of the christian sabbath upon the christian world has been incalculably great. It has formed the christian nations for the enjoyment of that civil order, peace, and harmony, which no unchristian nation ever realized. And there can be no doubt but the God of order ordained the sabbath for the great benefit of mankind in their *civil*, as well as in their religious connections.

4. The sabbath is highly beneficial, as it affords the most favourable opportunity for training up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Parents and heads of families ought to impart religious instruction to those under their care, and to do all they can to promote their spiritual and eternal good. But amidst the labours of the week, they can find but few good opportunities to pour instruction into the minds of children and youth. And if they could find time, children and youth would not be so ready to hear instructions, while they are eagerly pursuing more pleasing objects. But when they know that God requires them to remember the sabbath day and keep it holy; and when they are actually restrained from speaking

their own words and finding their own pleasure on that day, their minds are better prepared to hear and feel the force of religious instructions. Religious parents and heads of families do esteem the sabbath as a precious season for discharging their duty to those, whose temporal and eternal interests God has, for a time, lodged in their hands. And the effects of such private instructions have often been great, salutary and lasting, upon the minds of children and youth. Indeed, we generally observe a sensible and striking contrast between those families where private instructions are given sabbath after sabbath, and those who are allowed to grow up in ignorance of religion, and in the neglect of all the duties of the sabbath.

5. The sabbath affords a precious opportunity of attending the publick worship of God, and of hearing the *publick*, as well as private instructions of religion. It is one of the principal purposes of the sabbath, to give mankind an opportunity of hearing the great truths and duties of the gospel explained and inculcated. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." And the sabbath is the day, which God has appointed to hear his word. And to render this appointment more sacred and important, he has raised up and authorized an order of men to deliver his messages, and inculcate the everlasting gospel upon the minds of sinful and perishing creatures. This he did, under the law, and this he does, under the gospel. The sabbath with these appendages is an unspeakable gift to those in a state of probation, whose eternal interests are suspended upon their hearing, understanding, believing and accepting the terms of salvation, which he has provided for them, and offered to them, through the atoning blood of his dear Son. In this respect, the sabbath is of all other days the most beneficial and important. For without it, all other days may be infinitely worse than nothing. Thousands and millions of our fellow men are now destitute of the sabbath and all the means of salvation, which are connected with it, and of consequence, are perishing for the lack of vis-

ion. Though those, who enjoy the sabbath, often depreciate and despise it, and consider it a burden, rather than a benefit; yet it is of all temporal blessings the greatest, that God has bestowed upon this guilty and perishing world. I may add,

6. The sabbath is a peculiar and distinguishing benefit to the cordial friends of Christ; as it affords them a precious opportunity of attending the special ordinances, which he has appointed for their spiritual comfort and growth in grace; I mean baptism and the Lord's supper. Though these ordinances may be occasionally attended on other days, yet the sabbath is the only stated season of celebrating them. Where the sabbath is unknown, these ordinances are unknown. Where the sabbath is neglected, these ordinances are neglected. And where these ordinances are neglected, christians are declining, and religion becoming extinct. There are too many melancholy instances of this kind, to be found in this best part of our country. The sabbath lies at the foundation of all our religious privileges and enjoyments, if not at the foundation of our civil peace and prosperity. How much would religion decay, and the professors of it decline, if the sabbath were to be totally neglected in this place, and the sacred ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper to be entirely laid aside? The bare supposition must be extremely painful to those, who esteem a day in God's courts better than a thousand, and the communion with Christ and his friends, the highest enjoyment this side of heaven. To the godly, then, if not to others, the sabbath must appear extremely precious and beneficial.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If the sabbath was made for man, and designed to promote the benefit of the whole human race in all ages; then they ought to be very thankful for its appointment, perpetuity and obligation. It is the most useful and important ordinance that God ever appoint-

ed, and has been productive of the greatest temporal and spiritual blessings in all ages. It has been the principal source of virtue and piety in individuals, in families, and in all civil societies, whether smaller or larger. God promised to smile upon his chosen people, so long as they esteemed and observed the sabbath. "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." This promise to Israel was fulfilled so long as they performed the conditions of it, and sanctified the sabbath. Our fathers were extremely strict in keeping the sabbath, for more than a hundred years after God planted them in this land, which was undoubtedly the happy occasion of drawing down a rich profusion of both temporal and spiritual blessings. And though the sabbath has, of late years, been greatly neglected, despised, and profaned; yet it is the richest source of every blessing we enjoy. We have abundant reasons to be thankful, that God still continues this forfeited favour to us, and inspires so many to support, esteem and improve his holy day. It is the grand palladium and bulwark of every thing we hold most precious and valuable. It behoves those who have experienced saving benefit from the sabbath and its sacred ordinances, to make it appear to the world, that they hold these religious privileges in the highest estimation; and are determined to transmit them, so far as lies in their power, to all future ages. God has deposited these invaluable and sacred privileges in their hands, and they stand responsible, if they suffer them to be wrested from them. If the world despise them, they may not despise them. If the world neglect them, they may not neglect them. If the world profane them, they may not profane them. If the world oppose them, they are



bound to protect and preserve them, for the benefit of themselves and all who are coming after them.

2. If the sabbath be such a great and extensive blessing to mankind; then the neglect, the abuse and profanation of this holy day must be exceedingly sinful and displeasing to God. To abuse the sabbath is virtually to abuse every other temporal and spiritual blessing, and to provoke God to inflict every temporal and spiritual evil upon individuals and whole nations. The profanation of the sabbath was the national sin of Israel, and the principal procuring cause of all their national calamities. God told them by the mouth of Moses, "ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary," and subjoined a promise of every publick and personal blessing. But at the same time he said, if they should not keep his sabbaths, but despise his statutes, he would make their land desolate, and cause it to *enjoy* its sabbaths, which they did not suffer it to *enjoy*. But neither the threatening, nor the inflicting of national judgments, were sufficient to cure them of their national sin of sabbath-breaking. For after they had returned from their long captivity in Babylon, they still persisted in profaning the sabbath, for which Nehemiah upbraids and condemns them. He says, "Then 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 sabbath*." They were weary of the sabbath, "saying, when will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the *sabbath*, that we may set forth wheat?" God employed various means to allure them to observe his sabbath. He appointed the best of teachers to enlighten their understandings; he built the most beautiful and magnificent temple to gratify their eyes; and appointed the best of musicians to please their ears; but nevertheless they were bent to forsaking his house, and to profaning his holy day. And the same spirit has reigned in the hearts of the great majority

who have been favoured with the sabbath and its sacred ordinances. This is now the crying sin of every christian nation. The sabbath was kept, and the sanctuary was revered, through this country, until about fifty years past. But since then, "how is the gold become dim ! how is the most fine gold changed !" The ways of Zion mourn ; the houses of God are forsaken ; and the sabbath despised, neglected, and openly profaned. This is a sin of the first magnitude, and the source of every other abounding iniquity. It takes off all civil and religious, publick and private restraints, and opens the door to every species of vice and immorality and irreligion. It has always been found, that those who profane the sabbath, are incurably vicious. They are out of the reach of the means of instruction and restraint. This ought to make sabbath-breakers tremble !

3. If the sabbath be designed and calculated to promote the temporal and spiritual interests of all mankind ; then it is extremely unwise and impolitick for civil rulers to do any thing, which tends to lead their subjects to disregard and abuse such a holy and benevolent institution. It is weakening their own power and influence, and strengthening the hands and hearts of the lawless and disobedient. This impolicy it is well known, civil rulers have practised. King Charles II. appointed certain recreations and amusements for the express purpose of leading his subjects to disregard and profane the sabbath, which spread moral corruption through the nation. The rulers of the most refined and polished nation in the world, a few years since, totally set aside the sabbath and all religious ordinances ; but they have had, and still have reasons to regret their folly and guilt. Any rulers will find that they injure themselves as well as their subjects, by banishing the fear of God from their minds. And nothing can have a greater tendency to banish the fear of God from their minds, than allowing them to profane the sabbath. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, made Israel to sin, by setting aside religious ordinances of divine

appointment, and substituting his own in the room of them; and his successors on the throne pursued the same sinful policy, until the ten tribes were completely corrupted and destroyed. When religious restraints are taken off from the people, civil restraints will become very weak and feeble. This was the case in Israel, and this always will be the case in any civil community. It is extremely unwise and impolitick, to say nothing more, in those who govern, to do any thing which tends to take away the fear of God from before the eyes of their subjects. And when divine ordinances are treated with neglect and contempt, the fear of God will no longer restrain the corruptions of the human heart, which will produce every natural and moral evil.

4. If the sabbath tends to promote the temporal as well as spiritual good of all mankind, then none can be good members of civil society, who neglect, abuse, and profane this divine and benevolent institution. Though they may possess many amiable qualities and talents, and though they may conduct with propriety in their general intercourse with their fellow men; yet their neglect and profanation of the sabbath will more than counterbalance all their other good deeds. Their example strikes at the root of all civil and religious obligations, and prepares the way to general ignorance, irreligion, profanity, disorder, and confusion. It will not, it cannot be denied, that the people in this country have greatly degenerated from the virtue and piety, the peace and harmony of our fathers; and to what has this been principally owing? Has it not been principally owing to the abuse and profanation of the sabbath? Has not religious declension constantly kept way with the neglect and profanation of the sabbath? Look into any place, at this day, and will you not find the people degenerate, in proportion to their neglect, contempt, and profanation of the sabbath? And if you find one people more regular, more virtuous, or more religious, than another, do you not find that they more generally and more constantly observe the sab-

bath and reverence God's sanctuary? Facts speak louder than words, and irresistibly prove that the profanation of the sabbath, is the primary and principal source of the great degeneracy of the present day. And to whose door must this evil be laid? It must be laid at the door of the sabbath-breakers. And can such persons be deemed good members of civil society?

5. If the sabbath be so greatly and universally beneficial to mankind in all respects; then it highly becomes all professors of religion, to make it appear that the sabbath is their delight, and the holy of the Lord, honourable, by strictly and constantly performing the peculiar duties of it. They have received saving benefit from the sabbath, and can appreciate its value and importance, by their own happy experience. There are *secret*, *private*, and *publick* duties peculiar to the sabbath; and which all professors of religion are under special and solemn obligations to perform. The *secret* duties are serious reflection, meditation and prayer. While they rest from the common cares and concerns of life, it becomes them seriously to meditate and reflect upon what is past, present and to come, in respect to their spiritual interests, and to pour out their hearts with peculiar freedom, solemnity, and enlargement before God. Serious meditation and reflection prepare the mind to take clear and extensive views of themselves, of God, and the great interests of his kingdom, which are objects they are too apt to overlook and forget amidst the busy scenes of life. The serious and sincere performance of these *secret* duties, can scarcely escape the notice of others, for they require time, which cannot be spent without being observed. Those who seriously and habitually discharge the duties of devotion, whether on the sabbath or other days, exhibit an example full of admonition and instruction.

Secret reflection, meditation, and prayer, prepare christians for the private duties of the sabbath, which are reading the bible, social prayer, and private instruction. Religious parents and heads of families are

bound to bring up all under their care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, both by precept and example. And the sabbath affords them a precious opportunity for discharging these great and difficult duties. To instruct, to counsel, to warn and admonish children and youth, in a proper manner, requires wisdom, prudence, zeal, and firmness. For children and youth are extremely impatient of religious instructions and restraints. But the sabbath is the best, and often the only proper opportunity, which parents and heads of families have, of discharging these necessary and indispensable duties, and if they duly discharge these duties on the sabbath, children and youth will not commonly need any other restraints. Well instructed and well governed children and youth rarely become notorious sabbath-breakers. These *secret* and *private* duties of professors stand intimately connected with the *publick* duties of the sabbath. The professors of religion solemnly engage to attend the public worship of God and his sacred ordinances constantly without neglect. It is no neglect, when sickness, and other extraordinary circumstances forbid their attendance, but when these things do not occur, no professors have any excuse for staying at home, on account of business, company, or indolence. While professors of religion seriously and constantly perform these appropriate duties of the sabbath, they have a most salutary influence upon the families in which they live, upon the church to which they belong, and upon the people where they reside. Such exemplary professors are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. These are the men, who hold civil and religious society together, suppress vice and immorality, and promote virtue and piety, and draw down the blessing of God upon the degenerate children of men.

6. Since the sabbath is such a great and extensive benefit to mankind, and the profanation of it is such a great and land-defiling iniquity, it concerns all seriously to inquire whether they have not been guilty of profaning it in some way or other. There are a great

many ways of profaning the sabbath, though some are more heinous in the sight of God than others. This question may be put, in the first place, to professing christians. Have you sanctified the sabbath in secret, in private, and in publick? Or have you neglected to improve the precious season, in secret reflection, meditation and prayer? Or have you neglected to instruct, warn, and admonish those under your care and committed to your trust? Or have you spent the sabbath in indolence, and the neglect of the worship and ordinances of God in his house? These are questions which you can understand, and answer for yourselves; and, perhaps, others too can answer for you; for every species of profaning the sabbath is generally more or less visible. Or if you have not personally profaned the sabbath, have you not allowed others to profane it? Or if you have not allowed others to profane it, have you not neglected to reprove them for it, and restrain them from it? There is great reason to fear, that some professors of religion, do more or less neglect the secret, private, and publick duties of the sabbath, and by their neglect, not only profane the sabbath themselves, but lead others to profane it. How much in this way is Christ wounded in the house of his friends? You will all allow, my hearers, that it is proper to put these questions to the professors of religion? And can it be improper to put these questions to others also? Though you have not professed to love God and obey his commands; yet you are his creatures, and bound to love and obey him with all your hearts. The sabbath was made for you, and has been given to you, though denied to the many millions in the Pagan world. You have been commanded to remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. You have had the duties of the sabbath often explained and inculcated. You have many of you, at least, seen it strictly and piously observed. All these things have united to increase your obligations to observe and improve the sabbath for the important purposes, for which it was appointed, and given you. But how have you treated

the sabbath in your childhood, in your youth, or in your manhood, or in your riper years, or in your private or public stations? Have you rested from your worldly cares and labours? Have you performed the secret duties of the day? Have you discharged the private duties of the day? Have you steadily and stately revered God's sanctuary, and given unto him the glory due to his name in publick? If you have, what mean the prancing of horses, the rattle of carriages, the passing and re-passing of travellers before and after publick worship? What mean the circles round the house of God, after publick services are ended? Can it be denied, that the sabbath is publickly and grossly profaned in this place? And can this profanation be justified by professors, or non-professors, by parents, or by children, by the young or by the old? If it cannot be justified, it ought to be condemned; and if it ought to be condemned, it ought to be restrained; and if it ought to be restrained, can it be a doubt who ought to restrain it? The duty of restraining it is too plain to be misunderstood, and too important to be neglected. I ask you, who ought to be reformers? Will you see the profanation of the sabbath, and not move a tongue or finger to restrain it? Can you bear to see the virtuous and steady habits of your virtuous and pious parents violated and treated with contempt? A word to the wise ought to be enough.

The duty of performing is as plain and imperious, as the duty of restraining. On whom does this duty lie? It lies upon those, who are conscious of profaning the sabbath, and opening the flood-gates of iniquity. Ask your own consciences, and they will tell you your first and immediate duty. If you are wise, you will be wise for yourselves; but if you scorn divine reproofs, you alone must bear it.

## SERMON II.

### PROPHECY.

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JOHN xii. 16.

*These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.*

THE day after Christ had visited Lazarus at Bethany, "much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that he was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm-trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, hosanna; blessed is the King of Israel, that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt." This triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem was predicted in the ninth chapter of Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass." These things, however, which were so plainly foretold by the prophet, "understood not his disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him." God had good reasons for foretelling this great and joyful event, though he knew that his prediction would not be understood until after it was fulfilled.

In treating upon the subject of prophecy, which now lies before us, I shall show,



I. That God does foretel, in his word, many events before they come to pass :

II. That he never fails to bring to pass the events he foretels ; And,

III. That he has good reasons for foretelling events before he brings them to pass.

1. I am to show, that God foretels, in his word, many events before they come to pass. This appears from the text, and from the whole history of his conduct, from the beginning to the end of the bible. Many of the great and important events, which have come to pass, we find foretold in the sacred scriptures. God foretold the incarnation of Christ, four thousand years before he became incarnate. He foretold the general flood, an hundred and twenty years before it swept mankind from the earth. He foretold the fate of Shem, Ham and Japhet, long before their dispersion at the building of Babel. He predicted that the Amorites should be destroyed, and that the seed of Abraham should possess their land, four hundred years before these events took place. He foretold the fortune of Joseph, and of all Jacob's family, long before either of them went down to Egypt. He foretold to Moses, that he should actually lead Israel out of Egypt, and that his people should worship him in that mountain where he was speaking to him, before the event came to pass. He foretold the character, conduct, and condition of Ishmael and his posterity, for ages to come. He foretold the dispersion of the Jews, his own people, hundreds of years before they were actually scattered all over the earth. He foretold the ruin of Ninevah and Babylon, sometime before they were destroyed. He foretold the rising and falling of the four great empires, before they rose and fell. He foretold the time and place of Christ's birth, the manner of his life, and the most remarkable circumstances of his death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, before he appeared in the flesh. He foretold a general apostacy from christianity. And last of all, he foretold the corruption and ruin of the seven churches

of Asia, the rise and fall of the Mahomedans, the rise and fall of the man of sin, the commencement and duration of the millenium, the last declension of religion, the second coming of Christ, the general judgment, and the final state of all holy and unholy creatures. This is a brief and general account of prophecy. A vast many more particular predictions might have been enumerated; but those which have been mentioned are sufficient to make it appear, that God has usually foretold great and interesting events, long before they have come to pass. He has raised up prophets from age to age, to reveal his purposes to his professing people, and through them to the rest of mankind, who are all deeply interested in their final accomplishment.

I now proceed to show,

II. That God always brings to pass the events which he foretels. This will appear, if we consider,

1. That we have no evidence that he has ever *failed* of bringing to pass the events which he has foretold. We know that he has brought about many things which we find were foretold in his word. Though the disciples of Christ did not know at first, that he had fulfilled his prediction concerning his riding in triumph into Jerusalem, yet they afterwards knew and declared, that they themselves had been personally instrumental of fulfilling it. We know, that God has already fulfilled his predictions concerning the old world, concerning the seed of Abraham, concerning the Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires, concerning the coming of Christ, concerning the dispersion of the Jews, and concerning the rise and corrupting influence of the man of sin. The fulfilment of these predictions affords a strong presumptive evidence, that he has never yet failed, and never will fail, of bringing to pass all the events he has foretold. His conduct has hitherto confirmed the veracity of his predictions, and given us sufficient evidence to believe, that his faithfulness is immutable and infallible.

2. God has never foretold any events but such as he was willing to bring to pass. He never was and

never could be under any compulsion to foretel any events whatever. We cannot conceive any cause, which should constrain him to foretel any events, which he did not choose should exist. And we cannot conceive, that he should foretel even such events as he designed should take place, unless he chose to foretel them. We must conclude, therefore, that all the events which he has foretold, were such as he chose should exist, and such as he chose to foretel. This amounts to a high degree of certainty, that he always does and will bring all things to pass, that he has foretold. If he had been compelled to foretel events, which he did not choose should exist, and which he did not choose to foretel, we could have no ground to believe, that he always does and always will, bring about all the events he has foretold. But since he chose that all the events he has foretold should exist, and since he chose to foretel them, we may be assured that he will punctually and faithfully fulfil every prediction in his word, according to its strict and proper meaning. What God once chooses should exist, he always chooses should exist, and what he once chooses should exist, he is always willing should exist. He is always in one mind, and none can turn him. He never did, and never will alter any of his determinations. He has never foretold any event but what he has determined to bring to pass; and therefore we may be certain that he fulfils, from time to time, every event which he has foretold in his word.

3. God has foretold nothing but what his own glory requires him to fulfil. As he has foreordained nothing but what he intends shall promote his own glory, so he has foretold nothing but what his own glory requires him to bring to pass. He regards his own glory more than any of his creatures regard their interests. We know, that they sometimes regard and pursue what they suppose to be their own interests with great, constant, and persevering attention, diligence, activity and zeal. But the attention, diligence, activity, and zeal of the Lord of Hosts, in promoting his own glory, is

infinitely greater. And since God's heart is bound up in his own glory, he will infallibly pursue that course of conduct in his providence, which he views as best suited to promote it. His predictions tell us what his heart is fixed upon, and when we know what his heart is fixed upon, we have no ground to doubt, that he will pursue the objects of his desires to the utmost of his power. Poor, weak, dependent creatures are given to change, and grow weary and faint, and totally discouraged in their most ardent and sanguine pursuits. But God is never faint, or weary, or discouraged in his pursuits, or disposed to change the objects of his pursuit, which affords a very strong and weighty evidence, that he will infallibly bring about the events, which he has decreed and foretold. Besides,

4. God has foretold nothing but what he is able to bring to pass. Job said unto God, "I know that thou canst do every thing." This is strictly true. God can do every thing that power can do, or that does not involve a contradiction. There is none that can stay his hand, or effectually resist his operations in the kingdoms of nature, providence and grace. He can overturn, overturn, and overturn all difficulties, impediments, or obstacles, that stand in the way of his designs and operations. If the power of men resist his designs, he can break their power. If the hearts of men resist his designs, he can change their hearts. If kings or kingdoms presume to oppose him, he can break them, as a potter's vessel is broken. If all nations were to unite their counsels and exertions against God's purposes and predictions, they would be of no avail, to prevent him from bringing about the events, which he has designed and predicted to bring about. This God knew, when he foretold future events, and this we know after he has foretold them. We have, therefore, the highest and strongest evidence, that can be derived from the conduct, the power, and glory of God, that he will never fail to fulfil his predictions, or to bring to pass every event, which he has predicted in his word.

It now remains to show,

III. That God has good reasons for foretelling events before they come to pass. God was under no obligations to mankind to foretel any future events. Though he had foreordained all future events, and consequently foresaw all future events; yet he was under no obligations to inform mankind what events he foresaw and determined to bring about. He knew, indeed, the natural curiosity and propensity of mankind to look into futurity, and, if possible, to discover the good, or evil which may await them in time to come. But he never would have adopted the method of predicting future events, merely to gratify their vain and sinful desires. There is, therefore, just ground to inquire what were the real and good reasons of his foretelling future events in his word. We find that it has been his usual way, from age to age, to raise up holy men and inspire them to foretel great and important events, which he had determined to bring to pass. The question now is, why did he adopt this mode of conduct towards mankind? There may be two very good reasons for his foretelling future events in his word:

1. To convince mankind, that he is concerned in bringing about all the events which he has foretold. They are extremely apt to overlook the hand of God in bringing about events in the course of his providence. They will hardly believe that his hand is concerned in bringing to pass any event, unless it appears extraordinary, supernatural, or miraculous. Of course, they will not see and acknowledge his hand, even in fulfilling his predictions, until after they are fulfilled. This was the case, with respect to the body of the Jewish nation, as well as in respect to the disciples of Christ. The Jews did not see nor acknowledge the divine power and agency, in bringing about the incarnation, crucifixion, and ascension of Christ, while God was invisibly and irresistibly producing these great and important events, which he had foretold in his word. Though God had minutely described the person, the conduct, the preaching, and sufferings of Christ; yet the

Jews did not discover these things, nor the hand of God in bringing them to pass. And even the disciples of Christ did not know that God influenced them to carry him in triumph to Jerusalem, until he had come and left the world. The peculiar people of God had been for ages before equally stupid and blind to the hand of God, in fulfilling prediction after prediction concerning Christ. God upbraids them of this, and assigns it as a reason, why he foretold events before he brought them to pass. "Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah; which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness. For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; the Lord of hosts is his name. I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I *shewed* them; I did them suddenly, and *they came to pass*. *Because* I knew that thou art *obstinate*, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; *before it came to pass I shewed* it thee: lest thou shouldest say, *Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image hath commanded them.*" All mankind are naturally like the Jews, in overlooking, and disbelieving the hand of God in bringing to pass those things which he has foretold in his word. Nothing, therefore, is better calculated to convince mankind of the *universality* of divine providence, than God's foretelling future events. For when he has fulfilled his predictions, and actually brought about the events he has predicted, he has set his *hand and seal* to these events, and marked them as the production of his own hand. And as his hand and seal will sooner or later be seen, it will be out of the power of man to *disbelieve*, that he brought about the events which bear his plain and legible signature. As this signature is actually set upon all events which have been foretold; so the predictions of those events will sooner or later convince all mankind, that God

was concerned in causing those events to take place. And this is one very important reason, why God has foretold so many future events in his word.

2. God's foretelling and bringing to pass some events, demonstrates the truth of his bringing all other events to pass, which he has not predicted. For the events which he has predicted stand inseparably connected with all the other events which he has not predicted. God's predicting the death and crucifixion of Christ, four thousand years before Christ came, suffered, and died, and bringing them to pass stood connected with all other events, which took place in every part of the world, during that period. If God had not governed all events from Adam to Christ, he could not have brought about the death of Christ. He must have brought into being all the men that existed from Adam to Christ, and governed all their thoughts, words, and actions, in order to prepare the way for the existence of Judas, Pontius Pilate, and of all others who were concerned in his crucifixion. And since God has foretold a multitude of events, which reach from the crucifixion of Christ to the end of the world, he has set his *hand and seal* to all those events, which will demonstrate that he was concerned in bringing them to pass, after they have actually taken place. And since all other events from the crucifixion of Christ to the end of the world, stand inseparably connected with the events foretold; the final accomplishment of all divine predictions must necessarily demonstrate, that God had always governed all events, without a single exception, from the beginning to the end of the world. The glory of God and the good of the universe depend upon its being universally known, that *his heart and hand* are concerned in every event that takes place. It appears, therefore, that God could not have proposed a nobler, or more important end, in foretelling future events, than to make all his intelligent creatures *believe*, that he exerts his power and influence in governing all things. This design of prophecy coincides with God's ultimate end in creation, and directly serves to promote it. It de-

monstrates, that of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: that he is the Alpha and Omega, or the great centre to which all things past, present, and to come ultimately tend.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from the design of prophecy, that the predictions, which God has already recorded in his word, are the last he will ever give. He continued to foretel future events from Adam to Moses, from Moses to Christ, from Christ to the Apostle John. Then he directed him to close the cannon of scripture, and denounce a curse upon a man, who should presume to add any thing to, or take any thing from his written word. This looks like putting a final period to prophecy from that time to the end of the world. And we have reason to think so, because the series of predictions in the book of Revelations respects the most important events from the days of John to the final consummation of all things; by which God has infallibly *marked* all future events, as the production of his own hand. When the events which he has predicted, are actually brought to pass, it will necessarily appear that he has constantly governed the world. There never has been, and there never will be any occasion for new prophecies since the death of John. All who have pretended to prophecy since that time, have been impostors, who were deceived themselves or meant to deceive others. There have been not a few such persons, and may be again; but they are to be disbelieved and treated according to the directions of the more sure word of prophecy.

2. It appears from the design of prophecies, that they may answer their end, though they are not understood *before* they are fulfilled. Many, if not most of the divine predictions in the bible, are delivered in such dark, figurative language, as is not very easy to understand. This is the case in respect to common people, and even in respect to the most ingenious, stu-



dious, and learned divines. Expositors have found more difficulty, and made more mistakes, in their comments on the prophetic parts of scripture, than on any other parts of it. This has led some to think lightly of prophecies in general, and to despise all attempts to explain them. Voltaire says, Sir Isaac Newton wrote upon prophecies to console mankind for his superiority over them in other respects. But though the general obscurity of prophecies renders them difficult to explain and understand, either *before* they are fulfilled, or *while* they are *fulfilling*, or for some time *after*; yet they may answer the important purpose, which God designed to answer by them. Though the vision be for an appointed time, yet at the end it will speak, and answer the purpose for which it is given. Whether a prediction be understood *before* it is fulfilled, or while it is *fulfilling*, or even *a long time after*, it will finally mark the event with a divine signature, and demonstrate that God was concerned in bringing it to pass. There is reason to think, that there are many predictions in the bible which have been punctually fulfilled long ago, and which have never been fully understood or properly explained. But they will be understood some time or other, and then answer the purpose for which they were given. Great pains have been taken to understand, and explain the predictions concerning the return of the Jews to their native land, the overthrow of the Mahomedan imposture, the nature, commencement, and duration of the millenium. But it is a question whether any body has understood and properly explained these important predictions respecting these important future events. These predictions, however, will be fulfilled, and understood at the very time God intended, and consequently will fully answer his original purpose.

3. It appears from the design of prophecies, that their being disbelieved, does not in the least destroy their evidence or importance. They are designed to make it appear that God is concerned in bringing about all predicted and unpredicted events. Their being dis-

believed by some, or by many, before they are fulfilled, or while they are fulfilling, or long after they are fulfilled, does not prevent their being fulfilled, and being understood, just as God designed they should be, and consequently does not destroy or diminish their usefulness. Though thousands now disbelieve the predictions concerning the overthrow of popery, paganism, and all false religions, their disbelief may promote, rather than retard the accomplishment of these predictions. We may ask them the same pertinent question which Paul asked the Jews. "What if some did not believe, shall their unbelief make the faith of God of none effect?" What if the Jews disbelieve the predictions concerning them, or what if the Mahomedans disbelieve the predictions concerning them, or what if the Papists disbelieve the predictions concerning them, their disbelief will not expunge these predictions from the bible, nor hinder God from fulfilling them. So that the unbelief of Jews, Mahomedans, and Papists, ought not to destroy or weaken our faith in the divine predictions concerning them. The disbelief of divine predictions has not prevented their fulfilment in time past; and it will not prevent the fulfilment of those predictions which remain hitherto unfulfilled. The Jews' disbelief of Christ's first coming, did not prevent his coming at the appointed time; and their present disbelief of his second coming will not prevent his second appearance to judge the world. God is constantly preparing the way as fast as possible, by one event after another for the great day of consummation, when all preceding predictions will be fully accomplished and fully known. How many events must take place, and how many years roll away before the Jews shall be brought in, all false religions destroyed, the millenium commence and terminate, and the final judgment sit and continue, we know not. These are circumstances not predicted; but the events predicted shall certainly come to pass.

4. It appears from the design of prophecy, that the fulfilment of every divine prediction is an infallible

and increasing evidence of the truth and divinity of the bible, which contains the prophecies, which have been fulfilled. God is the only being in the universe, who is able to foresee and foretel future events. He expressly claims this prerogative. He says, "I am God, and there is none else: I am God, and there is none like me, *declaring* the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that *are not yet done*, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." God has been pleased to foretel many future events, and recorded his predictions in his word, and it is only to open the bible and read his predictions; and then compare them with the relation which sacred and profane historians have given of events, in order to determine whether any of those predictions have been fulfilled; and if we find they have been fulfilled, we discover an infallible evidence of the divine inspiration of the scriptures. None who have read the bible carefully and intelligently can deny, that some of the most important predictions in it have been fulfilled. Did God foretel the coming, life, and death of Christ? These events have taken place. Did God foretel the infidelity and dispersion of the Jews? These events have come to pass. Did God foretel the spread of the gospel, the destruction of the seven churches of Asia, the rise of Popish and Mahomedan impostures and delusions, and the savage state and character of the descendants of Ham and Ishmael. These events have actually and visibly taken place. These events have been brought about in succession, and one has been evidently instrumental of another, and the accomplishment of one prediction has been a corroborating evidence of the truth of another. And this chain of evidence in favour of divine Revelation, is continually lengthening, and becoming more and more forcible and irresistible. There is but one kind of evidence more infallible and conclusive in support of the inspiration of the scriptures, and that is, the evidence of miracles, which were wrought as credentials to the inspired writers. Miracles are a direct testimony of God

himself, that he inspired the prophets and apostles to write his predictions of future events. Miracles and predictions are the two fundamental supports of divine revelation. Were all other sources of evidence removed, these are alone sufficient to justify all who read the bible to believe that it came from God, and could not come from any other being in the universe.

5. It appears from what has been said, that the *criminality of unbelief*, has been continually increasing from Adam to this day. Though Adam was a believer in divine revelation; yet it seems that Cain was not. Though the patriarchs were believers; yet the great mass of mankind were unbelievers from Cain to Abraham. Though some of the seed of Abraham were believers till the coming of Christ, yet the rest of the world, and most of Abraham's descendants were unbelievers. Though there have been many individuals since Christ's day, who have been believers; yet the great majority of mankind still remain unbelievers. And the present unbelievers are of all others, the most inexcusable and criminal for their speculative, and experimental unbelief. For they are acquainted with the predictions recorded in the bible, many of which have been signally fulfilled; and are now visibly fulfilling. A full blaze of light has been shining in their eyes all their days, which they have obstinately resisted. And there is nothing that aggravates so fast and so much as resisting the light of truth. Our Saviour says, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." He said of the Jews, "If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen, and hated both me, and my father." And again he said, "Wo unto thee Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum: for if the mighty works which have been done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth

and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon and Sodom, at the day of judgment, than for you." Infidelity in Europe and America, is, of all others, the most aggravated sin, and will draw after it, the most aggravated condemnation. The bare knowledge of the bible, whether it be obtained by preaching, or by reading, will either save the believer, or condemn and destroy the unbeliever. All under the gospel are in the most favourable, and yet the most dangerous circumstances. They are shut up to the faith, and must either believe and be saved, or disbelieve and be damned. And how long God will allow them to live in this interesting state of trial, they know not. Their duty is plain, urgent, and infinitely important.

6. It appears from the nature and design of prophecy, that God will finally have the glory of all his works. For by his predictions and the accomplishment of them, it will appear that his heart and hand had been concerned in bringing about not only all the events that had been predicted, but all other events, which were inseparably connected with *predicted* events. It will finally appear, that God had as constantly and universally governed all events in the *moral* world, as in the *natural* world. So that all the holiness and happiness, which had been produced by the creation, the government, and redemption of the world, must be primarily and supremely ascribed to the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God. Besides, the accomplishment of divine predictions will clearly discover not only the *heart* and *hand* of God in all events, but the heart and hand of every man, and of every intelligent creature, in what they had done, as instruments of fulfilling divine predictions. After Christ was glorified, his disciples remembered the prophecy that had been fulfilled, and their own free and voluntary conduct in fulfilling it. And this will be the *result* of all divine predictions after they are accomplished. When all the predictions contained in the bible shall have been fulfilled, they will show to the whole intelligent universe

what concern God had, and what concern his creatures had in bringing about all the holiness and happiness of heaven. And it is of infinite importance, that the character and conduct of man and of all other intelligent beings, should be fully unfolded. For both the conduct of God and of his creatures will finally contribute to the supreme glory of God. It was no diminution of Solomon's glory, that he built the temple, by the instrumentality of his own servants. And so it will be no diminution of the glory of God, that he had employed the agency of his creatures, to accomplish his wise and holy designs. Hence it follows, that God will, by the accomplishment of his predictions, promote his own glory, and the good of the universe, to the highest degree.

7. It appears from the design of prophecy, that it will throw the weight of the whole intelligent universe in favour of the friends, and in opposition to the enemies of God. Every event which ever has taken place, or ever will take place, will promote the happiness of the righteous, and the final misery of the unrighteous. Every person in the world stands inseparably connected with all holy and unholy beings, and must feel the weight of their influence, in their favour, or against them. Individuals have always felt the influence of publick favours, and publick evils, in this world, and this will be the case in the world to come. The final state of the holy, will sensibly and eternally affect the state of the unholy, and the final state of the unholy, will eternally affect the state of the holy. This being true, it is the most serious and important question that every person can put to himself, whether he is holy, or unholy. When all God's predictions are fulfilled, it will fix all mankind in an unchangeable state of holiness and happiness, or in an unchangeable state of unholiness, unhappiness and misery. Divine predictions now hang over the world, containing vials of mercy, and vials of wrath; and how soon their contents will be poured upon the world, we know not; but when they are, we shall feel them either in time or eternity.

## SERMON III.

### HERESIES.

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#### I. CORINTHIANS xi. 19.

*For there must be also heresies among you, that they who are approved may be made manifest among you.*

THOUGH the church of Corinth came behind no other church in respect to the variety and richness of spiritual gifts ; yet they were unhappily divided in their religious sentiments, which produced unchristian animosities and contentions, which the apostle entreats them to lay aside. “ Now, I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you ; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.” Among other erroneous opinions and practices, he mentions, in the chapter that contains the text, their unworthy views and unchristian conduct respecting the sacrament of the Lord’s supper. He says, “ Now in this, that I declare unto you, I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear there be divisions among you : and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.” Here the apostle first mentions divisions, and then also *heresies* ; which plainly implies, that heresies are distinct and different from divisions. Though divisions in a church may flow from heresies ; yet they may flow from other causes. Both divisions and heresies have been in the christian church from the begin-

ning, and the text intimates, that they must still be in the church. This then is the truth which now lies before us :

That it is necessary, that there should be heresies in the church of Christ. I shall,

I. Explain heresies ;

II. Show that they have been hitherto in the church of Christ ;

III. Show in what sense it is necessary that they should be in the church of Christ ; and,

IV. Show why they are necessary in the christian church.

I. Let us consider what heresy is. There are but two different opinions upon this subject. One is, that it means a schism in a church, or a bitter contention, which brings about an unhappy and unchristian separation. But the apostle in the text and in the verse before it, makes a distinction between divisions or separations, and *heresies*. After mentioning divisions, he adds, "There must be also *heresies*." By heresies, all denominations of christians mean such great errors and false doctrines, as they consider contrary to, and subversive of what they call the essential or fundamental doctrines of the gospel. The apostle, in his epistle to Titus, represents an heretick as a man who maintains and propagates corrupt and dangerous doctrines, and not as one, who is only contentious, and causes animosities and disputes in a church. "A man that is an heretick, after the first and second admonition, reject ; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." An heretick avows his false and corrupt sentiments, so that the church have no occasion to prove that he is an heretick, but only to censure him for his heresy, he having condemned himself, by openly acknowledging and propagating his errors. The apostle gives the same description of hereticks in his epistle to the church of Galatia. "I marvel, that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel : which is not another : but there be some



that trouble you, and *would pervert the gospel of Christ*. But though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." That is, let him be anathematized or excommunicated for his heresy. As there are various essential and fundamental errors which would *pervert* the gospel of Christ; so all these errors are so many *heresies* in a scripture sense. Though every error is not a heresy; yet every error which subverts the gospel is a heresy. Heresy essentially consists in any religious errors, which are inconsistent with, and subversive of any of the first principles of the oracles of God; and hereticks are those who openly avow and propagate such false and dangerous doctrines. I proceed to show,

II. That heresies have been in the christian church from the beginning. Though the church of Christ was planted by his apostles, who admitted none into it but those who professed to believe and love the gospel sincerely; yet very soon error and heresy made their appearance among the professors of christianity. Immediately after the gospel was preached by Philip in Samaria, Simon the sorcerer professed to believe and embrace it; but he soon became an open enemy to christianity, and propagated the grossest heresies. Paul in his epistle to the Romans intimates, that there were hereticks in that church, and warns them to guard against their heretical opinions. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offences, *contrary to the doctrines which ye have learned*; and *avoid* them. For they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches, *deceive* the hearts of the simple." These persons were deceivers, which is the proper character of hereticks, who are actuated by the spirit of the great deceiver. Our text assures us, that there were heresies in the church of Corinth. Paul admonishes the church of Ephesus "not to be carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the *sleight of men*, and *cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*."

This implies, that there were hereticks, who propagated heresies among the Ephesian church, and used every artifice to deceive and destroy. To the Philipians the apostle says, “To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of *dogs*, beware of *evil workers*.” These were false teachers and dangerous hereticks. The apostle says to the Colossians, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; *rooted* and *built up* in him and *established* in the *faith*, as ye have been taught. Beware lest any man *spoil* you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of man, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” This was an admonition against hereticks and heresy, to which the Colossians were exposed. The apostle charges Timothy, “to charge some that they preach no other doctrine, than he had preached.” And he assures him, that “the spirit speaketh expressly, that *in the latter times* some shall *depart from the faith*, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron.” He concludes his epistle by saying, “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, *avoiding* profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred *concerning the faith*.” In his second epistle to Timothy he says, “Shun profane babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenedus and Philetus; who, concerning the *truth* have *erred*, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.” The apostle Peter says, “There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable *heresies*; even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” And the apostle John mentions various dangerous and destructive delusions and heresies in the seven churches of Asia in his day. If we now consult ecclesiastical history, from the apostolick times

to the present, we shall find, that the christian church has never been free from gross delusions and destructive heresies. Christ predicted, that there would always be tares among the wheat to the end of the world. This prediction has been constantly fulfilling, and will be finally and completely fulfilled. There never has been, and never will be a pure church in this world. There must be heresies in it. This leads us to show,

III. In what sense, it is necessary, that heresies should be in the church. There never has been, and there never can be any *natural* necessity of heresy in the christian church. Those who enjoy the gospel may always *know*, and *love* and *profess* the truth. They are at perfect liberty to embrace the truth, or to embrace error. They are never under any natural necessity of falling into any kind of heresy. Heresy is always the fruit of an evil heart of unbelief. If the christian church had always followed the instructions and admonitions of Christ and the apostles, they never would have fallen into any essential errors or heresies, but would have remained pure and uncorrupt to this day. And if christians from this day forward would only regulate their sentiments by the rules of the gospel, they would never imbibe any fatal heresies to the end of the world. There is, therefore, only a *moral* necessity of the continuance of heresy; a necessity arising from the moral corruption of the human heart. As long as there are any among professing christians, who are under the dominion of a totally corrupt heart, they will love error better than truth, and be disposed to imbibe fatal errors and heresies. And as we have good reasons to expect that there will be some such persons in the church, who will remain totally depraved; so we may believe, that there will be in time to come, as in time past, heresies in the christian church. Moral corruption will create a moral necessity of the perpetual continuance of heresy, as long as the world stands. It still remains to show,

IV. Why there is a moral necessity of heresies continuing in the christian church to the end of time; or

why God chooses, all things considered, that heresies should continue to exist. God does not love, but hates heresies in themselves considered. He forbids and condemns men for embracing them. But yet he chooses, all things considered, that they should exist. This Christ taught by the parable of the tares. The householder would not allow his servants to go and gather up the tares; "but said, nay, lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest." God has some wise and important purposes to answer, by always continuing heresies in the church. This is intimated in the text. "For there must be also heresies among you, that they who are approved may be made manifest among you." Though we do not know all the good purposes which God intends to answer by the continuance of heresies in the church; yet some of the most plain and obvious ones, it may be proper to mention. And,

1. One important purpose he means to answer by the means of heresies, is to distinguish truth from error. The leading and essential truths of the gospel have been revealed and taught ever since the first apostacy. The gospel was summarily preached to Adam, in the promise, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. The gospel was preached to the patriarchs, who all lived and died in the faith of it. The gospel was preached to Abraham and to all his seed under the old testament. And it has been still more fully and plainly preached by Christ and his apostles and their successors from his day to this time. The great and essential truths of the gospel have been a *stream of light*, which, like the rising sun has been continually shining brighter and brighter, unto the perfect day: while at the same time, fatal errors, delusions, and heresies have been increasing in number and magnitude, and involving all persons and all nations destitute of the gospel, in worse than Egyptian darkness. God made man upright, but they

have sought out many inventions. The great mass of mankind have, for near six thousand years, been employing all their ingenuity and learning in devising and propagating new and false schemes of religion, by which they have involved the world in general, in the grossest errors and moral darkness. The light of divine truth has always shone in the midst of the darkness of human error. And we all know, that darkness renders light more visible, and light renders darkness more visible. Just so, the darkness of error renders the light of truth more visible, and the light of truth renders the darkness of error more visible. The world that lies in moral darkness do not know that they lie in moral darkness, until the light of the glorious gospel shines among them. And those who have always enjoyed the light of the gospel, would not know, that the rest of the world are involved in gross and fatal moral darkness, did not the light of the gospel discover their deluded and perishing condition. Here then we see one important reason, why God has not caused the gospel to spread more extensively in the world, from the beginning to this day, and has left almost all nations to walk in their own way, and plunge themselves deeper and deeper in destructive errors and delusions. He has meant to set truth and error in *contrast*, and make them serve to illustrate each other. And this *contrast* has been producing this effect from age to age, and will continue to produce it to the end of time. Truth and error under the old testament dispensation illustrated each other; and truth and error under the new testament illustrate each other. And orthodoxy in the church illustrates heterodoxy in the church, and heterodoxy in the church illustrates orthodoxy in the church. The errors in the heathen world illustrate the truths believed and professed in the christian world. The errors in the Romish church illustrate the truths believed and professed in the Protestant church. And the errors in an Episcopal, Congregational, Presbyterian, or in any

other particular church, illustrate the truths believed and professed in that particular church. Sabellianism, Arianism, Socinianism, and Unitarianism, all illustrate the truth of Trinitarianism. Arminianism illustrates the truth of Calvinism. Every error that opposes any essential doctrine of the gospel, illustrates that essential doctrine of the gospel which it opposes. It is now easy to see, why God should choose, that errors, delusions, and heresies should always be not only in the world, but in the church. He always has employed, and will continue to employ them, as means to distinguish truth from error, and to cause error to appear more criminal and dangerous, but truth more amiable and important.

2. God chooses that there should be heresies in the church that true believers may be distinguished from false professors. This the apostle gives as a reason why there must be heresies in the church. "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are *approved may be made manifest among you.*" We know, that there were true and false professors in the church of Corinth. The true professors believed, and loved and professed the great and fundamental doctrines of the gospel, which Paul preached and inculcated; but the false professors, who were carnal, and had itching ears, followed false teachers, and heartily embraced and propagated gross and fatal errors. The apostle asks in the 15th chapter of this epistle, "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say *some among you*, that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God, that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also who are fallen asleep in

Christ are *perished*." Such a great and fatal *heresy*, as the denial of the resurrection of the dead, had sprung up in the great and flourishing church of Corinth, which Paul had planted and Apollos had watered. And it was necessary, that this heresy should be in this church, *that those* who were *approved* might be made manifest among them. It was certainly calculated to produce this good effect. There can be no doubt but that the sincere and approved professors disbelieved and rejected this heresy, while the insincere believed and propagated it to their own ruin, and the ruin of others. Heresy has always had the same tendency to distinguish true believers from false professors. It had this effect in the Jewish church. In the days of Rehoboam, it distinguished the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, from the ten tribes of Israel, who embraced the fatal errors of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. It had this effect till the coming of Christ, when it distinguished the Scribes and Pharisees from the few Israelites indeed. It had this effect in all the primitive churches, and distinguished true believers from Sabellians, Arians, Pelagians, and other hereticks. Heresy still serves to distinguish true believers from false professors in the christian church in every part of the world. God has chosen, that the present flood of errors, delusions and heresies should spread and prevail in the heathen and christian world, that true churches might be made manifest, and the true professors in them should be distinguished from false professors, who imbibe and propagate great and fatal heresies. The heterodox every where, are a foil to the orthodox, and exhibit their characters in a beautiful and amiable light. Unitarians are a foil to Trinitarians, and Arminians are a foil to Calvinists. They are now distinguishing true professors from the false professors, who are following the great and dangerous errors that they are so zealously propagating. And if they succeed in their proselyting scheme, there will soon be a wide and visible distinction between heterodox and orthodox churches in this land, and as visible a distinction

between true and false professors. God is evidently making manifest those whom he *approves*, and those whom he *disapproves*, by the prevailing errors and heresies of the day. Professors of religion in all our churches are rapidly taking sides with the orthodox and heterodox, by which they will necessarily, though not, perhaps, *intentionally*, discover the sincerity and insincerity of their hearts; which is a desirable discovery. I must further observe,

3. That God chooses, that errors, delusions, and heresies should be in the world and in the christian church, that mankind may have a fair opportunity of choosing the way to life, or the way to death. Truth is the way to life, and error is the way to death. It is through the medium of truth, that God prepares men for salvation, and it is through the medium of error, that he prepares men for destruction. Accordingly, it has always been his method to exhibit both truth and error before their minds, and give them opportunity of choosing the one, or the other, that they may be saved, or that they may be damned. He gave a fair opportunity to the first generations of mankind, to hear and embrace the preaching of Enoch, or to follow their own delusions. He gave a fair opportunity to the Israelites, when they first entered into Canaan, to embrace the laws of Moses, or to embrace the fatal errors of the ignorant and benighted heathens. Hear the proposal that Joshua made to them. "Now, therefore, fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the *gods* which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, *choose ye* this day whom ye will serve, whether the *gods* which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose lands ye dwell, but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord." The same opportunity of choosing truth or error; life or death God has given to all, to whom he has sent the gospel. And all under the light of the gospel, have now a fair op-



portunity to embrace truth, or error; that is, to believe and love the great and essential doctrines of the gospel, or believe and love destructive delusions and fatal heresies. Those who believe and cordially embrace the gospel, believe and love the great truths, which make them wise unto salvation. But to those who disbelieve and reject the great and essential doctrines of the gospel, God sends a strong delusion, that they may believe a lie, that they may be damned. For this great, glorious, and awful purpose of saving and destroying the souls of men, God chooses, that there should be fatal errors and heresies in the world and in the church. God compels no man to embrace truth, and no man to embrace error. He gives every one opportunity to embrace the one, or the other. This places mankind in this erroneous world, in a most important and critical situation. They have life and death set before them, and they are commanded to choose life, and the way that leads to it. If it be important, that truth and error should be distinguished; or that true believers should be distinguished from false professors; or that mankind should have a fair opportunity of choosing the way of life, rather than the way of death; then God has great and good reasons, for choosing that there should be strong delusions and fatal heresies in the church and in the world from age to age.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If heresies consist in those errors which are opposite to, and subversive of the great and essential doctrines of the gospel; then we have reason to think, that they have had a long and extensive spread in the world. Ever since the gospel was first preached to mankind, the great majority of the human race, who have had an opportunity to hear the great and essential truths contained in it, have been disposed to reject it, and have sought out many other ways of salvation. Though the seed of Abraham were numerous as

the stars of heaven; yet amidst the greatest light they enjoyed, they were perpetually apostatizing from God, and falling into the grossest idolatries and delusions of the heathen nations. Though Christ has afforded the best means of instruction and edification to his churches; yet there has always been great and destructive heresies among them. Indeed, there have been as great errors and delusions among professed christians, as among heathens. And considering the religious privileges and advantages, which nominal christians have enjoyed, they have discovered a greater love to error, and a greater stupidity in embracing gross and fatal heresies, than the most ignorant and stupid heathens have done. The god of this world has reigned universally and triumphantly among all the heathen nations, and seduced them into the most absurd and fatal heresies and delusions. And he has been very successful in blinding the minds and corrupting the hearts of nominal christians, and leading them to reject the plainest and most important truths of the gospel. Heresy, which consists in fundamental and fatal errors, has done more, than any other secondary cause whatever to destroy the souls of men. Heresy has blinded the minds of more than half mankind, respecting the being, perfections, designs, and government of God. Heresy has blinded the minds of the great majority of those, who have lived under the gospel, respecting their own sinful and perishing condition, and the way of salvation through the atonement of Christ, and the special operations of the holy spirit. The way of the world is still as darkness, they know not at what they stumble. They are stupidly and insensibly pursuing the path that leads to darkness, disappointment, and everlasting despair. Though light shines, yet it shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehends it not. For wise and holy reasons, God has chosen that the great deceiver should lead all the heathen world into idolatry, and a great part of the christian world into heresy, and cause

darkness to cover the earth, and thick darkness the people.

2. It appears from the nature and tendency of heresy, that a church composed of real christians, ought to censure and reject any of their members who embrace it. Many suppose, that a church have no right to censure and excommunicate professors of religion for mere heresy. They say, that every one has the right of private judgment, and does not stand amenable for any religious sentiments, which he chooses to adopt, to any human tribunal. They say, that no church can distinguish error from truth, and consequently cannot determine whether any man is an heretic, or not. But these are groundless objections against censuring and condemning men for heresy. Heresy has been explained to consist in essential errors. And it is as easy to determine what essential errors are, as to determine what essential truths are. Any error is essential error, that opposes or denies an essential truth. So that there may be as many essential errors as there are essential doctrines of the gospel. And if a christian church can determine what are essential doctrines of the gospel, then they can determine what heresy is, which consists in the denial of the essential doctrines of the gospel. And though every member of a church has the right of private judgment, yet he has no right to judge wrong, and embrace errors, which would pervert and destroy the gospel. Heresy is as plain and sure an index of a man's character, as immorality. As immorality flows from a corrupt heart, so does heresy. Let a catalogue of essential truths be presented to one member of a church, and a catalogue of essential errors be presented to another member of the church. And if the first embraces the catalogue of truths presented to him; and the second embraces the catalogue of errors, presented to him; the church would then have as just ground to judge, that he who embraced the catalogue of errors was an enemy to Christ and the gospel; as to judge that he who embraced the catalogue of truths

was a friend to Christ and the gospel. It is with the heart, that a man believes and loves the gospel; and it is with the heart, that a man disbelieves and rejects the gospel. He that professes to believe and love the essential doctrines of the gospel, is a visible christian; and he that professes to disbelieve and hate the essential doctrines of the gospel is a visible heretick; and such a visible heretick is a visible enemy to all righteousness, whom the church ought to censure, and exclude from their christian fellowship and communion. Hence says the apostle, "an heretick after the first and second admonition reject." Not only the *nature*, but the *tendency* of heresy shows that hereticks ought to be shut out of a christian church. For they are not only unworthy, but corrupt members, who are disposed to corrupt and destroy the church. And in reference to such persons the apostle says, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." A church cannot discharge their duty to Christ, nor to themselves, nor to hereticks, unless they exclude them from their christian communion and fellowship.

3. If it be one design of God in continuing heresies, to distinguish real christians from false and erroneous professors; then there is a palpable impropriety and absurdity, in attempting to unite those together in christian harmony and communion, who differ essentially in their religious sentiments. Many, at this day, are zealously engaged to bring about a coalition, harmony, and connection among almost all, who profess the christian name, though they widely differ in their opinions respecting the great and important doctrines of the gospel. It is, indeed, much to be desired, that all denominations of christians should be brought to believe, and love, and profess the first principles of the oracles of God. But it is not to be desired, that they should visibly unite, while they are visibly disunited upon the most important religious subjects. Such a union would imply something more than mutual charity and condescension to each other; it would imply a mutual combination in error. It would be practically

saying to each other, if you will allow us to err from the truth, we will allow you to err from the truth. Can this be the proper way to answer the wise purpose of God in continuing the existence of heresies? He says that they *must* exist, that those whom he approves may be made manifest, and distinguished from those whom he disapproves and condemns. The promiscuous union and harmony among those, who hold diametrically opposite sentiments, has a direct tendency to prevent making *manifest* the real difference between orthodox and heterodox christians, and is calculated to spread errors, heresies, and moral corruption through the whole christian world. This the most erroneous and lax professors of christianity know, and therefore have been the most forward and bold in proclaiming their unbounded catholicism and charity towards all who differ from them in their religious opinions. Those who believe and love the pure and important doctrines of the gospel, are willing to be *made manifest*, and to be known and distinguished from those, who dislike and despise and reproach the most precious and important principles of the christian religion. It is, therefore, very unwise and criminal in the sincere professors of religion, whom God approves, to unite with those who are ashamed of the gospel, and wish to hide their heterodoxy, among the conflicting and undetermined sentiments of the more popular denominations. Sincere christians need to be upon their guard against those, who, by their good words and fair speeches, would persuade them to unite harmoniously with concealed hereticks and real infidels, who would either corrupt their sentiments, or obstruct their spiritual edification and growth in grace. Nor will such a union be injurious to themselves only, but be injurious to the cause of Christ in general, and tend to spread error and heresy through the world.

4. It appears from what has been said, that when fatal errors and heresies greatly prevail, that then is a time when God is about to purge and purify the church and make manifest those who are approved among

the professors of religion. He has told us, that it is one of his good purposes, to make manifest those whom he *approves*, by the means of heresies. And it is easy to see, that heresies naturally tend to draw a visible line of distinction between true and false professors in the churches of Christ. There is now a trying time among his followers. Those who are with him and for him, will gather with him, while those who are against him will scatter abroad. God has always produced his designed effect, by errors, heresies, and delusions. This was the case, when Jeroboam corrupted the ten tribes by his idolatries and delusions. He drew together all the corrupt part of the Jewish Church, and made *manifest* the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, whom God accepted, approved, and blessed for ages. Error and heresy had arrived to their highest pitch, in Luther's day, when God overruled error and heresy as means of bringing about a great and general separation between the corrupt, and uncorrupt branches of the christian church. And the separation between Protestants and Roman Catholicks has continued to this day, and produced the happiest effects among the nations of the earth. Error and heresy had risen to an enormous height in England, when they were instrumental in bringing about the memorable separation between dissenters, and the heretical clergy in the established church; the happy influence of which separation, we in this country have always felt and still feel. God's design in heresies, is not to unite, but disunite pure churches from those who are corrupt; and to purge the pure churches from their corrupt members. God now appears to be indicating his purpose of separating the precious from the vile, those whom he approves from those whom he disapproves, by the flood of errors, heresies, and delusions, which are overflowing the land. It is now a fanning and winnowing, a purging and purifying time among the churches. God has for years been sifting other nations, and is now sifting our nation with the *sieve of vanity*, to make manifest those whom he *approves*. It is a time, not to *unite* with.

but to *separate* from the erroneous and corrupt. The friends of truth are loudly called upon to *show* and *exert* themselves in the cause of truth; and in opposition to all heresies, errors, and delusions. Hereticks are employing all their learning, ingenuity, and subtilty, to spread heresy and error among all the pure churches, who seem to be asleep and insensible of their danger. It becomes them to awake and stand fast in the liberty, wherewith Christ has made them free, and not be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

5. We learn from what has been said, the importance of ministers preaching the gospel fully and plainly. If the gospel had always been preached fully and plainly, it is hard to conceive how heresies and fatal errors should have abounded so much in every age, and in every part of the world. The great and essential truths of the gospel *approve* themselves to every man's reason and conscience in the sight of God. And where they are fully and plainly taught, men are constrained to see and feel their weight and importance, and the absurdity of believing and embracing errors, which are diametrically opposite to them. When the pure and essential doctrines of the gospel are fully and plainly taught, they cannot fail to make manifest the falsehood and absurdity of every fatal error and heresy. But if the gospel be not fully and plainly preached, it will naturally lead men into the most fatal errors by enabling them to pervert the gospel, and to employ it to prove and sanction the worst of errors. All nominal christians who run into the greatest errors and delusions, always employ the gospel to support their false doctrines. But if the gospel were fully and plainly preached, every one would perceive, that there is not a text in the bible, which countenances, approves, or supports any religious error that ever was believed, or propagated. It is the indispensable duty of ministers to declare *all* the counsel of God, and to explain and prove all the great and fundamental truths of the

gospel, as clearly as possible. Those who object against sentimental preaching generally do it, to prevent their errors from being exposed and refuted and condemned. The present mode of preaching is perfectly suited to unite and please all, who wish to bring about a coalition between the orthodox and heterodox. While preachers omit to preach the doctrines of the gospel and insist only on the duties of it, all denominations can agree, and unite in their christian fellowship and communion. It is the cardinal and essential doctrines of the gospel, concerning which professors of religion most widely and irreconcilably differ. They cannot therefore, be united in the truth, until they are united in these doctrines. To preach these plainly is the only proper and safe way of uniting christians.

6. It appears from the nature and tendency of heresy, that sinners at this day, are in the most dangerous situation. They are surrounded by errorists and heretics on every side. They naturally love darkness rather than light, and error rather than truth. And when they imbibe error, they always imbibe it as truth. Of course they go on highly pleased with their own delusions, crying to themselves peace and safety, until they are undeceived, beyond recovery. Heresy is the most easy and deceptive path to destruction. And heresy is rapidly creeping in among us. But why? That they who are *approved* may be made manifest. Let those who are approved, now manifest themselves, by raising the strongest barriers against heresy. Let them study the scriptures—labour to understand and defend the peculiar doctrines of the gospel—and avoid seducers. These are the most proper means of preventing errorists from destroying themselves and others.



## SERMON IV.

RATIONAL PREACHING.

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ACTS, xvii. 2.

*And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the scriptures.*

PAUL was a chosen vessel to carry the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles in various and distant parts of the world. For this great and arduous work he was eminently qualified. He was a man of genius, learning, eloquence and piety. Longinus, a learned heathen, ranks Paul of Tarsus among the most eminent of the Grecian and Roman orators; and christian writers have not been sparing in their encomiums upon his piety and eloquence. But from some motives or other they have seldom celebrated his reasoning powers and the use he made of them in preaching the gospel. The inspired writer of his life, however, more frequently mentions his *reasoning*, than his *declaiming* on the doctrines he taught. Speaking of Paul and Silas passing through Amphipolis, and Apollonia, and coming to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews, he says, "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days *reasoned* with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must *needs* have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." The truth, which here lies upon the face of the text, and which is proposed as the subject of the ensuing discourse is this:

That Paul usually proved the truth of the doctrines, which he taught.

I shall first show that he did this ; and then why he did it.

I. We are to consider, that Paul usually proved the truth of the doctrines, which he taught. He did not desire his hearers to believe any thing, which he asserted, without evidence. It seems by what is said in the eleventh verse of the context, that he commended the noble Bereans, for searching the scriptures, to see whether the doctrines, which they heard him preach, were agreeable to that infallible standard. He usually preached on the great and essential doctrines of the gospel, which he knew ought to be proved, by plain and conclusive reasoning. To reason fairly is to draw fair consequences from true premises, or to adduce clear and conclusive arguments in support of truth. In order to reason clearly and intelligibly upon the truth of a proposition, it is often necessary, in the first place to *explain* it ; in the next place to produce arguments in support of it ; and lastly to answer objections against it. By Paul's *proving* the doctrines, which he taught, we are to understand his reasoning upon them in this manner. And if we now examine his general mode of preaching, we shall find, that he usually *proved* the particular doctrine which he preached, by *explaining* it ; if it needed explanation ; by bringing *arguments* to support it, if it needed to be supported ; and by answering objections, if he supposed any would occur to the mind of the hearer. This will appear in respect to a variety of subjects upon which he preached.

When he preached upon the existence of God, he reasoned plainly and forcibly upon the subject. Hear his arguments in support of this first and fundamental doctrine of all religion. Speaking of the Pagans, who deny the existence of the only living and true God, and neglect to worship him, he says, "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead ; so that they are without excuse." But he argued more largely upon

this doctrine, in his discourse to the Epicurean and Stoick philosophers at Athens. "Then Paul stood in the midst of Marshill, and said, ye men of Athens, I perceiveth that in all things ye are too superstitious, for as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God, that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said: For we are his offspring. For as much then as we are the offspring of God, we *ought not to think*, that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." This clear, concise, and conclusive reasoning was perfectly adapted to prove the being and perfections of God, and the indispensable duty of the Pagans to know, to love, and to serve him.

Paul reasoned as plainly and forcibly upon the doctrine of divine sovereignty in electing and saving some and not others. "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he

hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou, that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" Here Paul stated or explained his subject, proved his subject, and answered the most plausible objection that could be made against it.

Paul taught the doctrine of total depravity, and proved it, by plain and conclusive reasoning. He first proved this doctrine from a long and particular account of the character and conduct of all the heathen world, and then from the authority of the old testament, in which the total depravity of the Jews is plainly asserted. He says, "What then? Are *we* better than *they*? No, in no wise: for we have before *proved*, both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin; as it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one," &c.

When Paul preached to the Jews and Greeks at Thessalonica, he undertook to prove, that Christ had come into the world, suffered, and died, and risen from the dead. This is related in our text and context. "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days *reasoned* with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging," that is, *explaining* and *proving*, "that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead: and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. Paul, in his preaching, not only asserted, that Christ was the long expected and promised Messiah, that he had suffered and died, and that he had risen from the dead, but he proved these points, and so demonstrated, that Christ was the only and all-sufficient redeemer.

In treating on the resurrection and future state of the righteous, Paul *reasoned* with great perspicuity and energy. Some of the Corinthians denied this doctrine, which made it necessary to prove it, which he did in this long and forcible train of reasoning. "Now if

Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen. And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God, that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins." He goes on in this strain till he starts and answers an objection. "But some men will say, how are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain; it may chance of wheat, or some other grain. But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body." Finally he says, "This corruptible must put on *incorruption*, and this *mortal* must put on *immortality*. So when this corruption shall have put on *incorruption*, and this mortal shall have put on *immortality*, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory." Thus philosophically and scripturally the apostle reasoned upon the resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the soul.

When Paul preached before Felix, "he *reasoned*" so plainly and forcibly "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, that Felix *trembled*." Immediately after he was converted and baptized, he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the son of God, and *reasoned* so clearly and conclusively on the subject, that he *confounded* the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, *proving* that this is very Christ. After he came from Athens to Corinth, and found a certain Jew named Aquila, he abode with him there. And we are told, that he there "*reasoned* in the synagogue every sabbath, and *persuaded* the Jews and the Greeks." He continued preaching in this manner to the Corinthians

a year and six months; but at length he came to Ephesus, where he entered into the synagogue, and *reasoned* with the Jews, in his publick discourses, “speaking boldly for the space of three months, *disputing* and *persuading* the things concerning the kingdom of God.” I trust, it now appears evident to every one, that Paul usually reasoned in his preaching, and *fairly proved* the truth of the important doctrines, which he publicly taught and inculcated. I now proceed to show,

II. Why he made it his common practice to *prove* the doctrines, upon which he treated. He did not adopt this mode of preaching because he supposed it would be the most pleasing to his hearers, nor because he was not capable of preaching in a more agreeable manner: But,

1. Because he meant to preach the gospel plainly and intelligibly to persons of all characters and capacities. He says to the Romans, “I am a debtor, both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians, both to the *wise*, and to the *unwise*.” And he says to the Corinthians, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with *wisdom of words*, lest the cross of Christ should be made of *none effect*. And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in *demonstration* of the spirit, and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.” The Apostle very well knew, that in order to preach the great, the deep, and important doctrines of the gospel plainly and intelligibly to all descriptions of men, it was necessary to *explain* those doctrines, that they might be clearly and distinctly understood; and in the next place, to *prove* them to be true; that they might be believed; and in many cases, to *answer* objections, that the mouths of gainsayers might be stopped. All preachers ought to be *teachers*, and all teachers find it necessary to *explain* and *prove*

what they teach, and to *remove* all objections, which naturally occur to the minds of those they teach. It is impossible to preach the gospel so as to be clearly and easily understood, without explaining particular doctrines and distinguishing one from another; and it is no less impossible to lead men to believe any particular doctrine after it is explained, without producing plain and powerful arguments in support of it, and removing every plausible objection against it. The Apostle knew, that men are reasonable creatures, and capable of perceiving the force of plain reasoning, and therefore he made it his common practice, to address the understandings of his hearers, and to *prove* the doctrines he taught, that they might believe them upon just and solid ground. He positively declared, "In the church, I had rather speak five words with my understanding, than by my voice I might *teach* others, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." He made a point of preaching argumentatively, for the important purpose of preaching plainly and intelligibly.

2. He commonly *proved* the doctrines he taught, because he meant to preach *profitably*, as well as *plainly*. He often assigns this good reason for his preaching so sentimentally and argumentatively. He solemnly declares to the elders of Ephesus, that he had meant to preach to them *profitably*, or in a manner best calculated to promote their spiritual and eternal good. He says "*ye know*, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, and how *I kept back nothing that was profitable* unto you, but have shewed you, and taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." He declared to the Corinthians, that "he had not sought his own *profit*, but the *profit* of many, that they might be *saved*. For we are not as many, who corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but

as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ. Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not ; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty ; not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully ; but by *manifestation of the truth*, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." The Apostle knew, that it was entirely out of his power, by preaching, to change, or sanctify the hearts of his hearers. This he freely acknowledged. " 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." But yet he knew, that by preaching the truth plainly and convincingly, he should certainly do *God*, if not *man*, service. He says " Now thanks be to God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge *by us* in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish : To the one we are the savour of death unto death ; and to the other, the savour of life unto life." All that preachers have to do, is to pour light into the understanding, and conviction into the conscience, by the *manifestation* of divine truth. It is only through the medium of the understanding and the conscience, that preachers of the gospel can reach and affect the *hearts* of the hearers. But in this way, they can deeply affect them, and prove greatly instrumental, in *saving*, or *destroying* them. It is of as much importance, therefore, that they should in their preaching approve themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, as if they could *change his heart*. Accordingly, the Apostle made it his practice, by lucid explanation, plain reasoning, and solid arguments, to exhibit the great and essential doctrines of the gospel before the understanding and consciences of men, in the clearest and strongest light ; because he knew, that this was the most *profitable mode* of preaching, and would certainly produce some important effects under a divine influence, and such as would be



most pleasing to God. Now, if the Apostle commonly preached the gospel *argumentatively*, for the purpose of preaching it most plainly and profitably, he certainly had good reasons for his peculiar mode of preaching, and far better reasons, than any can have for preaching in any different manner.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from Paul's usual mode of preaching, that he was, in the most strict and proper sense of the term, a metaphysical preacher. He preached argumentatively and drew just consequences from true premises. He employed fair reasoning and argumentation, in preaching upon the great doctrines and duties of the gospel. And fair reasoning upon any subject is precisely the same thing as metaphysical reasoning: or at any rate, fair reasoning upon any metaphysical subject, is metaphysical reasoning; and any deep, difficult, profound subject is properly a metaphysical subject. And taking the term, metaphysical reasoning in this strictest sense, Paul employed metaphysical reasoning in his preaching. For, in the first place, he usually preached upon metaphysical subjects, which required the exercise of the highest reasoning powers of man. He preached upon the existence of God—the perfections of God—the decrees of God—the sovereignty of God—the agency of God in the production of moral exercises in the human heart—the free agency of man under a divine agency—the divinity of Christ—the atonement of Christ—the nature of moral virtue or true holiness—the nature and extent of moral depravity in the human heart—the nature and necessity of regeneration or change of heart, by a special divine influence—the perseverance of saints—the dissolution of the body at death—the future resurrection of the body—and the immortality of the soul in a future state. These are the most difficult, most profound, and most important subjects, that any natural philosopher, moral philosopher, metaphysician, or divine, ever presumed

to reason upon. As he usually preached upon these deep and essential doctrines of the gospel ; so he preached upon them metaphysically, that is, he *reasoned* upon them. He did not merely preach *about* them, or *declaim* upon them ; but he *explained* them, *proved* them, and refuted the most plausible objections ever made against them. Let any minister, at this day, commonly preach upon the same subjects, and in the same manner that Paul did, and he will be called a metaphysical preacher, by those who generally preach upon different subjects in a different manner, and by those who are pleased with such a different mode of preaching. And we must allow, that they are perfectly correct in calling any minister a metaphysical preacher, who preaches sentimentally and argumentatively as Paul did.

2. If Paul preached upon such subjects, and in such a manner as has been represented, in order to preach in the most plain and profitable manner, then none have any good reason to speak reproachfully of his manner of preaching. We must believe, that he was sincere in his profession to preach plainly and profitably ; and we must believe also, that he chose the best method of preaching plainly and profitably. But if this be true, who can have any ground to complain or speak reproachfully of his mode of preaching ? It is certainly very unreasonable to find fault with the very best mode of preaching. But we know, that both the matter and manner of his preaching were highly displeasing to many who heard him. And though few, at this day, would be willing to say, that they dislike Paul's preaching : yet many are very free to say, that they dislike the same kind and mode of preaching. When any ministers generally preach upon the same subjects and in the same manner that Paul did, they reproachfully call them *metaphysical* preachers, and their preaching metaphysical preaching. Both ministers and people lift up a loud and united voice against what they call metaphysical preaching. We can scarcely hear or read an ordination sermon, which does not contain

some severe and contemptuous remarks upon either metaphysical preachers, or metaphysical preaching. Let us now candidly inquire whether there can be any just ground, to speak contemptuously of the best mode of preaching, which the best human preacher, for the best reasons, adopted.

Some may say, that Christ did not preach metaphysically, but only taught plain, practical doctrines, without reasoning upon them, or attempting to *prove* them, by a train of connected arguments; and therefore ministers should follow his example, and preach plainly and practically as he did, and not presume to preach upon deep metaphysical subjects in a metaphysical manner. Ans. There is reason to think, that Paul felt his obligation to follow the example of Christ, as much as any preacher of the gospel ever did. And so far as he deviated from Christ's example in preaching, he acted from pure and proper motives. And it is easy to see a good reason, why Christ did not undertake to prove the doctrines he taught, for he taught as one having authority, that none ought to dispute. It was sufficient for him to *assert*, or to *command*, or *forbid*, by his own divine authority. But neither Paul, nor any other human preacher is clothed with such authority.

Some may say, that those who preach upon the same metaphysical subjects in the same metaphysical manner that Paul did, do not preach plainly and practically, and therefore are unprofitable preachers. But if Paul was a plain and profitable preacher, why should not those, who follow his example, be plain and profitable preachers? And what is the language of well known facts in this case? Are not those, who preach upon the same subjects and in the same manner that Paul did, as plain and profitable preachers, as those who studiously avoid preaching upon the same subjects and in the same manner that the Apostle did? Who generally preach the most plainly, instructively, profitably, and successfully; those who are called metaphysical, or those who are called anti-metaphysical preachers? No preacher ever exhibited more truth,

more plainly, profitably, and successfully, than the Apostle Paul. He surpassed all the other Apostles in both the manner, matter, and success of his preaching. He was instrumental of turning thousands, if not millions of mankind from darkness to light, and from the delusions of Satan unto God. And still his mode of preaching is every where spoken against, both by preachers and people, but more generally by preachers, who are afraid of being reproached for *metaphysical* preaching; though it is utterly impossible to allege one solid objection against his mode of preaching, which was the best calculated to answer the best and most important ends of preaching the gospel.

3. If Paul, for good reasons, chose and adopted the very best mode of preaching; then no other reason can be assigned for disliking and reproaching it, but a dislike to the precious and important doctrines of the gospel, which his mode of preaching exhibits in the clearest and strongest light. And this is the very cause, which those, who dislike and reprobate it, either indirectly, or directly show to be the cause of their disapprobation and reproach. Some ministers show this to be the cause of their disapprobation, by *neglecting* to preach upon the same subjects and in the same manner, that the Apostle did; and others, by openly and boldly preaching *against* the doctrines, which he preached, and the manner of his preaching them. And people manifest their disapprobation, by saying, they love to have it so, and by choosing to have such preachers. Now, it is easy to see, that whenever both ministers and people *generally* unite in disliking the doctrines that Paul preached, and his manner of preaching them, that metaphysical preachers will be neglected, or opposed, or set aside. And whenever there are none, or but very few, who dare to go into a synagogue, or house of publick worship and reason three sabbaths, or three months, or a year and six months, upon the great and essential doctrines of the gospel, as Paul did; a wide door will be opened for the propagation and spread of gross and fatal religious error among all

classes of people. It is no small, venial evil, for either ministers or people to speak reproachfully and contemptuously of *metaphysical* preaching, for the real purpose of bringing the essential and fundamental doctrines of the gospel into contempt. No person, who loves these doctrines, is ever displeased in hearing them explained, proved, and set in the strongest light, by preachers. It is not metaphysical preaching, but the doctrines metaphysically preached, that is so much disliked, opposed, and reproached. When we hear either preachers or people speak against metaphysical preaching, we need to be at no loss, what their meaning, or design is, or what consequences will flow from their artful and pernicious conduct. They employ the smoothest, easiest, and most effectual method, to prevent the spread of truth, and promote the spread of error, that ever has been, or can be employed. Such deceivers are extremely dangerous, and their artifice ought to be exposed, condemned, and resisted, by all preachers and lovers of the truth.

4. If Paul preached plainly, in order to preach profitably; then other ministers ought to preach plainly, for the same important purpose. Paul's plain preaching offended and disaffected many of his hearers. But this did not prevent his preaching plainly; for his design in preaching was not to please men, but to profit *them*, and please *God*. So he said to the Galatians, who had forsaken him, and followed false teachers. "I marvel, that ye are so soon removed from *him* that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." If Paul could not please both

God and man, by preaching divine truths plainly, then, no other ministers can expect to please both God and man by plain preaching. But as Paul chose to please God and profit men, by preaching plainly, rather than to please men to their own destruction; so ministers ought to make the same choice, and preach in the same manner, and leave the event to God, whether the truth they deliver shall be a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death to their hearers. Plain and profitable preaching will always produce one, or the other of these important effects. Paul was willing to please men in every thing, except *neglecting* to preach truth plainly, and all ministers should be willing to do the one, and not the other. No preacher in the world can find a solid excuse for not preaching plainly and profitably, through fear of offending, or a desire of pleasing men. This, in many cases, is an extremely great trial. For by preaching plainly and profitably, many ministers have lost both the favour and support of their people, and involved themselves in great, distressing, and lasting temporal evils. But though such calamities may be foreseen, in consequence of ministers preaching plainly and faithfully, they have no right to shrink from the trial; but feel and say with the Apostle, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

5. If ministers ought to preach plainly and profitably, as Paul did; then people ought to approve of their preaching in such a manner, though it be *not pleasing* to their natural hearts. People have no right to desire preachers to seek to please them simply, but they ought to desire them to seek to save them. How thankful have many been, who have been recovered from the delusions of false teachers, to the knowledge of the great and saving truths of the gospel, by plain and profitable preaching? Thousands, whom Paul instrumentally turned from pagan and fatal delusions,

were ready to give him their eyes, for joy. People never desire their physicians to please them at the risk of their life, and it is no less criminal and absurd, to desire their ministers to please them, at the risk of their eternal salvation. But how many at this day, are running after false teachers, who are crying peace, peace to them, while they are standing on the brink of endless destruction! Such persons will not so much as give a hearing to plain and profitable preaching, and endeavour to prevent others from hearing it. Their folly will sooner or later be made manifest.

6. This subject calls upon all to inquire, whether they approve, or disapprove of plain and profitable preaching. There is nothing more sensibly affects the heart than preaching, and therefore there is nothing, which has a greater tendency to discover to every person, whether his heart is good, or bad, than his feelings under preaching, whether the preaching be good, or bad. To be pleased with bad preaching, is one of the surest marks of a *bad* heart; and to be pleased with *good* preaching is one of the surest marks of a *good* heart. You have all had an opportunity to hear both bad, and good preaching; now let me ask, which has been the most pleasing? Your feelings are a mark to yourselves, if you never express them to others; and they are a mark to others, if you *express* them. How ready are people to express their feelings in respect to preaching, not considering that they thereby expose both their understanding and hearts. Be entreated then, to examine your feelings, for your own benefit, and for the benefit of others.

## SERMON V.

THE MORAL RECTITUDE OF GOD.

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GENESIS xviii. 25.

*That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked : and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?*

When God was about to destroy Sodom, he appeared to Abraham and told him his design. This deeply affected the benevolent heart of that pious man, who instantly offered the most fervent and importunate cries to the Father of mercies, to spare that corrupt and degenerate city. And the only plea he urged before the Supreme disposer of all events was the rectitude of his own character. "And Abraham drew near and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city : wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Abraham implicitly acknowledges, that it would be *right* for God to punish the guilty who *deserved* to be punished, but not to punish the innocent who *did not deserve* to be punished. This leads us to conclude,

That Abraham knew, that God is a being of moral rectitude. I shall show,

- I. That God is a being of moral rectitude; And.
- II. Consider how Abraham could know this.



I. I am to show, that God is a being of moral rectitude. To make this appear, it may be observed

I. That God *ought* to be a being of moral rectitude.

Though we do not know every thing about God, yet we know something about him. We know that he has an eternal and underived existence, and that he possesses almighty power, perfect knowledge and wisdom, and all the essential attributes of a moral agent. He knows the natures, relations, and connections of all beings in the universe. And this knowledge necessarily confers moral obligation. For that which the Apostle lays down as a maxim is an eternal truth: "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." This applies to the Deity as well as to all other intelligent agents. As God perfectly knows the relation he bears to his creatures, and the relation they bear to him; so he perfectly knows how he *ought* to treat them, and how they *ought* to treat him. He knows what is right and wrong respecting his own conduct, and respecting the conduct of all other moral beings in the universe. He *ought*, therefore, to feel and act according to his moral discernment of what is right in the nature of things. And as he feels much more sensibly his obligation to moral rectitude, than any other being; so we have far more reason to believe, that he possesses moral rectitude, than that any other being in the universe does.

2. God claims to be a being of moral rectitude.

When Moses requested him to show him his glory, "The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will *by no means clear the guilty.*" Moses says, "He is the rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth; and without iniquity, just and right is he!" Elihu says, "Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity." David says, "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness. Justice

and judgment are the habitation of his throne ; mercy and truth go before his face. He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him." He is represented as a Being of immutable veracity. Balaam under a divine impulse says, " He is is not a man, that he should lie ; neither is he the son of man, that he should repent : hath he said, and shall he not do it ? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good ?" We read of the hope of eternal life, which God, *who cannot lie*, promised before the world began. To give greater security to the heirs of this promise, God confirmed the immutability of his counsel by an oath, " That by two immutable things, in which it was *impossible* for God to lie, they might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them." In these divine declarations, God claims to be immutably holy, faithful, righteous, just, and good ; and these immutable moral attributes constitute the highest possible perfection of moral rectitude.

3. God has made his rational creatures *capable* of discerning his *moral*, as well as *natural* attributes. He has implanted in their minds a *moral sense*, by which they can distinguish moral beauty from moral deformity in moral characters. But can we suppose, that he would have done this, if he knew that his own moral character would not bear examination ? He must have known, that if his rational creatures should discover any thing in his heart, or conduct, which was contrary to moral rectitude, it would dissolve their moral obligation to love his character, to obey his commands, or to submit to his government, and lay them under moral obligation to hate him supremely. For if his *heart* were evil, he would be the most *odious* instead of the most *amiable* Being in the universe. His conduct in making us *competent* to judge of his moral rectitude, is complete evidence of the perfection of his moral rectitude, and confirms his own declarations concerning it in his word.

4. God has not only made us capable of judging of his moral rectitude, but commanded us to do it. " Judge, I pray thee, between me and my vineyard." " Are not

my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? saith the Lord." His knowledge of his own moral perfections, is the only ground, upon which he can, with propriety, or even safety, appeal to us in respect to his moral rectitude. And since he has made the appeal, it amounts to irresistible evidence of the moral perfection of his nature.

5. God has not only commanded his intelligent creatures to judge of his moral rectitude, but has placed them under the best advantages to judge. He has placed them all in a state of trial, and in different parts of the universe, where they have had great opportunities and strong inclinations, to examine his conduct with the strictest scrutiny. All *mankind* have been in a state of trial in this world; but some have been more tried, than others. No men on earth, perhaps, were more severely tried than Abraham and Job. And their peculiar trials led them to examine the hand and heart of God, and to discover, if possible, some injustice, or want of goodness in God. But after all their investigations into the divine character and conduct, they were obliged in conscience, to proclaim to the world his perfect rectitude in all his dealings towards them. The angels of heaven have had much greater abilities, advantages, and opportunities to look into the works and ways of God; but though they have looked with the greatest diligence and attention, yet they have been constrained to proclaim, in the strongest terms, the perfect rectitude of the divine character and conduct. Isaiah heard the heavenly hosts "cry one to another and say, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts; the *whole earth is full of his glory.*" And John says he heard them "Sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; *just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.*" Now, if the greatest and best of God's intelligent creatures, after their strictest scrutiny of his conduct in the various parts of the universe, have not been able to discover the least moral defect or imperfection in his character and conduct, we

may confidently believe, that he possesses the perfection of moral rectitude. And to close this connected train of reasoning, I would observe,

6. That God has appointed a day for the very purpose of giving all his intelligent creatures the best possible opportunity of judging of his moral rectitude. The day of judgment is called the day of the *revelation* of the *righteous* judgment of God. At that day God will unfold all his own designs and conduct towards all his intelligent creatures; and their designs and conduct towards him, and towards one another. When all these things shall be exhibited before the minds of the whole intelligent creation, God will give them the best possible opportunity to know, with the highest certainty, whether he has always felt and acted perfectly right, in the creation, government, and redemption of the world. And his prediction of this future day of decision, affords the fullest assurance, at present, that he knows the absolute perfection of his own moral rectitude. But though this be a truth of the first importance, and capable of being established by plain, conclusive, irresistible evidence; and has been generally believed in all ages, by those who have enjoyed the sacred oracles; yet it may be a question how they came to the knowledge of the moral rectitude of their great Creator, and supreme Sovereign. This leads me to consider,

II. How Abraham could know that God is a being of moral rectitude. Here I would observe,

I. That he could not know the moral rectitude of God, by knowing what God would do, to promote the highest happiness of the universe. God, indeed, knew what he had designed to do to promote this great and important object; but he had not told Abraham, or any other man, what he had actually designed to do. Abraham could not judge of the rectitude of his moral character, by knowing all his purposes, respecting the whole intelligent universe. But without knowing all the purposes of God, he well knew, that it was not right for him to *punish the innocent*.

2. Abraham could not know the moral rectitude of God, by knowing, that the punishing of the *innocent* would not promote the highest good of the universe. Tho' he knew this to be sinful and wrong; yet he could not know that it could not be *beneficial* in the final result. For he knew, that God had, for some reason or other, introduced ten thousand moral evils into the world. And if moral evil committed by *men* might promote the highest good of the universe, how could he know but that moral evil committed by God, might promote the same important purpose? If it should be said, that the reason, why moral evil committed by men, may promote the general good, is because God overrules it to this end; why may it not be said with equal propriety, that God may overrule his own moral evil to serve the same purpose! How could Abraham, then, know, that it would be inconsistent for God to punish the *innocent* with the guilty, for the purpose of promoting the greatest good of the universe, if he should overrule it to that purpose? But,

3. Though Abraham could not know what would be right, or wrong, for God to do, either by knowing what had a *direct tendency* to promote the highest good of the universe; or what had an *indirect tendency* to promote that great and important object; yet he could know what was right, or wrong, for God to do, to answer any purpose whatever, by knowing that right and wrong, or moral good and evil, are founded in the *nature* of things. Moral good, which consists in true benevolence, is morally right in its own nature. And moral evil, which consists in selfishness, is morally wrong in its own nature. This mankind know to be true, not by their *reason*, but by their *conscience*. Every moral agent has a moral sense, by which he is capable of distinguishing right from wrong, or moral good from moral evil. The child seven years old is as capable of doing this, as in any period of his life. The peasant is as capable of doing this, as the philosopher, and the pagan, as the christian. Benevolence is intrinsically excellent, and deserves to be *approved and rewarded*. Selfishness is in-

trinsically evil, and deserves to be *condemned and punished*. Moral good is essentially the same in every moral agent ; and moral evil is essentially the same in every moral agent. It is the *moral nature* of benevolence, that renders it *morally* excellent ; and it is the *natural tendency* of benevolence to promote *happiness* ; that renders it *naturally* excellent. It is the *moral nature* of selfishness, that renders it *morally* evil ; and it is its *natural tendency* to promote *misery*, that renders it *naturally* evil. The *nature* of benevolence is one thing, and its *tendency* another. The *nature* of selfishness is one thing, and its *tendency* another. The *nature* of benevolence is *immutable*, and cannot be altered by the Deity. The *nature* of selfishness is *immutable*, and cannot be altered by the Deity. But the *tendency* of benevolence, and the *tendency* of selfishness may be altered. The selfishness of Judas in betraying his master for thirty pieces of silver, was a great moral evil in its own nature ; but its *tendency* under the circumstances it was committed, was to promote the highest good of the universe. And this holds true of all the sin in the world. For God has declared that “the wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder of wrath he will restrain.” Now, it is easy to see, that it was not necessary for Abraham to know, what would be the *tendency* of God’s punishing the *innocent* with the guilty, in order to know, whether it would be wrong in God to do it. If it had been possible for him to have known, that God’s punishing the innocent with the guilty, would have had a *direct tendency* to promote the good of the universe, he would have known, that he would not have done *right* in doing it. Or had he known, that his doing it would have had an *indirect tendency* to promote the good of the universe, still he would have known that it would not have been right for him to do it. He was perfectly able to judge of the *nature* of God’s conduct, without knowing either the *direct* or *indirect tendency* of it. If it were supposable, that benevolence should have a *natural tendency* to promote *misery* ; still it would be *morally excellent* in its *own nature*. Or if it were supposable, that *selfishness*

should have a *natural tendency* to promote *happiness*; still it would be in its *own nature, morally evil*. If there were not an *intrinsic excellence* in benevolence, and an *intrinsic deformity and turpitude* in selfishness, it would be absolutely impossible for any man to know whether he *ought* to exercise benevolence, or selfishness, under different circumstances. Or in other words, it would be impossible to see any distinction between *moral good* and *natural good*; *moral evil* and *natural evil*. It is the *nature* of a voluntary exercise in a moral agent, that renders it *morally good*, and not its *tendency*. And it is the nature of a voluntary exercise in a moral agent, that renders it *morally evil*, and not its *tendency*. Abraham, therefore, knew the *moral rectitude* of God, in precisely the same way, that God himself knew his own moral rectitude. He knew it, by knowing the *intrinsic excellence* of his benevolent affections; and not by the *tendency* of them to promote the highest good of the universe. His perfect benevolence was prior, in the order of nature, to his forming his great design of creation, and therefore the excellency of his benevolence did not depend upon its tendency to create, and promote the good of the universe. God did not, and to speak with reverence, could not discover the moral excellence of his own perfect benevolence, by its tendency to do good; for its moral excellence actually existed *before* he had determined to do good. And it is equally true, when one of our sinful race becomes truly benevolent, he discovers it by the *nature* of the exercise, and not by its *tendency* to do good. Men often do that from *selfishness*, which under present existing circumstances, has a tendency to do good. And on the other hand men often do that from *true benevolence*, which under present existing circumstances tends to do evil. But who will say, that the moral excellence of benevolence is destroyed by producing an unintended, and undesirable effect? Or who will say that the moral deformity and turpitude of selfishness is destroyed, by producing an unintended, but desirable effect? If the moral nature of benevolence cannot be determined in

one case, by its effect, it cannot be determined in any other case by its effect. And if the moral nature of selfishness cannot be determined in one case, by its effect, it cannot be determined in any other case by its effect. No case can be mentioned, nor conceived, in which the moral nature of any free voluntary exercise of the mind can be determined by the good or evil effect produced. It is absurd, therefore, to suppose, that the moral excellence of virtue consists in its tendency to produce happiness, or that the moral evil of sin consists in its tendency to produce misery. They are both founded in the nature of things. The one is morally excellent in itself considered ; and the other morally evil in itself considered, without any regard to the cause that produces them, or the effect that follows from them. This Abraham knew, and consequently knew, that it would be totally inconsistent with the moral rectitude of God, to punish the righteous with the wicked. He judged so not from the unknown consequences of God's punishing the innocent, but from the well known nature of punishing the innocent. He knew, that it was as morally impossible for God to punish the innocent, as it was for him to lie, or to do any other iniquity : And every other man in the world would have judged as Abraham did.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God be a being of moral rectitude, then he can never do evil, that good may come. His benevolence is under the constant and infallible guidance of his moral rectitude. It is morally impossible that he should do what is wrong in the nature of things, to promote his own felicity or the felicity of any of his creatures. If it were possible for him to see, that by speaking any thing false, or by doing any thing unjust, he could promote the highest good of the universe for ever, his moral rectitude would render it morally impossible for him to do any such act, which is in its own nature wrong. It is upon this ground alone, that the in-



aspired writers assert, that God *cannot* lie; that it is *impossible* for him to lie; and that there is *no unrighteousness* in him. Though he can overrule the sins of others to promote his own blessedness and the general good of the universe; yet he cannot destroy the criminality and ill desert of sinners, and cause them to become innocent. And though it were naturally possible for him to overrule a sinful action in himself to promote the highest good of the whole universe; yet he could not destroy the criminality and guilt of that action, and consequently it is morally impossible, that he ever should do a sinful action, to answer any purpose whatever. But if the criminality of a sinful action consisted in its mere tendency to promote misery and not in the *nature* of it, it is difficult to see why he could not do iniquity, and overrule it for his own glory, as well as he can suffer his creatures to do iniquity, and overrule it for his own glory; for he could *alter* the *tendency* of his own sin as easily, for aught we know, as he can *alter* the tendency of sin in his creatures. But since his moral rectitude consists in the nature of his pure benevolence, and not in its tendency to do good, it is morally impossible, that he should do evil that good may come. His moral rectitude perfectly governs his boundless *benevolence* and *Almighty power*, so that he can no more do evil, than he can cease to be. He cannot punish the *innocent* with the guilty. He cannot *break* his promises. He cannot punish one of his creatures for the sin of another. And he cannot injure the least of his rational creatures, to promote the happiness of all the rest. His moral rectitude binds him, in all cases, to do right.

2. If God be a being of moral rectitude, then he can never approve of his creatures doing evil, that good may come. Though he has given them abundant evidence in his word and providence, that he does overrule all the evil they commit, for his own glory, and for the good of the universe; yet he has never given them the least reason to believe, that he approves of their doing evil. I know they have endeavoured to

justify themselves in doing evil, because he has let them know, that he will overrule it for his own glory. But the apostle sharply rebukes them for pretending to draw this inference from his overruling their sin for his own glory and the good of his holy creatures. He asks, "What if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be *true*, but every man a liar: as it is written, that thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. But if our *unrighteousness* commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God *unrighteous* who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)" or an objector; "God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my life unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? and not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil that good may come? whose damnation is just." The apostle here does not deny, that he had said that God would overrule the unrighteousness of men to his own glory, but he denies, that he had ever taught that sinners might do evil that good may come, or that God could not or would not punish them for all their unrighteousness. For he says their damnation would be just, and God would be unjust, if he did not condemn and punish them according to their ill desert.

3. If God be a being of moral rectitude: then he will not punish the finally impenitent the less, on account of the good they have done in the world. It cannot be denied, that sinners have done a great deal of good in the world. The builders of the ark did a great deal of good in building it. They were the means of saving the human race from utter destruction. But this was no reason why they should not perish after they had built it. The utility of their conduct did not alter the *nature* of their sins, nor diminish their *desert* of everlasting punishment. Judas did a great deal of good by betraying Christ. He was instrumental of promoting the salvation of all that will

ever be saved. But this did not alter the nature of his sin, nor diminish, in his own view, his just desert of endless perdition. Joseph's brethren did a great deal of good, by selling him to the Egyptians. But this did not alter the nature of their malevolence, or diminish their criminality, in their own view, or in the view of God. If sinners do prophecy, work miracles, preach the gospel, and do ever so many things, which promote the glory of God and the good of others, still the selfishness of their conduct remains the same, and deserves the same punishment, that it would have deserved, if no good had followed from it. Accordingly, Christ informs sinners, that their plea of having done good in the world, will be of no avail to prevent their final condemnation to eternal punishment, at the last day. This is a sentiment which sinners are very loth to believe, and if they do believe, they heartily oppose it. They choose to judge of their own conduct contrary to the dictates of their own conscience, and contrary to the plain declarations of scripture. But if they are ever saved, they will cordially acknowledge, that their best services deserved eternal punishment.

4. If God be a being of moral rectitude, then it is morally impossible, that he should ever *injure* any of his creatures. They are extremely apt to think, that he often injures them, both by withholding good, and inflicting evil. But he never withholds good from any creature, only when his moral rectitude requires him to do it. He is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. He feels perfectly benevolent towards all his enemies, and does them all the good, that he can do them consistently with his immutable rectitude. He causes his sun to rise and his rain to fall upon them, and gives them as large a portion of the good things of life, as he can consistently. So that he never can injure them, by withholding any good thing from them, which his perfect rectitude permits him to bestow. Nor can he injure them, by inflicting more pain or misery upon them, than they justly deserve.

Though millions of mankind are every day suffering extreme pains and calamities ; yet not one of them has any just ground to complain, or even to think hard of God, on account of the evils he suffers, and though many myriads of the spirits in prison, are constantly suffering the weight of God's wrath ; yet they have no just ground to complain, or even to think hard of God. A proper sense of the moral rectitude of God, in the government and disposal of his creatures, and a cordial reconciliation to it would silence every murmur and complaint in the minds and mouths of this rebellious world. And it is nothing but a firm belief of the moral rectitude of God, and a cordial approbation of it, that does now, and always will prevent all murmurs and complaints in heaven, in the view of the damned. Though the effects and consequences of his immutable moral rectitude, are unspeakably dreadful ; yet the moral rectitude from which they flow, is supremely amiable, and deserves the approbation and praise of all holy beings, and will induce them to sing alleluia, in the view of it to all eternity. They will rejoice, that the righteous Lord has loved, and done righteousness.

5. If God be a being of moral rectitude ; then all the objections which have been made or can be made against his conduct are altogether groundless. For he has always acted agreeably to the moral rectitude of his nature. If it be said, that it was wrong for God to determine to save some, and not all mankind, before the foundation of the world ; there is no just foundation for the objection. If indeed he had determined to *punish* a part of mankind, who were innocent ; this would have been a solid ground of objection. But he did not determine to do this ; he only determined to punish a part, and not all who were guilty. And who can say, that there is any injustice in such a determination ?

If it be said, that God does not make a proper distinction between good and bad men in this world ; the objection is groundless, because he treats them all better than any of them deserve.

If it be said, that it is wrong for God to punish men for doing that, which he enables them by his universal influence over their minds to do; the objection is groundless, because he does not punish them if they are not guilty; but if they are guilty, then they deserve to be punished, and he does right in punishing them. They know, that they act freely under his influence, and consequently when they do wrong, it is because they choose to do wrong, and such a sinful choice, deserves to be condemned and punished, they themselves being judges. Sinners often condemn themselves as Judas did, and Joseph's brethren did, for doing that which God enabled and disposed them to do to promote his own glory. Since God always acts agreeably to the moral and immutable rectitude of his nature, he always acts right, and never gives the least ground of just complaint, in any part of his conduct towards his rebellious and murmuring creatures.

6. Since God is a being of perfect moral rectitude, all his works will eventually praise him. They will deserve and receive the approbation and praise of all his holy creatures. They will discover not only the wisdom and goodness of the divine character displayed in them, but the perfect rectitude of the divine conduct. Without the discovery of God's moral rectitude, there could be no just foundation to praise him for any or all his works. This is the reason, why the great works of Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander, and the Cæsars, will eventually lose all their praise. They never had, nor displayed any moral rectitude in all they did, and consequently all they did will finally redound to their everlasting reproach, and self condemnation. But the works of God will shine brighter and brighter to all eternity, and afford new arguments of gratitude and praise to all the hosts of heaven.

7. If God be a being of moral rectitude; then the weight of his wrath will be insupportable to the finally miserable. They will know, that he does not punish them from malice, revenge or malevolence,

but from true, pure, disinterested benevolence and justice. This will add an emphasis to their punishment, which they cannot support. They must sink under it, though they bid defiance to it before it comes. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a holy God. Unspeakably more fearful than if he were not holy. No selfish creature, perhaps, would punish his worst enemies for ever. Satan would not. His malice may be satiated ; but moral rectitude can never be satisfied, without giving sinners a just recompense of reward.

8. If God be a being of moral rectitude ; then it is the immediate and important duty of sinners to become reconciled to him. He has never done them any injury, but has always done them good. They have never had any reason to hate and oppose him. But they have always had good reasons to love and serve him. And they must become reconciled to him, or he will be obliged by the rectitude of his nature to punish them for ever. He now invites them to be reconciled ; he now commands them to be reconciled ; and he now threatens to destroy them, if they finally refuse to be reconciled to him upon his own gracious terms.

Finally, if God be a being of moral rectitude, then all his cordial friends are safe. They are the righteous, whom he will not destroy with the wicked. He has promised them eternal life, and his faithfulness cannot fail. They are safe amidst all the evils and calamities which fall upon the wicked world in this life. Abraham was safe, while he stood a solemn spectator of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Saints are safe, while thousands fall on their right hand and on their left, and sink down in endless darkness and despair. And though they may suffer many fiery trials in their way to heaven, as Abraham did, yet they will soon come out of great tribulations, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of glory. AMEN.

## SERMON VI.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

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PSALM cxix. 68.

*Thou art good and doest good*

DAVID WAS early and intimately acquainted with God. From his youth he delighted to contemplate upon the works and ways of God, and to trace all secondary causes to the first and supreme cause. While he watched his flocks by night, and surveyed the shining orbs above, his pious heart led him to exclaim in the language of joy and praise, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handy work." He had an eye to see God in the works of providence as well as in the works of creation. And the longer he observed the divine conduct towards himself and towards the rest of mankind, the more he was convinced of the goodness of God. He was able to say, from his own experience and observation, in his nearest approach to God, "Thou art good, and doest good." The plain import of these words is,

That God's goodness moves him to do good. I shall,

I. Describe the goodness of God; and,

II. Show that it moves him to do good.

I. The first thing is, to describe the goodness of God.

Goodness is the same in God as in man. In man it comprizes every amiable, moral quality of the heart, and signifies the same as general benevolence, which is the essence of every virtuous or holy affection. There are benevolent and selfish affections; goodness consists in benevolent affections, and badness in selfish

ones. God is love, and all his goodness consists in love; which is something entirely distinct from his power, or knowledge, or any other natural perfection. *It is his heart.* Goodness in every moral being lies in his heart, and consists in benevolent affections. But though the goodness of God lies in his heart, and consists in benevolent affections; yet, in various respects, it is superiour to the goodness of all other beings. For,

1. His goodness is absolutely *pure* and free from every thing of a selfish or sinful nature. Though some men are really good in this life, yet their goodness is mixed with a great deal of evil. Their benevolent affections do not flow in a constant, uninterrupted stream; but are often obstructed by unholy and unfriendly affections. They do not always feel the same love to God, nor the same love to man. Their hearts are composed of discordant and diametrically opposite exercises. Their goodness is like the morning cloud and early dew, which soon vanisheth away. But the goodness of God is constant, uninterrupted, and entirely free from every discordant affection. No selfish feeling ever existed in his heart. His heart is all goodness, and full of holy, kind, and benevolent affections. He is in scripture called the *Holy One*. His holiness consists in his goodness, and his goodness is without the least alloy, or impure mixture of unholiness, unrighteousness, injustice, or malevolence.

2. His goodness is not only *pure*, but *permanent*. The immutability of his goodness results from the immutability of his existence and natural attributes. His existence is immutable, because it is necessary and independent, and his power, knowledge, and wisdom are equally independent and necessary. And since his existence and all his natural attributes are immutable, we cannot see any cause or reason for any change in his goodness. All created beings are dependent in respect to their existence and all their natural powers and faculties; therefore we can easily conceive, that after they have possessed pure good-



ness, they may become partially, or totally destitute of it. There is nothing incredible in the account we have of the angels, who kept not their first estate. Though they were created perfectly holy and good; yet they might lose their perfect goodness, and become entirely sinful. There is nothing incredible in the first apostacy of our first parents. Though they were formed in the moral image of their maker, and were possessed of a pure heart; yet they were dependent for the continuance, as well as for the first existence of their moral rectitude. But we cannot conceive of any thing either *without*, or *within* a self-existent and independent being that should be a cause of intercepting, diminishing or destroying his goodness. We may, therefore, justly conclude, that his goodness is permanent and immutable as his existence. David expressly declares, that his goodness is unchangeable and everlasting. In the hundred and thirty-sixth psalm, he devoutly and gratefully cries, "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." And he repeats the declaration more than twenty-five times in this psalm. In the fifty-second psalm, he expressly asserts, "The goodness of God endureth continually." And to the friends of God he says, "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good: his *mercy is everlasting*: and his *truth endureth to all generations*." His faithfulness cannot fail, because his goodness cannot fail, and both are permanent and immutable, as his necessary and eternal existence.

3. His goodness is *universal* as well as *pure* and *permanent*. The goodness of men and angels is limited. It cannot extend any further than their knowledge extends, and their knowledge is very imperfect. But God's knowledge is universal and unbounded. He knows himself and all his creatures, whether rational, or irrational, and regards them all with a benevolent and impartial eye. He is good to the just and to the unjust, and to the meanest creature in the air, the

earth, and the ocean. He is good to the fowls of heaven, the beasts of the earth, the fish of the sea, and to every living creature. He sees them all at one intuitive, comprehensive view, and feels truly benevolent to them all. He is, strictly speaking, "good unto all; and his tender mercies are over all his works." He stands in the same relation to all his creatures, and feels the same kind of benevolent affections towards them all. His goodness pervades and fills the universe.

4. His goodness is perfect in degree, as well as in purity, permanency, and universality. His goodness bears proportion to all his other attributes. His benevolent feelings as much surpass the benevolent feelings of any or all his creatures, as his power, his knowledge, and his wisdom surpasses theirs. He loves with all his heart, with all his mind, and with all his strength. In this respect there is none good but God. His goodness, in point of strength and ardour, is infinitely superiour to the goodness of any benevolent creature in the universe. Yea, there is a greater amount of goodness in one exercise of his benevolence, than in all the benevolent feelings of all benevolent creatures, through every period of their existence. He loves his creatures infinitely more, than they ever did, or ever will love him, or one another. I now proceed to show,

II. That the goodness of God moves him to do good. The psalmist ascribes the goodness of his conduct to the goodness of his heart. "Thou art good, and doest good." It is the heart that moves every intelligent being to act. A good heart cannot fail to move a good being to do good. We have shewn that God is a good being, and his heart governs all the other perfections of his nature, and lays him under a moral necessity of employing all his knowledge, wisdom, and power to gratify his benevolent desires. Though the heathen philosophers, and many other learned men, have been ready to imagine, that an eternal, independent, and perfectly happy being would

have no possible motive, to act, or produce any effect ; yet it is much easier to conceive of his activity, than of his inactivity. Goodness, or pure benevolence is the most active principle in nature. We cannot conceive how an infinitely powerful and intelligent being, possessed of perfect benevolence, should never employ his wisdom and power to answer any benevolent purpose, or how God should exist from eternity to eternity, without displaying his great and glorious attributes in doing good. This then leads me to observe,

1. The goodness of God must have moved him to form, before the foundation of the world, the best possible method of doing the greatest possible good. His goodness must have mov'd him to employ his wisdom in the best possible manner. And it is the proper province of wisdom to form wise designs ; that is, to devise the best ends, and the best means to accomplish them. The wisdom of God enabled him to discover, among all possible modes of doing good, that which was absolutely the best, and his perfect goodness disposed him to adopt that best mode of operation. Divine goodness laid the divine being under a moral necessity of forming all his purposes of doing good as early as possible. When he saw what was best for him to do, he was morally obliged to do it ; and he could no more neglect to determine to do all that his infinite wisdom saw best to be done ; than he could cease to be perfectly wise and good. Not to determine to do the greatest good, when he clearly saw what it was, would have been inconsistent with his perfect rectitude. As the goodness of God must have moved him to act ; so it must have moved him to determine to act in the wisest and best manner, or to do the greatest good. There being no defect in his wisdom, nor in his goodness, nor in his power, these perfections united must have moved him to devise, fix, and determine, the best possible way of doing the greatest good. It was impossible for God, who was perfectly wise and good, to devise and adopt a plan of

operation, which was not the best that could be devised and adopted. For the least defect or imperfection in the divine purposes would argue a natural or moral defect in his character. So that we may safely conclude, that the perfect, immutable, and universal goodness of God did actually move him, to devise and adopt the best possible method of doing the greatest possible good, before the foundation of the world.

2. The perfect goodness of God must have moved him to bring into existence the best possible system of intelligent creatures. It must have moved him to give existence to the best *number* of beings. The number could not be infinite, but must be limited. And in the limitation, there was room for the display of perfect wisdom and goodness, to devise and fix upon the best possible number. He must have fixed the exact number of angels, of men, and of animals, as well as the exact number of the heavenly luminaries and material objects. He must have determined what variety there should be in the natural and moral qualities of the moral system to make it the most perfect. And he must have determined to make just such a natural and moral world as he has actually made.

3. The goodness of God continually moves him to exert his power and wisdom in governing all his creatures and all his works, in the wisest and best manner. His perfect goodness makes him the most active being in the universe. He is neither weary, nor faint. He never slumbers nor sleeps. He constantly does all that it is necessary for him to do, in order to govern the whole creation in the wisest and best manner. He is actively concerned in all the good that is done in every part of the universe. He guides the hands and hearts of all his creatures in all the good they do, whether intentionally, or unintentionally. Notwithstanding the stupidity, ingratitude, and disobedience of multitudes of his intelligent creatures, his goodness prompts him to pour down the blessings of his providence upon them in constant and copious streams. He satisfies the desires of every living creature, and fills the

mouths of all mankind with food and gladness. He bestows as many and as great favours upon this sinful world, as it is morally possible for him to bestow. He treats every individual creature as well as the good of his great system will allow. His impartial goodness leads him to regard the whole more than a part, and to govern individuals in subserviency to the good of his whole family in heaven and on earth. Though the goodness of God moved him to do great good in the works of creation; yet it has moved him to do unspeakably more good in the works of providence. He has been doing good every moment in every part of the universe, for nearly six thousand years; nor is there a rational, nor irrational creature that has ever existed, but has felt the influence of his universal and constant goodness. But it may be further observed,

4. That the perfect goodness of God must move him, to make the intelligent universe as holy and happy as possible, through the interminable ages of eternity. He will do as much good to his creatures, as it is possible in the nature of things that he should do. His power and wisdom will always be under the influence of his permanent, immutable, and universal goodness. He will never be less able, or less disposed to do good, in time to come, than in time past. He has formed the best plan to do good for ever, and he is able to do all the good that he has determined to do from eternity. He has all his creatures under his eye and under his control, and will employ them all, to promote the general good of the universe. God can no more cease to *do* good, than he can cease to *be* good; and he can no more cease to be good, than he can cease to exist. The good he has done bears no more proportion to the good he will do, than time bears proportion to eternity. He means to make all his goodness pass before the eyes of all his intelligent creatures. Angels and men will be as capable of enjoying holiness and happiness after the end of the world, as they were before, and God will be as able,

and as much disposed to make them holy and happy, after that period as before; therefore, as long as his boundless power and goodness remain, we may be certain, they will be incessantly and perpetually employed in augmenting the holiness and happiness of the blessed inhabitants of heaven. And who can conceive to what a height of felicity God can and will raise the objects of his complacency and delight, in future and eternal ages! Thus it appears from the nature and permanency of divine goodness, that God must make the intelligent universe as holy and happy as their natures will admit, through every period of their interminable existence. This important and consoling truth is not supported by fine spun reasonings, but is demonstrated by the immutability of the existence and perfections of God.

I now proceed to the improvement of the subject and observe,

I. The goodness of God is discoverable by the light of nature. It is a question, which has been frequently and warmly agitated, whether the goodness of God *can* be discovered by the *works* of God, without his word. But if God be not only good, but *does* good; then we may fairly conclude, that his goodness may be discovered by his works alone, without the aid of divine revelation. It is a common and infallible maxim, that *actions* speak louder than *words*. The goodness of men is more clearly and certainly discovered by their *conduct*, than by their *declarations*. It is true, that detached parts of their conduct may be ambiguous or doubtful, and their actions may appear better than they are; but this is because we cannot always know from what motives they act. But taking the whole of their conduct together, it affords the highest evidence we can have of their goodness; certainly much higher, than any declarations they can make. But if it be true, that God is good, and his goodness governs all his conduct; then his conduct is the highest possible evidence of his perfect goodness. His *word* is only an evidence of his goodness, *after* his goodness has been

demonstrated by his *works*. After we have demonstrated, that God is good by his *works*, then we know that he speaks the truth in his word, when he *declares* that he is good; but before we have demonstrated by his *works*, that he is good, we cannot know that he speaks the truth, when he *tells* us in his word that he is good. It is not only true, that the goodness of God may be discovered by his *works*, but it is true, that his goodness *cannot* be discovered in any other way, either in this world or in the world to come. For, if the evils in this world be an argument against his goodness, greater evils in another world will be stronger arguments against it. It is said by those, who deny, that the goodness of God can be discovered by his *works* in this world, that we do not know how he will treat mankind in a future state, without the aid of the bible; he may, notwithstanding his apparent goodness towards them in this life, annihilate them, or make them perfectly miserable. But we cannot know the contrary to this merely by his word; for though he has promised to make some of them happy; yet we cannot know that he will fulfil his promise, without knowing by his *works*, that he is perfectly and immutably good. The *works* of God, therefore, afford us the first and most infallible evidence, that God is good. Accordingly, the apostle asserts, that all the nations of the earth may discover the goodness of God by his *works*, and are inexcusable, if they do not. He says, "because that which may be known of God is *manifest* in them;" that is, the heathens, "for God hath *shewed* it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the *creation* of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are *made*, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." It is not for want of evidence, by the *works* of God, that the pagan world have not discovered the being and goodness of the only living and true God, but because of their moral depravity, and their criminal stupidity arising from it. All men might discover the goodness of God, which he is daily and constant-

ly acting out before them, if they would critically and impartially attend to his *works*, which afford the highest possible evidence he can give them of his goodness, either in this life, or the next.

2. If God always acts under the influence of pure, permanent, universal, and perfect goodness; then all the objections, that ever have been made, or ever can be made, against any part of his conduct, are objections against his goodness, which must be altogether unreasonable and absurd. Our eyes must be evil, if we object against God, because he is good. But if we object against any part of his conduct, we object against his goodness; for whatever he has done, he has been moved to do, by his pure and perfect goodness. It is as certain that his whole conduct is good, as that his whole heart is good. So that we cannot object against a single instance of his conduct, without virtually objecting against his goodness. This will appear, if we distinctly consider any objections we have ever formed against any part of his conduct.

If we object against his forming any or all his purposes from eternity, we object against his goodness; for his goodness required him to form his purposes as soon as his perfections enabled him to form them, or as soon as he knew what was best for him to do. But his essential knowledge enabled him to know what was best for him to do from eternity; and when he knew this, he could not consistently with his perfect knowledge and goodness, *delay* forming all his purposes, because there could be no reason for his delaying; and to *delay* without reason must have been contrary to his perfect rectitude. He acted under the influence of his perfect goodness in forming his purposes from eternity; and in forming just such purposes as he did form. We cannot therefore object against his forming his purposes from eternity, nor against any purposes he did then form, without objecting against his goodness; for his whole conduct in forming his purposes was the genuine fruit of his unerring wisdom,



guided by his pure, impartial, and universal benevolence, which ought to be loved and approved by every intelligent creature.

If we object against God's conduct in placing Adam as the publick head of mankind, and suspending their moral character upon the condition of his perfect obedience, we object against his goodness, which moved him to place Adam and his posterity in such a critical and dangerous state. God might have determined, that each individual of the human race should have been placed as the angels were, without any publick head, whose single act should so deeply affect millions and millions of others. But his perfect goodness moved him to appoint Adam to be the publick head of all his posterity, that by one man's disobedience, many should be made sinners. And since divine goodness determined this important event we cannot have the least reason to object against it.—If we object against God's *agency* in governing the hearts and conduct of mankind in the manner he does, we object against his goodness. For every act of his government is an act of pure goodness, which seeks the highest good of the universe. He could, if he pleased, make every one of mankind act entirely right, and prevent every one from acting wrong; and it is owing to his goodness, that he does not govern the moral world in this manner. He could have prevented all natural and moral evil from coming into the world, if he had pleased; and he could now banish all natural and moral evil from the world, if he pleased. But his perfect and universal goodness moves him to overrule both natural and moral evil, for the benefit of the universe, and who can object against it, without objecting against his goodness?

If we object against his saving one person, and destroying another, according to his original purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus, we object against his goodness. For it was pure, perfect benevolence, which moved him to form all his purposes of special grace. If we only admit the perfect goodness of God, and

believe that he always has acted, and always will act under the influence of it, it will be impossible for any of mankind, or for any other intelligent creatures, to see the least ground to object against a single instance of God's conduct in forming and executing his original and eternal purposes. The plain and important truth, that God is perfectly and immutably good, and always acts under the influence of perfect goodness, solves all the apparent darkness and difficulties in both the natural and moral world, and completely removes the ground of every objection, that ever has been, or ever can be made against the conduct of God in any of his works of creation, or providence or redemption.

3. If God always acts under the influence of his pure, permanent, universal goodness; then no creature in the universe ever has had, or ever will have any just cause to murmur or complain, under the dispensations of providence. Though mankind are born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward; and though God does inflict many and great evils upon the children of men; yet he never afflicts willingly, or grieves them. It is only, if need be, or some good end may be answered by it. He treats all his creatures as well, as it is morally possible for him to treat them; and with this, every one ought to be completely satisfied. All men have constant occasion to rejoice, that the Lord reigneth, and that their times are in his holy and benevolent hands. This good men have believed; and they have acted accordingly. Who ever suffered greater, more complicated, and more unexpected calamities than Job did; but in the depth of his afflictions he said, "The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He viewed all his sufferings as coming from the wisdom and goodness of God, which removed every murmuring thought, and produced cordial and unreserved submission. And the primitive christians lived in the lively faith of the perfect goodness of God in all the dealings of his providence towards them, which gave them entire satisfaction under all the evils they suffered. They could sin-

cerely say of themselves, "As dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things." The paternal goodness of God is a perpetual source of consolation to all his children while they are passing through all the fiery trials, which fall to their lot in this present evil world. When God's ancient people complained, that his ways were not equal, he appeals to their own consciences to justify his conduct, and condemn their own. "Are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?" God fills the earth with his goodness, and acts it out in every dispensation of his providence towards every individual of the human race, which ought to remove every murmur and complaint, fill every heart with gratitude, and every mouth with praise. Hence says the apostle to every one with great propriety, "Rejoice ever more; and again I say, rejoice."

4. If God be universally and perfectly good, and always acts under the influence of his immutable and perfect goodness; then it is owing to the knowledge, and not to the ignorance of sinners, that they *hate* God. They are called haters of God, and are said to have "a carnal mind which is enmity to God, and not subject to his law, neither indeed can be." Some ascribe all their enmity and opposition to God to their ignorance of his true character. They say no man can know the great and amiable character of God, and at the same time hate him. This would be true, if their hearts were holy and benevolent; but their hearts are entirely selfish, and selfishness is diametrically opposite to pure, holy, perfect benevolence. And therefore the more they know of God, the more their hearts rise against him, and hate every part of his character, and every instance of his conduct rightly understood. Could they see and realise the pure, benevolent motives of his conduct in all instances, they would perfectly hate and oppose all his designs and all his conduct. Could the eyes of all the sinners in the world be opened at once, and they have a clear and

full view of his motives in creating and governing all his creatures, they would all rise up in open rebellion against their maker. This is exemplified by the feelings and language and conduct of those, whose eyes God does often open to see and realise his sovereign goodness and grace. They are the persons who hate God the most sensibly, till their carnal mind is slain, and holy love is shed abroad in their hearts. Our Saviour, who knew what was in man, represents sinners as hating God, not because they are ignorant of him, but because they know him. He expressly says, "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen, and *hated* both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, *They hated me without a cause.*" Sinners hate God for his goodness, which is no just cause for their hating him. Their hearts are evil because he is good. They hate him more for his goodness, than for any thing else in his character. They hate his power, knowledge, and wisdom, because these natural attributes are under the constant influence of his pure, holy, disinterested benevolence; and of course, the more they know of his natural and moral perfections, the more their carnal mind rises against him.

5. If God be purely, perfectly, and universally good, and always acts under the influence of it; then he will display his goodness in the everlasting punishment of the finally impenitent. He loves them with the love of benevolence in this world, and desires simply considered, that they might not perish, but have everlasting life. This he declares under the solemnity of an oath. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" And again we read, "The 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." As God loves the impenitent in this life with the love of benevolence, so he will always feel benevolently towards them, while he manifests the tokens of his everlasting displeasure towards them. His perfect goodness disposes him to hate their perfect wickedness, and to punish them for it. And as it is his goodness, that disposes him to punish them, so it will dispose him to punish them for ever. If he punished them from a principle of malevolence and revenge, there could be no evidence, that he would punish them for ever. But since his perfect goodness leads him to regard the highest good of the universe, and to oppose whatever is opposed to that, his goodness requires him to punish those, who are the opposers of that good, so long as the highest good of the universe renders their punishment necessary. And we can see no reason why the good of the universe should not require their *eternal*, as well as *temporary* punishment. God's displeasure towards the finally impenitent, will be a holy and benevolent displeasure, and his goodness turned into wrath will for ever burn to the lowest hell, and give a peculiar emphasis to the miseries of the damned. If they could only see, that God punished them in the exercise of a malignant and a revengeful spirit, it would be a great relief to their sorrows; but they will always know and feel, that God always acts under the influence of perfect goodness, while he pours out the vials of his wrath upon them, which must serve to sink them deeper and deeper in darkness, misery and despair. The goodness of God, instead of being an argument in favour of universal salvation, affords the strongest argument to prove, that since God punishes sinners in this life, he will punish them for ever except they repent.

6. If God is purely and perfectly good, and always acts under the influence of his goodness; then those who are finally happy will for ever approve of the divine conduct towards the finally miserable. Some have supposed, that the everlasting miseries of the

damned would disturb and diminish the happiness of the blessed. And they undoubtedly would, if their miseries did not flow from the perfect goodness of God. But they will see and believe, that God displays his goodness in displaying his justice, and this display of goodness and justice, will be so far from diminishing their felicity, that it will augment it for ever. Though the blessed will not take pleasure in the mere miseries of the damned; yet they will take pleasure in the pure, impartial, and perfect goodness of God, in giving them the due reward of their deeds. Moses and the pious Israelites rejoiced in the goodness of God, which sunk Pharaoh and his hosts in the merciless waves. And we know, that the heavenly hosts sing the song of Moses, and say, "Amen, Alleluia;" while they behold the smoke of the torments of the damned. And the only reason is, that they see the displays of divine goodness in punishing those, who have opposed and always will oppose the glory of God, and the highest good of the universe.

7. If the pure, perfect immutable goodness of God be consistent with his pure, perfect, immutable justice; then while sinners remain impenitent, they have no ground to rely upon his mere goodness to save them. While God gives them health and strength, and prosperity, and pours into their bosoms the common blessings of his providence, they are extremely apt to imagine, that his goodness will terminate in his special grace; and that after he has done them so much good in this world, he never will inflict everlasting punishment upon them, in the world to come. This notion of divine goodness gives them habitual ease and security in the neglect of duty from day to day; and often affords them hope in their last moments. How often do we find those on a sick and dying bed who feel easy and safe, though they have never embraced the gospel. And if they are asked, why they are not distressed about their future and eternal state; they will readily reply, that they hope in the mercy of God to prepare them to die, before

they leave the world. They cannot believe that a being of infinite goodness will cast them off for ever. But they have no ground to rely upon the mere goodness of God, which may be displayed in their destruction, as well as in their salvation. This is certain from the nature of his goodness, and the displays of it, in ten thousand cases. What terrible calamities has he inflicted upon mankind, from age to age in this world? He has once swept away all the inhabitants of it, by the besom of destruction. He burnt up Sodom and Gomorrah, as a prelude to future and everlasting punishment. He has set them forth "for an *example*, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." What ground then, have dying impenitents to hope that the mere mercy of God will save them in their impenitence and unbelief? The immutable goodness of God will never move him to act contrary to his declarations and original designs, to save an impenitent sinner from endless destruction.

8. If God be purely, permanently, and universally good; then the terms of salvation, proposed in his word, are as low and condescending as possible. He requires nothing of sinners, but to love his pure and perfect goodness, in order to enjoy it for ever. He declares, "I love them that love me, and those who seek me early shall find me." It is certainly reasonable, that those who have hated God *without a cause*, should love him for his goodness, which is the highest reason for loving any being in the universe. And there is nothing in the way of their loving the pure and perfect benevolence of God, but their present voluntary selfishness. It is only because they love themselves supremely, that they cannot love God supremely, who is supremely worthy of their supreme affection. If they perish, therefore, they must perish by their own choice, in opposition to that love, which would save them. It is their immediate and important duty to turn from sin to holiness, which is only turning from hating to loving God.

9. If God be perfectly and immutably good; then he will cause all things to work together for the good of them that love him. All that he has designed to do, and ever will do, will display his goodness, which will be the constant and perpetual source of light, of joy, and blessedness to them that love him. Their happiness is as secure as his blessedness, and they will enjoy all good, so far as their natures will admit. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."



## SERMON VII.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

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MATTHEW, VI. 30.

*Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

Our Saviour as often addressed his disciples, as others, in his publick as well as his private discourses. He lost no opportunities for instructing and preparing them for the great, and difficult, and dangerous work in which he was about to employ them. He meant to send them forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, without arms, without purse, without script, to preach the gospel in the face of a frowning world. And to prepare them for such a dependent and defenceless state, he taught them to place an unshaken dependence upon the care and protection of divine providence. "Seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him. And he opened his mouth, and taught *them*," as well as the multitudes. And among other duties, he clearly and beautifully illustrated the duty and safety of trusting not only in the *universal*, but in the *particular* providence of God, for the peculiar comfort and consolation of his disciples, when they should be thrown poor and defenceless on the world. "I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much

better than they? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Here the argument is from the less to the greater. If God takes care of the lilies and all the inanimate creation, will he not take care of the fowls and all the animal creation? And if he takes care of all the animate and inanimate creation, will he not take care of all the intelligent creation? If God exercises a *general* providence over the natural world, will he not exercise a *particular* providence over the natural world? And if he exercise a general and particular providence over the *natural* world, will he not exercise a general and particular providence over the *moral* world? Christ appeals to the common sense of all mankind, whether they have not reason to believe, that God, who made the world and all that is in it, does exercise a *particular*, as well as a *general* providence over it; and whether they have not good ground to confide in his constant and particular care over them, and disposal of them.

The spirit of the text may be expressed in this general observation—

That God exercises a particular providence over every thing in this world. I shall,

I. Explain a particular providence; and,

II. Offer some considerations in favour of it.

I. I am to explain what we are to understand by a particular providence.

Many infidels, and some, who do not choose to call themselves infidels, deny that God exercises a *particular* providence over the world. They acknowledge, that he exercises a *general* providence over all the natural and moral creation, but deny that he governs individual creatures, persons, or events. They suppose, that he governs the world by general laws, which he

impressed upon it, when he willed it into existence; which laws he will continue in force as long as it exists. These general laws, they suppose, leave room for what we call contingencies. They suppose all things roll on through a vast variety of *contingent events*, according to the first impressions of motion, that were given to them by the first Mover, and under the direction of an universal providence. As to the tribes of lower animals, they are left under the direction of instinct; and as to men, God has given them the materials of natural and moral happiness, in the natural and moral constitution of things. He has given them also faculties and powers, necessary to collect and apply these materials, and carry on the work of their own happiness. They suppose, that God takes no care of men as *individuals*, but only as a species, or as large bodies and communities; that he takes no care of animals as individuals, but only as species: and in a word, that he takes no other care of his creatures than to continue their species according to the first law of their creation. Indeed, they consider this world like a great machine, which God at first created and set in motion, and left to run on according to the general laws given it, without the continued agency and direction of the great Creator.

This is what some call a general providence, and suppose is the only one that God exercises over the world.

But christians in general maintain the doctrine of a *particular* providence, by which they mean, that God not only gives general laws for the government of the world, but that he gives energy to such laws and applies them to every *individual* creature, object, and event in the world: or that he takes care of every individual person among mankind, as well as of the whole human race collectively; that he takes care of every particular animal, as well as of every species of animals collectively; that he directs and controls the smallest, as well as the most important events that take place in the world; that he does not merely see all

things as an unconcerned spectator, but by his invisible and almighty hand, guides and governs all his creatures and all their actions; and in a word, that he is the first and supreme cause of all that lives, and moves, and exists in this, and every other world. I now proceed,

II. To offer some considerations in favour of such a particular providence, as we have just described. Here it may be observed,

1. That it appears from the nature of providence, that it must be particular. We cannot conceive of a general, without a particular providence. The very idea of providence supposes the preservation and government of the world. If God exercises any kind of care or concern over it, it must be in upholding all things in existence, and in directing the conduct of creatures and the events, which respect their happiness or misery. And if this be the nature of providence, it must be particular and extend to every individual creature, and every individual event. For we can no more conceive, that one creature can uphold itself in existence, than another. If one creature needs the divine support, then all creatures need it. And if all creatures need the divine support at one time, then they need it at all times. It involves an evident absurdity to suppose, that any created object or created agent should be one moment *independent* of its creator for support and preservation; because *independence* is an incommunicable attribute of the Deity, which he can no more give to any of his creatures, or to any of his works, than he can give them eternal and uncaused existence. Since then all created things are necessarily dependent; God's preserving providence must respect and support them all individually. The small dust of the balance as much needs the constant agency of divine providence to support its existence, as the whole material system. The drop of the bucket as constantly needs the supporting hand of God, as the whole collection of waters in the deep and mighty ocean. The smallest animal or insect as con-

stantly needs the preserving power and agency of God, as all the species collectively. And every man in particular, must depend upon a divine and almighty influence to continue his existence, as much as the whole human race. The preserving providence of God, therefore, must of necessity be particular, and extend to every created nature and object, without a single exception. And so must the *governing* providence of God. For if one creature needs to be under a divine direction, so does another. If one event needs to be under a divine direction, so does another. And if one secondary cause needs a divine influence to give it energy to produce its effects, so does another. In short, if there be any need of a divine providence to uphold this world, there is the same need of a divine providence to govern it. And if there be any need of a divine providence to uphold and govern it in general, there is the same need of a divine providence to govern every thing in it, in particular. Every argument in favour of a *general* providence, is equally pertinent and forcible to prove a *particular* providence.

2. That the supreme and ultimate end of divine providence proves it to be particular. If God exercises any providence or government over the world, it is to answer some particular end, and the same, no doubt, for which he created it. This is the dictate of reason as well as scripture. Hence that ascription of praise to the creator in the fourth chapter of Revelation. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power, for thou hast created all things, and for *thy pleasure* they are, and were created." And the apostle says, "That of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory for ever." To this may be added the declaration of Solomon, that "God hath made all things *for himself*." Now, if God's last end in the creation of the world, be his own glory, and if he aims at the same end in the exercise of providence, then his providence must be *particular* as well as *universal*, and concerned in all created objects and events. If he means that the whole creation shall

promote his glory, then he must exercise not only an *universal*, but a *particular* providence over the whole. The whole is always made up of all its parts; and, therefore, in order that the whole creation may promote his glory, he must govern and direct all the *parts* of it to his supreme and ultimate end. Accordingly, we find, that some great and important events have been connected with and dependent on those that appear, without such a connection, very small and trifling. What important events depended on Joseph's dreams! They finally proved the means of preserving the whole church of God. The dreams of Ahasuerus proved the occasion of searching the records, which occasioned Mordecai's advancement, Haman's overthrow, and the Jews' deliverance from a general massacre. The gagging of the geese once saved the city of Rome from destruction, by the Gauls. Fabius, the Roman general, who by his wisdom and valour drove Hannibal, the greatest warrior then in the world from the Roman empire, was suffocated by a single hair in a draught of milk. These facts show how necessary it is, that God should exercise a *particular* as well as a *universal* providence over every creature, object, and event in this world, in order to make all things promote his own glory, which was his supreme and ultimate end in the creation of all things.

3. The goodness of God requires him to exercise a particular providence over all his creatures. Every creature susceptible of pleasure or pain is a proper object of the divine benevolence. And as all the creatures of God are always open to his all comprehensive view, so he regards them all with equal attention and impartial affection. God is love; and he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. His goodness disposes him to pay attention to his whole great family, and take particular care of every individual. He stands in the same relation of creator to all his rational and irrational, all his holy and unholy creatures. And though he does not feel the love of complacency towards them all; yet he feels the love of

benevolence towards every individual, and desires to promote its happiness so far as the good of all permits. His perfect, impartial benevolence, therefore, requires him to exercise not only a general, but particular providence over the smallest, meanest, and vilest creature and object in both the natural, and moral world.

4. The scripture represents God as exercising a particular providence over every material, and immaterial, rational, and irrational creature and object, that he has brought into being. It represents God as governing and controlling every part of the material creation. It says, he causeth the day spring to know his place, and maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good. He telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them by their proper names. He hath his way in the winds, and in the storms, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He causes the thunders to lift up their voice, the lightnings to flash, and strike when and where, and whom he pleases. He has the balancing of the clouds, and causeth it to rain on one city, and not on another. He giveth the snow like wool. He scattereth the hoar frost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels. Who can stand before his cold? He rules the raging of the sea, and sets bounds to the mighty ocean, saying, hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here thy proud waves shall be stayed. He watereth the earth, and causes it to yield its increase. He covers the valleys with corn, and the fields with grass. He gives beauty to the lily, and fragrance to the rose. His providence governs all the inanimate and vegetable world. Nor does he exercise a less particular and influential providence over the animal creation. He gives courage to the horse, strength to the lion, and wisdom to the hawk, and prudence to the ant. He openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. But he takes a more tender and affectionate care of all mankind, each of whom he values more than the whole animal creation. He fixes the bounds of their habitation, and determines

the number of their months. He keeps their eyes from tears, their feet from falling, and their souls from death. He governs all their thoughts, intentions, and actions. He gives them all things richly to enjoy. He takes as constant and particular care of every individual of the human race, as if he had but one person in the world to take care of. Such a wise, and powerful, and benevolent, and particular providence does God exercise over all his creatures, and all his works.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God exercises a particular providence over the world and all that is in it; then there can be no such thing as chance, or fate. The old heathen philosophers held the doctrine of fate, though they differed in their opinions of it. Some maintained, that matter had a necessary and eternal existence, and never was created; and consequently they supposed, that it was not in the power of any intelligent being to govern it so as to prevent either natural or moral evil. Of course they supposed, that natural and moral evils were to be ascribed to *chance*, or accident, independently of any supreme governour of the world. Another sect of philosophers supposed, that Jupiter, the supreme deity, governed all things according to his own first and immutable decrees, which they called fixt fate, agreeably to the etymology of the word *fate*, which is derived from the Latin words *for*, *fari*, *fatum*; that is, spoken. They supposed, that all things happened, just as the supreme deity had determined and said, that they should happen, notwithstanding the desires, the exertions, the hopes and fears, of all inferiour and dependent creatures. Hence they supposed, that all things happened by fatality, and that no event could be brought about, or prevented by any human means. But, if God, who made the world, governs it generally by the instrumentality of men and other subordinate agents; then there is no room for fate, or chance, or any contingent events. Though no denom-



ination of christians profess to hold the doctrine of fate, or chance ; yet they do profess to believe, that ten thousand events are contingent, and come to pass independently of any divine decree, or divine agency. This opinion is totally inconsistent with the rational and scriptural doctrine of a univeral and particular providence. God determined from eternity to make just such a world as this, and to govern it just as he does govern it, by a *particular* providence. He determined to leave no creature, no person, no object, and no event to mere casualty or chance. As the world and all there is in it is always under his eye and in his hand ; so he treats all creatures and all persons just as he originally intended, and brings about just such events, at just such times, and by just such means, as he originally intended. No contingent event ever takes place. Not an hair falls from the head, nor a sparrow falls to the ground contrary to his design, or without his agency. It is owing to his particular providence, that mankind enjoy so many, and no more favours ; and it is owing to his particular providence, that they suffer so many and no more evils. No good can come to them, and no evil fall upon them, but only under the direction and influence of his holy, wise, powerful, and particular providence.

2. If God exercises a *particular providence* over the world, and all that is in it ; then he will certainly accomplish his supreme and ultimate end in all the works of creation. As he made all things for his own glory, so he will make all things in the universe promote his infinitely wise and eternal purpose. As he exercises a particular providence over all the material, animal, and moral world, every object, every creature and every event, which he *has brought*, and *will bring* into existence, will be, some way or other, instrumental of accomplishing his great and good designs ; because there is nothing in the universe can either designedly or undesignedly oppose, counteract, or frustrate the operations of his providence. As he has made nothing in vain, so he governs nothing in vain. There is not

one worthless or useless creature, or object in the whole circle of creation. Though there are ten thousand creatures and things, which appear not worth creation, preservation, or government in our view; this is not true in the view of God. He knows how to dispose of all created beings and objects so as to make every one of them serve some valuable and important purpose. This world viewed as in the hand of providence, is a most beautiful, valuable and important world. And could we see the ultimate end to which God is moving all things, we should not be slow of heart to believe, that he will finally accomplish all his designs; that all his works will praise him; that they will bring an immense revenue of glory to himself, and an immense revenue of holiness and happiness to his dutiful and obedient subjects. God, in governing this world, for nearly six thousand years, has caused it to produce great and astonishing effects. How many millions of rational and immortal creatures has God already raised up here, to exist for ever in a future state? and how many millions more will he raise up here, for the same important purpose! And all the objects with which men have been, and will be surrounded here, and all the scenes of light and darkness, prosperity and adversity, through which he *has* called them, and will call them, have been and will be the means of forming their characters, and preparing them for endless bliss, or wo. While we live in this world, which is under the particular providence of God, we are living in a great, and good and solemn world. Every creature, every object, and every event is preparing the way for the final consummation of all things when we shall find, that God has not made an angel, a man, a worm, or a mote in vain, but all for his own glory.

3. The particular providence of God displays the perfections of his nature in the most grand and glorious light. His upholding, preserving and governing all things, by his universal and particular providence, gives the most exalted views of his eternal power and

Godhead. We measure the power of every agent by the nature, the number, and magnitude of the effects, which he has produced, or is able to produce. We admire the power of Sampson, who, by one effort of his strength, overthrew the house, and destroyed the lives of so many idolatrous Philistines. But what were those effects, in comparison, with the nature, variety and magnitude of the effects which God has, every moment, for thousands of years, produced! He has upheld, preserved, and governed the heavens and the earth, and all the innumerable creatures and objects which they contain. To uphold and preserve one individual creature or object displays a power superior to the united power of all created beings. But the power of God appears unspeakably greater and more astonishing in upholding and preserving every particle of dust in the earth, every drop of water in the ocean, every star in the firmament, and every creature in the universe. The number, variety, and magnitude of the effects, which God by his particular providence, has produced for ages, and will produce to all eternity, display his omnipotence in the most clear, amiable, and instructive light. His particular providence displays the immensity of his presence, as well as the omnipotence of his power. He is always present, wherever he always acts. He is always acting in heaven, in earth, and in all places; his presence therefore, fills heaven, and earth, and all places at one and the same moment, through every period of duration. And what an exalted idea does this exhibit of the divine omnipresence! But God governs every created being and object, as well as upholds and preserves all things in existence. He governs every particle of matter, every motion of every living creature, and every action of every moral agent, in subserviency to one supreme and ultimate object, which is his own glory. And to superintend and overrule all things in such a manner, displays infinite knowledge and wisdom. Nor does he make a less visible and glorious display of his boundless benevo-

lence, by the multitude of his favours, which he is continually bestowing upon both his innocent and guilty creatures. His creatures are innumerable, and the blessings which he bestows upon each are innumerable. It is the *particularity* of divine providence that gives the brightest display of the immensity of the divine presence, and the infinitude of the divine power, wisdom, and goodness.

4. It appears from the particular providence of God, that the whole world are under indispensable obligations of gratitude to him, for every favour they enjoy. Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. By his particular providence, he has preserved them, watched over them, and provided for them every blessing that they have ever enjoyed. In Him, they have lived, and moved, and had their being, and to his almighty hand and benevolent heart, they ought to ascribe the great and innumerable blessings, which have fallen to their happy lot. In the exercise of his particular providence over the world, he has every moment exerted his almighty power, and infinite wisdom, and goodness, to satisfy the desires of every rational and irrational creature. Such displays of divine power, wisdom, and goodness God has made before the whole world of mankind, which have laid every individual under the most endearing obligations of gratitude to their creator, preserver, and benefactor. He has not left the heathen world without witness, in that he has done them good, and given them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness. He has given far brighter displays of his goodness before all the christian world; and to no part of the christian world, perhaps, has he displayed the riches of his goodness and mercy so marvelously, as to our rising nation. We have been a people, emphatically saved of the Lord. We have been eminently the children of his care and providence. He has given us both temporal and spiritual, civil and

religious favours in vast variety, and extraordinary profusion. And in addition to these national blessings, he has bestowed upon every individual more personal mercies than can be reckoned up. But, alas! instead of giving unto Him the gratitude and praise, which the riches of his goodness have merited and demanded, how have we abused them! His goodness, instead of leading us to repentance, has led us to impenitence, unbelief, and rebellion. He has reason to complain of us, as he did of Israel—"Hear O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against me." "I beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." God has spared your lives, and loaded you with his benefits another year, and now calls for his just reverence of gratitude and praise. But this you cannot pay him, without giving him the supreme affection of your hearts, and devoting your spared lives to his service. O consider in what a good *world* you have lived, in what a good *land* you have lived, under what a good providence you have lived, and under what pious parents many of you have lived. These great and singular favours, vastly strengthen, and increase your obligations to live pious and grateful lives. But if any of you, whether young or old, should refuse to give your hearts and your service to God, and continue barren and unfruitful, you have nothing better to anticipate, than to be cut down and destroyed, and that even before such an anniversary as this returns. Be entreated to spend this thanksgiving day gratefully and penitently, and if you do, you may hope for the continuance and increase of every temporal and spiritual blessing, that infinite wisdom and goodness shall see best to bestow. Will not he that clothes the lily, and feeds the fowls; much more feed and clothe you, who confide in his providence, as long as you shall need these blessings, in your way to heaven?

## SERMON VIII.

THE REVEALED WILL OF GOD THE ONLY RULE OF DUTY.

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DEUTERONOMY, xxix. 29.

*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God ; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

It is a mark of the moral depravity of mankind, that they are generally more inquisitive to know their fortune, than to know their duty. They are much more solicitous to know what God intends, than what he requires. He has told them their duty, which they do not desire to know ; but he has not told them their fortune, which they are fond of being told. This general propensity to know futurity has led the great mass of mankind, from age to age, to practice the grossest idolatry. When God led his people Israel out of Egypt by the hand of Moses, he gave them his written law at Mount Sinai, to prevent their symbolizing with the idolatrous nations through whom he was leading them, and among whom he was about to fix their permanent residence. This law they publickly and solemnly engaged to keep, at the very time it was given. But God knew their native propensity to disregard their most sacred vows and engagements, and therefore he commanded them to renew their covenant to obey his revealed will, just before they entered into the land of promise. But still farther to guard them against seeking to magicians, astrologers, or soothsayers, to know things which God had not seen fit to *reveal*, Moses gave them the admonition in the text, “ The secret things belong unto the Lord our God ; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children, that we

may do all the words of this law." The plain meaning of Moses is,

That the revealed will of God, and not his secret will, is the rule of duty. I shall,

I. Consider what the secret will of God respects ;

II. Consider what his revealed will respects ; and,

III. Show that his revealed will, and not his secret will, is the rule of duty.

I. We are to consider what the secret will of God respects. The text supposes, that there are secret things in the mind of the Deity, which he has not revealed, or that he has secret designs concerning future events, which he intends shall remain undisclosed until they are actually accomplished. Before the foundation of the world, he formed in his own mind a complete scheme of his own conduct through all future ages. This scheme comprehended all things that ever have been and ever will be brought into existence. His secret will solely respects *the taking place* of those things, which he determined from eternity should take place, without any regard to the *nature* of them, whether morally good, or morally evil. It was his secret will, that not only holiness and happiness, but that sin and misery also should take place among his intelligent creatures. Though he loved only holiness and happiness, and perfectly hated sin and misery ; yet he determined that both should take place. It was his secret will, that Lucifer should rebel, and Adam should disobey, though he hated both the rebellion of Lucifer and the disobedience of Adam. It was his secret will, that Judas should betray and Peter should deny Christ, though he hated the conduct of both Judas and Peter. It is his secret will, that all the elect shall repent and believe, and that all the non-elect shall live and die in impenitence and unbelief, though he loves faith and repentance, and hates impenitence and unbelief. It always was, and is, and will be his secret will, that all things shall take place, which he sees will best promote his own glory, and the highest good of the universe, whether they are good

or evil, right or wrong in their own nature. The assembly of divines have given a just and accurate definition of God's secret will. "It is the counsel of his own will, whereby for his own glory, he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass." His secret will entirely respects his decree, his purpose, his intention, or his determination, concerning the actual existence or the actual taking place of all things, in both the natural and moral world. Let us now consider,

II. What the revealed will of God respects. It respects something very different from what his secret will respects. It respects what is right and wrong, what is good and evil, or what is duty and sin, without any regard to the taking place of these things. God has revealed in his word what is agreeable and disagreeable to him, in its own nature. His precepts require nothing but what is right and pleasing to him; and his prohibitions forbid nothing but what is morally wrong and displeasing to him. He has declared in his word, that he shall be pleased with men, if they are holy; but displeased with them, if they are unholy. He has declared in his word, that he will reward men, if they are holy; but if they are unholy, he will punish them. In this sense, the precepts and prohibitions of the divine law are a transcript of the divine character, or in other words, are holy, just and good. When God requires men to love him with all the heart, he lets them know, that it is his *pleasure*, that they should love him with all the heart; but not that it is his *secret or decretive will*, that they should love him with all the heart; for in some cases, it is his secret will, that they should not love him with all the heart. And when he threatens to punish them for not loving him with all the heart, he lets them know, that it is his *disposition* to punish them, but not that it is his *intention* or design to punish them for not loving him with all the heart; for in some cases, it is his secret will or design to save them from the punishment, which he has threatened to inflict upon them for disobedience. So that his precepts and prohibitions in his word, do not respect his



secret or decreative will at all. They have no respect to the taking place of things, whether good or evil; but only to what is morally right and morally wrong, or what is, in itself considered, agreeable and disagreeable to him. We come now,

III. To show that God's revealed will, and not his secret will, is the rule of duty. And this will appear, if we consider,

1. That God has revealed his will in his word for the very purpose of giving us a rule of duty. So Moses expressly declares in the text. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." The law of God reveals to us what is pleasing and what is displeasing to him, and at the same time, requires us to do what is pleasing, and to avoid what is displeasing to him, which lays us under the strongest obligation to obedience. The law of God is a perfect rule of duty, and enforced by eternal rewards and punishments. This rule of duty is binding at all times and under all circumstances. No secret purpose, intention, or design of the Deity, can disannul or diminish our obligation to obey this his revealed will.

2. The will of God revealed in his word is a complete rule of duty. The apostle asserts, that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." After God has revealed his will to us in his word, we have no occasion for any further information from him, in respect to duty. So Moses told the people of God, "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and unto our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." God's secret purposes concern his own conduct, not ours. It concerns him to do all that he determined to do from eternity, or to carry into effect all his wise and holy purposes: and it concerns

us to do all that his holy word or revealed will requires us to do. We have no occasion of knowing his secret will, in order to know his revealed will ; for his revealed will does not depend upon his secret will, nor does our obligation to obey his revealed will depend upon our knowing his secret will. The obligation of a child to do what his parent requires, does not depend upon his knowing the secret will of his parent, or the reason why he commands him to do this, or that lawful thing. The obligation of a subject to do what a civil ruler requires him to do, does not depend upon his knowing the reasons of state, or why the civil ruler requires certain acts of obedience. So the obligation of creatures to obey the revealed will of their creator, does not depend upon their knowing his secret will, or the reasons of his commands. It is the revealed will of God, therefore, and not his secret will, which is our infallible rule of duty.

3. God's secret or decretal will cannot be known, and for that reason, cannot be a rule of duty to any of his creatures. It is essential to a law or rule of duty, that it should be published or made known to those, who are to be bound by it. So long as God conceals his own purposes in his own breast, they cannot bind his creatures to regard them any more than if they did not exist in his mind. No human law can bind any human being before it is published or made known, any more than it can bind before it is enacted. God has told us, that he has reserved the times and seasons in his own power ; which means that he has concealed most of his purposes respecting future events, from the knowledge of his intelligent creatures. The angels in heaven know no more than we do, with respect to the future conversion and salvation of sinners in this world. The decree of election and reprobation, respecting sinners in time to come, is a profound secret in the divine mind, and so is his secret will, respecting thousands and millions of other future events. And whatever secret purposes God may have in his own mind, concerning future events in this, or any other

world, can be no rule of duty to us, or to any other of his intelligent creation. It is sufficient for us to know and to do his revealed will. His revealed will constantly and infinitely binds us, let his secret will be what it may respecting us, or any other created beings.

4. Supposing God should reveal to us all his purposes, respecting all his intelligent creatures in every part of the universe; this knowledge of his decretal will would be no rule of duty to us. His decretal will is only a rule of conduct to himself. It becomes him to do all that he has seen fit to determine to do; but our knowing what it becomes him to do, cannot inform us what it is becoming us to do. Supposing God had revealed to Lucifer the day before he rebelled, that he had determined or decreed, that he should rebel the next day, would that knowledge of the decretal will of God have laid him under moral obligation to rebel, or destroyed his moral obligation to love and obey God for ever? Did Christ's telling Judas that he was the son of perdition, and that it was his decretal will, that he should betray him, lay him under moral obligation to betray him, or lessen his guilt in betraying him? Or did Christ's telling Peter that he would deny him, and that it was his decretal will that he should deny him, lay him under moral obligation to deny him, or diminish his indispensable obligation to confess and own him before a frowning and opposing world? In these instances it is plain to the lowest capacity, that the decretal will of God was no rule of duty to Lucifer, Judas, or Peter. And it is equally plain, that the decretal will of God, can never be a rule of duty to any of his creatures. The decretal will of God cannot alter the nature of things, or make that right, which in the nature of things is wrong, nor that wrong, which in the nature of things is right. Though all the impenitent at the day of judgment will know, that it is the decretal will of God, that they shall be his enemies for ever; yet this knowledge of his decree cannot make it their duty to remain his enemies for ever. If all the decrees of God were univer-

sally known, they would be no rule of duty to angels or men, because his decrees have no respect to what is wrong, or right, but only to what it is wisest and best should take place. But his revealed will is a proper and infallible rule of duty, because it makes known what is right and wrong, and what is pleasing and displeasing to him; and what will promote, and destroy eternal happiness. I may add,

5. That the secret will of God cannot, if it were known, be a rule of duty, because it is entirely destitute of both precept and penalty, and consequently of all divine authority. The decretal will of God does not require any thing, nor forbid any thing, nor promise any thing, nor threaten any thing. It has no legal properties, nor legal authority, force, or obligation. It does not manifest God's approbation, or disapprobation of any person, action, or event. This is certainly the case, when it is not known; and it is equally the case, when it is known. God has, in some instances, revealed his secret purposes, and made known his eternal determination to bring about some events long before they took place. He revealed his secret or decretal will, that the posterity of Ham, Noah's youngest son, should be servants of servants unto the posterities of Shem and Japheth; but this was no rule of duty to the children of Shem and Japheth, to tyrannise over the posterity of Ham, and make them servants of servants. It is as criminal for the posterity of Japheth now to enslave the Africans, as if God had never revealed his will, his purpose, or design, to subject them to bondage and slavery from generation to generation. God's revealing his decree, that Issachar should crouch down between two burdens, was no rule of duty to him, or to his oppressors. God's revealing his will, that Ishmael should be a wild man, and his hand should be against every man, and every man's hand against him, and that he should dwell in the presence of his brethren, to be a perpetual scourge to them; was no rule of duty to the Ishmaelites, and gave them no right to oppose, plunder, and harass

mankind from age to age. God's revealing his eternal purpose respecting the sufferings and death of Christ, by Jews and Gentiles, was no rule of duty to the chief priests, to Herod, to Pilate, to Judas, or to the soldiers, to do what they did to the Lord of glory. God's revealing his will concerning the rise of the man of sin, and the subversion of his temporal and spiritual tyranny, is no rule of duty for France, or Britain, or Russia, or any other European nations, to wage war with Italy, ransack the city of Rome, and spread destruction and misery through the Pope's dominions, without any national provocation. All these instances, and numerous others that might be mentioned, clearly show, that God's secret or decretal will is no rule of duty, even after it is known, any more than before it is revealed. It is only a rule of the divine conduct, but no rule of human conduct. It has no precept, nor penalty, and is clothed with no divine authority. The conclusion is plain and irresistible, that the law of God, or his revealed will is the only rule of duty to mankind.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God's secret will respects one object, and his revealed will respects another object; then there is no inconsistency between his secret and revealed will. It is one of the most plausible objections, which has ever been made against the doctrine of divine decrees, that it is totally inconsistent with the preceptive, or revealed will of God. It is said, that to suppose God has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass, necessarily implies, that he requires one thing, but decrees another; or that he forbids one thing, but decrees another. He required Pharaoh to let his people go, but decreed that he should not let them go. He has required all good men to be perfectly holy in this life, but has decreed that no man shall be perfectly holy in this life. He has required all men every where to repent, but has decreed that multitudes shall never

repent. He has forbidden and threatened to punish all sin, but has decreed that all the sin, which abounds in the world, should take place. In all these instances, it is said, God's secret will is diametrically contrary to his revealed will. But how does this appear? God's secret will respects one thing, but his revealed will respects another. His secret will respects nothing but the existence or taking place of things; but his revealed will respects the nature or moral quality of the things that take place. He chooses that some things should exist, which he perfectly hates; and he chooses some things should not exist, which he perfectly loves, in their own nature. He requires nothing but what he loves, in its own nature; and he forbids nothing but what he hates, in its own nature. His revealed will respects nothing but the moral good and evil in the things he requires and forbids. He required Pharaoh to let his people go, because this was right, in the nature of things; but he decreed that he should not let his people go, not because it was right in Pharaoh not to let them go, but because it was best, all things considered, that he should not give them liberty to go. God requires all men to be perfectly holy in this life, because this is right, in the nature of things; but he decrees that no man shall be perfectly holy, in this life, because he knows it to be best, all things considered, that none should be perfectly holy before they leave the world. Holiness is one thing, and the taking place of holiness is another; and sin is one thing, and the taking place of sin is another. When God requires holiness, his preceptive or revealed will respects the nature or moral excellence of holiness; but when he decrees that holiness shall not take place, his secret or decretal will respects only the *event* of its not taking place. So when he forbids sin, his preceptive or revealed will respects only the nature or moral evil of sin; but when he decrees that it shall take place, his secret or decretal will respects merely its actual existence to answer some valuable purpose. Thus the secret and revealed will of God

respect entirely different objects, and are by no means inconsistent. If they respected the same objects, it is granted, they would be inconsistent. If God should require and forbid the same thing; or if he should decree that the same thing should, and should not, exist, his secret and revealed will would be totally contradictory and absurd. If those who pretend, that the secret and revealed will of God are inconsistent, would only make the same distinction in this case, that they do in innumerable other cases, they could not discover a shadow of inconsistency between the secret and revealed will of God. How often do they themselves make a distinction between what is desirable, in its own nature, and what is not desirable all things considered? The fond and faithful parent does not desire, simply considered, to correct his offending child, but all things considered, thinks it best and decrees or determines to correct his child. And though he tells his child he does not desire to correct him, simply considered, but has determined it to be best, all things considered, to correct him, he sees no inconsistency in what his father says and does. Just so, the wise, holy, and benevolent parent of the universe may consistently decree to bring to pass things which he hates, forbids, and condemns.

2. It appears from the representations, which have been given of the secret and revealed will of God, that our text has often been perverted and misapplied. Because secret things belong unto God, but those only, which are revealed, belong unto us, many have been led to conclude and say, that we have no right to believe and teach the doctrine of decrees, or the doctrine of election, or the doctrine of the saints perseverance, or the doctrine of reprobation, or the doctrine of divine agency in the production of moral exercises in the hearts of men, since these are secret things. It is true, all these things were once secret, but since they have been revealed, they are no longer secret things. Is not the doctrine of decrees revealed? Is not the doctrine of election revealed? Is not the doctrine of

reprobation revealed? Is not the doctrine of divine agency in the renovation of the heart revealed? Is not the doctrine of the divine agency in hardening the heart revealed? Is not the doctrine of the final perseverance of saints revealed? Who will presume to say, that these doctrines are not revealed in the bible, and were not taught by Christ and his apostles? These doctrines have long been disputed among almost all denominations of christians; but why should they be disputed, if they were not revealed in the sacred oracles? Or why should those, who disbelieve them, employ so much learning, criticism, and metaphysical ingenuity, in attempting to explain them away? The acknowledged truth is, that they are revealed in the bible, and I will venture to add, that they are as plainly revealed as any other doctrines in it. This being true, we have as good a right to examine, explain, and inculcate these, as any other doctrines to be found in the word of God. These doctrines may be truly explained agreeably to the analogy of scripture, and the dictates of the soundest reason, and all the subtil and plausible objections, which have ever been made against them, may be fairly and fully answered. And it is no evidence to the contrary, that we hear so many say, that they have never heard them explained, and the objections answered to their apprehension and satisfaction. It is only saying of themselves what Christ said of some, who heard him preach, "Because I tell you *the truth*, ye *believe me not*."

3. If God's secret will respects the taking place of future events; then all uninspired men, who pretend to reveal God's secret will, or to foretel future events, are guilty of both folly and falsehood. For secret things belong to God only, and he only can reveal them. He justly claims this supreme prerogative. "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." He challenges the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators,



either to foretel, or to escape the publick calamities, which he secretly intended to bring upon his disobedient people. There are many in the pagan, and some in the christian world, who pretend to look into futurity, and foretel things which God has never revealed; but they are guilty of egregious folly and presumption, and ought to be avoided, despised, and condemned. Pharaoh sought to the magicians to confront and oppose Moses, but all in vain. Belshazar applied to such impostors, who were constrained to acknowledge their ignorance and folly. None by searching can find out God, nor discover his secret will in a single instance.

4. If God's secret will cannot be known, then it can have no influence upon the actions of men. They are extremely apt to complain of the doctrine of the divine decrees, because they imagine it lays both a restraint, and constraint upon their free and voluntary actions. They say, if God has decreed all things, then he constantly restrains them from doing any thing, which he has not decreed; and as constantly constrains them to do every thing that he has decreed; so that his decrees totally destroy their free agency. But his decrees, which are his secret will, cannot possibly have the least influence to restrain them from acting, or to constrain them to act; for this plain reason, that they do not, and cannot know what his secret will is, till after they have acted. While the decrees of God lie a secret in his own mind, they cannot have any more influence upon the actions of men, than if they did not exist in his mind. The secret will of God, which is not known, never is or can be a motive to any person to do, or not to do what is decreed. Judas did not know, that it was decreed he should betray Christ, before he had determined and agreed to do it, for thirty pieces of silver. It was the money, and not the decree, that governed his free and voluntary act. Joseph's brethren did not know, that it was decreed, that they should sell him into Egypt, till after they had done it, so that they acted as freely and criminally as if it had not been decreed. Ask those, who object

against the divine decrees, as being inconsistent with free agency, whether they ever felt restrained from doing any thing they pleased, by the secret will or decree of God, and they will frankly say, that they never did feel any restraining influence from it. Or ask them, whether they ever felt constrained to do any thing, which they did not choose to do, by the secret will or decree of God, and they will frankly say, that they never did feel any overpowering or constraining influence from it. Neither scripture, nor reason, nor observation, nor experience affords the least ground to object against the secret will or decrees of God, as being inconsistent with men's being altogether free and voluntary in all their actions.

5. But if God has a secret will respecting all future events, and will always act according to his secret will; then it is easy to see the real cause why mankind are generally so much opposed to the doctrine of divine decrees. It is entirely owing to their fears, that he will execute his decrees, or bring to pass whatever he has decreed. This they see throws them into the sovereign hand of God to dispose of them according to his eternal purpose, which he formed before the foundation of the world. This is a most solemn and interesting truth, which every natural heart perfectly hates and opposes. If God can execute his decrees consistently with the perfect freedom of every moral agent; then he can cause every sinner to choose life or death, and be the free and voluntary instrument of his own salvation or destruction. And since God's secret will is unknown, no sinner can know whether he shall choose life, or death, be holy or sinful, happy or miserable to all eternity. It is not the decrees of God, which trouble sinners, but the agency of God in carrying them into effect, without their knowing what they are until they are fulfilled. By his invisible agency upon their minds, he governs all their views, all their thoughts, all their determinations, and all their volitions just as he pleases, and just according to his secret will, or eternal purpose, which they neither know before hand, nor can

resist, evade, or frustrate. They sometimes call this *fate*, but it is something far more disagreeable to them, than fate. If they were governed by fate, they would not be accountable for their conduct. But they are governed by a divine agency on their minds, which is not only wise, and holy, and powerful, but at the same time, perfectly consistent with their own moral liberty and freedom. They are entirely and constantly under the control of divine providence, which is God's most wise and powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions, according to his secret will. This secret will, for ought they know, may disappoint all their desires, all their hopes, all their expectations, and destroy all their happiness for ever. They know not but it is God's eternal, secret, and irresistible will to make them vessels of wrath, fitted by their own free, sinful choice for destruction. The carnal mind of every person in the state of nature rises in enmity and opposition to this secret will of God, is not reconciled to it, neither indeed can be. But if this be true, cries every sinner, what shall I do? My case is deplorably and desperately wretched. God has often told you so, but you would not believe it. Can you now believe otherwise? Can you believe that God has no secret will? Can you believe that he will not execute his secret will? Can you believe, that your opposition to his secret will can frustrate it? Can you believe, that God will give up his secret will to gratify your unsubmitive will? These, say you, are hard sayings. I hope they are not true. I will go to the bible, and see if they be to be found there. I will go to God, and not to man, to tell me the truth. I beseech you to go, and I venture to say, that if you do go, you will return *converted*, or *condemned*.

6. If God will certainly execute his wise and holy secret will; then all his friends have a constant source of joy under all circumstances of life. For he has assured them, that in executing his secret will, he will cause all things to work together for their good. Though he may cause them to pass through dark and

distressing scenes, yet he will never leave, nor forsake them, but eventually bring them into light. It is his secret will to order all things in the wisest and best manner, to promote his own glory and the perfect holiness and happiness of all who love him, and place their supreme dependence upon him. None, who have trusted in him, have ever found his faithfulness to fail. Those, who have believed and loved the secret will of God, have found it to be an unfailing source of support, consolation, and joy, under all the trials and afflictions, which they were called to experience. Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, Moses and Joshua, David and Samuel, Christ and the apostles, acknowledged the secret, governing will of God, and found it a solid foundation of hope and confidence, under the singular trials which fell to their lot. That which so many call error, absurdity, and even blasphemy, they called the most important and consoling truth. And the same truth is still the ground of joy and peace to all, who rejoice, that the Lord reigneth. Indeed, it would be absurd for any to rejoice in God, if they did not believe, that he will govern all things exactly according to his secret and eternal purpose. This all good men do believe, and therefore are bound to rejoice in that secret will of God, which the men of the world hate and oppose with all their hearts. All the promises of the gospel are founded in the secret will of God, and consequently all the hopes of christians are derived from it. It is their duty and privilege, to live by faith in the universal government of God, which he constantly exercises over all creatures, objects, and events, agreeably to the secret and eternal counsel of his own will.

7. If God's secret will be his governing will, and respects the existence of every thing that comes to pass, then it is very criminal in any to deny, or to complain of his secret will. It is the same thing as to deny that God governs the world, or to complain that he does not govern it in the wisest and best manner. Mankind seem to be very insensible of the great crim-

imality of denying, or of complaining of the secret will of God. It is as criminal as to deny that he governs the world or to deny that he reigns in righteousness. But who would not be shocked to hear any man say, that God does not govern the world; or that he governs it very unwisely, unjustly, and erroneously? There were *some* in Ezekiel's day, who boldly said, "The Lord hath forsaken the earth." And there were *many more*, who boldly said, "The ways of the Lord are not equal." Are there not at this day, two just such classes of people? One class, who boldly say, that God has not an eternal secret will or decree respecting all future events, and does not govern all things according to his original and eternal decree, but leaves all the *moral* world to act independently, without any divine control, and all the natural world to move on, without his constant care and superintendency. And another class, who boldly say, that "the ways of the Lord are not equal," and he orders, or suffers ten thousand things to take place, which he ought not to order, or suffer to exist. Must it not be highly displeasing to the creator, preserver, benefactor, and governour of the world, to hear his rational dependent, ungrateful, and undutiful creatures thus boldly deny the reality and rectitude of his universal government over them? God may properly address all, who use such language, as he addressed persons of the same character of old. "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord; yet ye say, what have we spoken so much against thee?" To deny the reality and rectitude of God's wise, holy, universal government, is tantamount to denying all obligation to love him, to obey him, to trust in him, and to serve him. And is this a small offence? Is it not sinning directly against God himself? Is it not practically calling upon all the intelligent creation, to rise up in open rebellion against their Maker! These questions must sooner or later, be answered, by all who live under that government of God, which he exercises over all his creatures and works, according to his eternal and secret will. Can we justify ourselves in denying

his secret will, or in complaining of it? God was highly displeased with those who murmured, and perished in the wilderness. And he is still more displeased with those who murmur under greater light, and in the enjoyment of greater temporal and spiritual blessings.

Finally, this subject affords a just occasion for all to inquire, whether they rejoice, or regret, that God always has, does now, and always will govern them, according to his secret will, or immutable purpose, which exists in his own mind from eternity. This question, were all intelligent creatures in the universe to speak their minds upon it sincerely and fully, would draw a line of distinction between all holy and unholy men and angels. And they will all finally be characterized and separated, according to this essential distinction. Can there then, be a more proper and important question proposed to the consideration of all intelligent creatures than this: whether they are willing that God should treat them through every period of their existence, just as he eternally determined in his own wise and holy mind to treat them? The question is perfectly plain and intelligible. And some no doubt have solemnly considered it, and cheerfully answered it in their own mind. Though they know, that they once were entirely unwilling, that God should dispose of them for ever agreeably to his fixt and eternal purpose, yet they now know, that they have been, and still are willing, that God should do all his pleasure with them, and all his other rational and immortal creatures. But are there not some, who are conscious, that they always have been, and now are, unwilling, that God should dispose of them according to his secret and eternal purpose? Can you, who are conscious of this, believe that you are friendly to God, and prepared to enjoy him, either in this life, or in the life to come? While you sit in judgment upon yourselves, must you not separate yourselves from God and from all his friends, and sentence yourselves to the doom of his incorrigible enemies? But if you will now

only give up your disaffection to God, and rejoice in his character and government, and make his revealed will the rule of duty, you may reverse the sentence you have passed upon yourselves, and build a hope of eternal life, which cannot be shaken or destroyed. Be entreated then to rejoice in the Lord always, and receive the support and consolation, which will certainly flow from such a reconciliation to God.

## SERMON IX.

THE SUPREME BEING THE ONLY PROPER OBJECT OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP.

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REVELATION xix. 10.

*And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, see thou do it not; I am thy fellow servant; and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.*

THE apostle tells us in the beginning of this chapter, that he had a vision of heaven, where "he heard a voice which came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. And he saith unto me, write, blessed are they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, those are the true sayings of God." The apostle, it seems, supposed the person, who had been revealing to him the future glory and prosperity of the church, was *Christ himself* in his glorified state. Accordingly, in a transport of joy and gratitude, "he fell at his feet to worship him." But the person perceiving his mistake, justly reproved him for his well intended, but misapplied worship. "See thou do it not. I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus." This was as much as to say, "I am a mere creature, and though of the angelick order, yet thine equal in office. I am appointed to deliver these messages of God to thee, as thou art to deliver the same messages to thy



fellow men, and in this respect, we are brethren and fellow servants, and neither of us a proper object of religious worship, which is due to the supreme being alone: worship God." The plain and full import of the text is,

That God is the only proper object of religious worship.

This is the important point, which I shall endeavour to establish in the present discourse. This will appear, if we consider,

1. That the scripture represents God as the only proper object of religious worship. God directed Moses to say to his people, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." David taught the same doctrine that Moses did. He said, "great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the Lord made the heavens. Give unto the Lord, ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering and come before him: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Here David represents God as the creator and above all other beings, who had been worshipped in any part of the world, and required his people to give unto the true God that religious and supreme worship and glory, which are due to him alone. God says himself, "I am the Lord; that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." And our Saviour said to satan, one of the greatest of created beings, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." I might cite a vast many more passages of scripture of the same import; but all who have read the bible

know, that the inspired writers uniformly represent God as the only proper object of religious worship. This will further appear, if we consider,

2. The absolute supremacy of God, in all his great and essential attributes. David represents him as worthy of the highest homage on account of his absolute supremacy. He says, "The Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it; and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." The creator of all things must be the Supreme Being, and the Supreme Being must be the only proper object of religious worship. Here then it seems necessary to observe,

1. That God is Supreme in respect to his existence. He assumes a name expressive of his peculiar existence. When Moses desired to know by what name he chose to be made known to his people, he said, "*I am that I am*: and thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, "*I am* hath sent me unto you." This name denotes the most absolute and perfect existence. God is the first of all beings, and of consequence has an *underrated* existence. There was nothing in the universe that existed before him which could be the cause of his existence. This is peculiar to God, and is not true of any other beings, for they all have a derived existence. There was an antecedent cause of their existing, and had not that cause operated, they never would have existed. But there was no antecedent cause of God's existence. He exists by an absolute necessity of his own nature. The ground or reason of his existence is completely within himself; so that he is properly an underived and self-existent being. As he did not derive his existence from any other being, so he is not in the least degree dependent upon any other being, whether he shall exist or not. As no being gave him his existence, so no being can take it away. Hence he is so often called the *living and only living God*.

He has an underived and independent life, which is peculiar to himself. All other beings have a derived and dependent life. He who gave them their life, can at any time take it away. But God is the *King Immortal*. He has life in himself, which no being in the universe can destroy. As God's existence is underived and independent, so it is necessarily *eternal*. We cannot conceive of his ever beginning to exist for this plain reason, that he had no exterior cause of his existence. Accordingly the psalmist addresses him as an eternal being. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth, and the world; even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." He is also *immutable*, as well as eternal, in his existence. He claims immutability as his highest prerogative. He says, "I am the Lord, I change not." And the apostle James calls him "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither the shadow of turning." Thus God is infinitely above all his creatures, in respect to his underived, independent, eternal, and immutable existence.

2. God infinitely surpasses all other beings in the immensity of his presence. Though his presence be not properly extended, yet it fills all places, and pervades all things, at one and the same moment. He is really as present, in one part of his vast dominions, as in another, and at one time, as another. He claims immensity of presence, as one of his essential attributes. "Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." Solomon addressed him at the dedication of the temple as *omnipresent*. "Will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house I have builded?" We cannot conceive that God, who made, and who preserves and governs all things, should be limited in his presence, or absent a single moment, from any place, or creature, or object, in the whole circle of creation. Omni-

presence, therefore, appears to be an essential attribute of the deity, which is peculiar to himself, and which renders him infinitely different from, and superiour to all created beings, whose presence is circumscribed by time and place.

3. God as far transcends all other beings in his *knowledge*, as in his presence. His knowledge is beyond all comparison in its kind and extent. Whatever he knows he knows intuitively. He sees through all objects, and looks directly into all hearts. He knows the views, and feelings, and internal exercises of angels and men, before they are expressed in their words or actions. He makes use of no means of gaining knowledge, but has a direct, immediate and universal knowledge of all things, which is peculiar to himself and belongs to no other being. He seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but he looketh on the heart. This is that kind of knowledge, which David said was too wonderful and too high for him, and to which he could not attain. The apostle says, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." He knows not only all things that have existed and will exist, but all things that might have existed. His knowledge is far more extensive, than the knowledge of all other beings is *now*, or *ever will be*. Though their knowledge will be for ever increasing, yet it will be for ever limited; but his knowledge always has been, and always will be universal and unbounded. So that his knowledge as far surpasses theirs, as eternity surpasses time, in duration.

4. God is absolutely supreme in *wisdom* as well as in knowledge. Though wisdom implies knowledge, yet knowledge does not imply wisdom. Knowledge is the bare perception of things, but wisdom consists in devising and forming the best designs, or in applying knowledge to the best advantage. Perfect knowledge is necessary to perfect wisdom. It would have been impossible for God to have formed the most perfect plan of operation from eternity, if he had not posses-

sed a clear, intuitive, and comprehensive knowledge of all things possible. The least defect in knowledge might have proved a defect in wisdom, and prevented the absolute perfection of his original and eternal purpose in the work of creation. But there was no defect in his knowledge, nor consequently in his wisdom. In the clear view of all things he was able to devise the best possible design, and the best possible means to accomplish it. His wisdom, therefore, surpasses the wisdom of all other beings. He is the only wise God, or the only being who is perfectly wise. Moses says, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect." David exclaims, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all." Paul speaks of the wisdom of God in the highest terms of admiration. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" And he represents him as displaying to the view of the whole intelligent creation his manifold wisdom, in the plan of redemption through the mediation of Christ. The wisdom of men and of angels is but mere folly in comparison with the unsearchable and incomprehensible wisdom of the Supreme Being.

5. God is supreme in *power* as well as in wisdom and knowledge. His power is the most prominent perfection of his nature, and the most visibly impressed upon all his works of creation and providence. But it is his creating power, that most clearly and infinitely surpasses the power of all created beings, who in this respect are entirely impotent. Neither men, nor angels can give existence to the least thing conceivable. They can only move and modify created objects, but are wholly incapable of creating a single mote or atom. Indeed, all the power they have to do any thing, they constantly derive from the almighty power of God, who essentially comprehends, or comprizes all the power there is in the universe. In him all other beings live, and move and have their being. They are not sufficient of themselves, to exist, to speak, to act, or even

think. And with all their derived power, they soon become weak and weary, and unable to act; but “the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary.” He is able to operate through the whole circle of creation, and to produce millions and millions of effects, without the least interruption, or a moment’s cessation. His power is underived, independent, and absolutely *supreme*. Furthermore,

6. God is supremely excellent in his holiness, goodness or benevolence. I use all these terms to denote his moral perfections, which are all comprized in his pure, disinterested, impartial, universal love. God is love. His whole moral excellence consists in holy love; and every moral attribute of his nature is only a modification of perfect benevolence and good will to all percipient beings. But if this be the holiness of the deity, some may be ready to ask, how does it appear that his holiness is infinitely superiour to the holiness of all other beings? Does not God require all his intelligent creatures to be holy as he is holy? Are not angels and glorified spirits completely holy? And do not all good men feel and express pure benevolence, and exercise the same kind of holiness, that God feels and expresses? This is all true; and yet there is a vast difference between the holiness of God, and the holiness of all other beings. We are told, “There is none holy as the Lord.” And Christ says, “There is none good but one, that is God.” The goodness of God far surpasses the goodness of all other beings, not only because it is underived, but because it is infinitely greater. There is more goodness in one benevolent exercise of God, than in all the benevolent exercises of all other holy beings united. Their goodness is limited by their views, which are extremely imperfect. They never take in but a very small part of the universe at one view, and their benevolent affections can extend no further than their views. And though their views will be eternally extending, yet they will for ever fall infinitely short of the all-comprehensive

views of God. So that all their views to eternity will be infinitely inferiour to the constant and unbounded views of the Deity ; and of consequence, all their holy exercises will be infinitely inferiour in point of extent, and of real virtue and excellence, to his constant and unlimited exercises. The whole universe stands perpetually transparent to his view, and he aims at the highest good of the whole in every volition of his will, and every exertion of his hand. If we only reflect a moment upon the greatness of God, we must have a clear conviction of his supreme goodness. He is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. His all-comprehensive views are never obstructed, and his benevolent affections are never diminished ; and therefore he exercises more holiness every moment, than all holy creatures ever have exercised, or ever will exercise to all eternity. Thus God is absolutely *supreme* in all his natural and moral perfections ; and this absolute supremacy over all his intelligent creatures renders him the only proper object of their religious worship.

This leads me to observe,

3. That it is absurd to pay religious worship to any being, who is not possessed of the essential attributes of divinity. It is absurd to love a being supremely, who is not supremely amiable ; or to place supreme dependence upon a being, who is not supremely independent ; or to yield supreme submission to a being, who is not supremely wise ; or to put supreme confidence in a being who is not supremely good ; or to make supplication to a being, who is not every where present, and able to hear, and answer all the supplications of all his supplicants. But there is no being in the universe besides God, who does possess these essential attributes of divinity, which render him worthy of that supreme love, dependence, submission, and confidence, which is expressed in prayer or praise, or in any other act of religious worship. This has been the universal opinion of all mankind in all ages of the world. They have never paid religious worship to

any being, whom they did not acknowledge to be a Deity and possessed of divine attributes. Though some have worshipped the sun, yet they always meant to direct their worship to the divinity, whom they supposed dwelt in it. Though some have worshipped an animal, yet they always meant to direct their worship to the divinity, whom they supposed dwelt in it. And though some have worshipped graven images or dumb idols, yet they have always meant to direct their worship to the divinity, that they supposed dwelt in them, or were always present with them. All their worship was *divine* worship, and intentionally paid to a *divine* being possessed of the essential attributes of divinity. But they were grossly deceived in imagining that there were gods many and lords many. For we have no evidence from scripture, or from reason, that there is, or can be, more than *one* living and true God, who is possessed of absolute independence, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and unlimited wisdom and goodness, and who is worthy of that supreme love, homage, veneration, and confidence, which is always implied in religious worship. All other beings, except the eternal, self-existent, independent, immutable, almighty, and all-wise Creator, are absolutely dependent upon him for their existence, and for all their rational and moral powers; and this dependence places them infinitely *below him*. There is no comparison between a *created* and *uncreated* being. One created being is as completely destitute of every *divine* attribute, as another. Angels are as destitute of every divine attribute as men, and men are as destitute of every divine attribute, as lifeless matter. There is but *one*; and there can be but *one* being in the universe, who is the proper object of religious worship; and that being is the only living and true God. Accordingly, the scripture requires us to worship him, and forbids us to worship any other being.

I now proceed to the improvement of the subject.

1. If God be worthy of religious worship solely on account of the essential attributes of his nature; then



he cannot form a being worthy of religious worship. He has indeed created beings superiour to men ; and he can undoubtedly create beings superiour to Gabriel, or any of the principalities and powers above. But supposing he should create a being as far superiour to Gabriel, as Gabriel is superiour to the lowest of the human race ; still that being would approach no nearer to divinity, than the smallest intelligent creature. Or suppose he should create a being, who should have a thousand fold more power, more knowledge, more wisdom, and more goodness, than the whole intelligent creation have now, or ever will have, still that being would approach no nearer divinity, than the smallest insect. Or suppose once more, that God should exert his whole omnipotence, to form a creature as great and good as possible ; still that greatest and best possible creature would be infinitely below his creator, in respect to both natural and moral excellence. For it is not conceivable, that even omnipotence can create an eternal, self-existent, independent, immutable, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, or an infinitely wise and holy being. Or in fewer words, we cannot conceive, that God can communicate any of his essential perfections to a created being, and make him a Deity. But if he cannot create a being equal to himself ; then he must remain the *Supreme Being*, and infinitely worthy of that *religious* worship, which is an explicit acknowledgement of his absolute *supremacy* ; and which cannot, *without denying his supremacy*, be paid to any created being, who is absolutely *dependent* upon him, and infinitely below him, in all respects. We have, therefore, the same demonstrative evidence, that God cannot create a being, who is worthy of religious worship, that we have of his being the Creator, Preserver, and Supreme Sovereign of the universe.

2. If God be the only proper object of *religious worship* on account of his essential and incommunicable perfections ; then there is as great and essential *difference* between that religious worship which is due to

him and that kind of homage which is due to creatures, as there is between his essential and supreme attributes and their derived, dependent, and limited natural and moral excellence. God allows, that they have some natural and moral excellencies, and accordingly requires them to pay civil or subordinate respect and homage to one another. He requires children to honour their parents, and the young "to rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man." Solomon requires his son, "to fear the Lord and the king." Paul exhorts subjects "to render fear to whom fear is due, and honour to whom honour is due." Peter says to christians, "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." Agreeably to such divine precepts, we find many instances in scripture, of pious persons paying civil or subordinate homage and respect to their fellow men. When Abraham bought a burying place of the children of Heth, "he bowed down himself before the children of the land." Joseph's brethren when they viewed him as Lord of Egypt, "bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the ground." When Moses went out to meet his father-in-law Jethro, "he did obeisance to him." When David came out of the cave where Saul was, "he cried to him saying, my lord the king, and stooped with his face, to the earth, and bowed himself." After David had granted liberty to Absalom to return, Joab the general of his army, "fell to the ground on his face, and bowed himself, and thanked the king." "Nathan the prophet bowed himself before the king with his face to the ground." When the sons of the prophets saw Elisha, they said, "the spirit of Elijah doth rest upon Elisha; and they came to meet him, and bowed down themselves to the ground before him." After David had transferred the crown from himself to Solomon, "all the congregation of the princes bowed down their heads, and worshipped the Lord and the king." Such tokens of civil respect and homage are entirely proper to express that love, that fear, that obedience, that submis-

sion, and that reverence, which we owe to our fellow creatures, according to the natural and moral excellencies they possess, according to the several offices they sustain, and according to the various relations they stand in to us. Now, it is easy to perceive, that there is as great and essential difference between civil respect and religious worship, as there is between God and created beings. There is precisely the same difference between paying supreme worship to our Creator and paying subordinate respect to our fellow creatures, as there is between exercising supreme love to God and subordinate benevolence to our fellow men. Civil respect approaches no nearer to religious worship, than the natural and moral excellence of the most exalted creature approaches to the natural and moral perfections of the Supreme Deity. This great and essential difference between civil respect and religious worship, every true worshipper of God sees and feels and expresses in all his sincere addresses to the throne of divine grace.

3. If God be the only proper object of religious worship; then we may justly and conclusively argue the divinity of Christ from his actually receiving, without disapprobation, religious worship from his friends and followers. Though many who came to him and conversed with him, viewed him as a mere man, and paid him only civil respect and homage, calling him Rabbi, or good master; yet his disciples and some others, who were better acquainted with him, paid him truly religious worship, which he did not disapprove or reject. We read, "When he was come down from the mountain great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper, and *worshipped* him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean:" and instead of reproving him for this act of religious worship, "Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was healed." At another time, "Behold, there came a certain ruler, and *worshipped* him, saying, my daughter is even now dead; but come and lay

thy hand upon her, and she shall live." Christ approved of his address, and restored his daughter. After Christ had saved Peter and those that were with him from sinking in the sea, "then they that were in the ship came and *worshipped* him, saying, of a truth thou art the son of God." Those who first saw him after he was risen from the dead, "came and held him by the feet and *worshipped* him." When he was carried up to heaven, those who saw him ascend, "*worshipped* him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." Stephen the first christian martyr died, "calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." This was a most solemn act of religion paid to Christ, as a person possessed of divine omniscience and omnipresence. And we are told, that the heavenly hosts pay the same divine and undivided worship to both the Father and Son. St. John heard them crying in heaven, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever." Such religious worship God requires both men and angels to pay to Christ. He expressly requires all men "to honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." "And when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, and let all the angels of God *worship* him." Now if both men and angels are required to pay religious worship to Christ and have actually paid him religious worship, and he has a right to receive it, and has actually received it, with entire approbation; then it is unquestionably true, that he is a Divine Person, and possesses all the essential attributes of Divinity. Arians, Socinians, and Unitarians have felt the force of this argument in favour of Christ's divinity, and endeavoured to evade it, by denying that *religious* worship was paid to him while he tabernacled in flesh. They say that those, who are said to *worship* him, only meant to pay him *civil* respect or homage. Though this might be true in some cases, yet it could not be true in the case of Stephen, who adored him with his dying breath. But though it were possible for Ste-

phen, in his imperfect state, to have committed the same error in paying religious worship to Christ that John did in paying religious worship to the angel; yet it cannot be supposed, that all the heavenly hosts are grossly deluded in paying the same religious and divine honours to the Redeemer that they pay to the Creator. The religious worship paid to Christ upon earth, and the religious worship paid to him in heaven, affords a plain, conclusive and unanswerable argument in favour of his absolute divinity and equality with the Father in all his essential attributes.

4. If no other than a *divine* person be a proper object of religious worship; then the Arians are real idolators in paying *religious* worship to Christ, whilst they deny his divinity. Though they acknowledge Christ to be a super-angelick being, yet they deny that he possesses self-existence, independence, or any other essential attribute of divinity. And so long as they view him in this inferiour light, they cannot pay divine honour to him, without being guilty of worshipping the creature, instead of the Creator, which is the essence of idolatry. Though they sincerely profess to believe, that he is the greatest of created beings, that he existed before angels and men, that he now reigns over them, and that he will finally judge them at the last day; still they have no right, on this supposition, to pay him religious homage. There is no essential difference between worshipping the highest and the lowest created objects, because they are all infinitely below the uncreated, self-existent, Supreme Being. If Papists are guilty of idolatry in worshipping the Virgin Mary and canonized saints; or if heathens are guilty of idolatry in worshipping demons, departed heroes, and graven images; then Arians must be guilty of idolatry in worshipping Christ, who, in their opinion, is totally destitute of every divine attribute? Socinians, who hold Christ to be a mere man, avoid this absurdity, by refusing to pay him religious worship. And if Arians would become consistent, they would become Socinians, and after

they became Socinians, they would become Unitarians, and after they became Unitarians, they would become Infidels. There is no place to stop between Arianism and Deism. The denial of the divinity of Christ, directly tends, in its genuine consequences, to subvert the whole gospel.

5. If God be the only proper object of religious worship ; then moral depravity has had a very blinding and fatal influence upon the minds of men in all ages. It has blinded the whole *heathen* world in respect to the being and perfections of the only living and true God, and plunged them in the grossest idolatry. They have paid religious worship to the hosts of heaven, to demons, to departed spirits, to four footed beasts and creeping things. It has blinded the minds of the great majority of the *christian* world, and led the Pope and his votaries to worship the Virgin Mary, and deified saints and dumb idols. It has led the whole body of Arians to pay divine honours to one whom they believe to be destitute of every divine perfection, and to blend the worship of a creature with the worship of his creator. Such great and general blindness of mankind cannot be owing to any defect in their understandings, but must flow from the moral corruption of their hearts. The light of nature and the light of the gospel has shone in darkness, and the darkness has not comprehended it. The apostle ascribes the idolatry of the world to this criminal cause. It was because "they became vain in their imagination, and their *foolish heart* was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools : And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."

6. If God be the only proper object of religious worship on account of his supremely great and amiable perfections ; then those are extremely criminal, who never worship him at all. There are a vast many of the human race, who never pay religious worship to any being in the universe. This is more common among those who call themselves christians, than among

the most savage and ignorant pagans. They almost universally pay religious worship to some being or objects which they deem divine. But how many are there in a christian land, who cast off fear and restrain prayer before God. Though they know the only living and true God, yet they glorify him not as God, either in secret, private, or publick. They live without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world. Such persons are more vile than the brutes that perish. "The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib;" but such christian pagans know not their Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, and treat him with the highest neglect and contempt. They despise his favour and defy his frowns. Hear the admonition of the prophet. "Understand, ye brutish among the people; and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the *heathen*, shall not he correct?" "Will he not pour out his fury upon those, that call not upon his name?" "Can their hands be strong, or their hearts endure, in the day that he shall deal with them?"

Finally, this subject exhorts all to renounce the idols which they have set up in their hearts. How many are setting up idols in their hearts? All who love the world, or the things of the world supremely, are idolators in the sight of God. And these idols are as fatal as graven images—and must be removed, in order to glorify and enjoy God.

# SERMON X.

THE HUMANITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

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LUKE ii. 52.

*And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*

THESE words are intimately connected with the whole of the preceding chapter, which contains a large and particular account of the time, place, and circumstances of Christ's birth; of the angels who proclaimed the great and joyful event; of the peculiar ceremonies of his dedication to God; of his early attendance on the passover; and of his uncommon growth in wisdom and stature, as well as in favour with God and man. The text, taken in connection with all these things, naturally leads us to conclude,

That Jesus Christ was really man.

It is certain, however, that the humanity, as well as divinity of Christ, has been called in question. This was one of the first heresies that sprang up in the christian church. A sect called the Docetæ denied, that Christ had a true body and reasonable soul, or that he literally hungered, thirsted, suffered and died. To this heresy, it is supposed, the apostle John alludes in his first epistle, where he says, "Hereby know ye the spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God. And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God. And this is that spirit of anti-christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now is already in the world." Though few, if any at this day, deny that Christ had a human *body*, yet some noted divines deny that he had a human *soul*,



which is virtually denying his proper and essential humanity. It is, therefore, a point worthy of serious consideration, whether Jesus of Nazareth, who appeared in the character of mediator, and died without the gates of Jerusalem, was really *man*. If we search the New-Testament, we shall find, that the inspired writers have said a great many things, which clearly prove the real humanity of Christ. He is there called man, and the son of man, more than forty times by himself and others. He appeared in fashion as a man, and was taken to be such, by all who beheld him and conversed with him. Though some thought he was John the Baptist risen from the dead; others that he was Elias; others that he was Jeremias, or one of the prophets; yet none doubted whether he was really man and one of the descendants of Adam. Accordingly, Josephus and all profane historians, who have mentioned Jesus of Nazareth, have always spoken of him as really man, and generally nothing more than man. This is such evidence of Christ's humanity as might well be considered as full and satisfactory. But since I propose to treat this subject distinctly and largely, I shall enter into a more particular consideration of the evidence of Christ's being really man.

Here it may be observed,

1. That he was really man, because he had a human body. It was formed and fashioned in his mother's womb, by the great parent of all flesh. "So it was," says the inspired writer, that while his mother was at Bethlem, "the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first born son, and wrapt him in swaddling clothes" This representation plainly supposes, that Christ's body was truly human and derived in an ordinary way from human nature. And this is further corroborated by the account given of his corporal increase in stature and magnitude through the several stages of infancy, childhood, youth, to complete manhood, by the same means of nourishment, by which other children come to maturity. Christ's body appears to have been, in

every respect, similar to that of other men. It was subject to heat and cold, pleasure and pain, hunger and thirst, strength and weakness, and to every corporeal infirmity which does not arise from human depravity. His having such a human body is a strong presumptive evidence, that he had a human soul, which was necessary to constitute him a real man.

2. He was really man, because he had a human soul as well as a human body. This is necessarily implied in what is said of him in the text. "He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." Here both his wisdom and piety is asserted; and we know, that these are properties of the soul, and not of the body. He possessed every intellectual power and faculty, which was necessary to constitute him a free, voluntary, moral agent, and capable of that wisdom and piety, which rendered him perfectly amiable in the sight of God and man. And his growing in wisdom and holiness is a conclusive evidence, that he possessed the same kind of intellectual powers and faculties, which are peculiar to a *human* soul, which gradually comes to maturity. Though his mind strengthened and expanded gradually; yet it strengthened and expanded rapidly, and made greater progress in knowledge and virtue, than other children of the same age, and under similar advantages. There is no doubt but that his pious parents instructed him as early and as well as they were capable. It is to be presumed, that they taught him to speak and to read, and improved every opportunity of pouring useful instruction into his attentive and docile mind. He heard them from day to day read the word of God, and call upon his name. He was soon capable of reading the scriptures himself, and of understanding what the prophets had said concerning his character, his office, and mediatorial conduct. He early knew much more concerning these great things than his parents. This appears from his extraordinary conversation with the Jewish teachers in the temple, who more astonished at his understanding and answers, and from

his reply to the gentle reproof of his mother for staying behind in the temple, "Wist ye not that I must be about my father's business?" His improvements in knowledge were surprising to all who heard him preach. While he taught in the temple, "the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man *letters*, having never learned." Though he employed most of his time in a laborious occupation with his father; yet he found many leisure seasons and opportunities, which other children, and youths, and even men, spend in trifling, that he wisely improved in reading and contemplating upon the most important and divine subjects. And if we consider the purity of his heart, the strength of his mind, and the rectitude of all his views, desires, and pursuits, it is natural to conclude, that his human soul, though at first weak and feeble, should gradually and rapidly increase, wax strong, and be filled with spiritual and divine wisdom. This account of Christ's mental improvements affords infallible evidence, that he possessed not an angelick, or superangelick, but a *human* soul, which being united with a human body, constituted him, in the strictest sense, a real man.

3. That Christ was properly a human person will appear, if we consider the state and circumstances in which he was placed while he lived in this world. For,

1. He was fixed in a state of dependence. This he repeatedly and plainly acknowledged. "Then Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the son of man can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth his father do." Again he said, "When ye have lifted up the son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that *I do nothing of myself*; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things." And again, "The words I speak unto you, *I speak not of myself*, but the Father that dwelleth in me, *he doeth the works*." These are plain expressions of his dependence upon his Father. And it was upon this ground, that he so frequently and devoutly prayed to his Father. Prayer always implies dependence upon him to

whom it is addressed. The prayers of Christ, therefore, prove that he lived, and moved, and had his being in God, as really as other men, and was as much dependent upon him for divine assistance, direction, and preservation, through the whole course of his life as any other of the human race. He prayed for divine direction in the choice of his twelve disciples. He prayed for divine assistance to raise Lazarus from the grave. He prayed for Peter and for all his apostles and followers at the last passover he ever attended. And he prayed to be divinely strengthened and supported through all his agonies in the garden and his sufferings on the cross. His continual prayers were a continual and practical expression of his state of dependence during his continuance on earth; and his dependence was a demonstration of his real humanity.

2. He was placed under law, which implies that he was a human moral agent, and accountable to God like other men. We are told that "when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son, *made of a woman, made under the law*, to redeem them that were under the law." Christ was as much bound as any other man by the divine law, to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength, and his neighbour as himself. As a child, he was bound to obey his father and mother. As a Jew, he was bound to observe all the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaick law. As a subject, he was bound to obey magistrates and all the higher powers. And as a dependent creature, he was bound to obey the whole will of his Creator. There was not a divine law in being in his day, but what bound him to universal and perfect obedience, as much as any other man. This he knew, and accordingly paid a strict, cheerful, and constant obedience to every divine precept and prohibition. He said, "it is my meat to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." And his Father proclaimed by a voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." When he came from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be

baptised of him, "John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering, said unto him, suffer it to be so now: for thus it *becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.*" "It *becometh us,*" that is, it becometh me as well as others to fulfil all righteousness, by universal obedience to the divine commands. And this he more expressly declared in his sermon on the Mount. "Think not that I come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." And again he said, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." No law, whether human or divine, can bind any but those to whom it is given. So the apostle declares with respect to the divine law. "Whatsoever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law." If Christ had not been man, he could not have been made under the law to man. But he was made under the law to man, which demonstrates, that he was really man. I must add,

3. That Christ was placed, like all other men, in a state of probation, from his birth to his death. His own eternal happiness, as well as the eternal happiness of mankind, was suspended upon his entire, constant, and persevering obedience through life. If he had failed in one point, he would have forfeited the divine favour, defeated the great design he came to accomplish, and plunged himself in hopeless ruin. Disobedience in him would have been far more criminal than disobedience in any other man, and drawn after it far more fatal consequences. This is what is meant by his being in a state of probation. For any person is strictly and properly in a state of probation, where future good or evil is suspended upon his future conduct. Thus Solomon placed Shimei in a state of probation when he suspended his life, or death, upon the condition of his keeping within, or going beyond the bounds he had set him. So God the Father made great and precious promises to Christ, upon the condition of his perfect faithfulness in performing the work

of redemption, and such conditional promises of good placed him in a state of probation, in respect to his future conduct. His Father promised, in the 42d of Isaiah, to strengthen and uphold him in his great and arduous mediatorial work, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not *fail*, nor be discouraged, till he hath set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law. Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein; I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, *and will hold thine hand and will keep thee*, and give thee for a covenant to the people for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." In the 53d chapter of this prophecy, the Father promises to reward him for his obedience and sufferings. After representing God as bruising and grieving him, by making his soul an offering for sin, the prophet introduces the Father as saying, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great; and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered among transgressors." This was the joy set before Christ, for which he endured the cross and despised the shame. Accordingly, just before his death, he claimed the fulfilment of the promises, which his Father had made him upon condition of his perfect and persevering obedience. He says to him, "I have glorified thee on earth: I have finished the work thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self; with the glory I had with thee before the world

was." This promise the apostle tells us the Father has actually fulfilled. He says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also *hath highly exalted him*, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess, *that Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father." Thus God the Father treated Christ as having been perfectly faithful through his whole probationary state. Besides, it is expressly said, that Christ was placed in a state of probation, to qualify him for his mediatorial work. The apostle in his epistle to the Hebrews says, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining unto God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Accordingly, we find that Christ actually passed through the most fiery trials. He was tried in the wilderness by Satan, who offered him the whole world if he would only worship him. He was tried by his enemies. He was tried by his disciples. He was tried in the garden. He was tried before the tribunal of Pilate. And he was still more severely tried on the cross. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief from his birth to his death. Thus it appears, that

Christ was really man, as he had a human body—a human soul—and a dependent nature, and was made under law, and placed in a state of dependence and probation. The inspired writers have given us as clear, as full, and as positive evidence of the humanity of Christ, as of any truth or fact they have recorded concerning any man they have mentioned.

I now proceed to improve the subject.

1. If Christ was really man; then the Arian notion of his pre-existence before he came into the world is entirely unscriptural and absurd. The Arians suppose, that Christ was the first and noblest of created beings, and existed before the foundation of the world. They suppose, that this pre-existent spirit was united with the body of Christ and supplied the place of a human soul, and enabled Christ to do and suffer all that he did and suffered to perform the part of a Mediator and Redeemer. And upon this ground they deny, that he possessed any real divinity, or was the second person in the Trinity, united with humanity. They hold, that Christ was neither God nor man, but an intermediate being. In this, they principally differ from proper Socinians and grosser Unitarians. These maintain, that Christ had a true body and reasonable soul, and was properly man, and no more than man. But the Arians suppose, that though Christ had a real human body, yet it was united with a super-angelick soul, which existed they know not how long before the creation of the world, and its union with the babe of Bethlehem. But if the babe of Bethlehem, as we have shown, had both a human body and human soul; then it is absurd to suppose, that a pre-existent, super-angelick spirit supplied the place of a human soul in the man Christ Jesus. Though many, who call themselves Trinitarians maintain the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence; yet they suppose that Christ's pre-existent nature was personally united with the second person in the Trinity, and consequently maintain the true doctrine of Christ's divinity. But in this, they are not so consistent as the Arians. For it is absurd, to



suppose, that Christ had both a human soul and a super-angelick soul, and that both these were personally united with the second person in the Trinity, and so constituted him a divine person. The true scriptural doctrine of Christ's divinity is founded upon the true scriptural doctrine of Christ's having a human body and an human soul, which was personally united with the second person in the Godhead. It is necessary, therefore, to believe the real *humanity*, in order to believe the real *divinity* of Christ. It has been found by observation and experience, that the denial of Christ's humanity directly leads to the denial of his divinity.

2. If Christ had a human body and a human soul; then we cannot account for the early depravity of children, through the mere influence of bad examples or bodily instincts and appetites. Those who deny original sin, or the native depravity of the human heart, endeavour to account for the well known fact of the early and universal sinfulness of mankind, by ascribing it to bad examples, and to the bodily instincts and appetites of children and youth. They say, though no man is born a sinner; though no native depravity comes in consequence of Adam's apostacy; though the souls of children come into the world as pure and clean of moral impurity as a clean piece of paper; though they are naturally as much inclined to good, as to evil; and are really as good as young moral agents can be: yet through the weakness of their mental powers and faculties, through the force of their bodily instincts and appetites, and through the influence of bad examples, they are led into sin. This is the most plausible account that can be given of the early and universal sinfulness of mankind by Arminians, who deny original sin, or native depravity. But this account of universal depravity is completely refuted, by the state and character of the holy child, the holy youth, the holy man, Christ Jesus. He was an infant; but he did not sin in infancy. He had a frail, mortal body, but it did not corrupt his heart. He lived in a wicked

world, where he saw many bad examples, but they did not lead him to follow them. He was a free moral agent, but he never chose to sin. He had a human soul and a human body, and placed under the same circumstances that other children were. Why did he not disobey his parents, quarrel with his companions, speak wicked words, and profane the sabbath, like other children? He was hungry and thirsty. Why did not his appetites for food and drink lead him into intemperance? He suffered weariness and pain. Why did he not murmur at his unhappy situation? When he was reviled, why did he not revile again? If Christ had a human body and human soul, which was exactly like the human body and human soul of other children and other men, it is impossible to account for his perfect innocency, from his birth to his death, upon Arminian principles: or to account for the universal depravity of other men and children, upon the same principles. It is contrary to scripture and to the universal experience and observation of mankind to suppose, that infants come into the world as pure and innocent, as the holy child Jesus.

3. If Christ was really man; then there is no natural impossibility of men's becoming perfectly holy in this life. It seems to be a very common opinion, that there is not only a moral, but a natural impossibility of men's becoming perfectly holy while they remain this side of the grave. Many suppose, that the present state of things, the influence of Satan, the weakness of the mind, and the infirmities and frailties of the body are such, that men cannot cease from sinning, till they lay aside these gross bodies, and leave this dark and sinful world. But this is an egregious mistake. Christ, under all these unfavourable circumstances, kept himself free from every moral evil. He was always pure, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, though clothed in a frail, mortal body, and surrounded by as many impediments to virtue as any other man ever was. And his perfectly holy life shows, that mankind may live in the same manner in this present

evil world. Christ knew that no man is under a *natural* necessity of sinning, and therefore he requires all his followers to be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect, and to keep themselves always in the love of God, which is *sinless* perfection. Neither the law, nor the gospel allows any person to be imperfectly holy in this world.

4. If Christ was really man; then God is able to keep men from sinning consistently with their moral agency. Many suppose, that God cannot restrain men from sinning, without destroying their moral freedom and accountability. They think, that if God should govern their hearts, or control their wills, he would destroy their moral liberty, and make them machines. But how does this appear? Christ was a man, and like all other men, a free moral agent. Yet God held his hand, and directed all the motions and exercises of his heart, so as never to suffer him to have an evil thought, or to do a sinful action, in perfect consistency with his moral liberty and freedom. And if God could preserve Christ from sinning through all the changes, trials, and sufferings he endured, we may justly conclude, that he is able to restrain all other men from sinning, without obstructing or infringing upon their moral agency. Men are always perfectly free and voluntary in their thinking, speaking, and acting, though the preparation of their heart and the answer of their tongues are from the Lord, and under his constant influence and control.

5. If Christ was really man; then there is no absurdity in the doctrine of the final perseverance of saints. This doctrine is often called absurd and absolutely denied, notwithstanding all the scripture says in favour of it, because it is supposed to be inconsistent with the free agency of christians. It is said, that God cannot cause them to persevere in holiness, while he allows them to act freely and voluntarily. But why not? He allowed the man Christ Jesus to act freely and voluntarily through the whole course of his life; and yet caused him to be perfectly holy and harmless and uncontaminated by the world all the

while he lived in it. It is said, that whilst christians remain moral agents, they must be able to apostatise and fall away ; and God cannot prevent it, consistently with their free agency. But was not Christ a free agent and able to apostatise, and neglect the great work which he had undertaken ? He certainly was as able to neglect, as to perform his great work. But God held his hand and heart under his irresistible influence, which entirely prevented his negligence and apostacy, and caused him to persevere in holiness and obedience, until he finished his work, without infringing or restraining his free agency. And cannot God as easily hold the hands and hearts of all christians under his irresistible influence, which shall infallibly prevent their apostacy, and cause them to endure to the end, so as to secure the salvation of their souls ? The perseverance of the man Christ Jesus proves not only the possibility, but the certainty of the final perseverance of saints, which is so plainly taught in the bible.

6. If Christ was really man ; then there is no reason to suppose, that men possess a self-determining power, or a power to act independently of the divine influence and control. . Those who maintain this opinion, suppose that men could not be really in a state of probation in this life, if they were not possessed of a self-determining power, and able to act independently of any divine influence or control over their free and voluntary actions. They say it is absurd to suppose, that men can be in a state of probation, while their actions are decreed, and are under the controlling influence of the Deity. But was not the man Christ Jesus in a state of probation ? And were not all his actions decreed ? And did he not always act under the superintending influence of his Father ? We are told, that “ God created all things according to his eternal purpose which he proposed in Christ Jesus.” It was decreed from eternity, that he should be come incarnate ; that he should be born in Bethlehem ; that he should preach ; that he should work miracles ;

that he should suffer and die to atone for the sins of the world; and in a word, that he should do and suffer all that he did do and suffer, till he ascended to heaven. And in executing his decrees respecting Christ, God the Father guided every step he took, every word he said, and every action he did; and yet he was, strictly speaking, in a state of probation through the whole course of his life. Now, if Christ could act freely, voluntarily, and virtuously, in a state of probation, without a self-determining power, and under the constant and controlling influence of the Deity; then it is easy to see, that mankind may be in a state of probation in this life, though all their actions are decreed, and are under a constant divine influence. If a self-determining power be necessary to render mankind free, voluntary, and accountable agents in this probationary state; then it is not easy to see why a self-determining power is not as necessary to render them moral agents in a future state. They will all undoubtedly be free agents in a future state, and absolutely confirmed in holiness, or sin. But how is it possible for God to confirm men in either sin or holiness if they possess a self-determining power? If saints and sinners in a future state should possess a self-determining power, it is impossible for those, who maintain the principle of self-determining power, to tell why saints in heaven may not become sinners; and sinners in hell become saints. The doctrine of a self-determining power is not only unscriptural, but perfectly absurd.

7. If Christ was really man; then his conduct is a proper example for all men to follow. Accordingly, the apostle Peter tells us, that Christ left us an example, that we should follow his steps. Though his human and divine nature were personally united; yet this personal union with the Deity did not render him, as some have supposed, *impeccable*, or *incapable* of sinning. If this had been the case, he would not have been in a state of probation. But notwithstanding his personal union with the Deity, he was really man, and as much

in a state of probation as other men. His conduct through the whole of his probationary state, is a proper example to all mankind. His conduct as a child, is a proper example to all children. His conduct as a youth, is a proper example to all youths. And his conduct as a man, is a proper example to all men. As he walked, so all men ought to walk. As he was in this world, so all men ought to be while they live in it. The Socinians suppose, that God's principal purpose in sending him into the world, was to set a perfect example of virtue and piety to mankind. But though this was not the principal purpose he came to answer; yet it was undoubtedly one purpose for which he came. His example is a criterion, by which all his followers may determine how far they walk worthy of their vocation, and act up to their profession. And when they are in doubt how they ought to conduct in any situation or circumstance of life, let them ask how they suppose Christ did act or would have acted in their present situation, and follow his real or supposed example.

8. If Christ was really man; then he is well qualified to perform all the remaining parts of his mediatorial office. In particular, to perform the part of an intercessor. So says the apostle expressly. "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make *intercession* for them." It is because the second person in the Trinity is united to the man Christ Jesus, that it becomes him to intercede with the first person in the Godhead. It was in his mediatorial character, as God-man, that Christ interceded with the Father for his disciples and all his followers in the 17th of John. The union between the human and divine nature in the person of Christ, qualifies him for his delegated government of the world, from his resurrection to the end of time. He is to reign till the work of redemption shall be finished—and then to deliver up the kingdom to the Father.

And the union between the humanity and divinity of Christ, qualifies him in a peculiar manner for being the Supreme Judge of the world. He can make a visible appearance, and administer judgment in mercy.

9. If Christ be really man; then those will be unspeakably happy, who shall be admitted into his visible presence, and dwell with him for ever. This blessedness he has promised to all his sincere followers. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." And as he says in another place, "that they may behold his glory." Saints will be probably placed nearer to the personal presence of Christ, than the angels, which will afford them a felicity superiour to that of any of the heavenly hosts.

Finally, if Christ was such a glorious and amiable man, then it must be the highest glory of men, to become christians, and name his name, exhibit his moral image, and devote themselves to that glorious cause, for the promotion of which he suffered and died.

# SERMON XI.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

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ACTS iii. 15.

*And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses.*

PETER made this declaration upon a very peculiar occasion. As he and John were going into the temple to pray, a man lame from his birth saw them and asked an alms. "Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, silver and gold I have none, but such as I have, give I thee : In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." The man instantly leaps up, walks into the temple and praises God. The spectators were filled with wonder and amazement. And when Peter saw it, he turned and said, "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this ? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk ? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers hath glorified his son Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the holy one, and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you ; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses."

The subject, which now lies before us, is the resurrection of Christ. And in treating upon it, I propose,

I. To inquire whether it were impossible for God to raise Christ from the dead ;



II. To inquire what sort of evidence of this truth we ought to expect; and,

III. To exhibit the evidence there is, that God did raise him from the dead.

I. We are to inquire whether it were impossible, that God should raise Christ from the dead. Some have thought it incredible, that God should raise the dead, and were it impossible, it would be incredible. God can do every thing that is possible, but nothing that is impossible. It is impossible, that God should cause a thing to exist and not to exist at the same time; and it was equally impossible, that God should cause Christ to be both dead and alive at the same time. These are natural impossibilities, not because they are above the power of God to effect, but because they are contradictions and absurdities, which no power can effect. But we can see no absurdity or impossibility in raising a dead man to life: for, it is undoubtedly as easy to divine power to restore the union between the soul and the body after it has been dissolved, as to establish such an union at first. So that there does not appear any more absurdity or impossibility in God's restoring the union between Christ's human body and human soul after it had been dissolved by death, than in establishing that union at first. And as there was no *natural*, so there was no *moral* impossibility in his raising Christ from the dead. That is morally impossible with God, which is inconsistent with any part of his moral character. It is morally impossible, that he should do any thing, which is contrary to his justice, veracity, or immutable purpose. But it does not appear to have been contrary to his justice, veracity, or any immutable purpose, to raise Christ from the dead, whom he had promised that he should not see corruption. And since the resurrection of Christ was neither above the power, nor inconsistent with the moral character of God to effect, there is no absurdity in believing, upon proper evidence, that he did raise him from the dead. And supposing this was the case, let us inquire,

II. What sort of evidence we ought to expect in proof of it. Those who deny divine Revelation say, that we cannot have either *ocular* nor *demonstrative* evidence of Christ's resurrection; and as to *moral* evidence, that is very uncertain and precarious. It is readily conceded, that we are not to expect to find either ocular, or demonstrative evidence of Christ's rising from the dead, yet we may justly expect to find such clear and conclusive *moral* evidence of the fact, as is sufficient to satisfy every impartial and candid mind.

Moral evidence is that, which we receive from writings and verbal testimony, and which is founded upon the known connection between moral causes and effects. And though it does not amount to strict demonstration, yet, in many cases, it arises to that certainty, which carries full and irresistible conviction to the mind. We have no ocular, or demonstrative evidence, that our ancestors came from Europe; but we have such clear *moral* evidence of it, that we cannot seriously disbelieve it. For we cannot suppose, that all the European and American historians should have been deceived, or have united to deceive others upon so plain a subject as the first settlement of the civilized inhabitants of this country. It is as natural and habitual to mankind in general, to write and speak the truth, when they have no temptation to the contrary, as it is to write and speak at all. Accordingly we find, that all nations agree in admitting human writings and human testimony, as satisfactory evidence, in all their secular concerns of a publick or private nature. Written records and verbal testimony are deemed sufficient evidence to establish any truth, or fact, before any civil court or human tribunal. Indeed to deny the validity of such moral evidence would throw the world into confusion, and burst all the bands of civil society. But if we admit moral evidence to be satisfactory in all other important cases, why should we not admit it to be equally satisfactory, in respect to the resurrection of Christ? As a past event, it requires and ad-

mits of no other kind of evidence. It only remains, therefore,

III. To exhibit the clear and full moral evidence we have, that Christ was actually raised from the dead. And,

1. The witnesses, who testified the truth of this important fact, are in every respect worthy of entire credit. Peter declares in the text, that he and the other apostles were witnesses of Christ's resurrection. And it must be allowed, that they were men, whose characters and qualifications for witnesses, render them worthy to be believed. They were possessed of a clear discernment and sound judgment. They were capable of perceiving and relating the truth upon this subject in a plain, intelligible, and consistent manner. Besides this, they had been personally and intimately acquainted with Christ several years before his death. They had heard him speak in private and in publick. They had seen him work miracles. And they had often critically observed his general deportment, his personal appearance, and every feature of his face. They were, therefore, perfectly capable of determining, when he appeared to them after his resurrection, whether he had the same voice, the same figure, and the same countenance, that he had before his death. He was with them forty days after his passion, and ate, and drank with them, and allowed them to satisfy themselves of the truth and reality of his resurrection, in the most sensible and palpable manner. They were all slow of heart to believe, that he was risen from the grave, and especially Thomas one of the twelve, to whom he condescended to say, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." And from a full conviction of the truth of his resurrection, he was constrained to cry, "My Lord, and my God!" The apostles having such perfect personal knowledge of Christ's resurrection, were not afraid to publish the important truth, in the most solemn and publick manner. Peter boldly declares

before a large concourse of people, that he had cured the impotent man in the name of Christ, whom God had raised from the dead. And all the apostles wherever they went, always preached the doctrine of Christ's resurrection, though at the risk of losing every thing most valuable in life, and even life itself. They were, therefore, both competent and faithful witnesses. They exhibited every mark of truth and honesty. They all spoke the same things, and their number served to strengthen and corroborate their testimony. Or if that should be scrupled, the apostle tells us, Christ was seen after his resurrection, by above five hundred brethren at once. Would not the testimony of such witnesses be deemed sufficient to support any cause before any human tribunal? If we ought to place full faith in any human testimony, we ought to place full faith in the united and consistent testimony of the apostles in favour of the resurrection of Christ. For,

2. If they had used any deception in their testimony, they must have been detected in the time of it. They gave their testimony when and where, if there had been any fraud in the case, it might have been most easily and fully discovered. It was within a few days after Christ's resurrection, that Peter and John publicly declared the fact, at Jerusalem and in the temple, where Christ had taught, wrought miracles, and had been personally known for several years, and where he had just been crucified and buried. His enemies remembered what they had said, and done respecting his doctrines, his miracles, and his crucifixion. They remembered, that he professed to be the promised Messiah and king of the Jews; that he had foretold his death and resurrection; and that they had requested and obtained liberty of Pilate, to take the best possible precaution against any deception that might be used respecting his rising from the dead. They had time, opportunity, authority, and every motive, to call the apostles to account, and to punish them severely, if they could discover any fraud or falsehood

in their testimony. Why then did they not discover some fraud or falsehood in the apostles, who boldly and publickly declared, that they had actually seen and conversed with Christ after his resurrection? No reason can be given for this, but that what they said was true, and could not be disproved, by those who could and would have disproved it, had it been false. If the enemies of Christ had only discovered any deception in the testimony of the apostles, they would have discovered Christ to have been an impostor, and justified themselves in putting him to death; and at the same time, defeated the evil design of his followers, and crushed the gospel at its birth. If the declaration of the apostles concerning the resurrection of Christ had been a falsehood, it must have been detected in the time of it; and as it was not, and could not be detected then, we must conclude that it was true, and that Christ was certainly raised from the dead, according to the scriptures.

3. The Jewish nation were convinced, that Christ was really raised from the dead. Though they were extremely loth to believe his resurrection, and took unlawful means to conceal the evidence of it, bribing the soldiers, who guarded the sepulchre, to say that his disciples came and stole his body while they slept, yet the true testimony of the apostles completely discredited the story of the soldiers. And when the supreme court of the nation apprehended the apostles themselves, and examined them critically concerning what they had publickly declared, with respect to the resurrection of Christ, they maintained the truth of the fact, and no threatnings could deter them from continuing to preach the same doctrine. I will read the large and particular account of this legal process, which we have in the chapter following the text. "And as Peter and John spake unto the people, the priests and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in

hold unto the next day. Howbeit, many of them who heard the word believed : and the number of the men was about five thousand. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and their elders, and the scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, by what power, or by what name, have ye done this ? Then Peter filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole ; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom *ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead*, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of *you builders*, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other ; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled ; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, *they could say nothing against it*. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men ? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us *straitly threaten them* that they speak henceforth to no man in his name. And they called them, and *commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus*. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have *seen and heard*. So when

*they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them.*" This was the highest ecclesiastical council in the state. It was held at Jerusalem, where Christ had just been crucified and buried. It was called for the sole purpose of examining the apostle's testimony in respect to the resurrection of Christ, a testimony which had been instrumental, the day before, of converting five thousand men. The examination was very deliberate and very strict, as well as very publick. When it was finished, the council conferred together, and frankly acknowledged, that they could find no falsehood, nor deception, nor any thing else in the apostles, for which they could condemn them. Accordingly, they determined only to command them not to preach any more, lest their testimony concerning the resurrection of Christ should be more extensively spread and believed among the people. As this council, who examined the apostles themselves, were constrained to believe, that their testimony concerning Christ's resurrection was true; so their belief of the fact, is tantamount to the belief of all the rest of the nation. And if the first men in the Jewish nation, who were best acquainted with Christ, who were the most prejudiced against him, and who were the most reluctant to believe the testimony of the apostles concerning his resurrection, were constrained to believe it, we may well believe it. That evidence, which convinced the Jewish council of the truth of Christ's resurrection, and converted five thousand men to the faith of the gospel, ought to be completely satisfactory to us, at this day. It must be added,

4. That there could have been no deception in respect to Christ's resurrection, appears from the known circumstances of the case. The Jews took so much care and precaution to prevent deception, that had the apostles or any of the friends of Christ been ever so much disposed to palm a cheat upon the world, they could not have done it. Matthew, giving an account of Christ's death and burial, in the 27th chapter of his gospel, says, "Now the next day that followed the day

of preparation, the chief priests and pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again. Command therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, he is risen from the dead : so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, ye have a watch : go your way, *make it sure as you can.* So they went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch." This seems to have been the most prudent and effectual method that could be devised, to prevent the disciples, or any of the friends of Christ, from coming and taking away his body in a clandestine manner, and to ascertain whether he actually rose from the dead, or not. There is, therefore, no ground to suspect, that there was any fraud or deception in the case. The whole story of the bribed soldiers is in its own nature inconsistent and absurd. It is not credible, that the disciples should go to the sepulchre, and not perceive the guard that was set there. It is not credible, that if the guard were awake, that they should attempt to take away the body of Christ. It is not credible, that if they saw all the guard asleep, and did attempt to roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and to take away the body of Christ, that they could have effected their purpose, without waking the guard. And it is still more incredible, that the guard should have known, that they did come and take away his body while they were asleep. The whole affair of Christ's burial was so conducted by his friends and enemies, as to preclude the possibility of his body's being taken away in a clandestine manner. Joseph, of Arimathea laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of a rock : and at the same time, rolled a *great* stone to the door of the sepulchre. Besides, when Christ actually rose, "Behold there was a great earthquake : for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sat upon it. His counte-



nance was like lightning, and his raiment as white as snow. And for fear of him the keepers did shake and become as dead men. And the angel said unto Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, who had come to see the sepulchre, Fear not ye : for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is *risen* as he said : come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead. Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken council, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, say ye, his disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governour's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day." Such are the allowed circumstances of Christ's burial and resurrection, and under such circumstances, was it possible that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary; or that the disciples to whom they told what they had seen and heard at the sepulchre; or that Joseph of Arimathea; or that the chief priests and elders, to whom their own guard told the truth at first, should have been deceived, as to Christ's resurrection? They all undoubtedly believed the apostles, who were eye witnesses of his resurrection, and who testified, at the risk of their lives, that they saw him alive after his death. And we know, that their testimony concerning this infinitely important event, was believed by three thousand converts to christianity on one day; and by five thousand on the next day; and by millions since, in the course of more than seventeen hundred years. According to all the principles of human nature, the apostles spoke the truth, and if we may believe any human testimony, or moral evidence, we may safely believe, that God raised Christ from the dead.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. If we have clear, satisfactory evidence, that Christ rose from the dead ; then we have good ground to believe, that the gospel is true. The truth of the gospel rests entirely upon the truth of Christ's resurrection. If the apostles propagated a fraud and falsehood, with respect to the fact of Christ's rising from the dead, then the gospel they preached was a mere cunningly devised fable. But if we have clear and conclusive evidence of Christ's resurrection, then we have equally clear and conclusive evidence of the truth and divinity of the gospel. Our Saviour, before his death, suspended the highest and ultimate proof of the divinity of his person, and of the truth of his doctrines, upon the event of his resurrection from the dead. He repeatedly and plainly told his disciples, that he should be crucified and slain by wicked hands, and afterwards rise from the dead. He said, "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." He said in reference to his body, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." He said, "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." Sometime before his death, "he shewed unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and *be raised again the third day.*" These declarations were known not only to his friends, but to his enemies, who for that reason took peculiar care to ascertain the fact, whether he did, or did not rise again, as he predicted. And if he had not risen again according to his prediction, both his friends and enemies would have had a right to consider and call him an impostor. But by actually rising from the dead, he distinguished himself from all impostors, and exhibited the highest possible evidence, that he was what he professed to be, the promised Messiah and Saviour of the world.

Accordingly, the apostles made the resurrection of Christ the principle subject of their preaching. Wherever they preached, whether among Jews, or gentiles, they boldly declared, that Jesus of Nazareth, was risen from the dead, and was the only all-sufficient Saviour of sinners. This was agreeable to the commission that Christ gave them to preach the gospel, just before he ascended to heaven. "And he said unto them, these are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures. And said unto them, thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer *and to rise from the dead the third day*; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are *witnesses* of these things." Thus Christ founds the truth of the gospel upon the truth of his resurrection, and he directs his apostles to found the truth of it upon that single and all-important fact. And agreeably to this, the apostle Paul tells the Corinthians, that the gospel he had preached was founded entirely upon the truth of Christ's resurrection. "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain—ye are yet in your sins." But if it be morally certain, as we have shown, that Christ was raised from the dead, then it is morally certain, that the gospel, with all its precepts, promises, and threatenings, is infallibly true. And upon this foundation, it has stood the test of ages, and been mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the strong holds, and to the resisting of the most powerful attacks of its most inveterate and subtle enemies.

2. If God raised Christ from the dead, then we may justly conclude, that he made a complete and satisfactory atonement for sin, by his sufferings and death on the cross. If he had not been perfectly obedient to his Father's will, and faithfully performed every part of the work which he gave him to do, he would not have

manifested his approbation of him by raising him from the dead. Christ requested his Father, before he died, that he would give him a peculiar mark of his approbation, on account of his fidelity in performing his mediatorial work. He goes to him and says, "I have glorified thee on earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory I had with thee before the world was." Such a mark of his approbation his Father gave him *by raising him from the dead*, as well as by receiving him to heaven. Hence says the apostle, that "Christ was declared to be the Son of God, with power, according to the spirit of holiness *by the resurrection from the dead*." Again, he represents the Father as exalting him to his own right hand, as a mark of approbation, on account of what he did and suffered on the cross. "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God. But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. *Wherefore*, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." This was the highest possible mark of approbation, that the Father could give him, on account of his dying the just for the unjust, making his soul a sacrifice for sin, and giving his life a ransom for many. When Christ had drank the last drop of sufferings on the cross, he cried, "It is finished!" The atonement for the sins of the world is made. And the truth of this declaration, God the Father sealed, by raising him from the dead.

3. Since God has raised Christ from the dead, we may be assured, that he will completely accomplish the whole work of redemption. He has begun this great and arduous work, and performed the most difficult parts of it. He has come into the world, and tak-

en upon him human nature. He has lived a life of universal obedience and self-denial. He has died a painful and meritorious death, and he has risen triumphant from the grave. These were the most formidable evils and difficulties he had to meet and surmount in performing the great work of man's redemption. If he had fainted in the garden, or if he had been confined in the grave; he would have failed in his whole design. This his friends feared, and his enemies hoped, from the time of his death, to the time of his resurrection. Then he soon removed the fears of his friends, and destroyed the hopes of his enemies. He first appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary; then to Peter; then to the twelve; and after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. Having completely convinced his friends of his resurrection to life, just before he left the world, he called his eleven disciples together, and assured them that he had power, and was determined to pursue the work he had undertaken, and would employ and assist them in carrying it into effect. "And Jesus came, and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Since God has raised Christ from the dead, given him all power in heaven and earth, and made him to be head over all things to the church, we may confidently believe, that he will continue to carry on, until he has finished the whole work of man's redemption. His resurrection is a solid foundation to expect, that he will do all the great and good things which he has promised to do for the salvation of those whom the Father has given him. Accordingly, when he was about to reveal to his beloved disciple John, the future glory and prosperity of his kingdom, he mentions his death, resurrection, and supreme authority, as the infallible evidence of the full accomplishment of all his predictions. John says, "I was in the spirit

on the Lord's day; and heard behind me a great voice, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and what thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot. And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, fear not, I am the first and the last; I am he that *liveth* and was dead; and behold, *I am alive forevermore*, amen; and *have the keys of hell and of death*. *Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.*" The resurrection of Christ is the primary and principal ground we have to believe that he will fully accomplish the whole work of redemption. Since he has risen from the dead, and holds the reins of universal government, we may confidently expect, that he will go on conquering and to conquer, until all his enemies are made his footstool, all the elect are called in, and all the promises and predictions of the gospel are fulfilled. Thus the resurrection of Christ is the richest source of divine consolation to all true believers. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," says the apostle Peter, "who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, *by the resurrection of Christ from the dead*, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time."

4. If Christ was literally raised from the dead, there is reason to believe, that there will be a literal and general resurrection of the dead at the last day. Christ was literally raised from the dead. He arose in the same body in which he was laid in the tomb. Not only Thomas, but all the disciples, had a full belief of his body's being the same after his resurrection, that it was before. And from Christ's literal resurrection, the

apostle conclusively argues a literal and general resurrection of the dead. He says, "now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the *first-fruits* of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." The first-fruits are always of the same nature as the future harvest. This was exemplified in respect to Christ's resurrection, by those who rose from the dead just after it. We are told that when he expired on the cross, "the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom: and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the *graves* were opened; and many *bodies* of saints who slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." The bodies of these persons were certainly raised out of the graves in which they had been laid. Their resurrection was as literal as the resurrection of Christ. Our Saviour himself expressly declared, that he would literally raise the dead at the last day. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the *graves* shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." Mr. Locke and many others have supposed, that not the *bodies*, but the *souls* of men will be raised at the general resurrection. Their opinion, however, upon this subject, appears quite unscriptural. The bible leads us to believe, that the *bodies*, and not the *souls* of men, will be raised at the general resurrection. We are expressly told, that the *graves* shall give up their dead, the *seas* shall give up their dead, and *death and hell* shall give up their dead. This representation implies, that the bodies of men shall be raised from the places where they were at first laid, or where they shall be found at the last day. And the doctrine of a literal resurrection is corroborated by the account we have of Enoch and Elijah, who were translated both soul and body to heaven. Nor is there any weight in the philosophical objection against a lit-

eral resurrection, drawn from the great change of particles in the human body while alive, and the vast distance they may be scattered from one another after death. For God who *formed* the bodies of men, has knowledge, and power, and wisdom enough to find, collect, and unite them together, ages and ages after death. Our bodies are called *tabernacles*, in allusion to that in the wilderness; and that we know was so framed, that every joint, and socket, and pin could be taken apart, and perfectly put together again. Why then should it be thought incredible, that God should literally raise the dead at the general resurrection? The whole current of scripture ought to remove all objections and doubts respecting the doctrine of a general and literal resurrection of the body at the great and last day.

5. If God has raised Christ from the dead, invested him with supreme authority, and given him divine power to complete the great work of redemption; then we may be sure, that he is preparing all things for a general judgment. The general resurrection and the general judgment are inseparably connected, and will take place together at the end of the world. The former is preparatory to the latter. The apostle founds the certainty of the general judgment upon the certainty of God's raising Christ from the dead, and appointing him to the government of the universe. Speaking of the wretched state of the heathens, he says, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day, in the 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 hath raised him from the dead.*" The same apostle also declares, that Christ must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet, and then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to the Father. Christ cannot finish the work which his father gave him to do, before he has raised mankind from the dead, called them together, judged them according to their



works, and fixed them in their final and interminable state of complete blessedness, or complete guilt and despair. Though more than seventeen hundred years have rolled away since the resurrection of Christ, and though as many more years may roll away before the general resurrection and general judgment; yet it is as certain that they will sooner or later come, as that Christ rose from the dead, and now lives to govern the world. And we are all as deeply interested in these solemn and important events now, as if they were to take place to-morrow. Though we all know this, yet we need to be repeatedly and solemnly reminded of it. The apostle Peter supposed, that those who had heard and understood, and believed (as well as others) the doctrine of Christ's resurrection, and the future and eternal consequences of it, were liable to *forget* their relation to and connection with those important and invisible realities, and he wrote a whole epistle on purpose, to impress them deeply and lastingly upon their minds. "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I *stir* up your minds, by way of *remembrance*: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they are willingly ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water. Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and earth which are now, by the word of God are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to-

ward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*” Nothing can be added to the weight and solemnity of this exhortation. But I may conclude the subject, by saying to every one present, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Amen.

## SERMON XII.

NEUTRALITY RESPECTING JESUS CHRIST IMPOSSIBLE.

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MATTHEW xii. 30.

*He that is not with me, is against me ; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.*

THE occasion of these words was this. There was brought unto Christ a man possessed of a devil, who was both blind and dumb : and he healed him, in so much that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. Though the miracle excited the admiration of the people in general ; yet it raised the enmity and opposition of the Pharisees, who maliciously charged him with casting out devils by Belzebub the prince of devils. Christ completely refutes this charge, by showing the absurdity of supposing, that Satan should cast out Satan, and act against the interest of his own kingdom, for the sake of joining with him in building up the kingdom of God ; and by showing the still greater absurdity of supposing, that he should act in concert with Satan, whom he knew to be his most malignant and powerful enemy. For says he, “ He that is not with me, is against me ; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.” To be with Christ, or against him, naturally signifies to be with him, or against him in some *design*. Merely loving, or hating a person is not commonly considered as being with him, or against him. But this phrase generally signifies being united with, or opposed to a person in some design he has formed and is pursuing. And in this sense Christ evidently meant to be understood in the text. For he was then actually carrying on that great and important design, which al-

ways has employed his thoughts, and always will employ them, until it is finally accomplished. In reference to this design he said, "He, that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad." We may, therefore, justly conclude,

That no man can be indifferent towards the design which Christ is carrying on. I shall,

I. Show what design Christ is carrying on; and

II. Show that no man can be indifferent towards it.

I. I am to show what design Christ is carrying on. He never had, and never will have but one design; and this design was concerted in the council of heaven, from the early days of eternity. Though all the persons in the sacred Trinity are united and engaged in this design: yet the most conspicuous and important part of it belongs to the office of Christ to fulfil. He has engaged in the work, and done much to accomplish it. He has come from heaven to earth, assumed human nature, suffered and died, risen from the dead, ascended up to heaven, taken the government of the world into his hands, and continues to act the part of a prince and saviour. But still the question recurs, What has he done, and is still doing all these things for? or what end or design is he carrying on? I answer, the great design of saving sinners. The work of redemption comprises all the works of creation and providence. Christ engaged from eternity, to accomplish the work of man's redemption. This is the scriptural representation of Christ's design. As soon as the great deceiver had brought about the apostacy of our first parents, God graciously promised them, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, destroy the works of the devil, and save all who were predestinated to eternal life. Accordingly, when he appeared on earth, he declared that he was the son of God and saviour of the world; that he came to give his life a ransom for many; and that whosoever believed in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. After his resurrection from the dead, he said to his disciples, "All power is given unto me in heaven and

earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world." And the apostle declares, "God hath raised Christ from the dead, and set him at his own right hand 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. And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church." Thus it appears, that the supreme and ultimate design, which Christ has undertaken, which he is carrying on, and which he will finally accomplish, is the promotion of the glory of God and the holiness and blessedness of his eternal kingdom, in the salvation of all penitent and believing sinners. And this must be allowed to be the greatest and best design, and the most interesting to all intelligent beings, that ever could be formed and executed. Therefore I go on to show,

II. That no man can be indifferent towards it. Christ expressly declares, "He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad;" which plainly implies, that every man either approves, or disapproves his design, and inwardly desires to promote, or obstruct it. And that no man can be indifferent towards it, will appear, if we consider the following things.

I. The design, which Christ is pursuing, is the greatest of all possible designs in every point of view. It is great in its origin. It was concerted in the early days of eternity, by the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and is as great a design as their united and infinite wisdom could form. It is great in extent. It reaches to and comprises all beings and objects in the universe. It is great in its duration. It began to operate from the beginning of the world, and it will continue to operate to the end of the world, and from that period to all eternity, and produce effects the most interesting to

every intelligent being, who will always be a spectator of them. Now, it is not conceivable, that any man should be indifferent towards this great and comprehensive design, which Christ is carrying on, and which will deeply and eternally affect the minds of the whole intelligent universe.

2. The great design, which Christ is pursuing, is totally opposed to all the selfish designs of mankind. Every man is naturally disposed to seek his own things and pursue his own interests, independently of, and in opposition to, the interests of others. This selfish spirit reigns more or less in the hearts of all the children of men, and leads them to form ten thousand selfish and sinful designs, which they regard as very important to themselves. But the perfectly wise and benevolent design, which Christ is pursuing, opposes and counteracts all the selfish designs of mankind. Their selfish designs respect their own good; but his design respects the glory of God. Their selfish designs respect temporal things; but his benevolent design respects eternal things. Their selfish designs respect nothing but happiness; but his benevolent design respects holiness as well as happiness, through all the periods of time and all the ages of eternity. So long as Christ lived in obscurity and concealed his great and benevolent design in coming into the world, he grew in favour with God and man. But as soon as he made known his design, and pursued it in open opposition to the views, the purposes, and selfish interests of the Jews, they hated him, reviled him, and opposed him, with the utmost virulence, till they finally imbrued their hands in his blood. And wherever the gospel has made known his design, it has never failed of exciting the enmity and opposition of the wise and unwise, of the learned and unlearned, of kings and of kingdoms. It was foretold, that Christ in pursuing his great design, should raise the general resentment and opposition of mankind. "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together

against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." Mankind never feel indifferent towards any person, or object, that counteracts and defeats their desires, designs, or pursuits. No man, therefore, who is not indifferent to his own temporal, or eternal interests, can be indifferent towards the design, which Christ is pursuing, and which will deeply affect his interests both for time and eternity. Every individual of the human race will be just such as Christ's design requires, either rich or poor, either bond or free, either great or small, either high or low, either good or bad, either happy or miserable, through every period of his existence. "Think not," said Christ, "that I am come to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." And Jesus said again, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they who see not, might see; and that they who see, might be made blind." Christ in pursuing his great and benevolent design, bends the characters, the conduct, the conditions, and the interests of the whole world in subserviency to the interests of his own kingdom, and in opposition to the selfish characters, conduct, conditions, and interests of all who are against him. And will any selfish heart be indifferent to such a person, pursuing such a design? Will not every holy heart be for him, and every unholy heart be against him?

3. Christ, in carrying on his great, comprehensive, and benevolent design, employs all mankind as instruments in promoting it. Christ has all power in heaven and earth, and is able to subdue all things to himself, and to cause every creature and object in this world, to be instrumental, some way or other, in affecting the great design he has constantly in view. He employed the winds and waves in his service. He made a fish furnish him with property. He claimed the right to take

from its owner a colt, to ride in triumph into Jerusalem. He employed twelve men at first, and seventy more afterwards, to preach the gospel, before his death. And after his resurrection, he commanded and commissioned the apostles and all their regular successors, to preach the gospel to all nations, to the end of the world. And he still employs the hearts and hands and influence of all other men in his service. He governs supremely and absolutely in the moral, as well as in the natural world, and makes his enemies, as well as his friends the active and voluntary agents in doing whatever he sees necessary for them to do, to advance his cause and interest in the world. This was predicted of Christ under the type of Solomon, in the 72d psalm. "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall bow down before him; and all nations shall serve him." Men are naturally very unwilling to serve any cause, or promote any interest, which appears hostile to their own. But the cause which Christ is pursuing is totally opposed to all the sinister views and selfish interests of mankind. They cannot, therefore, feel indifferent whether Christ shall succeed or not, in his great design, or whether he shall employ them, in acting *for him against* themselves. Had the builders of the ark known the design of building it was to prepare the way for their own destruction, they would never have struck a stroke to prepare it for the safety of some and the ruin of themselves. No sinner, who understands the design of Christ in the government of the world, can feel indifferent whether the design shall succeed, or whether he shall be an agent in effecting it. Accordingly, we find, that whenever and wherever Christ visibly succeeds in building up and enlarging his kingdom, none appear indifferent; but all that are not with him are against him; and generally not only feel, but speak



and act against him. Nevertheless, Christ causes them all to promote the very design they hate and mean to oppose. He makes the wrath of man praise him, and the remainder of wrath he always restrains. Christ has made all nations to serve him from the beginning of the world to this day, and will make all nations serve him from this day to the end of the world, whether they are willing or unwilling to serve him. And in the view and belief of this truth, no man is, or can be indifferent to his great design. I may add,

4. None of the inhabitants of the invisible world are indifferent towards the great and interesting design, which Christ has undertaken, and is determined to accomplish. They have all been acquainted with it, and understood the origin, nature, extent, and consequences of it, for nearly six thousand years, though it was not so early, or so generally known in this world. "Unto me," says the apostle, "who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he proposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." The execution and accomplishment of Christ's eternal purpose will deeply and eternally affect all good and all bad beings in the invisible world. The happiness of the holy, and the misery of the unholy angels will be vastly augmented by the accomplishment of the great work of man's redemption, through the mediation and government of Christ. He has employed, and will employ them all in the great work in which he is engaged. He has employed unholy angels in introducing and spreading sin and misery among all the nations of the earth. And he has employed holy angels in promoting holiness and happiness in the world, and in counteracting and defeating the designs of satan

and wicked men. While the holy angels have been with Christ, and acted with him and for him, and rejoiced in every instance of success and accession to his cause, and in every instance of his victory and triumph over his enemies; the unholy angels have been against him, and endeavoured to scatter abroad and ruin his church and kingdom. All the inhabitants of the invisible world are full of zeal for, and against Christ's design, and will never cease in their opposite and powerful exertions, until it is finally and fully accomplished. While all heaven and hell are not indifferent toward the design of Christ, can it be supposed, that any of mankind should be indifferent towards it, who are infinitely more interested in it, having all their eternal interests suspended upon it? No; far from it. The apostle John tells us, that he saw in vision men, angels and devils, all fiercely engaged in contending for it, and against it. "And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil and satan, who deceiveth the whole world. And I heard a loud voice, saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore, rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them." The great design of Christ is becoming more and more interesting and affecting to the whole intelligent universe, and they are all more and more engaged, either to *promote* it, or to *obstruct* it; nor is there a single individual, who understands it, indifferent towards it. He that is not with Christ, is against him and his great and glorious design.

## IMPROVEMENT.

I. If none can be indifferent towards the design which Christ is carrying on, then none have any ground to imagine that they are neuters in religion. It is to be feared, that many, who live under the light of the gospel, wish to persuade themselves, that they are neither friendly nor unfriendly to Christ. They do not desire to profess any love to Christ and his cause; nor, on the other hand, do they desire to appear opposed to him or the design he is pursuing. They mean to be neuters in respect to religion, and neither promote it, nor oppose it. They see some very sensible and respectable persons professing to be with Christ, and to be engaged to promote his cause; and therefore, they wish not to counteract them. And they see some very vile and worthless persons openly professing to despise and oppose the cause of Christ, and they choose not to appear as belonging to their class. They endeavour to feel and appear to feel indifferent towards that cause, which some are so much *for*, and others are so much *against*. They determine to steer a middle course, and to act a neutral part. They choose to let religion alone, and pay no more regard to it than they find it necessary, in order to pursue their own business to the best advantage. If their character or interest requires them to attend publick worship, they will attend; or if custom requires them to pay an external respect to the sabbath, they will pay that respect; or if circumstances require them to read the bible, or even to pray in their families, they will do these things; or if they think it will be for their profit to support religion, they will support it. They are also resolved never to speak against religion, nor to appear to act against it. Is this a mere imaginary character? Is it not actually exhibited by many, who esteem themselves, and are esteemed very amiable, excellent, valuable persons? Neuters of this character are very numerous, and are willing to be considered as such by others. But though they may really think themselves to be neuters, and

may be thought to be so by their fellow-men; yet they are not neuters, and do not appear to be neuters in the heart-searching eye of Christ. He knows what is in man, and he knows that no man can be indifferent towards him and the great design he is pursuing. He declares the truth when he says, "He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad." There is no design with respect to which men are so fond of appearing neuters, as the design which Christ is engaged in; but there is no design to which they can be *less* neutral. It is extremely absurd and dangerous for any to imagine that they are really neuters to the most important cause that was ever pursued, and upon which their own interest, and the interest of the whole intelligent universe is suspended. They must be happy or miserable to all eternity, accordingly as they are *with* or *against* Christ, in his great and glorious design. For if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, God says, "Let him be anathema, maran-atha."

2. If none can be indifferent towards the design which Christ is carrying on, then all who do not act *for* him, act *against* him. As all must be for him or against him *in their hearts*; so all must be for him or against him in their conduct. So Christ plainly declares in the text. He says, "He that is not *for* me, is *against* me;" that is, he that is not for me in his heart, is against me in his heart. Again he says, "He that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad;" that is, he that is not for me in his heart, is against me in his conduct; "he scattereth abroad," and really opposes my design. Thus Christ viewed, represented and treated such as pretended to be with him, but were destitute of true love to him. "It came to pass, that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, foxes have holes, and birds have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." This was an implicit rejection of him for his insincerity. "When he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day,

many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." He knew that those who professed to love and believe in him, were totally destitute of both love and faith, and rejected them accordingly. When those whom he had miraculously fed, followed him over the sea of Tiberias, he said unto them, "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." This was a severe reproof for their following him externally, while their hearts were far from him. Though those who are destitute of love to Christ, may profess to love him, to be with him, to act for him, and to be workers together with him in building up his kingdom; still they are against him, and scatter abroad. Paul acknowledges, that though he should preach like an angel, and suffer like a martyr, without love to Christ and his cause, it would not be acting *for* him, but against him. He says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." It is more than possible, that not a few who live under the light of the gospel, who profess to love the gospel, who attend all the ordinances of the gospel, and who do a great many things, which under the government of Christ tend to promote the design of the gospel, that nevertheless in his view, are against him, and scatter abroad. Men must be inwardly with Christ, in order to be externally for him. While men ultimately seek their own things, they cannot seek the things of Christ. So long as they are internally against him, they are

externally against him, let them say, and do or suffer ever so much for him.

3. If all who are with Christ are united to him in his great and glorious design; then all who are united to him are more firmly united to one another, than any other persons in the world. There is nothing that unites the men of the world so strongly together, as their union in their worldly designs. Union of design will often bind those together who are disunited in affection. Worldly designs, however, are liable to fail, or change, and consequently the unions formed by them are often dissolved. But the great design of Christ is immutable and eternal, and all who are united to him in his design are immutably and eternally united to him and one another. Christians are united to each other, not only in affection, but in a design that cannot be defeated, or change. Hence Paul triumphantly asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The sincere and ardent brotherly love of the primitive christians excited the admiration of the world. The heathens exclaimed, "How these christians love one another!" The union of christians to one another is founded in their union to Christ in his great and glorious design, and can no more fail, than Christ can fail in finishing the work which his Father has given him to do.

4. If all who are not for Christ, are against him, then the most regular and amiable sinners may be as much against him, as any other sinners. They are as unwilling to have their desires, their hopes, their interests and selfish designs counteracted and defeated, as the most stupid and abandoned sinners. But if Christ pur-

sues and accomplishes his great and benevolent design, he will entirely disappoint and destroy all the selfish hopes, desires, and designs of the most regular and amiable sinners, which cannot fail to raise their enmity and opposition to him in the most lively and sensible manner. Accordingly, we find that this has always been the case. Sinners of the fairest character and of the highest estimation in their own view, and in the view of the world, were the bitterest enemies that Christ had while on earth. These were the scribes and pharisees, whose character and conduct Christ most pointedly condemned, and whose condition he represented as the most dangerous and deplorable. They saw that Christ's design was diametrically opposed to theirs, and would completely destroy their eternal hopes and interests. Sinners of the fairest characters and highest hopes at this day, view the design of Christ in the same light, and are of all others the most opposed to that eternal purpose, which God purposed in Christ Jesus, and sent him into the world to accomplish. What persons are generally more opposed to the doctrine of election and reprobation, than the most intelligent and inquisitive sinners? They generally know more about the character and design of Christ, and the scheme of salvation revealed in the gospel, than thoughtless and careless sinners; and of course they are generally the most understandingly and heartily opposed to the gospel, and raise the strongest objections against it. And this holds true with respect to awakened sinners, who externally reform, and most ardently inquire what they must do to be saved. When they are told, that they must believe in Christ, love his character, and cordially approve of his carrying into execution his eternal purpose of saving those whom his Father has given him, and no others, their hearts rise in total enmity, and they invariably say, this man shall not reign over us.

5. We learn from what has been said, the great criminality of sinners. They are all against Christ in their hearts and in their conduct, without a single exception.

They both see, and hate, and oppose that eternal purpose, which Christ is constantly carrying into execution. And by opposing this great and glorious purpose, they oppose the glory of God, and all the holiness and happiness in the universe. Is this a small error; or a mere venial fault? Is it not a sin of the first magnitude? Can they be guilty of a greater? It is criminal to destroy the property of an individual. It is more criminal to destroy the life of an individual. It is more criminal still to destroy the lives of millions. And it is the highest possible degree of criminality to destroy the holiness and happiness of the whole universe. And this sin can be committed in the heart, and is committed in the heart of every one who is against Christ, and gathers not with him, but scatters abroad, and does all in his power to prevent the infinite good which will eternally flow from the accomplishment of Christ's design. Is this true? some sinner may be ready to ask. Let me ask that person, whether he would not choose that the good of the universe should be destroyed, rather than to be eternally miserable? And if he would choose this, he would destroy the good of the universe were it in his power, to prevent his own eternal destruction. The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God; and he wishes that there might be none, rather than suffer his eternal wrath. The carnal mind therefore, is enmity against God, not subject to his law or government; neither indeed can be. This, every person knows to be true, who has seen the plague of his own heart. Unbelief, or opposition to the person and design of Christ, is the greatest of all sins, and will draw after it the greatest of all punishments. It shall be more tolerable for the men of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for sinners who die impenitent and unbelieving under the gospel.

6. This subject shows the imminent danger of all who are against Christ and opposing his great and glorious design. They reject the counsel of God against themselves; but that counsel will stand; and if it does stand, it will necessarily destroy all the counsels, and



designs, and desires, and hopes, and happiness of sinners. Christ himself possesses omnipotent power, and has all created objects and created beings under his absolute control; and can employ them all as instruments to accomplish his eternal purpose. How is it possible then, that he should be counteracted and defeated in his design? Sinners may misconstrue and misunderstand particular passages of scripture; but they cannot misconstrue and misunderstand the great design which Christ is pursuing and will certainly accomplish. And if he accomplishes his design, the hopes of the finally impenitent to escape with impunity, must perish. If Christ continues to reign, he will make all his incorrigible enemies his footstool, and sink them in endless perdition. Christ has commanded it to be proclaimed throughout the world, that "he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned." All delaying sinners are constantly liable to be cut off, and lie down in eternal sorrow. Their feet stand on slippery places, and all that Christ is doing to carry on his design, is ripening and preparing them for a more aggravated doom. And all that they are doing while against Christ, is increasing their guilt, and the wrath of the Lamb. So long as they delay to act for Christ, they act against him, and by acting against him, they act against themselves and all the good of the universe. Unless they turn to Christ and become cordially reconciled to him, they will draw down the displeasure of Christ, and the displeasure of all holy beings in the universe, which will sink them in the depth of eternal despair.

Finally, this subject affords a solid ground of peace and safety to those who are united to Christ in his great and good design. If he succeeds, they are safe. If he promotes his own interests, he will promote theirs. If he is accepted of the Father, they will be accepted in him. If he is rewarded for all his labours and sufferings, they shall be rewarded for all their labours and sufferings in his cause. If he sits down with the Father on his throne, they shall sit down with him on his throne.

If his glory and blessedness shall be eternally rising, they shall eternally rise in glory and blessedness with him. The gospel which unfolds the nature, extent and eternal consequences of the accomplishment of Christ's design, opens the most glorious prospects to all the friends and followers of the divine Redeemer. They shall rejoice while others mourn. They shall be completely holy and blessed, while all the enemies of Christ are completely sinful and wretched. Be not then weary in well doing, but be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the service of Christ, knowing that your labour shall not be vain in the Lord.

## SERMON XIII.

SINNERS DESTROY THEMSELVES BY THEIR OWN BLINDNESS.

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PROVERBS iv. 19.

*The way of the wicked is as darkness : they know not at what they stumble.*

ALL men are either saints or sinners, either holy or unholy, either righteous or wicked ; and they are all walking in paths as different as the characters they sustain. The saints are walking in a straight and narrow path ; the sinners are walking in a crooked and broad path ; the saints are walking in a path that leads to perfect light, and the sinners are walking in a path that leads to perfect darkness. This is the representation, which Solomon gives of all mankind. He says, " The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." But he observes by way of contrast, " The way of the wicked is as darkness : they know not at what they stumble." His plain meaning is this :

Sinners are in such darkness, that they are insensible of the objects, which are leading them to ruin.

I shall first consider the darkness in which sinners are involved ; and then illustrate the general observation, that they are insensible of the objects, which are leading them to ruin.

I. Let us consider the darkness in which sinners are involved. We find much said in scripture concerning their peculiar blindness and darkness. Moses represents them as " groping at noon-day." Job says, " they meet with darkness in the day time, and grope in the noon-day as in the night." Isaiah says, " They have made them crooked paths ; they grope for the

walk as the blind, and grope as if they had no eyes ; they stumble at noon day as in the night." David represents their way "as dark and slippery ;" and Jeremiah represents them as walking "in slippery ways in darkness." The royal preacher says, "The wise man's eyes are in his head ; but the fool walketh in darkness." It appears from all these representations, that all sinners are involved in gross darkness. But to what is this darkness owing, or in what does it consist ? It cannot be owing to any deficiency in their natural powers ; nor to any want of intellectual information. They enjoy the same means of instruction that saints enjoy, and are as capable of understanding the doctrines and duties of religion. The bible points out the way to heaven as clearly to them, as to others ; and sets the same motives before them to walk in the same straight and narrow path to eternal life. Their darkness, therefore is not natural, but moral darkness which lies not in their understandings, but in their hearts, which are entirely depraved. Moral depravity always produces moral blindness. Our Saviour says, "The light of the body is the eye, if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." The heart is the same to the soul, that the eye is to the body. As a good eye lets in natural light, so a good heart lets in moral light ; and as a blind eye shuts out natural light, so a bad heart shuts out moral light. Accordingly, the apostle expressly ascribes the darkness of the understanding to the blindness of the heart. He represents all unrenewed men, "as having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the *blindness of their heart.*" While sinners remain under the entire dominion of a wicked heart, they are altogether blind to the moral beauty of the character, of the works, and of the providence of God. Their blindness to these divine objects the psalmist describes in very strong and impressive terms. "They know not, neither will they understand : they walk in darkness :

all the foundations of the earth are out of course." God is a being of pure benevolence, he constructed the world upon benevolent principles, and he governs it to answer benevolent purposes. This is all dark to sinners, who view all things with a selfish eye. They can trace nothing into light, but all things into darkness. The present and future state of the world is all darkness, and they see no light in their own, nor in any other creature's existence. Notwithstanding all God has said about himself, and about his creatures, and about his designs, the whole universe still appears to them dark and mysterious. Being alienated from the life of God, and opposed to all true benevolence, their minds are totally involved in moral darkness. When they extend their views to the end of life, to the end of the world, and to the boundless scenes of eternity, they cannot discover a gleam of light. They are a mystery to themselves; and all the changes and revolutions in the natural and moral world are dark and unaccountable to them. The foundations of the earth are all out of course in their view, and the nature and tendency of all things are utterly repugnant to their wishes and desires, and appear to counteract all their hopes and purposes. And if God is pursuing and will accomplish perfectly holy and benevolent designs, these will counteract and defeat all their selfish interests and promising prospects, and involve them in total darkness and hopeless ruin. But yet,

II. They are insensible of the objects over which they are stumbling and falling. "They know not at what they stumble." This has been the case of sinners in all ages. We find many melancholy instances of this kind in the bible. The blindness of Pharaoh's heart, led him insensibly to stumble, and fall, and perish. The rebellious Israelites had not eyes to see, nor ears to hear, nor hearts to perceive, but walked in darkness, until they stumbled, and fell, and perished in the wilderness. The seven nations of Canaan were involved in moral darkness, and perceived not their danger, until they were destroyed. It was Saul's mo-

ral blindness and obstinacy, which led him in the path to ruin. And it was owing to the same moral blindness, that led the Jews to stumble and fall in the gospel day. "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for: but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Accordingly as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block. Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see." The consequence was, they stumbled and fell. Spiritual blindness is the same in all sinners, at all times, and has the same dangerous and destructive tendency. It makes them walk in darkness, and stumble over every thing that lies in their way, without their knowing at what they stumble. Every thing is armed against them, and yet they do not see the danger to which they are exposed. They walk as carelessly as if nothing could hurt them. When they are wounded, they do not feel their wounds; and though they stumble every step they take, yet they vainly imagine, that they shall never fall. The reason is, they know not at what they stumble, and are insensible of the objects, which are constantly leading them to destruction. This may be illustrated in a variety of particulars.

1. They are insensible that they stumble at the great deceiver. The bible represents this evil spirit as employing all his power and subtilty, to seduce and destroy sinners. He is said to blind the minds of them that believe not. He is said to be the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience. He is said to walk about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He is full of his devices to ensnare and destroy the ungodly. He knows how to take advantage of their ignorance, stupidity and depravity. He has not only the power, but the art of tempting. He adapts his temptations to the state, the character, and disposition of sinners. Some he tempts to disbelieve the being of God; some he tempts to disbelieve the

word of God ; some he tempts to oppose the gospel ; and many more he tempts to neglect and refuse a cordial compliance with the offers of mercy. He tempts the awakened, to stifle convictions, and return to a state of stupidity. While he tempts moral sinners to self-righteousness and self-dependence, he seduces others to walk in the smooth and broad road to destruction. But though sinners are thus led captive by Satan from day to day and from year to year ; yet they are totally insensible of his malignant influence over them, and know not that he is perpetually causing them to stumble. They sometimes, indeed, see the objects which he employs to seduce them, but still they are insensible of his seducing influence. They know not that they are continually walking in the paths of the destroyer, who is leading them blindfold to destruction.

2. Sinners are not sensible, that they are stumbling at one another. They are all taking the same course and pursuing the same objects. They are united in their disaffection to God, and in their love to the world. They join hand in hand, and all lead, and are led. Those who are before look back and see multitudes following them ; and those who are behind look forward, and see multitudes before them. Their numbers inspire them with courage and resolution ; for they cannot imagine, that so many of their fellow men are deceived, and are walking together in the path to ruin. Besides, they are constantly telling one another either expressly or implicitly, that there is no danger, and that they may safely and joyfully pursue their present course. Though they are in danger from Satan, yet they are in much greater danger from one another. The eye and ear affect the heart. They are continually seeing each other's conduct, and hearing each other's language. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. They all directly or indirectly invite each other to walk together, and never leave, nor forsake one another. They use all their influence, by example, by smiles and frowns, to increase their num-

bers, and maintain their strength and security. Thus moral sinners are a stumbling block to the immoral, and the immoral are a stumbling block to the moral. The aged are a stumbling block to the young, and the young are a stumbling block to the aged. Thus all classes and ages of sinners are mutually stumbling blocks to each other, yet they are all so involved in spiritual darkness, that they know not at what they stumble. They seem to have no apprehension, that the friendship of the world is enmity to God, and that to follow a multitude in doing evil, is the direct road to destruction.

3. Sinners are insensible, that they stumble at divine providence. God governs the natural and moral world, by a constant and powerful, but invisible influence, which he exerts with great regularity and uniformity. This gives occasion to the morally blind and stupid to disregard his holy hand, and disbelieve his universal government. Ezekiel tells us, that, in his day, sinners said, "The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not." Zephaniah tells us, that those who were settled on their lees in his day, said, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." And the apostle tells us, that sinners would continue to imbibe such sentiments, and scoffingly say, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." The very evidence which God is every day giving sinners of his being and providence, leads them to forget, or to doubt, or to deny both. But if they do see and acknowledge God in his providence, yet they entirely misconstrue it. Since he causes his sun to shine and his rain to fall on the evil as well as on the good; and since he causes all things to come alike to the evil as well as to the good, they thence conclude, that he loves them all alike, and will treat them all alike in a future world, as well as this. Because he does not execute vengeance speedily, they presumptuously imagine he never will; and because he waits to be gracious, they flatter themselves, that his



patience and forbearance will never end. His goodness instead of leading them to repentance, leads them to impenitence, unbelief and presumption. Though the frowns of providence sometimes awaken their fears, yet they more commonly excite their enmity and opposition to his righteous treatment. So that they are constantly and insensibly stumbling over both the smiles and frowns of providence.

4. Sinners are insensible, that their common employments are dangerous objects, over which they are stumbling and falling. They are apt to think, that while they are industriously pursuing their lawful callings, they are in the path of duty and safety. Their secular concerns habitually engross their thoughts and affections, and cement their hearts to the world. Though they are commanded to do every thing heartily to the Lord, and whether they eat, or drink, or whatever they do, to seek the glory of God; and though they are forbidden to love the world and the things of the world; yet they do every thing for themselves, and labour solely for the meat that perisheth. But while they are habitually indulging their selfish feelings, they are wholly insensible, that the ploughing of the wicked is sin, and that their worldly motives in their worldly pursuits are leading them to ruin. Their daily cares and concerns continually divert their attention and affections from all invisible and eternal objects. All earthly objects serve to make them earthly-minded. They cannot serve God and mammon. For while they are laying up treasures for themselves, they are not rich towards God, and yet know not, that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. They are so blind to the selfish and sinful motives of their own hearts, in their common secular concerns, that all their worldly employments are insensibly leading them in the path to destruction.

5. They are no less blind to the nature and tendency of their *religious* performances. Though some sinners do not perform any duties of religion externally, and of course, do not place any dependence upon them;

yet there are many, who stately read the bible, call upon God, and attend the religious duties of the sanctuary. These externals of religion they seriously, and as they imagine, conscientiously perform, while their hearts are far from God. By maintaining these forms of religion, they are so blind as to think, that they are really doing their duty and performing a reasonable and acceptable service to their maker. So Paul thought before he became acquainted with his own heart; and so the young man in the gospel thought, who said he had kept all the commandments of God; and so all moral sinners think. They trust in themselves that they are righteous, and shall be saved, because they are better than others. Their religious performances encourage and animate them to pursue a way which seemeth right in their own eyes, though the end thereof be the way to death. They have no suspicion, that their supposed prayers, and duties, and good works, are an abomination to the Lord, and leading them to endless darkness and despair. Such was the deplorable case of the self-righteous and blinded Jews, for whose salvation the apostle fervently prayed. "Brethren, my heart's desire, and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." They were blind to the character of God and to the deep depravity of their own hearts, which made them insensible, that they were stumbling over their religious duties, and falling to rise no more. Some of the most amiable sinners are thus walking and groping in the dark path to destruction, while they are fondly expecting they shall eventually reach the kingdom of glory.

6. The moral blindness of sinners insensibly leads them to stumble at the preaching they hear. They often love to hear the gospel preached, and cherish a pleasing hope, that it will sooner or later prove a savor

of life unto life to them. God says of the sinners in Zion, "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways. They ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God." They often go to the house of God, with a serious intention to hear for their lives, and not to be hearers only, but doers of the word. But walking in darkness under the blinding influence of their unholy hearts, they either misunderstand, or misapply, or oppose the truths they hear. If preachers point out one stumbling block, they will blindly stumble over another. If they warn them against one false way, they will blindly run into another. If they clearly show them, that by pursuing their present course, they must certainly perish; yet they will persist in their delusion, and risk the fatal consequences. They stumble at the most alluring and most alarming truths exhibited before them and inculcated upon them. The morally blinded stumble at the very same truths, which the morally enlightened believe to the saving of their souls. The apostle Paul says that the unbelieving Jews "stumbled at that stumbling-stone and rock of offence, which God had laid in Zion." And the apostle Peter repeats the same divine declaration concerning blind and impenitent sinners. "Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore who believe he is precious; but unto them who be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them who stumble *at the word*, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed." But those who hear and disbelieve the gospel have no idea, that they stumble at it, and are highly displeased, when they are charged with it. "Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world: that they which see not, might see; and that they who see, might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees who were

with him heard these words, and said unto him, are we blind also ?” I must add,

7. That sinners are blind to the blindness of their own hearts, which are insensibly leading them to blackness and darkness forever. Their hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. The deceitfulness of the heart leads them to think they intend right, when they act wrong, and that their hearts are better than their actions. Though they know, that their hearts are sometimes as bad as their actions, and even worse, still they think there is some goodness in their hearts, upon which they place great dependence. They trust in their own hearts to dispose them to reform, to repent, and to believe, and finally obtain pardoning mercy. And this confidence in the goodness of their own hearts, removes all fear of future and eternal misery. But if they are constrained to see the badness of their hearts, they will plead the badness of their hearts, as an excuse for hating God, for rejecting the offers of mercy, and for remaining in impenitence and unbelief, not knowing that these self-justifying pleas have a direct tendency to destroy them for ever. They are every day stumbling over their own hearts, which are deceitfully and insensibly leading them in the broad and smooth way to endless darkness and despair.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If sinners are so blind and insensible to the dangerous objects with which they are surrounded, and over which they are stumbling, it is not strange, that they generally live so securely and joyfully. It has always appeared strange as well as grievous to the godly, to see the ungodly live securely and joyfully, though under a sentence of death, and continually exposed to the wrath to come. Job was surprised to see the wicked spend their days in wealth, in joy, and in festivity. David was grieved at the prosperity of the wicked, and could not account for their not being in

trouble, like other men. Amos was astonished to see the sinners in Zion live in ease, put far away the evil day, lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall, to chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick like David, drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chiefointments. Not only this, but every other class of impenitent sinners appear to live in more ease and security, than any other persons in the world. Though sinners widely differ from one another in a great many respects; yet in one respect they are very much alike. They generally live without God in the world, and without fear of his future and eternal wrath. Such stupidity in rational and immortal creatures, who know that they are probationers for eternity, seems very strange, and cannot be accounted for upon any other ground, than that moral blindness and darkness in which they are all involved. Though they have eyes, they cannot see; though they have ears, they cannot hear; though they have hearts, they cannot perceive; and though they are told that they are blind and walking in darkness upon the brink of destruction, they will not believe it. Though they are continually stumbling at the things of the world, the men of the world, and the god of the world, they know not at what they stumble; but imagine they are walking safely. And it is not strange, that those who see no danger, should fear no danger. Where is the sinner who fears that the god of this world, or the men of this world, or that his own heart will destroy him? Where is the sinner who fears that he is every day preparing himself for final perdition? Or, where is the sinner, who does not live securely and even joyfully, notwithstanding all he has ever read, or heard about his depravity, his guilt, or his danger? Where is the sinner who is afraid of leading the blind, or of being led by the blind? And why should this appear strange, since blindness has happened to all sinners, which makes them insensible of the objects. over which they are continually stumb-

ling and falling? The carelessness and stupidity of sinners is a visible demonstration of their moral blindness to all moral objects. Those who deny the moral blindness of sinners, discover their own moral blindness, and maintain a doctrine, which not only scripture condemns, but universal observation refutes. Nothing but this moral blindness can account for the conduct of the great majority of mankind, who are crying peace and safety, while exposed to instant destruction.

2. If all sinners are involved in such moral darkness as makes them insensible of their dangerous and perishing condition; then it is not strange, that they are so displeased at having their danger clearly pointed out. This tends to interrupt their present peace and comfort, and to destroy all their future hopes and prospects of happiness. If they are once made to realize their danger of the damnation of hell, their ease, security, and joy are completely destroyed. They cannot bear, therefore, to hear the plain truth, respecting their wretchedness and guilt. The experiment has been often made; and the effects have been recorded by the pen of inspiration. Sinners could not bear to hear the plain preaching of the prophets, nor the plain preaching of Christ, nor the plain preaching of the apostles. Those preachers did not make danger, they only pointed out danger so plainly, that sinners could not help seeing it. It was this that excited their bitterest complaints and most sensible opposition. The truth is still the same, and sinners still feel the same opposition to it, when set in the same light. They cannot bear to hear of their moral blindness, nor of the danger to which it exposes them both in this life and the life to come. They cannot bear to hear that they are walking in darkness, and know not at what they stumble, nor the fatal consequences of stumbling. But they have no reason to complain of those who clearly point out their danger. It is an act of kindness to point out the danger to which a blind man is exposed, and to direct a man who is lost to the right road from which he is wandering. Sinners are really walking

in the path of the destroyer, who is leading them captive at his will; they are really groping in darkness, and wandering from the strait and narrow path to eternal life, and must perish unless they are made to see and avoid the dangers with which they are surrounded. But they will not take one step to avoid danger until they see it; and they will not see it if they can possibly help seeing it. This all faithful teachers know, and therefore feel themselves under indispensable obligation to show them their danger in the plainest and most impressive manner. They watch for souls, as those who must give account, and stand responsible if any perish through their neglect, or unfaithfulness. They are to warn sinners of their danger, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, whether they are pleased, or displeased. And if they do hear, they will be thankful for the most solemn warnings and the most searching truths, addressed to their consciences. They will find that the truths which they most hated and opposed, did them the most good.

3. If sinners are blind to the objects, which are insensibly leading them to destruction; then they are in extreme danger of being finally lost. All things conspire to destroy them, because they abuse all things, with which they are connected and concerned. Prosperity tends to destroy them. If God treats them kindly, and pours the blessings of providence in their bosoms, they are disposed to abuse every favour they enjoy. If God frowns upon them, and subjects them to every species of adversity they will murmur and complain, and abuse his holy and righteous chastisements. If he uses the best means of grace with them, they will abuse them, and take encouragement from them to continue in impenitence and unbelief. If he waits to be gracious to them, and spares their lives and their health, they will live to themselves, and not to him. If he alarms their fears, and they cannot forbear to read and hear, seek and strive to escape future and eternal misery, they will trust in themselves that

they are righteous, and on that account, refuse to submit to the self-denying terms of salvation. The more they think, and say, and do themselves, and the more is said to them and done for them, the more their darkness increases, and the more stumbling blocks they meet with. Their path is like the setting sun, which withdraws every beam of light from the eye, and leaves every one in total darkness. This they find to be true, by their own experience, as they pass from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, and from manhood to old age, whether they have lived in security, or whether they have lived in bondage through fear of death. As nothing has served to remove their darkness, but every thing has served to increase it, so every thing is armed against them, and threatens their final ruin. If you should ask any sinner of any age, character or condition, whether the path in which he is now walking, grows any lighter, or his prospects of future and eternal happiness any brighter, he will answer, no; but the longer he lives, his path grows darker and darker. And the most aged sinner walks in the greatest darkness, and is most exposed to stumble and fall, and rise no more. Thick clouds and darkness are gathering fast over the paths of sinners, and all things are conspiring to increase the danger of being finally lost. There is not a gleam of hope in their case from men or means. These have proved ineffectual, and they will continue to be ineffectual, though Paul plant and Apollos water, unless God sees fit to give an increase, which he has delayed to do, and may delay to do until the day of their death, and they close their eyes in everlasting darkness. And this truth, like every other truth they have ever heard, may prove a stumbling block, and an occasion of their endless destruction.

4. If sinners are constantly growing blinder and blinder, and more and more insensible of the things, which are leading them to ruin: then they are entirely in the sovereign hand of God, who may save or destroy them, according to his holy and righteous pleasure. It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but



of God, who sheweth mercy. And he has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and compassion on whom he will have compassion, and whom he will he hardeneth. This prerogative belongs to him, and he solemnly declares that he will exercise it. "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no God with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." Sinners would fain flee out of his hand, and the false friends of sinners would fain take them out of his hand, but this is impossible. And their real friends have no disposition to take them out of his hand, but cheerfully resign them to his sovereign disposal. Though sinners are apt to think it is extremely hard, that God should hold them in his sovereign hand, yet it is entirely owing to the blindness of their hearts, that they think so. For it is the dictate of their own reason and conscience, that they deserve everlasting misery, and that God would be just and even amiable in making them the vessels of his everlasting wrath; and that without being reconciled to his amiable sovereignty, they cannot be happy either in this world, or the next. It is vain and dangerous, therefore, to say or do any thing, which tends to make sinners believe, that they can find any path to heaven, in which divine sovereignty will not meet them, and in which they can arrive to heaven, without being cordially reconciled to it. This, however, is too often attempted, by those who deny the doctrine of divine sovereignty, and by those who profess to believe it, but never plainly and fully preach it. It is easy to bring sinners out of any darkness, but that which arises from divine sovereignty; for it is easy to make them see, that there is no difficulty in the way of their salvation, but what with their natural hearts, they can surmount, if they are not obliged to exercise unconditional submission to divine sovereignty. They are often willing to do any thing and every thing else, rather than to be for ever miserable, but this they say and feel, that they cannot do. But it is vain and dangerous to tell them, that they need not, and ought not, to do this. Whether

they see it, or their teachers see it, or not, they are in the sovereign hand of God, and they must see, and believe, and love this truth, or they can never truly love and enjoy God. If they finally stumble at this truth, they stumble, never to rise again. And no means that men can use, and no light that they can exhibit, can prevent their stumbling and perishing.

5. Since sinners are walking in darkness and blind to every thing, which is insensibly leading them to destruction, it is owing to the distinguishing and astonishing grace of God, that any are saved. Their darkness is irremovable by any human means, and all external objective light seems to increase it. Their eyes have they closed, and will not open them, and God might justly leave them to walk in their own chosen way of darkness. It is therefore, mere sovereign and distinguishing grace in God, who caused the light at first to shine out of darkness, to shine in their hearts, and give them the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ. When God calls any out of darkness into his marvellous light, they never fail gratefully to acknowledge his undeserved and distinguishing mercy. It looks astonishing, that they should be taken, while others are left.

6. This subject now calls upon all to inquire whether they have ever been made the subjects of God's special grace. Have they ever found themselves walking in darkness? Has their darkness ever been removed? and is their present path, like the shining light, and shining more and more unto the perfect day? Does the present state of sinners here appear to you very dangerous and deplorable? Do you take pains to remove stumbling blocks? They are thrown in from every quarter.

7. Let the blind and deaf immediately perform the duty, which God expressly enjoins upon them. "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see." This command you are bound to obey, and if ye refuse to obey, God will eventually say, "Bring forth the blind

people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears," that they may hear their sentence of final condemnation and see and take the place of their eternal punishment.

## SERMON XIV.

THE PLEA OF SINNERS AGAINST ENDLESS PUNISHMENT.

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ISAIAH, xli. 21.

*Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob.*

EVER since the first apostacy of mankind, they have been disposed to contend with God, respecting his character, his laws, and government. They have called in question his sovereignty, his justice, and even his goodness. They have complained of the precepts and penalties of his holy and righteous laws. They have arraigned the justice and equity of his government, and said, that the ways of the Lord are not equal. But God has always been willing to meet their complaints and settle the controversy between them, upon the most just and solid grounds. By Micah, he challenges them to the contest. "Hear ye now what the Lord saith; arise, contend before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me." By Isaiah in the text he calls upon them to reason the case with him fairly. "Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob." God seems to take it for granted, that those who call in question the excellence of his character, and the rectitude of his laws and government, suppose that they have reasons, and even strong reasons for their erroneous feelings and opinions. It is

true that some who imbibe false and dangerous opinions in religion, choose to conceal them for a time at least; but those who avow their errors profess to have, and presume to offer, what they deem strong reasons for their religious errors. Scepticks, atheists, and deists, profess to have what they deem strong reasons for their various opinions, and often produce them. Though Universalists formerly chose to confine their peculiar sentiments in their own breasts; yet lately, they are very free to write, to preach, and to publish their errors, and bring forth their strong reasons in support of them. It is, therefore, my present design, to meet this class of errourists, and examine the force of their *strong reasons*, and see whether they are sufficient to support the peculiar doctrine, which they build upon them. I propose to examine the five following principles, upon which they argue in favour of their peculiar doctrine.

1. The universal goodness of God.
2. The universal atonement of Christ.
3. The universal offers of salvation.
4. The universal goodness of mankind.
5. Their universal punishment in this life.

These, I presume, they will all allow, are the strongest reasons they have in support of the doctrine of universal salvation, and those upon which they most confidently rely.

1. Let us inquire whether it can be fairly inferred from the universal goodness of God, that he will finally save all men. It is readily granted, that the goodness of God extends to all intelligent creatures, and even to all creatures that possess the least sensibility or capacity of enjoying happiness, or suffering pain. He is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. His goodness consists in the love of benevolence, and in the love of complacence. His love of benevolence is universal, and extends to all creatures, without any respect to their moral characters. He values the happiness of every individual according to its worth, whether he has a good moral character, or a

bad moral character, or no moral character at all. He values the happiness of angels according to its worth, the happiness of mankind according to its worth, the happiness of the spirits in prison according to its worth, and the happiness of all percipient creatures according to its worth. His universal benevolence, therefore, is impartial. He values the happiness of angels more than the happiness of men, the happiness of men more than the happiness of the inferiour creation, because angels are more capable of enjoying happiness than men, and men are more capable of enjoying happiness than animals and insects. His universal goodness is also disinterested. He loves all his creatures, with benevolence, because he loves happiness simply considered, whether it tends to promote his own felicity, or not. And since his benevolence is universal, impartial, and disinterested, he must love the good of all his creatures, more than the good of any individual, or any individuals ; and consequently must be disposed to give up the good of any individual or individuals, for the sake of promoting the greatest good of the universe. It is the natural tendency of impartial love to treat every object according to its worth. If a rich man sees his house on fire, and values every article in it according to its worth, but cannot save them all, which will he give up to save the rest ? There is no doubt in this case, but he will give up the lumber and least valuable articles, and pass through one apartment after another, and seize his desk, which contains his silver and gold, and most valuable papers, while he suffers all the other articles to be consumed in the flames. Or if his dearest friends and connections are to be preserved, will he not seek to save these, rather than his property ? His impartial benevolence, in this situation, would be guided and governed by his wisdom. Apply this to the universal, impartial, and disinterested benevolence of the kind parent of the universe. Must not his universal, impartial and disinterested love to the happiness of all his creatures lead him to seek the greatest happiness of all, and if necessary for that pur-

pose, to sacrifice the happiness of individuals to the happiness of the whole? And now who durst to say, but that God, in his *universal goodness*, guided by his perfect *wisdom*, did see best to decree before the foundation of the world, that part of the angels should be for ever holy and happy, and part of the angels should be for ever unholy and miserable, and part of mankind should be for ever holy and happy, and part for ever unholy and miserable? And if God did see it to be wisest and best to elect some angels and some men to eternal life, and reprobate some angels and some men to endless death, who durst to say, that it was inconsistent with his universal goodness and wisdom thus to elect and thus to reprobate some angels and some men? There is, therefore, no force at all in the argument drawn from the universal goodness of God, to prove the doctrine of universal salvation. It is just as consistent with the universal benevolence of God, to make men miserable in a future state, as in this present evil world, where he inflicts ten thousand temporal evils and calamities upon them. The universalists themselves could see no plausibility in their argument drawn from the universal benevolence of God, if they did not designedly or undesignedly overlook the distinction between God's love of benevolence and love of complacence. Though God's love of benevolence be universal, yet his love of complacence is not; but confined to those only who bear his moral image, and possess the same benevolent spirit that he possesses. He loves them that love him with the love of complacence, but hates all those who hate his holy and amiable character. Accordingly, he declares in his word, that "he that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." God always did and always will love Judas with the love of benevolence, but never did and never will love him with the love of complacence. If the advocates for universal salvation could prove, that God loves all his unholy creatures with the love of complacence, they might fairly infer that he will make them all finally and for

ever happy; but they have no right to draw this inference from his universal benevolence.

2. Let us inquire whether the universal atonement of Christ affords a solid argument in favour of the universal salvation of mankind. The scripture plainly teaches us, that Christ did die on the cross, to make atonement for the sins of the whole world. Christ himself said, "he came to give his life a ransom for many." When John saw Jesus coming to him, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Paul said, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all." Again he said, "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour; that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man." And the apostle John said, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." These passages of scripture plainly prove, that Christ died in the room of all mankind, and made atonement for every man, without a single exception. He died as much for Judas as for Paul. But we have no right to conclude, that because he died to make atonement for all men, that all men will be saved. And the advocates for universal salvation, would see, in a moment, that no argument could be fairly drawn from the universal atonement of Christ, in favour of their doctrine, if they would only consider the nature of his atonement. The sins of men were not transferred to him, nor was he punished for their sins. He suffered, indeed, for them; but his sufferings did not pay the debt of suffering, which they owed to divine justice. They still deserve to suffer the penalty of that law, which they have transgressed, and which penalty he did not suffer, and which if he had suffered would not have taken away their desert of punishment. Sin is not of the nature of a pecuniary debt, which one person can pay for another, by suffering. The atone-



ment of Christ did nothing more, than display that vindictive justice, which would have been displayed, by executing the penalty of the law upon transgressors of it themselves. It did not render them less guilty or less deserving of punishment, nor lay God, in point of justice, under the least obligation to pardon and save them. It only laid a foundation for God to have mercy on whom he would have mercy, and to appear just in pardoning and justifying any penitent, believing, returning sinner. Though Christ died to make atonement for all men, yet he did not die with a design to save all men. Accordingly he said, "I lay down my life for the sheep," that is, for the elect, whom his Father had given him. Christ's universal atonement is perfectly consistent with God's electing love and discriminating grace. It is true, God has bound himself by *promise to Christ*, to save the elect, but he has not bound himself by promise to save any other of mankind. And it is impossible to prove from the nature and extent of the atonement, that any but the elect will be saved. Let a man only understand the nature and design of Christ's atonement, and he cannot draw the least argument from it, in favour of Chauncey's scheme, or Murray's scheme, or Huntington's scheme, or any other scheme of universal salvation. There would not be the shadow of plausibility in the argument drawn from the atonement of Christ; if his atonement were not considered and represented as paying the debt of suffering in the room of sinners, which is absolutely false and absurd. Even the personal suffering of sinners has no tendency to take away their guilt and desert of punishment. The personal suffering of the fallen angels for nearly six thousand years has not taken away any of their guilt or desert of punishment; but they still deserve to be punished, as much as if they never had suffered the least degree of punishment. And if the personal sufferings of sinners cannot take away their guilt and desert of punishment, surely the sufferings of Christ in making atonement cannot take away their guilt and desert of punishment. So that the

universal atonement of Christ does not afford the least argument in favour of the doctrine of universal salvation. Nor,

3. Do the universal offers of pardoning mercy to sinners in the gospel, afford the least argument to prove that they all will be saved. It is readily allowed, that the bible abounds with such free, rich and universal offers of mercy to sinners. The evangelical prophet cries, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Christ cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And in the parable of the gospel feast, he represents all as invited to come and partake of it. We also read, "The spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst, come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." These universal offers of pardoning mercy have some true meaning, and the great question now is, what do they mean? Are they to be understood conditionally, or unconditionally? There is a condition to be seen on the very face of them. There is something for men to do on their part, in order to possess the spiritual blessings offered. Men must thirst for the waters of life and come to them, in order to partake of them; and men must come to Christ, that they may have life, in order to obtain it. Christ says, "All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." Coming to Christ signifies the same as believing in him. All the offers of the gospel are made to some holy exercises of heart; such as holy love, holy repentance, holy faith, holy submission, and all other holy affections. And if men exercise any of these holy affections, they are promised eternal life; but if they refuse to exercise holy affections, they are threatened with eternal death. Christ commanded his apostles, and through them all their successors in the ministry, to preach the gospel

in this conditional language, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." Repentance and faith are the cardinal conditions, upon which eternal life is promised; and impenitence and unbelief are the cardinal conditions, upon which eternal death is threatened. This is agreeable to the solemn declaration of Christ. "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him." Lest the universal offers of mercy should be misunderstood and perverted, the gospel every where guards them with the solemn conditions of eternal life, or eternal death. Every offer of mercy in the gospel is inseparably connected with the promise of eternal life, upon the condition of accepting the offer, and with the threatening of eternal death, upon the condition of rejecting the offer. Hence the universal offers of pardoning mercy in the gospel afford no argument in favour of universal salvation, but an evidence next to demonstration, that some men will be damned.

4. Some draw an argument in favour of universal salvation from the universal goodness of mankind. They assert, that there is no such thing as a change of heart, by the renewing and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit; and that it is an infallible mark of hypocrisy for one man to think or say, that he is any better at heart, than any other. They deny, that there is any essential distinction between saints and sinners in this life. They hold, that all men are partly bad and partly good, and that none are totally depraved. If they can prove this, it is granted that they can fairly infer from it, that all men will be saved. For the gospel does certainly promise eternal life to all who truly love God, repent of sin, and believe in Christ, or have the least degree of saving grace. But can they prove, that there is no essential distinction between such true penitents and sincere believers, and the rest of mankind? Can they prove, that total depravity has not reigned in the hearts of all men, naturally from Adam

to Moses, from Moses to Christ, and from Christ to this day? Christ taught the doctrine of total depravity. He said, that sinners have not the love of God in them, and that they have the same selfish and malignant spirit, that reigns in the heart of the great adversary. Paul taught, that all men are naturally dead in trespasses and in sins, and that they have a carnal mind, which is enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be; so that they who are in the flesh cannot please God. It is unscriptural and absurd in the highest degree, to pretend to draw an argument in favour of universal salvation, from the false supposition of the universal and equal goodness of mankind.

5. Some argue, that all mankind will be saved, because they are all sufficiently punished in this life. This they consider as a very strong reason to prove universal salvation. They affirm that temporal punishment is all that sin deserves. They affirm that there is not a threatening in the bible, respecting any future and eternal punishment of sinners. But all men of plain, common sense, who have read the bible, and whose understanding has not been darkened by the blindness of the heart and the sophistry of seducers, know that God has plainly threatened future and eternal punishment to the finally impenitent and unbelievers. The law threatens eternal death to every impenitent transgressor of it. Christ abundantly taught the doctrine of future and eternal rewards and punishments. He taught this doctrine, when he said, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear *Him* who is able to destroy both *soul and body in hell.*" He taught this doctrine when he said, "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." He taught this doctrine in the parable of the tares and the wheat; in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, and in the representation of the general judgment in the 25th of Matthew. After such plain

and positive declarations and predictions of future and eternal rewards and punishments, none who pay due regard to the bible, can believe that all men will be saved. Thus weak, impertinent and absurd are the supposed strong reasons in favour of universal salvation.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If no arguments can be drawn from the strong reasons, or fundamental principles, upon which the doctrine of universal salvation is founded in favour of it; then no arguments can be drawn in favour of it, from any passages of scripture, which have been or can be adduced to support it. All denominations of christians endeavour to read the whole bible into their scheme of doctrines, and especially the universalists. They quote and apply a multitude of texts to prove that all men will be saved, and while they explain the passages they cite, according to their own false principles, they carry a great degree of plausibility to many people. But if the passages they adduce be rightly explained according to the first and fundamental doctrines of the gospel, they would appear to have no pertinency or force at all. Let any passage of scripture be explained according to the true meaning of God's universal goodness, as consisting in universal benevolence and limited complacence; or according to the true sense of the universal atonement of Christ; or according to the true sense of the universal offers of mercy to sinners; or according to the true sense of the universal and total depravity of mankind; or according to the true sense of the threatenings denounced against sinners in the gospel; and such a passage rightly explained could not afford the shadow of an argument in favour of universal salvation. And this is true of every passage in the bible. All the numerous texts that universalists quote, they explain and apply according to their own false principles, and of course they misapply and pervert every text they adduce in support of their unreasonable and unscriptural sentiments. No doctrine can

be proved, or refuted, by merely martialing one class of texts against another, without explaining them according to some sound and acknowledged principle. Texts ought never to be adduced to explain and establish any first principles; but first principles are to be adduced to explain and establish the sense of every text of scripture. It is easy to select particular passages, which without a true explanation, will appear to support the most absurd doctrine that ever was imbibed and propagated. The plain words of Christ, at the first sacrament, respecting the bread he brake, "This is my body," have been ten thousand times employed to prove the doctrine of transubstantiation, or the bodily presence of Christ at his table. But can these words prove the grossest absurdity in nature, that Christ's identical body can be actually present in ten thousand places at once? This is contrary to the reason and common sense of all mankind. It is just as absurd to suppose, that some texts in their true sense proves that all men will be saved; and that other texts in their true sense prove, that some men are now, and others will be separated from God and all good to all eternity. It is in vain to attempt to refute universalists by quoting particular texts of scripture, without explanation. The only way to refute them, is to refute their strong reasons or first principles, which they argue from. They can evade any text of scripture, by explaining it according to their false principles. This is their denier resort, when they meet with any plain scripture in opposition to their favourite doctrine. They deny the force of all texts, which speak of the doctrine of election, the doctrine of reprobation, the doctrine of the general judgment, or of any other doctrine opposite to their own, by saying that all such doctrines are inconsistent with their sense of the *universal goodness of God*, or the universal atonement of Christ, or the universal goodness of mankind, or their universal punishment in this life. All their plausibility arises from their sophistry, which consists in reasoning right from false principles. That they all mean to reason sophistically I do not be-

lieve, nor mean to assert; but I have no hesitation in asserting, that they do reason sophistically, and more sophistically than any other errourists that I am acquainted with. For their doctrine is more palpably and obviously false, than any other doctrine pretended to be found in the bible.

2. If those who maintain, that all men will be saved, have no strong and conclusive reasons to support their opinion; then those who maintain, that only a part of mankind will be saved, have strong and conclusive reasons to support their doctrine. The doctrine, that all men will be saved is directly opposite to the doctrine, that only some men will be saved. If the doctrine of universal salvation be false and founded upon false principles; then the opposite doctrine, that only a part of mankind must be true, is founded upon true and solid principles. Two directly opposite doctrines cannot both be true, but one must be true, and the other false. It has been made to appear sufficiently plain, perhaps, that no just and conclusive arguments can be drawn either from reason, or from scripture, to support the doctrine of universal salvation; from which it necessarily follows, that just and conclusive arguments may be drawn from reason and scripture, to support the doctrine, that only a part of mankind will be saved. Whatever reason has to say and scripture has to say upon the subject, is in favour of the doctrine of future and eternal rewards and punishments. Reason says, that all impenitent sinners *deserve* eternal punishment, and that it is consistent with God's universal benevolence, to inflict an eternal punishment upon them. Reason says, that there is an essential difference between saints, who possess pure, disinterested benevolence, and sinners, who are wholly under the dominion of perfect selfishness; and that these two classes of men ought to be for ever separated; the benevolent made happy and the malevolent made miserable. Reason says, that no totally depraved sinners will ever choose to become benevolent, without a special divine influence upon their hearts; and that God is under no

obligation to grant them such a special divine influence; and consequently that God may, consistently with his universal benevolence, renew one and not another, as an act of absolute sovereignty. And now all that scripture says respecting these points, seems to confirm all the dictates of reason. Every doctrine and every passage of scripture, according to its true sense, either directly or indirectly proves, that only a part of mankind will be saved. All reason and all scripture is in favour of those, who maintain the doctrine of *universal* salvation; or in favour of those, who maintain the doctrine of *limited* salvation. But universalists themselves are sensible, that the whole current of scripture is apparently against them, and for this reason, they exert all their powers, in conversation, in preaching, and in writing to explain away the texts and refute the reasons, which oppose their doctrine. They never lay down principles and explain them, nor construe scripture according to the dictates of reason. But those who hold to a limited salvation lay down principles and explain them. They tell what they mean by God's benevolence, and what they mean by his love of complacence; what they mean by total depravity; what they mean by regeneration; what they mean by election and reprobation, and what they mean by the terms of salvation. And having fixed these great and fundamental principles of the gospel, they can read the whole bible in support of them, or in consistency with their doctrine of limited salvation. They do not set one text of scripture against another, but explain every text agreeably to the great fundamental principles, which they have established and explained. There is no occasion of misconstruing and misapplying any passages of scripture, in order to prove, that only a part of mankind will be saved; or in order to refute every argument and every scripture, that universalists can bring to support their unscriptural and absurd sentiments. Their strong reasons, when brought to the test of solid principles, lose all their force, and leave them no infallible rule by which to construe apparently



conflicting passages of scripture. But those who maintain, that only a part of the human race will finally reach the kingdom of heaven can easily construe scripture in general in harmony with the doctrine they profess.

3. It appears from what has been said concerning the strong reasons, that are brought forth in support of universal salvation, that they destroy one another. If one of these reasons be true, the others are all impertinent and inconclusive. If it be true, that the universal goodness of God is inconsistent with his hating sinners for their sins, with his threatening to punish them for their sins in a future state, and with his actually punishing them for ever ; then he must make them all eternally happy, without any regard to the atonement of Christ, without any regard to their universal goodness, and without any regard to their suffering in the present life. The representation, which universalists give of the universal goodness of God, and the manner in which they reason from it, show that they all build their whole scheme upon it. For according to their reasonings from divine goodness, it must make all intelligent creatures for ever happy, whether they are holy or unholy, guilty or innocent. What occasion then was there for the atonement of Christ, in order to save any of mankind from a punishment, that his universal goodness would not permit him to inflict ? According to their idea of the universal goodness of God, it is absurd to talk about either the need, or the benefit of Christ's atonement, for there was no need of it, and it does no good. It does not save men from future and eternal punishment, nor from temporal death, nor from temporal evils and calamities. They have but one strong reason, in their own view, in favour of universal salvation, and that is the universal goodness of God. Take this away from them, and they have not another reason left them, of the weight of a straw. Ask them whether they build their doctrine upon the universal goodness of God ; or upon the universal atonement of Christ ; or upon the universal offers of the gospel ; or

upon the universal goodness of human nature; or upon the punishments which God brings upon men in the present life; and they are silent, and durst not answer distinctly. They are capable of seeing that these strong reasons clash, contradict, and destroy each other. It is fated to errour to run crooked. False principles are as inconsistent with one another, as with truth. And when passages of scripture are explained upon false principles, they are made to clash, to contradict, and destroy the force of each other. It is not for the want of pains, nor talents, that universalists cannot make their strong reasons unite and harmonize in the support of their doctrine. The truth is, all their strong reasons are false, and being false, cannot be made to appear consistent by any subtil reasonings, nor by any false glosses upon particular passages of scripture. So that the plain and palpable inconsistency of the scheme of universal salvation, is a plain demonstration of its falsehood.

4. If universalism be founded upon the false and inconsistent principles, that have been mentioned; then it leads to the denial of all the fundamental principles and doctrines of the gospel. Accordingly we find, that universalists do deny the doctrine of personal election, the doctrine of regeneration, the doctrine of conditions of salvation, and the doctrine of final separation of the righteous from the wicked, at the general judgment. These are certainly the cardinal doctrines of the gospel, and when these are denied, who can see that there is any *truth* or *importance* in the gospel? Men are as certain of future and eternal happiness, *without* it, as *with* it. Though universalists would not be pleased to be called deists, yet they are deists, to all intents and purposes; and their doctrine leads directly to deism, and the preaching of it makes more deists, than universalists, among their more discerning hearers. Their errour is a great and essential errour, because it tends to prevent men from performing the conditions, upon which the salvation of their souls is absolutely suspended. It assures them, that they need not re-

pent, nor believe in Christ, nor exercise one holy or gracious affection, in order to escape the wrath to come, and enjoy everlasting life. They cannot fail of eternal happiness, let them say, or feel, or act as they will. Can there be a more licentious and dangerous doctrine than this? I know they flatly deny this tendency. But their denial evinces their inconsistency, absurdity and delusion.

5. It appears from what has been said, that those, who preach the false and dangerous doctrine of universal salvation are extremely criminal. Their criminality is very great, whether they do, or do not know, that their doctrine is false. If they do not know that their doctrine is false, it is because they are voluntarily ignorant. If they did but impartially attend to the dictates of reason and scripture, they would know, that their doctrine is false. But if they do know, that their doctrine is false, then they are tenfold more criminal in propagating it, and leading precious and immortal souls to endless perdition. They are severely condemned in scripture, as strengthening the hands of the *wicked*, and making *sad the hearts of the righteous*. They are represented as under strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they might be damned. But where is the great criminality of preaching this doctrine, if it did not expose them to any temporal, or eternal punishment, and why should such false teachers be ranked among the most vile and guilty characters, described and condemned in the bible? Or why should the prophets and Christ, and apostles, have been so bitterly and mortally opposed for preaching this doctrine, as the universalists assert, that they did preach it? I never heard them answer this question either in their conversation, or preaching, or publications, and I have read the writings of their most celebrated laymen and clergymen. The question must be grovelling and unanswerable, and among other things prove their doctrines to be false and dangerous.

6. If universalists are highly criminal for teaching the false and dangerous doctrine of universal salvation; then it is unwise and criminal for any to go

and hear them spread their fatal errors and corruptions. The wisest of men gives this wise and important caution against hearing false and corrupting teachers. "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth thee to err from the words of knowledge." It is very wrong for any to gratify an itching ear and vain curiosity, at the risk of fatal deception. And though some may imagine, that they are out of the reach of danger by hearing the sophistry of seducers; yet their example may lead others to hear and believe a lie to their eternal ruin. There is in every human heart a prepossession and bias towards error, and the most fatal error. It is unwise for any to trust in their own hearts, which are deceitful above all things, and presume upon their knowledge and integrity to discover and reject errors plausibly represented, and in their own nature agreeable to the depravity of the heart.

7. This subject shows the importance of understanding, and being firmly established in the *first principles* of the oracles of God. Detached passages of scripture can be of but little service in contending with universalists, or any other hereticks, without the knowledge of first principles, according to which all passages are to be explained. The knowledge of the first principles of all religion, will enable any persons to discover, to reject, and to refute all hereticks. Nothing but sound principles are sufficient to refute unsound and false principles. It was the knowledge of the first principles of the gospel, that armed the apostles against all the errors, delusion, and sophistry of Jews and Greeks, and enabled them to pull down the strong holds of the arch deceiver, and all his deluded followers. And all who enjoy the gospel, need the same impregnable armour of the first and fundamental principles of religious truth. We ought to think, while we read the bible, and compare all its declarations, promises, and threatenings, with some true and infallible principle. Those who neglect to take this course, will always be liable to be carried away with every wind of doctrine, and make shipwreck of their faith, and to be drowned in perdition.

## SERMON XV.

THE EXCUSE OF SINNERS, THEIR CONDEMNATION.

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MATTHEW, xxv. 24.

*Then he that had received the one talent came, and said, Lord, I knew thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping, where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed.*

It is easy to understand the general design of the parable, which contains these words. By the owner of the servants, Christ means to represent the Creator and owner of the world. By the servants, he means to represent mankind in general. By the different talents, he means to represent the different powers and faculties, and the different privileges and advantages, with which God distinguishes one person from another. By the two servants that faithfully improved their talents, he means to represent good men, who serve God with fidelity. And by the slothful and unfaithful servant, he means to represent the sinner, who entirely neglects the service of God, and blames *him*, rather than *himself*, for his negligence. "Lord, I knew thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed." This language of the slothful servant, expresses the feelings of every impenitent sinner. From this we may conclude, that all sinners are disposed to complain of God for requiring that of them, which he has not given them. I shall,

I. Show what God does not require of them, which he has not given them;

II. What he does require of them, which he has not given them; And.

III. That they have no reason to complain of his requiring that of them, which he has not given them.

I. I am to show what God does not require of sinners, which he has not given them.

Here it may be safely said, that he never requires any *talents* of them, which he has not given them. Christ uses the term talents in the parable in its most strict and proper sense, to signify a piece of money. The Jews reckoned a talent of silver at four hundred and fifty pounds sterling, and a talent of gold at seven thousand two hundred pounds sterling. But as the parable itself, is to be understood figuratively, so the term talents is to be understood figuratively, to signify all intellectual powers and faculties, and all external privileges and opportunities of getting and of doing good. These natural talents God bestows upon sinners in larger or smaller measures as he sees best. He gives greater talents to some, than to others, and more talents to some, than to others. To one he gives ten talents, to another two, and to another one. To some he gives great powers of mind, and great opportunities of cultivating, enlarging, and strengthening their mental powers. And to some he gives great corporeal strength and activity, and peculiar opportunities of exerting these faculties to valuable and important purposes. But he never requires men to have more or better natural talents than he has given them. He never requires the man to whom he has given but one talent, to have two; nor the man to whom he has given but two talents, to have ten. He never requires a blind man to see; nor a deaf man to hear; nor a man that has no feet to walk; nor a sick man to be well; nor a weak man to be strong; nor a short man to be tall. He never requires any man to have a better understanding, or a better memory, or any better intellectual faculties than he has given him. And he never requires any man to do any action, which he has not given him knowledge, strength, time, and opportunity of doing. In a word, he never requires either saints or sinners to have any natural talents, which he

has not given them; nor to exercise any natural talents, which they do not possess. I now proceed to show,

II. What God does require of sinners, which he does not give them. The slothful servant tells his lord, that he reaps where he has not sown, and gathers where he has not strewed; by which he means to say, that he required that of him, which he had not given him. And sinners at this day generally say the same with respect to God. They say, that he requires that of them, which he has not given them. Though sinners, like the slothful servant, have a bad meaning in saying this, yet their assertion must be allowed to be true; for God does most expressly require that of them which he has not given them. Though he does not require them to *have faculties*, which he has not given them, yet he does require them to *have a heart* to improve the *talents* he has given them in his service, which he has not given them a *heart* to do. He requires every sinner "to love him with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength, and to love his neighbour as himself," though he has not given him such a heart. When he gave the law at Mount Sinai to all the congregation of Israel, he required them to love him supremely, though he knew and implicitly said, that he had not generally given them a heart to love him. He now commands all sinners every where under the gospel to repent. He now commands all sinners every where under the gospel cordially to believe and embrace it. And he now commands sinners every where, whether they eat, or drink, or whatever they do, to do all to his glory. Or in fewer words, he commands them to have a heart to improve all the talents he has given them in his service and to his glory, though he has not given them such a heart. He requires them to exercise the same holy love, holy joy, holy hope, holy patience, holy submission, and holy obedience, which he requires saints to exercise, though he has never given them such holy exercises of heart. It appears from the whole current of scripture, that God does reap where he has not

sown, and gather where he has not strewed; that he does require sinners to have a heart to improve all the talents he has given them, in his service; and that he does require them to have the same holy heart, which he has given to others, but has not given to them. I use this phraseology because it is scriptural, and because it is the very phraseology, which sinners themselves use upon the subject, and upon which, like the slothful servant, they found their complaint. But though I admit the propriety of their saying, that God does require of them *that*, which he has *not given* them, yet I will endeavour to make it appear, that their complaint, even in their own terms, is entirely groundless. Accordingly, I now proceed as proposed,

III. To show, that they have no reason to complain of God for his requiring that of them, which he *has not given them*. The idle servant complained of his master, because he required *that* of him, which he had *not given* him. "Then he which had received the one talent came, and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed." By this language of the idle servant, Christ meant to represent the language and feelings of sinners in respect to God. They all complain, that he is hard, severe and even unjust, in requiring *that* of them, which he has *not given* them. But that they have no reason at all, to complain of God for his requiring that of them, which he has not given them, will clearly appear, if we seriously, candidly, and attentively consider the following things.

1. *What* God has given sinners is a good reason, why he should require *what* he has *not given* them. He has given them talents, by which they are capable of having what he has not given, and which he requires them to have: that is, an heart to improve them in his service. He has given them all the rational and moral powers, which are necessary to constitute them moral agents. And these rational and moral powers, which are natural talents, are the proper and only proper foundation of moral obligation. The bare knowledge



of right and wrong, or of moral good and evil, lays sinners under moral obligation, to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. The bare knowledge of duty in all cases, lays men under moral obligation to do it. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." The natural talents, which form the natural capacity of sinners, lay them under moral obligation, to love and serve their Creator. It is impossible, that any creature of God should know his character and perfections, and not be bound to love him; which is precisely the same thing as being bound to have a good heart, which essentially consists in love. The natural talents, or the rational and moral powers, which God has given to sinners, lay them under moral obligation to *have* what he has *not* given them, namely, a *good heart*. They are under the same obligation to *have* a good heart *before* they have it, as afterwards. For their obligation to have a good heart is entirely founded in their rational powers, and not in their actually having a good heart. As God has given them the same rational powers that he has given saints; so they are under the same obligations to have a good heart, that saints are. Their not having a good heart, does not destroy their obligation to have one. Though God does not and cannot, consistently require sinners to have *talents*, which he has not given them; yet he does and can consistently require them to have a *heart* which he has not given them. There is an essential difference between *natural* talents, and *moral* exercises. Though it be not right, that God should require sinners to have talents, which he has not given them; yet it is perfectly right, that he should require them to have a *heart*, which consists in holy exercises, that he has not given them. And every sinner is capable of seeing and feeling, that the very talents God has given him, lay him under moral obligation to *have an heart* to improve them, which he has not given him. And it is upon this very ground, that the master of the unfaithful and slothful servant judges and condemns him out of his own mouth, for complaining of his in-

justice and severity. "And he said unto him, out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow; wherefore, then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?" Or, as it is in a parallel place, "Thou *oughtest* therefore, to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming, I should have received mine own with usury." This was as much as to say, "You knew, that I gave you a talent and commanded you to occupy and improve it for my profit. You knew that I was very strict with my servants, and would require of them all my due. You *ought*, therefore, to have had a *heart* to improve my talent to the best advantage, and had you have had a heart to improve it to the best advantage, I should have received mine own with interest, or as you say, I should have reaped where I had not sown, and received from you, more than I gave you, which is perfectly reasonable, because you are, and acknowledge you are my servant." Now, sinners have no more reason to complain, that God is unjust and severe in requiring them to have that, which he has not given them, than the slothful servant had to complain that his master was unjust and severe, in requiring that of him, which he had not given him. The reason in both cases, is perfectly plain and obvious. The master required nothing of his servant, but what the *talent* he gave him, enabled and bound him to give him. And God requires nothing of sinners, but what the *talents*, he has given them, enable and bind them to give him. The talents which God has given to sinners, both *enable* and *bind* them to have a good heart, that is, to have an *heart* to improve all the talents he has given them to his glory. If they presume, therefore, to justify themselves in not having a heart to improve the talents which God has given them, their own mouths condemn them.

2. Sinners have no reason to complain of God for his requiring them to have a good heart, which he has not

given them, for this is the only thing that he has a right to require of them. They know, that he has no right to require them to have any natural talents, or any intellectual and moral powers which he has not given them. They know, that he has no right to require them to have a selfish or wicked heart. They know, therefore, that he has no right to require any thing of them, except a holy or benevolent heart. And to deny, that he has a right to require this of them, is virtually to deny, that he has a right to require any thing of them; and of consequence, that they ever did, or ever can commit any sin. For if God has no right to require any thing of them, they cannot be guilty of disobeying him, or committing any sin at all. If God has no right to require them to have a good heart, which he has not given them; then he has no right to require them to do any thing, which they are not willing to do, which must render them completely innocent. He has no right to require them to love him with all the heart, unless they choose to love him supremely. He has no right to require them to love their fellow men as themselves, unless they choose to exercise disinterested benevolence towards them. He has no right to require them to repent, to believe, to speak the truth, to do, or to refrain from doing whatever they please. For, any precept, or prohibition of his, necessarily implies, that he requires such love, such faith, such repentance, or some such affection as he has not given them; which they say is reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strewed. Or in other words, requiring that of them, which he has not given them. Now, can there be any thing more unreasonable and absurd, than this complaint of God, for requiring a good heart, which he has not given them? It implies, that God has no right to command them in a single instance, and that they are under no obligation to obey him in a single instance. The complaint of the slothful servant implied, that his master had no right to require any obedience or service of him, which was absolutely criminal and extremely displeasing to his master, who said

unto him, "thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed." This you have unreasonably and presumptuously complained of. Therefore his master commands, "Take the talent from him and give it unto him which hath ten talents; and cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth." Thus God views and will treat sinners, who complain of his injustice and severity, in requiring them to have a good heart; which he has not given them, or for requiring them to do any thing which they are unwilling to do.

3. One person has no reason to complain of another, who has authority over him, for requiring him to do what he is able to do, but has no heart to do. A child has no reason to complain of a parent for requiring him to do what he is able to do, though he has no heart to do it. A servant has no reason to complain of a master for requiring him to do what he is able to do, though he has no heart to do it. And a subject has no reason to complain of a ruler for requiring him to do what he is able to do, though he has no heart to do it. All human authority supposes a right to require that of men, which they are able to do, but have no heart to do. No subject of human authority, therefore, has reason to complain of being required to do any thing, which is right in itself and which he is able to do, if he were willing. The reason why the Israelites in Egypt had a right to complain of their task masters, was because they required more than they were able to perform, though ever so willing to obey. Now, if no subjects of human authority have any reason to complain of being required to do what they are able to do, but have no heart to do; then surely no subjects of divine authority have any reason to complain of being required to do what they are able to do, but have no heart to do. They are as much the subjects of God, as they are the subjects of their rulers. They are as much the servants of God, as they are the servants of their masters. And they are as much the children of God, as they are the chil-

dren of their parents. It is upon the ground of his supreme right to command, that God requires a cordial and universal obedience of sinners, as well as of others. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master : if then I be a father, where is mine honour ? and if I be a master, where is my fear ? saith the Lord of hosts." If a subject has no reason to complain of his prince, nor a servant of his master, nor a child of his parents, for requiring him to do what he is able to do, but has no heart to do ; then a sinner has no reason to complain of his Creator and supreme Sovereign, for requiring him to do what he is able to do, but has no heart to do. God does not require sinners to make brick without straw, nor to do any thing, which he has not given them talents, or natural abilities to do. They have no reason to complain of his requiring them to love and serve him, though he has not given them a dutiful, obedient, and benevolent heart. Furthermore,

4. Sinners have no reason to complain of God that he condemns them for not doing what they are able to do, but have no heart to do, for they condemn themselves for the same thing. The idle sinner condemns himself for neglecting to do what he had health and strength to do, but had no heart to do, when he finds himself plunged into poverty and distress. The spendthrift condemns himself for neglecting to save his property, though he had no heart to preserve it, when he feels the evil effects of his foolish prodigality. The disobedient sinner condemns himself for his disobedience, when he sees the fatal consequence of his disobedience, though God gave him no heart to obey. Saul condemned himself before Samuel, for not obeying the voice of the Lord in the destruction of the Amalekites, which he had power, but no heart to do. Joseph's brethren, in distress, condemned themselves for their guilty conduct towards him, though they had no heart in the time of it, to speak or act peacably towards him. Pharaoh, in extremity, condemned himself before Moses, for disobeying the divine messages, though God had not softened, but hardened his heart. Judas judg-

ed, condemned and punished himself for not loving and obeying his master, though he had no heart to love and obey him. Those, who were awakened under Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost, condemned themselves for their treatment of Christ, which they would not have been guilty of, if God had given them a heart to know and love the Lord of glory. And all awakened and convinced sinners always condemn themselves for not doing what they are able, but have no heart to do. Such abundant evidence we have, that sinners condemn themselves for not doing what they are able to do, but have no heart to do. They are, therefore, extremely absurd and criminal, in complaining of God for condemning them for not loving and obeying him, which they are able to do, but have no heart to do. If sinners will now only consider candidly and attentively what God has given them, and does *not* require : and what he has *not* given them, but *does* require, they cannot fail of feeling convinced, that they have no ground to complain of any precept, or prohibition, which he has enjoined upon them in the bible ; and that it is owing to the blinding nature of their moral depravity, that they have been and still are plunged in darkness upon this most plain and important subject.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

I. It appears from what has been said upon this subject, that sinners are not under a *natural*, but only a *moral* inability to do all that God requires them to do. God does not require them to get any more or better talents, than he has given them. This they are under a natural inability to do. They cannot add one cubit to their stature, nor one intellectual faculty to their mind. All that God requires of them is, to improve all the talents or natural faculties he has given them. This they do not want natural ability to do, but only a good heart or moral ability. The slothful servant was as able to improve his one talent, that was given him, as the servant that had two talents, was able to improve his

two; or as he that had ten talents, was able to improve his ten. Sinners are as able to improve all the talents they have, as saints are to improve all the talents they have. Sinners in general have as good natural talents, as saints in general, and they are under no greater natural inability, to love God, embrace the gospel, and obey all its precepts, than saints are. But they are under a total moral inability to do these things. Hence our Saviour says, "No man can come unto me, except the Father who sent me to draw him." Sinners have natural ability to do their duty, because they have natural talents; but they have not moral ability to do their duty, because they have no heart to improve their natural talents. The distinction between natural ability and moral inability is as plain and obvious, as the distinction between natural talents and a heart to improve them. This distinction is to be seen and felt all over the world. We every where see men of fine natural talents, who have no heart to improve them. And we all feel, at times at least, that we have talents, that we have no heart to improve. But notwithstanding this plain and sensible fact, how many are there among the learned and unlearned, among saints and sinners, who either directly or indirectly deny the distinction between natural and moral inability, and maintain, that sinners are under a *natural*, and not merely a *moral* inability to embrace the gospel, or to do any thing in a right and acceptable manner. This must be owing to their not making a distinction between a talent, and an heart to improve it; or in supposing the want of a heart is the want of a talent; which is absurd, because a heart is no talent. A talent is something that God gives, but never requires; a heart is something God requires, whether he gives it, or not. A talent is something passive; but a heart is something active. A talent has no moral qualities; but a heart has moral qualities. A talent is something which never deserves either praise or blame; but a heart always deserves either praise or blame. No talent or rational faculty can change; but a heart may change, and often does. It

is extremely strange, therefore, that so many should think, that the heart is a talent, and the want of it is the want of a natural talent, or intellectual faculty, which lays sinners under a natural inability to love God, to repent of sin, and to embrace the gospel. No person would ever think, that sinners are under a natural inability to love and serve God, if he did not imagine, that the want of a good heart, is the want of a natural talent, or intellectual faculty to love and serve God. And whoever do think, that a want of a good heart is the want of a talent or natural faculty, must, to be consistent, think that sinners are as really under a natural inability to do their duty, as a blind man is to see, or a deaf man to hear. But it appears from what has been said of the distinction between talents and the heart, that sinners want no talents, but only a good heart, in order to embrace the gospel, and consequently their inability is altogether *moral*, and not *natural*.

2. It appears from what has been said, that it is of great importance to understand the distinction between talents, and a heart to improve them, or between natural and moral inability. It is absolutely necessary to understand this distinction, in order to understand some of the most important truths in the bible. Without seeing this distinction, who can see the propriety of the first and fundamental law of God's moral kingdom, which commands every person, let his heart be what it will, to love him with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength? Who can understand the command, which requires those who have no repentance to repent, and those who have no faith, to believe the gospel? Who can understand the precept, that requires those who are totally selfish, not to seek their own things, but the things of others? and to do to others, as they would that others should do to them? Who can understand the express command to sinners, "Make you a new heart and a new spirit," or to rise from spiritual death to spiritual life? Who can understand the consistency between the doctrine of regeneration and the command "to put off the old



man and put on the new ;” or the consistency between the doctrine of the saints perseverance, and the numerous cautions and warnings against their falling away ? Who can understand the consistency between God’s secret and revealed will ? or the universal invitations given to sinners to embrace the gospel, and the doctrine of personal election to eternal life ? Who can understand that divine threatening, “ The servant who knows his master’s will, and does it not, shall be beaten with many stripes,” or punished according to the light and knowledge he resists ? These are all gravelling points to those, who do not understand the distinction between *natural* and *moral inability*. And no expositor of the bible, that I ever read, who did not understand or denied this distinction, could reconcile these apparent difficulties and inconsistencies every where to be found in the Scriptures. It is because Arminians, Antinomians, and Universalists, do not understand, or will not acknowledge the distinction between natural and moral inability, or between talents and an heart to improve them, that they run into their different and dangerous errors. And no one can refute them, without understanding this distinction. It is, indeed, impossible for any person to understand the truths and consistency of many of the most important doctrines and duties of the gospel, without understanding the wide difference between men’s having natural abilities, and an heart to improve them.

3. It appears from what has been said in this discourse, why God is so much displeas’d with sinners, for pleading the want of a good heart, as an excuse for not improving the talents he has given them, to his glory. They not only justify themselves in that in which they ought to condemn themselves, but by justifying themselves, they condemn God as the most unjust and cruel being in the universe. They charge him with reaping where he has not sown, of requiring that which he has not given, and of threatening them with eternal destruction for not doing that which he has not given them power to do. This is a higher charge, than can

be brought against the greatest tyrant on earth, or even against the great adversary of God and man. But sinners cannot plead the want of an heart to love and obey God, without virtually bringing this charge of injustice and cruelty against him. Every self-justifying and sin-extenuating plea that they make, is a God-condemning plea. Just so far as they justify themselves, they condemn him. What can be more criminal and displeasing to God than this. He has given them great and distinguishing talents, and made them capable of loving and serving him; but they deny, that he has made them capable of loving and serving him, because he has not given them another talent, that is, a good heart; and upon this ground, they justify themselves, and condemn him. But how dare they "provoke the Lord to jealousy? are they stronger than he?" Though sinners do not always see, that just so far as they justify themselves in their slothfulness, impenitency and unbelief, they condemn God; yet he sees it and highly resents it. The master of the slothful servant clearly saw the nature and implication of his self-justifying plea, and would not endure such an impeachment from such an ungrateful and wicked servant; but condemned him to the severest punishment. And can the idle and unfaithful servants of God, who to justify themselves, condemn him, hope to escape with impunity? They are guilty, but God is righteous. They have injured God, but he has not injured them. And he never will forgive them, until they first condemn themselves, as he condemns them, and accept the punishment of their iniquity, and ascribe righteousness to him, in respect to the precept and penalty of his law.

4. We learn from what has been said, on what account sinners grow worse and worse under the strivings of the spirit. When they are first awakened, they commonly feel condemned for their past stupidity, and negligence, and slothfulness, and resolve to be more earnest and diligent in seeking the Lord. But as the spirit strives more powerfully, their wicked heart leads them to re-

sist a sense of guilt, which is so painful to them, and to find some excuse for their conduct. And what the bible says about the moral inability of sinners to love God and embrace the gospel, they zealously lay hold of, as a most plausible excuse; and they begin to plead that they cannot do what God commands them to do. For he requires them to have a good heart, which he has not given them. And now the tables are turned. Instead of blaming themselves for their moral impotency, they blame God. Instead of acknowledging that they have been idle servants, they charge God with being a hard master. They cast off blame from themselves, and fix it upon God. And instead of contending with themselves, they contend with him; which is in the highest degree criminal. Their carnal mind rises directly against God, and condemns him as the most unjust and cruel being in the universe; which is immediately sinning against God himself, with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their mind, and with all their strength. And can we conceive it possible, that they should rise in criminality and guilt, so fast in any other way, as in this? "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" This is not only the most *criminal*, but the most *dangerous* way of sinning. It directly tends, not only to stifle convictions, but to produce despondency. For, so far as sinners can make themselves believe, that the want of a good heart is the want of a talent, and a valid excuse, they will pity themselves as in a deplorable condition, and blame God for not giving them a good heart, and threatening to cast them off for ever for the want of it. A great many guilty sinners have thrown themselves into this wretched situation, by justifying themselves, and charging God foolishly. All awakened sinners are in a critical situation, and it is extremely difficult, to guard them against the guilt and danger of justifying themselves and condemning God. The best way to guard them against this delusion, is to make them see, if pos-

sible, the distinction between natural and moral inability.

5. It appears from what has been said, that no awakened sinners are under genuine convictions, until they are constrained to give up all their excuses for their negligence, impenitency and unbelief. All their excuses are founded upon their false notion of being unable to do what God has required of them, because he has not given them an heart to do it. This excuse they ought to give up, and must give up, when the commandment comes home to their conscience. "For whatsoever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may become guilty before God." The sinner under genuine conviction, has no self-justifying, and God condemning plea to make. His mouth is stopped, though his heart rebels. Paul owns that he was subject to such genuine convictions. "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." And the publican had no excuse to make, when he cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The law, which requires a holy heart, allows of no excuse for the want of it. It is extremely dangerous for sinners to take awakenings for convictions, and a mere sense of danger for a sense of guilt. They must renounce all self-righteousness and self-justification in order to accept the unpromised mercy of God.

6. It appears from what has been said, that all sinners are equally liable to conviction. The same talents which God has given them, and required them to improve, he can turn against them, and employ as means of conviction and self-condemnation. All their intellectual powers, all their acquired knowledge, all their religious advantages, and all their easy and agreeable circumstances in life, he can turn against them, and make them feel that these things have increased their obligations to improve them, and consequently their guilt in misimproving them. Though all secure sinners employ all their talents to invent plausible ex-

cuses; yet God can make them employ all their talents to discover and condemn their past stupidity, negligence and slothfulness. Though the careless and thoughtless, imagine that they can successfully plead their cause before God, yet when they come in sober earnest to justify themselves, they will find that God can condemn them out of their own mouth. How many great and learned men has God laid prostrate at his footstool? It is only to take away their groundless excuses, and they fall before him.

7. This subject now exhorts all sinners, without exception, to improve their talents which God has given them. Of these talents they cannot divest themselves. They are a part of their rational and immortal existence. And they bind them to love and serve God with a pure heart. And if they are slothful, and bury them, or pervert them, they will sink them, like talents of gold, in endless perdition. How many sinners have wished in vain to be deprived of their noble, rational and immortal talents; or to be completely annihilated rather than to feel their insupportable condemning power. You cannot turn to the right or left, with security or impunity. There is only one strait and narrow path before you. To obey God from the heart, or to be condemned and destroyed for ever. And can you hesitate a moment, what is your duty and interest? Are you secure? Awake! Are you alarmed? Condemn yourselves, and justify God, and accept of mercy.—Stand no longer idle.—You must soon give to God an account of what you have done with your talents. And if you do not make yourselves an heart to use the talents he has given you, to his glory, he will say in respect to every one of you, “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into utter darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

## SERMON XVI.

THE HAPPINESS OF SELF-DENIAL.

LUKE, XVIII. 28, 29, 30.

*Then Peter said, lo, we have left all and followed thee. And he said unto them, verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting.*

THERE was no duty that Christ more frequently and plainly inculcated, than the duty of self-denial. He made it the cardinal condition of men's becoming his sincere followers. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." And when "a certain ruler asked him, saying, good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said unto him, sell that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful, for he was very rich. And when he saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they that heard it, said, Who then can be saved? And he said, the things which are impossible with men, are possible with God. Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily, I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." Mark expressly says, "the self-denying man shall receive an *hundred-fold now*

in this time, and in the world to come eternal life." The text fully warrants us to say,

That the exercise of self-denial is productive of the highest happiness both in this life and in the life to come.

I shall first explain self-denial, and then show that it is productive of the highest present and future happiness.

I. Self-denial is to be explained. Though it be universally allowed, that there is such a thing as self-denial; yet very different opinions are entertained concerning the nature of it, which makes it necessary to show in what it essentially consists.

In the first place, it does not consist in giving up one temporal and personal good for a greater temporal and personal good. For this is self-gratifying instead of self-denying. Any entirely selfish person would be willing to do this. Christ said to his hearers, "If ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them who do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again." Men are generally fond of exchanging a less personal and temporal good for a greater personal and temporal good. And though in some cases, they may feel a degree of reluctance in giving up a smaller for a greater temporal good; yet on the whole, they choose to do it, to gratify their selfishness. One man will sacrifice his property, to gratify his ambition, which he esteems a greater good. Another man will sacrifice his property to gratify his appetite, which he esteems a greater good. Another will sacrifice his property, to gratify his revenge, which he esteems a greater good. But none of these persons in these cases, exercise the least self-denial. They only give up one personal and temporal interest for what they esteem a greater personal and temporal good, which gratifies their selfish and corrupt hearts.

Nor, secondly, does self-denial consist in giving up a less temporal and personal good for a greater personal and eternal good. The most corrupt and selfish men in the world, are willing to give up any or all their temporal and personal interests for the sake of obtaining future and eternal happiness. Micah represents a sinner as expressing this willingness in the strongest terms. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" What this person is represented as willing to sacrifice for the salvation of his soul, thousands and thousands of mankind have actually done, to obtain future and eternal happiness. All the idolatrous nations round about Judea, sacrificed their dear infants and children in order to obtain the favour of Moloch and their other false and cruel gods. The heathens in East-India and the East-India islands make the same cruel and inhuman sacrifices to their false gods and stupid idols. Some idolize the river Ganges, and sacrifice themselves and others to that idol. Thousands and thousands go as pilgrims to sacrifice themselves to the grand idol Juggernaut. Some are voluntarily, and others involuntarily burnt to ashes, for their own or their friends eternal benefit. The Mahometans, who are semi-christians, go long pilgrimages to Mecca, and practice other self-mortifications for the sake of securing future and eternal happiness. And among those, who call themselves christians, there are a multitude of hermits, monks and nuns, and other enthusiastick and superstitious persons, who voluntarily deny themselves the enjoyments of civil society, macerate their bodies, and subject themselves to the extremes of heat and cold, pain, poverty, and reproach, for the sake of obtaining the salvation of their souls. But there is not the least self-denial in such selfish mortifications, sufferings and sacrifices. If a man should gain the whole world, and then give it up



for the sake of escaping eternal misery and obtaining eternal happiness it would be the highest act of *selfishness*, instead of *self-denial*, which does not consist in giving up a *less* temporal and personal good, for a greater temporal and personal good; nor in giving up a less personal and temporal good, for a greater personal and eternal good. In a word, self-denial does not consist in any thing that gratifies a selfish heart; and therefore it does not consist in giving up our *own present* good for *our own future* good, let our own future good be what it may.

But, thirdly and positively, self-denial consists in giving up *our own* good for the *good of others*. The man who gives up the least *personal* good for the *personal* good of another, without any hope of reward, exercises true self-denial. The man who gives up his *private* good for the good of *the publick* without any hope of reward, exercises true self-denial. Such self-denial stands in direct contrariety to selfishness. No man, who is entirely selfish, can be willing to give up his own good for the good of another person, or for the good of the publick, or for the glory of God, without a hope of reward, or receiving a greater good than he bestows. Satan knows, there is no self-denial, and consequently no virtue in selfishness, or in any action that flows from selfishness, and on that ground, he denied that Job had any self-denial, or virtue in his exercising love and obedience to God. “The Lord said unto satan, hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil. Then satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.” Had Job loved and served God, from mercenary motives, he would undoubtedly have felt, if not acted as satan predicted, when God stripped him at once of all his wealth and

prosperity. But he blessed God in his sore afflictions and bereavements, which demonstrated his pure self-denial and disinterested virtue. Christ, in the text, represents self-denial as consisting in mens' giving up private or personal good for the kingdom of God's sake. "Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, parents, &c. for the kingdom of *God's sake*, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." This self-denial which Christ enjoined, he also practised. So says Paul to the Corinthians. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet *for your sakes* he became *poor*, that ye through *his poverty* might be made rich." Paul says to the Romans, "We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for *his good*—for even Christ *pleased not himself*." And again, the apostle says, "Let no man *seek his own*, but every man *another's wealth*." According to the dictates of scripture, reason, and conscience, all self-denial consists in giving up our *own good* for the *good of others*, when our own personal and private good stands in competition with the good of others. We should never find any difficulty in understanding the nature and tendency of self-denial, if we were only willing to practice it; and we should find no difficulty in practising it, if we only possessed pure disinterested love to God and man. For,

II. True self-denial is productive of the highest present and future happiness. Though this may look like a paradox, yet, I trust, it will appear a plain and important truth, if we consider the following things. And,

1. The nature of true self-denial. It consists, as we have seen, in giving up a less private or personal good for a greater publick good; or in giving up our own good for the greater good of others. And this necessarily implies disinterested benevolence, which is placing our own happiness in the greater happiness of others. When a man gives up his own happiness to promote

the greater happiness of another, he does it freely and voluntarily, because he takes more pleasure in the greater good of another, than in a less good of his own. So that though he gives up private and personal good, yet he does not give up all good, for he enjoys all that good of another, for which he gives up his own. And since that good of another is always greater than his own good, which he gives up for it, he becomes happier than he could be without such an act of self-denial. The selfish man who loves his property more than his ease, enjoys more pleasure in labouring, sweating, and toiling, than in spending his time in idleness and ease. So the benevolent man, who gives up his own personal good for the greater good of his neighbour, enjoys all that greater good of his neighbour, for which he gives up a less personal good of his own, and consequently he is happier, than if he had not done that act of self-denial. Or if a benevolent man gives up his private good to promote a greater publick good, he enjoys all that greater publick good, for which he gives up his private good; and of course becomes happier than if he had not given up the *private* for his *publick* good. Or if a benevolent man, gives up his house, or his lands, or his children, or any thing that he calls his own, *for the kingdom of God's sake*, he enjoys that kingdom of God for which he gives up his personal good, and necessarily becomes happier than if he had not done that great act of self-denial. We cannot conceive of any act of true self-denial, which will not be productive of the *present*, as well as *future* good of the person who performs it. It is the dictate of every man's reason, that his giving up his own personal good, for the good of others, or for the glory of God, will be productive of greater good in this life and in the life to come. Let a good man labour and suffer ever so much for the good of others, or the glory of God; the good of others and the glory of God will afford him a happiness which will over-balance all his painful labours and sufferings, and certainly be productive of a greater present and future happiness. If this be true, the benevolent must know

it to be true, by their own experience. Let me ask you then, whether you ever enjoyed a purer or higher happiness, than you have found in promoting the good of others and the glory of God, by acts of self-denial?

2. Those who have denied themselves the most, have found the greatest happiness resulting from their self-denial. God the Father denied himself in giving up his only begotten and dearly beloved Son to suffer and die for this guilty and perishing world. But he always has been, and always will be unspeakably more blessed by this astonishing act of self-denial, than by any thing else he has ever done, or ever will do. The Lord Jesus Christ exercised greater self-denial, than any other person in this world, by becoming incarnate, taking the form of a servant, and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross for the salvation of the most guilty and ill-deserving creatures. But he declares, that he delighted to do his Father's will in suffering and dying; and was then and always will be more happy, than if he had never suffered or died. And on this supposition, the apostle urges christians to imitate his example of self-denial, as the way to become the most happy. "Let us run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Moses found the greatest happiness in a long series of self-denying obedience and sufferings. It is expressly said, "By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; *choosing* rather to *suffer affliction* with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; *esteeming* the reproach of Christ *greater riches* than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect to the recompense of reward." Paul found self-denial productive of happiness. He says, "I take *pleasure* in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, *for Christ's sake*." And ranking himself with christians, he says, "We are

troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. But though our outward man perish, the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And again he says, after reciting a long catalogue of sufferings, "As sorrowful, yet always *rejoicing*; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet *possessing all things*." Now, if God, if Christ, if Moses, if Paul, and if the primitive christians found the greatest happiness in the greatest acts of self-denial, it must be true, that true self-denial in all instances will produce the purest and greatest happiness in the minds of those who practise it, both in this life, and in the life to come. Thus it appears from the *nature* of self-denial, and from the *effects* which have flowed from it, that it is productive of the purest and highest happiness. And this will further appear, if we consider,

3. The great and precious promises, which are expressly made to self-denial, by Christ himself. When he first sent forth his disciples to preach the gospel, he forewarned them to expect opposition, reproach and persecution in every form. But he enjoined it upon them to take up their cross, and suffer every evil that they met with, for *his sake*, and promised to give them an ample reward for all their self-denial in promoting his cause and kingdom. He said, "He that loseth his life for *my sake*, shall find it. He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's *reward*; and he that receiveth a righteous man, in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's *reward*. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his *reward*." Christ promised the amiable young man, whom he re-

quired to sell all that he had and give to the poor, that if he would thus deny himself, take up the cross and follow him, he would abundantly reward him, by giving him treasure in heaven. But the young man thought this was too hard a condition of salvation, and therefore went away sorrowful. And the disciples thought so too. They were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? Christ told them that this was possible with God, though not with men. Then Peter said unto him, we have left all, and followed thee, wanting to know what reward they should receive for giving up all. "Jesus answered and said, Verily, I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands *for my sake and the gospel's*, but he shall receive an *hundred fold now in this time*, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." These same promises are made in the text, and several other places, to those who exercise self-denial, or give up all for Christ's sake, or the gospel's sake, or the kingdom of God's sake. And these promises assure every one, who exercises true self-denial, that he shall be an hundred fold more happy in *this world*, as well as in the *next*, in *time*, as well as in *eternity*, than if he did not thus deny himself, and give up all for the kingdom of God's sake. And it is easy to see, from the *nature* of self-denial, that these promises, not only *may* be, but *must* be fulfilled. For self-denial consists in giving up a *personal* good, for a *publick* good; and a *present* good, for a *future* good. And those who give up their personal good for the good of others, enjoy all the good of others, for which they give up their own; and those who give up their own good for the glory of God, enjoy all the glory of God, for which they give up their own good, and of course, they must enjoy all the good of all other beings, so far as they are capable of it, which will be a hundred, a thousand fold greater good than their own personal good.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from what has been said in this discourse concerning self-denial, that it is necessarily a term or condition of salvation. Christ was repeatedly asked, what was the peculiar and necessary term or condition of becoming his disciple. And whenever this important question was put to him, he always replied, that self-denial was an indispensable condition. He uniformly said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." This condition he more largely explained and illustrated in the fourteenth of Luke. "When there went great multitudes with him, he turned and said unto them, if any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether ye have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it, begin to mock him saying, this man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand, to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is a great way off he sendeth an embassy, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that *forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*" This condition of becoming a disciple of Christ is founded in that supreme and disinterested love to him, which disposes a man to love him *more* than father or mother, son or daughter, or even his own life; and which at the same time disposes him to hate father or mother, son or daughter, or even his own life, when either of these stand in the way of his loving Christ supremely. Christ exercised just such supreme love to his Father, when "Peter began to re-

buke him saying, be it far from thee Lord: this shall not be unto thee." That is, that thou shalt die on the cross. "But Christ turned, and said unto Peter, get thee behind, satan; thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Christ had a supreme and disinterested regard to the glory of God in dying on the cross, and therefore, hated Peter, or the best friend on earth, who stood in the way of his feeling and expressing supreme love to his Father, in suffering and dying on the cross. So Christ requires every person, who would become his disciple, to love him supremely, and to give up or hate every person or object, that stands in the way of his loving him supremely. Now such a supreme love to Christ is not only a proper, but a necessary and indispensable condition of becoming his disciple, and obtaining pardon and salvation. Salvation consists not only in freedom from future and eternal misery, but in the enjoyment of future and eternal happiness in heaven. But heavenly happiness is a *social* happiness, and consists in union and communion with God, with holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect in pure, disinterested love. All heaven is full of disinterested love and self-denial. God has denied himself, Christ has denied himself, the Holy Spirit has denied himself, the holy angels have denied themselves, and all departed saints have denied themselves, and always will deny themselves, in giving up impenitent angels and impenitent men to eternal perdition. Without self-denial, therefore, no man can see God and the kingdom of God, and enjoy it. Self-denial is not a mere arbitrary condition of salvation, but the only possible condition of salvation. Men cannot be saved upon any lower or easier condition. They cannot embrace the gospel without it, and they cannot enjoy the salvation of the gospel without it.

2. It appears from what has been said in this discourse, concerning self-denial, that the doctrine cannot be carried too far. Though every one will allow, that self-denial is a scriptural doctrine, and ought to be



preached, and all ought to practice self-denial, yet many imagine it may be, and sometimes is carried too far. But ought it not to be carried as far as Christ carried it? And can it be carried any farther than he carried it? He required men to deny themselves, and take up their cross, and give up not only little things, but great things; and not only *some* things, but *all* things. And lest he should be misunderstood, he mentions particulars. He mentions houses and lands, which include every species of property. He mentions fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, wives and children, which include the nearest and dearest connections and friends. And to all these sacrifices he adds the sacrifice of life itself. "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" The life here spoken of as lost and as found, is not mere *temporal*, but *eternal* life. What preacher ever taught self-denial in a plainer or more extensive sense, than Christ did? Or what preacher can carry the doctrine farther, or to a higher degree than he did? He makes self-denial in the highest sense and in the highest degree, an indispensable condition of salvation to every person in the world, whether rich or poor, high or low, bond or free, learned or unlearned. Though few presume to complain of Christ for preaching the doctrine of self-denial too plainly and extensively; yet many complain of ministers for preaching the doctrine so plainly and extensively as he did. They say this doctrine is strong meat, too strong for common people to hear, understand, believe, and love. Indeed, many are ready to cry out with those, who heard Christ preach this doctrine to the amiable young man, "Who then can be saved?" They say it amounts to *unconditional submission*, or a *willingness* to be cast off forever. And this is undoubtedly true. But what if it does amount to this, shall it not be preached? Shall not the only condition of salvation, which Christ has proposed,

be preached? Can the gospel be really preached to sinners, so that they can understand it, unless this doctrine be preached? Shall ministers presume to *alter* or *lower* down the condition of salvation? Or if they do lower down the condition of salvation, and men comply with their lowered down condition, will it prepare them for heaven, or will Christ admit them there? I now ask, what shall ministers do, or what shall I do, in preaching the gospel? The doctrine of self-denial as Christ preached it, is disbelieved, denied, opposed, and even ridiculed, by nine in ten, if not by ninety-nine in an hundred, from Maine to Georgia, and not only by the men of the world, but by christians and christian ministers. The question returns, what ought ministers to do? or what must they do, in respect to preaching the doctrine of self-denial? shall they wholly omit it? or shall they preach it obscurely? or shall they preach it plainly and fully as Christ did? They must take up their cross and preach it. And a heavy cross it is. But heavy as it is, it is light compared with what must be endured by those who are unwilling to bear it.

3. If christianity requires men to exercise true self-denial, then the christian religion is not a *gloomy*, but a *joyful* religion. It affords an hundred fold more happiness, than any other religion can afford. Those who embrace christianity in the spirit of self-denial, give up their own good, for the good of others, and for the glory of God; and thereby put themselves into the enjoyment of all the good, for which they give up their own private, personal good, which is an hundred and a thousand fold greater, than any private, personal and selfish good can be. This is not only *theoretically*, but *practically* and *experimentally* true. All who have embraced the gospel in the spirit of self-denial, have always been the happiest men in the world. Abel was happier than Cain, Enoch was happier than Nimrod, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and the prophets, Christ and the Apostles, and all the primitive christians were an hundred fold happier than the unbelieving world among whom they lived. Christians now are far more

happy in the continual exercise of self-denial, than sinners in their highest state of prosperity. Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. While they keep their hearts in the love of God and man, and place their happiness in the happiness of others, and in the glory of God, they *rejoice always*, and enjoy all the good that comes to their knowledge. They enjoy the houses and lands, and prosperity of the men of the world. They enjoy the temporal and spiritual happiness of their fellow christians, and they enjoy the kingdom of God and all the blessings contained in it. They enjoy all the good they see in this world, at present, and all the good of the world to come, in a lively hope and prospect. God has filled the world with his goodness, and those who have given up their own good for the good of others, enjoy all the goodness he has displayed towards themselves and others. They experimentally know the truth of Christ's declaration and promise, "There is no man that hath left house or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold *now in this time*, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands—and in the world to come eternal life." So long as christians keep themselves in the faith and love of God, and give themselves and all they have to him, *as having nothing, they possess or enjoy all things*. They have more reason to rejoice, and do actually rejoice more than any other men in the world. Their path is not dark and gloomy, but like the rising sun shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

4. It appears from the nature of that self-denial, which the gospel requires, that the more sinners become acquainted with the gospel, the more they are disposed to hate it and reject it. All sinners are lovers of their own selves, and regard their own good supremely and solely, and the good of others, only so far as it tends to promote their own private, personal, and selfish good. But the gospel requires them to deny themselves, and give up all their private, personal, separate good, for

the good of others, and the kingdom of God's sake : and this is diametrically opposite to their selfish hearts ; it is a *hard* saying, they cannot bear to hear it. The whole gospel is a scheme of self-denial, and therefore the whole gospel is perfectly disagreeable to the hearts of sinners, when they clearly understand it. There are many, however, that believe, maintain, and teach, that sinners would love and cordially embrace the gospel, if they only understood it, and that nothing but ignorance prevents their embracing it. But this is contrary to scripture, reason, and fact. Christ said to sinners, "Ye have both *seen* and *hated* both me and my Father." It is contrary to reason to suppose, that sinners who are entirely selfish, should love the gospel, which requires them to give up all they have to embrace it. And it is contrary to fact. The more sinners know the gospel, the more unwilling they are to embrace it. The experiment has been made. The plainer Christ preached the gospel, and the more they understood it, the more they hated and opposed both him and the gospel. The plainer the apostles preached the gospel to sinners, the more they hated and opposed it. And the plainer the gospel is preached at this day, the more the carnal mind of sinners is awakened, and rises in opposition to it. It is found by experience, that it is impossible to preach the gospel plainly and intelligibly to sinners *so as to please them*. The offence of the cross has not ceased. Self-denial cannot be truly explained and exhibited, so as to become pleasing to any selfish heart.

5. It appears from the nature of that self-denial which the gospel requires, why sinners are more willing to embrace any false scheme of religion than the true. We find sinners of all descriptions more willing to embrace Arianism, Socinianism, Arminianism, Antinomianism, and Universalism, than the plain truths of the gospel, and the reason is obvious. The gospel requires self-denial, but no *false* scheme of religion does. Every false scheme of religion teaches men, that they may and can go to heaven, without self-denial, or without giving up all they have for the kingdom of God's sake, or

without unconditional submission, or without being willing that God should dispose of them for time and eternity, according as it shall be most for his own glory. No Arian, no Socinian, no Arminian, no Antinomian, no Universalist ever preaches gospel self-denial, or any doctrine, which flows from it. And all these preachers will tell their hearers, that the gospel doctrine of self-denial, is false and absurd, and ought never to be preached, or believed, or practised. And this is highly pleasing to every unrenewed, unsanctified, and unholy heart. This will account for all the success which false teachers have had, in every age, and in every part of the world. They have left out of the gospel all that is displeasing to sinners, and preached all in the gospel, which is pleasing to them. All men desire salvation, and are highly pleased to be told, that they may have salvation, and retain all their selfish desires, and hopes, and enjoyments. But this is preaching another gospel, than that which Christ and the Apostles preached, and will deprive those who embrace it of all the good the gospel of Christ promises, and subject them to all the evils that it threatens. It most seriously concerns every one to shun and avoid those, who would pervert the gospel of Christ, and lead them in the broad and smooth road to ruin. Christ forewarns men to beware of false teachers, who are wolves in sheep's clothing, and declares, that if the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the ditch, and perish. It is only through the straight and narrow gate of self-denial, that any can enter into the kingdom of heaven. He that hath an ear, let him hear.

6. It appears from the nature of that self-denial which the gospel requires, that sinners have no excuse for not embracing the gospel. The only excuse they make is, that they are *unable*; that they *cannot* embrace it. But there is nothing in the way of their embracing the gospel, except that self-denial which it requires. And it requires self-denial only because it is absolutely necessary in order to be completely happy, both in this world and in the next. It is entirely reasonable.

that they should deny themselves, and place their happiness in the happiness of others, and in the glory of God, which will make them an hundred-fold more happy, than they can be while they enjoy only a private, separate, and selfish good. They have no excuse, therefore, for retaining their selfishness another moment. It is their immediate duty to forsake all for Christ's and the gospel's sake. The apostles did, Zachæus did, and thousands in Christ's and the apostles' days, and millions since. Christ now commands you to take up your cross and follow him, and promises to reward you an hundred-fold both in time and in eternity. It is much easier to be *benevolent* than *selfish*. There is far more pleasure in seeking the things of Christ, than your own things. There is far more happiness in being united with his friends, than in being united with his enemies, who are enemies to *you*, as well as to *him*. It is impossible for you to be united to his enemies, because they cannot be united to you ; or to one another. Selfishness is a *repulsive* principle, and forbids *union*. Be entreated then to renounce it, and become united to Christ, to God, and to all holy beings, and you shall receive an hundred-fold more happiness in *this time*, and in time to come for ever. The good, which you have always been seeking, but which you have never found, you shall immediately find by coming to Christ, taking up your cross, and following him. If you do not give up all that you have, all that you have will be taken from you. This is your only alternative. Choose you this day, whether you will seek to save your life, and lose it ; or voluntarily lose your life, that you may find it.

Finally, if men must give up all they have to be christians, then it is a *great thing* to be a christian. He is essentially different from every sinner in the world. He exercises that pure, disinterested love, that no sinner is willing to exercise, even to obtain eternal life. He is more amiable, more excellent, more worthy of the love of God and man, than any totally selfish creature in the universe. He now enjoys, and will for ever enjoy more happiness, than any selfish heart can feel. He has the

witness in himself that he belongs to Christ, and is a joint heir with him to all the blessedness of the heavenly world. Who, then, but must wish to be a christian? Who, that is one, cannot know it? And who, that is not, cannot but know it?

# SERMON XVII.

THE NATURE AND EFFECT OF DIVINE TEACHING.

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JOHN, VI. 45.

*It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*

THE mere outward means of religious instruction have never had a saving effect upon the minds of men. This has been verified in all ages, and in all nations of the world. The works and providence of God are proper means of religious instruction, which have been afforded to all mankind; but they have not received much knowledge of divine things from them. In addition to these means of divine instruction, God gave the Jews his word, his ordinances, his priests, and his extraordinary prophets; and yet, notwithstanding all these means of light, when our Saviour appeared among them, he found them enveloped in gross darkness. Though he referred them to plain prophecies respecting himself; yet they could not discover his character, nor perceive his divine mission. And though he plainly told them that he came into the world to save sinners, yet they could not be persuaded to come to him, and rely upon him for salvation. This he knew was owing to their moral impotency, which flowed from their moral depravity, and therefore he said unto them, "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." But at the same time, he informed them, in the words of the text, that God could make them able and willing to come to him for life. "It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore, that hath heard,



and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me.”—  
These words lead us to consider two things.

I. How God teaches men; and,

II. Why those whom he teaches come to Christ.

I. Let us consider how God teaches men. The inspired writer evidently supposes, that God teaches in a manner different from all other teachers. The works of God and the creatures of God may be said to teach, but yet they do not teach like God himself. He has a peculiar way of teaching, which is superiour to all other teaching. To be taught of God is something very different from being taught of men. So Christ intimated to Peter, when he acknowledged his divinity. “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” The question, then which still lies before us is, How does God himself teach mankind? To this I answer,

1. He teaches them, by bringing divine and invisible objects *near* to them. Men have the power of *describing*, but not of *presenting* divine and spiritual objects to the mind. Men are naturally disposed to put these objects far away out of their sight. If they think of God and of invisible and eternal realities, they do not realize their relation to them, and connection with them; but view them as objects at a great distance, with which they have little, or no concern. But when God teaches men concerning himself, he draws near to them, and draws them near to himself, so that they cannot help realizing his being and presence. And when he teaches them concerning things unseen and eternal, he makes them realize, that there is such a place as heaven, and such a place as hell, and that they stand upon the verge of eternity, and know not how soon they may be called into it. Men may describe the divine perfections, but God can shew them to sinners. He can bring his power, his wisdom, his justice, his sovereignty, and his mercy so near to them, as to make them feel their reality and weight from day to day and from week to week. Men may describe the righteousness, holiness, and goodness of the divine law. But God

can bring it home to the conscience, and cause sinners to realize the infinite weight and authority of its awful sanctions. He can make them sensible, that it is a living law of the everliving God, which never has been repealed, or abated, but stands in full force, and clothed with all the authority of the supreme sovereign of the universe. Men can describe the vanity of the world, and all its enjoyments. But God can shew sinners the world just as it is, in comparison with the great objects of eternity, and cause them to realize, that it is vanity of vanities, and lighter than a feather in contrast with eternity. Men can describe the heart and lives of sinners, but God can turn their attention inward, and make them see their hearts and lives in all their criminality and ill desert. They naturally overlook themselves, and are strangers to their hearts, and the nature of their conduct. But when God teaches them, he makes them realize the corruption of their hearts and the criminality of their lives.

2. God teaches men, by operating upon their minds as well as by bringing divine objects near to their view. He does both these things at once. While he brings divine objects near, he opens all the powers and faculties of their minds to attend to them. He opens their understanding to perceive clearly the truths and objects he presents to their view. As he opened the understanding of the two disciples to understand Christ's teaching, so he opens the understandings of sinners, whom he teaches the truth concerning his own character, law, and government. He makes them understand what he has said concerning himself, and concerning themselves, in his word. He causes them to realize that he is what he has said he is, and that they are what he has said they are. That he is just in requiring them to love and serve him, and that they are guilty in refusing to love and serve him; that they stand condemned by the law they have broken, and are constantly exposed to deserved destruction. He opens their understanding to perceive the full meaning of these great and solemn truths, which they had often

heard, but never clearly understood and regarded. He not only enlightens their understanding, but awakens their conscience to do its office, and teaches them what is right and what is wrong, what is duty and what is sin. He takes away the mists and clouds, which their corrupt heart had thrown over their conscience, and makes it speak with authority, in approving and condemning according to truth. Thus he awakened the conscience of the malefactor on the cross, who had long remained stupid and blind to his own character and condition. His conscience constrained him to feel and say, that he deserved both temporal and eternal death. Those who had resisted the light and truth, which Christ had exhibited before them, by his miracles, and by his conversation and preaching, were taught of God to see and feel their danger and guilt, by a divine influence upon their understanding and conscience. God awakened their conscience, which condemned them for their aggravated guilt in crucifying the Lord of glory, of whose person, character and gracious design they had been voluntarily and criminally ignorant. After Paul had blindly and obstinately resisted the knowledge of Christ and of himself, God enlightened his understanding and awakened his conscience, to know and feel the truth respecting Christ and himself, which threw him into the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. But after God has thrown light into the understanding, and conviction into the conscience of sinners, he more effectually teaches them, by operating on their *heart*. He has their heart in his hand, and can turn it whithersoever he pleases. When he teaches them savingly, he opens their heart to attend to and receive divine truth, as he opened the heart of Lydia. He gives them a wise and understanding heart. He gives them a spiritual discerning of spiritual things. He gives them a heart to know him. Or as it is expressed in another place, he gives them eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to perceive. He takes away a stony heart and gives them an heart of flesh.— He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness

at first, shines in their heart, to give them the light of the knowledge of his own glory as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ. The opening of the heart is the most effectual method of teaching sinners. When their heart is opened, all their other powers will do their office, and nothing is necessary for their further instruction, but the exhibition of divine truth from time to time.—When this is done, they hear and learn of the Father all that is necessary to prepare and dispose them to come to Christ. I now proceed to show,

II. Why those that are taught of God do come to Christ. They always do come to him. The scripture abounds with instances of such persons coming to Christ. The penitent and divinely taught malefactor immediately cast his eye and his heart upon Christ and sincerely embraced him as an all-sufficient Saviour. The three thousand who were taught of God on the day of pentecost cordially embraced their crucified Redeemer. Cornelius, who had been taught of God, was ready to receive Christ as soon as he was preached to him. Paul, who had opposed and persecuted him, trusted in him for salvation, as soon as he was taught of God. Those who have been taught of God, have always been disposed to come to Christ for salvation. The question now is, why do all such persons come to Christ? There are several plain and obvious reasons why they do this.

I. Because they see their need of Christ. God teaches them their guilt and danger. He makes them see that they are not only exposed to eternal destruction, but justly deserve it: And this leads them to cry, “God be merciful to us sinners.” But by being taught their own characters and the character of God, they are fully convinced, that no mercy can be found out of Christ. God cannot be merciful to them in any other way than that he has devised and revealed in the gospel, through the atonement of Christ. Those who are not taught of God, refuse to come to Christ, because they see no need of coming to him for pardoning mercy. They trust in themselves, that they are righteous, and that

their righteousness is sufficient to entitle them to pardon and acceptance with God. This is the representation, which Christ gives of those, who have not been taught of God, nor seen the plague of their own hearts, nor realized the sentence of condemnation, which God has passed upon them. "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Unrenewed and untaught sinners have neither seen God, nor his law, nor their own hearts, nor their perishing condition, in a true light. But those, who are taught of God, see all these things, in a true light, and are fully convinced, that salvation is to be found in Christ alone, and that there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby they can be saved. They feel themselves shut up to the faith. The law which they have broken is a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, that they may be justified by faith. They cannot see how it is morally possible, that God should be just, and yet justify any but those who come to Christ, and believe in him for salvation.

2. Those who are taught of God come to Christ, because they have become cordially reconciled to God and wish to enjoy his favour. The great obstacle in the way of merely awakened and convinced sinners coming to Christ, is God himself. They are not willing to come to God penitently and submissively. They have strong objections against his character, his designs, his commands, and his terms of mercy. They are not willing that he should have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and require them to submit to his sovereignty, as an indispensable condition of receiving them into his favour. But those who are savingly taught of God are cordially reconciled to him, and heartily give up all their objections against his perfections, his designs, his commands, and his terms of mercy. All impediments of this kind are entirely removed. They have heard, and learned, and seen so much of the Father, as to love him supremely and submit to him unreservedly. They are so sensible of their sinfulness and ill desert in the sight of God, that

they feel, that he has a just right to save, or destroy them for ever. They can adopt the prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." They are willing to return to God, whether he be willing to receive them, or not. They are reconciled to him, whether he be reconciled to them, or not. They feel towards God and themselves, as the prodigal son felt towards his father and himself. When he was taught of God, "he said to himself, how many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father." He was so fully convinced of his father's rectitude, and of his own ill-desert, that he could lay no claim upon his pardoning mercy, and could not ask his father to restore him fully to his favour. So those who have been taught of God, are willing to return to him, and ardently desire his forgiving grace, while they renounce all claims to it, and acknowledge that they may be justly denied. Here the similitude fails; for the prodigal had no mediator; but those who are taught of God and are reconciled to him, have a mediator, and therefore may submissively ask to be completely restored to the forfeited favour of their injured Sovereign, for the *sake of Christ* who has died for them, though not for their *own sake*. And being cordially reconciled to God the Father, they are willing to come to Christ, and rely upon his mediation and atonement, as the sole ground of their complete restoration to the divine favour. Besides,

3. Those who are taught of God will come to Christ, because Christ himself appears supremely amiable and precious. They have seen so much of God, and are so sincerely reconciled to him, that they are prepared to view Christ as the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. Christ's love to his Father, to his law and government, and to perish-

ing sinners, renders him the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely in their view. His divine and human excellencies and his mediatorial offices all concur, to unite them to him, as the branches are united to the vine. The teaching of the Father, by his effectual operations upon their understandings, their consciences, and hearts, draws them to Christ, according to his own representation; "No man can come to me, except the Father, which sent me, draw him." The Father *draws* those whom he has taught, in the day of his power, by making them *willing* to come to Christ. They are drawn, not by *constraint*, but by the cords of love. Their understandings, their consciences, and their hearts are opened to see the truth and feel the force of the Apostle's declarations in the 3d of Romans, concerning the necessity and propriety of sinners coming to Christ for pardon and salvation. "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested—even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe. Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; whom God has set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sin—that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Christ." Those who are taught of God, see the truth of what the Apostle here says of their just condemnation by the law, of the necessity of Christ's atonement and of the propriety of their coming to him, and believing in his atonement, in order to obtain pardon and acceptance in the sight of God. In this view of God, of Christ, and of themselves they freely and joyfully come to Christ, being heavy laden with guilt, that they may find rest to their souls in the favour of God.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God teaches men in the manner which has been described; then his special grace is irresistible. It is certainly grace in God to teach sinners what they are unwilling to know, and what they must know in order to be saved. This is teaching them what men and means cannot teach them, and what God teaches some, and not all. It is, therefore, not only grace, but special grace. And the manner in which God teaches some in distinction from others, shows that his special grace is irresistible. When he teaches by men and means only, which is his common way of teaching all without exception, sinners *can* and *do* resist his common grace. The old world resisted his grace, which led him to say, "my spirit shall not always strive with man." Isaiah says of the impenitent Israelites in the wilderness, with whom God used the most powerful external means of instruction, "But they rebelled, and vexed his holy spirit." And Stephen says to unbelieving and impenitent sinners, who had been externally taught by Christ and by himself, "ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart, ye do always *resist* the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye." Those, whom God teaches only by his word and providence, universally resist his common grace. But when he teaches them, by operating internally upon their understandings, hearts, and consciences, they cannot resist his special grace, which takes away the sole ground and cause of resistance. This special operation slays the enmity of their hearts, and fills them with holy, benevolent affections. It makes them willing, in the day of his power, to be reconciled and submissive to his will, and to the terms of life, proposed in the gospel. They are *persuaded*, not compelled, to come to Christ for salvation. Those, who disbelieve and deny the doctrine of special grace in the conversion of sinners, disbelieve and deny it, upon the supposition, that it is of the nature of compulsion, and inconsistent with the freedom and choice of the converted. But *making* men willing



cannot be inconsistent with their freely willing and choosing. The irresistible grace of God is irresistible, only because the subjects of it have no will, no desire, or inclination, to resist it. This irresistible grace, which makes men love and obey God, he continually exercises towards them, from the moment they are converted, until they reach the kingdom of glory. Hence says the Apostle, "whom God predestinates, them he also calls; and whom he calls, them he also justifies; and whom he justifies, them he also glorifies." It is entirely owing to the special, and irresistible grace of God, that some are saved, while others are lost. God does something different for those that are saved, from what he does for those that are lost. He makes some willing to come to Christ for salvation, but not others; and those whom he does not make willing to come to Christ for salvation, remain unwilling and freely reject the counsel of God to their own destruction.

2. If men are taught of God in the manner that has been described; then repentance towards God is always *previous* to faith in Christ. None will come to Christ, until they are taught of God, to love him and his law, and to condemn and loathe themselves for their disaffection to his character, and disobedience to his commands. Love to God and repentance of sin, not only may be, but must be, before any can or will love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and believe in him for salvation. Repentance cannot be before love, nor faith before love and repentance both. If this were not true, there would be no necessity or occasion of their being taught of the Father, in the manner that has been mentioned, in order to their coming to Christ. Our Saviour supposed, that none would come to him, before they had been taught and learned of the Father, his character and their own. And it is impossible to see why any should come to Christ, before they have learned by a divine, special influence on their hearts, what God is and what they are. Before they have seen and loved God, and seen and hated their own conduct,

they cannot see their need of Christ, nor the necessity of renouncing self-dependence, and relying alone upon Christ for pardon and acceptance with God. Though the views and exercises of sinners before their hearts are changed, are often various; some having a greater sense of danger than of guilt, some having a greater sense of guilt than of danger, and some continuing much longer in this state of bondage than others; yet when their hearts are changed, their exercises are uniform in order, though they may not be sensible of that order. They love God, hate sin, and believe in Christ. This is the real order of their exercises. But some may be more sensible of love to God at first. Some may be more sensible of love to Christ at first. And some may be more sensible of self-loathing and self-condemnation for sin at first. This is easy to be accounted for, because before their hearts were changed, they had a speculative knowledge of God, a speculative knowledge of sin, and a speculative knowledge of Christ. As soon, therefore, as their hearts are changed, they may instantly love God, and almost instantly hate sin for being against God whom they love, and almost as instantaneously love Christ for condemning sin in the flesh, and making atonement for it. But their minds may dwell more upon one of these objects, than another, and consequently they may feel more sensibly affected towards one, than towards another, though really affected by each. It is by no means certain, that those who most sensibly exercise love to God at first, do not hate sin, before they love Christ. It is not certain, that those who most sensibly love Christ at first, do not love God and hate sin, before they love Christ. And it is not certain, that those who most sensibly hate sin at first, do not love God before they hate sin. Converts may be very sensible of the various exercises of their hearts, without being sensible of the order and immediate connection of their exercises. The experience of christians is no evidence, that love is not before repentance, and repentance before faith. This point must be determined by the na-

ture of those exercises, and the representations of scripture. The nature of these exercises evidently requires that love should be before repentance, and repentance before faith. If we look into the old testament, we shall find repentance always placed before pardon, through the sacrifices which typified Christ, in whom true penitents virtually believed. And if we look into the New Testament, we shall find repentance placed before faith. Christ taught men to repent, and then believe. And Paul taught repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Whenever repentance and faith are mentioned together, repentance is mentioned before faith. Though some may consider this as a matter of mere speculation, yet it is of great importance to refute Antinomians, who place faith before love and repentance, and consequently make all the christian graces, the fruit of an unholy and unrenewed heart.

3. If God teaches men in the manner that has been described, before they come to Christ; then there is more ground to hope, that those will be saved, who are under his peculiar teaching, than that those will who are not under it. When God himself begins to operate upon the understandings and consciences of sinners, there is ground to hope, that he will continue to operate, until he changes their hearts. It is true, that God can teach partially, and leave those to perish in their obstinacy, whose eyes are wide open. He often does enlighten the understanding and awaken the conscience, without changing the heart. But when we see sinners awakened and convinced, there is ground to hope, that their awakenings and convictions will terminate in conversion; not indeed on account of any goodness in them, but because God has taken them into his own hand, and is able to subdue their enmity, and reconcile them to himself, and so draw them to Christ.—Awakened and convinced sinners often imagine, that they really seek and strive to come to Christ, but if this were true, there would be no occasion of the Father's drawing them to Christ. They are so far from seeking

and striving to come to Christ, that they are seeking and striving to be saved without him. And this is the reason why they cannot come to Christ without being drawn of the Father. This preparatory work of the Father ought to be distinguished from the preparatory work of sinners. God prepares sinners to come to Christ, but they never prepare themselves to come.— Our Saviour himself says, they *will not* come except they be drawn. And no sinners know before they are drawn, that they ever shall be drawn, for it depends upon the sovereign pleasure of God, whether he will draw them, or leave them to perish for ever.

4. It appears from the manner of God's teaching sinners, that his special teaching does not throw any difficulty in the way of their coming to Christ. His peculiar teaching does not throw any difficulty in the way of their being saved, but directly tends to remove the difficulty, which they throw in their own way, that is, their unwillingness to come to Christ. By his teaching, he brings himself and divine things near to them, opens their understandings to see them in all their weight and importance, and awakens their conscience to feel their obligations, to feel properly towards himself, towards themselves, towards eternity, and towards him, who has brought life and immortality to light, and freely offers to save them from the wrath to come. By teaching them these things, he points out the way to eternal life, without throwing any thing in the way of their coming. But you are now ready to ask, Is not this special teaching special grace, without which we *cannot* come to Christ? It is, indeed, special grace, without which you *will not* come to Christ, but *with which*, you will come. And can that which makes you *willing* to come, be any difficulty in the way of your coming? Special grace does not give you any new *power*, but only a new *choice*. Special grace shows you, that there is no difficulty in the way of your coming to Christ, but what you make; and at the same time removes the very difficulty you do make. Your refusing to come to Christ makes the only difficulty in the way of your coming;

and special grace makes you willing, which removes that difficulty. You choose to misunderstand and misrepresent special grace, in order to make it a ground of excuse for not coming to Christ. How absurd is it for you to say, we cannot realize the being and perfections of God, and the invisible things of the invisible world, unless God enlightens you, when you are conscious you do not desire to be enlightened? Or to say you cannot realize your obligation to approve of these divine objects, when you are conscious, that you do not desire to realize your obligations? Or to say you cannot come to Christ, without being drawn, when you are conscious that you are unwilling to come to him, and even unwilling to be made willing?

5. If those whom God himself effectually teaches by his special grace, will come to Christ, then those whom he does not thus effectually teach, will not come to Christ. All mere external instructions they can and will resist. They will be of no avail to draw them one step towards Christ. All outward means often fail to make sinners read the bible, which they have in their hands, and which they have time and opportunity to read. They prefer reading any other book, rather than the bible: or they choose not to read it at all.—Outward means often fail of leading sinners to call upon God in secret or private, or of leading them to the house of God, or disposing them to receive any benefit from it, if they do come. All outward means have always failed of drawing sinners to Christ, so long as God withheld the teachings of his special grace.—What a variety of external means was used with the sinners in Zion. They had line upon line, and precept upon precept, but instead of bringing forth grapes, they brought forth wild grapes. What a variety of means are now using with sinners every where, but they produce no salutary effect, only when and where God is pleased to instruct them himself. How easy it is for God to destroy sinners. It is only to afford them *external* teaching, and deny them *internal*. And he has a perfect right to deny them internal teaching. He is

under no obligation to take them into his own hand, to enlighten their understanding, or awaken their conscience, or to soften their hearts. It is only for him to let them alone, and they will certainly destroy themselves. Has not God long let them alone, and have they not long remained untaught, though they have seen the hand of God in his providence, and heard his voice in his word? Has not a spirit of slumber seized their minds, and do they not grope in darkness at noon-day? They know not at what they stumble. Their feet stand on slippery places, and every thing within them, and without them, is constantly pushing them on to the gulph of destruction. While God is letting them alone, their situation is growing more and more dangerous every day. And they and others may despair of the efficacy of all external means alone, to awaken, convince, or convert them. These they have resisted, and will continue to resist, unless God, by his special grace, removes their resistance.

6. This subject affords ground of hope, that some who are now in the path to ruin, will be sooner or later taught of God, and drawn to Christ. God is able to awaken the most stupid, to convince the most hardened, and make the most obstinate willing to come to Christ. The father has promised to do this for all whom he has given to his Son, and his Son places full confidence in the faithfulness of his Father. Hence he says, "all that the Father hath given me, shall come to me." If there be any here, whom God has given to Christ, and whom he has not savingly taught, these he will take into his own hand, and effectually teach them the straight and narrow way to eternal life. He has hitherto delayed to do this, for wise and good reasons; either because he is waiting to make a more signal display of his almighty and sovereign grace, till they arrive at the brink of destruction; or because he is waiting to be inquired of by his friends, to take away the hard, stoney, stubborn hearts of his enemies. Those therefore, who have been taught of God, have great encouragement to cry sincerely and mightily to

him, to arise and plead his own cause, and have mercy upon those, who are abusing his mercy, and filling up the measure of their sins, and ripening themselves for ruin. You have a right to the promises of God. It is written in the prophets, "and they shall be all taught of God;" that is, all the elect. And it is written in the psalms. "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

# SERMON XVIII.

THE PECULIAR SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANS.

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I. CORINTHIANS ii. 12.

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*

IT seems to be generally supposed, that experimental religion is something very mysterious and unintelligible. There was a sect of christians in the third century who called themselves Mysticks. They maintained, that the bible is a mystical book, and ought to be understood and explained in a *mystical*, and *not in a literal sense*. This opinion has never since been entirely exploded. The serious and devout William Law, who wrote excellently on christian perfection, and several other subjects, finally died a Mystick. There is something of a mystical nature to be discovered in many of the old divines, who wrote upon experimental religion, under the title of the mystery of godliness, and the mystery of sanctification. Even now we often meet with the phrases, the mysteries of the gospel, the mysteries of religion, and the mysteries of our holy religion. The phrases sound so scripturally, that they are generally well received, though seldom understood. And it must be allowed, that the sacred writers use so many figures, metaphors, similitudes, and parables, that it does seem at first view, as though the doctrines and spirit of the gospel were in some measure mystical. At least, this idea seems to be suggested by the Apostle's mode of speaking in the text. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we



might know the things that are freely given to us of God." The plain import of these words is,

That God has given christians a peculiar spirit, by which they have a peculiar knowledge of divine things.

I shall endeavour to describe,

I. The peculiar spirit which God has given to christians; and,

II. Show that this peculiar spirit does give them a peculiar knowledge of divine things.

1. I am to describe the peculiar spirit which God has given to christians.

By a spirit peculiar to christians is meant a spirit, which no other men possess. This is evidently what the Apostle means by saying, "now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God." God has given christians a spirit, which he has not given to the world, and which is directly opposite to the spirit of the world. If, then, we can ascertain what the spirit of the world is, we may ascertain what the spirit of God is, which he has given to christians. The spirit of the world is that spirit, which is common to mankind in general, and which governs all their conduct so long as they continue in a state of nature. It is the spirit of the prince of the power of the air. Or to speak in plainer terms, it is a *selfish* spirit, which leads men to seek their own private, separate interest, in opposition to the glory of God and the general good of the universe. Selfishness reigns in the hearts of the men of the world, and is the essence of all the moral evil that overspreads the earth. But the apostle tells us, that God has given christians a spirit, which is diametrically opposite to the spirit of the world; and this must certainly be the spirit of *benevolence*. There are but two kinds of moral exercises, which are diametrically opposite to each other, in moral beings. These are *benevolent* and *selfish* exercises. They all possess either a spirit of benevolence, or a spirit of selfishness, and are either holy, or unholy, accordingly as they possess the one, or the other of these essentially different exercises of heart. And if we now search the

scriptures, we shall find, that the spirit which God gives, when he renews and sanctifies men, is the spirit of benevolence, which is the moral image of the Deity. Our Saviour says, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And the reason is, "that which is born of the flesh is *flesh*; and that which is born of the spirit is *spirit*." And that spirit, which is the fruit of the spirit is *love*. So says the apostle John. "Love is of God, and every one that *loveth* is *born of God*." When God regenerates any person, he sheds abroad his love in his heart. He gives him an heart after his own heart, which is an heart of love. When God foretold his purpose of renewing the hearts of his people in Babylon, who were pining away in their iniquities, he promised to give them a new, tender, benevolent heart. "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you." When God renews men in the spirit of their minds, he forms their hearts after his own moral image; and his own moral image is *love*, which comprises all his moral perfections. The spirit which is of God, is a Godlike spirit, or a spirit of pure, disinterested love; which is the essence of all virtue or moral excellence, and which is perfectly opposed to the spirit of the world. This spirit of universal benevolence, is so peculiar to christians, that the least spark of it is never found in the hearts of sinners, who love themselves solely and supremely. I now proceed to show,

II. That this peculiar spirit which christians receive from God, gives them a peculiar knowledge of spiritual and divine things. This the Apostle expressly asserts in the text. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might *know* the things that are freely given to us of God." To illustrate the truth of this divine declaration, it may be observed,

1. That the spirit of peculiar divine love, which christians receive from God, removes that ignorance

of spiritual and divine things, which is peculiar to sinners. The bible every where represents sinners as deaf, and blind, and ignorant, in regard to every thing of a spiritual and divine nature. Moses says that sinners in his day, had not eyes to see, nor ears to hear, nor hearts to perceive the displays of God's wisdom, power, and goodness towards his people. Solomon says, "the way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble." And Paul represents sinners, "as having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the *ignorance* that is in them. *because of the blindness of their heart.*" It appears from these passages of scripture, that the peculiar ignorance of sinners, in respect to spiritual and divine objects, arises altogether from the depravity of their hearts, which darkens and blinds their understandings. But if this be true, then the peculiar spirit of pure benevolence, which christians have received from God, must remove from their minds all that ignorance of divine things, which is peculiar to sinners. Pure benevolence must necessarily take away from christians their former ignorance, which arose from selfishness. As the removal of scales from a blind man's eyes, will remove all the blindness, which arose from those scales; so the giving to christians a spirit of benevolence, must certainly remove all that blindness or ignorance, which arose from their former selfishness. If selfishness produces a certain kind of ignorance of spiritual things, then benevolence must remove that certain kind of ignorance, by producing a certain kind of knowledge of the same divine objects. And thus the apostle sets the peculiar knowledge, which christians have of spiritual things, in direct contrast with the peculiar ignorance of sinners. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are *spiritually* discerned. But he that is *spiritual* judgeth all things." As soon as christians receive that spirit of benevolence, which cometh from God, they become *spiritual*, and as soon

as they become spiritual, they discern those spiritual things, which sinners cannot discern, because of the blindness of their selfish hearts. That benevolence in the minds of christians, which removes selfishness, at the same time removes the spiritual ignorance, which flows from selfishness. This the apostle plainly intimates in his second epistle to the Corinthians. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." But he subjoins, "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Here the apostle plainly declares, that when God shines in the hearts of christians, he removes that blindness or ignorance, which is peculiar to those that are lost; and at the same time, gives them a peculiar *knowledge* of his own glory in the face of Jesus Christ. And he expresses this idea more fully in the third chapter of his second epistle to the Corinthians. Speaking of the Israelites in the wilderness, he says, "their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament—and is still upon their hearts: nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that spirit: and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." The spirit of benevolence never fails to remove that spirit of selfishness, from which all spiritual ignorance arises.

2. The way in which the scripture represents God as *enlightening* the minds of men in the peculiar knowledge of himself, is by changing their hearts, or giving them a pure, benevolent spirit. God directed Jeremiah to tell sinners in Israel: "I will give them an *heart to know me.*" As their ignorance of God arose

from the blindness of their hearts, so in order to remove that kind of ignorance, he determined to give them a wise and understanding heart, or a spirit of true benevolence. When Peter professed the true knowledge of Christ, he answered and said unto him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." God had converted Peter, and given him a holy and benevolent heart to know him the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he had sent, which prepared him for eternal life. Paul says to the christians of Ephesus, "ye were sometimes *darkness*, but now ye are *light* in the Lord." God had opened the eyes of their understanding, and turned them from darkness to light; by giving them an heart to perceive the beauty and glory of divine things. The apostle Peter conveys the same sentiment in what he says to christians in general. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a *peculiar* people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of *darkness* into *his marvellous light*." And the apostle John writes to believers in the same strain. "But ye have an unction from the Holy one, and ye *know all things*." And again he says, "beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and *knoweth God*." These, and a great many other passages of scripture of the same import, plainly teaches us, that the way in which God teaches christians the peculiar knowledge of divine things, is by giving them his own spirit, which is a spirit of love, or pure benevolence. This leads me to observe furthermore,

3. That there is no other possible way, by which God can give christians the peculiar or *experimental* knowledge of himself and divine objects, but by giving them his own spirit, or shedding abroad his love in their hearts. He cannot convey this peculiar spiritual knowledge of divine things to any of mankind, by mere inspiration. He inspired Saul, but this did not remove the blindness of his heart. He in-

spired Balaam, but this did not remove the blindness of his heart. He inspired Caiphas, but this did not remove the blindness of his heart. And Paul supposes a man may have the gift of prophecy, may understand all mysteries and all speculative knowledge, and may have a miraculous faith, sufficient to remove mountains, and yet be totally destitute of the true love and knowledge of God. The reason of this is plain, because inspiration has no tendency to change the heart, but only to convey more speculative knowledge to the understanding. For the same reason, God cannot give men the peculiar, spiritual knowledge of himself by *moral suasion*, or the mere exhibition of divine truth. If he should give them a clear, correct, and comprehensive knowledge of all the truths in the gospel; this alone would have no tendency to soften or subdue their hard hearts, or make them know what it is to be holy as he is holy, and perfect as he is perfect. Nor can he give them a spiritual discerning of spiritual things, by mere convictions of guilt, fears of punishment, or hopes of happiness. For there is no connection between the common effects of the common influence of the divine spirit, and the peculiar, experimental knowledge of the divine beauty of divine objects. But though God cannot give men this peculiar knowledge, either by inspiration, or by moral suasion, or by mere awakenings and convictions; yet there is one way and only one in which he can give it, and that is, by giving them his spirit; or a benevolent heart. As soon as they partake of the divine nature, they immediately have a peculiar, experimental knowledge of the things of God. For,

In the first place, by exercising benevolence themselves, they *know* how all benevolent beings feel. They know how God feels, how Christ feels, how the Holy spirit feels, how angels feel, how the spirits of just men made perfect feel; and how all their fellow christians feel; who have drunk into the same spirit, and exercised the same benevolent affections. So the apostle argues before and in the text; "For what man

knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might *know* the things that are freely given unto us of God” As one man knows what his rational faculties are, so he knows what another man’s rational faculties are; or as one man knows what his own selfish feelings are, so he knows what another man’s selfish feelings are; or as one man knows what his own benevolent feelings are, so he knows what another man’s benevolent feelings are. Just so says the apostle, we who are christians, and have received the spirit which is God, *know* the things of God, that is, what a benevolent spirit he possesses, and what a benevolent spirit he has given unto us. As soon as God gives christians his spirit, he gives them the knowledge of the holy exercises of his own heart; and of the holy exercises of all who possess his spirit. For the spirit of benevolence is the same in God, in Christ, in angels, and in men. Hence Christians are said “to be renewed in *knowledge* after the image of God.” And when they are thus renewed, it is said, “old things are passed away, and all things are become new.” They have a new experimental knowledge of God, and of all holy beings, in respect to the moral beauty and excellence of their characters.

In the second place, the peculiar spirit which they have received from God, gives them a peculiar *knowledge* of the peculiar happiness of those who possess the spirit of benevolence. Nothing produces such pure, refined and exalted felicity, as holy love. The supreme blessedness of heaven flows from the mutual love which reigns in the hearts of all its holy inhabitants. This peculiar happiness christians know by their own experience, for they have actually enjoyed that heavenly happiness which flows from brotherly love. So the apostle says, when speaking expressly upon this subject. “But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of

man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. *But God hath revealed them to us by his spirit.*" And he adds, "we have received the spirit which is of God, *that we might know* the things which are freely given to us of God." Though no *natural* man's eye, or ear, or heart, can perceive the things which God has prepared for them that love him; yet those who do love him, *know* what he has prepared for them, because he has given them his spirit of benevolence, that they *might* know the spiritual blessedness laid up for them in another world. Every christian *knows* the nature of the enjoyments of heaven, though he has never been there. He knows that heavenly happiness arises from the holy love that reigns in the hearts of holy beings. The mutual benevolence of the heavenly inhabitants diffuses mutual joy and complacency through all the mansions of the blessed. All real christians, who possess this pure benevolent spirit, must therefore know the *nature* of that happiness, and of those enjoyments which God has prepared for them, and which they shall receive when they shall take possession of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Finally, the benevolent spirit which christians have received from God, necessarily gives them a peculiar *knowledge* of the peculiar truths of the gospel. The whole scheme of the gospel was devised and adopted in benevolence, is carried on by benevolence, and will be completed by benevolence. Benevolence, therefore, prepares christians to *understand it*. Hence the apostle exhorts them, "to be rooted and grounded in *love*, that they may be able to *comprehend* with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to *know* the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge:" That is, the knowledge of those who are destitute of true benevolence. As all the doctrines, precepts, promises, and threatenings of the gospel, are founded in *love*; so none but christians who are rooted and grounded in *love*, can have a peculiar, spiritual knowledge, not only of holy beings and holy enjoyments, but of holy and divine truths. Benevolence is



the key to unlock the most profound and difficult, and important doctrines of the gospel, and prepare the mind to discern the beauty and consistency of them. These are all easy, says Solomon, to them *who understand*, or who have a spiritual discerning of spiritual things, which flows from a wise, a benevolent, and understanding heart.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. If the peculiar knowledge, which christians have of God and of divine things, arises from benevolence; then there is nothing *mysterious* in *experimental religion*. Many seem to think, that there is something mysterious in experimental religion, and that those who have experienced religion, understand something mysterious, which those who are in a state of unrenewed nature, have not natural faculties to understand. There are but two real mysteries in the gospel, and those are the doctrine of the blessed trinity, and the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ. These are strict and proper mysteries, which no created being is capable of understanding, and which christians are no more capable of understanding, than any other men. But there are no other doctrines of the gospel, which are mysterious, and incomprehensible by mankind. Though it be more difficult to gain a speculative knowledge of some doctrines of the gospel, than of others; yet sinners are as capable of gaining a speculative knowledge of the difficult doctrines of the gospel, as christians. The spirit which they have received from God has given them no new natural powers, and no new speculative knowledge of the gospel. It has only given them an experimental knowledge of God and divine objects, which arises entirely from their benevolent hearts. They know nothing about religion but what any sinners might know, if their hearts were right. It is true, they are regenerated; but regeneration consists in love; they are sanctified; but sanctification consists in love; they have a new heart; but a new

heart consists in love; they have new knowledge; but their new knowledge consists in love; they have new joys, new hopes, new peace; but all these arise from love. They have experienced no other change, but a change from sin to holiness, or from selfishness to benevolence. They see no objects but what they have seen before, and understand no truths but what they understood before. There is nothing more mysterious in loving God, than in hating him, or in loving divine objects, than in hating them; or in being united to God, than in being alienated from him; or in being led by the spirit of God, than being led by the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience. The men of the world love to hear experimental religion represented as mysterious, because they are ready to conclude that they are excusable for not understanding what is mysterious, and beyond their power to understand, and for not being and doing what they are told is a mystery, and beyond their power to know, to be, and to do, until they experience a supernatural and mysterious change. There is no mystery at all in experimental religion. This clearly appears from the single consideration, that all that is contained in it, may be explained intelligibly to the meanest capacity. All the essential doctrines of the gospel may be explained, and all the duties of the gospel may be explained, and love to these doctrines and these duties may be explained; but if they were mysterious, they could not be explained; for no real mystery can be explained. All that the scripture means by christians being born again; being called out of darkness into marvellous light, being made new creatures, being led by the spirit, being spiritually minded, walking in the spirit, having their conversation in heaven, and enjoying communion with God, may be clearly explained, and understood by those who perfectly hate all spiritual and divine objects. A sinner can understand how a christian feels, as well as an holy angel can understand how a sinner feels. Though an angel never experienced *selfishness*, yet he knows enough about it to *hate* it; and though a

sinner never experienced holiness, yet he knows enough about it to hate it. Though sinners never had that love to God, in which experimental religion consists; yet they know enough about it to *hate* it. They sometimes are ready to think and say, that if they only *knew* what experimental religion was, they would love and practise it. But when it is clearly and intelligibly explained to them, it never fails to excite the enmity of their carnal mind against it. Let the experimental exercise of supreme love to God be intelligibly and correctly explained to them, and they will oppose it with all their hearts. Supreme love to God implies loving him more than any other and all other objects, and being willing to give up any other, and all other objects for the sake of promoting his glory. So our Saviour explained supreme love to God, and taught his disciples to give up father, or mother, brother, or sister, houses, or lands, natural life, or eternal life, for the honour of God and the interests of his kingdom. Upon which one exclaimed, "Who then can be saved!" All experimental religion consists in just such disinterested benevolence. And is this a mystery which sinners cannot understand? By no means: they can fully understand and oppose it. All the religion which the gospel requires, is a *reasonable service*, and ought to be represented in a plain and intelligible manner.

2. If the peculiar knowledge and views which christians have of divine things, arise from benevolence; then there is no superstition, or enthusiasm in vital piety, or experimental religion. The enemies of the gospel often represent all pious and devout christians, as either superstitious, or enthusiastick. If they are very strict, in avoiding all appearances of evil, in condemning all sinful practices, and in discharging all the private and publick duties of devotion, they are apt to call them superstitious. Or if they are very zealous in maintaining and defending the doctrines of the gospel, in promoting the cause of religion, and in opposing all religious errors and delusions, they are apt to call them zealots and enthusiasts. But though pi-

ous and devout christians may sometimes be superstitious, and some times enthusiastick; yet their vital piety, or experimental religion, does not consist in either superstition or enthusiasm, but in pure benevolence, which leads those who possess it, to hate and oppose all superstition and enthusiasm. This will appear, if we only consider in what either superstition or enthusiasm consists. Superstition consists in *imaginary fears* of signs, omens, or the power and influence of some invisible evil spirits. The Athenians were too superstitious; they were afraid of bad signs, ill omens, and the power of inferiour false gods; and used a great many unlawful and absurd means to escape imaginary dangers. And all heathen nations are still too superstitious, and are all their life-time in bondage, through imaginary fears. Nor are multitudes in a christian land free from such superstition. But pure benevolence is the most perfect and infallible antidote against superstition. The supreme love of God, takes away the fear of man, the fear of the great adversary, and the fear of every inferiour, malignant spirit. While christians supremely love, and entirely trust in God, they fear nothing but disobedience. They are not anxious to know what future good or evil awaits them; because they believe that God governs all things, and will cause all things to work together for their good. Enthusiasm consists in a zeal not according to knowledge, which disposes men to form a false estimate of things, and to pursue *less important*, instead of *more important* objects. Some are enthusiastically engaged in pursuing visionary schemes of wealth, some in pursuing schemes of knowledge, some in pursuing visionary schemes of ambition, some in pursuing visionary schemes of religion, and some in zealously practising one religious duty, to the neglect of other and more important duties. There are a vast many kinds and shades of enthusiasm. But piety or experimental religion, which flows from that pure spirit of benevolence, that christians have received from God, never leads them into false zeal or enthusiasm; but directly tends

to lead them to a true estimate of duties and objects, and to pursue each according to their relative magnitude and importance. Of all men in the world true christians are the freest from both superstition and enthusiasm; though, at the same time, they possess the purest, the warmest, and most persevering zeal in doing what is right, in shunning what is wrong, and in opposing what is evil.

3. If the peculiar knowledge, which christians have of divine things, arises from a spirit of benevolence; then they who are real christians may *know* that they are such. The spirit which they have received from God, bears witness with their spirit, that they are the children of God. So the apostle reasons in the eighth of Romans. "As many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father. The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." The primitive christians knew that they were children of God, because they had received the spirit of God, which was the spirit of adoption. All christians at this day have the same spirit of adoption, which gives them the same evidence of being the children of God. The spirit of adoption is essentially different from the spirit of the world, and produces essentially different effects, by which it may be distinguished from the spirit of the world. The spirit of the world is a spirit of selfishness, which disposes men to love the world, and the men of the world; but the spirit which is of God is a spirit of benevolence, which leads men to love God, and the children of God. The apostle John says, "we *know* that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." The love which all true christians have to the friends of God, is an infallible evidence of their having received the grace of God in truth, whether they attend to and distinguish this evidence, or not. They have the

witness in themselves, and ought to see it, and praise God for it. And were it not for some remaining selfish affection, every true christian would know that he is so.

4. If the spirit which christians have received from God, gives them a peculiar knowledge of God and of divine truths and objects; then they may always be able to give a reason of the hope that is in them. Though they are not able to exhibit all the external evidences in favour of the divinity of the gospel; yet they are able to tell what *internal* impressions and effects the great *truths* of the gospel have produced in their minds. The reason of their hope is not a knowledge of any *new* truths contained in the gospel; but it is a *belief* and *love* of those truths which they had known before, and which carry internal evidence of their divinity and importance. They know the gospel is divine, by the divine effects it has produced in their hearts. This was the primary and solid ground upon which the disciples of Christ built their hopes of eternal life. When some of his nominal disciples went back and walked no more with him, then he said to the twelve, "will ye also go away?" Then Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we *believe*, and are *sure*, that thou art that Christ, the son of the living God." Unlearned christians may exercise as strong a faith in the gospel, and build as firm a hope of salvation upon it, as the most learned christians. They are able, therefore, to give a good reason of the hope that is in them, and to tell why they are not atheists, nor deists, nor mere *nominal*, but real christians. There have been a vast many more *unlearned* than *learned* christians, who have sealed their faith with their blood, and laid down their lives in testimony of the truth and divinity of the gospel; which is the highest evidence they could give of their well grounded hope of eternal life.

5. If christians know that they are christians, by the spirit which they have received from God; then sin-

ners may know that they are sinners, by the spirit of the world, which reigns within them and governs all their conduct. They are more constantly and entirely under the dominion of a *selfish* spirit, than christians are under a *benevolent* spirit. They have clear, constant, and full evidence, that they are sinners, and that every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts, is evil, and only evil continually. But though they always act from selfishness, and invariably seek their own good solely and supremely; yet their selfishness, which is desperately *wicked*, is at the same time *deceitful* above all things. The selfishness of Satan sometimes disposes him to put on the appearance of an angel of light; and so the selfishness of sinners sometimes leads them to put on the appearance of the children of light, and to do the same things that christians do. By this they often deceive themselves as well as others, and really doubt whether they are sinners, or whether there is any essential difference between them and real christians. But if they would only form their opinion of themselves, by *internal motives*, instead of their *external conduct*, they would find no ground to doubt of their having the spirit of the world, and always acting from entirely selfish and sinful motives, which are directly contrary to the spirit of benevolence, which is of God, and which governs the hearts and conduct of real christians. There are probably many more doubting sinners, than doubting christians; but neither have any good reason for doubting, for they both might know what manner of spirit they are of, and in what path they are walking. Doubting sinners are in a most dangerous and deplorable condition. They are in doubt whether they are walking in the strait and narrow path to eternal life, or whether they are walking in the broad road to ruin. They are in darkness and see no light, and know not at what they stumble. No human means can remove their darkness and ignorance, and give them that light and knowledge, which arises from the spirit which is of God. No truths which can be exhibited before their eyes, no

addresses that can be made to their understandings, and no convictions that can be produced in their consciences, by the common influences of the divine spirit, can remove their ignorance, and give them that peculiar knowledge which comes from God, and can make them wise unto salvation. They are in a morally helpless and hopeless condition, and nothing can prevent their lying down in everlasting darkness and despair, but the sovereign and unpromised mercy of God.

6. If christians have received the spirit which is of God, and which gives them a peculiar knowledge of spiritual and divine things; then the world have no reason to think it strange, that they treat them according to their enlightened views and feelings. They have no reason to think it strange, that christians, whose hearts are purified, and whose understandings are enlightened, hate their selfish spirit, which God hates, condemn their vain and sinful ways, which God condemns, avoid their company, which God requires them to avoid, and use every proper method to restrain, reform, and convert them from the error of their ways, which God has commanded them to use. They possess a spirit that is in direct contrariety to the spirit of the world, and they cannot act consistently, unless they manifest their spirit and condemn, and oppose that which the men of the world highly esteem, but which is an abomination in the sight of God. Though sinners often complain of christians for their strictness, they have no reason to complain, but ought to be thankful for their admonitions and restraints.



## SERMON XIX.

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION THROUGH THE ATONEMENT.

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COLOSSIANS i. 14.

*In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.*

The apostle rejoiced, that the Colossians had received the grace of God in truth, that they had been made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, that they had been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son, "in whom," he says, "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." The apostle here represents God as granting men renewing grace and a title to eternal life as something distinct from *pardoning mercy*, which he ascribes solely to the blood or atonement of Christ. God can as a sovereign, grant men regenerating grace, before he pardons them through the redemption of Christ; and after he has pardoned them through the redemption of Christ, he can, as a sovereign, grant them every temporal, spiritual, and eternal favour he pleases. The atonement of Christ is the sole ground upon which God pardons or justifies believers, but it is only the *occasion* of his bestowing other blessings upon both believers and unbelievers. Forgiveness of sins is that only, which God bestows upon men entirely on the ground of the atoning blood of Christ. The letter as well as the spirit of the text allows us to say,

That God forgives or justifies believers solely through the redemption or atonement of Christ. In order to set this subject in a true light, I shall,

I. Show what is implied in forgiveness ;

II. Show that the atonement of Christ is the sole ground of forgiveness ; And

III. Show that all other blessings come to mankind merely in consequence of Christ's atonement.

I. Let us consider what is to be understood by God's forgiving, or pardoning, or justifying believers. I use all these terms as synonymous ; because to forgive, to pardon, and to justify believers, are phrases which the inspired writers use to signify the same thing. Accordingly, I shall use each of these terms in the same sense in the present discourse. Sin is a transgression of the law, and the wages of sin is death. Believers as well as others have transgressed the law, and deserved the eternal death which it threatens to every transgressor. By God's forgiving them, therefore, we are to understand his pardoning or not punishing their iniquities ; or his remitting or not inflicting the penalty of the law upon them. This is the strict and proper meaning of forgiveness ; which, when *complete*, implies an entire removal of all the penal evils that the transgressor has incurred. When Pharaoh forgave his chief butler, he removed all the penal evils of his offence, and restored him to his former office. But there may be a *partial* forgiveness of an offence, without removing all the penal evils of it. A privy counsellor may prove unfaithful and deserve to die ; but the king may *partially* forgive him, and only displace and disgrace him. In forgiving or justifying believers, God removes the condemnation of the law, and restores them to his forfeited favour. Christ says, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation ; but is passed from death unto life." And the apostle says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus," by a sentence of justification. After believers are forgiven or justified, it is consistent for God to exercise not only the love of benevolence, but the love of complacence towards them, and to express his complacence by pecu-

liar marks of his favour. They stand as fair for every token of divine approbation, as if they had never sinned. God declares, that he loves them that love him, and if he loves them, he may express his love to them in whatever way he pleases. The pardon and forgiveness of believers is properly called *justification*, because it places them in a condition in which God may treat them as though they were and always had been perfectly innocent. I now proceed to show,

II. That God forgives or justifies believers entirely through the redemption or atonement of Christ. By redemption through the blood of Christ, the apostle evidently means the same as the atonement which he made by his sufferings and death on the cross. And we find the other inspired writers of the New Testament, use the words ransom, redemption, and propitiation to signify the same as atonement. Believers are by nature children of wrath, even as others. They have broken the law of God, which threatens eternal death or everlasting punishment for the least transgression. This law knows no mercy or forgiveness to the guilty, but lays God under moral obligations to punish them, unless something be done to make atonement for their sins. But nothing can make atonement for their sins, which does not express the same vindictive justice of God, which he expresses in the penalty of his law. This sinners never could do for themselves by repentance, reformation, or works of supererogation. There was but one person in the universe, who could make atonement for sin, and that was the Lord Jesus Christ; and he could do it no otherwise but by shedding his blood on the cross. It was solely by sacrificing his own life, or dying the just for the unjust, that he made such a propitiation, redemption, or atonement for sinners, upon the ground of which God can consistently with the honour of his character and support of his government, forgive and save them from the wrath to come. And upon this ground alone the scripture every where represents him as forgiving or justifying believers. The apostle in the text, ascribes forgiveness solely

to the atonement of Christ. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the *forgiveness* of sins." He expresses the same idea in the same language in Ephesians, i. 7. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the *forgiveness* of sins, according to the riches of his grace." In the conclusion of the fourth chapter he says, "Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, *forgiving* one another, even as God *for Christ's sake*, hath *forgiven you*." He states this doctrine more clearly and fully in the third chapter of Romans. "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be *justified* in his sight. But now the righteousness of God without the law is *manifested*, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that *believe*; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being *justified* freely by his grace, *through the redemption* that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in *his blood* to declare his *righteousness* for the remission of sins—to declare, at this time his *righteousness*: that he might be *just*, and the *justifier* of him who believeth in Jesus." Paul taught the same doctrine in his discourse at Antioch. "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the *forgiveness* of sins: and by him all that believe are *justified* from all things; from which, ye could not be *justified* by the law of Moses." Here forgiveness signifies the same as justification, and justification signifies the same as pardon, which believers receive entirely on account of Christ's atonement. Peter said to Cornelius and to those who were convened at his house, "We are witnesses of all things which Christ did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew, and hanged on a tree; Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly, not to all the peo-

ple, but unto witnesses, chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify that it is he who was ordained of God to be the judge of the quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, *that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*" Christ himself taught this doctrine in the twenty fourth of Luke. He said to his disciples just before he ascended to heaven, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and *remission of sins* should be preached in his name, among all nations." When those who were pricked in their heart on the day of Pentecost, "said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, repent, and be baptised every one of you *in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.*" Zacharias said at his circumcision, "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shall go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his way: to *give knowledge of salvation* unto his people, *by the remission of sins.*" And agreeably to this prediction we read, Mark i. 4. "John did baptise in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance, *for the remission of sins.*" I have mentioned all these passages of scripture to show, that God does pardon, or forgive, or justify believers entirely through the redemption or atonement of Christ and on no other ground. It only remains to inquire,

III. Whether he does not bestow all other blessings on mankind merely in consequence of Christ's atonement. The texts which have been cited to prove, that God grants forgiveness to believers solely on ac-

count of the atonement of Christ seem to prove, or at least, to imply, that he bestows other favours merely in consequence of his atonement. But there is no occasion of insisting on this argument, for we have others sufficient to establish the point beyond all reasonable doubt.

1. It is an undeniable fact, that God does bestow innumerable favours upon believers themselves, *before they are interested in Christ by faith*; and of course, before they can be forgiven or justified *on his account*. He gives them food and raiment and supplies their wants, while they are in a state of nature; and not only so, he gives them the offers of salvation, and takes away their stony heart and gives them an heart of flesh, while they are under the condemnation of his holy law. These great and invaluable favours he bestows upon them before they are united to Christ; and before they can be forgiven or justified through his atoning blood. They must, therefore, be bestowed *merely in consequence of it*. And if God can bestow any other favour, *except forgiveness*, upon believers, before they are justified through the atonement of Christ; then after they are justified through his atonement, he can bestow any other favour upon them, *except forgiveness, merely in consequence of it*. These inferences are plain and undeniable, because they are drawn from a plain and undeniable fact.

2. It is a plain and undeniable fact; that God bestows ten thousand favours upon the non-elect, who never have been, and never will be forgiven or justified through the redemption of Christ. The children of Israel who perished in the wilderness were highly favoured. God carried them through the Red Sea, fed them with bread from heaven, and supplied their wants for many years; but they abused these and all other favours. They were shut out of both the earthly and heavenly Canaan. They were never forgiven or justified through the blood of that atonement which their sacrifices typified. And from this, we must conclude,

that they received all their blessings, not on the *ground*, but only in consequence of the blood which Christ shed on the cross.

3. It is agreeable to the dictates of reason and scripture to suppose, that God may act as a *sovereign* in bestowing any favours upon mankind, except *forgiveness*. This favour he cannot bestow, in a way of *sovereignty*, because the rectitude of his government, and the beauty of his vindictive justice must be displayed in forgiving the transgressors of his law. If he could have consistently forgiven sinners without an atonement, in a way of *sovereignty*, he might have saved all the human race, in this plain and easy way. Why then did he not adopt this plan of salvation? He has not adopted it; and no reason can be given why he has not adopted it, but because he knew that nothing but an atonement for sin, could render it consistent with his vindictive justice, to forgive the transgressors of his just and holy law. Accordingly, he gave his only begotten and dearly beloved son to suffer and die on the cross in the room of sinners; by which he has displayed his vindictive justice as clearly as he could have done, by actually inflicting the penalty of his law upon the whole human race. So that he can now be *just* in justifying all penitent believers, through the vicarious death and sufferings of the Divine Redeemer. This plan of redemption has rendered it consistent for God to grant *forgiveness* to all true believers through the blood of Christ; and to grant any other favour to *them*, and to *the rest* of mankind, as an act of *mere sovereign goodness*. Thus it appears, that God can and does bestow innumerable blessings upon both believers and unbelievers, not on the *ground*, but only in consequence of the atonement of Christ.

Though we feel satisfied, that we have established this important point; yet since "an opinion has gone forth," that we have not established it; there seems to be a propriety in saying something to weaken, if not to destroy the influence of that vagrant opinion, which has appeared in the shape of a formidable objection.

Though the objector concedes, "that it is no part of his system that Christ obeyed *in our room* to supersede the necessity of our obedience, as he suffered in *our room* to supersede the necessity of our sufferings:" and though he still further concedes, "that *we are not rewarded* for two things at once, (Christ's obedience and our own) but rather that two persons in different senses are rewarded for the same thing;" yet he insists, that we are rewarded and receive every blessing, whether temporal, spiritual, or eternal, on account of *Christ's righteousness*, in distinction from *his atonement*. He says we have no righteousness of our own, which satisfies the demands of the law, and therefore we have no righteousness which God can *approve* and *reward*, only through the *legal reward* of Christ's perfect righteousness. But who ever heard of a *legal reward* before? It is a solecism. No law, human nor divine, ever promises a *reward* to those who obey it. The Governour may offer a large reward to any man who shall apprehend a robber; but this offer is no law, because it has no precept, nor penalty. It does not command any man to go after and apprehend the culprit, nor threaten to punish him if he neglect it. He is liable only to the loss of the reward, which is no punishment at all. And it is equally true, that no divine law promises a reward to the obedient. God did not promise to reward Adam, if he should perfectly obey the law of Paradise. It is true, there may be a *federal reward*, or a reward promised to the fulfilment of certain conditions in a mutual covenant. Such a reward was promised to Christ, if he fulfilled the conditions of the covenant of redemption; and such a reward he has partly received, and will fully receive at the consummation of all things. But this is no *legal reward*. The notion of a legal favour or reward, is altogether unfounded and visionary. No reward is an expression of distributive justice, but only an expression of discretionary goodness. This our Saviour beautifully illustrated by the conduct of a master and the conduct of an householder. "Which of you," he says to his hearers, "hav-



ing a servant ploughing, or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by when he is come from the field, Go, and sit down at meat? And will not rather say unto him, make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterwards thou shall eat and drink? Doth he *thank* that servant; because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are *commanded you*, say, We are unprofitable servants: We have done that which was our duty to do." Here Christ discards the idea of a *legal reward* in the most pointed terms. And in the parable of the householder, he represents a reward as being, *in its own nature*, perfectly *gratuitous*. The parable is this. "An householder went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle—and said unto them, Go ye also into my vineyard; and whatsoever is right I will give you. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right that shall ye receive. At even his steward calls the labourers, and gives them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, these last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way. I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?"

Is thine eye evil *because I am good*? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen." There can be no doubt, that this parable was designed to illustrate *the absolute sovereignty of God*, in bestowing both temporal and eternal rewards upon mankind. If pardon and justification both signify the same as forgiveness; and if believers after they are forgiven stand as fair to be rewarded, as if they were innocent; then we may safely conclude, that believers are *forgiven* solely through the atonement of Christ, but are rewarded *merely in consequence* of his atonement. Though a multitude of texts have been heaped together to prove the contrary of this conclusion, yet they are all perverted and misapplied, being construed upon the false principle, that believers are *rewarded* through the medium of the *legal* reward of Christ's righteousness. The objector appears to be more of a *superficial* and *sophistical*, than of a *metaphysical* reasoner, in arguing from a *false principle*, against plain and undeniable facts.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God the Father forgives or justifies believers solely through the redemption or atonement of Christ; then it is easy to see how all the blessings which God has ever bestowed, or ever will bestow upon all percipient creatures, have flowed and will flow, directly or indirectly through the *medium* of Christ. God the Father created all things according to his *eternal purpose*, which he purposed in *Christ Jesus our Lord*. His plan of redemption comprized all creatures, all objects, and all events. If he had not formed this great and comprehensive design of redeeming some of the fallen race of man, he would not have created the heavens and the earth, nor given existence to any rational or irrational beings. The whole work of creation was designed to be subordinate and subservient to the great work of redemption. And he concerted this plan in order to lay a foundation to bestow the largest and

richest favours upon the whole universe, that infinite wisdom, power, and goodness could bestow. Accordingly, Christ is represented as the *medium* of the most perfect *union* and *blessedness* of all holy beings in heaven and earth. This the apostle teaches both in his epistle to the Ephesians and in that to the Colossians. To the Ephesians he writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings *in Christ*: according as he hath chosen us *in him*, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved: in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fullness of times *he might gather together in ONE all things both which are in heaven and are in earth, even in him.*" Again he says in the same epistle, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all the saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see, what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, *who created all things by Jesus Christ*, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the *manifold wisdom* of God, *according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" And to the Colossians he says, "Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints *in light*; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: *in whom we have redemption through his*

*blood, even the forgivenesses of sins*; Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature: for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: *all things were created by him, and for him.*" These passages clearly show, that the work of redemption comprises all the works of creation, as *means* or *subordinate causes* of carrying into effect the supreme purpose of God to save sinners through the death and mediation of Christ. Though God the Father intended to forgive or justify believers only on account of the mere atoning blood of Christ; yet he meant that all his intelligent creatures should partake more or less of *the happy consequences of his mediatorial work*, which will augment the blessedness of heaven forever. There is an important sense, therefore, in which it is true, that all the temporal, spiritual, and eternal good that mankind have enjoyed and will enjoy, comes to them through the *medium* of Christ.

2. It appears from what has been said, why God cannot forgive or justify sinners before they become believers. While the elect continue in the state of nature, they continue in the state of condemnation. God cannot become reconciled to them, before they become reconciled to him and the way of salvation through the blood of Christ. For before they do this, they have no interest in his atonement. And it is no more consistent with the vindictive justice of God to pardon sinners *before they believe*, than to pardon them without an atonement. Hence we find, that love, repentance, and faith are made the conditions of forgiveness throughout the New Testament. To deny all conditions of justification is implicitly to deny, that believers are justified entirely through the atonement of Christ. The foundation of justification is totally distinct from the conditions of it, and is laid in Christ. "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." It is the part of sinners, not to lay the foundation, but only to perform the condi-

tions, of justification. These are not arbitrary, but necessary conditions. They must exercise love, repentance, and faith in order to become united to Christ, and to receive pardoning mercy through his atonement. God can grant them every other favour, but forgiveness, before they embrace the gospel and become believers. This he cannot grant, nor they receive, before they become reconciled to God, renounce all self-righteousness, and are willing to be forgiven through the atonement of Christ alone.

3. It appears from what has been said, that both Antinomians and Arminians have run into equally great, though very different errors, respecting the true scriptural doctrine of justification. The Antinomians have supposed, that believers are justified through the atonement of Christ, by faith alone, without the deeds of the law. From these just and scriptural premises, they have drawn a very unjust and unscriptural conclusion. They suppose, that believers are under no obligation to perform good works, because Christ has both *suffered* and *obeyed* in their room and stead, so that their justification and salvation do not in the least depend upon any thing they can do, either before, or after they are justified. They hold, that neither good works nor bad works, can promote, or prevent the salvation of believers. They build this false and dangerous opinion upon what the scripture says concerning justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the law. They suppose, that justification implies not only forgiveness, but a *title* to eternal life; and that there is no difference between God's *forgiving* and *rewarding* believers. This is a great mistake; for though God *forgives* believers solely on account of the *atonement* of Christ; yet he does not *reward* them for *his* obedience, but for *their own*. But the Arminians deny the distinction between God's *forgiving* and *rewarding* believers, which leads them into an error concerning justification, that is directly opposite to the Antinomian error. They suppose, that God *justifies*, as well as *rewards* believers, for *their good works*. They aliege in

favour of their opinion, the parable of the talents, the numerous promises which God has given, that he will reward good men for all their good deeds, and the representation which Christ has given of the final rewards of the righteous at the last day. Now, it is easy to see, that both Arminians and Antinomians are really erroneous in their respective opinions concerning the doctrine of justification; and it is no less easy to perceive what has led them into their different errors. They have both overlooked the plain and important distinction between the *ground* of God's *forgiving* believers and the *ground* of his *rewarding* them. He *forgives* them solely on the *ground* of *Christ's atonement*, but *he rewards* them solely on the *ground* of *their own good works*. It is impossible to maintain the true scriptural doctrine of justification by faith alone, and at the same time, steer clear of the Antinomian error on the one hand, and the Arminian error on the other, without making this distinction. Those who have denied, that believers are *rewarded* for their *own good works*, have often attempted it, but without success. Some have said, that though believers are *forgiven* or *justified* solely on the *ground* of *Christ's atonement*, yet they are *rewarded* solely on the *ground* of his *imputed* righteousness or obedience. And it has been said of late, that though believers are *forgiven* or *justified* solely on the *ground* of *Christ's atonement*, yet they are *rewarded* solely on the *ground* of his *legal*, not *imputed* righteousness or obedience. But this and every other way, which has been devised to reconcile the justification of believers wholly on account of the *atonement* of Christ, with the numerous and express promises of God, to reward them entirely on account of *their own obedience or good works*, is clogged with gravelling difficulties. For, if they are *rewarded*, as well as *pardoned* for Christ's sake, why are they not to be rewarded equally? Or if they are to be rewarded for Christ's sake, why are they not promised to be rewarded for Christ's sake, instead of their own, as they are promised to be *pardoned* for Christ's sake, and not for their own? Or if they are

to be rewarded for Christ's sake, why are they not required to perform certain *conditions* in order to be rewarded for Christ's sake, as well as required to perform certain *conditions* in order to be *pardoned* for Christ's sake? These questions cannot be answered, on the supposition, that they are to be *rewarded*, as well as *pardoned*, on Christ's account. But the doctrine of *forgiveness* and the doctrine of *rewards*, as stated in the new testament, are perfectly consistent and plainly intelligible, though Antinomians and Arminians, and others have blended, confused, and perplexed them.

Finally, it appears from what has been said, that it is of great importance to understand the true scriptural doctrine of justification, by faith alone without the deeds of the law. Luther considered the doctrine as one of the most essential doctrines of the gospel. He wrote as well as preached more upon this, than any doctrine. He called it, *articulus stantis, vel cadentis ecclesie*; the doctrine upon which the church must either stand, or fall. It is the only solid ground upon which men can safely build their hopes of escaping the wrath to come, and obtaining eternal life. If the proper distinction between the *ground of forgiveness* and the *ground of rewards* were clearly understood and believed, ministers would not direct impenitent, inquiring sinners to go to Christ, *as they are*, for a *new heart*, instead of going to him for *pardoning* mercy, which is contrary to the direction of Christ and the apostles. The inspired writers uniformly direct sinners to repent and believe the gospel, before they can expect to be pardoned and justified through the *atonement of Christ*.

It is the proper official work of Christ to *forgive sins*, but not to change the heart; which is the proper office of the Holy Spirit. There is but one proper mode of directing impenitent, inquiring sinners, and that is to direct them to love God, repent of sin, and believe in Christ, in order to be forgiven, pardoned, or justified in the sight of God. God has made no promises to the impenitent and unbelieving, that he will give them a *new heart*, but he has abundantly promised to forgive

all penitent believing, returning sinners. To exhort sinners to go to Christ for a new heart, has a direct tendency to prevent them from going to him for pardon and justification; for they will think that their going to Christ for a new heart is *doing their duty*, for which they ought to be justified, independently of the atonement of Christ. They are naturally self-righteous, and self righteousness is incompatible with saving faith. A mistake with respect to the sole foundation of justification before God, is not only a common, but a dangerous mistake. There is reason to fear that it has proved the eternal ruin of many, who have had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.



## SERMON XX.

HOLY OBEDIENCE THE ONLY TITLE TO ETERNAL LIFE.

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LUKE x. 27, 28.

*“And he answering, said, thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart; and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, thou hast answered right: this do and thou shalt live.”*

Our Saviour was a teacher sent from God, and he improved all proper seasons and opportunities of preaching and discoursing upon religious subjects. As he taught very important and interesting truths, in a very easy, plain, and familiar manner, the common people heard him gladly; but the more learned Jewish instructors thought they knew too much about their laws and religion to need any instruction from him, and therefore never sought to hear him preach or converse, in order to learn, but only to raise objections, or put puzzling questions. While he was conversing upon the solemn subject of divine sovereignty, “Behold, a certain lawyer,” or Jewish teacher, “stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Though Christ knew his sinister motive in asking this question; yet, as it was a serious and interesting question, he gave a direct, plain, and serious reply to it. “He said unto him, what is written in the law? How readest thou?” This was a proper reply to one who was a professed teacher of the law, and at the same time constrained him to answer his own question. “And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.” Christ then addressed him

in the best manner to carry conviction to his conscience. "And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: *this do*, and thou shalt live," or have eternal life. This is a plain and positive declaration, which places before us the following sentiment;

That God promises eternal life to all who obey his commands. I shall show,

I. What is implied in obeying God's commands;

II. Show that God does promise eternal life to all who obey his commands; And,

III. Show why he promises eternal life to all who obey his commands.

I. I am to show what is implied in obeying God's commands. It is easy to see in what obedience to the divine commands consists. It must consist in doing what the commands of God require. The two great commands of the law require love to God and love to man. And to exercise this love is to obey these commands. So Christ asserts in the text. "This do," says Christ to the lawyers, "and thou shalt live." Love to God and man comprises all the holy and gracious affections, which God requires in any of his holy precepts or commands. So Christ told another lawyer, who endeavoured to entangle him in his talk. "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commands hang all the law and the prophets." All the divine commands are of the same nature, and require the same thing; that is, *love to God and man*. And upon this ground the apostle asserts, that "*love is the fulfilling of the law*." Love is obedience to every command God has given in his word. The reason is, love is the fruit of the spirit, and comprises every species of holy affections. Hence, says the apostle, "The fruit of the spirit is love," from which flows "joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, and meekness."

Love disposes men to repent of sin, to believe in Christ, to submit to providence, to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Or in other words, it disposes men to *feel* and *act* in all cases, agreeably to every divine command. The least exercise of true love to God or man is *true* obedience; and the *constant* exercise of true love to God or man, is *perfect* obedience. Though we often speak of *internal* and *external* obedience; yet strictly speaking, there is no ground for this distinction, because all true obedience is *internal*, and consists in the exercise of love. Mere *external* conformity to the divine commands, is no obedience at all; and has nothing virtuous or praiseworthy in it. There is no virtue or obedience in *external* conformity to the divine commands, even when it flows from love; for all the virtue or obedience, *in that case*, wholly consists in the love from which it flows. So that it is love, strictly speaking, which fulfils the law, and is the essence of all true obedience to the divine commands. I now proceed to show,

II. That God does promise eternal life to all who obey his commands, or exercise those holy and benevolent affections, which his commands require. God has always promised eternal life to those who obey his commands both in the old testament and in the new. In Leviticus xviii. 5, we read, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, *which if a man do, he shall live in them.*" In Deuteronomy xxxiii. 46, 47, we read, "Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day—for it is not a vain thing for you; *because it is your life.*" In the 30th chapter of this book, Moses says to Israel, "See, I have set before thee this day, life, and good, and death, and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, *that thou mayest live.*" Nehemiah says to God in confessing the sins of his people, "They hearkened not to thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, which if a man do, he shall live in them." God says, by his prophet Ezekiel.

“If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, *he shall surely live, he shall not die.*” And again he says, by the same prophet, “I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, *which if a man do, he shall live in them.*” David says, “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a *broken heart*; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit—a broken and contrite spirit, O God, thou wilt not despise.” God himself says, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth *his conversation right will I shew the salvation of God.*” And again he says, “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.” In the new-testament, we find the same promises of eternal life made to all who internally and externally obey the divine commands, from pure and holy exercises of the heart. Christ declared in his sermon on the mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall find mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God.” Christ promised the amiable young man in the gospel, eternal life, if he would obey the divine commands. “Behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” Christ replied, “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” And he repeats the declaration, “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” And Christ taught this same truth, by the parable of the talents. He said to each of the two faithful and obedient servants, “Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Thus it clearly appears from both the old and new-testament, that God has always promis-

ed eternal life to all who internally and externally obey his commands. Indeed, the whole bible is full of promises of eternal life to all who *internally exercise*, and *externally express that love, which the divine law requires*.

It now remains to show,

III. Why God promises eternal life to all who sincerely and cordially obey his commands.

Here it may be proper to observe,

1. That God does not promise eternal life to all who obey his commands, because their sincere and cordial obedience *atones* for their sin, and lays a foundation for pardon, for forgiveness, or justification in the sight of God. After men have once sinned, their future obedience can make no atonement for past transgression. Perfect obedience is their constant and indispensable duty. So that they can never do any thing more than their *duty*. If they sincerely repent, and reform, and love God perfectly *after* they have sinned, neither their repentance, nor reformation, nor their perfect love to God, can have the least tendency to atone for their past disobedience. They still deserve to be punished with eternal death, which the divine law threatens for the least transgression; and God cannot forgive the least sin consistently with his vindictive justice, without an atonement made for it, by the sufferings of one who is not a transgressor. Accordingly, we find that God never has pardoned, forgiven, or justified sinners on account *of their own obedience*, but only on account of the atonement for sin, which Christ made by his sufferings and death on the cross. God did not pardon, forgive, or justify sinners, after the first apostacy, on account of their repentance, reformation, or obedience; but only by faith in the Lamb of God, who was *typified* by the vicarious sacrifices appointed immediately after the first transgression of Adam. Adam offered sacrifices, Abel offered sacrifices, Noah offered sacrifices, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job offered sacrifices *before* the Mosaiek dispensation; and after that, sacrifices were renewedly enjoined upon all the people of God, until Christ offered his own body on the cross as a sac-

rifice for sin. It was by faith in these sacrifices, which before and under the Mosaick dispensation typified the atonement of Christ, that men were pardoned, forgiven, or justified, and not by their love, repentance, or obedience. We are expressly told, that Abel was a believer, Enoch was a believer, Noah was a believer, Abraham was a believer, and all the patriarchs were believers. For it is said, "These all died in faith, not having received the *promises*, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and *embraced* them." These promises respected the coming and death of Christ, the Messiah, whose death was typified by the vicarious sacrifices that were appointed to make atonement for sin. God first promised to Adam, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. He next promised to Abraham, that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed; and that *seed*, the apostle tells us, was *Christ*. Moses foretold, that Shiloh should come. Isaiah foretold, that Christ should pour out his soul unto death, and make his soul an offering for sin. Daniel foretold, that Messiah should be cut off, but not for himself. The gospel was symbolically preached to Adam, to Abraham, and to all under the law, by the vicarious sacrifices, which typified Christ as a suffering Saviour. And it was by faith in a Saviour to come, that all true penitents were pardoned, forgiven, or justified; and not by their own obedience or righteousness. The apostle Paul takes a great deal of pains to show that men were pardoned or justified by faith, on the ground of Christ's atonement, before the gospel dispensation, as well as after it. To the Romans he says, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." After this, he asks, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of *works*? Nay: but by the law of *faith*." Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith

without the deeds of the law." To this doctrine the apostle knew that the Jews, who relied on their obedience or good works for justification, would be ready to object, and say, why was not this doctrine of justification by faith alone, taught before the gospel dispensation, if it were true? He implicitly says it was taught even before the Mosaick as well as Christian dispensation. "What shall we then say, that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by *works*, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham *believed God*, and it was counted to him for righteousness." As Abraham, who lived before the law, was not justified by works, so those who lived under the law, were not justified by obedience. So the apostle expressly tells the Jews. "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the *forgiveness* of sins: and by him all that believe are *justified* from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." And again he says, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the *law*, then Christ is dead in vain." Thus it appears, that God does not promise eternal life to those who obey his commands, because their obedience atones for their sins, and lays a foundation for their pardon, forgiveness, or justification. Nor;

2. Does God promise eternal life to those who obey him, because their obedience *merits* eternal life. Though obedience to the divine commands is really *virtuous* and intrinsically *excellent*; yet it is not *meritorious*. The obedience of a creature can lay no obligation upon his creator. Men are the servants of God, and in that character they cannot merit any good, by their obedience to their divine master. This, Christ beautifully illustrated in a discourse with his disciples. "Which of you having a servant ploughing, or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by when he has come from the field, go and sit down at meat? And will not rather say unto him, make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and

drunken, and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he *thank* that servant, because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are *unprofitable* servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." This has always been the feeling of all penitent and obedient servants of God. Jacob acknowledged before God, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." Isaiah acknowledged his own and his people's unworthiness. "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." The church in Jeremiah's day make a still more humble acknowledgment of their unworthiness. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." The penitent prodigal renounced all claim to any favour. He said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But Paul is still more particular and explicit, in renouncing all claim to favour on account of his own righteousness and obedience. "If any man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law a Pharisee; concerning zeal persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the *law*, but that which is through the *faith* of Christ, the righteousness which is of God *by faith*." All true penitents feel as Paul felt, in respect to obedience. They know, and are willing to acknowledge, that they cannot merit the least favour at the hand of God, by their best obedience to his commands. He



does not, therefore, promise eternal life to those who *obey* him, because their obedience *merits* eternal life. But though God does not promise eternal life to those who *obey* him, because their obedience atones for their sins, nor because their obedience merits any favour at his hands ; yet,

3. He does promise eternal life to them because their obedience is a proper ground, reason, or condition for bestowing upon them such a gracious and unmerited reward. Though their obedience to his commands does not render them *meritorious*, yet it does render them *virtuous*, and *amiable*, and *worthy of his approbation* ; and it becomes him, as a being of perfect rectitude and benevolence, to *express* his cordial approbation of their cordial obedience, by giving them a free, gracious, and eternal reward. His bestowing good upon the ungodly world, is no expression of his approbation of their character and conduct ; but his bestowing good upon them that be good, is an expression of his approbation of their goodness. And every expression of his approbation of their duty and obedience, is in the strictest sense, a real and proper reward. Not indeed a reward of *justice*, but a reward of *grace*. “The righteous Lord loveth righteousness.” God loves those whom he has pardoned, forgiven, or justified by faith through the atonement of Christ ; and can consistently express his approbation of their love, obedience, righteousness, or good works, by rewarding them with eternal life. Accordingly, he has promised eternal life to all who obey his commands, as an expression of his approbation of their duty and obedience, which is really a great and *gracious reward*. But not too great for an infinitely gracious God to bestow. So the apostle viewed the matter. “What shall we then say to these things ? If God be for us, who can be against us ? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, *how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?*” All things include eternal life. And so the apostle explains it in a parallel passage. He says to the same believers, “But being now made free from sin, and become *servants to*

God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the *end everlasting life*. For the wages of sin is death; but the *gift* of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Eternal life is a *gift* of grace, or a reward of grace, as really as death is the wages or reward of sin. All the good that God bestows upon good men, either in this life, or the life to come, he bestows as an expression of his approbation of their obedience, or good works, which is a *gracious reward*. It was a proverb in Israel, that "to him that soweth righteousness shall be a *sure reward*." And it is not strange that this should be a proverb in Israel; for all the promises of good, which God made to that people were promises of a gracious reward for their obedience. Hence David says to God, "in keeping thy commandments is great reward." Christ abundantly taught the same doctrine of eternal rewards for obedience. He says to those who patiently endure reproach, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." He says, "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward." He says to every one that exercises true self-denial, "he shall receive an hundred fold in this world, and in the world to come *eternal life*." He said to each of the servants that properly improved their talents, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been *faithful* over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: *enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*." And he says, when he shall come to judge the world at the last day, he will reward the righteous for their good deeds, with life eternal, and the wicked for their evil deeds, with everlasting punishment. Thus it appears, that God does promise eternal life to all who love and obey him with all their hearts, not because their obedience atones for their sins and lays a foundation for their pardon, forgiveness, or justification, nor because their obedience merits any favour at his hands, but because it becomes him to *express* his approbation of their obedience and good works, by a free, gracious, unmerited, and eternal reward.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from what has been said, that there is a wide and essential difference between the ground of God's pardoning, forgiving, or justifying men, and the ground upon which he rewards them with eternal life. It appears from both the Old and New Testament, that God pardons, forgives, or justifies sinners exclusively upon the ground of the atonement for sin, which Christ made by his sufferings and death on the cross. He pardons or justifies them freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, without paying the least respect to their love, penitence, obedience or good works. Though he can give men many other good things in a way of sovereignty; yet he cannot consistently pardon or justify them upon any other ground, than the *atonement* of Christ. But after he has pardoned or justified them, he can consistently bestow upon them both temporal and eternal favours, on the ground of their gracious affections and cordial obedience. The ground, therefore, upon which God pardons or forgives men, is totally different from the ground upon which he rewards them with eternal life. This distinction runs through the bible, but is most plainly asserted, illustrated and proved, by the inspired writers of the New Testament. Paul took a great deal of pains to enlighten both Jews and Gentiles upon this subject, and to convince them, that the atonement of Christ is the sole ground of pardon or justification, exclusive of the deeds of the law, or any good works. It appears to have been his main object in writing his epistle to the Romans, to the Galatians, and to the Hebrews, to show that Christ died a vicarious sacrifice, that his vicarious sufferings and death made an atonement for the sins of all mankind; and that God pardons, forgives, or justifies men solely on account of his atonement, without regard to any work of righteousness that they do or can do; while at the

same time, he taught all true believers, that God promised to reward them for all their benevolence, self-denial, patience, submission, and every act of cordial obedience to his command. But he never intimated that God would reward them for Christ's making atonement, or for their making atonement. For they never did or could make atonement, and consequently they never merited a reward for making atonement; and as Christ stood alone, and no one with him in making atonement, they did not deserve to be rewarded for what he voluntarily did and suffered. Though it is true, that he deserved to be rewarded for making atonement. Accordingly, God promised to reward him, and has rewarded, and continues to reward him, by giving him those for whom he intentionally suffered and whom he died to save. It hence clearly follows, that if men are to be rewarded for any thing, they are to be rewarded for their cordial obedience to the divine commands. And it is proper, that God should approve of their free, voluntary acts of obedience, and give them a gracious, unmerited, and eternal reward, as he has abundantly promised in his word.

2. It appears from what has been said, that men were forgiven, pardoned, or justified under the Old Testament, on the same ground that men are under the New. We know that men are now pardoned or justified on the sole ground of the atonement of Christ. The apostle expressly declares, that "God justifies men freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ." And it appears from what has been said, that he justified or pardoned men under the Old Testament, on the same ground. Though he promised eternal life to all who obeyed his commands; yet he did not promise to pardon or justify them for their obedience, or good works. For he taught them to offer vicarious sacrifices, which typified the atonement of Christ, for which alone he pardoned or forgave their sins. And this demonstrates, that they were pardoned or forgiven on some other ground than their *obedience* to the divine commands; for if they were par-

done for their obedience alone, there was no occasion for their offering yearly and every day sacrifices, which were expressly said to be offered to make atonement for their sins. That those sacrifices were typical of the atonement which Christ was to make by his sufferings and death on the cross, the apostle has clearly proved in his epistle to the Hebrews. And there is no doubt but that the penitent Jews viewed them in that light, and exercised faith in the promised Messiah. This is confirmed by what the apostle says concerning the unbelieving Israelites who perished in the wilderness. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. For some, when they had heard, did provoke; howbeit, not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he, that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." Here we are told, that the *gospel* was preached under the Old Testament, and that some believed it, while others rejected it. Those that believed were pardoned and justified: but those who disbelieved were condemned and destroyed. Though God promised eternal life to all upon the ground of their obedience, yet he did not promise to pardon or justify them, unless they cordially embraced the gospel which was preached to them through the medium of the vicarious sacrifices, which typified the atonement of Christ, the sole ground of pardon and justification. All that ever have been pardoned and justified, under either the Old or New Testaments, have been pardoned and justified in precisely the same way, and on the same ground. Though men

have been rewarded for their obedience and good works, yet they have never been pardoned or justified on any other ground than the atonement of Christ.

3. It appears from what has been said, that the Socinians maintain a great and fatal error. They suppose, that Christ was a *mere man*, and did not suffer and die as a vicarious sacrifice, to make atonement for sin. Of course they maintain, that men are pardoned and accepted in the sight of God on account of their obedience or good works. This they endeavour to prove by two principal arguments. One is, that God is morally obliged to pardon sinners on account of their repentance and obedience. And the other is, that God did actually pardon sinners under the Old Testament on account of their repentance and obedience, without any atonement. This they infer from his promising eternal life to all who obeyed his commands. But this argument is fully refuted, by the vicarious sacrifices for sin, which God required all men, from Adam to Moses, to offer; which, if they had any meaning, typified the atonement of Christ, without which there is no remission of sin. To deny the doctrine of atonement, through the vicarious death and sufferings of Christ, is contrary to the whole current of scripture; and subversive of the whole gospel, which has always been preached from Adam to this day.

4. This subject teaches us, that the doctrine of pardon or justification by works, is an unscriptural and dangerous one. I know that Arminians do not choose to say, that men are justified for their works, as being meritorious, and laying God under obligation, in point of strict justice, to pardon and save them. But they are willing to say, that God does *graciously* forgive, pardon and justify them on account of their good works. This they strenuously maintain in opposition to the doctrine of justification through the atonement of Christ alone. It is easy to see what leads them into this error. It is a supposition, that God pardons men upon the same ground upon which he rewards them. They plead in favour of their opinion, that God promises

eternal life to all who obey his commands, and that he actually rewards men for their obedience. They instance his rewarding the two servants, who faithfully employed their talents; and more especially in the representation that Christ gives of the decision of the great day, when he says he will bestow eternal life upon the righteous for their good deeds of charity and mercy. This argument looks plausible, but is entirely fallacious, if what has been said is true, that God does not pardon men upon the same ground, upon which he rewards them. And it appears from the whole current of scripture, that he does not. It is only on the ground of Christ's atonement, that he does, or can pardon sin. But he can and does reward men, *in mercy*, for their obedience and good works. Though we have no right to deny the premises of Arminians, yet we have a right to deny the consequence which they draw from their premises. For though it be true, that God can and does reward men for their obedience and good works, yet it is false, that he pardons or justifies them for any thing but the atonement of Christ. Their false doctrine is extremely dangerous, because it directly tends to lead men to build their hopes of pardon and salvation upon the ground of self-righteousness, which Christ and the apostles every where condemn. Self-righteousness destroyed the Pharisees, and well nigh ruined Paul himself. It is totally inconsistent with depending on Christ alone for salvation.

5. In the view of this subject, we may easily discover what it was that led the Jews into the fatal error of expecting to be saved by their strict observance of the various precepts and commands which God had given them. They did fall into this dangerous error. The Pharisee that went up to the temple to pray did; and Paul did before his conversion. *Their error was owing to their ignorance.* They had lost the knowledge of the true spirit, meaning, and design of the Mosaick dispensation. They made no distinction between the moral law and the ceremonial law, which required them to offer those sacrifices, which were typical of Christ, and

pointed out the ground of *pardon* through his atonement. They observed the ceremonial law just as they observed the moral law, and expected to be pardoned and saved by their obedience to both, without faith in Christ, who was preached to them by the vicarious sacrifices, which they were required to offer, to make atonement for sin. This error Paul embraced, and supposed, that in respect to the law, he was blameless. But after he had discovered and renounced it in himself, he discovered and lamented it in his Jewish brethren. He speaks very feelingly and tenderly upon the subject. "Brethren, my heart's desire, and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, *but not according to knowledge.* For they being *ignorant of God's* righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man who doeth those things *shall live by them.* But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise—That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For there is no difference between the *Jew* and the *Greek*: for the same Lord over all, is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." The apostle here lays open the whole cause of his brethren's expecting to be saved by their own righteousness, or obedience to the law of Moses. It was owing to *their ignorance* of the justice of God, which requires an atonement as the sole ground of pardon and justification; to *their ignorance* of the typical sense of the ceremonial law, which pointed to the atonement of Christ; and to *their ignorance* of the difference between the ground of *pardon* and ground of *reward*. Their false teachers had explained away the whole spirit and design of the Mo-saick dispensation. And this led them to disbelieve



and reject the gospel as Christ and the apostles preached it, in consistency with all the laws of Moses. And to convince those who vainly imagined that the law and gospel were inconsistent with each other, the apostle demands, "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given, which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was *our school-master, to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*" The whole Mosaick dispensation was designed and suited to lead men to the knowledge of the way of pardon and salvation, through the atonement of a Saviour to come. But the Jewish teachers, through ignorance, perverted and explained away the spirit and design of the Mosaick dispensation; and instead of showing that it was a school-master to teach the way of salvation by Christ, they employed it as an unanswerable objection against the gospel. And many besides the Jews in former times, and the Socinians in modern times, have been equally ignorant and erroneous in respect to the doctrine of justification through the atonement of Christ alone.

6. We may justly conclude from what has been said, that though believers are pardoned or forgiven on Christ's account, yet they are not rewarded on his account. It is generally acknowledged by Calvinistick divines, that believers are pardoned or forgiven on the ground of Christ's atonement; but some of them maintain, that they are rewarded for his obedience. Or, in plainer terms, they suppose, that believers are rewarded *for* Christ's obedience, as really as they are forgiven or pardoned *for* his atonement. This appears to be not only an error, but a palpable absurdity. We can see a good reason, why God should pardon or forgive believers solely for Christ's

sake, or entirely on the ground of his atonement, which rendered it consistent with his justice ; but it appears very absurd, that he should reward them for Christ's sake, or entirely on account of *his obedience*, in distinction from their own. Christ obeyed for himself, and believers obey for themselves. They are truly virtuous and praise-worthy for their own obedience ; but they are not virtuous or praise-worthy for his obedience. God may, with propriety, express his approbation of their virtuous obedience, by giving them a *gracious reward* ; but it is absurd in the extreme, to suppose that he graciously rewards them for Christ's obedience. This supposition is not only repugnant to reason, but contrary to the whole current of scripture. We have made it to appear, we trust, sufficiently plain, that God has abundantly promised, both in the old and new testament, to give eternal life to all who obey his commands, on their own account ; and not on account of Christ's obedience, or sufferings. And we feel well satisfied, that this scriptural doctrine never has been, and never can be refuted.

Finally, it is easy for sinners to seek, in the view of this subject, what they must do to inherit eternal life. They often put this serious and important question, as though they could not answer it, and as though they could find no answer to it in the bible. This can be owing to nothing but blindness of heart. They have often heard and read both the old and new testament, in which the way of life to sinners is plainly pointed out. There never has been but one way, in which sinners could obtain eternal life. They never could *atone* for their own sins, nor do any thing that *merited* salvation. But they have always been able to love God with all their heart, to repent of sin, and to believe in Christ, and rely upon his atonement, as the sole ground of pardon and justification in the sight of God. This is the only way of salvation revealed in the bible. In this way sinners have been saved, both under the old and new testament. This is a plain way of salvation. For every sinner knows, that he

has transgressed the holy and righteous law of God, which threatens eternal death as the wages of sin; that he cannot atone for the least transgression; that he must rely upon that atonement, which Christ has made by his sufferings and death on the cross; and that he cannot rely on that atonement, without renouncing his self-dependence, and self-righteousness. This way of salvation is perfectly plain, and approves itself to every man's understanding and conscience; but no man can embrace it, without deep humiliation and self-abasement, and self-condemnation, and unreserved submission to the absolute sovereignty of God. There is nothing that prevents sinners under the gospel from knowing what they must do to be saved, but the *mere blindness* of their hearts; and there is nothing that prevents their doing what will entitle them to eternal life, but the *obstinacy* of their hearts. They will not come to Christ that they might have life. They had rather rely upon their own righteousness, than to rely upon the atonement of Christ. They hate God and Christ, and love death; and death must be their doom, unless God, in sovereign mercy, both sanctifies and pardons them. God has done this for all that have been justified, and he will do this for all whom he has given to Christ.

# SERMON XXI.

## THE JOY OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE.

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### II. CORINTHIANS, i. 12.

*For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.*

Paul begins this epistle with an account of the trials and conflicts, that he and other apostles had experienced in Asia, as an apology for not coming to the church in Corinth before, as he had given them some ground to expect. He assures them, that he had always meant to act conscientiously, and had done so in not paying them a visit, as he had intended and intimated. He says, "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to *you-ward*." He here seriously declares, that he had not delayed coming to them, from sinister or worldly motives, but from pure, christian, gracious motives, which his conscience approved, and which he could reflect upon with joy and satisfaction. Such simplicity and godly sincerity is common to all true believers. And this warrants me to say, that christians have reason to rejoice, when their conscience testifies in favour of their conduct. I shall,

I. Show when christians have the testimony of their conscience in favour of their conduct; and

II. Show that they have reason to rejoice, when they have this testimony in their favour.

I. It is to be considered when christians have the

testimony of conscience in their favour. Though it may be supposed to be difficult to give a just and accurate definition of conscience; yet every man knows, that it is something distinct from reason, and every other faculty of the mind. It is conscience, which enables men to distinguish right from wrong, or moral good from moral evil. It is conscience, which teaches them their moral obligation to do what is right, and to avoid what is wrong. And it is conscience, which approves them for doing right, and condemns them for doing wrong. It is this faculty in the breast of christians, which testifies in their favour, when they do right, but condemns them when they do wrong. The question now before us is, when do christians have the testimony of conscience in their favour?

The apostle had the testimony of conscience in his favour, and all christians sometimes have the testimony of conscience in their favour. But when does conscience testify in their favour? I answer,

1. When it testifies that they have done what is right. It is always right, that they should do "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report." And when they do any or all these things, they always have the testimony of conscience in their favour, that they have done what is right. Conscience always knows and approves what is right in itself considered; and as all men sometimes do what is right in itself considered, so all men sometimes have the testimony of conscience so far in their favour. Accordingly, we find all men professing to act conscientiously, sometimes and in some things; and we have no reason to scruple the sincerity of their profession. But though conscience approves of all men for doing what is right in itself considered; yet this is but a partial approbation, and consistent with the highest disapprobation. This leads me to observe,

2. That christians have the full testimony of conscience in their favour, when it testifies not only that

they have done *right*, but have done right from *right motives*. It is the proper office of conscience to judge, not only whether christians do what is really right, but whether in doing what is really right, they act from proper motives. Christians may do a great many things that are right, from wrong motives; but conscience never approves of their acting from wrong motives. The apostles rejoiced in having the testimony of conscience, that they had acted from *right*, and not from wrong motives. "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." They acted from benevolent, and not from selfish motives; they acted from heavenly, not from worldly motives; they acted from grace, and not from nature; they acted to please God, and not themselves. For acting from these pure and holy motives, their conscience approved and applauded them, though the world despised and opposed them for it. All real christians sometimes act from the same noble and virtuous motives; and whenever they do, they have the testimony of their conscience in their favour; that they have lived and acted in christian simplicity and godly sincerity. I now proceed to show,

II. That this testimony of conscience in their favour affords them good ground to rejoice.

1. Because it assures them, that they have *internally*, as well as *externally* obeyed God. All real christians have that love, which is the fulfilling of the law. The divine law primarily requires the heart, and external actions only as expressions of the heart. The first and great commandment is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." God requires every person in every precept to obey him from a holy, benevolent heart. He never requires any external action to be done sepa-

rately from pure, holy love. None who are in the state of nature, ever act from this true love to God and man. They have not the love of God in them. They are under the entire dominion of a sinful and selfish heart, which is not obedience to, but a transgression of the law of God. They have not, nor can have the testimony of conscience, that they have ever internally obeyed God in a single instance. God has shed abroad his love in the hearts of real christians, who delight in his law after the inward man. They not only do the actions which God requires, but do them from pure and proper motives. When conscience is allowed to do its office, it makes the same distinction between external and internal obedience, that the divine law does. It approves of internal obedience, but disapproves of external obedience, which does not flow from internal obedience. Unrenewed men seldom allow conscience to do its whole office; that is, to judge what manner of spirit they are of, but only to judge what manner of actions they perform. They are satisfied, if conscience testifies that they act in external conformity to the divine law, though their hearts are far from God. But real christians habitually allow conscience to do its whole office, and judge of their hearts, as well as of their actions, which flow from their hearts; and it gives them no satisfaction to have conscience testify in favour of their *external conduct*, unless it testifies also in favour of the christian simplicity and godly sincerity of their internal views and intentions. Conscience is as ready to approve of right motives of action, as to condemn wrong ones. Whenever christians impartially consult conscience, it never fails to approve of whatever they do from pure and benevolent motives. So long, therefore, as they keep their hearts with all diligence, and do what is internally as well as externally right, they have the approbation of conscience, which affords them a just and solid ground to rejoice, which all the world cannot take away. David says, "Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them," or destroy their peace.

And it was a proverb in Israel, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways; and a good man shall be *satisfied from himself.*" As the *reproach* of conscience is extremely *painful*, so the *approbation* of conscience is extremely pleasant and joyful. And it is peculiar to christians to have the approbation of conscience, which is a permanent source of joy and consolation both in prosperity and adversity, because it affords them infallible evidence, that they have done their duty.

2. Christians have reason to rejoice, when their conscience testifies in their favour, because it affords them infallible evidence, that they have the approbation of God. Conscience is God's vicegerent in every human breast, and always says the same things that God says. It approves of what God approves, and condemns what God condemns. When christians feel and act as their conscience dictates and approves, they may know that God approves their views and conduct, and that their hearts are right in his sight. And it is only by the testimony of their approving conscience, that they can possibly know that they are at peace with God, as well as with themselves. Unless their conscience approves of their heart, they cannot know that God approves of it. Accordingly, the apostle directs christians to determine whether they have the approbation of God, by determining whether they have the approbation of their own conscience. He says, "As many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby ye cry Abba Father. The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." When the conscience of christians testifies, or bears witness in their favour, that they have the spirit of adoption, that is, a holy, filial, dutiful spirit, then they may certainly conclude that they are the sons of God, and stand entitled to the everlasting favour and enjoyment of God. When conscience ap-



proves of the heart, it is an infallible evidence, that God approves of it; or when the heart and conscience unite their testimony in the favour of christians, they have the highest evidence that they are the children and heirs of God. No witness of the spirit, without the witness of conscience, can give christians an infallible evidence, that they have the approbation of their heavenly Father; but when their conscience approves of their heart, they may certainly know that he approves of them. Hence says the apostle John, "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us *not*, then have we *confidence* towards God." This peace of conscience which christians enjoy, stands inseparably connected with peace with God, which is a source of peculiar joy and satisfaction. David esteemed the favour of God as the source of peculiar joy. "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 wine increased." And again he says, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." And again he says to God, "Thy favour is life, and thy loving kindness is better than life." The apostle tells christians, that "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." And he joins himself with christians in saying, "Being justified by faith, *we have peace with God*, through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and *rejoice* in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts."

3. Christians have reason to rejoice, when their conscience bears testimony in their favour, because it affords them infallible evidence. that they will sooner or

later meet the approbation of all the world. Christ forewarned his faithful followers, that the world would disapprove, reproach, and oppose them for acting conscientiously in the discharge of their duty. And they have always found, that his precaution was proper, and his prediction true. The men of the world disapprove of christians more for doing right, than for doing wrong; more for obeying, than disobeying their conscience. The men of the world are not displeased with christians for conforming to the world, but for not conforming to the world: and practically condemning the customs, manners, and practices of the world. Christians feel themselves bound to obey the dictates of their own conscience, rather than to regard the frowns or flattery of the enemies of truth. But their conscience, which dictates and approves their righteous conduct, assures them, that they shall sooner or later meet the approbation, not only of God, but of man. All men carry in their breast a conscience, as well as christians, and their conscience approves of what is right in christians, as well as what is right in themselves. And though their conscience be now defiled and blinded by the moral corruption of the heart; yet it will eventually be awakened to do its office, in condemning themselves and approving of christians. This has been verified in a thousand particular instances. Individuals who have disapproved and condemned christians for acting agreeably to their conscience, have afterwards, if not at the time of it, inwardly approved of their conduct. That which one man's conscience approves, the conscience of every man in the world will approve, when he has a fair and impartial view of it. Whatever the conscience of christians approves in them, all the world will approve, when it is clearly exhibited before them. Job acted conscientiously, for which his friends and enemies condemned him; but finally every eye that saw him and every ear that heard him, blessed him; and those who complained of him most, were constrained to justify him, and condemn themselves. Saul hated and opposed David

for acting uprightly, according to the dictates of his own conscience; but his conscience constrained him to approve of his integrity and kindness to him. Joseph's brethren hated and abused him for acting according to his own conscience; but when their conscience was awakened to do its office, it justified him, and condemned themselves. Paul knew, that his conscience approved of his preaching as he did, and therefore he confidently believed, that the conscience of his hearers approved of it. "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty; not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." When the conscience of christians testifies in favour of their character and conduct, they may be assured that their character and conduct will be approved sooner or later by all mankind, and by the whole intelligent universe. And is not this a solid ground for their rejoicing always and without ceasing? I may add,

4. That they have good reason to rejoice, when their conscience testifies in their favour, because it affords them an infallible evidence, that they stand entitled to all the blessings of eternal life. Since their conscience testifies, that they love God, it equally testifies that God loves them; and since it testifies that God loves them, it equally testifies that they are his children and heirs of eternal life. And to be assured of eternal life, is the broadest and firmest ground of joy unspeakable and full of glory. Accordingly, we find that the primitive christians, who had the testimony of their conscience in their favour, did actually rejoice in the full assurance of hope, that they stood entitled to all the blessedness of the heavenly world. Hear them express their joyful hopes and prospects.—“God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus

Christ. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Peter thanks God for the same joyful hopes and prospects of christians. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope—to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. Wherein ye greatly *rejoice*, though now for a season (if need be) ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearance of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye *rejoice* with joy unspeakable and full of glory." While christians have the testimony of conscience in their favour, they have all the promises of God in their favour. Hence says the apostle, this is our rejoicing, that is, the primary source of all our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that we have acted from christian simplicity and godly sincerity.

## IMPROVEMENT.

I. If Christians have the testimony of their conscience in their favour, then they may always know their gracious state. They have the spirit of adoption, and their conscience witnesses with their spirit of

adoption, that they are really the children of God. The primitive christians carried in their breast an infallible witness that they were the subjects of saving grace. They say in the text, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the *grace* of God, we have had our conversation in the world." Their conscience testified, that they had acted, not from fleshly wisdom or worldly motives, but had acted in simplicity and godly sincerity from gracious motives. Their conscience gave them infallible evidence, that they possessed the grace of God in truth. And all real christians carry about with them the same infallible witness, that they are in a state of grace. They have a spirit of grace, or a gracious spirit; and their conscience witnesses with their spirit of grace, that they are born of God, and are his children. There is scarcely any religious subject, which has been involved in more darkness and obscurity, than that which has been called *the mystery of sanctification*. This has led many to imagine, that christians know that they are in a renewed and sanctified state in some mysterious manner, which cannot be intelligibly explained. They suppose, that the Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity, reveals to them, either immediately, or by some passage of scripture, that they have passed from death unto life, and experienced a saving change. But it appears from what has been said, that it is the testimony of conscience, that they have received the fruit of the spirit, which gives them the only true and infallible evidence, that they are born of the spirit, and are the children of God. The fruit of the spirit is *love*, a *filial* love to God, which the conscience testifies is saving grace. Christians are required to know, that they have passed from death unto life. And this is a reasonable requisition, because they are capable of knowing this, and may know it, if they impartially consult conscience, which will always tell them the truth on this subject. The apostle Peter exhorts christians, "to give diligence to make their

calling and election sure." And the apostle Paul says to christians. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Christ is in you," that is, the spirit of Christ, "except ye be reprobates?" Every christian is to blame, if he does not know that he is in a gracious state. His ignorance is always owing to negligence. He has the witness in himself, and may know it, if he would only seriously and impartially consult his conscience, which stands ready to testify in his favour. But here you will ask, Does not conscience testify against christians? I answer, it does testify against their *sinful* exercises, but in favour of their *holy* ones. And this approbation of their holy exercises is an infallible evidence that they are in a state of grace; but the disapprobation of their sinful exercises, is no counter-evidence, that they are not in a state of grace. It is only an evidence of their moral imperfection, which will cleave to them as long as they live in this world. Though Peter's conscience testified that he was extremely criminal in denying his Master; yet it equally testified, that he loved Christ supremely. For when Christ put the question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" The testimony of his conscience enabled him to say in simplicity and godly sincerity, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." Though christians may, and ought to mourn and weep bitterly as Peter did, when their conscience condemns them for dishonouring Christ; yet they may rejoice, when conscience testifies, that they love him supremely. Real christians have no right to walk in darkness and go mourning all the day long, through fear that they are not christians. Their duty is to consult the testimony of conscience: "that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world." And this is true, and ought to make them rejoice.

2. If conscience will always testify to christians what is right if they consult it; then they may always

know their duty. Conscience is always an infallible guide respecting duty, when it is properly consulted. There are a vast many plain cases of duty, which conscience imperceptibly dictates, without any deliberate, or formal consultation. But there are not a few dark, doubtful, or difficult cases of duty, when christians find themselves in need of a sure guide. In all such cases, they may infallibly know their duty, if they sincerely desire and impartially seek to know it. Their conscience is always with them, and able and ready to direct them, if they will only properly consult it. Paul would not have thought, that he ought to do many things against the name of Jesus, if he had duly consulted his conscience. Christ exhibited infallible evidence, that he was the promised Messiah, and had Paul consulted his conscience while reading the predictions concerning Christ in the old testament, it would have convinced him, that he ought not to have viewed him as an impostor, and to have opposed him as such. Or if he had consulted conscience when he heard Stephen's dying discourse, he would not have thought that he ought to aid and countenance the persecutors of that sincere follower of Christ. He was, as he afterwards found himself to be, highly criminal in not knowing his duty in respect to Christ and his sincere followers. Christians, as well as others, frequently say, that they wish to know their duty in certain cases, but cannot determine what it is. Sometimes they cannot determine whether it is their duty to attend publick worship. Sometimes they cannot determine whether it is their duty to relieve such an object of charity. And sometimes they cannot determine whether it is their duty to promote such a cause of publick utility and importance. They find a great many such difficult cases, in which they cannot discover their duty. But this is a great mistake. For if they would only sincerely desire to know their duty, and impartially consult conscience, it would dictate their duty, and remove their difficulty. It is their duty either to act, or not to act in all such cases, and conscience

would infallibly decide the question, if they would properly seek its guidance and direction. As a general rule, it is the duty of christians to do what is the most self-denying. And this is the principal reason why they are so negligent and reluctant to consult conscience. For conscience always bears testimony against all selfishness, and in favour of true self-denial, or disinterested benevolence. The truth is, christians always may, and consequently ought to know their duty. They are always to blame, if they do not consult conscience in difficult cases, or if they act contrary to its infallible dictates.

3. If the conscience of christians approve of them for doing their duty, then they live the happiest life of any men in the world. The testimony of their conscience in their favour, affords the purest, the highest, and most permanent source of happiness. This source of happiness is peculiar to real christians, who alone enjoy it. The men of the world, amidst all their worldly possessions, hopes, and enjoyments, never have the approbation of conscience; for though they do many things that are right, yet they never do any thing from right motives. They never act in christian simplicity and godly sincerity, but with fleshly wisdom, and from selfish and sinister motives, which their conscience, when it does its office, always disapproves and condemns. But all real christians do those things which are not only externally, but internally, right; for which they have the approbation of conscience, the approbation of God, and expect to have, and shall have, the approbation of the whole intelligent creation. And what can be a source of higher and purer satisfaction and self-enjoyment than this, under all circumstances of life, whether prosperous or adverse? All real christians may adopt the language of the text. Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we have acted with christian simplicity and godly sincerity, which affords us that peace, which the world can neither give nor take away. But are there any other men that can justly adopt this language? Can they



say from their own experience, that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace? and that in keeping God's commandments there is great delight? Can they say that their conscience ever testified to their godly sincerity and gracious motives in any thing they have ever done? Do they ever derive comfort, consolation, and joy, in reflecting upon their inward views, desires, and designs, more than upon reflecting upon their external conduct? Or does not a critical examination of the real motives of their external conduct always weaken and diminish their comfort and satisfaction, rather than increase it? It was the pure, sincere, godly motives of their conduct, that afforded the primitive christians the solid and permanent ground of their joy and rejoicing. And this is true in respect to all real christians at this day. The approbation of their conscience affords them a source of joy and self-enjoyment, that all the men of the world are destitute of, and strangers to. Though they often suffer more evils and trials than the men of the world, still it is true that they enjoy more happiness. The approbation of conscience gives them more solid peace and real felicity, than the men of the world can, or do ever derive from the approbation of ignorant and partial admirers of their apparent virtue and prosperity. For their conscience tells them, that if their admirers only knew their internal views and motives of conduct, they would despise and condemn them. But it is not so with real christians, whom the world despise; for they have the testimony of conscience, that the world would approve them, if they only knew their internal views and motives of action. And this makes them feel very indifferent whether the world applaud or reproach them. At least, the apostle Paul felt so, for he says to the Corinthians, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

4. If the conscience of christians always approves of all their christian simplicity and godly sincerity in acting, then they never need to be afraid to do their

duty. Though they may often expect to meet with the frowns of the world in doing their duty, yet so long as they enjoy the approbation of conscience and the approbation of God, they need not fear the disapprobation of the world; for they enjoy that peace, which the world cannot give nor take away. They may always assure themselves, that they shall be more happy in doing their duty, than in neglecting it; and that the more constantly and faithfully they do their duty, the more they shall promote their happiness, both in time and in eternity. This the primitive christians believed, and acted accordingly. The testimony of their own conscience gave them courage and resolution to pursue the path of duty, through the most formidable difficulties, trials, and dangers. And they enjoined it upon all the followers of Christ, to be “steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as they knew that their labour should not be in vain in the Lord.” And the apostle Peter put the question to their conscience, “who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?” Christians have a peculiar, and endearing motive to do their duty, notwithstanding all the frowns and flatteries of the world; I mean the motive of their own present, future, and eternal happiness. The approbation of their conscience assures them of the approbation of God, and the final approbation, not only of all good men, but of all bad men. The fear of man bringeth a snare, and good men are oftener entangled in this snare, perhaps, than in any other in the world. They are extremely apt to fear the losing of the favour, as well as of incurring the displeasure of the enemies of the gospel. Peter denied his Master through fear of his enemies. And Paul tells him, that he had dissembled in preaching the gospel, through fear of those who heard him. How often do christians neglect some of the duties which they owe to God and man, through a servile fear of those whom they ought not to fear? And how often do they neglect the duty which they owe to one another, through fear of meeting the disapprobation of

those, whose approbation they ought to have? How often do they fear the disapprobation of their fellow-men, more than the disapprobation of their own conscience? This is a groundless as well as a sinful fear. It destroys their present and future peace. If they wish to be happy and rejoice, let them secure the approbation of their own conscience, in doing their duty. There is an inseparable and infallible connection between duty and happiness, which cannot be destroyed. Happiness is to be enjoyed in the faithful discharge of duty, and the more faithful christians are in doing their duty, the more happy they will finally and for ever be.

5. If the conscience of christians testifies in their favour, when they do their duty, then it as faithfully testifies against all their short-comings, and criminal deficiencies, and moral imperfections. The conscience of christians is far more apt to do its office than the conscience of sinners. They forbid it to speak; but christians more or less allow and invite it to speak, in reproof, as well as in approbation. And to this it is owing, that christians are vastly more burdened with sin, than the men of the world. They silence their conscience as much as possible, lest it should disturb their groundless peace. But christians desire to know what is *wrong*, as well as what is *right*, in their hearts and conduct. For they have the same simplicity and godly sincerity in repenting of their neglect, as in performing their duty. They sincerely desire to know what manner of spirit they are of, and pray to God to search and try them. For they know that if they regard iniquity in their hearts, the Lord will not hear their prayers, nor approve their conduct.

6. If conscience approve of actions that are right in themselves, when they are done in christian simplicity and godly sincerity, but does not approve of any external actions, which flow from fleshly wisdom, and selfish and sinful motives; then we may discover the great source of self-deception in sinners. They consult conscience only in respect to their external conduct, which is often right and amiable, simply considered,

and such as conscience says is right; and from this they conclude, that they have the approbation of conscience, which gives them peace, and lulls them in the most dangerous security. In this way, Saul justified himself when Samuel condemned him. In this way the amiable young man in the gospel justified himself, in saying, that he had kept all the divine commands. In this way Paul made himself believe, that touching the law he was altogether blameless. In this way all the scribes and pharisees trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. And in this same way, sinners endeavour to make their conscience speak in their favour; by judging partially in respect to their external conduct, while their internal views and motives are not submitted to the infallible decision of that faithful judge. We hear all descriptions of men of the world speaking of doing their duty, as much as christians, though they never did an act of duty in their life. This is self-deception, because sinners do not mean to hear the truth from their conscience, nor from any other quarter. They are blindly pursuing the path to ruin. This is infinitely dangerous. They are intreated to hear and obey the infallible dictates of conscience. Conscience will sooner or later speak, and divide them from the righteous, and make them take their proper place.

# SERMON XXII.

THE FAITH OF MIRACLES.

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MATTHEW, XXI. 22.

*And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

IN order to set this peculiar promise in a just and clear light, I shall inquire,

I. To whom it was made ;

II. What was the extent of it ;

III. What was the condition of it ; and

IV. Whether it be applicable to christians at the present day.

I. We are to inquire to whom the promise in the text was made.

Soon after Christ began to preach, and had converted a number of his hearers, he chose from among them twelve men to be his disciples ; to whom he gave authority to preach the gospel, and power to work miracles. Matthew says, "When he had called to him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease." Mark says, "He called unto him whom he would, and they came to him. And he ordained twelve that should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach ; and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils." And Luke tells us, that "After these things, the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city, and place, whither he himself would come," to preach the gospel, and work miracles. These particular persons Christ appointed

and qualified to preach and to work miracles before his crucifixion ; but after his resurrection, and just before his ascension to heaven, he gave a more general commission to his apostles and to others to work miracles. “ And he said unto the eleven, go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not, shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe ; in my name shall they cast out devils ; they shall speak with tongues ; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them : they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Here Christ promised to bestow the power of working miracles, not only upon the apostles and their successors in the gospel ministry, but also upon common christians. How long this power of working miracles was continued in the church, it is not easy, nor necessary to ascertain ; though we have pretty good evidence from ecclesiastical history, that it continued in more or less instances, until the third or fourth century. Now, it appears, that the promise in the text was made to those who possessed miraculous powers in particular, not only from the context, but from several other similar passages of the scripture. In the verses preceding the text, it is said, “ When Jesus saw a fig-tree in the way, he came to it and found nothing thereon but leaves only, and said unto it, let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it they marvelled, saying, how soon is the fig-tree withered away ? Jesus answered and said unto them, verily I say unto you, *if ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall not only do this, which is done to the fig-tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*” Mark mentions this same promise in nearly the same language. He says, “ In the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling

to remembrance, saith unto him, master, behold the fig-tree thou cursedst, is withered away. And Jesus answering, saith unto him, have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say to this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and *shall not doubt in his heart*, but shall *believe* that those things which he saith *shall come to pass*: he shall *have whatsoever* he saith: therefore, I say unto you, *whatsoever things ye desire* when ye pray, *believe* that ye receive them, *and ye shall have them.*" Our Saviour made a similar promise to his disciples in the 14th of John. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the *works* that I do (that is, miraculous works) *he shall do* also, and *greater works than these shall he do*, because I go unto the Father. And *whatsoever ye shall ask* in my name *that will I do*, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. *If ye ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*" He repeats the same promise in the 16th of John. "Verily, verily I say unto you, *whatsoever ye shall ask* the Father *in my name*, he will give it you." It plainly appears from all these similar passages, that the promise in the text was made to the apostles and to all those primitive christians who possessed miraculous powers. Christ promised all such persons, that if they should pray in faith for any *miracle*, their prayer should be heard, and the very miracle they prayed for should be granted.

II. We are to inquire concerning the *extent* of the promise. "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Though this promise seems to be indefinite and universal, yet we must suppose it was in some measure, or in some sense, limited. It is very natural to conclude, from the peculiar character of the persons to whom it was made, that it had a sole and immediate respect to the bestowment of miraculous gifts. Christ meant to assure those, to whom he had given, and should give the power of working miracles, that if they prayed in faith for any supernatural gift in particular, that that particular gift should be granted. But we have no reason to think,

that if they prayed for any thing else, believing it would be granted, that that particular thing would be granted. The promise was undoubtedly limited and restricted to miraculous gifts, and had no respect to any other favours. If those who possessed the power of working miracles had prayed for any common temporal or spiritual blessings in particular, they had no ground to expect that those particular blessings would be granted in answer to the promise in the text. We know that the apostles and primitive christians were subject to poverty, pain, sickness, and all the common trials and afflictions of the present life; and though they undoubtedly prayed, that these natural evils might be prevented, mitigated, or removed, yet it does not appear, that their prayers respecting those things were always granted. But if the promise in the text were unlimited and universal, it seems that they might have prayed for any common favours, with the same faith and assurance of being heard, as when they prayed for miraculous gifts.

III. Let us inquire with respect to the condition of the promise under consideration. It is said in the text, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive." And in another place it is said, "What things soever ye *desire* when ye pray, *believe* that ye receive them, and *ye shall have them.*" This promise was expressly made upon the condition of a certain kind of faith. If those to whom it was made, exercised that certain kind of faith, their faith absolutely secured the fulfilment of the promise; but if they failed of exercising the faith required, the promise was not fulfilled. We find an instance of this in the 17th of Matthew. There we read, "A certain man came to Christ, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is a lunatick, and sore vexed; for oft times he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither



to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil, and he departed out of him. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, *because of your unbelief*: for verily I say unto you, *if ye have faith* as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." So far we may be assured, that the promise made in the text was made upon the condition of a certain kind of faith, the least degree of which secured the fulfilment of it. The question now is, wherein did the faith of miracles differ from any other kind of faith? To this I answer, that it differed from every other kind of faith, in respect to the *peculiar foundation of it*, which was a *peculiar power* of working miracles, given to *all* the apostles, and to *some* common christians, in the primitive days of the gospel. Christ promised those to whom he had given the power of working miracles, that he would *assist* them in working any miracle they desired to work, upon the condition of their *believing* that he would assist them, according to his promise, which ran in this form: "These signs shall follow them that believe; *in my name* shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them: they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." This was a promise distinct from the promise of eternal life to true penitents; and the *faith* of miracles was built upon this distinct promise, and not upon the promise of eternal life. This appears from the account we have of Peter's faith in working a miracle. "Now when Peter and John went up together into the temple, at the hour of prayer, a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple, which is called beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple. Who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms. And Peter fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting

to receive something of them. Then Peter said, silver and gold have I none : but such as I have, give I thee : *in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.* And as the lame man, who was healed, held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this ? or look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk ? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers hath glorified his Son Jesus ; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. *And his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know : yea, the faith which is in him, hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.*" Here we have a plain and intelligible illustration of the faith of miracles, or that faith to which the promise in the text was made. Peter knew that Christ had given him the peculiar power of working miracles, and that he had promised to assist him in working any miracle, upon the condition of his exercising faith in that promise to assist him. Accordingly, in the exercise of faith in that promise, he said, "*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.*" Saving faith consists in cordially approving the way of salvation by Christ ; but the faith of miracles consisted in *believing his promise to assist* those, whom he had endowed with miraculous power, to perform any miracle, which they desired to perform. It is easy to see that a faith founded upon a promise, is very different from a faith that is not founded upon a promise. Christ did promise those whom he had endowed with miraculous power, that he would assist them in working any miracle, if they would believe in *his promise* of assistance. Those, therefore, who exercised the faith of miracles in the primitive days of christianity, could give as good a reason for their peculiar faith, as others could for their faith in the gospel. Though their faith of mira-

cles was different from saving faith, yet it was built upon as plain, as intelligible, and as firm a foundation, as saving faith; for it was built upon a divine promise, which they were bound to believe. It now remains to inquire,

IV. Whether christians, at this day, have a right to apply the promise in the text to themselves in any case whatever, or whether ministers, at this day, have a right to say to christians, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive." Some devout divines have applied this promise to christians, and some devout christians have applied it to themselves, and professed to have acted under the influence of it. But it is a very serious and important question, whether this be not a misunderstanding, a misapplying, and a perverting of the promise. And perhaps, it will appear in this light, if we consider the following observations.

1. This promise was made to particular persons, and in respect to a particular object. It was made to those who possessed miraculous powers, and with respect to their exercising those powers. All the primitive christians were not endowed with supernatural gifts. Though these were bestowed as largely and generally upon the church of Corinth, as upon any other christian church at that day, yet Paul asked them, "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?" Many were converted some time before they received miraculous gifts. Hence Paul asked certain disciples whom he found at Ephesus, "*Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?*" And they said unto him, we have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, unto what then were ye baptized? and they said unto John's baptism." He then told them, that John baptized his converts upon their faith in *Him* who was to come. "And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them,

*the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.*" When the evangelist Philip had preached the gospel in Samaria and converted many, Peter and John, two apostles, were sent thither; "And when they had come down, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost. (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus;) then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." Their receiving the Holy Ghost signified their receiving the gift of *miracles*, and not the gift of special grace. This the converts had received before the apostles laid their hands upon them. As the gift of the Holy Ghost was not conferred upon all christians, so none but those upon whom that gift was conferred, possessed miraculous powers, and had a right to claim the promise in the text, and to presume to act by virtue of it. The gift of miracles was like the gift of prophesy. When a man had received the gift of prophesy, he was established as a prophet, and had a right to depend upon a prophetick spirit. After Samuel had once received the gift of prophesy, all Israel knew that he was *established* to be a prophet of the Lord. So when a christian had once received the gift of the Holy Ghost, he had a right to work miracles, and to claim the promise in the text. Though we cannot tell how a man, who had received the gift of prophesy, knew that he had received *that gift*; nor how a christian, who had received the gift of miracles, *knew* that he had received *that gift*; yet we must suppose, that a man, who had received the gift of prophesy, *knew* that he had received it; and that a christian, who had received the gift of miracles, *knew* that he had received it. As those, therefore, who had received the gift of the Holy Ghost, *knew* that they had received it, so they had a right to apply the promise in the text to themselves; but as those who had not received the gift of the Holy Ghost, must have *known* that they had not received it, so they had no right to apply the promise in the text to themselves. It hence follows, that christians, at this

day, who have not received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and *know* that they have not received it, have no right to apply the promise in the text to themselves, nor to pray for any supernatural gift, *believing*, that they shall receive it, by virtue of the promise.

2. If christians at this day, apply the promise in the text to themselves, they must do it upon the principle that *believing* a thing to be true, will *make* it true, which we know is false. Some of the Jews in Christ's day *believed* that he was a temporal prince, and would deliver their nation from all their temporal enemies; but this did not make it true. The Jews in general since that time, have *believed* that Christ was an impostor; but this has not made it true. Paul *believed* that he was a good man, and stood high in the favour of God before he was *converted*, but this did not make it true. If any thing be not true before it is believed to be true, the believing of it to be true, cannot make it so. If the promise in the text was not made to any who had not received the Holy Ghost, then if any who have not received the Holy Ghost believe that it is made to them, their believing this to be true, will not make it true. There is no doubt but that some christians in these latter days, have *believed*, that the promise in the text was made to *them*, and have prayed for particular favours, *with a strong belief* that the particular favours they prayed for would be granted, according to their faith, but have commonly, if not always been disappointed.

3. It appears from the limitation of the promise in the text, that it cannot apply to christians at this day. The promise was limited to those only, who had received the Holy Ghost; and in respect to his supernatural gifts alone. It gave them no assurance, that if they prayed for any thing, except some supernatural gift, that they should certainly receive it. And since those who had received the Holy Ghost, had no right to exercise faith in the promise, in respect to any common favours, it necessarily follows, that common christians, at this day, have no right to exercise faith in the pro-

mise, in respect to praying for common favours. It is absurd to suppose, that "all things whatsoever, christians at this day, shall ask in prayer, *believing*, they shall receive," when this was not true in regard to those, who had received the gift of the Holy Ghost. This would be to suppose, that if any particular christian now, should ask for any particular grace, *believing* he should receive it, he would receive it; or if he should ask to be preserved from any particular danger, *believing* that he should be preserved, he would be preserved; or if he should ask for temporal prosperity, *believing* it should be granted, it would be granted. If it be absurd to suppose these things, then it is absurd to suppose, that christians, at this day, have a right to apply the promise in the text to themselves in any case whatever. I may add,

4. We have reason to believe, that pious persons have often prayed *properly* for particular favours, and yet have been denied. David fasted and prayed for his sick child, that it might live; but it died. Paul prayed that the thorn in his flesh, whatever it was, might be removed; but instead of removing it, "the Lord said, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul had undoubtedly read and believed the promise in the text, when he besought the Lord thrice, that the thorn in his flesh might depart from him; but he did not exercise faith in the promise, because he knew it did not respect natural, but only supernatural gifts. Christ prayed repeatedly and fervently that the cup of suffering might pass from him; but that cup did not pass from him. Though he knew that his Father always heard and approved his prayers, yet he did not always expect that he would always grant whatever he prayed for; except he prayed for some *miraculous* gift; and then it was always granted as he expected. These instances clearly show, that christians, at this day, have no right to apply the promise in the text to themselves, nor to exercise faith in it, in praying for any thing whatsoever.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. If the apostles and primitive preachers, and professors of christianity were endowed with supernatural gifts; then we can easily account for the rapid and extensive spread of the gospel for three or four hundred years after its first publication. All civil and ecclesiastical historians agree in the fact, that the gospel did spread far and wide in that period of the church, without the aid of civil or military power; and in opposition to Jewish prejudices and heathen superstition, idolatry, learning, and philosophy. Gibbon, and other deistical writers, have endeavoured to account for this event, without a divine and miraculous interposition in favour of christianity. But they can give no satisfactory evidence in support of their infidel opinion. The inspired writers alone give us full and infallible information upon this subject. The account they give us of the supernatural powers conferred on the apostles and their followers, constrains us to believe, that the gospel must have triumphed over all opposition wherever it was carried by men armed with miraculous powers. Not only the apostles, but all the churches which they planted, possessed a great variety of supernatural gifts. They possessed the word of wisdom, which enabled them to understand and explain the old testament types and predictions of Christ. They possessed the power of prophecy, which enabled them to foretel future events. They possessed the gift of tongues, which enabled them to speak to every nation in their own language. They possessed the power of casting out evil spirits, and of healing all manner of bodily diseases and infirmities. The frequent exercise of all such supernatural powers must have carried an irresistible conviction to the minds of men, of the truth, divinity, and importance of the gospel, which they heard preached with the utmost clearness and pungency. It is not by any means incredible, that the

preaching of the gospel, attended by a combination of supernatural powers, should confound the heathen priests, silence the heathen oracles, overturn the heathen temples, and subvert the whole system of heathen idolatry, superstition, and fanaticism. No mere human power and exertion can account for the astonishing spread of the gospel in the primitive times of christianity; and nothing short of those supernatural powers bestowed upon the propagators of it, could have enabled them to produce the great and glorious effects which it is universally acknowledged they did produce. And since such miraculous powers were absolutely necessary to promote the spread of the gospel through Judea, Asia, and the whole Roman empire, at first, it is very reasonable to suppose, that those supernatural gifts were continued in the church *so long*, and no *longer*, than they were necessary to promote the gospel. Accordingly, the best historians tell us, that they gradually *decreased*, and finally *ceased* about the close of the third century.

2. If christians have no right, at this day, to apply the promise in the text to themselves, then they have no right to pray for any favour, whether temporal or spiritual, private or publick, absolutely and unsubmitively. "Every good gift, and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. He is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth." He has infallibly determined when, and where, and upon whom he will bestow all his favours; and christians have no right to desire or to ask him to alter any of his determinations respecting themselves or others. And since they never know before hand, his determinations respecting the bestowment of any future favours, they have no right to ask for any thing, which he has not absolutely promised, without unreserved submission to his will. Though he has promised Christ, that he will save all those whom he has given him in the covenant of redemption, yet christians have no right to pray absolutely and uncon-



ditionally for the salvation of any particular sinner; because they do not know that it is his will to save that particular person. Though they ought to pray for those that are sick, that they may be recovered to health, yet they ought not to pray for this favour absolutely and unconditionally; because they do not know that it is the will of God to grant it. And though they ought to pray for all mankind, that both temporal and spiritual blessings may be bestowed upon them: yet they have no right, in any case, to pray for any publick favours, absolutely and unconditionally, because they do not know what publick favours God has determined to bestow. Their prayers, in all cases, and in respect to all things, ought to be made conditionally and submissively. And whenever they pray conditionally and submissively, they pray that whatever they ask for may not be granted, if God see best to deny them. Christ has set a perfect example of submissive prayer, in his address to his Father in the garden, respecting his tremendous sufferings on the cross. There he kneeled down and prayed, saying, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not *my* will, but *thine* be done." His will was to have God remove the cup from him, if he were pleased to do it; but if not, he prayed that his petition might be denied, and the will of his Father might be done. Christians, at this day, ought always to follow this example in all their prayers for themselves and others, and in respect to every thing they pray for. They have no right to imagine, that "all things whatsoever they shall ask in prayer, *believing*, they shall receive." This promise was given to certain persons for a certain time, and does not belong to them, and they have no right to exercise faith in it.

3. If christians have no right, at this day, to exercise faith in the promise in the text, then they have no right to exercise faith in their own peculiar feelings or impressions. The apostles and primitive christians, who possessed miraculous powers, did not believe that all things whatsoever they asked in prayer, should be

granted, because they had peculiar feelings and impressions respecting what they asked; but they believed that whatsoever they asked would be granted, because a divine promise had been given them, that whatever they asked in faith of that promise, should be granted. They knew that the promise in the text was made to their *faith*, and not to their *feelings* or peculiar *impressions*. They did not expect to work a miracle, because they had a certain *impression*, that they could work a miracle; but they expected to work a miracle, because they believed in the *promise* of divine assistance to work a miracle. Since those who possessed miraculous powers, had no right to believe, that whatever they asked in prayer, would be granted on account of any peculiar *impression*, that it would be granted: it is certainly absurd for christians at this day, who are totally destitute of miraculous powers, to believe that they shall receive whatever they ask in prayer, on account of some peculiar *impression*, which they have that what they ask they shall certainly receive. Though christians, at this day, have no promise, that whatever they pray for shall be granted, yet they sometimes have a strong *impression* on their minds, that a certain favour they ardently desire will be bestowed, if they pray for it on the ground of that impression. But since they have no promise to believe in, they have no right to believe in any *impression*, that what they pray for shall be granted. There is reason to fear, that christians many times believe in an *impression*, instead of a *promise*; and confidently expect, that God will grant what they are *deeply impressed* he will grant, if they ask for it. Men are naturally disposed to regard *peculiar impressions*, and to be influenced by them, in their hopes and fears, and prayers. We sometimes hear of persons having promises come to their minds, and making deep impressions on them. And it is very probable, that the promise in the text has come to the minds of many persons, and made deep impressions upon them; and led them to imagine, that they really believed the *promise*, while they only believed the *impressions* made by

it. It is more than possible, that some may now recollect certain *impressions*, which led them to pray for certain favours, in great confidence, that they would be granted. But no one has a right to exercise faith in his own peculiar feelings or impressions. There are no promises made to any impressions. All the promises of the gospel are made to some holy exercise or affection, and to nothing in which men are entirely passive.

4. If christians, at this day, have no right to apply the promise in the text to themselves, then those who apply it to themselves are in danger of running into gross errors and delusions. There have been many individuals, among almost all denominations of christians, who have applied the promise to themselves, and have prayed and acted under a supposed influence of it. They have believed, that if they prayed for particular favours, in the belief that the favours would be granted, that they should certainly receive them. And they have built their faith in the promise, not upon having supernatural gifts, but upon their having *peculiar and uncommon impressions* in respect to the favours they prayed for. Such an application of the text, and of similar passages in the new testament, has led some to expect what they had no right to expect. It has led them to pray for certain things, with an ardent desire and belief, that they would be granted. It led Mr. Whitefield confidently to expect what he had no right confidently to expect. He had an amiable, promising little son, whom he ardently desired and prayed might be an eminently useful minister, and he had such strong and agreeable impressions concerning him, that he confidently expected, that he would be what he so ardently desired and prayed that he might be. But his son died when he was about four years old, and the event not only disappointed him, but cured him of his error. The misapplication of the promise in the text, has led some confidently to expect, that a certain man would be their minister, because they had a strong impression and a lively faith that he would be

their minister ; but they were disappointed. The same groundless faith has led others to expect that a certain man would be ordained in a certain place, on a certain day ; but the event did not take place. The misunderstanding and the misapplying this text has led some confidently to expect, and publickly to predict, that there would be a revival of religion in such and such places, and such and such persons would be converted at such and such particular times ; but their hopes and predictions were not realized. The same misapprehension and misapplication of the same promise have led some to go where they had no right to go, and to do what they had no right to do ; and what they afterwards bitterly regretted. These facts are capable of being fully substantiated. And they have taken place, as I said, among almost, if not all denominations of christians. Impressions have governed the faith of Quakers, of Congregationalists, of Methodists, of Universalists, and even of Deists. Relly, the father of the Murrean Universalists, professed to be governed in speaking and acting, by internal impressions. And Lord Herbert, the father of Deists, professed to be guided by internal impressions. The great adversary endeavoured to lead Christ astray, by the misapplication of a promise. And probably this has been, for ages, his most successful method of leading both sincere and insincere christians into the most absurd and fatal errors and delusions. He first makes certain impressions on their minds, which leads them to misunderstand and misapply promises in their favour. How often does he lead sinners to entertain a false hope, by applying promises made to christians, to themselves ? How often does he lead christians to adopt the sentiment, that if they believe a thing to be true, it will make it true ? that if they believe a thing to be right, it will make it right ; or if they believe an event will happen, it will make it happen ? It is easy to see, that by this mode of seduction, he can lead mankind into any errors and delusions he pleases. Paul was sensible of this diabolical artifice, and cau-

tions the Corinthians against it. He says, "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy. I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Men are very fond of thinking that if any agreeable *impressions* are made upon their minds, they must be made by some *good* spirit. But they ought to remember, that *impressions* may be made by an *evil* spirit, as well as by a good spirit. "Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour."

5. If no other peculiar promise respecting prayer was made to those who possessed miraculous powers, but the promise in the text, and other similar promises, then all the other promises made to prayer are applicable to christians at this day. They have a right to exercise faith in the general promise, "He that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." They have a right to exercise faith also in innumerable other promises made to the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous. They have all the encouragement to pray in faith of the promises, that they can reasonably desire. God has never said to the seed of Jacob, "seek ye me in vain;" but he has assured them, that if they pray aright, they shall always be heard; and either receive what they pray for in particular, or something more for his glory and their good. In order to pray aright, they must pray with a real *desire* for those things they pray for, and with a cordial submission to the will of God, whether he shall grant or deny their requests. And when they offer up such prayers, they are always his delight, and shall avail much, though they do not obtain the particular things they ask for. And this is all they ought to desire or do desire when they pray aright.

## SERMON XXIII.

FEEBLE CHRISTIANS.

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MATTHEW, XII. 20.

*A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.*

IN order to understand these words, it seems necessary to read a number of the preceding verses with which they are intimately connected.

After Christ had healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day, "Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence; and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all, and charged them that they should not make him known: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold, my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory." Something like this seems to be the true sense of the passage: "You, Jews, imagine that the Messiah will come to set up a temporal kingdom in this world, to aggrandize your nation and save them from the oppression and tyranny of the Gentiles, to whom you have so long been subjected. But in this you are greatly deceived. I, who profess to be the promised Messiah, am not come to gain

*temporal*, but *spiritual* victories. I am not come to execute vengeance, but to display mercy, agreeably to the predictions concerning the promised Messiah, which you have often read in the prophecies of Isaiah and other prophets. I am come to seek that which was lost, to strengthen that which was weak, and to heal that which was sick. I will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; but I will bind up the broken hearted, and comfort the feeble minded, until I have obtained a spiritual victory and triumphed over both Jews and Gentiles. My kingdom cometh not with observation, or with tumults and convulsion, like other kingdoms, but silently and irresistibly in the hearts of men. I have cured the withered hand, I have healed multitudes that followed me, and I am now ready to heal the minds as well as the bodies of men, and perform the whole work, which I was sent into the world to perform." The spirit of the text in this connexion, justifies us in saying,

That Christ is ready to receive and comfort the feeble minded. I shall,

I. Describe the feeble minded;

II. Consider how it comes to pass that they are feeble minded; and,

III. Show that Christ is ready to receive and comfort them.

I. I am to describe the feeble minded.

These are certainly such as resemble the bruised reed and smoking flax. They are those of a broken and contrite spirit, and essentially different from the stout hearted. Their carnal mind has been slain, and their stony hearts softened. They have experienced a saving change, but still are in darkness and difficulty. They feel their need of comfort, and their unworthiness of it. This is the general character of the feeble minded, in distinction from those who are strong in faith. But it may be proper and useful to give a more specifick description of the feeble minded; for they do really differ in various respects, though they are essentially alike. Here it may be observed,

1. That those are feeble minded, who have submission to God, without faith in Christ. This is often the case with young converts. Their enmity to God is taken away; their objections are removed; they cease to contend with their maker; they justify him and condemn themselves; they realize that they are in his hand, as the clay is in the hands of the potter, and they are willing that he should dispose of them as shall be most for his own glory. While they lie here submissively at the foot of divine sovereignty, their past fears and distresses leave them in a solemn calm, that they cannot account for; but are apt to conclude, that God has given them up to stupidity. Though they really submit to God, yet they do not believe in Christ. They realize that God may justly destroy them, but do not see how he can justly and consistently save them. They are still ignorant of the way of salvation through the atonement of Christ; and being ignorant of this they do not exercise faith in the only and all-sufficient mediator; which leaves them in darkness. In such a weak, feeble, and comfortless situation, many have continued not only for days, and weeks, but months, if not for years. These persons resemble the smoking flax before it begins to blaze.

2. Those are feeble minded, who have submission and faith, but no hope. Submission and faith may both exist in the heart, without creating a hope of salvation. Those who have submitted to divine sovereignty, and seen the way of life through Christ, may not know nor think, that their submission and faith are genuine exercises of grace, and entitle them to the promises of the gospel. Though they are conscious of love to God and love to Christ, still they imagine, that they do not feel as they have always supposed that true converts feel. The change of views and feelings in their minds, does not appear to them like what they have supposed a saving change to be. Though they are sensible, that they feel differently from what they once felt; yet they durst not indulge a hope, that they have passed from death unto life, and are in a renewed, pardoned,



and justified state. They sensibly desire to obtain pardoning mercy, and feel determined to seek and strive for salvation as long as they live. There are a great many such persons in the world, who appear to others, by what they say and do, to be real christians; and yet entertain no hope themselves of their own good estate. Their hearts appear to be broken like the bruised reed, their consciences appear to be enlightened and tender, and they discover sparks of grace, which resemble the smoking flax before it bursts into a flame.

3. There is another class of the feeble minded; I mean such as have submission, faith, and hope; but yet have little confidence in their gracious state. They sometimes hope, and sometimes fear, but generally doubt. They are never confident that they have received the grace of God in truth. They mean to be conscientious and punctual in the performance of all religious duties, and to seek and strive for greater light and confidence; but yet they live somewhat easy upon their feeble and slender hope of being the children of God. They are almost continually under what they consider the hidings of God's face, which strong as well as weak christians sometimes experience. It must not be omitted to observe,

4. That backsliding christians are weak and feeble minded. There are some sincere professors, who lose their first love, neglect their first duties, and grow languid and dull in running the christian course. Such instances are mentioned in scripture, and such instances are to be found at the present day. This may be owing in many cases, to a change of circumstances, which lead the spiritually minded to become worldly minded. the strict to become lax, the serious to become vain, and the exemplary to become conformed to the spirit and manners of the world. The declension may take place in almost any stage of the christian life; but more generally in the early stage of it, among young and inexperienced converts, who are not well acquainted with the world, the men of the world, the things of the

world, and the remaining depravity of their own hearts. Such persons are feeble minded while their stupidity continues, and after they awake, repent, and return to God. They cease to trust in their own hearts, and tremble in the view of the dangers of their pilgrimage state.

Now such feeble minded christians as have been described, are no visionary characters. The apostle often mentions such persons. He exhorts the Romans "to receive him that is weak in the faith." He tells them that "they ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." He commands the Thessalonians "to comfort the feeble minded." And he sets them an example of this tenderness and compassion. He says, "To the weak, became I as weak, that I might gain the weak." It is probable, that there are many more weak, than strong christians, at this day. This certainly seems strange at first view; but it does not destroy the evidence of the fact. We must believe this is true, though we should not be able to account for it. It is very easy, however, to discover and point out various causes, why many pious persons should be feeble minded, or weak in the faith. This leads me to consider,

II. How it comes to pass, that any, who have experienced a saving change, should be such feeble minded persons as have been described. Among others, the following causes may be mentioned. And,

1. It may be owing to the want of instruction, that some are feeble minded. There are many persons who are deprived of religious instruction. Some in this gospel land are destitute of bibles and of preaching, and yet God sees fit, by means of his providential dealings and private instructions, to awaken, convince, and convert them. He causes them to see the plague of their own hearts, fastens a sense of guilt and self-condemnation on their consciences, and disposes them to cast themselves upon divine mercy, and there leaves them in darkness and doubts. They are unacquainted with the scriptural signs of grace, and know not how to judge justly of their spiritual state. Others may sit

under general and indiscriminating preaching, and seldom hear any thing said about experimental religion. The exercises of the heart under awakenings and convictions, and in the act of conversion, are rarely mentioned, or if mentioned, are never *described*. And how should those, who sit under such preaching, be otherwise than feeble minded, in respect to their religious exercises? It is undoubtedly partly owing to the want of religious instructions, that a great many real christians make no more progress and enjoy no more comfort in their religious course. Though there are many religious instructors in this favoured land, yet there is a great want of sentimental and experimental preaching, which is the occasion of there being not a few feeble minded christians.

2. It may be owing to wrong instructions, that some are feeble minded. They never hear the great and peculiar doctrines of the gospel clearly explained and properly supported. But on the other hand, they hear a great deal said against them, as unscriptural, unprofitable, and dangerous. Not a few of those who profess to preach the gospel, deny the first principles of the oracles of God, and employ all their learning and ingenuity in opposing and attempting to refute them. Though such preachers cannot prevent their hearers from becoming christians, and believing the doctrines they deny, yet they throw great difficulties in the way of their growing in knowledge and grace, and becoming strong in the faith. Though they do not embrace all the errors which they hear taught and inculcated, yet they very often embrace some, which weaken their faith in the precious truths that they do embrace. How many apparently good men will neither deny nor maintain the doctrine of decrees, the doctrine of election, the doctrine of reprobation, the doctrine of true submission, the doctrine of total depravity, the doctrine of instantaneous regeneration, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, nor the doctrine of saving grace as a due qualification for communion at

the table of Christ. All such persons are weak in the faith. They see those doctrines of the gospel, as one saw men as trees walking. And having such obscure and faint ideas of the doctrines of grace, they must be involved in darkness and uncertainty, in respect to the religious state of their minds. Having been taught to place religion in that in which it does not consist, they must be at a loss whether they have ever experienced a saving change or not. Though there may be some feeble, yet there are but very few strong and growing christians, who stately sit under erroneous preaching.

3. It may be owing to a natural gloominess of mind, that some christians are weak in faith, and hope, and every christian grace. Though they read a great deal in the bible, and though they hear a great deal of plain, instructive, and experimental preaching, and though they have a sound judgment, yet they love to look on the dark side of things, and cherish a desponding disposition. Those who wish to live in fear, rather than in hope, and make themselves believe it is their duty to call their sincerity in question as often as they can, take a direct method to weaken their faith and hope, and every gracious affection. It is easy for gloomy persons to call up gloomy objects, and dwell upon these things, which tend to weaken their evidence of grace. They are so unduly afraid of being deceived, that they try to make themselves believe that all the light they have ever seen, and all the comfort they have ever enjoyed, was owing to some delusion. And when new views and feelings are experienced, they do all they can to repel them and argue them away, and prevent them from giving light and hope. They adopt a mode of arguing which is very plausible. They say there is an essential difference between true and false love, true and false faith, true and false repentance, and every christain grace has its counterfeit, so that there is room to be deceived; and according to scripture and observation, there is reason to fear that many have been deceived; it is possible, therefore, after all that

they have experienced, they may be deceived. By this mode of reasoning from the *possibility* of deception, they keep themselves in perpetual darkness and doubt. There is great sophistry in this mode of reasoning in respect to themselves, but not in respect to others. It is always true, that it is possible they misjudge in respect to the goodness of others; but it is not always true, that they should misjudge in respect to their own gracious affections. As there is an essential difference between holy and unholy affections, so they may *know* this difference; and when they know this difference, and clearly see that their love is of the right kind, it is then impossible that they should be deceived. This may be clearly illustrated by the case of Judas and that of Peter. The eleven apostles thought that Judas was a good man till he betrayed his master, but they were deceived in respect to his sincerity. Peter, as well as the rest was deceived with respect to him, and it was not possible that it should have been otherwise, so long as Judas conducted like a sincere christian. But it was impossible that Peter should be deceived in this respect, when he exercised supreme love to Christ, and could appeal to him and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." It would have been absurd then for Peter to put this question to himself, is it not possible that I am now deceived? have not others been deceived? may not I, after all, be deceived? Such questions as these, would have been as absurd for Peter to ask himself, as to ask, "*Am I not asleep, while I know I am awake?*" Every real christian has the witness in himself of his sincerity, and when he loves Christ supremely he may know it, and when he knows it, he has no right to wander in the wide, dark, and boundless field of *possibility*. But some poor, gloomy christians have undoubtedly walked in this dark field, until their feeble faith has been swallowed up in vision. But it may be further observed,

4. That it may be owing to *the manner of their conversion*, that some who have experienced a saving change, are weak and feeble minded christians. Though re-

generation is the same in all who experience it, yet the previous, attendant, and concomitant circumstances of it are often very various. Some are much longer under awakenings and convictions than others, before they are converted. Some have a much greater *sense* of *danger* than of *guilt*, before they are converted; and others a greater sense of *guilt* than of *danger*, before they are converted. Some are converted in the view of one divine truth, and some in view of another. Some are converted in the view of one part of the divine character, and some in the view of another. These various circumstances lay a foundation for a great diversity in the degrees of light and joy which attend genuine conversions. All the previous, attendant, and concomitant circumstances of regeneration, which have been mentioned, never did, nor could, meet in the conversion of any particular person; so that there never was a perfect similarity in any two conversions. Now, not only young, but aged converts, are apt to judge of their own experiences by the experiences of others; and especially by the experiences of those whom they esteem the most judicious and pious christians. And this often proves an occasion of darkness and doubts to those who pay more attention to the *circumstances* of regeneration, than to the *nature* of it. But our Saviour has told us, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." It remains to show,

III. That Christ is ready to receive and comfort all such penitent, broken hearted, feeble minded persons, as have been described. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory." In the sixty-first of Isaiah, he is predicted as saying of himself, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the *meek*: he hath sent me to bind up the *broken hearted*, to proclaim liberty to the *captives*, and the opening of the prison to them that are *bound*; to *comfort* them that *mourn*; to give them *beauty*

for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." This prediction he punctually fulfilled, while he preached and conversed among men. Once he said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." At another time he said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." And, "in the last day, that great day of the feast, he stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He feels the same tenderness and compassion towards the broken hearted and feeble minded now he is in heaven, as he did while he was here on earth. Since his ascension he says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." These gracious and unlimited invitations to distressed, broken hearted penitents, give them the strongest assurance, that Christ is ready to receive and comfort them, if they will only come to him, and cast themselves unreservedly upon his mercy. And this will further appear, if we consider that Christ has thrown them into this dark, doubtful, distressing state, to prepare them for the more sensible and grateful reception of pardoning mercy, and divine consolation. The longer and deeper sense they have of their guilt and wretchedness, the higher sense they will have of light and comfort when it is granted. It has been observed, that those whose conversion has been attended with peculiar darkness and doubts, have eventually made some of the brightest christians. Darkness prepares for light, despondency for hope, and humiliation for exaltation. The more effectually the stony heart is bruised, and the longer the sparks of grace are kindling into a flame, the more steady and lasting it may be expected the fire will burn. Whatever grows very gradually in nature's garden, generally grows longer than that which grows rapidly. And this, perhaps,

holds equally true in respect to the trees of righteousness, which grow in the garden of grace. We are more frequently disappointed in regard to what are supposed to be clear, plain, sudden, surprising, and very joyful conversions, than in regard to conversions attended at first, with less promising prospects. There is reason to think, that Christ views with peculiar complacency, those who have the deepest sense of unworthiness and ill desert, and come to him the most meekly, humbly, submissively, and diffidently. Such, therefore, may be assured, that Christ will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but bind up the broken hearted, strengthen the feeble minded, comfort them that mourn, and give them the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from the description which has been given of the feeble minded, that there is reason to think, that many are converted sooner than they suppose they are. True converts generally date their conversion at some time, when they found some peculiar light and joy. But a submission to divine sovereignty, or a willingness to be in the hands of God, generally takes place in the heart, before sensible repentance, or faith, or joy, or hope. After the heart is changed, and its enmity is slain, and it becomes reconciled to God, it may be destitute of repentance, faith, joy, and expectation of heaven; and in this feeble, comfortless state it may remain some time, a long time, and we cannot say how long. Probably some are converted days, or weeks, or months, or years, before they entertain a hope of being renewed, sanctified, and adopted into the family of God; and possibly some are in bondage, through fear of eternal death, all their days. The doubts of christians often arise from their not knowing the best marks of conversion in their favour. They consider *joy* as a better evidence of being converted,



than submission, humiliation, godly sorrow, or a hungering and thirsting after righteousness. But that which is the most contrary to selfishness, is always the best mark of a change of heart; and what is more directly contrary to selfishness than submission, humiliation, godly sorrow, and every species of self-denial? These are the peculiar marks which Christ has given of his true disciples. But these are not the marks which many preachers propose to their supposed converts, to try their sincerity by. They pronounce those to be converted, who have no other views and feelings than such as may arise from the most selfish heart. When they see sinners in deep distress under a sense of their guilty and perishing state, and then rejoice in the hope of escaping future misery, they are ready to pronounce them real converts, without inquiring whether they have seen the justice of the divine law, the amiable sovereignty of God, and felt a willingness that he should dispose of them, both in time and eternity. Such exercises of self-denial and disinterested love to God, they are so far from representing as evidences of grace, that they pronounce them inconsistent with it. It is true, that joy and rejoicing may flow from submission, repentance, faith, and hope; but it is the submission, the repentance, the faith, and humiliation, which are surer marks of conversion, than joy and rejoicing. Real converts, therefore, might find satisfactory evidence, that their hearts are renewed, much sooner than they commonly do, if they would attend to the best evidence they have of being born again. They really have the evidence of reconciliation to God, self-condemnation, self-abhorrence, godly sorrow, self-abasement, self-denial, and unreserved submission to God; and these are the best marks they can have, that they have passed from death unto life.

2. It appears from the description of the feeble minded, that men may easily think that they are converted before they are. They may imagine they are feeble minded, while they are really stout-hearted. They may be bowed down under a deep sense of their dan-

ger and guilt—walk softly—cry ardently to escape the wrath to come—and be willing to do any thing and every thing, except exercising supreme love and unlimited submission to God. While in this situation, they are often told, and are willing to believe, that they are doing all they can do and ought to do; that they are the bruised reed and smoking flax, and feeble minded, whom Christ is ready to receive and comfort. This fills them with joy, and they are pronounced converted. But they are like the way-side, the stony-ground, and thorny-ground hearers, whom Christ represents as self-deceived, and destitute of every mark of a sound conversion. They precipitately and presumptuously imagine they are converted before they are. They are like one and another, who inconsiderately said, that they would follow Christ, though they were not prepared to take up the cross and follow him. Or, they are like those who followed him for the sake of the loaves and fishes, whom he rejected and condemned.

None have a right to think they are converted, until they find some marks in them, of pure disinterested love, and real self-denial, which are exercises diametrically opposite to every selfish affection. Search the bible through, and you will not find a single mark of grace or vital piety, but what has the nature of disinterested love, and real self-denial. And if you consult your own reason and conscience upon the subject, you cannot discover a single mark of saving grace in your hearts, which does not appear to your own judgment, an exercise or action diametrically contrary to every species of selfishness. It is always owing to self-deception, therefore, that any suppose they are converted before they are. They do not judge of their spiritual state by the marks of grace, which Christ, and other inspired teachers have given. They suffer their own selfish hearts and erroneous teachers, to lead them astray. There have been, and still are, many erroneous teachers, who ignorantly teach for doctrines the opinions of men, which are directly opposed to, and subversive of, the doctrines and spirit of the gospel.

A false hope is extremely dangerous, and all ought to guard themselves against it. Let those who are in doubt and darkness, exercise the strictest self-examination.

3. If the feeble minded have been justly described, then it is very difficult to strengthen and comfort them. They are generally disposed to keep themselves in darkness and doubts, and refuse to be comforted. Their feebleness principally arises from ignorance, and it would be easy to remove their ignorance, if it were not voluntary ignorance. It would be easy to distinguish regeneration or a change of heart from all previous, attendant, and concomitant circumstances, in which it does not consist, and clearly show that it wholly consists in a change of heart from selfishness to pure, disinterested benevolence. There is no pure and holy love, in the servile fear of punishment in awakenings. There is no pure, disinterested love, in a sense of guilt or mere conviction of sin. There is no pure, disinterested love, in seeking and striving to escape the wrath to come. There is no pure, disinterested love, in the joy which springs from the mere hope of future and eternal happiness. Regeneration, therefore, does not consist in any of these things, but in pure, disinterested love, which every real convert possesses. Why then does any such person doubt and fear, that he has not experienced a saving change? It must be owing to voluntary ignorance. He has been told, or been used to think, that it consists in something else. Though he has submission, he has no faith; or though he has submission, faith, and hope, yet he has not such great joy as some converts have, and such as he supposes is necessary to remove doubts and create confidence of his good estate. Such feeble minded christians overlook and disregard the highest and best marks of saving grace, and wait in doubt and darkness for some better evidence of a saving change, than *cordial reconciliation to God, unreserved submission to his will, godly sorrow for sin, self-loathing, self-abasement, supreme love to Christ, and a resolution to live a holy, obedient,*

self-denied life. These *scriptural* marks of grace, they dare not depend upon; but imagine, that some such things as have given others singular light, and joy, and hope, would remove all their doubts and fears, and give them complete satisfaction and confidence. But if the best scriptural marks of grace will not strengthen and comfort their feeble minds, it is impracticable to *remove* their voluntary ignorance, doubts, and fears, by any human means. They refuse to be comforted by gospel motives, and seek for light where there is no light to be found, and pursue a course, which commonly increases their darkness, and diminishes their exertions to grow in knowledge and to do their duty. There is reason to fear, that there are some who never will enjoy the consolations of the gospel, which they ought to enjoy, until their dying hour.

4. If the feeble mindedness of christians be generally owing to the causes which have been mentioned, then it is of great importance, that preachers should give proper directions to inquiring sinners, and feeble-minded christians. If inquiring sinners are properly taught, they will not commonly think they are converted *before* they are; nor build their hopes upon any other than scriptural grounds, after they are converted. If they are properly taught the nature of total depravity, which renders all their desires, distresses, seekings and strivings in their unrenewed state unholy and unacceptable to God; then they will easily understand the nature of regeneration, which removes their total depravity, by changing their hearts from selfishness to benevolence, from hatred of God to love to him, from opposition to submission, from unbelief to a cordial belief and approbation of the gospel; and these new, holy, benevolent affections appear to be the only and sufficient grounds of a solid hope of salvation. When they look into the gospel, they find that their new views and exercises are just such as Christ required of all his true followers. As long as these views and exercises continue, they enjoy peace and comfort, and are not

troubled with doubts, and fears, and darkness, unless they find these views, and feelings, declining, and languishing. And then their desires and prayers are, that their former views and feelings may be restored. They do not desire, nor expect any other *kind* of evidence of their good estate, but that which arises from the *scriptural* marks of grace. But those who have been differently taught under awakenings and convictions, and have never been told that their hearts were totally depraved, but been assured that their seekings and strivings were acceptable to God; and should they be converted, their conversion would consist in a joyful hope of salvation, under such unscriptural instructions are very liable to gain a false hope, and to form a false notion of regeneration, not only in respect to themselves, but in respect to others. And in case they are really regenerated, they will build their hope upon the *weakest*, and not the *strongest* evidence of conversion. It is, therefore, of great importance, that preachers of the gospel should give proper, scriptural directions to inquiring sinners, and desponding saints. And in order to do this, they must clearly delineate the true character of sinners, and the true character of saints, and the scriptural grounds of christian hope. There are as many, and as great errors among those, who are called experimental preachers, as among those who are called speculative, legal and superficial preachers. When people are taught the first and fundamental principles of the gospel, if they are awakened, they will be awakened in the view of truth; if they are convinced, they will be convinced in the view of truth; and if they are converted, they will be converted in the view of truth. Of course, they will not be feeble-minded, but strong in the faith. Or if their first love should languish, and they should fall into declension, there is a rallying point to which they may be more easily brought, reformed, and reconverted. For real saints often need to be brought to that point in christianity, from which they first derive their hope.

5. If the feeble-minded be such as have been described, then there is reason to apprehend, that the great deceiver uses all his art and subtilty to make and keep them feeble-minded. He can suggest false grounds of doubt, and throw them into darkness and perplexity; which he knows will weaken and obstruct them in their christian course, if not cause them to stumble and fall. He knows that darkness and doubts will obstruct their enjoying religion, or professing religion, or promoting religion, or opposing in religion. When such feeble-mindedness creeps into a church, it has the most unhappy and deplorable effects. This was exemplified from time to time in the Jewish church, in the seven churches of Asia, and is still exemplified in many of the churches of Christ at this day. But the feeble-minded love to be so, and will either reject, or abuse the proper means to strengthen and comfort them; which are the plain, important truths of the gospel. In the view and love of these, their doubts would vanish, and their hopes become strong and joyful. But the feeble-minded are generally the most reluctant to hear and embrace the plain and heart-searching doctrines, especially; if their feebleness arises from forsaking God and conforming to the world.

6. It appears from what has been said, that feeble-minded christians are to be *blamed* as well as *pitied*. They are certainly to be pitied, for they *enjoy little* and *suffer much* from their religion. The renovation of their hearts has rendered their consciences tender, spoiled them for the enjoyments of the world, and made them desire the spiritual comfort, which they at the same time refuse. They greatly injure themselves, and the cause of religion. For they lead the men of the world to think that religion is a gloomy, visionary and hateful thing, and never productive of that peace, serenity, and joy, which the scripture represents it to be. For this injurious effect, they are responsible, because God has given them reason to rejoice, and required them to rejoice, and nothing but what is wrong in their

hearts prevents them from rejoicing. But they are apt to pity, rather than blame themselves, and think that others ought to pity, rather than blame them. But whenever they get light and enjoy peace, they will blame themselves.

## SERMON XXIV.

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### CONTENTMENT.

#### I. TIMOTHY, VI. 6.

*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*

SINCE God orders all the circumstances of human life, every person ought to be entirely satisfied with that state and situation in which he is placed. One person has no more reason to complain of his condition than another. This the apostle taught Timothy to teach others. "Let as many *servants* as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters let them not despise them because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful, and beloved partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions, which are unprofitable." And then he adds. "But godliness with contentment is great gain." The apostle here directs Timothy to teach all men to be religious in order to be contented, and to be contented in order to be happy in any situation in which God places them; whether as masters, or servants, whether in the most eligible, or least eligible circumstances of life. This is the connection of the text, and in treating upon it, I shall,

I. Explain godliness :



II. Show that godliness will produce contentment ;  
and,

III. Show that godliness with contentment is great  
gain.

I. I am to explain godliness. This consists in two  
things.

1. It consists in a godly heart. Godly signifies god-  
like. Those who have a heart after God's own heart  
are godly, and bear his moral image, in which man  
was at first created, and to which every renewed per-  
son is restored by the special influence of the divine  
spirit. The spirit in regeneration instamps the moral  
image of God upon the heart, which consists in right-  
eousness and true holiness. There is nothing in which  
men so nearly resemble God, as in a godly heart. This  
transforms them into the divine likeness, and makes  
them holy as God is holy, and perfect as God is per-  
fect. Godliness comprises every species of holy affec-  
tions, as ungodliness comprises every species of sinful  
affections. Godliness is the essence of all vital piety,  
and contains every thing that belongs to experimental  
religion. Besides,

2. Godliness implies not only a godly heart, but a  
godly life. All men will live according to their hearts.  
Those who have a godly heart will live in a godly man-  
ner ; which implies,

1. A sincere consecration of themselves to God.  
Those who mean to live a godly life, give themselves  
away to God in an everlasting covenant, never to be  
forgotten. They consecrate their time, their talents,  
their property, and all their influence to his service.  
They resolve to live to him, and not to themselves.  
They sincerely aim to do every thing to his glory.  
Whether they are rich or poor, whether they are rul-  
ers or subjects, whether they are bond or free, they  
mean to be the servants of God, and to seek the inter-  
ests of his kingdom, above every other interest. They  
mean to acknowledge him in all their ways, and look  
to him to guide all their steps, and supply all their  
wants. These have been the inward views and feel-

ings of all who have lived a godly life, in every age and part of the world. Nor is this all, for

2. The godly not only devote themselves to God, but pay a sincere and habitual obedience to the intimations of his will. They delight in the law of the Lord after the inner man. Abraham was all obedience to the divine commands. He went wherever God directed him to go, and gave up whatever God commanded him to give up. Moses was equally obsequious to the will of God, under the most self-denying circumstances. All who possess a godly heart are willing to express it, in all the various ways which God requires. They esteem his precepts concerning all things to be right, and find a peculiar pleasure in obeying his voice. If they are rich, they mean to obey the commands given to the rich. If they are poor, they mean to obey the commands given to the poor. If they are rulers, they mean to obey the commands given to rulers. If they are subjects, they mean to obey the commands given to subjects. If they are teachers, they mean to obey the commands given to teachers. If they are hearers, they mean to obey the commands given to hearers. If they are masters, they mean to obey the commands given to masters. If they are servants, they mean to obey the commands given to servants. If they are in prosperity they mean to obey the commands given to the prosperous. If they are in adversity, they mean to obey the commands given to the afflicted. If they are aged, they mean to obey the commands given to the aged. Or, if they are young, they mean to obey the commands given to the young. They mean to walk with God in the way of his commands, and to avoid every evil and false way. They habitually aim to be both internally and externally conformed to the character, the will, and commands of God. I now proceed to show,

II. That this godliness will produce contentment. This is plainly suggested in the text. "But godliness with contentment is great gain." The connection here is that of cause and effect. Godliness naturally leads

men to be contented in every condition of life. This Paul knew to be true, by his own happy experience. He says, "I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content." His godliness taught him this rare and useful lesson. Now, it will appear from various considerations, that contentment naturally flows from godliness. For,

1. Godliness leads those who possess it, to realize that God always treats them as well as they deserve. They live under an habitual sense of their unworthiness in the sight of God. They realize that they have forfeited all good, and have deserved all evil at the hands of their creator and benefactor. They are ready to say to God, as Jacob did, "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." And they can heartily adopt the language of the prophet. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed." The godly always feel their unworthiness, which naturally creates contentment in their present condition, whether they are in prosperity, or adversity. Under the deepest afflictions, they are disposed to say with the prophet, "Wherefore doth a living man complain?" And again, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause." So far as godliness tends to produce a sense of unworthiness, just so far it tends to create contentment with all the allotments of providence.

2. The godly are sensible, that God always treats them according to their prayers, which reconciles them to the divine dispensations towards them. They give themselves to prayer, and in their prayers they desire God to give, or to deny, or to take away favours according to his own pleasure. They know not what is best, and cheerfully leave it to God, to do what he knows to be best. They desire to submit their understandings to his understanding, and their will to his will. They know, therefore, that he gives what they desire he should give; that he denies what they desire he should deny; and that he takes away what they de-

sire he should take away. He treats them exactly according to their desires in their most serious and devout moments; which cannot fail to give them satisfaction. This gave Job satisfaction when he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." This gave satisfaction to David, when he said, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." This disposed the primitive christians to say, "As dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." A godly spirit disposes the godly to choose, that God would give or deny them favours, and order all their external circumstances as he sees best; and when he has given, or withholden, or taken away, they know he has done his own pleasure, which is what, in their most fervent prayers, they desired him to do. His will being known affords them true satisfaction and contentment. For it was their heart's desire, and prayer to God, that his will, and not theirs, might be done. Godliness carries in its own nature, contentment under all the dispensations of divine providence. And this will further appear, if we consider,

3. That it leads men to live by faith in the perfect wisdom and rectitude of the divine government. The godly believe, that the hand and heart of God are concerned in all the events, which actually take place. They believe, that there is no good and no evil in the world, which God has not, for wise and good reasons, determined should exist. They believe, that God always treats them, and all other men, as well as infinite wisdom and goodness can treat them. They believe, that he never sends any evil, or denies any favour, but when his own glory and the best interests of the universe require it. They believe his own declaration, that "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." They believe, that "he is good unto all, that his tender mercies are over all his works; and that he will make all things work together for good to them

that love him." And while they exercise this holy and godly faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, they cannot distrust the care and faithfulness of God, nor feel discontented with their present, nor anxious about their future condition. While they thus stay themselves upon God, and confide in his wisdom and rectitude, they are in perfect peace. They must be satisfied, while they realize, that God gives them as many and as great favours, and inflicts as few and as light evils, as he can possibly do, consistently with his unerring wisdom and perfect goodness. They cannot wish to be treated better than a perfectly wise and good being can treat them. Instead of murmuring and repining under his frowns, they are disposed to admire and praise him for his astonishing goodness and mercy. Hear the godly and gracious language of David, notwithstanding all the evils he suffered. "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He anointeth my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Such ample and joyful contentment naturally flows from genuine godliness. It only remains to show,

III. That godly contentment will produce great gain; or rather, that godliness with contentment is great gain. Or, as the apostle says in another passage in this epistle, "Godliness is *profitable* unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." This leads me to say,

1. That godly contentment gains all the good in this world. Those who are contented after a godly sort, enjoy all the things that they possess, and they actually possess as much as they desire to possess; which affords them complete contentment. The contented person is in just such a situation as he, all things considered, desires to be in. So that he actually enjoys all the personal good bestowed upon him; and this is all the good that he at present desires. And being contented with his own lot, he becomes contented with

the lot of all mankind. He is godly, and feels as God does towards all the human race. God is perfectly satisfied, or (if I may use the term) contented with the state and circumstances of the whole family of man. Every person enjoys just as much good, and suffers just as much evil, as God sees best he should enjoy and suffer. He constantly sees all men in the very circumstances most pleasing to him, and would not have a single circumstance altered, for the time being, with respect to any creature, person, or event, on earth. Just so, the godly person who is contented with his own state, is equally contented with the state and circumstances of all mankind, so far as his knowledge extends. And this contentment necessarily puts him into the possession of all the good he sees and knows to exist in the world. He actually enjoys the whole. He gains all the good, which he sees bestowed upon himself, and upon his fellow-creatures. This explains Christ's paradoxical declaration to Peter. "Then Peter began to say unto him, lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered, and said, verily, I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold *now* in this life, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." The plain import of these declarations is, that godliness or true benevolence disposes men to be contented with, and to enjoy not only all the personal good that falls to their lot, but to be contented with, and to enjoy all the good which they see fall to the lot of all their fellow-creatures. Those who are godly and contented, do really *gain* all the good there is in this world, so far as it is possible they should *gain* it, or enjoy it. Those who live in the exercise of godly contentment, cannot desire that God should make the least alteration in the mode of treating the whole human race. And as they pass over the world, they are satisfied and contented with their own

state, as connected with the state of all their fellow-men. They behold the world *now*, as God did at first, and say it is all very good. Nothing can be added to it, or taken from it, or altered in it, to make it any better. Thus godly contentment gives them the *enjoyment*, though not the *possession*, of the whole world. But to *enjoy* the whole world is much better than to *possess* it; and is really to *gain* it, in the highest and best sense of the word. I may observe again,

2. That those who possess godly contentment, *gain* not only this world, but the world to come. As they are contented and satisfied with all things as they are in the present world, so they will be equally contented and satisfied with all things as they are in a future world. God is pleased with all things in eternity. He sees every creature and every object there, in that situation, which gives him complete satisfaction and self-enjoyment. He constantly enjoys all the good that all his holy creatures enjoy, and that in connection with all the evil that his unholy creatures suffer. He sees nothing amiss in eternity, but beholds all things in the situation in which he pleased to place them, with infinite delight and satisfaction. Just so, the godly in the exercise of godly contentment, are prepared to enjoy all the good in eternity, so far as they now see or expect it, and so far as others see or expect it. Contentment *here* prepares them for contentment *there*. Godliness *here* prepares them to enjoy godliness *there*. And as they enjoy their *own* good and the good of *others here*, so they now enjoy their own good and the good of others laid up for them *there*. Godliness *gains* every thing in this world and in the world to come: in this world contentment, and in the world to come eternal life. Accordingly, the apostle represents the godly as actually possessing this rich, durable, double *gain*. For he says of them, "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.*" Now, it must be *great gain* indeed, to gain not only all the good there is in this world, but all the

good there is in the world to come. Godliness is as *profitable*, as it is possible any thing should be. It will *gain* all the good in the universe. In its final issue, it will make all the godly as happy as their finite and limited capacities will permit. This not only *may* be, but *must* be, according to the nature of godliness, and express declarations of God himself. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor any human heart conceived *the full* and *final* gain of godliness.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If godliness produces contentment, then those have reason to doubt of the sincerity of their religion, who do not derive contentment from it. Among the professors of godliness, some are more godly than others, and consequently derive more contentment from their godliness than others; but all who are really godly, derive some sensible satisfaction and contentment from it. Those, therefore, who do not derive any satisfaction or contentment from their professed godliness, have reason to fear, that they never have experienced the grace of God in truth. The want of the effect argues the want of the cause. Godliness has a natural tendency to produce contentment, and the scripture represents the real godly as deriving this happy effect from their godliness. The sincere piety of David produced this effect. "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 wine increased." His piety produced that peace and contentment which the world cannot give. And he says to God again, "Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." And this peace and quietness he says he derived from his filial piety. "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother. My soul is even as a weaned child." Solomon says, "A good man shall be *satisfied* from himself." And he as-



serts, that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." The connection between godliness and contentment is so intimate and inseparable, that none have reason to think that they possess the one, if they do not enjoy the other. Godliness is the same in every person who possesses it, and always produces the same effect, though in different degrees. It cannot be supposed, that any possess real godliness, and yet never derive real contentment from it. The gain of godliness greatly consists in contentment, when all other things fail of affording it. A false hope, derived from a false religion, may yield a certain kind of satisfaction in days of prosperity; but it is only real godliness can afford solid peace and contentment, in days of adversity. It is then the godly find the gain of godliness, and those who do not find this happy effect of their religion, when it is brought to the test, have reason to fear, that the love of God has never been shed abroad in their hearts. Job said of God, "Though he slay me, I will trust in him." Paul's godliness taught him to be content in whatever state he was placed. The professed godliness which does not produce contentment, is real ungodliness.

2. If godliness produces contentment, then none can be contented, who are destitute of godliness. It is the exclusive nature and tendency of godliness to produce contentment, and therefore we are constrained to conclude, that contentment cannot be derived from any other source. It is the scripture character of the ungodly, that they are always discontented. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. They are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." God himself cannot (to speak with reverence) make them contented. This has been demonstrated in the course of providence, for nearly six thousand years. God has filled the earth with his goodness, and granted the largest portion of good things to the ungodly. The prosperity of the wicked has been a stumbling block to the righteous. Job could not account for it, that "the tabernacles of rob-

bers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure ; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly." David could not account for "the prosperity of the wicked, who are not in trouble as other men; neither are plagued as other men, and whose eyes stand out with fatness, and who have more than heart could wish." God has poured the blessings of his providence into the bosoms of the ungodly, in the largest profusions. But none of these things could ever make them contented. The more he has given them, the more they have wanted, and the less they have been satisfied. Though he has given silver to those who have loved silver, yet they have never been satisfied with silver. Though he has given abundance to those who love abundance, yet they have never been satisfied with increase. Though he has clothed some with silk and purple, raised them to royal dignity, and put crowns of gold and diamonds on their heads—yet they have never been satisfied with their elevated stations. It appears from the experience of ages, that it is impossible to satisfy the desires of the ungodly. Their desires are selfish desires, and these are so unlimited and discordant, that they never can be satisfied. All who are in the state of nature and destitute of real godliness, know by their own experience, that they never have found true contentment in any situation in which they have been placed, nor in the possession of any worldly good. They may have restrained their hopes and expectations from the world, but they have never given up their worldly desires. These continue to disturb their peace, and prevent all true contentment. The whole world of the ungodly are continually murmuring and repining under all the great and innumerable external favours and blessings, that God is constantly pouring down upon them in his providence.

3. If godliness be so gainful as we have heard, then none can be godly too soon. Almost all who enjoy religious instructions, whether private or publick, or both, seriously intend to become godly before they die and go into eternity. They know, that as they brought no-

thing into the world, so they can carry nothing out of it. They know that the fashion of this world passes away, and they are passing away with it. And they know enough about their future state to be convinced, that they must become godly in order to be happy there. But they imagine, that they can be much more happy here, without godliness than with it. They imagine, that godliness will be a great *loss*, instead of great *gain*, while they are in health and prosperity. So the child thinks. So the youth thinks. So the man of the world thinks. And so every sinner thinks. They hope to gain, instead of losing, by living without God in the world, as long as they can with safety. But this is a most egregious mistake, if godliness be profitable unto all things, and *gains* the happiness of both this world, and of the world to come. And this is certainly true, if godliness produces real contentment, which the enjoyments of the world never did, and never can produce. Contentment is the supreme and ultimate end which all the ungodly are seeking and hoping to find in the things of the world; but if they should gain the whole world, the whole world could not give them contentment. Those who have obtained the most wealth, the most power, the most magnificence, and affluence, have told us from their own experience, that these things, instead of yielding true contentment, are a fruitful source of disappointment and vexation of spirit. This is agreeable to the experience of all the ungodly. Ask any ungodly man, whether he has ever found contentment, and he will answer no. But ask any godly person, whether rich or poor, high or low, whether he has ever found contentment; and he will answer, he has found it in the enjoyment of God, and not in the things of the world. If we may give credit to the testimony of both the godly and ungodly, we must believe, that godliness is the only source of contentment, and that none can become godly too soon for their own *present*, as well as *future* happiness. As soon as they become godly, and reconciled to the character and government of God, they will find the treasure hidden in the field, and the pearl

of great price, which will make them both rich and happy. "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

4. If godliness be so gainful as we have heard, then there is no danger of being too godly. The men of the world often complain of the children of light, for being too godly, and paying too much regard to the glory of God, and the interests of his kingdom. They imagine they spend too much time in religious services, expose themselves too much in attending publick worship at all seasons, and deny themselves too much for the promotion of the cause of Christ. They imagine they waste their health and their time, and really injure their interests, by giving God too much of their hearts and lives. They think they rather *lose*, than *gain*, by being too godly. But wisdom is justified of her children. The godly are the only men, who display true wisdom, in their views, and feelings, and conduct. And the more godly any are, the more practical wisdom they exhibit before the eyes of the unwise and ungodly world. Though the godly may sometimes feel and express a zeal which is not according to knowledge, and which they have reason to regret, yet no godly person ever regretted being too godly. When pious persons review their conduct at the end of a day, or at the end of a year, or especially at the end of life. they always regret their barrenness and unfruitfulness in the service of God, and lament their having had too *little*, and not too *much* religion. And they certainly have reason to lament this, if godliness be *great gain*. Were Abraham, or Moses, or Job, or Paul too godly? Were the friends and followers of Christ, when he was on earth, too godly? Have any christians *since*, been too godly? Or have they ever regretted having too much of godly contentment, whether in prosperity, or adversity? So far from this, all christians have lamented their great proneness to murmur and complain, both in prosperity and adversity, which has been owing to their want of godly contentment.

5. If godliness be so gainful as has been represented, then the godly have good reason to pity the ungodly. They have always been unhappy and miserable objects; for they have always been disappointed respecting that contentment, which has been the supreme and ultimate object of all their worldly pursuits. Though they have often obtained the things which they desired, and which they expected would afford them contentment, yet they have always found that they produced a contrary effect, and blasted their hopes and expectations. All that cometh is vanity; the world will, in time to come, as in time past, deceive and disappoint them. They are pursuing a course, which will disappoint one hope after another, until it plunges them in utter despair, which is the perfection of misery. Such persons are really to be pitied, though they may view themselves as rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing. The godly see their misery, and guilt, and danger, and ought to pity them. David condemns himself for being envious at the prosperity of the wicked. Good men ought to guard against such unwise, as well as sinful feelings. And as soon as they view their end, they will feel as David did, and pity their forlorn condition, when they shall lose the world and their souls with it. Lazarus had reason to pity Dives, while living in all his wealth and affluence. Every godly man has reason to pity the ungodly, though having more than heart can wish; for he sees his present discontentment, and foresees his future disappointment and despair, if he persists in his ungodliness.

6. If godliness be so gainful as has been represented, then the godly ought to do all they can to lead others to be godly. Godliness is benevolence, and benevolence wishes well to all mankind. God is good to the evil, and the godly are good to the ungodly. And though they may express their goodness to them, by promoting their temporal happiness, yet they can give a much stronger expression of their benevolence towards them, by promoting their piety and godly con-

contentment. It is true, parents ought to lay up for their children, but they cannot promote their present and future good in any other way so much, as in a faithful discharge of parental duty towards them. They can do nothing better for them, than to teach them by example, godly contentment, godly obedience, and godly zeal, for their spiritual and eternal good. These are powerful means to impress the minds of the young with a sense of the importance and benefit of early piety. And these are the best means that the godly can use, to lead all the ungodly to give up their lying vanities, choose the one thing needful, and prepare for both living and dying.

## SERMON XXV.

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PERFECT HOLINESS IN THIS LIFE THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS.

II. CORINTHIANS, XIII. 9.

*And this also we wish, even your perfection.*

THE church in Corinth was a very large and respectable church, while the apostle Paul resided among them; but after he left them, they fell into various disputes, animosities, and contentions, through the influence of judaizing teachers, who led many of them into both theoretical and practical errors. The apostle being informed of their irregularities and errors, wrote to them, in order to reclaim them. And his first epistle had a salutary effect, and produced a partial reformation. Still there were some things that needed to be reformed. He accordingly wrote them his second epistle, in which he tenderly and affectionately reminds them of their past declension, but intimates that he rejoiced in the prospect of their becoming so completely reformed, that if he should come among them again, he should find nothing to censure. He says, "Now I pray to God, that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates. For we can do nothing *against* the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad when *we are weak*, and *ye are strong*; and this also we wish, even your perfection." This was as much as to say, "though we have power to reprove and censure you for doing wrong, yet we do not desire an opportunity of exercising this power. We pray to God, that ye do no evil, that ye may be strong, and that we

may be weak. For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth." If you do no evil, and act agreeably to your christian profession, you will disarm us of our power of reprovng and censuring you. And we shall be glad when we are weak, and ye are strong, in this respect. For this is the very thing we wish, *even your* perfection. And if the apostle was right in his wish, then we may justly conclude,

That it is the duty of christians to be perfectly holy in this life. I shall,

I. Show what is meant by their being perfectly holy ; and,

II. Show that it is their duty to be so in this life.

I. I am to show what is meant by saints being perfectly holy.

This is a point, concerning which there is a diversity of opinions. Even those who agree in the nature of holiness, do not agree in respect to the perfection of it. But if we can only determine in what the moral imperfection of saints consists, we may easily determine in what their moral perfection consists. For if their moral imperfection consists in the weakness of their holy affections, then their moral perfection must consist in the strength of their holy affections. Or if their moral imperfection consists in the inconstancy of their holy affections, then their moral perfection must consist in the constancy of their holy exercises. Now, it is easy to see, that their imperfection in holiness cannot consist in the weakness of their holy affections. For their affections never can be perfectly strong, that is, as strong as the divine affections. In this respect, they never can be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect. Nor can they be perfect as the angels in heaven are perfect. For they are beings of far greater strength and of more enlarged intellectual powers than men, and capable of exercising much stronger affections than they. So that if perfection in holiness consists in the strength of the affections, it is impossible that saints should ever be perfectly holy, either in this world, or in the world to come. Besides, their affec-



tions always are as strong as they can be. When they do love God, they love him as much as they can, in their present circumstances, and with their present views. And when they love any other holy object, they love it as much as they can love it, for the time being. Men always love, or hate, with all their heart, and with all their mind, and with all their strength, or to the utmost of their capacities. Saints being perfectly holy, therefore, does not mean that their holy affections are equal, in strength, vigour, or fervency, to the affections of God, or of angels, or of the spirits of just men made perfect. And from this it follows, that their perfection in holiness must consist in the *constancy* of their holy affections. If they should constantly and uninterruptedly exercise holy affections, they would be absolutely perfect in holiness, and entirely free from sin. If they should constantly, without any interruption, keep themselves in the love of God, and never indulge one selfish, or unholy affection, they would be perfectly holy, in the sense of the text, and in the sense of this discourse. I now proceed to show;

II. That it is their duty to be perfectly holy in this life. And this will appear if we consider,

1. That there is a constant reason for their being holy, and, therefore, they ought to be constantly holy. The constant reason for their being holy, arises from their natural capacity. They are endued with rational and moral powers, which render them capable of holy exercises. They know the difference between holy and unholy exercises, and are capable of feeling their moral obligation to exercise pure, holy, benevolent affections towards all the beings with whom they are concerned, and towards all the objects by which they are surrounded. This knowledge of their duty lays them under constant obligation to do it. It is as right that they should be constantly holy, as that they should ever be holy. Their obligation never ceases; and, therefore, they are constantly bound to fulfil it. They always have reason to be holy, but never a reason to be unholy. So long, then, as they retain their natural

and moral powers, they are under indispensable obligations to be holy in all manner of conversation and godliness.

2. The divine law requires christians to be constantly and perfectly holy. The law saith to every one, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." This law, which is founded in the nature of things, never has been, and never can be abrogated. It binds christians at all times, and requires them to be constantly holy, or to exercise holy, and none but holy affections. It carries their duty as high as it can be carried; and as high as the duty of angels, or the saints in light. They can do no more than love God with all their heart, and their fellow-creatures as themselves. And this the divine law requires of christians at all times, and under all circumstances. If it be the duty of christians to obey the first, and fundamental law of God's kingdom, then it is their constant and indispensable duty to be perfectly holy in this life.

3. The gospel, as well as the law, requires of christians, in this life, constant holiness, or sinless perfection. This appears by a multitude of precepts and prohibitions contained in the new testament. It is difficult and needless to mention them all. But I will cite a number, which are plainly and directly to the purpose.

1. Those precepts, which require saints to do every thing from love to God, require them to be constantly holy and free from sin. Paul speaking to the saints at Corinth, says, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Again he says to them. "Let all your things be done with charity;" that is, with pure, holy love. And to the Colossians he says, "Above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, and the Father by him." And again he says, "Whatsoever ye do, do it

heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men." These divine precepts are universal and unlimited. They require christians *to do every thing* in love and obedience to God. But to do every thing in such a manner, is to be constantly and perfectly holy. As these precepts admit of no qualification, or exception, they bind christians to maintain constant holiness, or sinless perfection, through the whole course of their lives.

2. Those precepts which enjoin *constant* obedience upon christians, require them to be perfectly holy and sinless. We find many such injunctions. Christians are required "to rejoice in the Lord alway; to rejoice evermore; to *pray without ceasing*; and to be steadfast, unmoveable, *always* abounding in the work of the Lord." Constancy in holy affections, and holy obedience, amounts to perfect holiness and freedom from sin. If christians always lived in such a joyful, prayerful, and dutiful frame, they would live perfectly holy and sinless.

3. All those precepts, which enjoin *universal* obedience upon christians, require them to be perfectly holy and conformed to the will of God. Paul, after wishing the perfection of christians, immediately exhorts them to maintain that perfection, which he wished them to have. "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be *perfect*, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." To his christian brethren in Galatia, he says, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." He enjoins it on the Philippians to do "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report." Peter also in his first epistle to christians in general, says, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ: as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. But as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in *all manner* of

conversation. Because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy." These precepts are exceeding broad, and extend to every branch of a christian's duty; and require him to be perfectly holy in heart and life.

4. All those precepts, which require christians to resist all opposition and surmount all difficulties in the path of duty, require them to be perfectly holy and constantly obedient. Christians are required to resist the devil and all his evil suggestions. James says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Peter says, "Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist steadfast in the faith." "Wherefore," saith the apostle Paul, "take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, whereby ye may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Christians are required to resist and overcome the world, in every form, in which it obstructs their holy and devout life. John says to them, "Love not the world, neither the things of the world. if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Paul tells them, "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds." And again he says, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Christians are warned against the *men* of the world, as well as the things of the world. Our Lord bid his followers, "Beware of men, beware of false prophets, and take heed and beware of the Scribes and Pharisees." And the apostles warn christians to beware of false spirits, false teachers, and all who lie in wait to deceive. Christians are urged also to feel and conduct with benevolence and propriety towards enemies. Christ commands them "to love their enemies, and bless those who curse them, and to do good to those that hate them." The apostle gives a

similar exhortation. "Bless, and curse not. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." Temporal evils and afflictions are great trials; but christians are required to feel and conduct perfectly right under them. They are exhorted to be patient in tribulation; not to despise chastenings, nor to faint under divine rebukes; nor to think it strange, that they are called to fiery trials, but to rejoice under them. In a word, christians are required to feel and act perfectly right, notwithstanding all the assaults of Satan, all the allurements of the world, all the opposition of sinners, and all the trials and troubles, which fall to their lot. They are required to feel and conduct according to the law of love, at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances. And this certainly amounts to their being required to be perfectly holy and devoted to God, in this life. I may add,

5. That all those passages of scripture, which enjoin it upon christians, to put away, mortify, and subdue all sin, require them to be perfectly pious and holy. The gospel abounds with injunctions and admonitions to this purpose. "The grace of God," says the apostle, "that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in *this present world*." And Peter says, "Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings, as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Paul says, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." Again he says, "Let not sin reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." And again he exhorts the Ephesians, "to put off concerning the former conversation, the *old man*, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and to put on the *new man*, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Thus it appears from the light of nature, from the law of God, and from the gospel of Christ, that christians ought to be perfectly holy, and totally free from sin;

which is sinless perfection, in this life. But lest several objections should weaken the conviction of this truth in the minds of some, I will say a few words to remove them.

1. It may be thought, that if christians are required to be perfectly holy in this life, then there is no difference between the law and the gospel. The law requires sinless perfection, and for that reason, men could not be saved by it; and if the gospel requires sinless perfection, then it is as difficult to be saved by the gospel, as by the law. Answer.—The law does require sinless perfection, and condemns the transgressor for the least offence, to eternal destruction; and therefore none can be saved by the law. And it is equally true, that the gospel requires sinless perfection, but not as a *condition* of eternal life. For it makes provision through the atonement of Christ, for the transgressions of believers, and promises forgiveness to their faith and repentance. The law knows no forgiveness, but the gospel does. And, therefore, notwithstanding the law of love binds christians to constant and perfect obedience; and notwithstanding christians violate this law; yet through the gospel, they may be forgiven and saved. So that perfection of holiness is a *duty* under the gospel, though not a *condition* of pardon and acceptance with God.

2. It may be said, it is not the will of God, that any should be perfectly holy, in this life. There is no man that liveth, and sinneth not. If any man say he hath no sin, he deceiveth himself, and the truth is not in him. How then can it be the *duty* of christians to be perfect, when God has determined, that they shall not be so? Answer.—Our duty does not depend upon the divine decrees. It arises from the nature of things, and the preceptive will of God. It was decreed that angels should fall; but it was their duty to persevere in sinless perfection. It was decreed that Adam should fall; but it was his duty to continue perfectly holy and innocent. It was decreed, that every christian shall be just as imperfect as he is; but it his duty to be free from all moral

imperfection. If it be the duty of christians to grow in grace, and to be any more holy than they are at present, then it is equally their duty to sin no more, and to be perfectly holy. So that God's determination, that christians shall not reach absolute perfection in this life, is no obstruction, nor objection to their duty of becoming perfectly holy.

3. It may be said, that it is the opinion of some good men, that christians are not bound to be perfectly holy, in this life. The assembly of divines say, "No mere man since the fall is *able* in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God; but daily doth break them, in thought, word, and deed." *Answer.*—If this means that christians are *morally unable*, perfectly to keep the commandments of God, it is true; but no objection against their being *naturally able*, and *bound* to pay *perfect* obedience to the divine commands. It is probable those divines meant to guard against the notion of some in their day, as well as in this, who professed to be perfectly holy. But if they did not mean a *moral* inability, in distinction from a *natural* inability, to be perfectly holy, their opinion was unscriptural and unsound, and ought to be rejected.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If christians ought to be perfectly holy in this life, then they are much more sinful, than they appear to be in the eyes of the world. The world see that they fall below that perfection of holiness, which the gospel requires, and even below that perfection, which their profession requires. Their external conduct shows the imperfection of their hearts. But their external conduct is better than their internal exercises, which they often conceal, and never fully exhibit. They often externally obey the divine commands, while they are far from feeling that pure love to God and man, which they ought to feel. So that the external imperfection, which the world see and condemn, is a small

part of that imperfection, which they see and lament in their own hearts; and a much smaller part of that imperfection, which God sees and condemns. The apostle John says, "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Christians have a spiritual discerning of spiritual things, and can easily discern the difference between selfishness and benevolence, or between right and wrong affections in their own hearts. And when they discover wrong affections, they feel them to be a criminal imperfection, whether they express them externally, or not; and whether their external conduct, which flows from their sinful affections, meets the approbation or disapprobation of the world. They often condemn themselves for that, which the world approve and admire. They make the law of God the standard of their internal motives, as well as of their external actions. And so far as their hearts fall short of this infallible standard, they judge and condemn themselves, as sinfully imperfect.

2. If it be the duty of christians to be perfectly holy, then they are never satisfied with their present attainments in holiness. They appear to them low, in comparison with the standard of perfection, and even in comparison with the apparent attainment of others. They are apt to think others better than themselves, and that they are less than the least of all real saints, though not of all professors. They may know, that they externally conduct better than some who name the name of Christ. But they do not know, and are not apt to think, that they are better than exemplary professors. They can hardly think, that sincere christians fall so far below the standard of perfection as they are conscious they do. They are greatly dissatisfied with their present imperfect views and exercises, and desire to approach nearer and nearer to that perfection which God requires. How often does David lament his imperfection, and pray for quickening grace in the 119th psalm? He says, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken thou me according to thy word." And soon after he says, "I will run the way of thy commandments,



when thou shalt enlarge my heart." Paul acknowledges his imperfection, and resolves to press forward after higher and higher attainments in grace. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching unto those things which are before; I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." All who have the love of God in them, not only desire to keep themselves in the love of God, but desire larger measures of that love, or to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They ardently desire to go from one degree of grace to another, until they arrive to the full stature of perfect men.

3. If it be the duty of christians to be perfectly holy, then the best christians are the most sensibly burdened with sin. Not because they have the most sin, but because they hate sin the most, and feel it to be their greatest burden. The more holy christians are, the more they attend to the exercises of their hearts, and the more clearly they distinguish sin from holiness, and the more they loath and abhor themselves for the least sin, in thought, word, and deed. Accordingly, we find the best of men most bitterly complaining of the burden of sin. Job in a clear view of God and himself cries out, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." David complains more bitterly of the burden of sin. He cries, "Mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink, and are corrupt, because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long." When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and heard the seraphims crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory," he exclaimed, "Wo is

me ! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." A clear view of the divine holiness filled the prophet with a deep sense of his own unholiness and vileness, which sunk him in self-reproach and self-abasement. The apostle Paul, who arrived as near to perfection as any man ever did in this life, appears to have been the most sensibly burdened with sin, in the view of the purity and strictness of the divine law, which he fell short of perfectly obeying. He expresses his feelings upon this subject with the utmost freedom. "And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not, but what I *hate*, that I do. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The best of saints are the most disposed to compare their hearts with the strictness and spirituality of the divine law, which discovers their great imperfection, and fills them with the deepest sense of the burden of sin.

4. If christians ought to be perfectly holy, then they grow in humiliation, more than in any other christian grace. All their other attainments in holiness, unitedly tend to produce humiliation and self-abasement. The clearer views they have of God, of Christ, of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, and of the holiness and blessedness of heaven, the clearer views they have of their great imperfection, in divine knowledge, in love to God and man, and in the discharge of every duty. Though they may have joyful and grateful views of God and divine things; yet these very views lead to

humiliation and self-abasement, as they serve to show them how much they rob God of his glory, and themselves of peace and happiness. For nothing but their sinful imperfections cause God to withdraw his gracious influences, and the manifestations of his love. They know by happy experience, that so long as they dwell in love, they dwell in God, and God in them; and that whenever they draw near to God, God draws near to them. Though they do really grow in grace, and make some advances towards perfection, yet they find no occasion of boasting of their spiritual attainments, but much occasion of humiliation and self-condemnation, that they grow so slowly, and approach no nearer to what God requires them to be, and they desire to be. There is no christian grace, they find more occasion to exercise, and none which they more habitually exercise, than humiliation and self-abasement.

5. If christians ought to be perfectly holy, then they are the most inconsistent persons in the world. They sometimes feel their obligation to be perfect, and sometimes they are totally insensible of it. They sometimes do their duty, and sometimes neglect it. They sometimes see God and are pleased, and they sometimes see him and are displeased. They sometimes rejoice; that the Lord reigns, and they sometimes distrust his care and faithfulness, and murmur and complain. They sometimes go forward in their religious course, and they sometimes go backward. This inconsistency they are more or less guilty of every day, which they cannot justify, but feel constrained to condemn; and which lays a foundation for a spiritual conflict or warfare in their minds; such as Paul experienced when he said, "That which I do I allow not; for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I." They never feel safe from unholy exercises, which puts them in a state of constant watching and guarding against wrong affections creeping into their hearts, and obliges them to keep their hearts with all diligence.

6. If christians ought to be perfectly holy, and yet are so inconsistent as not to be perfectly holy, then this

inconsistency is no counter evidence of their being in a state of grace. Real christians often construe it so. A sense of their inconsistency clouds their minds, and weakens their former hopes of their gracious state, and sometimes reduces them to the borders of despair, not only for days, but for weeks, and months, and even for years. Some who appear to be, and are eminent christians have suffered their interrupted and inconsistent exercises to plunge them into a most gloomy and disconsolate state. This is wrong, as David says he was, "when his soul *refused* to be comforted." This inconsistency of contradictory exercises is peculiar to christians, and one thing which distinguishes them from sinners; and therefore instead of being an evidence against them, is an evidence in their favour. They ought to ask why it is thus with them? And the true answer is, because they are *imperfect* christians, as all christians are; and inconsistent christians, as all christians are. The misconstruing this evidence of grace, is very hurtful to sincere professors, as it disturbs their peace, weakens their hands, and reproaches religion. But this mistake, probably, has a greater and more unhappy effect upon sincere non-professors, and prevents their performing a very important duty for a long time. How many such persons have entertained a well grounded hope of a renovation of heart, and have acknowledged, that they have entertained a hope of being reconciled to God, but yet have found such an inconsistency in their views and feelings at different times, that they continue to live in doubt, and in neglect of duty. They are intreated to consider the nature of christian perfection, which is always attended with more or less inconstancy, and inconsistency, and draw a just conclusion from it. Or else they never will, and never can obey Christ's new and dying command.

7. If the imperfection of christians consists in the inconstancy of their holy affections, then sinners are perfectly sinful; for they *constantly* exercise selfish and sinful affections. Every imagination of the thoughts of their heart is evil, and only evil continually. They

never have the love of God in them. All their moral exercises are a constant, uninterrupted train of sinful exercises, which are so many transgressions of the law of God. What an amazing train! How must they appear in the sight of God! How fast are they treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath! What is their delay of duty, but an act of continued rebellion? What saves them from complete destruction, but abused mercy? What excuse can they have, for not becoming christians? God commands—Christ calls—the church invites—their own interest for eternity, calls imperiously. Let them hear these solemn calls—obey—and live.

## SERMON XXVI.

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THE MORAL IMPERFECTION OF CHRISTIANS THEIR GREATEST BURDEN.

ROMANS VII. 24.

*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

It has been a question among expositors, whether the apostle, in this chapter, is speaking of himself, or of some other man; and if speaking of himself, whether he is speaking of himself as in a state of nature, or in a state of grace. Whoever will read through the chapter with attention, can hardly doubt whether he is not speaking of himself, and expressing his views and feelings both before, and after he had experienced a saving change. From the sixth to the fourteenth verse, he is evidently speaking of the exercises of his heart, while in a state of nature; and from the fourteenth verse to the end of the chapter, he is evidently speaking of his alternate exercises of right and wrong affections. For he speaks of his own moral imperfection just as other good men speak of their moral imperfection. Job acknowledges before God, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me; if I say I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse." Solomon asserts, "that there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." It is very evident, that the apostle in the text is speaking of himself as in a state of grace, and expresses the painful sense he had of his own moral imperfection. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Though

he could sustain his infirmities, and even rejoice in tribulation, yet he was sometimes ready to sink under the burden of sin. This naturally leads us to inquire, why sin was so extremely burdensome to the apostle Paul. Here it may be observed,

1. That sin was very burdensome to him, because he was a subject of special grace. He was sanctified in part. He was a partaker of the divine nature. He imbibed the spirit of Christ. He had a pure, disinterested, impartial, and universal love to all beings and creatures, which were capable of enjoying happiness, or suffering pain. He was holy as God is holy. And holiness in any being creates a perfect hatred and aversion to every species of iniquity. It is because God is perfectly holy, that he perfectly hates sin, and cannot look upon it, but with absolute abhorrence. It was because Christ loved righteousness, that he hated and abhorred iniquity. And so if any man be holy as God is holy, and have the spirit of Christ, he will feel towards sin, as God and Christ feel towards it; he will hate it with a perfect hatred. Paul was created in righteousness and true holiness after the image of God, and the same mind was in him, that was in Christ Jesus; he had therefore a perfect hatred to all sin, and especially his own sin. While in the exercise of holiness, he saw the criminality and turpitude of all the evil affections, which were so apt to rise in his imperfectly sanctified heart, and they were extremely loathsome and burdensome to him. He could not forbear exclaiming, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" or from this dead body, speaking, as it is supposed, in allusion to a custom among the Romans, who sometimes put a criminal to death by fastening him to a dead body, till he was suffocated by its pollution and stench. So odious and detestable did Paul's sinful exercises appear to his pure and holy exercises. It is a burden to see, and much more so, to be connected with any hateful objects. And among all hateful objects, the holy apostle viewed sin as the most hateful to see and feel. And so

did David. He says, "mine iniquities are gone over my head; as an *heavy burden*, they are too heavy for me. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. I am feeble and sore broken. I have roared by reason of the disquietude of my heart." Saints can bear any other burden more easily than the burden of sin, because it is so hateful to their holy feelings.

2. Sin was exceedingly burdensome to the holy apostle, because he had an enlightened and tender conscience. He was not only alarmed before his conversion, but made the subject of strong and genuine convictions. His conscience was effectually awakened to condemn the depravity of his heart. He was made to feel the heavy burden of guilt which he had contracted, and what an evil and bitter thing it was to violate the dictates of his conscience. Those christians, who have had powerful and pungent convictions of conscience, before their hearts were renewed, are generally apt to have a more enlightened and tender conscience than others, afterwards. They never forget how they have felt under a sense of their own ill-desert, and of God's just displeasure. Paul's convictions were probably very powerful and overwhelming; for they laid him prostrate in the dust, and shook his whole corporeal frame, and created an insupportable conflict between his corrupt heart and enlightened conscience. He deeply regretted, that he disregarded the solemn and dying discourse of Stephen, and the great truths which he delivered. He deeply regretted the contempt he had poured upon Christ, and the gospel he preached. He deeply regretted his enmity to his harmless followers, his cruelly persecuting them, and making havock of the church. Though while he was doing these things, he verily thought he was doing God service; yet as soon as he was struck under sudden and pungent convictions, his conscience accused and condemned him, as acting a most stupid, obstinate, and criminal part; and all his self-confidence and self-righteousness forsook him, and left him to feel the full



weight of self-condemnation. He felt the bitterness of spiritual death, and his giving up his hope, was like giving up the ghost. Such clear and powerful convictions made an impression on his conscience, which he never could erase from his mind. His conscience, which had been so deeply wounded, was ever after extremely tender. Whenever he found his heart at variance with his conscience, it gave him a quick and painful sense of guilt. This rendered sin a continual and heavy burden. His conscience was not seared or hardened, but always alive and awake, to discern and condemn every unholy and sinful affection. He maintained an habitual spiritual warfare between his heart and conscience. Hence he said, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have *always* a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." His tender conscience continually admonished him to keep his heart with all diligence, knowing that out of the heart are the issues of life. He was sensible, that if his heart were wrong, his actions proceeding from it would certainly be wrong; and whenever they were wrong, they were a burden to him, and created a self-loathing and self-condemnation, which was a spiritual conflict extremely heavy to bear.

3. His burden of sin and guilt was very great, because he made the divine law the rule of his duty. He did not mean to follow the false customs, and manners, and maxims of the men of the world, who lean to their own understandings and trust in their own hearts, to direct them how to feel, and to act; but he made the law of God the infallible rule of his conduct. As soon as his carnal mind was slain by the divine law, he cordially approved of it as a rule of life. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law. And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me?"

God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." He saw "that the law is spiritual, but that he was carnal, sold under sin." He saw his heart in the glass of the divine law, which is exceeding broad, reaching to all the thoughts and intents of the heart, as well as to all the actions of life. This convinced him, that the divine law condemned a thousand internal exercises and external actions, which the men of the world approve and applaud. He saw that every deviation from the divine commands, either in thought, word, or deed, was altogether and exceedingly sinful. He saw, that just so far as he fell short of absolute perfection, he disobeyed God, and fell under the condemnation of the holy law of God, which he violated. He found, by comparing his heart with the divine law, it condemned him, and if his heart condemned him, God was greater than his heart, and knew all things, and must condemn him for much more, than he condemned himself. The more holy the apostle was, the more he loved and delighted in the law of God after the inward man; and the more he loved the divine law, and made it the rule of duty, the more sensible he was of his numerous violations of it, and of the great criminality of violating it in the least degree. He knew his own heart better than the world knew it, and though the world saw little or no moral imperfection in him, he saw and groaned under a great deal of sin and guilt. And this is true of all who sincerely desire to pay an universal and constant obedience to all the intimations of the divine will. When the commandment comes, and they compare their hearts with it, sin revives; they see more and more of their criminal imperfections and short-comings in duty, which is a burden, and source of self-condemnation and self-loathing.

4. The apostle's sins were a heavy and distressing burden to him, because he had a clear and lively sense of their great aggravations. He saw his own sins to be far more aggravated than the same sins in others.

He knew a vast deal more than other men and other christians. God had given him peculiar talents, privileges, and advantages to attain to high degrees in both human and divine knowledge, and he made great and rapid advances in mental improvements, both intellectual and spiritual. He was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, where he studied Moses and the prophets, and their learned expositors, and the writings of the pagan historians, philosophers, and poets, before his heart was changed. This prepared him, as soon as he was brought out of spiritual darkness into spiritual light, to gain clear and extensive views of the great plan of redemption, and of all the peculiar doctrines and duties of christianity. He was moreover divinely inspired, and in vision carried to the third heaven, where he heard and saw the unutterable things of the invisible world. He knew far more than any other man then in the world, about God, about the bible, about the church of Christ, about the depravity of mankind, and about the happy and the miserable spirits in heaven and in hell. These peculiar and discriminating favours the apostle habitually remembered and ascribed to the astonishing grace of God towards him. His holy and grateful heart constrained him to say, "By the grace of God, I am what I am, and less than the least of all saints;" that is, the most unworthy and ill-deserving. Though he knew and said, he was not behind the chief of the apostles in respect to holiness, he was less than the least of them in respect to guilt. He was sensible, that his sins were attended with the most aggravating circumstances, because he had sinned directly against God, against Christ, against the Holy Spirit, against the friends and cause of Christ, and against the greatest and most distinguishing blessings of providence and grace. It grieved him to the heart, that he had hated God, whom he then loved; that he had persecuted Christ, whom he then loved; that he had made havock of the church, which he then loved, and that he then carried about with him the remains of moral corruptions, which he hated, and which he had

solemnly resolved and professed to renounce. He viewed himself as the most sinful and inconsistent man in the world, because he sinned against the greatest light, the greatest love, and the most endearing obligations, by which God had bound him, and he had bound himself. And a deep and pungent sense of his aggravated guilt, caused him to exclaim, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death," whose weight is so insupportable?

5. Sin was a heavy burden to the apostle, because he desired and endeavoured to restrain it. Sin is no burden to those, who live in the habitual and allowed practice of sinning. The profane person, who indulges himself in profaneness, feels no burden of that sin lying upon him. The sabbath breaker, who allows himself in profaning that holy day, feels no burden of that sin lying upon him. The worldling, whose habitual practice is, to love and pursue the world and the things of the world, feels no burden of the sin of worldly mindedness lying upon him. While the great mass of mankind live as they list, and lay no restraint upon the corruptions of their hearts, they know nothing about that burden of sin, which christians feel, who keep their hearts with all diligence, and lay a restraint upon every selfish and sinful exercise and affection. It is a burden to the christian who means to renounce the world, to find his heart so often rising to a supreme affection to it. It is a burden to the christian, who desires and resolves to keep the sabbath holy, to find his heart wandering that day, like the fool's eyes, to the ends of the earth. It is a burden to the christian, who means to practice every religious duty and moral virtue, to find, that he so often, either externally or internally violates his own resolutions, vows, and engagements. And this was the case of Paul, who meant to live soberly and righteously in this present evil world, and who laid a restraint upon all his external conduct and internal views and affections. He meant to covet no man's silver, or gold, or apparel, or any of the good things he enjoyed, but to keep himself

unspotted from the world. But he acknowledges, that he never arrived to that attainment. He says, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before; I press forward towards the mark" of perfection. He laboured habitually and ardently to get rid of the burden of his moral imperfections, which he hated and condemned, as displeasing to God and injurious to himself.

6. Sin was extremely painful and burdensome to Paul, because it interrupted him in the performance of duty. He loved his duty, and felt himself under strong obligations to do all things whatsoever Christ had commanded him. He had a great many arduous, dangerous, and self-denying duties to discharge. He was eminently the apostle of the Gentiles, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God; which exposed him to the enmity and opposition of their false philosophers, idolatrous priests, and infatuated followers, who were often instigated to persecute him, by the unbelieving Jews, every where scattered among them. Hear his own account of his labours, trials, dangers, and sufferings, in the cause of Christ, which his enemies constrained him to give. "Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? so am I. (I speak as a fool;) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils

among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." Amidst this multiplicity of labours, trials, and sufferings, he complains of his moral corruption as obstructing and preventing him from a constant discharge of his duty. He says, "I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do, I *allow* not; for what I *would*, that do I not; but what I *hate*, that do I. I find then a law, that when I would do *good*, *evil* is present with me." Sin was the only thing, that prevented him from doing his duty constantly and perfectly; and therefore was a heavier burden, than all the external labours and sufferings, which he was called to experience. In tribulation he could rejoice; but to be obstructed and hindered in the discharge of his duty, was a burden too heavy to bear. It grieved his benevolent heart, to think of neglecting his duty to God, to Christ, to christians, and to the souls of his fellow-men.

7. Sin was extremely burdensome to Paul, because it interrupted his enjoyment of God. He loved God supremely, and delighted in his law, in his character, and in his government, while he exercised holy affections. He could say with David, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." While his heart was united with God, in calling upon his name, and doing his will, he enjoyed that peace, which the world could not give, nor take away. But when sin reigned in his heart, his views were obscured, his holy affections cooled, and his highest happiness destroyed. The world and the things of the world could not supply the place of God, and afford him any spiritual enjoyment. He found, that there was no fellowship between righteousness, and unrighteousness; and no communion between light and darkness. He found that just so far as he departed from God, God departed from him; and just so far as he grieved the Holy Spirit, he withdrew his gracious and comforting influence. And when he found

himself sold under sin, he groaned, being burdened, and cried, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And the more he grew in grace, and delighted in communion with God, the more he dreaded sin, which interrupted his holy affections, and his highest enjoyment of God. He was, therefore, like other christians, sometimes most happy, and sometimes the most wretched of men.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from the character and experience of saint Paul, that there is an essential distinction between saints and sinners. This distinction does not consist in saints being perfectly free from sin, while sinners are under the entire dominion of it. For saints are all more or less guilty of sin. Solomon declares "that there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." And the apostle John says in the name of christians, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." It likewise appears from what has been said concerning Paul, that he was not wholly free from sin, and had not arrived at complete perfection in holiness. But though it be true, that saints sin, as well as those, who have never been renewed and sanctified; yet there is still an essential distinction between saints and sinners. The saint *hates* sin, but the sinner *loves* sin. Though the holy apostle often transgressed the law of love, yet he hated every transgression. All his sins were a burden to him. He hated and loathed every sinful exercise of his heart. But this is not the case of sinners. It gives them no self-loathing or self-condemnation, that they hate God, disobey his commands, and abuse his mercies. They take pleasure in walking in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes, without any restraint. It is true, they pursue different ways of sinning, but every way of the sinner seems *right* in his own eyes, and consequently his own way of sinning is

a pleasure, and not a burden to him. In this respect, there is an essential difference between every saint and every sinner. Some sinners, indeed, maintain a fair exterior, and apparently conform to the precepts and prohibitions of the gospel as universally and constantly, as real christians, and they take pleasure in their self-righteousness, and feel no pain or burden, that their hearts are far from God, and bound up in some worldly object, or pursuit. But it grieves every real christian to discover, that his *heart* has departed from God, and cleaved to the world. There is, therefore, as real and essential a difference between the *lowest* saint and the *least* sinner, as there is between the *best* saint and the *worst* sinner. When christians discover their own sins, they hate them; but when sinners discover their own sins, they love them. When christians discover their own sins, they are a burden to them; but when sinners discover their own sins, they are no burden to them. It is true sinners sometimes feel a guilt and regret at the painful consequences of their sins, but still they love them, and desire to continue in them, aside from their ill effects. There is, therefore, an essential distinction between all real christians and all unrenowned sinners; and by this distinction, every person may know whether he is a saint or a sinner. If he hates all his own sins, he is a saint; but if he loves all his own sins, he is a sinner. Paul loved his own sins, before he was converted, but hated them afterwards; and every sinner loves his own sins, before he is converted, but hates them afterwards. Sin was no burden to Paul, before he was converted; but it was a great burden afterwards. Sin is no burden to the sinner, before he is converted; but it is a burden afterwards as long as he lives.

2. It appears from the character and experience of Paul, why all real christians are engaged in a spiritual warfare. They are but imperfectly holy. They have some right, and some wrong affections. Their hearts are divided between sin and holiness. This is true of the best christians in the world. Paul was undoubted-



ly the best christian in his day, if not in any day before or after him. And his affections were heterogeneous, some were holy and some were sinful. This he acknowledges and laments. Notwithstanding his high attainments in grace, he was subject to affections which were sinful and hateful. So that he said, "I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do, I allow not; for what I *would*, that I do not; but what I *hate*, that do I." Holy and unholy affections are diametrically opposite to each other, and never fail to create a conflict and warfare in the hearts of christians. This, the Apostle tells believers, was not only his, but their case. He says to the Galatians, "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye *would*." This spiritual warfare is between holiness and sin, and not between sin and conscience. Sinners often experience a warfare between sin and conscience, for their conscience often reproves and condemns them for their evil affections and actions. But it is peculiar to christians, to carry on a voluntary warfare between their holy and unholy feelings and conduct. They mean to stand upon their guard against all their spiritual enemies, and resist not only the evil suggestions of the great adversary, but every unholy and unsanctified affection. They watch and strive to keep their hearts with all diligence, because they know that they are fickle and deceitful above all things, and not to be trusted. Though they know what their views and exercises are to-day, they know not what they may be to-morrow. They may, like Paul, intend well and resolve well, but to-morrow, their good intentions and resolutions may forsake them, so that the good they *would* do, they will not do; but the evil they *would not* do, that they will do. They view the world, the men of the world, and the god of the world, as combined against them, and unless they are resisted and fought against, they will conquer them and lead them astray. Hence they feel constrained to be always prepared and armed, to fight the good fight

of faith, and watch unto prayer for divine grace and assistance.

3. It appears from the character and experience of Paul, that the moral imperfection of real christians, is no just cause of their desponding, or doubting of their gracious state. It is essential to the christian character, in this life, to be morally perfect and morally imperfect. Paul, in his best estate, had some holy and some unholy affections. He had not attained, neither accounted he himself already perfect, but groaned under his moral imperfections. He knew by the grace of God that he was a child of God. He knew that he really loved God and his Redeemer. He knew that he desired and laboured to do his whole duty. But he knew that he was a froward and undutiful child of God, and often disobeyed and displeased his heavenly Father. But this did not lead him to despond or doubt, whether he knew the grace of God in truth. His holy love and obedience gave him positive and infallible evidence, that he was renewed and sanctified; and his unholy affections and conduct were no counter evidence, to prove that he never did feel and conduct right. He did not expect absolute perfection in this life, and knew that it was not essential to his christian character, and infallible title to the promises of the gospel. The gospel promises eternal life, to every one that loves God, that repents of sin, that believes in Christ, that hungers and thirsts after righteousness, that has passed from death unto life, and that has the least degree of true holiness. But the great adversary often employs the imperfections of true believers, to perplex their minds, disturb their peace, weaken their hands and discourage their hearts, and plunge them into spiritual darkness and despondency. They ought not, therefore, to be ignorant of his devices, nor neglect to guard against his malignant influence. Christians have no more right to believe, that they are *insincere*, without evidence, than they have to believe that they are *sincere*, without evidence. The caution to christians is, "Be not deceived." They have no

right to deceive themselves, nor to be deceived by any deceiver. Paul did not call his good estate in question, because he was burdened with a sense of imperfection. And no real christian ought to doubt or despond, because he feels the heavy burden of imperfection. His feeling such a burden is an evidence, that he loves holiness and hates sin ; that he loves his duty, and delights in the love of God after the inward man. If christians could not have hope, so long as they remain imperfect, they could have no hope in this life. Let them keep their hearts right with God, and grow in grace, and this will afford them sure and positive evidence of their gracious estate, which the remains of moral corruption cannot destroy.

4. It appears from the character and experience of Paul, why christians must live by faith. It is because they have so much moral corruption remaining in their hearts, which is altogether criminal, and causes them to need daily the pardoning mercy of God. This renders it necessary, that they should live by faith in the atoning blood of Christ. It was in the view of his daily imperfection, that Paul constantly lived by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He says, " I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified 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." And it is written in the prophets, " The just shall live by faith." All real, but imperfect christians find occasion every day to apply to the blood of sprinkling for pardon and cleansing. Though their criminal imperfection does not destroy their hopes, yet it destroys their peace, until they find peace with God, through the Lord Jesus Christ. The best of christians find as much need, and are as much disposed to live by faith, as the lowest or most imperfect christians. They cannot bear to live under the just displeasure of God, and therefore daily seek his pardoning mercy, and the light of his reconciled countenance. They are the most sensible of their imperfections, and most desirous that

they may be blotted out, through the atonement of Christ.

5. It appears from the character and experience of saint Paul, that real christians never live in a state of spiritual death. Though they are imperfect, and their spiritual affections often decline and languish; yet they do not live like sinners, without a sense of the burden of sin. Paul felt and lamented every degree of his moral imperfection. He did not live from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, or from year to year, in a dead, torpid, unfeeling state, as some suppose, that real christians may do. He was alive to his *sinful*, as well as *holy* exercises. While he had joy and peace in believing, he had pain and distress in disbelieving and disobeying. He did not feel indifferent whether his heart were right, or wrong with God. It is as inconsistent with the character of real christians, to live habitually in a dead and secure state, as to live in a state of perfection, as some vainly and criminally profess to do. Paul did not live in such a state of sinless perfection, and there is but little reason to believe, that any of the Methodists are more holy than saint Paul. And there is no reason to think, that real christians can live at ease in sin, any more than he could. There are undoubtedly some dead professors, who live, and feel, and act as the men of the world do, but they have no evidence, that they are real christians, but positive evidence, that they are in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity.

6. It appears from the character and experience of the apostle Paul, that the more christians grow in grace, the more they will resemble, and find that they resemble him, in their religious character and spiritual experience. Young christians very often enjoy much comfort and peace in believing, and seem to imagine, that they shall never feel such burdens and distresses from sin, as the apostle felt, and as older christians sometimes complain of. But if they live and grow in grace, watch over and restrain the corruption of their hearts, they will find the christian warfare extremely

painful and burdensome. When they find the world against them, and the weakness and fickleness of their own hearts, which are bent to backsliding, and easily carried away with the current of the times, and their moral imperfections, and undue attachment to the world in its various forms, they will then find abundant occasion for mourning, as well as rejoicing. Though they may not be troubled with doubts and fears respecting their gracious state ; they will be burdened and troubled and distressed, on account of their great imperfections in external and internal duty. It is no evidence, that christians are growing fast in grace, that they experience no more darkness and distress in their minds, but it is a greater evidence, that they are declining in every gracious affection, and losing their first love.

7. This subject now calls upon all to inquire whether they have that evidence of being good men, that Paul had of being a real christian. Have you any better evidence of being really gracious, than Paul had before his heart was changed ? He then had that external evidence of being a good man, and in favour with God, which gave him entire satisfaction. And are there not many now building their hopes upon the same kind of evidence ? They appear externally like Paul and other christians. But have they that internal evidence of being christians that he had, and other true believers have ? Have you ever felt the burden of sin ? Have you ever engaged in a spiritual warfare ? Have you lived by faith in Christ, day by day ? Has sin become a greater and greater burden ? Are you more and more diligent to keep your hearts in the love of God ? Does it give you pain to be interrupted in duty ? Do you derive your highest happiness from the enjoyment of God, or from the enjoyment of the world ? These are questions respecting views and feelings, that none can answer but yourselves. Others can answer for all your amiable external conduct ; but not for any wrong feelings of heart.

8. This subject reproves and condemns those, who

make light of sin. It is the character of some sinners, that they make a mock at sin, and they are called mockers. This is extreme folly and wickedness. The burden of sin is not a light burden to bear. It made the heart of Paul to stoop. He did not look upon sin as a light thing. God does not, Christ does not, saints do not, and the angels in heaven do not. And those who now make light of it, when the commandment comes home to their conscience, will find it heavy. And it will sooner or later come home to every one's conscience. Let all sinners, then, prepare to meet God and their conscience, by true repentance, self-abasement, godly sorrow, and a lively faith in the divine Redeemer. There is no room for delay. The burden of sin may now be taken off, but never will be taken off beyond the grave, but terminate in endless and insupportable despair.

## SERMON XXVII.

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THE LIVING GO TO THE DEAD.

II. SAMUEL, XII. 23.

*I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*

WHILE David's child was sick, he put on sackcloth, lay in the dust, fasted, and besought the Lord to spare his life. But as soon as he perceived the child was dead, he arose from the earth, and washed and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped : then he came to his own house ; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. This sudden change in his appearance and conduct, was surprising to his servants, who expected that the death of his child would increase, rather than abate the anguish of his heart. They accordingly said unto him, " What thing is this that thou hast done ? thou didst fast and weep for the child while it was alive ; but when the child was dead thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, while the child was yet alive I fasted and wept ; for I said, who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live ? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast ? can I bring him back again. "*I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*" Such a reflection as this, ought to strike the minds of the living, whenever they see any of their relatives, friends, or acquaintance, called out of this into another world. We are much more apt to realize, that our departed friends will not return to this world, than that

we shall follow them into another. The truth, therefore, which lies upon the very face of the text, deserves a very serious consideration :

That the dead will not return to the living, but the living will go to the dead.

The subject naturally divides itself into two branches, which I shall distinctly consider.

1. Let us consider, that the dead will not return to the living.

We know there is often a strong desire in the living, that the dead might return to them in this world. They want to see them and converse with them about both temporal and eternal things. This is more frequently the case, when any have lost their friends at a distance, and had no opportunity of making or receiving communications of serious and weighty importance. And there is another more common motive for desiring the deceased to return, which is, to know their final condition. Many, who would not wish to go into the eternal world to see their departed friends, would yet be highly gratified to see them once more in this life. And it is very probable, on the other hand, that many or all the deceased would be very glad to return to the living, either to say or do something, that they did not or could not say or do before they left the world. But such mutual desires of the living and of the dead to meet again in this world, will not be indulged, because the dead will not be allowed to revisit the earth, where they finished their course, and performed the last act on the stage of life. "As the cloud is consumed, and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more." God has placed a barrier between this and the other world; but what that barrier is we know not: we only know that it is completely sufficient to prevent all intercourse between the living and the dead. The living have sometimes requested the dead before they left the world, to break over this barrier and appear to them again; and they



have engaged to do it, if it should be in their power. But there has been no well authenticated instance of the dead's returning from the world of spirits. In this case, as well as in many others, God confirms by his providence what he has declared in his word. He says the dead shall not return, and he does not allow them to return. It is true, in several instances he has raised the dead miraculously to answer some important purposes. But such instances serve to confirm the general truth, that the dead shall not return to this world again. Why God will not suffer the dead to return, we can only conjecture. It may be, as the apostle Paul suggests, because neither the happy nor the miserable can communicate to the living what they have seen, or known among the dead; or it may be because, as Christ intimates, no communications that either the happy or the miserable could make, would be of any real service to confirm the living. It is certain, however, that for wise and good reasons, God has absolutely determined, that the dead shall not return to this world after their spirits are absent from their bodies. They have gone to their long home, where they must abide forever; and where the living can never see them, without going to them. And this,

II. They must all sooner or later do.

Immediately after the apostacy of Adam, God told him, and through him every one of his posterity, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." This sentence of mortality assures all the living that they must go to the dead. The inspired writers sensibly realized, and repeatedly taught this solemn truth. Joshua says, "This day I am going the way of all the earth; that is, I am going where all mankind have gone and are going. David expresses the thought in the same language. "I go the way of all the earth." Job says, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down, he fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not. His days are determined, the number of his months is with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass."

As for himself he says to God, "I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." And speaking of one that was dead, he says, "The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto him, and *every one shall draw after him*, as there are innumerable before him." David says, "Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world: both low and high, rich and poor together. They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: that he should live for ever; and not see corruption." And it is said, "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to *retain* the spirit; neither hath he *power in the day of death*: and there is *no discharge* in that war." It does not depend upon the choice of the living whether they shall die and go to the dead. They are under a natural necessity of dying, either by disease, accident, violence, or the infirmities of old age, which none can escape, who escape all other causes of death. And when the dust returns to the dust, the spirit must go to God who gave it. All the art of man can do no more than to *retard* the stroke of death, it cannot prevent its fatal effect. This has been demonstrated by the experience of nearly six thousand years. During such a long period of time, every mineral, vegetable, and animal substance has been explored to discover means of preserving and prolonging life; and yet human life has been gradually shortening from age to age. The word and providence of God have, therefore, put it beyond the possibility of doubt, that death must come, and all the living must go to the dead. But here a very serious question arises, which deserves a serious attention: What is it for the living to go to the dead?

Though we cannot say any thing upon this question to gratify curiosity; yet we may say some things which we all ought to know and realize. Here then it may be observed,

1. That for the living to go to the dead implies their

passing through the change of death. This is undoubtedly in all cases a very *great* change, and cannot be known any otherwise than by actual experience. I know it is supposed, that some have suffered all the anguish, or distress of dying, without being dead. They refer to instances of those, who have been recovered from long fainting, swooning, and merely apparent drowning. Though persons who have lain long in a fit, or swoon, or trance, or in a state of drowning, may remember and relate their peculiar views and sensations in such circumstances; yet neither they nor others can certainly determine, that they really experienced all the pain or pleasure of dying. The pleasure I say, because it is more than possible for God to give some an easy and pleasant passage out of time into eternity. But so far as our observation extends, it appears that death is generally extremely painful. Hence the agonies of death have become a familiar expression to denote the exquisite pains of dying. And it is principally on account of what is supposed to be endured in death, that it is called and feared as the king of terrors. The pains of death are usually correspondent to the causes which produce it. Those whose natures are exhausted by old age, often seem to die in more ease, than many others. Those who die with a lingering disorder, seem to die in nearly the same manner. Those who die in their early days, by acute diseases, often experience greater distress in dying. And those who fall by casualty, or violence, generally suffer the keenest agonies of death. But though the living may be most affected by the apparent distress of the dying, yet they themselves may endure much more than they appear to endure. So that none can know what it is to pass through the great change of death, until they are actually called to endure it. And this all the living must experience, in order to go to the dead. Death is the only door through which the living can go to departed spirits. By whatever means they are brought to their dying hour, it will be a serious and solemn scene to pass

through the dark entry, which leads out of time into eternity.

2. For the living to go to the dead, implies their committing their bodies to the dust from which they were taken. Whether their bodies are emaciated, or full of vigour and activity when they leave them, they must see corruption, which is the natural and unavoidable effect of death. As soon as the soul departs from the body, the body tends to dissolution, and must be consumed, whether it be laid in a costly tomb, or be deposited in a common grave, or thrown into the ocean, or lie neglected and unburied on the surface of the earth. The ancient heathens were very solicitous about the body after death. They had a strange notion, that departed spirits could have no rest so long as their bodies lay unburied. Though this be a groundless and absurd opinion, yet it must be a serious consideration to the living, that they must go to the dead through the grave, that dark and silent and dreary mansion, appointed for all men. If there be something solemn and revolting to go into a tomb, or a graveyard, or a field where thousands have been slain, and left their bones to whiten in the sun; how much more solemn and striking must be the thought of actually lying in the grave and mouldering into dust, as the dead have done for thousands of years past. How many human bodies have been devoured by monsters in the sea? how many have been devoured by beasts of the desert? and how many have gradually mouldered to dust and mixed with their mother earth? No mark or vestige can be found on the earth of Adam and Eve, and of their numerous posterity for four or five thousand years past, and were it not for sacred and profane history, we could not have known, that they ever existed in this world. And all the living are now constantly following those departed inhabitants of the earth, into the land of silence and oblivion. When the living go to the dead, they go to the grave, which will cover them in darkness and blot out their names from under heaven. They will soon become unknown and forgotten.

by those who come after them. Who can tell where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lie? Who can tell where Moses and Aaron lie? Who can tell where the kings of Judah and Israel lie? Or who can tell where the prophets and apostles lie? They are all gone to the dead through the grave, where all the living must follow them. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh." All who are now living will soon be gathered to their fathers, and mix with the great congregation of the dead, "alike unknowing and unknown."

3. For the living to go to the dead implies, that they must follow them not only into the grave, but into eternity. The bible gives abundant evidence of the existence and activity of the soul after it leaves the body. Our Saviour spoke of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as still living. Moses and Elias appeared with Christ on the mount of transfiguration. We read of the spirits of just men made perfect. We are exhorted to follow those, who through faith and patience *inherit* the promises. Stephen committed his departing spirit into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ promised the penitent malefactor, that he should that day be with him in Paradise. And Paul desired that he might die in order to be the sooner with Christ. Nor is it less evident, that the souls of the wicked exist after death and go into eternity. We have, therefore, just ground to conclude, that all who have already died are gone into eternity, where they are in full exercise of all their rational powers and faculties. It clearly appears then, that when the living go to the dead, they go into the world of spirits, where the immense number of the human race, that have lived and died from the beginning of the world to this day, are now collected together in their appropriate mansions. How many of the living would rather never see the dead, than go where they are now to be seen? But they must all go, whether willing or unwilling, and see a world of spirits, which is unspeakably different from this. What an amazing impression must the world of spirits make upon all when they enter into that untried

and before unknown state ! This is a serious part of dying, and far more interesting than merely committing the body to the dust. All that we see of death, this side of eternity, looks like sleep and rest ; but those who die see something infinitely more solemn and interesting. They actually go to the dead, and see them in their new and deeply affecting situation. It is sometimes very striking to see how much a person we were once acquainted with, is altered by age, or by sickness, or by adversity, or even by prosperity ; but the alteration in the views, and feelings, and appearance in departed spirits, is undoubtedly far greater than any alteration they ever underwent in this life. It is impossible to form a conception of departed spirits until we go to them, and see them in their eternal state. To go from one material world to another, where all the inhabitants are clothed in the same material bodies that we are, would be a very novel and surprising transition ; but to go from a material to a spiritual world, where all the inhabitants are immaterial spirits, must be far more astonishing and affecting. And this great transition all the living must make when they go to the dead. Besides,

4. The living must go to the dead, not merely to see where they are and what they are, but to dwell with them for ever. Many, perhaps, would be really pleased to have a vision of the invisible world, as Isaiah, Paul, and John had, and to be permitted to survey the scenes, and objects, and inhabitants, of a happy and miserable eternity, if they might be permitted to return, as they were. But the living must go into the invisible world, not as mere spectators of it, but as everlasting inhabitants in it. They must go never to return to the world they have left. They must remain among departed spirits to all eternity. This is the most solemn and impressive idea of death. It struck the mind of Job with peculiar awe and solemnity. " Are not my days few ? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return." Accordingly, men's dying is repre-

sented as “ their going to *their long home.*” As soon as they reach the world of spirits, they will find a place prepared for them, in which they must remain to interminable ages, whether it be among the happy, or among the miserable. The miserable are, by some means unknown to the living, separated from the blessed. And though all at death will go into the eternal world, yet individuals will go to that part of it, which is allotted to them for their final residence. The unholy will go to the unholy, whose abode is in the regions of darkness and despair; and the holy will go and dwell with the spirits of just men made perfect. Every departed soul will immediately know its final destination, the moment it enters the invisible world. It will immediately meet a multitude of spirits like itself, in character and destination, whose smiles or frowns will excite unutterable sensations of hope or fear; of joy or sorrow. When Lazarus died, he was carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom. Departed spirits never get lost in their passage from this to another world, however great the distance. They are probably conveyed by those good, or evil spirits who attended them through the scenes and changes of their probationary state. Good men are attended by good angels, and bad men by bad angels. They know, by their conductors, whither they will be conducted. Who can conceive the strong and strange emotions of their hearts, while traversing unknown regions, with their new conductors, to the places of their final and eternal residence! But their *joyful*, or *painful* anticipations will be more than realized, when they actually meet the smiles of heaven, or the frowns of hell, which will continue as long as they exist. Thus going to the dead, is going into a blessed or miserable eternity beyond the grave; and it is the prospect of such future and eternal consequences of dying, that renders death, of all events, the most solemn and interesting to the living.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. If the living must go to the dead, then their separation from one another will not be of long duration. The living are apt to be deeply affected with the thought, that they shall not soon, if ever, see their departed friends again. As they know that the dead will not return to them, they seem to forget, that they shall go to the dead, and may very soon see them in another world. When children see their dear parents die, they are ready to imagine, that they shall never see them again. When parents see their dear children die, they are ready to imagine, that they shall never see them again. "A voice was heard in Rama, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children, *because they were not.*" Her imagination perverted her reason, and led her to despair of her ever seeing her deceased children, either because she thought that they had ceased to exist, or because she forgot that she must soon follow them into eternity. And there is no doubt that other bereaved parents have thought and grieved as Rachel did. Parents and children, the nearest and dearest relatives and friends, can very patiently bear a separation from one another, while they cherish an expectation of soon meeting together again; but when death separates them, they can hardly support it, because it seems like an eternal separation. This is a mere imaginary idea. The time of their separation is short. The living will soon follow their departed friends to that world where they will remain for ever. If the living did but properly realize their own frailty and mortality, they would not imagine, that their separation from their deceased friends was either final or lasting, but very short and momentary. The dead, who realize what eternity is, view the longest life as a moment, and expect soon to see those whom they left behind, bewailing a long, if not a lasting separation. The universal and deep mourning of the living for the dead, is one of the most



striking evidences, that their inward thought is, that they shall live for ever, never see corruption, nor follow those who have gone before them into eternity. "All men think all men mortal but themselves."

2. If the living must go to the dead, it cannot be a matter of great importance, whether the time be longer or shorter before they go into the world where their departed friends are gone. They are extremely apt to make great account of the distance of death and eternity. While they vainly imagine, that it is a great while before they shall be called to meet death, and go to the dead, they feel little anxiety about leaving the world; but when death and eternity appear near, they are greatly alarmed. It will be as interesting to meet death late, as to meet it early, and indeed the consequences will be much more interesting. Death was far more interesting to Methuselah than to Abel. Methuselah lived eight or nine hundred years longer in his probationary state than Abel did, and had a much more solemn account to give of himself than Abel had. The truth is, the longer men live in this probationary state, the more serious and interesting will the consequences be of their going to the dead in the eternal world. This seems to be forgotten by those who lot upon long life, and console themselves, that it is a great while before they shall close their eyes upon this world and open them in another. They have no fear of dying, if they may be only spared to the latest hour of life. They are willing to follow their fathers and mothers, their brothers and sisters, and even their own children to the grave, if they may be permitted to stay behind, and not go before them, nor with them. But if they are young, they *may* soon follow the young who have gone before them; and if they are old, they *must certainly* soon follow both the young and the old, who have gone the way of all the earth, and not only see them, but dwell with them for ever. It is one of the most common and fatal delusions, to put far away the evil day of death, which is always near, and may be at the very door. It was this delusion, that ruined

the unwise man, who laid up goods for many years, and said to his soul, eat, drink, and be merry. It was this delusion, that destroyed Dives, who desired the dead to be raised to warn his living brethren of the same delusion, and prevent their coming to him in his state of torment. And it is this delusion, that now keeps thousands thoughtless, prayerless, and graceless. As they dread going to the dead, so they dread to think of it, and prepare for it.

3. If those who die go immediately to the dead ; then every instance of mortality may be as affecting to the inhabitants of the other world, as to those in this. In this world death is always more or less affecting to the living, in a larger or smaller circle. Solomon represents every instance of mortality as affecting to the living. He says, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting : for that is the end of all men ; and the living will lay it to his heart." Death has always been the greatest source of sorrow to all the inhabitants of this world. Many who deem it a mark of weakness to shed tears on any other occasion, think it not beneath them to weep with them that weep, and mourn with them that mourn, on account of the decease of their friends or fellow men. The reign of death from Adam to Moses, and from Moses to this day, has made this world a vale of tears, and a scene of bitter lamentation and sorrow. But the living have never seen death only on one side, and that which is the least solemn and interesting. They have seen only the sickness, the pains, and the terrors of the dying ; but have never seen the eternal consequences of death in the invisible world. These must be unspeakably more affecting to every benevolent heart in heaven, and to every selfish heart in hell, than any of the previous or attendant circumstances of death in this world. If the conversion of a soul fills all heaven with joy, there is reason to think, that the arrival of that soul in paradise, spreads a greater and more general joy among the blessed who had been waiting for the happy event. While those who are

left lament, those who meet rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. The spirits in prison are not *less*, though *differently*, affected by the arrival of a poor, miserable, guilty, malignant spirit among them. Like Dives, they dread the increase of their numbers, which adds poignancy to their torments. The prophet forewarned the king of Babylon, that "*hell* from beneath should be *moved* at his coming." As there is not a day nor an hour passes, without deeply affecting the hearts of some in this world, by the death of others, so there is not a day nor an hour passes, without deeply affecting by the same event, the hearts of some in the world of spirits, who are never stupid, or torpid, but always awake and alive to every thing of serious and eternal importance.

4. If the living will go to the dead in the manner that has been described; then we may see one reason why good men have often been willing to die. Job said, "I would not live always—all the days of my appointed time will I *wait* till my change come." Good old Simeon said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." Paul said in the name of christians, "We are confident, and willing rather to be *absent* from the body, and to be *present* with the Lord." The truth of such declarations was often verified, by the peaceful and joyful deaths of the ancient patriarchs. It is not incredible, that good men should be willing to die, since there is one good reason for it, and that is, their desire to go to the dead, to see them, to converse with them, and to dwell with them for ever. They have a sincere desire to see the first parents of our race, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, primitive christians, their former pious relatives, friends, and acquaintance, with whom they took sweet counsel together and walked to the house of God in company; and above all, they ardently desire to see the Lord Jesus Christ enthroned in glory at his Father's right hand. They live in hope, that death will not only put a final period to all their present trials, troubles, and sorrows; but introduce them

into the presence of such amiable and glorious personages. Though they sometimes tremble at the thoughts of death ; yet their hopes often overcome their fears, and make them willing to pass through the dark valley which leads to the world of light. They live in the habitual exercise of that faith, " which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." They see, by the eye of faith, something beyond the grave worth dying for. They anticipate the blessedness of being where Christ is, where the spirits of just men made perfect are, and where all holy beings are perfectly united in love, communion, and felicity. If good men may have such views, desires, and hopes, it is reasonable to believe, that they may be willing to die. A cordial and firm belief of the gospel, which has brought life and immortality to light, will account for the peace that christians enjoy, and the hopes they entertain, and the willingness they sometimes express, of being absent from the body and present with the Lord. What if some do not believe this to be true, shall their unbelief make it false ? Paul actually took his leave of the world with joy, and triumphed in the full view of eternity. He cries, " I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day : and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." How many since Paul's day have expressed similar views and hopes, and appeared entirely willing to die, and go to the general assembly and church of the first born in heaven.

5. If the living must go to the dead, then we may learn one reason, why mankind in general are so loath to die. It is not always owing to men's reluctance to leaving this world, but their dread of going into another. They do not wish to meet either saints, or sinners in the world of spirits. They know, that they can find no pleasure in seeing and conversing with the saints in

light, and can find nothing but pain, guilt, and despair, in seeing and conversing with the spirits in prison. They can see nothing beyond the grave but what they hate and dread, and this makes them so reluctant to dying. They would be willing to leave a world in which they have experienced nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit, but they cannot bear the thought of going into a world where they cannot see a gleam of light or joy, but a state of everlasting darkness and despair. And there are others who dread dying, not merely because they fear the pains of death; but because they fear the awful consequences of going into an unseen and untried world, from whence they shall never return. They wish to avoid seeing saints in all their glory and blessedness, and are still more anxious to avoid seeing those, who are receiving the due reward of their deeds, where there is no light, nor peace, nor hope. I know some say they are only afraid of dying, but not of being dead; but this is probably owing to their not looking through the grave into a boundless eternity. There are, I believe, but very few, who are willing to go into another world, that are not willing to go through the pains of death, to get there. That faith which reconciles men to go to the dead, generally reconciles them to go through the dark, dreary, or painful valley of death. So that the real cause of men's being so unwilling to die, is the fear of what they may see, or hear, or suffer after the pains of death are over, and they are fixed in eternity. And all who are in a state of unrenewed nature, and under the dominion of a totally corrupt heart, have solid reasons to fear going to the dead, and meeting the inhabitants of heaven, or hell. The day of death must be a tremendous day to all who are unprepared for heaven. To be driven away in their wickedness, is to be banished from the gracious presence of God, from the smiles, approbation, and society of the blessed, and to be doomed to dwell and suffer with the guiltiest, vilest, and most miserable creatures in the universe: and "can their hearts en-

dure, or their hands be strong, in the day that God shall thus deal with them?"

6: If the living must go to the dead; then a realizing sense of this solemn truth, would have a happy tendency to qualify the grief of mourners, and turn their thoughts into a proper channel. They are extremely apt to ponder upon the mere idea of separation, of a *long*, if not final separation. It is true, their departed friends have left them, and gone to their long home. It is true, that they will never return, and you will never have another opportunity to see them, to converse with them, or to enjoy their company, or assistance, or protection, or consoling sympathy. But why should you cherish and increase your sorrows by dwelling upon the imaginary idea of a long separation? The separation will not be long, if you are prepared for heaven, and they are gone there, for you will soon go there, and see them, and converse with them, and dwell with them for ever. And all the pains of a short separation will be infinitely outweighed by a joyful meeting, and an everlasting residence together in the kingdom of glory. But if you are not prepared for heaven, and they are not gone there, it is a mercy that you are separated from them, and it will be an infinitely greater mercy, if you should be for ever separated from them. Why then, I repeat the question, should mourners nourish their grief, by pondering upon the idea of a long separation? They ought to turn their chief attention to what they now are, and what their departed friends now are. These are subjects of the greatest solemnity and importance. And while these occupy their thoughts, the mere idea of separation will dwindle into insignificance. Their tears will cease to roll, but their hearts will not cease to feel. To think of following them into the grave will produce tenderness and tears; but to think of following them into eternity, will produce self-reflection, self-examination, and probably self-condemnation. These exercises have a tendency to do mourners spiritual good, and to prepare them for a happy meeting with their

departed friends, or for a happy and eternal separation from them. It is affecting to look into the grave, but it is far more solemn and useful to look into eternity, where all departed spirits are gone, and will forever remain. The contemplation upon the scenes and objects of eternity, is, of all things, the best suited to afford consolation to mourners, if they ought to receive consolation; and if that does not afford them consolation, there is nothing else in the universe can, in their present situation. The recent mourners, and there is a number of such, are entreated to attend to the source of consolation, which this solemn subject suggests. And if they are not prepared, they are entreated to prepare, to contemplate eternity with joy and hope. This will dry up their tears, and give them that peace and consolation, which neither the death of others, nor their own death can destroy.

Finally, it is the immediate and indispensable duty of every person of every character, age, and condition, to prepare to go to those who have gone from them, and will never return. All must go to meet their departed friends, and they must go where they are. Though their bodies are in their graves, yet their spirits are not there, but in eternity, and there they must go to find them, and when they have found them, they must abide with them. When the living visit their deceased friends, they must pay them a long, an endless visit, which will be unspeakably *delightful* or *dreadful*. But every one must go to the dead, whether willing or unwilling to go. Living parents must go to their deceased children; living children must go to their deceased parents; living brothers and sisters must go to their deceased brothers and sisters; and living friends must go to their deceased friends. All must go, none can be excused; and none know how soon they must leave the living and go to the dead. The grave is without any order. The time of their departure out of this into the eternal world cannot be long to any. It is certainly near at hand to the aged. There is but a step between them and death. And though the

young *may* live many years and rejoice in them all, yet the day of darkness and death will soon arrive, when they too must go the way that all the world have hitherto gone. But providence is every day telling us, that children and youth, and those in the midst of their days, may meet a premature death. No one knows what a day may bring forth to himself. "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 serious question now is, are you who mourn, and you who rejoice prepared to go to the dead? Are you prepared to go to those who have left you, whether they were prepared to leave you or not? Are you prepared to see them, whether they are holy or unholy, happy or unhappy? If you are cordially reconciled to God, and have secured his favour and protection, you are prepared to go into eternity, and to see all that is to be seen, and to know all that is to be known there: but if you are not prepared to meet God, you are not prepared to meet departed spirits, whether they are holy and happy, or unholy and miserable. The question is not, whether you are willing to leave this troublesome world, but whether you are willing to meet both the holy and unholy, the happy and the miserable in another world. This question demands serious self-reflection, and self-examination. The recent instances of mortality as well as another serious circumstance, imperiously call upon us all, to look into our own hearts, and inquire whether we are prepared to go to the dead, who have left us and gone into eternity, from whence they will never return. It would be strange if none of you should this day recollect, that I have finished the forty-eighth, and entered upon the forty-ninth year of my ministry among you.\* I have

\* April 1821.



buried, perhaps, seven or eight hundred hearers, who are gone into eternity, where I must shortly meet them. It would be strange indeed, if I should not habitually bear in mind the consequences of my preaching to them and to myself, and in some measure realize, that I watch for souls as one that must give account. And under this impression, can you think it strange, that I have said so much concerning the *eternal* happiness to be enjoyed, and the *eternal* misery to be suffered beyond the grave? I expect to meet those of my hearers who are gone before me, and those who shall follow after me into eternity. I wish to make divine truths and divine objects appear to you in this world, as I expect they will appear to you and to me in another world. It becomes me to call myself to an account how I have preached the gospel; and it becomes you to call yourselves to an account how you have heard it. It becomes me to view both you and myself in the light of eternity, and to preach as a dying creature to dying creatures. I shall soon cease to speak, and you will soon cease to hear me; but what I have said, and you have heard, will never be erased from our minds. It will be a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death. I am preaching and you are hearing for eternity; and may God, in his infinite mercy grant, that the preacher and hearer may be each other's crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus! Amen.

## SERMON XXVIII.

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THE FINAL HARVEST.

MATTHEW XIII. 39.

*The harvest is the end of the world.*

AFTER Christ had spoken and explained the parable of the sower, "he put forth another parable saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came, and said unto him, sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, nay; lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." This parable Christ spake to the multitude, in the hearing of his disciples, who, when Jesus had sent the multitude away, and went into the house, "came unto him saying, declare unto us the parable of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that sowed the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the

good seed are the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burnt in the fire; so shall it be in the end of the world; the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them who do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." By this parable Christ gives us a lively and striking representation of the last day. "The harvest is the end of the world." The time of harvest, is the time when men reap the fruits of their long and painful labours. So the end of the world is the time, when God will reap the fruits not only of his own labours, but of the labours of all whom he employs in his vineyard. The text in this connection plainly teaches us,

That God will have a harvest at the end of the world.

I shall endeavour to make it appear, in the first place, that God will have a harvest, and in the second place, that this harvest will be at the end of the world.

God is the wisest, the most powerful, and most active being in the universe. He always proposes some wise and important end in all he does. No wise man will cultivate and sow his field, without a design of reaping a valuable crop. Who then can suppose, that God will be incessantly sowing, without any design of reaping? He had a wise design in creating the world, and he is constantly exerting his almighty power in accomplishing his primary and important design. He employs his powerful influence every moment in preserving and governing the world, in causing the regular succession of day and night, of winter and summer, of seed time and harvest, and in bringing about every event, that takes place in any part of his vast dominions.

And can we entertain the thought, that he will exert his omnipotence for thousands of years, without obtaining his object, and enjoying the fruits of his labours? The ultimate end of all labour is rest and enjoyment. Men labour in one season, in order to enjoy rest in another. God intends, that all his great and laborious exertions shall terminate in eternal rest and enjoyment. Though his plan of operation be immensely great in duration, as well as extent, yet it must be completely accomplished. Though his seed time may continue many thousand years, yet it is inseparably connected with the harvest. To suppose, that he should be eternally creating new worlds, or new modifying old ones, would be to suppose, that he has no perfect, consistent, and ultimate end in view. And to suppose this, would destroy all the wisdom of his operations. His ultimate end, therefore, in the creation of this world, must be completely accomplished, and the accomplishment of it must put a final period to all his operations, and to the operations of all his creatures here below. There must be a cessation of labour, and a time of rest, in the moral world. God must have a time to reap as well as to sow, a time to enjoy as well as to labour. It is just as certain, that he will have a harvest, as that he now has a seed time.

I proceed to show,

II. That God's harvest will be at the end of the world. It is more than three months, it is more than three years, and it may be more than three thousand years before his harvest will come. His field is the world. His labourers are now sowing, and preparing the way for the great harvest; but it will not come till the end of the world. For neither the wheat, nor the tares in the field, will come to maturity before that important period. But then all rational and accountable creatures will appear in the perfection of their natures and characters, and be fully ripe for a final separation. And when the wheat and the tares, or the righteous and the wicked, shall be separated and fixed in their

final and unalterable state, then God will rest from his labours, and reap the happy fruits of all his works of creation, providence, and redemption. This is that glorious consummation, which will take place at the end of the world. But in order to a more clear and full illustration of this interesting subject, I will enter into particulars, and observe,

1. That God will, at the end of the world, reap the rich and glorious fruits of his own labours. He has been labouring, in a certain sense, from the early days of eternity. Before the foundation of the world, he formed the best possible plan of operation, and determined all things that should ever take place, by his own operations, and by the operations of all his creatures. Though he formed this great, complicated, and comprehensive design with perfect ease; yet it required the highest possible effort of his all-knowing, all-wise, and all-benevolent mind. It requires considerable mental exertion in a man of large property, to form a wise and correct plan of his own conduct, and of the conduct of all whom he employs in his service; and it requires still greater mental exertion in a general of a numerous army, to form a wise and complicated plan of his own conduct, and of the various operations and movements of all under his command. But it required an infinitely greater exertion of the Deity to determine in his own mind, how many worlds he would make: how many creatures he would form; and how he would dispose of them all through every period of their existence. Having made these astonishing *mental* exertions in adjusting the whole plan of creation, he began to labour with his own hand. By his omnipotent hand, he brought heaven and earth, angels and men, out of nothing into being; and by the same hand, he constantly upholds and governs all his creatures, and his works. He universally controls all the views and designs, and conduct of angels and men, and employs them all as labourers in his vineyard, and as instruments in his hand, of executing his original and eternal purposes. Thus God, speaking after the

manner of man, has been labouring, in devising the plan of creation, in performing the work of creation, and in superintending both the natural and moral world, from the beginning to this day; and he will continue his constant and laborious operations till the end of time. Then his harvest being fully ripe, he will gather it in, and reap the fruit of all his labours, from the beginning to the end of the world. His harvest will not be blasted nor injured, by any unforeseen or unexpected accident, but be a complete compensation for all his laborious exertions, and a complete fulfilment of his benevolent desires and designs.

2. At the end of the world, God will reap the fruits of all the labours of his holy creatures. These are his faithful and industrious servants. All the holy angels are his ministering spirits, and continually engaged in his service. They guarded the tree of life. By them, he conveyed his messages to the patriarchs and prophets, in former ages. And he still employs them to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation, both while they live, and when they die. He employed the ministry of angels, in giving the law at mount Sinai. He employed the instrumentality of angels in destroying Sodom, and spreading destruction in the camp of the Assyrians. He sent angels to announce the birth of Christ. He sent an angel to strengthen Christ in his agony in the garden. He sent angels to watch the sepulchre of Christ, and to confirm the truth of his resurrection, and ascension to heaven. And there is reason to think, that he continues to employ a vast many angels to carry on the purposes of his providence and grace. With all these powerful and faithful labourers in his service, all good men always have been, and always will be united, while they remain on the earth. All the real friends of God, in every age, and in every part of the world, have freely and faithfully laboured in his vineyard. Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and all the patriarchs, spent their long lives, in serving God and their generations. Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua,

Samuel and the prophets, were no less faithful and zealous in doing the work, that God gave them to do. If to these eminent servants of God, we add the apostles and primitive christians, and all the good men that have ever lived from the beginning of the world to this day, and all that ever shall live from this day to the end of time, the labourers in the Lord's vineyard will appear immensely numerous. Solomon employed no less than one hundred and fifty thousand labourers every day, for seven years together, while he was building the temple in Jerusalem; but what is this number of labourers, in comparison with the many millions of labourers, that God has employed, and will employ in the course of seven thousand years, in finishing his living temple, which he is here erecting, and determines to bring to absolute perfection? We cannot, at present, form any adequate conception of the great, and glorious, and everlasting effects of so many faithful labourers for so many thousand years. But we know, that God will reap all the fruits of all the labours, and sufferings, and prayers, of all who shall be renewed, and sanctified, and redeemed from among men, at the last day.

3. At the end of the world, God will reap the fruit of all his unholy, undutiful, and mercenary servants. Though God made all his rational and immortal creatures for himself, and formed them capable of yielding him a free, voluntary, and faithful service; yet a large number of them have renounced their allegiance to their rightful Lord and Sovereign, become disaffected to his character, opposed to his wise and holy designs, and resolved to pursue their own selfish interests in direct contrariety to his. Apostate angels and apostate men are alienated from God, and heartily opposed to his cause and interest in the world, and would not, if they could avoid it, do any thing to promote the designs he is pursuing, and is determined to accomplish. But God is able to overrule all the enmity and opposition of fallen angels and of fallen men, in subserviency to his own glory, and the great interests of his kingdom.

This he has most clearly and strikingly manifested in the course of his providence, from the beginning of the world to the present day. He has always had the hearts of all his enemies in his hand, and made them undesignedly willing to promote the very ends they hated. God designed to promote his own glory in the fall and recovery of mankind. And he employed Satan, his first and greatest enemy, as a free, voluntary instrument to promote that design, which he had no desire, nor intention to promote. And after the apostacy of the human race, we find, that God employed evil spirits, as free voluntary agents in fulfilling the purposes of providence. He undoubtedly employed their invisible influence in bringing about the dispersion of the ambitious and idolatrous builders of Babel; in sending Joseph into Egypt; in trying the patience of Job; in hardening the heart of Pharaoh, and the hearts of the Egyptians; in hardening the hearts of the seven nations of Canaan, and preparing them for their predestinated ruin; and in tempting Saul, Ahab, Haman, and Judas, to pursue the path to their own destruction. God saw it necessary to bring all these things to pass, and employed the free and voluntary agency of his most inveterate enemies to effect his purpose. There is reason to believe, that God has as constantly and universally employed the *unholy*, as the *holy* angels in carrying on his gracious designs in this fallen world. And he as constantly and universally employs *unholy* as *holy* men in labouring for him in his vineyard. He has hitherto employed a vast many more *sinners* than *saints*, in his service. It appears from both sacred and profane history, that God employed the Egyptians, Syrians, Babylonians, Grecians, and Romans, to labour for him, in preparing the way for the coming of Christ, and the spread of the gospel among those, who were perishing for the lack of vision. And he is now setting the whole wicked world in motion, and employing their selfish exertions to promote his benevolent and gracious designs. And though the labours of his mercenary servants never have been, and never will be *vir-*



ious; yet they always have been, and will be, unspeakably *useful*, in promoting his ultimate end, in the creation of the world. And when he has accomplished this wise and noble end, he will then reap a rich harvest from their long, laborious, and undesigned services. I must add,

4. That God will, at the last day, reap the fruits of all the labours of the Lord Jesus Christ. He came into the world to do the will of him who sent him, and he delighted to do his will. He was the most faithful and laborious servant, that God ever employed in his service. He went into his Father's vineyard, and went about his Father's business, before he was twelve years old; and he never lost, nor misimproved a single moment of time, for more than twenty years. And though his life was comparatively short; yet he did more in that short period, than any other person ever did, in more than nine hundred and sixty years, and was far the most faithful, most industrious and most laborious servant, that ever voluntarily entered into his Father's field. He knew all that he had to do and to suffer for his Father before hand. He knew that he had to combat the power and subtilty of Satan in the wilderness. He knew that he had to work miracles, to cure all manner of diseases, to cast out devils, to go all over Judea and preach the gospel of the kingdom, to lay open the corruption of the human heart, to condemn the errors, delusions, and false religion of the apparently best and worst of men, to meet their contradictions, reproaches, and malignant opposition, to endure the heat of summer and the cold of winter, and to save himself and others from sinking in the sea of Tibereas. But these labours, dangers, and sufferings, were nothing in comparison to what he knew that he had to endure in the garden, before the bar of Pilate, and on the cross, by the hands of wicked men. Though he fully anticipated these things and sensibly realized the tremendous sufferings before him; yet he did not shrink from them, but magnanimously and cheerfully resolved to meet them. "Now is my soul trou-

bled : and what shall I say ? Father save me from this hour : but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name." And when the time was come, that he should finish the work that his Father had given him to do, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, to make his soul an offering for sin ; where he was derided, insulted, and with wicked hands crucified and slain. The painful and faithful labours of Christ were unspeakably greater, and more important, than all the labours of angels and men put together. Indeed, their labours would have been of little account, if not entirely lost, had it not been for the labours of Christ. He has done, and will do more than any other person in the universe, to bring home many sons unto glory, and to augment the holiness and happiness of heaven for ever. When he shall have finished his mediatorial work, he will exhibit the fruits of his labours before the eyes of the whole intelligent creation, and fill every holy heart with inexpressible joy. Thus at the end of the world, God will reap the fruit of his own labours, the fruit of Christ's labours, and the fruit of the labours of all his holy and unholy creatures ; and these fruits will yield him a most glorious and plentiful harvest, and lay a broad and permanent foundation for the everlasting rest and enjoyment of all holy beings.

#### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If at the end of the world, God will reap the fruits of his own labours, and of the labours of all his intelligent creatures ; then he will have a very rich and plentiful harvest of every thing the most valuable and desirable.

For, in the first place, he will have a rich and plentiful harvest of *knowledge*. None of his intelligent creatures will come to their proper maturity in knowledge until the end of the world, when God's ultimate end in the creation of it, shall be completely answered, and

universally known. Though angels have been growing in knowledge from the day of their creation to this day, and will continue growing in knowledge from this day to the great and last day; yet they will not come to their full growth, until they have seen all intelligent creatures collected together, and all their views, and feelings, and exertions completely unfolded, together with all God's dispensations of providence and grace towards them. Though they have been looking into God's works and ways for nearly six thousand years, with great attention, and though they have made great and rapid improvements in knowledge during this long period, yet they may learn ten fold more in one thousand years to come, than they ever learnt before; and yet not arrive at their full growth, or proper perfection in knowledge, until the end of the world and the final consummation of all things. This is also equally true of the whole human race. Though they come into the world extremely ignorant, yet they naturally grow in knowledge as they grow in years; but though some of them have lived hundreds of years in this world, and thousands of years in another, yet none of them ever have, or ever will, come to the full measure of perfect men in knowledge, till the end of the world. Then the intellectual powers and faculties of all minds, whether human or angelick, will come to *maturity*, though not to *equality*. *Angels* will continue a *superiour*, and *men* an *inferiour*, order of beings; and one angel will be superiour to another angel, as well as one man superiour to another man, in knowledge. But this variety in knowledge will be consistent with absolute perfection in each individual. Now, if at the end of the world, the many myriads of angels, and the many millions of the human race, will all be collected together in one vast assembly, and exhibit all the improvements in knowledge they have ever made under all the means of divine cultivation, which they have ever enjoyed; God will certainly reap a rich and plentiful harvest of knowledge, which will afford him unspeakably more joy, than any harvest ever afforded the richest man in

this world. Every child of Adam will know more than Adam, or Enoch, or Moses, or Solomon, knew, when they left the world; and all the angels will know vastly more, than they ever knew before God's ultimate design in creation was accomplished and revealed. God will reap a rich harvest of *holiness*, as well as of *knowledge*. All the angels of heaven, and all that shall have been redeemed from among men, will shine forth in the kingdom of their Father, in all the *beauties of holiness*. The patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, all that had been sanctified and justified, will appear but a little lower than the angels of heaven, in their gracious and divine attainments. And these attainments will appear far more valuable and excellent in the sight of God, than all their intellectual improvements. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness. God views holiness in himself and in his rational creatures, as infinitely more amiable and valuable, than any other excellence or perfection. And the immense fruits of holiness, which the immense number of his labourers in his vineyard shall have brought forth, in the course of many thousand years, will vastly increase the value and joy of his rich harvest at the end of the world. Furthermore, his harvest will then comprize not only all the knowledge, and all the holiness, but all the happiness of all his holy creatures. All his faithful servants will then cease from their labours, and enter into everlasting rest and enjoyment. They will enjoy that blessed kingdom, which had been prepared for them, by all the labours of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and of the whole intelligent creation. And God will then see all his holy creatures brought to the perfection of their natures, placed in their proper mansions, and in the full enjoyment of all *good*. A more rich and plentiful harvest than this, we cannot conceive it possible for God to enjoy at the end of the world and final consummation of all things.

2. If God will reap such a rich and plentiful harvest of knowledge, holiness, and happiness, at the end of the world; then he deserves our everlasting gratitude

and praise for his *goodness* in creating it. Nothing but mere goodness could have possibly moved him to form the great and benevolent design of creation. He was under no natural necessity to create the heavens, or the earth, nor any intelligent creatures in them. He was self-sufficient for his own blessedness. He might have enjoyed everlasting rest in the contemplation of his own glorious perfections. And he must have known before hand, that if he should create the heavens and the earth, and fill them with rational creatures, how much care and labour it must cost him and them, to accomplish the great, and complicated, and arduous design. But in the full view of all this, his benevolent heart moved him to create the world, and to exert all his perfections in upholding and governing it, until he had brought millions and millions of rational and immortal beings to the highest perfection in knowledge, holiness and happiness. As this state of perfection will be the result of the work of creation, so we may safely conclude, that this was his ultimate end in bringing all things into existence. And we cannot conceive that he should have formed a greater, wiser, or better end in the creation of the world. He will always have occasion to rejoice in all his works, and so will all his holy creatures. He will not be indebted to them for any of their labours, but they will always be indebted to him for all the good that his labours and theirs will finally produce. For they will fully and for ever enjoy his rich and happy harvest at the end of the world. They cannot look backward to the beginning of the world, nor forward to the end of it, without seeing their indispensable obligations, to thank and praise him for *creating goodness*. And if we felt as the heavenly inhabitants feel, we should joyfully join with them in saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

3. If God will have a vastly rich and plentiful harvest at the end of the world; then we have no reason to expect, that he ever will have more than one har-

vest. At the end of the world, God will have created the heavens and the earth just as he originally intended to create them; he will have preserved and governed them, just as he intended to preserve and govern them; he will have brought as many intelligent creatures into existence, as he intended to bring into existence; he will have brought them to that state of perfection in knowledge, holiness, and happiness, to which he intended to bring them; and he will have completely answered his original and ultimate end in the work of creation. And this will be the largest and richest harvest, that he could possibly propose, desire, or produce. We cannot conceive, therefore, that after he has actually reaped this great and valuable harvest, that he should desire to produce and reap another. The very supposition would argue imperfection. It would imply, that he was not able to form the greatest, wisest, and best end in the creation of the world, at first. It is as absurd to suppose, that God will have more than one harvest, as to suppose, that he will have a thousand, or two thousand, or a million harvests. When God formed his original and eternal design of creation, he formed as great, as wise, and as good a design, as his boundless wisdom and goodness could devise, and his almighty power could accomplish. And unless, after the end of the world, he should increase in power, wisdom, and goodness, it will be both naturally and morally impossible, that he should devise or accomplish any new design in the work of creation. I know that some have supposed, that God will not gather in all his harvest at the end of the world. They suppose that after he has separated the wheat from the tares, or after he has separated the righteous from the wicked, and cast the wicked into a lake of fire, he will there ripen, and purify, and prepare them for the kingdom of heaven, and be reaping a rich harvest from the regions of sin and sorrow, for ages and ages, after the end of this world. And indeed some have supposed, that he will continue to destroy old worlds and create new ones, through the endless

ages of eternity. But these suppositions are plainly contrary to the natural and moral perfections of the Deity, and to his own declarations concerning the end of the world, and the complete accomplishment of his original design in the creation of it.

4. If God shall have such a rich and plentiful harvest at the end of the world, then all his faithful labourers have a bright and glorious prospect before them. Though they are now really wheat and the excellent of the earth; yet they are in a green and imperfect state, and can scarcely be distinguished by themselves and others from the tares in the field. But all intelligent beings are constantly labouring to ripen them for the harvest, and bring them to maturity and perfection in knowledge, holiness, and happiness. Though they are now the sons of God, yet it doth not yet appear what they *shall* be: but we know that, when he shall appear, they shall be like him in every natural and moral excellence, and shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. They will rejoice to find themselves, and so many myriads of rational and immortal creatures brought to a state of perfection, and completely prepared for everlasting rest and enjoyment. But above all, they will rejoice, that God had perfectly obtained his supreme and ultimate end in the creation of the world, by his rich and plentiful harvest. For his harvest will be their harvest, and they shall enjoy the fruits of all his and their own labours, so far as they shall be capable of enjoying them. Thus light is continually sowing for the righteous, and gladness of heart for the upright. Though the harvest they are preparing will not be ripe until the end of the world; yet let them not be weary in well-doing: for in due season they shall reap, if they faint not. Success in any business is the most animating motive to activity. It was the prospect, which Moses had of the recompense of reward, that animated him to labour so long and so faithfully for God. It was the prospect of success in bringing home many sons unto glory, that induced Christ to endure the pains and reproaches of

the cross. And the apostle urges christians to the greatest activity in the service of God, from the same motive of success. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always *abounding* in the work of the Lord ; for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

5. If God always has been, from the beginning of the world, carrying on his original design of producing a rich and plentiful harvest at the end of it ; then none can cordially approve of any *part* of his conduct, without approving of the whole. Many, however, imagine, that they approve of many things he has done, who say they do not approve of his eternal purpose, nor of innumerable instances of his conduct in the dispensations of his providence and grace. But none can really and heartily approve of any one thing he has done, in creating, preserving, governing, and redeeming the world, who do not approve of his ultimate design in the creation of the world, and of every thing he has done, and employed others to do, to produce a rich and plentiful harvest at the end of it. His design is uniform and consistent, and in its very nature and operation, deeply affects all his intelligent creatures, who either approve, or disapprove of it. Some approve of it, and desire and endeavour to promote it ; and some disapprove of it, and desire and endeavour to prevent its accomplishment. None are neuters. Every one is on the Lord's side, or against him ; every one gathers with him, or scatters abroad. All in the invisible world, are *openly* for him, or against him ; and all in this world, are *really*, though not *visibly*, for him, or against him. And it is because mankind are not so well acquainted with God's ultimate end in creation, as the good and evil angels are, that they do not as openly appear and act for him, and against him. Did all men now only know and realize that design which God formed in eternity, and which he has been pursuing, and will finally accomplish at the end of the world, there would not be a doubting christian, nor a doubting sinner on the face of the earth. When



the tares and the wheat are ripe for the harvest, there will be no difficulty in distinguishing them one from another; so when saints and sinners are ripe for God's harvest at the end of the world, there will not be a doubting saint or sinner. And it is in the view of God's harvest, that both saints and sinners, can now best discover, whether they are really *for* him or *against* him. Let them then only consider what he has plainly told them concerning his harvest, at the end of the world, and what a separation he will make between the tares and the wheat, the sheep and the goats, and his faithful and unfaithful servants, and they can scarcely doubt, whether God's harvest will be a day of the greatest *joy*, or of the deepest sorrow to them.

6 This subject calls upon you all, to inquire, for what, and for whom, you have been labouring. There is no doubt but you have generally been industrious and laborious about something; but for what have you been labouring? Have you been labouring for the meat that perisheth, or for that which endureth unto eternal life? Have you been labouring to lay up treasures in heaven, or to lay up goods for many years, and to become great, and rich, and happy in this present life only? Have you been labouring for God, or for yourselves? Have you been seeking his interest or your own? Have you been workers together with him, or with his enemies? It is easy to answer these questions in the view of this subject. If you have approved of God's ultimate end in the creation, preservation, government, and redemption of the world, which he has been pursuing, and which he will certainly accomplish at the end of it; and if you have been labouring to prepare yourselves and others for a state of perfection, in knowledge, holiness, and happiness; you have been labouring for God; if not, you have been idle and worse than idle all your days. God says of Israel, "He is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself." "Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, to those who bring forth fruit unto themselves, consider your ways, ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye







