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DONATION OF

SAMUEL AGNEW,

OF PHILADELPHIA, PA.

Letter.....

March 15th 1855.

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21

In a Volume of Sermons by Doctor Gill,  
N<sup>o</sup>. 4. is one on the death of M<sup>r</sup>. Wilson,  
including a concise memoir of him.



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S E R M O N S  
O N  
V A R I O U S S U B J E C T S  
A N D  
O C C A S I O N S.

By the late Reverend

Mr. *Samuel Wilson.*

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MEMORANDUM

of

the

Mr. James M. [unclear]

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S E R M O N S  
O N  
V A R I O U S S U B J E C T S  
A N D  
O C C A S I O N S,

By the late Reverend

Mr. *Samuel Wilson*:

T W O O F W H I C H

Were published in his Life-Time,

A N D

The Rest taken from his own MANUSCRIPTS.

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To which is prefixed

A short ACCOUNT of his CHARACTER,  
In an ORATION delivered at his *Interment*,  
By JOSEPH STENNETT.

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L O N D O N :

Printed for J. WARD, over-against the *Royal-Exchange*;  
and G. KEITH, at *Mercers-Chapel, Cheapside*.

M.DCC.LIII.



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## P R E F A C E.

*T*HIS volume appears in the world to gratify the pressing instances of many of the worthy author's friends, who either received their first serious impressions under his awakening and instructive ministry, or were established in the important doctrines of christianity, and nourished up in experimental and practical religion by that good food which, by the grace of God, he dispensed among them. As it was the pleasure of the great Disposer of all things to call him to himself, in the midst of his days, and of his usefulness, it was their desire to recover, if possible, some of those discourses which they had heard from his

*lips with much benefit and delight : and they have encouraged themselves to hope, that, though unassisted with the advantages of his serious, and persuasive manner of address from the pulpit, yet they might happily revive some of those influences they had formerly felt, and be of the same profit to others. These considerations prevailed on those, on whom the right of the author's manuscripts devolved, at his decease, to consent to this publication.*

*THE two first sermons were printed some years ago ; and are to be found in an excellent defence of some of the most important principles of our holy religion, which, as the tide of infidelity and corruption was threatening to bear down all before it, was attempted by a set of able and worthy divines, some years ago, in this city ; and among whom Mr. Wilson bore a part ; which was so well executed,*

*cuted, as to render it the request of some, who mourn over the continuance of the same opposition to the gospel, that they might stand here also.*

*ALL the rest are discourses which were never designed for the press, but have been deciphered, from his own notes in short-hand, by such of his most intimate friends, who were acquainted with the character in which they were wrote.*

*WHATEVER be the censure that may possibly fall on the hand that, under these disadvantages, from a tender regard to the memory of his friend, and the hope of their further usefulness to the souls of men, has ventured to prepare these papers for the press, a very little candour will be sufficient to secure the author from any disgrace; especially when it is considered, that, as it was seldom his custom*

*to confine himself to his notes in the pulpit, so, from the happy liberty he enjoyed there, they usually received considerable improvement.*

*BUT notwithstanding these disadvantages, and the mistakes of transcribers must have rendered many emendations necessary, yet the reader may be assured, that such caution has been used in this respect, as strictly to preserve Mr. Wilson's sentiments, and to secure his just title to these sermons, as his own.*

*IT will be observed that the choice of the subjects which has been made for this volume, consists of some of the doctrinal, and others of the more experimental and practical kind. To which I will only add, with an humble dependance on the divine blessing, that if these discourses afford as much profit and pleasure to those who read them, as they have given*  
the

*the editor in the revisal, the design of their publication will be happily answered; and that, as Mr. Wilson's other printed sermons, when collected together, make one volume, of about the same size with this, so, if this meets with suitable encouragement, it may be followed with a third.*

JOSEPH STENNETT.



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A  
FUNERAL ORATION,  
A T

The INTERMENT of the Reverend  
Mr. SAMUEL WILSON, in  
the Burial-Ground at *Bunhill*,  
October 12, 1750.

**W**HATEVER be the triumphs of  
the king of terrors on these  
mournful occasions, or the dis-  
grace that is brought on our nature by death ;  
whatever variety of miseries we must our-  
selves endure in our way to the grave, or  
the pangs we feel in our attendance on the  
remains of our friends thither ; or, indeed,  
whatever be the awful consequences of dy-  
ing ; yet as the light of nature discovers,  
and acknowledges an infinite display of the  
sovereignty of the Divine Being in this im-  
portant concern ; so the sacred scriptures tes-  
tify, not only to the wisdom and justice of  
such a procedure, but to the mercy and good-

2     *A FUNERAL ORATION, &c.*

ness of it too. It is a procedure which, one would imagine, should silence all the adversaries of divine revelation; since no scheme besides can satisfy a rational enquirer about it: and it should carry the strongest evidence on our minds of that ruin which the sin of our first parents has brought upon all mankind, and of which the bible gives us the only clear and explicit account.

AND tho' we find, by sad experience, the successful endeavours of corrupt nature to overcome the other dictates of conscience, yet here, —at the mouth of a grave, we have such a standing conviction, as the hardest hearts, in their near approaches to it, find it exceeding difficult to elude. Thus, as the last enemy, which a good man has to conquer, is death; so the last conviction that sin is able to stifle in the breasts of the wicked, is the apprehension of the horrors and dangers which attend it. And yet, such is the stupidity of human nature, that even this suppression of all reason, and all sense of religion, is, too often, the dreadful case.

IF reason did its office, how could it be possible for any one of us, in this great assembly, to behold the ensigns of mortality around us, to traverse the fields of the dead, and to tread on the dust of thousands, to fix our eyes on an open sepulchre, and to see the dear remains of a friend committed to its silence and darkness, to become the prey of corruption, and the food of worms, and to know too that in a few days this will be our own case; how could it be possible, I say, if rational reflection took place, for any one of us to see, and consider these things with a negligent and unaffected heart?

BUT the emotions of our minds should surely be much more quickened, and the instruction come with greater weight, when we attend the funeral solemnities of men of any eminency and considerable usefulness in the world; more so still, when they have been eminent for piety and religion; and, I was going to say, most of all, when we behold the heralds of life themselves laid down in the grave, and become the

sub-

subjects of mortality. For we have daily the repeated and sorrowful evidence, that men of every rank and character must die. — *Our fathers where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?*

THE reverend and excellent person, whose grave we surround, was descended from a line of pious and worthy ancestors, both on his father's and his mother's side, among whom were several very worthy ministers of the gospel. He had so happy a texture of mind; such fine natural parts, and was so very early imbued with remarkable evidences of a divine work upon his soul, as led his religious friends, in his tender years, to hope that Heaven had pointed him out for the service of the sanctuary: and time soon made it appear that they were not mistaken.

PREPARED with suitable study, adorned with useful literature, stock'd with spiritual experience, warmed with zeal for GOD, and love to the souls of men, and richly furnished with the unction from above, he came forth into his

his sacred work; and approved himself an able teacher of others, at a time of life, when but few enter upon a public profession of religion themselves. He was favoured with an healthful constitution; a constitution which was hardly ever much shaken with any disease, till that which brought him hither. His industry was suited to it. And such was the sweetness and benevolence of his temper, that, as it readily engaged him in offices of kindness to others, tho' frequently attended with much labour and fatigue to himself; so it seldom suffered him to be ruffled with resentment at any ungrateful treatment he met with in return. With all these happy talents, he soon became a very popular and successful preacher. And that this popularity was not the effect of novelty, and superficial attainments, appears, in that it was not only the blaze of a few months or a year, as is often the case, but it continued with him thro' the whole course of his ministry. So that, by the blessing of GOD on his labours, he raised a congregation from low circumstances, to become one of the most flourishing in this city.

And

## 6 A FUNERAL ORATION, &c.

And he discharged his pastoral office with that seriousness, prudence, and temper, as was attended with such a series of increase and harmony, as few communities have, for so long a time, enjoyed.

BUT neither honourable descent, neither genius, nor learning, neither the ornaments of nature, nor of grace, neither love to GOD, nor love to men, nor faith, nor usefulness will, we see, secure the continuance of men here beyond the limits of the divine decree. Not the art of medicine, not the aching hearts of kindred and of friends, not the tears and groans of a large, and beloved flock, nor the fervent prayers of fellow-labourers in the same service, can respite the commission, when the hour is come: for it is the just and reasonable appointment of the great Disposer of all things, that *man should die, and there is no discharge in this war.*

WHAT makes the stroke the more feeling, is, that he is removed from us at a time, when the growth of the most destructive errors, the increase of every kind of wickedness, and the sad and general decay of vital religion among

good men themselves, seem to render the continuance of persons of remarkable piety, and abilities, of very great consequence to the best interest in the world. And it is still the more affecting, that he bowed his head in the midst his strength, and when a large treasure of experience, and great ripeness of judgment, gave us encouraging hopes of his growing usefulness, for many years to come; and that his life also should, at such a time as this, become a sacrifice to the zeal of his heart, and the fatigues of his work. These are some of the mysteries of providence, which tho' we understand not now, will be unfolded hereafter.

HOWEVER, we must, we ought to be reconciled to the will of the wise and righteous Ruler of the world, and Head of the church, who has thought fit to call him home: and we have no doubt but he is entered into that *rest, which remains for the people of GOD*. Nor can it be conceived what a peculiar pleasure that *rest* must afford to a servant of *Christ*, who has *laboured* as he has done; or with what exalted delight, a welcome, from the lips of

*Jesus* into *that* world, must have been received by one, who had so long *determined to know nothing but him, and him crucified, in this;*—by one, the business of whose life was to spread the Saviour's grace, of which himself had been so rich a partaker; to lead sinners to that precious fountain of his blood, in which his own soul had been bathed; and to defend the glories of his person, and the virtue of his righteousness and salvation, on which he had long placed all his own dependance for justification and acceptance with GOD.

WE shall no more sit under the powerful conviction of his manly and nervous reasoning;—no more be charmed with his eloquent persuasion, or be struck with the happy mixture of his grave and familiar address;—no more enjoy the force of his various, affectionate, and pertinent pleadings before the throne of grace, or feel our souls melted by his tears into the same devout and heavenly temper.

BUT it becomes us, I say, to submit; and it is our business now to make the best improve-

prove-

provements of so awakening, and so instructive a providence. And what are these? but that we should be awfully, and more effectually convinced of the absolute right which the Divine Being will for ever maintain over all his works? what,—but that we should entertain a renewed, and a deeper sense than ever of the malignity of sin, which continues to make such ravage in the church, as well as in the world? what,—but that we should inscribe vanity upon every temporal enjoyment, and uncertainty on the peaceful and uninterrupted continuance of blessings of a higher nature, while we pass thro' this vale of tears, and land of changes? what,—but that we should look forward for our comfort, under all the distresses of this weary wilderness, to that world, where there is no sin, nor sorrow, and where death shall have no more power?

IT is an honour to the family of the deceased, that they have been related to so worthy a man: and they, as well as many others, will tell how he adorned the characters of the husband, the father, the brother, and the friend.

The best support, that every surviving relative can have under their present very great affliction, is to be derived from that treasure of precious promises which often comforted his heart, and were the frequent subjects of his ministry, — promises which remain, tho' he is gone. His amiable example also lives, and will always live, I trust, in their remembrance, tho' he is dead, and they shall *see his face no more*. To which I will add, that love itself, which usually opens the floodgates of sorrow wide, on these occasions, will help to moderate theirs, when they reflect, that the greater their *loss* is, it gives them the more illustrious idea of his *gain*.

I AM sensible that many of his late charge, and, among them, not a few of his spiritual children are come hither, to pay the last respect to his dear remains, and to pour out the affectionate tribute of their tears on his tomb, — and it is a just and decent tribute. When *Lazarus* died, an affectionate disciple of our Lord said to the rest, *Let us*  
*also*

also go, that we may die with him: and Jesus himself wept on that sorrowful occasion. But then, they should consider, that religion sets the proper bounds to our grief, and it also instructs us, that tears are not the only tokens of respect, which are due to the memory of good men, when they are taken from us. No — they are to remember that their dear pastor, tho' he is *dead, yet speaketh*, — *speaks* still by that doctrine which he taught them, and that pattern which he set before them, while living; — *speaks* to them now by his own death, and tells them how frail they are, and how soon those that *bear* may be called to their account, as well as those that *speak*. May they so remember him who *broke the bread of life* to them, and, by divine appointment, *had the rule over them*, and *watched for their souls*, that they may follow his *faith*, considering the end of his *conversation*, and be partakers at last with him in his joy.

AND let those who have often felt their consciences roused by his awakening dis-

courses, or their souls, for a season, melted by his most affectionate address, and yet continue in their sins, let them, I say, consider, that his lips are now shut for ever, and his commission is sealed up. Let them seriously reflect, that the *gospel* which he preached to them will be *a savour*, if not *of life unto life*, yet *of death unto death*. And let them fear lest, in their final neglect of his faithful and unwearied warnings, he should prove *a swift witness against* them, in that tremendous day of account, which cannot be far off.

MAY we that are ministers, and have had our labours, in many respects, united with his, who have had the advantage of his friendship, and have often taken *sweet counsel together* with him, may we likewise make the best use of so affecting a dispensation. Our work also will be soon finished, and *the places which know us now*, will, very soon, *know us no more* for ever. May we therefore be quickened to greater activity and faithfulness in the discharge of those important services in which we

are

are engaged, and be stirred up more carefully to prepare for the same summons; that *when our Lord comes we may be also ready.*

To conclude: let us all be comforted with these considerations, that, tho' ministers die, *the word of GOD, the gospel of Christ Jesus liveth and abideth for ever*: — that tho' the children must pass thro' the *valley of death*, in their way to their *Father's house*, yet their Father always lives: — that tho' their elder Brother has died, yet it was for their sins; tho' he has descended in the grave, yet he has perfumed it by lying there; and, that tho' *he was dead*, yet *he now liveth*, and *behold, he is alive for evermore*. *He is risen again for their justification, and ever lives to make intercession for them*. He is *the resurrection and the life*, and whosoever *believeth in him, tho' he were dead, yet shall he also live*. And, blessed be GOD, I trust many of us can say, that tho' we must die, yet *our lives are hid with Christ in GOD*; that *the spirit of life, which is in Christ Jesus, hath made us free from the law*

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*law of sin and death; and that we have room to hope, that, when Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory.*

CON.

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# SERMON I.

*The doctrine of efficacious grace asserted  
and vindicated.*

Preach'd at LIME-STREET.

PHIL. ii. 13.

*It is God who worketh in you, both to will and  
to do, of his own good pleasure.*

**I**N the beginning of this chapter, the apostle recommends to the saints; at *Philippi*, mutual forbearance, affection, humility, and condescension, as the great ornaments of the christian character. To this end, he reminds them of their common fellowship of the spirit, and their joint relation to, and interest in, the blessed Jesus; who, as he observes, in the days of his flesh, exemplified these graces, in a very distinguishing manner: so entirely was his heart set upon advancing his Father's honour, and so prevailing the affection which he bore to his  
B people,

people, that, though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet he 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, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. <sup>a</sup> “ Now,” says the apostle, “ you profess to be the disciples of “ this Jesus, you call him Lord; keep in “ view then his temper and conduct, and “ copy after him: *Let the same mind be in “ you that was in him*; and so much the rather give diligence herein, as I, who, when “ present with you, was serviceable, as an “ healer of your breaches, and an helper of “ your faith and joy, am now providentially “ removed from among you: *Wherefore, my “ beloved, as ye have always obey’d, not as in “ my presence only, but now much more in my “ absence, work out your own salvation with “ fear and trembling.* <sup>b</sup> God is calling you to “ duty, diligence, and circumspection; give “ no occasion for the reproach, that your “ zeal declined upon my leaving you; but “ remember what is before you, a crown of “ immortal glory, and run with patience and “ constancy the race that is appointed you, “ and in your way to the prize, let there be “ no other contention, but who shall soonest “ reach the goal, and first lay hold of eter-  
“ nal

<sup>a</sup> Ver. 6, 7, 8.

<sup>b</sup> Ver. 12.

“nal life.” And lest they should, conscious of their own spiritual impotence, be discouraged, he adds, “*For it is God that worketh in you, &c.* Your work, indeed, is great, your difficulties are many; but if God is with you, he will give you a will, and furnish you with power, to perform what is acceptable to him.”

PERHAPS it will be said, that the words under consideration, relate to saints already renewed in the spirit of their minds, and so cannot, with propriety, be produced as an argument for the necessity of a divine agency, in the conversion of a sinner. To this it might be answer'd, that it is no unusual thing, in theological enquiries, to borrow a passage of scripture, as an illustration, where it is not insisted on as a direct proof: but, in the instance before us, admitting it primarily may belong to believers, the consequence will be this, that either the sinner has more will to, and power for, that which is good, than the saint, or the same God, who *works* in the one, must also in the other, *both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* If a good man, who knows so much of his duty, who has been so long accustomed to the discharge of it, and has so often tasted the sweets of communion with God, whilst engaged in his service; if in the midst of all his advantages, experience, and hope, he cannot of himself will or perform any thing that is spiritually

B 2

good;

good; much less the sinner, whose heart is carnal, who is a slave to his lusts, and under the tyranny of the God of this world.

THE word ἐνεργῶν, which we translate *worketh*, is expressive of power, yea, of mighty power; it supposes a difficulty in the performance, and perfection or superior strength in the agent. It is not barely our setting our hand to a work, but the doing of it thoroughly, or to purpose. Accordingly, when *the arm of the Lord is revealed*, the sinner is born again, *by the exceeding greatness of that power, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself:*<sup>c</sup> There is an energy on God's part, and a change on ours.

THIS working of the Almighty, is further described to us as internal: He *worketh in us*, and that *to will*, as well as *to do*. Ministers preach to us, but God worketh in us. The best of means, applied with the utmost skill, will not of themselves soften the hard, or cleanse the impure heart: God only has access to the spirits of men, so as to secure this desirable event, and he can do it on whom, and when he pleases: *For he worketh in us, of his own good pleasure*; a phrase which has in it both the ideas of sovereignty, and of kindness. God gives his grace at *pleasure*, to whom, and in what degree, he thinks fit, *dividing to every man as he will*: And as this grace is his own image, and leads on to  
the

<sup>c</sup> Phil. iii. 21.

the glorious enjoyment of himself, it must needs be a favour of inestimable value.

THE words being thus explained, give us an occasion to observe,

*That when a sinner is born again, there is a change wrought in his soul, by the mighty power of God.*

BY this *change*, I do not understand an alteration of profession or character barely; for, as the apostle tells us, circumcision avails no more than uncircumcision, where the new creature is wanting. The change which we intend is real, not nominal, a change of the subject, not of the name only. A man may professedly renounce idolatry, submit to baptism, as a badge of christianity, and attend the worship of God, in the assemblies of the saints, call himself, and be deemed by others, a believer; and yet be a stranger to the change we are treating of. Again, we distinguish the grace of God in the renewing of a sinner, from reason, or the improvements of it, when its dictates are supposed to be duly attended to. Reason belongs to us as men, and is common to our nature, as raised above the beasts that perish: But this is not sufficient to make us wise unto salvation. Where is the person of whom it may be said, that, after a course of sin and impiety, he brought himself, by bare reasoning, to forsake the evil of his way, to love the Lord his God with all his heart, to be-

lieve on the Lord Jesus, to worship God in the spirit, and to persevere in these things unto the end? Experience tells us, that sin and Satan so entirely possess the sinner's heart, that there must be something more than the care and improvement of our reason to make room for Christ and holiness. Nor farther, do we mean, by this change, that which is merely the result of presenting certain truths to the understanding, in a strong and engaging light; so that whereas formerly they were either not at all, or very little attended to by us, now we are brought, with proper application, to reflect and meditate on them, and so are, by deductions from them, engaged in the choice of virtue, and the hatred of vice. This, indeed, we allow to follow upon this change, as a fruit of it; but till the soul is spiritually enlighten'd, we suppose it to be incapable of judging aright of spiritual truths, or of forming practical conclusions from them.

IN contradistinction to these accounts of regeneration, we assert, that it is the implanting of a principle of spiritual life, or the forming of the divine image in the soul; in which the soul itself, as to the substance of it, remains the same, but the qualities of it are altered; the understanding from being *darken'd*, becomes *light in the Lord*; the will, which before was rebellious against God, is now brought into subjection to him; and the affections,

affections, which before were wholly carnal, and determined on sensual objects, are now purified and refined, and fixed on heavenly things. In a word, the change is real and universal, the power which effects it is divine, the fruits many and discernible, and the great efficient *Jehovah* the Spirit.

A PARTICULAR account of the exact way in which the Spirit accomplishes this great work, is not to be expected, after our Lord has told us, that as *the wind bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit*:<sup>d</sup> So that we are to attend only to the proof of the fact; That what the scripture calls the new creature, or a principle of grace, is formed or wrought in the soul by the power of God, in a way of efficacious grace. I choose to call it the *new creature*, as distinguishing between regeneration and conversion, the one being previous to, though necessarily connected with the other. In regeneration, we are passive, and receive from God; in conversion, we are active, and turn to him: we repent, believe, and obey; but this supposes we have been his *workmanship*, and, by his power, have been renewed in the spirit of our mind.

HERE I shall, in some measure, pursue the very same method which a late celebra-

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ted

<sup>d</sup> John iii. 8.<sup>e</sup> Dr. *Whitby*.

ted writer, <sup>e</sup> on the other side of the question, admits to be just, and which he therefore keeps in view, in all his reasoning on this subject. And so I begin,

I. WITH those arguments which may be taken from the scripture account of the work itself, which is represented to us in such terms, as lead us necessarily to conclude, that the soul is passive in it, and that it is brought about by the arm of the Almighty. Thus,

1. THE Apostle tells us, *if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.* <sup>f</sup> And again, *Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature:* <sup>g</sup> And so we are said to be *God's workmanship created*; and yet more expressly, *the new man is said to be created after God in righteousness, and true holiness.* <sup>h</sup> I don't find it disputed whether these passages refer to the subject before us; and if they do, it must be allowed, that either the metaphor is ill chosen, and wrongly applied, or it must be expressive of the same power in the new birth, with that which was exerted in creation, or the making of something out of nothing.

To this it is objected, <sup>i</sup> that the term, *create*, does not always suppose the persons of things said to be created, to be wholly pas-

<sup>f</sup> 2 Cor. v. 17.

<sup>g</sup> Gal. vi. 15.

<sup>h</sup> Eph. iv. 24.

<sup>i</sup> See Dr. *Whitby's* discourse of sufficient and effectual grace, pag. 272.

passive, or the power to be so great as we pretend, for God is said to create and form the church of the *Jews*; <sup>k</sup> which must be understood of their stipulating with God, as well as of his engagements to them; in which their covenanting with him they were active. To this we answer, it is certain, whether the phrase is to be understood in a natural or political sense, it stands connected with two other instances of God's goodness, (*viz. redeeming them, and calling them by their name* <sup>l</sup>) in which they had no concern, but what was purely passive. And, if we consider how often God upbraids that people with their breach of covenant, it will not so well agree with the design of the place, which is evidently their encouragement, that this circumstance should be introduced, which must necessarily effect them with shame and fear. I cannot but think there was so much sovereignty in God's choosing *Abraham*, and so much power in his raising his family, from so small a beginning, to be so great a people, as might abundantly justify the Prophet in the use of the terms *create* and *form*, without having any regard to their promissory or covenant engagements.

It is further objected <sup>m</sup> against this argument, that God is said to create that which he brings into a new and better state. Thus

*David*

<sup>k</sup> Isa xliii. 1.

<sup>l</sup> Ibid.

<sup>m</sup> Dr. *Whitby*, p. 273.

*David prays; Create in me a clean heart; <sup>a</sup> and God is said to create new heavens, and a new earth, <sup>o</sup> and to create Jerusalem a rejoicing. <sup>p</sup> As to the case of David, it is plain, his fall had so far convinced him of the plague of his own heart, that he despairs of healing it himself, and therefore cries to God, Create in me a clean heart. It might be a doubt with him, very probably, after so dreadful a backsliding, whether he had ever been truly converted; and if so much power, as would justify the expression, was necessary for his recovery, we may easily conclude what is needful for the renewing of a sinner, wholly dead in trespasses and sins. As for the other passage mentioned, what difficulty soever may attend settling the exact meaning of it, the following expressions in the chapter, abundantly warrant the use of the metaphor; for, according to the prophet, there is then to be no more an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; the wolf and the lamb are to feed together, and the lion to eat straw like the bullock; <sup>q</sup> events altogether supernatural and miraculous. As to the Greek fathers speaking of the new creature as a change for the better only, if it should be allowed that this is their sentiment, I do not see how it affects the*

<sup>a</sup> Psal. li. 10.  
20. and 25.

<sup>o</sup> Isa. lxxv. 17.

<sup>p</sup> Ver. 18.

<sup>q</sup> Ver.

the argument; for the question is not whether the change is for the better, but what power is necessary to it, and to whom it is to be referred, to God or the creature.

2. ANOTHER scripture representation of regeneration, is that of our being *quicken'd* by the great God, when *dead in sins*:<sup>r</sup> and what the power is, whereby we are quicken'd, the apostle tells us, that ye may know *what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward, who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.*<sup>s</sup> Whatever may be the fact the apostle has in view, the terms are as strong and expressive, as language will admit. Great pains are taken by our opponents,<sup>t</sup> in expounding this place of the resurrection of the body, in the last day, which they allow to be a work of almighty power; but it is impossible to prove this to be the meaning of it, because there is not a word of the resurrection of the saints in the text. The natural meaning of the place is evidently this: the apostle prays that God would enlighten them into that mystery of mercy, the work of faith in their souls, begun and carried on by the same *power*, which *raised* his Son *from the dead*; and whereas he speaks of those who did believe, it is to acquaint them, that faith, in the exercise and encrease, is from the divine power, as well as in the first principle.

How

<sup>r</sup> Eph. ii. 1, 5.    <sup>s</sup> Chap. i. 18, 19.    <sup>t</sup> Dr. *Whitby*, p. 272.

How far this power is consistent with scripture exhortations and persuasions, will be considered in its place.

3. WE are said in scripture, to be *born from above*,<sup>u</sup> to be *born of God, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*<sup>w</sup> In regeneration, the agency is removed from the creature, and ascribed to the great Creator. To this it is objected,<sup>x</sup> that we are said to be *begotten* by the *word of the living God*, and that *faith comes by hearing*; and the apostle tells the *Corinthians*, he *begot them by his gospel*; which must, say our opponents, be understood in a way of moral suasion, and not in that supernatural, all-powerful way we contend for. To this we reply, that though faith comes by hearing, yet it is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God. Ministers preach, and whilst they preach, and and with their preaching, God works, and so it is that men are turned unto him; otherwise even a *Paul* may *plant*, and an *Apollos* *water*, but there will be *no increase*; for, as the apostle observes, they are only *ministers by whom we believe*; *neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase*:<sup>y</sup> so that we conclude the metaphors, which the scripture makes use of, in representing the renewing of a sinner, carry in them plain notices of a divine interposure,  
and

<sup>u</sup> John iii. 3.

<sup>w</sup> Chap. i. 13.

<sup>x</sup> Dr. *Whitby*, p. 274.

<sup>y</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6, 7.

and that in a way of infinite and almighty power. And to understand them otherwise, is to charge the Holy Spirit with what is allowed to be a blemish in all writers, the using of words without meaning, or of figures widely distant from, and disproportionate to the subject.

II. IF we consider the scripture account of the sinner before this change passes upon him, it will serve us as a further proof of the necessity of efficacious grace, in our being born again.

I. WE are said to be *dead in trespasses and Sins*; \* that is, by reason of sin, to be altogether impotent to that which is good. As the organs of the body at death cease to perform their usual functions, so the unrenewed sinner is *without God, and without Christ; in the world*; he is lost to his duty, and estranged from every thing that is spiritually good.

To this it is objected <sup>a</sup>, that common convictions, especially where they are strong, prove that the sinner, even before conversion, is not void of all sense, as a dead body is; so that the argument, according to us, if it proves any thing, proves, say they, too much. To this we answer, that all convictions are originally from God, and the sinner, under the greatest fear of punishment, may have no apprehension of the excellency of his duty,  
nor

\* Eph. ii. 1. Col. ii. 13. <sup>a</sup> Dr. *Whitby*, p. 276.

nor any spiritual desire after communion with God : witness *Judas*, who, though he had an hell in his conscience, was utterly a stranger to the grace of God.

IT is farther objected, that the places cited concern only the *Gentile* world, held under the government of *Satan*, but have no relation to the profelytes of justice, much less to the jew, and least of all to the baptized christian. To this it is sufficient to reply, that the apostle was quite of another mind, or he would not have said, *among whom we all had our conversation in times past.*<sup>b</sup> And in another epistle, where he is professedly considering the difference between the jew and gentile, he says; *what then? are we better than they? no, in no wise; for we have before proved, both jew and gentile, that they are all under sin.*<sup>c</sup> And therefore he uses that phrase to the church of *Corinth*, after an enumeration of the greatest sinners, *such were some of you.*<sup>d</sup> And he puts himself into the number, in what he says to *Titus*; *For we ourselves also were sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts.*<sup>e</sup> Now it will easily be granted, that the apostle, before his conversion, was restrained from grosser sins. None suppose that he run into all excess of riot, but had escaped the pollutions, which were in the world through lust. And if that  
is

<sup>b</sup> Eph. ii. 3.    <sup>c</sup> Rom. iii. 9.    <sup>d</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 11.    <sup>e</sup> Titus iii. 3.

is allowed, it will be difficult to assign a reason why he should thus put himself into the number of the chief of sinners, if there had not been something common to them all; I mean, an impotence to good, and a propensity to evil.

2. A FARTHER account, which the scripture gives us, of our condition before conversion, is that our *understanding* is darkned; that we are *alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our heart*; <sup>f</sup> yea, we are said to be *darkness*: <sup>g</sup> and the apostle tells us; *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*: <sup>h</sup> so that if we are *made wise to salvation, God who commanded light to shine out of darkness*, must, in the same way, and by the same power, enlighten our understandings, *to give us the knowledge of his glory, as it shines in the person of his Son*. <sup>i</sup> Till this is the case, the gospel, tho' in itself *the wisdom of God*, will be accounted *foolishness*. <sup>k</sup>

As to what is objected, that these passages only describe the case of the willfully blind, who love darkness rather than light, we answer, they are evidently delivered in too general terms to admit of such an interpretation; yea, we are expressly told, *there is none*  
righte-

<sup>f</sup> Eph. iv. 18. <sup>g</sup> Ver. 8. <sup>h</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 14. <sup>i</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 6.

<sup>k</sup> 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

*righteous, no, not one; there is none that understands; there is none that seeks after God.*<sup>l</sup>

3. ANOTHER argument may be taken from our Lord's words; *No man can come unto me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him.*<sup>m</sup> By coming to Christ, we understand receiving him, or believing in him: by the Father's *drawing*, his work of power upon the heart of a sinner, when he is brought to Christ. Now without this, says our Lord, *no man can come unto me*; not the wise and learned, the prudent and ingenuous, any more than the ignorant and illiterate, the obstinate, and rebellious: the event is alike impossible to them all; *no man can come, except the Father draw him.*

To this it is objected,<sup>n</sup> that, if this is the case, there is nothing praise-worthy in our faith, or blame-worthy in our unbelief; since when God draws, there is no resisting; and where he is not pleased to do it, we cannot move, in a spiritual sense. To this we answer: it is as true, that, before conversion, we will not, that as we cannot come to Christ. Though we may not be condemned for a mere impossibility of believing, yet we may very justly, for strengthening ourselves in our prejudices against Christ, and the way of salvation by him. That the scripture expressly tells us, *faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift*  
of

<sup>l</sup> Rom. iii. 10, 11. <sup>m</sup> John vi. 44. <sup>n</sup> Dr. *Whitby*, p. 280.

of God; ° and yet we are required to believe. Nor do I see any such contradiction in some mens being judicially, as a punishment for their sins, shut up in unbelief, and their condemnation for loving darkness, rather than light.

AGAIN, P it is objected, that this drawing of the Father is to be understood only, or principally, of God's persuading, and prevailing upon us to come to Christ, by the consideration of the miracles, or mighty works, which were done by him, as an evidence of his being the Messiah, and by the promise of eternal life upon our coming. To this we answer, that supposing (though we can by no means allow it) this were the genuine sense of the place, we might urge it, as an argument in the case before us; for if we cannot, but as taught of God, consider the nature and evidence of Christ's miracles, which are barely facts, supposed to be done by him, in confirmation of his mission, much less can we, without a divine interposure, renounce our darling corruptions, quit our most beloved iniquities, and heartily embrace Jesus as our Saviour and our King. In short, the tree must first be made good, before it can produce any good fruit; for *the carnal mind, whilst it continues so, is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* 9

° Eph. ii. 8. P Dr. *Whitby*, p. 280, 281. 9 Rom. viii. 7:

III. OUR next general head of argument is taken from God's challenging this work as his own, speaking of it as performed by him, and in such terms, as manifestly exclude the creature's agency: thus we read; *the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed; to love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.*<sup>r</sup> This is thus explained by the prophet *Ezekiel*; *I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statute.*<sup>s</sup> A like promise we have in these words; *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean. From all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you; a new heart also 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, and cause you to walk in my statutes.*<sup>t</sup> And so the prophet *Jeremiah*, giving an account of the new covenant, does it in these terms; *This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people:*<sup>u</sup> And more fully

<sup>r</sup> Deut. xxx. 6.    <sup>s</sup> Ezek. xi. 19, 20.    <sup>t</sup> Chap. xxxvi. 26, 27, 28.    <sup>u</sup> Jer. xxxi. 33.

fully in the following words; *I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever.*<sup>w</sup> Now, can it be thought that, by all these expressions, God intends no more than that he will assist and succeed our endeavours to renew and convert ourselves? Is this the meaning of his *putting his Spirit within us*? Of his *taking the stone out of the heart, and giving an heart of flesh*? Why does he promise so often, *I will do this for you*, if the work were divided between him and us? So that, according to the language of the old testament, we are to expect renewing grace from God as his own proper work.

To this it is objected,<sup>x</sup> that the passages mentioned out of *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*, refer to the jews in the end of the world, and therefore are wrongly produced in the question before us. To this we answer; that if that be the case, it proves however their conversion will be of God. Besides, these promises contain blessings, which are inseparable from salvation, and what every faint is in the experience of.

THE apostle, in his epistle to the hebrews,<sup>y</sup> quotes them, and applies them to Christ as the surety of this covenant, and so uses this as an argument of the superior excellency of the gospel, above the jewish dispensation, that the covenant is better, established upon better promises; which would have been foreign to

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his

<sup>w</sup> Chap. xxxii. 39. <sup>x</sup> Dr. *Whitby*, p. 291. <sup>y</sup> Heb. viii. 8, &c.

his design, if it relates only to the recovery of the jews, in the end of the world.

IN the new testament we read, that *God opened the heart of Lydia*; <sup>z</sup> that *faith is not of ourselves, it is his gift*: <sup>a</sup> he gives it to some to believe; he must draw, or there will be no coming to Christ. <sup>b</sup> *Paul preaches and prays, but God opened Lydia's heart*; he must prepare the heart for the seed, and cause the seed to take root, and to bring forth fruit to his glory: And therefore the apostle distinguishes between the gospel, and the power that renders it successful: *Our gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power*. <sup>c</sup> *Life and immortality are, indeed, brought to light by the gospel*; but God only can make unto us *a savour of life unto life*; and this he does when he makes it *his power unto salvation*. But to proceed,

IV. Another argument for the efficacy of the grace of God in regeneration, may be taken from this consideration: That supposing infants are polluted and defiled, in consequence of what we call original sin, as many of these as die before the actual exercise of reason, must either be renewed by the immediate hand of God, or be excluded from salvation; since our Lord has told us, *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*; <sup>d</sup> nor will it be disputed, that  
without

<sup>z</sup> Acts xvi. 14.

<sup>a</sup> Ephes. ii. 8.

<sup>b</sup> John vi. 44.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Thes. i. 5.

<sup>d</sup> John iii. 3.

*without* habitual holiness, at least, *no man can see the Lord.* As for infants, we take it for granted, in the present argument, that they are *conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity; that that which is born of the flesh, is flesh;* that they are by reason of the disobedience of the first man, sinners, and so unworthy of and unmeet for the heavenly glory, and must be excluded from it, unless wash'd in the blood of Jesus, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. To suppose them all, or indeed any of them, to perish, is to be cruelly wise above what is written; and to imagine they are so holy, as to need no cleansing, or that any thing defiled can enter into heaven, is directly flying in the face of scripture. So that though we are not told positively what is their portion, yet we may safely determine that they are made meet, if in heaven; for that inheritance, which is incorruptible and undefiled. And, if this is the case, we cannot suppose they contribute any thing to it themselves; it must be from the abundant mercy and powerful grace of a compassionate God. Now, can it be thought that persons grown to years of maturity, who have for a great while accustomed themselves to do evil, and whose vicious habits are hereby confirmed and enlarged, will be more easily wrought upon? It is true, they have some degrees of reason and conscience; but as these are in the service of sin, the bias will be ever to evil, till it is alter'd by the grace of God.

If it should be said, secret things belong to God; and, as he has not expressly told us what will be the final state of infants, no argument can be fairly drawn from premises, which are in themselves uncertain: We answer, no more is intended by it, than what will be easily granted by those who allow the doctrine of original sin; and where this is denied, we agree it is of no force.

WE might now produce some eminent instances of the grace of God, in the renewing of sinners, as they stand recorded in scripture; from which we may conclude, that in their case, however, the happy change was from God, and the immediate effect of his almighty power. Thus, in the story of *Zacheus*, it does not appear that our Lord said any more to him than this: *Make haste and come down, to day I must abide at thine house.*<sup>e</sup> Yet presently a change was wrought in his soul, and the fruits of it appeared in an ingenuous confession of his former iniquities, and, in an humble resolution to pursue the contrary paths of justice and mercy. Now what can this, so great and sudden an alteration, be attributed to, but the powerful influence which the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ had upon his mind? We cannot suppose there was an opportunity for a great deal of discourse or reasoning with him; but, if there was, we may easily judge how far words alone are sufficient to engage a rigorous

<sup>e</sup> Luke xix. 5.

rous oppressor in acts of righteousness and mercy: so that, from the effects, we may judge of the cause, and conclude, that so great a change could not have been made at once upon such an heart, but by the *same power, whereby God is able to subdue all things to himself.* Another instance which might be mentioned, is that of *Saul*, who was not proselyted to christianity under a sermon, or at a religious conference <sup>f</sup>, but when his mind was under the strongest and most settled prejudice against it; when his zeal in persecuting the church was heighten'd into a kind of fury or madness; under these unpromising circumstances, he is made to hear the voice of the son of God, and live; and, in the humble language of a disciple, to say, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Instead of going on, as he had designed, in *making havock of the church.* We might add the case of the thief on the cross, who either went to heaven without holiness, or he received it immediately from that Jesus, who said to him; *This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.* <sup>g</sup> If it is said these are extraordinary cases; we answer, whatever differences there may be in the circumstances of sinners, the power is the same in the renewing of them all; for the enmity which is in every sinner's heart against Christ and holiness, can only be removed by an act of omnipotence.

<sup>f</sup> Acts ix.<sup>g</sup> Luke xxiii. 39, &c.



# SERMON II.

*Of efficacious grace.*

Preach'd at LIME-STREET.

PHIL. ii. 13.

*It is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.*



THE doctrine which we endeavoured to state and establish, in the preceding discourse, was to this effect: *That when a sinner is born again, there is a mighty change wrought in his soul, by the efficacious working of the Holy Ghost.* His being quickned, and made spiritually alive, is the effect of God's power, which works in him, as well *to will*, as *to do*, of his own good pleasure. This we attempted to prove, from the scripture representations of the work itself, in which it is called, a *new creation*, a *resurrection*, and a *being born again*; terms expressive of power, in the exertion of which, the Almighty is, and cannot but be alone, and the creature manifestly passive. Again,  
we

we observed, from the same infallible oracles, that the state of man, before this change passes upon him, is such, as will by no means admit of the supposition of an ability to renew himself; since he is described as *dead in trespasses and sins*, having his *understanding darkned*, being *alienated from the life of God*, through the ignorance that is in him, because of the blindness of his heart; inasmuch as he is said to be *darkness* itself; and it is affirmed of him, that he *receives not the things of the Spirit of God*, but accounts them *foolishness*. For these reasons, our Lord might well say, that *no man can come unto me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him*. Farther, we observed, that God challenges this work as his own, and speaks of it in the old and new testament as brought about by his power; and the promises which he has made, concerning it, conclude him to be equal to the work, as well as gracious to his chosen; and are as entirely silent, as to the agency, as they exclude and set aside the merit, of the creature. Moreover, we hinted that this must be the case with infants dying before the exercise of reason, supposing them to be under the pollution of original sin, unless we exclude them all from salvation. If they are regenerated, it cannot be in a way of moral suasion, but of internal and almighty efficacy.

WE proceed now to another consideration, to prove the necessity of efficacious grace, in the renewing of a sinner; and that may be taken,

V. FROM the difficulty of the work, as it consists in conquering the strongest prejudices, mortifying the most corrupt habits, and in the implanting of a principle of grace and holiness, to which the sinner is entirely averse; and, in opposition to which, Satan, who maintains the throne in his heart, uses his utmost endeavours. There is a greater distance betwixt the terms, *sin* and *holiness*, *corruption* and *grace*, than between those of *something* and *nothing*. In creation, something is formed of out nothing; but in regeneration, (as one strongly expresses it) *hell is changed into heaven*. In creation, there is no assistance, but then there is no opposition; but regeneration is like the stemming of a rapid stream, and turning it into a contrary course; in which, as there is nothing to help, so there is every thing to hinder. The sinner is not barely destitute of the divine image, and without strength for the performance of what is good; but *every imagination of the thoughts of his heart, is only evil continually*:<sup>a</sup> He is so far from the fear of the Lord, and any concern about communion with him, that the language of his heart unto God is, *Depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of thy*

<sup>a</sup> Gen. vi, 5.

*thy ways. What is the Almighty that I should serve him? and what profit shall I have if I pray unto him?* <sup>b</sup> And, whilst he is wilfully pursuing a course of rebellion, and strengthening and enlarging his vicious habits, we may well ask, with the prophet, *Can the ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then, and not till then, may the sinner, who has been accustomed to do evil, learn to do well.* <sup>c</sup> Can any created finite power, at once, in a moment, change the fierceness of a devouring lion into the meekness of a lamb? If this calls for omnipotence, how much more, to reduce the stout-hearted sinner, who is far from righteousness, to the obedience of faith, and a delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man. Go and try the experiment, treat with the rebel, who, for a course of years, has had pleasure in unrighteousness, whose heart is in league with Satan, and strongly attached to sin; use the most moving and persuasive arguments to convince him of the folly of his way: see whether he will be brought, by all your reasoning, to quit his darling lusts, and walk in the ways of the Lord: no, after all your advice, though mingled with tears, he loves his idols, and after them will he go. Satan has such an interest in the hearts of the children of disobedience; he leads them captive to that degree, that none but the Almighty can dispossess

<sup>b</sup> Job xxi. 14.<sup>c</sup> Jer. xiii. 23.

sefs him, and break the chain; and therefore, when the apostle is speaking of this mercy, he uses a word strongly expressive of power—*Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, ἐξ ἑσπέρου τοῦ, hath snatch'd us out of the power or hand of the devil, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear son.*<sup>d</sup> An excellent and most judicious divine<sup>e</sup> has a passage pertinent to our purpose, in his discourse on regeneration: “The new birth,” says he, “is a  
 “ change of nature; of a nature, where there  
 “ was as little of spiritual good, as there was  
 “ of *being* in *nothing* before the creation.  
 “ It is a change of a stone into flesh, of a  
 “ heart, that, like a stone, hath hardness and  
 “ settledness of sinful parts, a strong resist-  
 “ ance against any instrument, an incorpora-  
 “ tion of sin and lust with its very nature;  
 “ where the heart and sin, self and sin, are  
 “ cordially one and the same. None can  
 “ change such a nature but the God of all  
 “ grace. No man can change the nature of  
 “ the meanest creature in the world. Now  
 “ to see a lump of vice become the model  
 “ of virtue; he that drank in iniquity like  
 “ water, to thirst after righteousness, to cru-  
 “ cify his darling flesh, to be weary of the  
 “ poison he loved, for the purity he hated,  
 “ speaks

<sup>d</sup> Col. i. 12, 13.    • Mr. Charnock. vol. 2. p. 208.

“ speaks a supernatural grace, transcendently  
 “ attractive, and powerfully operative.” So  
 that, as he somewhere else observes, “ We  
 “ have no reason to wonder that creation is  
 “ only ascribed to the hand of God, when,  
 “ in regeneration, his arm is supposed to be  
 “ revealed.” But to proceed,

VI. IF we consider the different success of the gospel, as dispensed by several persons, or by the same person, at different times; it will be evident, that there must be the power of God attending it, or it will not be successful to salvation, or prove a *savour of life unto life*. *Peter's* hearers, and those to whom *Stephen* ministred, appear to be equally ignorant of, and alike prejudiced against the gospel. These apostles deliver themselves with the same plainness and faithfulness, upon the subject of the guilt contracted, by shedding the innocent blood of the Son of God. Three thousand are converted, baptized, and added to the church, from a single sermon, delivered by *Peter*; whereas *Stephen's* hearers blaspheme and stone him. *Paul* again finds hearts and houses open to him, in one city, and is obliged to escape for his life in another.

Now how can this be accounted for, but upon the apostle's principle—*neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but God that gives the increase*. Nay, how common is it for the same person, who has, perhaps,

haps, for years, sat unmoved under the ministry of a learned, faithful, and affectionate preacher, at length in the day of God's power, under means far less likely to answer the end, to be awakned, convinced, and renewed? And are there not many instances of persons, of the same family, education, and advantages, attending the same means, and *one is taken*, and he perhaps the most profane or obstinate, and the rest left to a bare outside profession, or an hypocritical formality? Why should the same gospel, in one hand, thus *run and be glorified*, and, in another, no less valuable, be *a savour of death unto death*? Why should the same preacher, at one time, *see of the travel of his soul* to his satisfaction; at another time have occasion to complain, *who has believed our report*? If *the weapons of our warfare* were *mighty* in themselves, why not equally, and at all times, successful? But the event makes it evident, they are only so *through God*; and when his power is put forth, he can easily, and he only can, bring down every high thought and imagination, and reduce the stubborn hearts of rebellious sinners to a subjection to himself.

VII. ANOTHER argument for the efficiency of the grace of God in regeneration, may be taken from the consideration of the concern which God has in the whole world. If we reflect on the various parts of the creation, we shall find that, in the vegetable,

animal, rational, and intellectual world, all first, or natural principles are derived from God; and the actual exercise of those principles, whatever concurrent circumstances may attend, is constantly under his providential influence. And is this the case in universal nature? and can we suppose that in regeneration, one of the noblest works of God, he is left out, as having little or no concern? How strange, how unaccountable, would this be!

OUR natural philosophers readily allow, that every thing that is necessary for the growth and improvement of vegetables, is from God; that he, as the great author of nature, has given it to the seed, to receive the fatning influence of the earth, the moisture of the rain, and the enlivening genial rays of the sun: Nor will they dispute that the sun itself had never been what it now is, the great fountain of light and heat, to the universe, but by the will and power of the Creator. They will tell you, the rain descends at his appointment, and that he orders and determines its extent and usefulness; that there is an equal display of his power, wisdom, and goodness, in the growth of the grass, in the flourishing of plants, and the increase of corn; all is from him, and under the immediate influence of his providence. Moreover, in the animal world, or among the beasts of the field, the fowls of  
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the air, or the fish in the sea, they will allow a principle of life and motion is from God, and the actual exercise of it in a dependance upon him. What we call sometimes *instinct*, or *nature* in them, is confessedly not of themselves, but from him, who hath appointed their situation in the order of creatures, and furnished them with all their powers, sensations, and appetites; whence they are directed to collect their proper food, and reject what would be hurtful or destructive to them. And none but an atheistical sceptic will deny but that, in the rational world, we have our souls, with all their capacities of reasoning, reflection, judgment, and memory from God; that he made us by his power, and continues us by his providence, wiser than the beasts of the field, and of more understanding than the fowls of the air: And who will not allow that the angels, creatures of the highest order, have all their intellectual powers from God? Now, shall we admit that every creature hath its being from, and lives, and moves, and acts in a dependance upon the glorious Creator, and suppose that the saint receives a principle of grace from himself, and continues a believer, by the strength of his own reasoning, and the vigour and constancy of his own resolution? Is it from God that I am a reasonable thinking creature? and from myself that I am a christian, holy and spiritual?

tual? Am I not sufficient for the least action in common life, but as upheld by his power, and under the influence of his providence? And will it be said, I can renew myself, and cleave to the Lord, with full purpose of heart, by my own strength? What is this but to allow a dependance in the less, and to deny it in the greater? What *Adam* possessed in paradise, as to the perfection of his nature, the felicity he enjoyed, and his power to serve, worship, and adore his Creator, he had confessedly from him, who made him, after his own image. Now, if the first impress of the divine likeness on his soul, was the produce of God's wisdom and power; certainly the restoring that image, when lost or impaired, can be no less the work of the Almighty. If the care and skill of an artificer is requisite to the first making of a machine, or any curious piece of work; it must be equally necessary to the repair of it, when its principal springs are broke, and every thing out of order. But we go on,

VIII. To consider the gross absurdities, which manifestly attend the denying the efficacy of the grace of God in regeneration; as,

I. THIS would be to furnish christians with an easy and ready answer to that question of the apostle; *Who maketh thee to differ from another? What hast thou, that thou didst*

not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? <sup>f</sup> Such an one might boldly reply, upon the scheme of our opponents, “ My own reflection and judgment, my reason and choice made me to differ: the means were, indeed, the same, what I enjoy’d in common with others; but the success was the effect of my own care, diligence, and attention, whilst they mis’d of it through their own heedlessness and carnality.” It is objected to this<sup>g</sup>, that the apostle is here speaking of gifts only, and of such as were miraculously and immediately infused, without human industry, and conferred on the primitive christians, without any co-operation of their own faculties. So that, as this kind of ministration of the Spirit has, for a great while, ceased in the church, an argument cannot fairly be drawn from it, in our inquiries about the more standing and ordinary dispensations of it. To this we answer, that, admitting the apostle is speaking of gifts, renewing grace is undoubtedly one of those gifts, and not the least valuable of them, which came down from the Father of lights; for when we are born again, it is not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God; and we are no more to ascribe to our own agency the difference between us and others in the gift of grace, than the apostles, or primitive christians, could in the miraculous endowments

<sup>f</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 7.

<sup>g</sup> Dr. *Whitby*, p. 296.

endowments which were bestowed on them. Moreover, is it not evident that the difference between a sinner and a saint is a great deal more, both in the nature and consequence of it, than between a person possessed of gifts, and one who is destitute of them? Gifts are useful to others, but grace prepares for heaven; gifts may obtain and enlarge a reputation among men, but grace only disposes for an intimacy with God here, and the enjoyment of him hereafter. Is it God who makes the difference in the one, and man in the other? The apostle determines how it was in his own case; *And last of all, says he, speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time, for I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God; but, by the grace of God, I am what I am.* “The alteration is marvellous, the change surprising, from a persecutor to a preacher! “But I ascribe it not to myself, but to the “grace of God; *and this grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain: so far from “it, that under its influence I laboured more “abundantly than they all.*” And so fearful was he, lest God should not have all the glory, that he adds, *Yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me.* <sup>h</sup>

2. ANOTHER absurdity which attends the denying of the grace of God in regeneration,

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<sup>h</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 8, 9, 10.

is its contradicting and opposing the general design of God in salvation, which is, *that no flesh should glory in his presence, but that he who glorieth, should glory in the Lord.*<sup>i</sup> That doctrine which gives the creature room to boast, that his own arm, either in the whole or in part, brought him salvation, cannot be of God. If our will is to give the turning point, and the ballance is placed in our own hands; and, after all the provision that God hath made, and the pains he is supposed to be at, the creature is himself to determine the matter by his own choice or refusal; to be sure, the honour ought to go with the agency. And of this our opponents seem to be so sensible, that some of them allow that it is of preventing grace that we will and chuse what is good, and refuse what is evil; of assisting grace, that we are enabled to perform that will, and persist in that choice; and of mercy, when we have done all, that we are accepted; a way of expressing themselves, not a little contradictory to their scheme, and which at other times, they are far from being fond of. It is objected,<sup>k</sup> that glorying, or boasting, in some instances is not unlawful; that the apostle was found in the practice himself, and declares, with a good deal of vehemency, that *it were better he should die, than any man should make void his glorying*; <sup>l</sup> and that elsewhere he speaks of *rejoicing or boasting in the testimony of a good consci-*

<sup>i</sup> 1 Cor. i. 29, 31. <sup>k</sup> Dr. *Whitby*, p. 299. <sup>l</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 15.

*conscience.*<sup>m</sup> To this we answer; it must be proved, before the objection will be of any force, that the apostle is speaking in those places of the grace of God in regeneration; whereas, in the one, he is speaking of the high opinion he had of the gospel, in opposition to the contempt it met with from an ungodly world; and in the other, of the fruits, not of the principle of grace, which fruits he ascribes to a divine influence, when he says, *not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he and the rest of the saints had their conversation in the world:* and where is the inconsistency of this with that general direction; *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord*<sup>n</sup>.

3. ANOTHER absurdity arising from the supposition of the creature's agency, in his own regeneration, is, that it would then be uncertain whether any would be renewed at all, very possible that none might, and, all circumstances considered, absolutely impossible that any should. Suppose the best external evidence were produced, and the most weighty arguments made use of, if the issue depends

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upon

<sup>m</sup> 2 Cor. i. 12.<sup>n</sup> Jer. ix, 23, 24.

upon the will of man, and that will be as liable to refuse as to chuse, the event must needs be uncertain, till the creature has determined; nor could it be certainly known, were this the case, whether any one would determine right. But, if the scripture account of man, before conversion, may be depended upon, if he is dead in trespasses and sins, darkness, and enmity against God; his will, being averse to good, and prone to evil, would necessarily determine in favour of sin, and in a rejection of holiness. One would have thought, that when the apostle *Paul* came to *Athens*, the seat of learning, the wise men of that place would have patiently heard what he had to offer, and duly weighed and considered the nature and importance of his doctrine, and that at least the major part of them would have embraced the gospel evidence, which attended it. But instead of this, we find that he met with more success in *Corinth*, a city remarkably dissolute and wicked, than he did among the learned philosophers of *Athens*; and, upon his attempt to reclaim the *athenians* from their gross superstition and idolatry, they mocked and derided him as a base fellow, and rejected the doctrine of salvation, as foolish and irrational. So true is it what our Lord says, that *these things are hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes*; neither can flesh and blood reveal them to us, but our Father who is in heaven.<sup>o</sup>

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WE shall now enquire whether the grace of God, in the renewing of a sinner, may be frustrated, or set *aside*, by the opposition of the creature. And here we are to remember it is God's work, and therefore must be perfect, since he can and will do all his pleasure. To say that he cannot, though he would, change the sinner's heart, by an immediate act of his own power, is to challenge his omnipotence: so that the question is not whether God can do this, or no? But whether it is worthy of him, and how far it is really the case? And this may be determined,

I. FROM the inviolable and inseparable connection of the several parts of that golden chain mentioned by the apostle,—*for whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified;*<sup>p</sup> that is, as many as are ordained unto eternal life, either are, or shall be called and sanctified by the grace of God, as their meetness for it, and be justified by the righteousness of Christ, as their title to it, as well as at length, be glorified in the enjoyment of it. Accordingly we are expressly said to be *chosen unto holiness.*<sup>q</sup> Now, if the purpose of God, in election, is supposed to stand, then those whom he thus

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loved,

<sup>p</sup> Rom. viii. 29, 30.<sup>q</sup> Eph. i. 4.

loved, with an everlasting love, shall be effectually drawn by the cords of it, agreeably to what our Lord says; *All that the Father giveth me, shall come unto me; and him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out.*<sup>†</sup>

2. THIS may be farther argued, from the purchase which our Lord, by the merit of his obedience and death, has made of his people, with respect to their present safety, and future felicity. The scripture represents him not only as redeeming them from wrath, when he died for their offences, but as purchasing them to himself, as having a fulness of grace for their supply in this world, and as having obtained a glorious inheritance for them in the other. Accordingly, in the prospect of his approaching death, he prays, first, that they might be *sanctified through the truth*, and be *kept from the evil one*, and then adds, *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.*<sup>‡</sup> Grace and glory are, indeed, blessings altogether unmerited by the saint; but they are due to his surety, upon an engagement on the Father's part in the counsel of peace to the Son, that if he would *make his soul an offering for sin*, he should have a *seed to serve him*, and *see of the travel of his soul to his satisfaction.*<sup>‡</sup> Now our Lord Jesus Christ having done his part, to the abundant satisfaction of the Father, which  
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<sup>†</sup> John vi. 27. <sup>‡</sup> Chap. xvii. 17, 24. <sup>‡</sup> Isai. liii. 11.

was declared in his resurrection, and session at his right hand ; it would be unfaithful in the Father, and contrary to mutual stipulations, if any for whom he died should fall short of eternal life. And this must be the case, if any of these are supposed fully and finally to resist the grace of God. But,

3. WE may consider God's chosen people, as committed to Christ, as his charge and trust, for which he is accountable to the Father ; and accordingly he speaks of that part of them who were as yet uncalled, as his other sheep, whom he must bring in, and who should hear his voice. " *Other sheep I have*, that is, I have " their names in the book of life, their persons " within the view of mine omniscience ; *them* " *also I must bring in,*" there is a necessity laid " upon me ; not on their part, but as I would " approve myself faithful to him who ap- " pointed me." It would be greatly inglorious to the Mediator, should he, when giving up his accounts to the Father, say, " Here are " some only of the children whom thou hast " given me ; or some of these, after all the " pains I have been at, are yet unrenewed, " and so unfit for eternal life." Besides,

4. If the soul is passive in the implanting the principle of grace, as we have endeavoured to prove, then there can be no resistance in regeneration : whatever opposition may be made by the soul to common convictions before regeneration, or what conflicts soever be-

between flesh and spirit afterwards; yet we may, with the apostle, be confident, that where the work is begun, it shall be carried on; where the arm of the Lord is revealed, the success will be answerable: so that we conclude that God, in the renewing of a sinner, works so as none can let; otherwise he might be disappointed of his purpose, fail in his promise to his Son, or be overcome by the creature, in the exertion of the exceeding greatness of his power; either of which are unworthy of him, who is a God of truth, and whose arm is almighty.

HAVING thus established the doctrine proposed, we shall now attend to some of the principal objections which are advanced against it; such as,

1. IT is said, by the opponents<sup>w</sup> of efficacious grace, that God hath given sufficient grace to all men, upon the due improvement of which they may be saved, if it is not their own fault; and to assert the contrary, say they, is to wrong the fountain of goodness, and to represent him as a cruel, severe, and harsh Being, and so make him the object of our dread and hatred, rather than of our love and reverence: and if all men have sufficient grace, what necessity for this mighty power of God, in the conversion of a sinner? And to prove this, they quote these words: *What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should*

<sup>w</sup> Dr. Whitby, p. 234.

*should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* <sup>x</sup> To this we answer,

(1.) IF it can be proved that God originally furnished man with sufficient knowledge of, and ability for the discharge of, his duty, and that man, by his chosen rebellion, forfeited this, in common with all other mercies, and exposed himself to the deserved vengeance of God; then there can be no more unrighteousness in God to deny the creature, thus fallen, what they call sufficient grace, than to reserve the fallen angels in chains, under darkness, to the coming of the great day. There would be some appearance of reason in the objection, if man was now to be considered as innocent, and in the uprightness, in which God originally made him; but the scripture concludes him under guilt; a very material circumstance which the objection takes no manner of notice of.

(2.) IF by sufficient grace is intended that which is absolutely so in itself, without the industry and care of the creature, or some superadded aids from heaven, we deny that there is such grace given to all men; for if there was, the effect must be the same in all, and so none could miscarry. If it is said, the success depends on the will of the creature, then this grace is so far insufficient in itself, and the phrase improper: if on a divine interposure, the objection comes to nothing; since it is then  
agreed,

<sup>x</sup> Isaiah v. 4.

agreed, with us, that, let the supposed grace be never so sufficient, the event is determined by a divine agency. Besides, is it not evident, from the Spirit striving with the ungodly world, in *Noah's* time, for a hundred years together, without success, and from the conduct of the jews, who for so many ages, enjoyed the ministry of the prophets, and at length of the Son of God himself, that common convictions, attended with the best of external advantages, are insufficient to effect the great work of regeneration? But,

(3.) As to the place quoted from the prophet *Isaiab*, in which God is represented, as asking *what could he have done more that was not done?* We are not to suppose that he speaks as having exerted himself, *ad ultimum sui posse*, or as if he could not have given grace; for, to be sure, he, who made the vine, could make it as fruitful as he pleased. The phrase is evidently after the manner of men, in which the Almighty stoops to expostulate with the creature, for the abuse of his mercies, and upbraids him with his ingratitude; but is far from giving the least countenance to his pride, in a false opinion of his own sufficiency. We might add, as a farther proof, that what the objection calls sufficient grace, is not given to all; that the very means of grace are denied to many. The gospel revelation is entirely unknown to a great part of the world now, as it was to the greatest part of it, under the

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the jewish dispensation ; and the declaration is express, that there is *salvation in no other but our Lord Jesus Christ*, nor any other name given, under heaven whereby we can be saved ; that *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* : so that we may ask, with the apostle, *how shall they believe on him, of whom they have not heard* <sup>y</sup>? Such, undoubtedly, have not the sufficient grace which our opponents contend for ; and I need only add, with respect to others, who are favoured with the gospel, why do saints, after conversion, beg so earnestly of God, that he would enlighten, assist, support, and sanctify them, if the means which they enjoyed were sufficient in themselves for this purpose, or might be rendered so, by their own care and industry ? If we may judge of their sentiments by their petitions, they apprehended grace from God, as well as, and together with, the means, to be absolutely necessary to their spiritual improvement, and proficiency in holiness. But,

2. IT is further objected <sup>z</sup>, that if God has not given sufficient grace to all, why does he judge or condemn any for the want of it? To this we answer, with the apostle *Paul*, there will be two rules, by which the Judge will proceed in the great day ; *as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law ; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.*<sup>a</sup> I am far from believing that God will

<sup>y</sup> Rom. x. 14, 15.    <sup>z</sup> Dr. *Whitby*, p. 243.    <sup>a</sup> Rom. ii. 12.

will condemn the heathen, who never heard of Christ, for not believing in him, but conclude that they will be judged by that law, which is written upon their hearts, which either excuses or accuses, according to the good or evil of their actions. And as for those who live under the sound of the gospel, and finally perish in unbelief, they will not, I humbly conceive, be condemned so much for their spiritual impotence, as for their hardening their hearts, and positively shutting their ears against Christ: and, if this be the case, is God unrighteous, who taketh vengeance? God forbid. But,

3. IT is objected <sup>b</sup>, that God commands us to *make ourselves new hearts*; that he says, *turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die* <sup>c</sup>? that we are exhorted to *cleanse our own hearts* <sup>d</sup>, and the like. Now, say they, if this is impracticable by the creature, how does this reflect upon the wisdom and goodness of the Lawgiver? Upon his wisdom, in requiring that of us, which he knows is only in his own power to bestow; and upon his goodness, in deriding and mocking his creatures with their misery? What should we think of a prince, who should command his subjects, on pain of his displeasure, to measure out the ocean, or number the sands on the sea shore? Or should he require of them any thing else equally impossible, how unworthy would this be

<sup>b</sup> Dr. *Whitby*, p. 237. <sup>c</sup> Ezek. xviii. 31. <sup>d</sup> James iv. 8.

be of him, and how injurious to them? And shall we impute this to him, who is infinite in goodness, and wisdom? God forbid. To this we answer,

(1.) THAT if a command on God's part necessarily infers a full power on our part to comply with it, or fulfil it, then we must be supposed to have the same power to serve him, as the saints in glory have: and, in this respect, the difference between a state of imperfection and absolute perfection, would be lost; for God requires we should love him with all our hearts, and with all our souls; and the law admits of no abatement, but rigorously requires perfection, and threatens eternal death to him *who continues not in all things written therein to do them*<sup>e</sup>: so that if this were a fair way of reasoning, we must conclude, that because God commands we should *be holy, as he is holy*<sup>f</sup>, and *walk as Christ walked*<sup>g</sup>, therefore we might, by our own power, *cleanse ourselves from every degree of filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in his fear*<sup>h</sup>. But,

(2.) THE most that can be judged of commands and exhortations, in scripture, is this; they are representations of our duty, not of our strength; declarative of God's authority, and right of dominion, and not of our power or ability. A command respects  
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<sup>e</sup> Gal. iii. 10. <sup>f</sup> 1 Pet. i. 16. <sup>g</sup> 1 John ii. 6. <sup>h</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 1.

us as creatures; whether upright or fallen, it is equally obligatory on us; God hath the same claim to worship from us, and the same dominion over us, since the fall, as he had before. To which we add,

(3.) THE design of God, in these commands, is to acquaint us with the necessity and importance of those things which he requires; particularly in the instances referred to, that *without holiness we cannot see his face*; that except a man have a new heart, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven: and so they are intended, upon a conviction of our weakness and insufficiency, to lead us to him, who hath not only required them of us, but hath promised to bestow them upon us. So that the awakened sinner, comparing the command and the promise together, in the one, he is led to contemplate the majesty, authority, and holiness of God; in the other, his grace and faithfulness: the one is the rule of his duty; the other, the ground of his faith: from the one, he learns what he ought to be, and do, whilst he is led on, and encouraged by the other, to pray for that grace which is sufficient for him.

THE same may be said with respect to the exhortations we meet with in scripture: they are designed to work upon the minds of those to whom they are addressed, and are made use of by the spirit of God in convincing of sin. And is there any impropriety in charging

ing it upon a rebellious ungrateful generation, that whereas *the ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib,*<sup>i</sup> they, by a neglect of duty to their daily Benefactor, discover more stupidity and disingenuity, than the very *beasts that perish?*<sup>k</sup> May not the only wise God make use of the most moving and affecting language, in upbraiding his reasonable creatures with a contempt of his goodness, without supposing the sinner to be self-sufficient, and to stand in no need of his assistance?

4. It is farther objected, that whereas we say the sinner is passive in regeneration, this is to destroy the freedom of the will, to subvert human liberty, and to reduce the reasonable creature to a meer machine, and so to take away the merit of virtue, by making it necessary, and not the result of choice. To this we answer; we are to distinguish between the nature of the will, and the qualities of it. The soul is the same, in all its faculties, after regeneration, as it was before; but the qualities of it are alter'd. The grace of God changes the corrupt, without invading the created nature of the will. Man's will, before the fall, was holy, as well as free, and so necessarily under a rational bias to every thing that was consonant to the divine mind, and which was made known to him as such: But the will of man, as fallen, is impair'd, not so much in its nature, or essence, as in

<sup>i</sup> Isa. i. 3.<sup>k</sup> Psa. xlix. 12.

its tendency ; it is now most unhappily turn'd off from spiritual to carnal and sensual objects ; the will is the same in it self, or in its nature, now, as it was then ; but the bias is very different : so that if we would judge aright of the freedom of man's will, we must consider the objects about which its is suppos'd to be conversant. If the worship, service, or love of God, are taken into the question, we assert, these were originally the chosen objects of the delight of the innocent creature, but are now the matters of his aversion, whilst he continues in a state of unregeneracy : And, when he is renew'd, and every high thought and imagination is reduced to a subjection to Christ, we never meet with a complaint from him of violence offered to his will, or of being forced and compelled to a choice of holiness. True, he is sensible of the hand of God upon his soul ; he feels, acknowledges, and adores the arm of the Lord in his conversion ; but he is so far from thinking it any hardship, that he rejoices abundantly in the mercy. And whereas, now his soul is thirsting after God, and his delight is in the law of the Lord, he is sensible this wonderful change in his case, was effected by his power, who *works in his people both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.*<sup>1</sup> He is far from desiring such a liberty, as would leave him as liable to apostatize and miscarry, as to persevere and be saved :

<sup>1</sup> Phil. ii 13,

ved: No, he rather longs to be in heaven, among the spirits of just men made perfect, under a glorious necessity (if that may deem'd so, which is the matter of their constant choice and delight) of serving God without weariness or interruption: If he might express the utmost of his ambition, it is to be with Jesus, in a world where to sin or offend is impossible.

We may observe, that at the same time we assert that God works immediately in implanting the principle of grace, we allow, that the renew'd sinner is a proper subject of moral suasion; and that God deals with him, in promoting a work of grace in his heart, in an argumentative way, and enables him to compare and judge of things which are proposed to him, as proper to be pursued or avoided, and to choose, or refuse, as they appear desirable, or the contrary; though we conclude, in all this, the saint gladly esteems God's word as his only rule, and his Spirit as his only guide. As to what is said concerning virtue, and the rewards which are supposed to be due to it, I apprehend, man, in his best estate, is vanity; his obedience, in its utmost spirituality and perfection, is a debt which he owes to his great Creator; nor can he be profitable unto God, so as to enter a claim, or challenge a reward from the Almighty. So that as we utterly disclaim the doctrine of merit on the creature's part,

we need not enquire how far the grace of God, in the renewing of a sinner, destroys this idol, which the pride of man is so willing to set up, and worship.

5. It is objected, if *God works in us both to will and to do*, and without his special grace we can do nothing, then we may e'en sit still, and do nothing, only wait carelessly till he shall excite us to, or assist us in our duty; and so this doctrine, say they, destroys all diligence and industry, and renders the sinners endeavours, how sincere and serious soever, foolish and unnecessary. To this we answer, that the great God may certainly fix upon what order he pleases, in his conferring of favours, and bestowing undeserved blessings. Now the order he has settled is this; that though he gives all freely, and not for our sakes, yet he will be sought to, and enquired of, by us, for those spiritual mercies, which we want at his hand. The direction is, *ask, seek, and knock*; the encouragement lies in the promise, *ye shall receive, ye shall find, and it shall be open'd unto you.*<sup>m</sup> *They who seek me early*, says God, *shall find me*; <sup>n</sup> and such as *wait on him*, *shall renew their strength*; <sup>o</sup> so that it is in a way of duty that we are to expect his presence. God is not, indeed, tied up to means: he may be found of them who seek him not; but he has obliged us to a constant and diligent attendance on them. And I would ask, Is not his

<sup>m</sup> Mat. vii. 7.<sup>n</sup> Prov. viii. 17.<sup>o</sup> Isa. xl. 31.

his promise of *meeting* and  *blessing* us, of his being *in the midst of us*, to assist and comfort us, a more rational and powerful motive to a close adherence to our duty, than a false imagination of a power, which we are not really possessed of, and so must necessarily disappoint us in all our ungrounded expectations from it?

Thus we have gone through the principal objections advanced against the doctrine of efficacious grace, and conclude, upon the whole, that we have scripture and experience on our side, whilst we assert that regeneration is *not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* ° What remains, but a serious enquiry, whether we have tasted that the Lord is gracious? how far we have been *quickned* by the mighty power of God, *who were dead in trespasses and sins?* † Without the new birth there is no entering into heaven, our Lord has expressly assured us. † What can we then say of God's gracious dealings with us? has he *put his Spirit within us, writ his law in our hearts,* † *taken the stone out of our hearts, and given us hearts of flesh?* † Have we been made to loath and abhor ourselves; to prize, above every thing, the person, righteousness, and fulness of Christ? Have we fled for refuge to him, as ready to perish? and do we

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find

° John i. 13. † Eph. ii. 1. † John iii. 3. † Jer. xxxi. 33.  
 † Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

find a spirit of grace and supplication poured out upon us? do we thirst after communion with, and aim at a resemblance of Jesus? is this, or such like, the genuine experience of our souls? Then let us call upon them, and all that is within us, to bless his name, whose *workmanship* we are. Let him have all the glory; and let it be our great concern, as well as prayer, to God continually, that we may, in all things, walk worthy of this holy vocation, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, till we get safe to that world, where Father, Son, and Spirit, will be all in all, as the everlasting source of pure and perfect happiness; and where, as the great Jehovah, one God over all, they will, to endless ages, inhabit the praises of those who shall stand before the throne, perfectly cleansed from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and whose robes shall be *washed, and made white in the Blood of the Lamb.*<sup>†</sup>

† Rev. vii. 14.





## S E R M O N III.

*The insufficiency of any atonement the sinner can make.*

MICAH, vi. 6, 7, 8.

*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? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD?*

The first SERMON ON this text.



**W**HEN God in his providence or grace is pleased, in a peculiar way, to distinguish a people with spiritual or temporal privileges, as hereby he lays them under the strongest engagements to obedience, so the disregard of their divine

Benefactor, in the midst of the enjoyment of his favours, bespeaks the most disingenuous behaviour. The general conduct of the people of the jews affords us an eminent discovery of this perverseness of human nature. And in the whole of their history, from *Moses* to *Christ*, as transmitted to us, in its several parts, by holy men as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, we may read ourselves, who naturally, in all the affluence of the bounties of providence, say unto God *depart from us*, and on whom the greatest obligations too frequently make little or no impression.

THE prophet *Micah* was sent upon a very awful errand to the children of *Israel*, to reproach them for their ingratitude to their greatest and best Benefactor, and to denounce destined vengeance upon them. And as the judgments threaten'd were of a very severe and destructive kind, that God might appear to be righteous in inflicting them, in the chapter before us, we have a plea lodged in their consciences, and an expostulation with them, as to the ungrateful returns they had made the Lord for his kindness and care. And it is observable that this is ushered in with the greatest solemnity, by an invocation of the *hills* and *mountains* to witness to the controversy between God and his people. *Hear ye now what the LORD saith, arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills bear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD's controversy,*  
and

and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel.<sup>a</sup> As if he had said, “Were it possible, the most inanimate parts of the creation would be sensible of the inequality and disproportion between my ways of mercy, and your paths of rebellion.” You have then an affectionate enquiry into the cause of their ingratitude. *O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.*<sup>b</sup> “If you have any charge against me produce it. If I have been unjust or unmerciful, enter your plea, and it shall be heard.” But on the contrary, he goes on to remind them of what he had done for them. “Have I not brought thee up out of the land of *Egypt*? did I not hear thy groans in the state of bondage, and redeem thee from that burdensome servitude? did I not give thee *Moses* as a leader and a lawgiver, *Aaron* as a priest, and *Miriam* as a prophetess? did I not turn *Balak’s* designed evil in hiring *Balaam* to curse thee, into a blessing? Reflect on these things, and then witness against me, if you have the least ground for it.” In consequence of this awful charge, the people of *Israel* are represented as enquiring, in the former part of our text. *Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God?*

<sup>a</sup> Micah vi. 2.<sup>b</sup> Ver. 3.

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? To which the prophet replies, He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD? In which words you have,*

- I. A CONVICTION of guilt fastened on their consciences.
- II. A RESOLUTION taken by them, to wait upon God, and worship in his presence.
- III. AN inquiry into the way of expiation, or means of atonement.
- IV. AN intimation of the impossibility of making an atonement, by any thing men can do, or give. And then,
- V. AND lastly, you have the rule of human obdience, or what it is that God expects, or requires of us.

EACH of these heads contains matter of the highest importance, and deserves very special attention. And, I begin,

I. WITH the conviction of guilt, which seems to be fastened upon their consciences.

THAT

THAT this was the case, I think is pretty evident, partly by their silence upon hearing the dreadful charge brought against them; but more especially, by their inquiring after an atonement. If the case had been otherwise, we should no doubt have heard of their innocence; for where there is any room for it, tho' only in our own apprehensions, we are naturally very prone to justify ourselves, and especially when accused of ingratitude. But when the Spirit of God brings the charge home, and we feel that we are really the persons who have thus come short of the glory of God, and abused his infinite goodness, there is no longer any dispute: but, with *Paul*, when *sin revives*<sup>c</sup> in this manner, and we compare it with the purity and perfection of the divine law, we are disabled as to our usual attempts to excuse ourselves, or extenuate our guilt. And from the method that the Holy Ghost makes use of, to bring the *Israelites* to a sense of their evil, we may learn, that the best way to fasten a thorough conviction of guilt on the soul, is to represent the mercy and kindness of God as abused, and despised by its rebellion. Sometimes the Lord indeed works by terrible things upon his people: but this issues not in the sorrow which the gospel recommends, without some displays of the divine mercy. We never sorrow truly after a godly sort, but when we consider our  
God

<sup>c</sup> Rom. vii. 9.

God as the best, as well as the highest of beings, as full of mercy and compassion, as well as possessed of indisputable authority; and so view our sins as injurious to his goodness, as well as affrontive to his sovereignty. Thus you find the Lord reasons with his people here. First, he shews them what he had done for them, that they might the better know what they had done against him. All moral suasion, indeed, or reasoning, how just so ever in itself, or founded on the best principles, will be fruitless and inefficacious, unless the Spirit first create a light in the darkened understanding, and implant a principle of love to God in the soul. And thus it would have been to no manner of purpose for the prophet to have set before the people the mercies of God, had he done this in ever so moving and reasonable a way, unless *the arm of the Lord* had been *revealed*.<sup>d</sup> But supposing him to be, as certainly he is, the author of all grace in the soul, yet the way or means by which he excites this grace of evangelical repentance, is by representing to the sinner those bowels of God's compassion, and the multitude of his tender mercies, which have been neglected, and trampled upon by his carelessness, and wickedness. The terrors of God's wrath against sin have a tendency to drive us to despair, without some discoveries of his mercy and compassion; and indeed until then, we shall

<sup>d</sup> *Isai. liij. 1.*

shall never have a just sense of our guilt, or of the desert of our iniquities. Thus it was with *David*, when the prophet *Nathan* told him that *the Lord* had put *away* his *iniquity*<sup>c</sup>, he cries out in the bitterness of his soul, *against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.*<sup>f</sup> And, as it is in the first exercise of repentance, so, in the whole of the christians conversation afterwards; there is nothing hath so great a tendency to melt him into ingenuous contrition for sin, as the belief that God *will heal his backslidings, and love him freely*<sup>g</sup>, that he *will be merciful to his unrighteousness, and his sins and his iniquities he will remember no more.*<sup>h</sup> But again,

II. You have the resolution of this people to come before the Lord, and bow in his presence.

WHEN we are made sensible of our deficiencies in duty, and are awakened to a sense of our guilt upon that account, we are naturally very ready to enter into resolutions that we will now serve the Lord with full purpose of heart; his worship, that hath been neglected, shall be now constantly, and diligently attended to; we will *come before the Lord*, we will bow to his authority, and be obedient to his laws. There is indeed a presence of the most high God from which we cannot separate

<sup>c</sup> 2 Sam. xii. 13.    <sup>f</sup> Psal. li. 4.    <sup>g</sup> Isai. xiv. 4.    <sup>h</sup> Heb. viii. 12.

rate ourselves, as he *sits upon the circle of the earth*, and beholds, by one all-comprehending view, things done in both worlds. But there is also a special presence of God in the ordinances of his appointment, and worship of his sanctuary, which, how much soever it may be despised, and neglected by persons estranged from him; yet, when they are apprised of their guilt, they will in some measure see the folly of their ways, and resolve to return unto the Lord. And this is the practice of every soul under religious awakenings. When our sins were first set in order before our eyes, we entered into the firmest resolutions, that we would for the future be more conscientious in all our ways, especially with respect to our attendance on religious worship: and this hath often served to still the clamours of conscience about past guilt, till the work has been carried on with power, and the soul put upon enquiry after a proper worthiness, in which to appear before the Lord, as a just and holy God. And this leads us to the next general head. Which is,

III. THAT having thus resolved to *come before the Lord*, they enquire in what way they must approach, so as to find favour in his sight. *Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high GOD?*

THIS supposes a discovery made to the soul of the infinite distance, and direct contrariety,  
that

that there is betwixt the most high and holy God, and itself, as nothing but a poor sinful creature. It was a very just observation of the apostle, that it is through *ignorance of God's righteousness*, that we go about to establish our own.<sup>1</sup> Were we apprised of the perfection and purity of his nature, and the rigorous demands of his law, we must either contradict our own experience, or believe it impossible to appear before God with comfort, but as cloathed with perfect innocency and purity. It is because, either we think not at all of the Almighty, or else regard him as one like ourselves, that we rush into his presence, *as the horse rusheth into the battle*. Were we sensible that he is as necessarily just, as gracious, and therefore can by no means acquit the guilty, any more than he can deny himself, we should be more earnest in our enquiries *wherewith to come before him*. One single transgression renders him our enemy, as well as leaves us incapable of *serving him in spirit and in truth*. Angels approach him with awe, but then it is with the freedom of spotless creatures, that never offended him. Man being fallen from his original integrity, and having lost his beauty, upon the least spiritual awakening, must be sensible of the enmity there is between God and him. And it is observable, that this seems to have been a principle common to the whole world, though  
known

<sup>1</sup> Rom. x. 3.

known only in the glory of it, by that gospel which hath brought life and immortality to light. As there is no nation without its God, so they have all by their practice acknowledged that they had a sense of guilt, in those sacrifices, of some kind or other, which they have been used to offer to their offended deities. And as it thus supposes that we *know God* in some measure, before we can *obey the gospel of his Son*<sup>k</sup>, or shall be solicitous after a righteousness in which to approach unto him; so you have here several methods proposed, some of God's institution, though designed to other purposes, and some of man's invention, that were abominations in his sight. And,

THE first of these is that of *burnt-offerings, and calves of a year old*. These were appointed by God to be observed by the children of *Israel*, through all their generations, not as expiatory in themselves, but as specifying, and shadowing forth *good things to come*.<sup>1</sup> “ Shall I come, “ says *Israel*, with these? they have divine authority for their sanction; or will God be better pleased *with rams*, or with *thousands* of them? or if *oil* should be more acceptable, will *ten thousand rivers* of it be sufficient to take away my guilt? or if he be wearied out with his own appointments, so that he will have *no more* such oblations, shall I give him *my first born*, according to the barbarous superstitious

<sup>k</sup> 2 Thef. i. 8.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 1.

“ perstitious custom of the heathens, the  
“ child of my strength, the son of my affec-  
“ tion *for my transgression, or the fruit of my*  
“ *body for the sin of my soul?* This is all that  
“ I have in my power, except I give my body  
“ to be burnt; and this shall be readily offered,  
“ if it may be accepted.” From which we  
may learn these two things:

1. How easy a matter it is to mistake the design of God in his institutions. It is a very great unhappiness to converse with the ordinances of God from wrong principles, or with mistaken views. All the services of the old testament-dispensation, many and pompous as they were, had no immediate influence upon the people’s acceptance with God, nor were designed to eclipse the glory of Christ, as *the Lord our righteousness*: and whenever they were regarded as expiatory, it was an abuse put upon them, contrary to the intention of the great Lawgiver. And, would to God the children of *Israel* were alone in their abuse of divine institutions. How easy is it to observe, in ourselves and others, the aptness there is to rest in duty, or to regard the sacrifice of praise, or a broken heart, as the ground of God’s delight in us? There is a wide difference between neglecting or despising, and idolizing a duty or ordinance. By the one we condemn the authority of *Christ*, and by the other we diminish his glory, by making any thing a partner, or competitor with him.

2. HENCE we may also see that persons under convictions will naturally turn to any thing, how expensive or unnatural soever, rather than submit to God's righteousness. They will heap up oblations, give *thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil*, nay, lose the tenderness of a parent, in their concern for sin, and give up the *fruit of their bodies*, as a sacrifice for their *transgressions*, rather than look to him whom God has *set forth as a propitiation*. And how agreeable is this to the conduct of many in our day? If constancy in their attendance upon divine worship, or the largest charity may suffice, they may have some light into the way that leads to everlasting life. But if they must cease from pride, and glory only in the Lord, if *Christ* must have all the honour of salvation, and they be no sharers with him, they practically say they will rather have no life, than receive it from his hands. O the vileness and enmity of our natures! the pride of our hearts! and the obstinacy of our wills! This ought to be matter of lamentation unto us. What grievous penances do the poor deluded *papists* submit to? what large contributions do they chearfully make, to gain salvation out of God's way? And I am persuaded, that, what seems to be most contrary to nature, would rather be submitted to by the carnal mind, than that *Christ* alone should be exalted. What necessity then is there for his mighty power to subdue every high

high thought and imagination, before we shall become his willing people? Which leads us,

IV. To shew you the impossibility of any thing of ours, to make atonement, or to take away sin.

WE may offer *burnt-offerings*, or *thousands of rams*, and, if possible, do every thing of this kind mentioned in the text; but all will not do. And that for these two reasons: *first*, they were never designed by God to this end; nor, *secondly*, are they in themselves sufficient for it.

I. THEY were never appointed by God unto this purpose. The apostle to the *hebrews* shews us at large, that none of their rites were designed to be substituted in the room of *Christ*: and accordingly you find, when they were abused by the people, God very strongly declares his abhorrence of them: which must be understood as respecting rather the abuse of these institutions, than the institutions themselves; for they were not only good, but then in their full force. There are two remarkable passages in the prophecy of *Isaiab* to this purpose. *Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom, and give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in*

*the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto me, the new moons, and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons, and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them.<sup>m</sup> And, they are rejected with greater abhorrence, if possible, in another passage in the same prophecy, He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man: he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck: he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood: he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol.<sup>n</sup> It must be very surprising to every considerate mind, to observe here, with how much detestation the Lord rejects those very institutions, which he himself had so positively commanded. But when we consider, how strangely they were abused by the *jews*, in the regard they paid them, and the dependance they had upon them, as making atonement, then the wonder ceases; for it is very evident from the whole tenor of God's word, that he never designed *the blood of bulls and goats, or the ashes of an heifer to take away sin*; ° for then there would have been no occasion to have *laid the iniquities of his people on his Son*, or to have made*

<sup>m</sup> *Isai. i. 10.—14.*    <sup>n</sup> *Chap. lxvi. 3.*    ° *Heb. ix. 13. and x. 4.*

made *his soul an offering for sin.*<sup>p</sup> But, as that which may fully satisfy us that God never intended it, compare what you find in *Romans iii. 25.* where we are told of *Christ*, that *God hath set him forth*, or as it should have been rendered <sup>q</sup>, *pre-ordained him to be a propitiation thro' faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins*, compare this, I say, with *1 Corinth. i. 30.* *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption*, and you will easily see, that it was never the design of God, that burnt-offerings or rivers of oil should satisfy for sin. And we know that *his counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure.*<sup>r</sup>

2. THIS will further appear, if we consider the insufficiency of these rites, in themselves, to answer the demands of divine justice, or to come up to the perfection which the law of God requires. Now the law requires perfection of nature, and universal uninterrupted obedience; and, in case of failure, threatens death. And let us then consider what is proposed here. And here is nothing to answer for that perfection of obedience that is required. All that can be thought of by those, who would *give the fruit of their bodies for the sin of their souls*, is, that it should take away the penalty threatened: But then, it is also neces-

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sary

<sup>p</sup> *Isai. liii. 6, 10.*    <sup>q</sup> *αγοσθητε.*    <sup>r</sup> *Isai. xlvi. 10.*

fary that the law be made honourable by a perfection of obedience. Further, as all that is proposed answers but to one part of a sinner's case, so it is altogether insufficient for that; for what is there in the blood of bulls or of goats that can satisfy for the breach of the divine law? Is there any proportion between a created life, and the affront offered against an infinite Being? What tho' we could give the whole world, and all the lives of men and angels in both worlds, would it equal the debt we owe to God? No, sin, as it carries in it a contempt of the divine authority, leaves the sinner helpless, as well as hopeless in himself. This the apostle treats with such a force of reasoning in the 10th of the *hebrews* that he that runs may read it. *For the law, says he, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year, make the comers thereunto perfect: for then would they not have ceased to be offered.\**

We come now,

V. To consider what it is that *the Lord our God requires of us*, and that is, *to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with him.*

BUT of these things I shall consider hereafter, and conclude this discourse with a few remarks on what has been said. And,

I. WE

\* Heb. x. 1, 2.

1. WE may here justly reflect on the great unhappiness and folly of the jewish nation, who fell into so general and fatal a mistake with respect to the design of the ceremonial law, notwithstanding such great care was taken, to guard them against resting in the performance of its rites, for their justification in the sight of God. This led them to add many inventions of their own to those divine appointments, and into a neglect of him who is *the end of the law for justifying righteousness*, and consequently into a carnal apprehension, and very partial discharge of the moral law itself, and upon the whole, exposed them, in the end, to the severity of the divine resentments. Again,

2. WE may from hence see the infinite advantages we enjoy under the gospel dispensation: by which we are delivered from this yoke of ceremonies, and have so clear a revelation of *Jesus Christ* in all the glory of his satisfaction, and perfection of his righteousness.

3. THIS will surely teach us the aggravations of their crimes, under these superior advantages, who attempt to add their own foolish inventions to the appointments of God, or rest on any thing but Christ Jesus, and what he has done, and suffered, for their justification before him. To which I will add,

4. AND lastly, The double obligation we are under, both from our deliverance from the burden of the legal ceremonies, and the clear revelation we enjoy of Christ and his salvation, to manifest our firm and humble faith in him, by the holiness of our lives and conversations.



S E R-



## S E R M O N I V.

*Of the duties of justice, and mercy.*

MICAH vi. 8.

*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good,  
and what doth the Lord require of thee,  
but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to  
walk humbly with thy God?*

The second SERMON on this text.



HAVING, in a former discourse, from the foregoing words, considered the representation which the prophet gives of a conviction of guilt fastened upon the consciences of the people of *Israel*; and upon this the resolution taken by them, to wait upon God, and to worship in his presence; having considered the enquiry they make into the way of expiation, and treated on the intimation that is given of the impossibility of making an atonement by any thing men can do. I proceed now,

V. To consider *what* it is that *the Lord our God requires of us*, and that is, *to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with him.*

AND, from what hath been offered under the former heads, it is evident, that he requires none even of these at our hands, as the ground of our reconciliation to him, or acceptance with him. For if the *fruit of our bodies* is insufficient *to take away the guilt of our souls*; how much more insufficient must those services be, which God hath a natural right, as our Creator, to demand, and which, at the same time, in the best of men are so very imperfect, as to need the perfuming incense of the interceding *Jesus* to be accepted at all. Supposing therefore that we are redeem'd, and only so, by the blood of *Christ*, from the curse of a violated law, regarding I say ourselves, as heirs of the grace of God, and expectants of eternal glory, I shall enquire what it is, in the sense of the prophet, that the Lord, as our God, looks for at our hands, and for the performance of which, he will supply us with necessary measures of his grace. And this is,

I. *To do justly.*

JUSTICE towards our fellow creatures, is one great branch of natural, as well as revealed religion. As it would be impossible, that society among men shou'd be preserved, and  
order

order maintained without it; so it is a received principle, agreed to by the common consent of all nations, that fraud, extortion, violence, and oppression, which are opposed to justice, and faithfulness, are destructive to community, wherever they are allowed of, or connived at. This part of natural religion receives very considerable improvement from revelation, as represented in the strongest light, and enforc'd by the most conclusive reasonings.

IT may be considered under two branches; *first*, as it respects the substance; and *secondly*, the character and reputation of our fellow creatures, or fellow christians.

(I.) THEN, we are *to do justly* towards the substance or the estates of others. That is, in the whole of our conversation, we are to endeavour, as near as may be, to give to every one his due: and, though we shou'd have it in our power secretly to defraud or over-reach our neighbour, we are to be as conscientious in avoiding it, as we wou'd the most barefac'd injury or oppression.

IN the several callings in which the providence of God hath fixed us, we are to be faithful and honourable in our dealings. This you find expressly commanded under the first dispensation: *Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, and the wages of him that is hired, shall not abide with thee all night, until the morning.* \* And so again, *ye shall do no unrighteousness,*

\* Lev. xix. 13.

ousness in judgment, in mete-yard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin shall ye have: I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes and all my judgments, and do them: I am the Lord.<sup>b</sup> And if the people of *Israel* were obliged to this, not only from their relation to God as their creator, but as especially favour'd with his providential appearances for them; how much more does it become christians, who profess to believe that *Christ* hath deliver'd them from the condemnation of the law, and from the bondage of sin, and the destruction of hell, to be faithful and holy in all manner of conversation. The reason of this command I take to be founded in our mutual relation to each other as creatures. No man can apprehend himself to be wrong'd, or injur'd in his substance, with pleasure and satisfaction. As we therefore would have others act towards us, we are to deal by them. The prophet *Malachy* reasons upon this subject with a great deal of force. *Have we not, says he, all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?*<sup>c</sup>

(2.) WE are to do justice to the character, and reputation of our fellow creatures, or fellow christians, as well as to their substance. I doubt not but there are many,

<sup>b</sup> Ver. 36, 37.

<sup>c</sup> Chap. ii. 10.

many, under a profession of religion, who would not allow themselves in any instances of fraud or injustice in their dealings, and yet, make little or no conscience of their words, forgetting that an invasion on our property in worldly things, is a much inferior injury to a wound or stain in our reputation. It is mention'd as one of the greatest branches of wickedness for which God will *reprove*, that a man *sitteth, and speaketh against his brother, and slandereth his own mother's son.* <sup>d</sup> And Solomon reckons among the seven things that *the Lord abhors, a false witness that speaketh lies, and him that soweth discord among brethren.* <sup>e</sup> And, under the new testament, the apostle *Paul* recommends it to *Titus*, to put the brethren in mind, *that they speak evil of no man*, and assigns a good reason for it, *for we our selves also were sometimes foolish, and disobedient.* <sup>f</sup>

THIS then is one part of the reasonable service that the Lord requires of us, that we *do justly* to the estates and characters of our fellow creatures, and surely, (by the way) hence we may conclude, that if God will be the avenger of injustice towards his creatures, much more so towards his Son. If the wages of every instance of injustice is *death, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall they be thought worthy, who have trodden under foot the Son of God; and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy, or common, thing?* <sup>g</sup>

Will

<sup>d</sup> Psa. l. 20. <sup>e</sup> Prov. vi. 19. <sup>f</sup> Chap. iii. 2, 3. <sup>g</sup> Heb. x. 29.

Will not the righteous Lord, think you, severely resent the refusal to render to Christ his due; which must be the case where the glory that is essential to his person, and the honour that is due to his atonement are refused him? But then again,

2. WE are to *love mercy*, as well as to *do justly*.

MERCY supposes the objects of it to be miserable, and so to stand in need of a compassionate regard. Accordingly, it is highly agreeable to the laws of nature, as well as the revealed will of God, that we should pity, and sympathize with our fellow creatures in distress. *Solomon* tells us, that *he that is glad at calamities, shall not be unpunished.*<sup>h</sup> It must needs be most barbarous to insult a person in misery, and to triumph over distress. The gospel carries this matter further, obliging us not only, in general, to pity persons in affliction; but if our very *enemy* should *hunger*, we are to have *mercy on him*, so as to *feed him*; and thus by returning good for evil, we are to *heap*, as it were, *coals of fire upon his head:*<sup>i</sup> and for this we have not only the command, but example of our great Lord, who died praying for those that embred their hands in his blood, and breathed his soul into his Father's hands, with this amazing request, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*<sup>k</sup> And the apostle *Paul* seems to want words

to

<sup>h</sup> Prov. xvii. 5. <sup>i</sup> Rom. xii. 20, 21. <sup>k</sup> Luke xxiii. 34.

to express to us this great and glorious principle, when he says, *Put on therefore, (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as Christ forgave you.*<sup>1</sup>

AGAIN, a person may not only be miserable by his necessity, but through his own folly and miscarriage; and then if the offence be private, if we observe repentance in our brother, we are to be *easy to be entreated*, and forgive him, though it be to seventy times seven.<sup>m</sup> Nay, if the offence be of a more public nature, as far as our regard for the honour of *Christ*, and the good of society will admit it, we are to judge favourably: and whilst we are faithful to our Lord, we are to be as merciful as may be to our fellow creature. This you find eminently in the example of the incestuous person: the apostle *Paul* was as earnest that the *corinthians* shou'd receive him upon his repentance, with all the respect and love due to a brother; as he was solicitous they shou'd reject him, whilst he was insensible of his offence.<sup>n</sup> And where any professing christians are above receiving returning sinners, in all the bowels of mercy, they, as really, and, perhaps, as heinously offend against God, as in any other injury or oppression. For the same God who says, *thou shalt not steal*, has also said, *thou shalt*

<sup>1</sup> Col. iii. 12. <sup>m</sup> Luke xviii. 22. <sup>n</sup> 1 Cor. v. compared with 2 Cor. vii.

*shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.* He who requires us to *do justly*, will have us also *love mercy*.

WE are not only to *be merciful*, but to *love mercy*: And this may imply either the readiness, or chearfulness with which we are to shew it; or the degree of our regard to this disposition.

FIRST, We are to do it, readily, not only as our duty, but our privilege. This is to be *followers of God as dear children*,<sup>o</sup> for he *delights in mercy*.<sup>p</sup> And wherever this is the case, it doubles the favour, and renders it the more peculiarly acceptable to the person on whom it is bestowed. When we are not driven to pity the distressed merely from the extremity of their case, but as those who are sensible that we are under higher obligations to God for the freedom and sovereignty of his kindness to us, it appears to flow from the spiritual tenor and disposition of our souls. Thus what we do, in this respect, is to be done with all our hearts. Again,

SECONDLY, It may imply the largeness of our mercy. We are to *love mercy*. Whatever a man delights in, he wou'd do it frequently, and fully. And in this we are to measure our duty by the circumstances of the distressed, and the ability God hath given us. If we have it not in the power of our hands to communicate of our substance, we are to help them by our advice, and by our prayers.

<sup>o</sup> Eph. v. i.

<sup>p</sup> Micah vii. 18.

prayers. But where God hath given us largely of the good things of this life, *freely have we received*, and *freely* also are we to *give*. And the necessity a man is in of a continual supply of the abundant mercies of God, is a very just rule by which he ought to measure his pity and bounty to his fellow creatures.

THUS then I have considered the two first branches of our duty, *to do justly, and to love mercy*; under which two heads may be reduced all the commands of the second table, respecting our fellow creatures. And before I enter upon the first table, or our duty towards God, it will be necessary to make some remarks upon what I have said. And,

I. FROM hence then we may learn the glorious perfections of the great Lawgiver. As we may know something of the nature of a prince by the laws he enacts; so we may read the glory of God in the rules that he hath prescribed for us to walk by. He must needs be a *holy* and a gracious God, who requires us *to do justly, and to love mercy*. That is a very magnificent description of the holiness of God, which *Moses* gives us in his song. *Who is like unto thee, O Lord amongst the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?*<sup>9</sup> And it is a very instructive representation, which we have in the *revelation* of the worship of perfected saints in the upper world. *They sing the song of Moses*

<sup>9</sup> Exod. xv. 12.

*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. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy.* <sup>r</sup> And as God is just, so he also is merciful; that is, in a way consistent with his justice. For otherwise, whatever notions we may have of this attribute, it must be rather a weakness than a perfection. And therefore you find them both joined together by the psalmist, *Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.* <sup>s</sup> So that, whilst we are learning our duty, we may observe the infinite and harmonious perfections of that God who hath commanded it; that he is a being, as strictly just and holy, as he is merciful and good. Again,

2. FROM hence we may infer the imperfection of our obedience. Is there a mouth in the whole world, but what must be stopped before God, with respect to the duties of the second table? Were we never unfaithful to any trust reposed in us? did we never wrong our neighbour, either in his person, or his estate? have we, upon all just occasions, been ready to put on bowels of compassion, pity, and tenderness? can we say that we have been fully, and always faithful in these things? No, surely. If conscience performs its office faithfully, it must tell us how infinitely

<sup>r</sup> Rev. xv. 3, 4.

<sup>s</sup> Psal. lxxxix. 14.

ly short we have all come of our duty in these respects: agreeable to what the apostle *Paul* observes at large to the *Romans*; when speaking of the person, *whose damnation is just*, *What then?* says he, *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.*<sup>t</sup> From whence he concludes; *that every mouth should be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. For by the deeds of the law, shall no flesh be justified in his sight.*<sup>u</sup> Let us remember then the imperfection of our circumstances at best, and consequently the unworthiness of our conduct, that, whenever we glory, it may be in the Lord. But again,

3. HENCE we see the intire consistency there is between our looking to *Christ* as *the Lord our righteousness*, and our regard to the precepts of the moral law, as good in themselves, and necessary to us, both as to life, and godliness. He that hath commanded us to believe on his Son, and hath promised eternal life and happiness through him, and on his account, hath left it as our duty to *maintain good works.*<sup>w</sup> The same *Jesus* who came to destroy and abolish the condemning, hath left in full force the commanding part of the law. He hath indeed removed the enmity, that was betwixt God and us, for the breach of it; but he hath establish'd the spi-

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<sup>t</sup> Rom. iii 9, 10.<sup>u</sup> Ver. 19, 20.<sup>w</sup> Tit. iii. 8.

ritual part, and requires our regard to it: and as he knows we are impotent, as well as unworthy, he hath directed us to look to himself for assistance for the discharge of duty, as well as merit for the favour of God. You see the prophet in the text, at the same time that he assures us that nothing on our part can answer for our transgressions, tells us what God expects of us. As it is impious to say we have liberty to sin in our practice, because grace hath abounded in our experience; so it is the highest idolatry to present our services, as an offering to God for our acceptance. It will be allowed, I apprehend, that our Lord was a judge in this matter: and he says to his disciples, *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.*<sup>x</sup> Which he illustrates by this question, *Will a master thank that servant that doth the things that were commanded him?*<sup>y</sup> Will he think himself obliged? much less then the sovereign Lord of all, who fills heaven and earth with his presence and glory. But because he will not thank him for his services, as an obligation laid on him, does he therefore cease from his right to those services? by no means. So that you see there is the highest consistency betwixt keeping the commandments, as a rule given

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<sup>x</sup> Luke xvii. 10.<sup>y</sup> Ver. 9.

us by God to walk by, and not trusting in our obedience, as satisfactory for our acceptance with him.

4. AND lastly, in all our actions towards our fellow creatures, we are to be careful that one duty does not shut out another. We are *to do justly*, but then so, as *to love mercy*; and we are to exercise *mercy*, so as to *do justly*. That which would be justice in one case, may be cruelty in another. And that which would be mercy in one circumstance, may be injustice in another. Thus, supposing a crime committed in which the good of society is concerned, to take no notice of this, is to be unjust: because it is injuring a whole community. But supposing the case of a private nature, in which a man's self is only concerned, to take all the advantage of justice, in many instances, would be unmerciful.

I SHOU'D now have proceeded, under the last general head, to consider the other branch of our duty, and that is *to walk humbly with our God*; where we have a very large field of discourse, as what includes the whole first table. The former hath a more immediate respect to our conversation with men, this to our actions towards God. Under the first we are viewed as in the world, under the latter as conversing more immediately with the divine Being. But that I shall not enter upon at present: and only

add, that we have abundant cause to bless the name of the Lord our God, that whilst we must plead guilty before him, he hath revealed a way, in which justice and mercy are reconciled, all his perfections glorified, and yet that there is hope in *Sion* concerning the greatest of sinners.





# SERMON V.

*Of walking humbly with God.*

MICAH vi. 8.

*He hath shewed thee, O man; what is good;  
and what doth the Lord require of thee, but  
to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk  
humbly with thy God?*

The third SERMON on this text.



O be admitted into the friendship of a great and good man, and much more of a powerful and mighty prince, is justly esteemed among the most valuable blessings of this life; and in proportion to the greatness, or wisdom of the person, his conversation is regarded as an honour and a privilege. It is but now and then that we hear of a peasant being received into the confidence and familiarity of his prince. How extraordinary an instance of

condescension is it then in the great and holy God to allow, nay even to require, his people to walk with him in a way of friendly communion? When, with *David*, we *consider the heavens the work of his hands, the sun moon and stars which he hath ordained,* and turn our thoughts to those *ministering spirits, those sons of the morning,* who enjoy a constant view of the perfections of his nature, and incessantly adore his glory, we may well say, *What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?*<sup>a</sup> That God should require us to make him *our fear and our dread, to walk before him in uprightness,* and to tremble in his presence, is not so surprising: but, that he should fix an inseparable connection betwixt our happiness and our duty, or betwixt our reasonable service and our privilege, how amazing is such condescending goodness as this? To measure the dimensions, or fathom the depths of this grace calls for the enlarged capacities of a perfected spirit, and yet even so it is, that he who will not be pleased with *thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil,* he who will not admit of the sacrifice of *the fruit of our bodies for our transgressions,* hath not only required us *to do justly, and to love mercy,* but to *walk humbly with him.* The two former duties, I have shewn you, respect the second table, in which the Lord

calls

<sup>a</sup> Psa. viii. 3, 4.

calls for equity in our dealings, and for the love of mercy towards the objects of compassion, among our fellow creatures. We proceed now,

3. To the last clause of the words, and which contains the last branch of our duty, *viz. to walk humbly with our God.*

THIS indeed includes the whole of the first table; and I hope to make it evident that what God calls for at our hands, as agreeable to our relation to him as creatures, and especially as redeemed by the blood of his Son, is one main branch of our happiness, and the fruit of our belonging to the covenant of grace. And here, you will easily observe, that there are these *three* things to be inquired into from this clause of our text.

FIRST, The duty it self, and that is *to walk with God.*

SECONDLY, The manner of its performance; it is to be done *humbly*: and,

THIRDLY, The reason, or authority by which it is enjoined; *the Lord hath required it of us.* I begin,

FIRST, with the duty itself, and this is *to walk with God.* In his *presence*, we are told, *is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore.*<sup>b</sup> To enjoy the favourable

<sup>b</sup> Psa. xvi. 11.

avourable smiles of the fountain of all excellency must needs give joy *unspeakable, and full of glory*. Happy is the man, that is in such a case, yea thrice happy is the man whose God is the Lord. <sup>c</sup> It is said of Enoch that he *walked with God*. <sup>d</sup> And you find the same expression, with little alteration, very frequent in scripture. As this evidently takes in the whole of our religion, so there are many things necessarily presupposed, as antecedent to such an honourable and gracious intimacy with the divine Being, as is intended by this phrase. For,

1. You know there must be a mutual agreement between two parties, before they can *walk* together. Enmity implies aversion; and there can be no friendly communion, much less agreeable *walk*, between two that are directly opposite to each other. So that to *walk with God*, supposes that he is at peace with us, and we with him. This was the case originally betwixt the great *Jehovah* and our first parents, whilst they retain'd their integrity. God could converse with them with delight, and they commune with him with freedom. But no sooner had they sinned against him, than they discovered a principle of enmity, in flying from his presence. And methinks we need no other evidence, that in this we all bear their image, than the constant experience we have of a corrupt principle

<sup>c</sup> Psal. cxliv. 15,

<sup>d</sup> Gen. v. xxiv.

principle within us, which says unto the Almighty, *Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* \* And hence it is the apostle observes, that whilst we are in the flesh, or strangers to the work of the Spirit upon our souls, we cannot please God; and assigns this reason for it, *because the carnal mind is enmity against God:* † it is in league with his enemies, sin and satan, and filled with the strongest aversion to him. And, as we are enemies to God by wicked works, so he is at enmity with us; being of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, he must abhor the workers of it, considered as his enemies. Of this you have many intimations in his word. See, instead of many others, these two very awful passages, psalm v. 4, 5. *For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.* To which you may add what is mentioned in psalm xi. 5, 6. *The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence, his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.*

Now this being the enmity that is naturally between God and us, as the prophet Amos observes, ‡ *Can two walk together except*

\* Job. xxi. 14. † Rom. viii. 6, 7, 8. ‡ Chap. iii. 3.

*cept they be agreed? The way in which, or the person by whom, we arrive at this privilege is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is stiled our peace,<sup>h</sup> and, is said, to have destroy'd the enmity betwixt God and us. As we are made nigh to God through him, he having finished transgression, and made an end of sin, and reconcil'd God unto us by his everlasting righteousness. The means of our reconciliation to God, is the agency of his Spirit; who reveals the Saviour, in the glory of his person, and perfection of his atonement, and powerfully destroys every high thought and imagination, that wou'd exalt it self against the Lord, and his Christ; and leads the believer into a discovery of the excellency of the wisdom, grace, and glory of this way of redemption; enabling him to bless God for it, and rejoice in it. This you have represented to you, in both the branches of it, in a very just light by the apostle Paul: *And all things are of God, says he, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation. To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made**

*him*

<sup>h</sup> Eph. ii. 14.

*him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*<sup>1</sup> In which passage you have, first an intimation of the way of reconciliation on God's part. It is by *Christ* that he becomes one with us; by putting away our sins, and imputing them unto his Son. Again, our being friends with God being necessary, as well as his friendship to us; he hath *committed* unto his ministers this *word of reconciliation*: in the ministrations of which they, *as ambassadors for Christ*, in his name, and by his authority, deliver this message of peace unto sinners; in which they earnestly *beseech* them *to be reconciled unto God*: and, in order to it, represent to them the grace of God, in making him *to be sin for us, who knew no sin*. So that before we can walk with God, we must be acquainted with his Son, and have some good ground to hope that we are accepted in him. God must be at peace with us, and we reconciled to him, otherwise all our endeavours to *walk with God* will be insignificant. And, as one well observes, “ All that we do for God, will in this case, be  
 “ as the gifts of an enemy; and though they  
 “ may possibly be rewarded in this life, yet  
 “ as the *sacrifices of the wicked are an abo-*  
 “ *mination to the Lord*, so they will be rejec-  
 “ ted as to any worthiness in the day of the  
 “ Lord.” But again.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 18.—21.

2. It supposes such a reconciliation, as that the consequence of this agreement, the end and design of the persons shou'd be the same. Persons; you know, in walking together are travelling towards one and the same place; and, taking the words in a moral sense, where any are said to *walk together*, they are supposed to have one common aim and view. The design that God has in every thing, is the manifestation of his own perfections; to set forth to view the glory of his wisdom, power, and faithfulness. Thus he is said to *have made all things for himself*:<sup>k</sup> and the world is said, with all things that are in it, to be created by his agency, and *for his pleasure*.<sup>l</sup> In the work of our salvation, among other perfections, that of his grace is mentioned in a very peculiar manner, as illustrated in every part of it. Now to *walk with God* supposes, that we are regarding the same end with him. Does he design to be glorious in shewing mercy, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin? then the saint that *walks with him* in truth, is breathing after the same; and would be better acquainted with the greatness of his kindness, and have the Lord alone exalted in his soul. He wou'd be glad to improve in the knowledge of his love, as sovereign, and undeserved; and is aiming, in every thing that he does, more or less, that Christ may  
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<sup>k</sup> Prov. xvi. 4.<sup>l</sup> Rev. iv. 11.

be magnified, as the foundation and glory of the whole spiritual building. Again, does the Lord design, after he hath guided the believer by his counsel, to receive him to his glory? or having finished the work of grace in his soul here, to crown him with the reward of eternal life? The believer is also, in some measure, one with him in this respect, waiting and longing to enjoy him, as the inheritance, and portion of his soul. He would be more and more loosened from time, and grow in his longings after the God of his salvation. As the Lord says unto him, *Fear not, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward;*<sup>m</sup> so he takes leave humbly to reply, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.*<sup>n</sup>

3. AND lastly, before we can *walk with God*, there must be a spiritual principle of life and motion given to, or created in our souls. Natural death leaves the body inactive, destroys the power of the organs to discharge their several functions; and so, whilst, in a spiritual sense, we are dead in trespasses and sins, there can be no *walk with God* maintained: *We are alive unto sin, but dead unto God.*<sup>o</sup> As the body of *Adam* would have been like the earth from whence it was taken, had not God *breathed into it the breath of life*; so our souls, while in this natural state, may very justly

<sup>m</sup> Gen. xv. 1.

<sup>n</sup> Psa. lxxiii. 25.

<sup>o</sup> Rom. vi. 11.

justly be compared to dry bones scatter'd at the grave's mouth. And as there can be no converse between the living and the dead; so, whilst we are spiritually dead; we must needs be strangers to communion with the saints, and much more with God himself. These things are necessarily supposed antecedent to our *walking with God*. He must be at peace with us in *Christ*; and we reconciled to him by the power of his Spirit, bestowing knowledge and faith upon our souls. We must have, in some measure, one and the same aim, and from *death in sin*, be made *alive unto God*.

HAVING premised these things, I proceed to a more particular enquiry into the duty itself. And you may observe, that the expression is metaphorical, and to be taken in a moral, and not a natural sense, consisting, as I apprehend, in the believers communion with the divine Being, as his God in covenant, and his regard unto his will as the Lord his Sovereign.

FIRST, To *walk with God*, is to maintain communion or fellowship with him as our God in covenant. And this may be considered either as extraordinary, or more common.

I. THERE are some seasons in which the christian walks with God in a more near and intimate way, as his own God, in whom he hath a special propriety. This I call a more extraordinary walk with God, as what

is not commonly maintained with constancy by the saints. It is impossible to give a just description of this to the man, who is a stranger to it in his own experience. When we think of the familiarity which a father allows his child, or that which one friend will take with another, both fall vastly short of this divine communion. For as there is the greatest disproportion between the two parties engaged in it, God, and man; so, when God manifests himself unto us, it is in a way that is agreeable to his infinitely glorious nature. The best account that I can give of it, is something like this. When the Lord designs to visit a believer with these remarkable intimations of his loving-kindness, he leads him, by the special agency of his Spirit, to his Son, as one in whom he is well pleased, discovers to him the largeness of his grace in him, and witnesses by his Spirit that he is interested in it, and thus, in a special and delightful way, he looks into such a soul with that love, that *seals it unto the day of redemption;* and as thus receiving the grace of God, he allows such an one the liberty to contemplate his divine perfections, as engaged in his favour. Of this the royal psalmist seems to have had frequent experience, *There be many,* says he, *that say, who will shew us any good?* but the voice of my soul is, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us:* and, as if the mercy had been given in upon

its being asked, he adds, *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine encreased.*<sup>p</sup> And therefore, in another place, he calls upon the saints, *Sing unto the Lord, (O ye saints of his) and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*<sup>q</sup> And again, he says, *I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.*<sup>r</sup> And, to add no more, *How excellent, says he, is thy loving kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house: and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life, in thy light shall we see light.*<sup>s</sup> Thus, as in the multitude of his thoughts within him, the Lord visited him with the special consolations of his Spirit; so, more or less, it hath been the experience of every chosen vessel: at some seasons such have been enabled to say, *Our beloved is ours and we are his,*<sup>t</sup> *we know in whom we have believed,*<sup>u</sup> and are even confident that  
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<sup>p</sup> Psa. iv. 6, 7.<sup>q</sup> Psa. xxx. 4, 5.<sup>r</sup> Psa. xxxiv. 1, 2, 3.<sup>s</sup> Psa. xxxvi. 7, 8.<sup>t</sup> Cant. ii. 16.<sup>u</sup> 2 Tim. i. 12.

he will keep them from falling, and present them faultless, before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. <sup>w</sup> But then,

2. THERE is a more constant and habitual *walking with God* by faith, whereby we converse with him in his Son as a merciful God, and ready to communicate every necessary good unto us. Thus, though the apostle *Paul*, could not always say he felt the bliss of *the third heaven*, yet you know, as to his more common experience, he says, *The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the son of God*; <sup>x</sup> that is, he was desirous to walk in Christ Jesus, as he had at first received him, as the Lord his righteousness for acceptance, and the Lord his strength for assistance. And thus the believer is said to *walk with God*, when he converses with him, as he manifests himself in his Son. And to this purpose you find the word explained in the eleventh of the *Hebrews*, where you have a large catalogue of worthies, who lived and died in faith, several of whom, as we are informed in the old testament, *walked with God*. And indeed there can be no walking with God without faith, for *without faith it is impossible to please him*. <sup>y</sup> Nay, it is the property of faith, in the hand of the Spirit of God to empty a man of himself, and to fill him with his Lord, or in other words, to lead him to look for all that in, and from Christ, of

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which

<sup>w</sup> Jude 24.<sup>x</sup> Gal. ii. 20.<sup>y</sup> Heb. xi. 6.

which he finds he is deficient in himself, and which may be reduced to two heads, *viz.* righteousness and strength, as we are both impotent and guilty. But again.

SECONDLY, As *walking with God* implies communion with him and dependance upon him, so also it includes a regard unto him as the Lord our soverèign, or to his will as our law. We are expressly told, *his servants we are to whom we yield ourselves servants to obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness.*<sup>2</sup> God calls, not only for all the regard of the soul as to its dependance on him, but also its obedience to him; and this must be, (1.) Universal in its extent; and, (2.) Ingenuous in its principle.

1. IT must be universal in its extent. It is impossible, indeed, that it should be perfect in the degree of it; because *every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts is only evil, and that continually.*<sup>a</sup> But then we are not to say of this or that part of God's law, we will pay a ready obedience to it, in the neglect of any other of the same authority. He that hath enjoined one precept, hath enjoined all. *Abraham* not only left his native country, at the command of God, but parted with *Hagar* and *Ishmael*, and almost with his beloved son *Isaac*, and and that in a dreadful way too. Nor do we indeed justly acknowledge our Redeemer's dominion, or properly call him *Lord*, if we  
wilfully

<sup>2</sup> Rom. vi. 16.

<sup>a</sup> Gen. vi. 5.

wilfully, constantly, and habitually neglect the things which he commands. It is said of *Zacharias* and *Elisabeth* that *they walked in all the commandments, and ordinances of the Lord blameless*:<sup>b</sup> by which we are not to understand that they were absolutely perfect in their regard to the law either moral or ceremonial; but had received a principle of grace from God, which, as far as it was in exercise, influenced them to an universal concern for his glory in all their ways. In walking with God no part of known duty is to be neglected, nor any instance of transgression wilfully to be allowed of. 'Tis true, when we have done all, we must say we have come vastly short of our duty, and therefore bless God for our salvation in his Son. And the ascribing our salvation wholly to *Christ Jesus* is so entirely consistent with an habitual desire to honour God by an holy regard to all his revealed will, that, in proportion to our increase in communion with him, we shall find those desires the more earnest to shew forth the praises of that grace, whereby we are made acceptable in the sight of God, by a conversation becoming the gospel. And, for my part, I must think that, let a man's pretensions to faith or privileges be ever so great, whilst he manifestly discovers no proper sense of his obligation to duty, and lives in an habitual neglect and contempt

<sup>b</sup> Luke i. 6.

of it, I ought to conclude that such a man's *faith is vain*, that is, that he hath no true faith at all. And I think what the apostle *John* observes very abundantly strengthens the conclusion: *Hereby*, says he, *we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*<sup>c</sup> And those are very awful words of the apostle *Paul*, that *the damnation of such persons is just, who only slanderously report*, that is barely, though unjustly affirm, that we may *do evil that good may come.*<sup>d</sup> And if the very report of these things deserves condemnation, how much more the wilful acknowledgement of them in their daily conversation? How then can a man be said to *walk with God*, who allows himself, in the course of his conversation, to act contrary to his revealed will, to trample upon his authority, and neglect his grace?

2. THIS obedience must be ingenuous in the principle, as well as universal in the extent of it. *Paul* seemed to have an unlimited concern for the law of God, before conversion, as far as he was acquainted with it; but then it was the obedience of an enemy, and not of a son. He was *walking with himself* rather than with his *God*; but after his conversion, being experimentally acquainted with the mercies of God himself, he pres-

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<sup>c</sup> 1 John ii. 4, 5.

<sup>d</sup> Rom. iii. 8.

ses the saints at *Rome*, by these mercies to *present* their *bodies a living sacrifice*, holy, and *acceptable unto God*, as their most *reasonable service*.<sup>e</sup> Our obedience can never deserve the name of gospel obedience, unless it flows from a view of our interest in God through *Jesus Christ*: this our Lord seems to intimate, when he says, *If ye love me keep my commandments*.<sup>f</sup> Love must precede obedience. Which leads us to consider,

II. THE way and manner in which this duty is to be discharged. But of that and what follows in a future discourse.

<sup>e</sup> Rom. xii. 1.

<sup>f</sup> John xiv. 15.





# SERMON VI.

*Of walking humbly with God.*

MICAH vi. 8.

*He hath shewed thee, O man; what is good;  
and what doth the Lord require of thee,  
but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to  
walk humbly with thy God?*

The fourth SERMON on this text.



IN speaking from the last clause of these words, I have in a former discourse proposed,

- I. To consider the duty itself, and what it is *to walk with God.*
- II. THE manner of its performance; it is to be done *humbly.* And,
- III. THE reason, or authority by which it is enjoined. *The Lord hath required it of us.*

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THE first of these I have considered, and proceed now,

II. To treat on the way and manner how this duty should be performed. It is to be done *humbly*; with becoming apprehensions of the privilege we are admitted to, and our unworthiness of it.

THE term *humility* is as frequently used, and as little understood, in the genuine meaning of it, by the generality of professing christians, as any one word by which any branch of our religion is expressed. Some take it for a free, ingenuous, and unreserved deportment towards our equals and inferiors, in opposition to a lofty, imperious carriage. And this is certainly one lower branch of humility. Others confine it to a serious form of countenance, or a particular tone of voice in religious services, attended with a distinguished meanness of apparel and behaviour; when at the same time, there may be as much pride in such affected singularities, as in the most pompous and expensive excesses. No, as the soul is the seat of humility, and God the author, and primary object of this grace, it must needs contain something of a much more excellent nature in it. If we were not acquainted with the vileness of our nature, we might be tempted to think that there  
could

could be little or no occasion for the exhortation in our text, to walk *humbly* with God: but, if we know any thing, we must be sensible of the infinite disproportion betwixt him and us, both as to nature, and perfections. For a worm to be allowed to walk with the Creator of all things, and a sinful creature to be admitted to converse with perfect purity, are wonders of grace, which must needs astonish the soul that is a partaker of so inestimable a privilege: and the higher we are lifted up in the enjoyment of it, the lower we must needs sink in our own eyes. The nearer we are to our God, the further we shall be from vanity, and carnal pride. There is indeed a sort of external communion with God in ordinances and privileges, that may be separated from *humility*. Thus the church of the *Jews* was, you know, for several ages distinguished by some special tokens of the divine presence; in which sense, God might be said to *walk*, or to dwell externally with them. This favour they abused to a fond conceit of themselves, and a haughty contemptuous treatment of the rest of the world; and by their gross pursuit of bodily services, and resting in them, they at last sunk into an utter neglect of all spiritual and vital religion. But where the soul is taken by the Spirit of Christ into the immediate presence of God, and indulged with communion with him, every look of love is of a  
humbling

humbling nature, and each testimony of his grace leaves such an one more abased in his own eyes. And that we may the better come at the meaning of the Spirit of God in the text, as to the manner of the discharge of this duty. I shall,

FIRST, Consider the believer in his first setting out for God.

SECONDLY, In his conversation afterwards in his passage to heaven. And,

THIRDLY, In the reward that he is to receive, when he comes to *see as he is seen, and know as he is known.*

UNDER each of which it will be evident, that it is the great work of the Spirit of God, to bring us to low thoughts of ourselves, and to engage us to *glory only in the Lord.*

FIRST, We are to take a view of the believer in his first setting out in religion. We shall then find him brought under a sense of his being a lost, undone, perishing creature, viler than the beasts of the earth, deserving the same torments with the very devils themselves. We are naturally prone to think ourselves something, when in reality we are nothing; and to fancy ourselves *rich, and increased with goods, when we are poor,* and stand in need of every thing. Nay, so great is our pride, that we say in our practice, if not in words, *Who is the Lord that we should obey him* <sup>a</sup>? The spirit of man, thus vainly exalted,

<sup>a</sup> Exod. v. 2.

exalted, requires the agency of a divine hand to humble and bring it down: and till we feel the power of almighty grace in bringing us to a just knowledge of ourselves, we cannot be said to *walk with God*. Many indeed have, to appearance, set out very well, with determined resolutions for new obedience, and perhaps have done many things for God, and yet, after all, have turned back. And the apostle assures us, concerning himself and his brethren the *Jews*, that they were *zealous for God*, and *followed after righteousness*, but never obtained life by it, as seeking to be justified by the works of the law.<sup>b</sup> They hoped to be *the end of the law* unto themselves *for righteousness*; but when informed by the ministration of the gospel, that they must have *no confidence in the flesh*, they discover that they never had felt the power of divine grace, by their *stumbling* at this, as an *offence* unto them.<sup>c</sup> And indeed the doctrine of the cross, or reconciliation to God by the blood of *Jesus*, as it reduces the creature to the necessity of acknowledging that all the salvation is of *grace*, and not of *debt*, hath ever been rejected by the wisdom and pride of this world. And this will always be the case, till men become the workmanship of *Christ Jesus*, and receive a new creation from his Spirit. As our Lord's errand into this world was to save sinners, to call,

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<sup>b</sup> Rom. ix. 31.<sup>c</sup> Ver. 33.

not the righteous, but lost, sick and perishing souls; so there never was one that came to the Father by him, but was made sensible, in some good degree, of his having sinned, and come short of the glory of God, and of the plague of his own heart, as being *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.* And this, is the very first step towards *walking with God*: for they are the poor and hungry that he fills with good things, whilst the rich and the full he sends empty away. <sup>a</sup> It is to the humble and contrite one that he looks, as one made desirous of his presence by his Spirit, and having a right to it by his relation to his Son. Till we can see ourselves in some measure in the same light with the apostle *Paul*, we must not think of *walking with God*. He who now came not behind the very chiefest apostles, could remember the time, and was ready enough to acknowledge it, when he was a *blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious*: and therefore he recommends *the grace of God* to others, as bestowed on himself, when he was the *chief of sinners.* *But I obtained mercy,* says he, *because I did it ignorantly in unbelief: And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith, and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom*

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<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 53.

*I am chief.* <sup>e</sup> And this I take to be one great thing included in that promise made to *Christ, Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power;* <sup>f</sup> *willing* to own themselves what they really are, sinners by nature and practice, deserving death as the wages of their iniquities; *willing* to submit to the grace of God as given to the most unworthy, and in this way to maintain fellowship with God. Let the thoughts of the heart be never so much exalted before conversion, no sooner doth the Lord visit the spirit of a man with his grace, but *when the commandment comes, sin revives, and the sinner dies;* <sup>g</sup> that is, is dead in himself; he sees what he is, what he deserves, and what would become of him, unless an arm of infinite power and grace relieve him. Thus then, in the first setting out of a believer, it is the constant way of the Holy Spirit to lay him low in his own eyes, and this partly by representing to him the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and more especially, by leading him to an acquaintance with the nature of rich and undeserved mercy: and this agrees with the experience of every child of God. Can we not look back and remember what mean thoughts we once had of ourselves? how were we made to loath ourselves, and lie in the dust before God? Even the common mercies of life, such as food and raiment ap-  

peared

<sup>e</sup> 1 Tim. i. 13, 14, 15. <sup>f</sup> Psa. cx. 3. <sup>g</sup> Rom. vii. 9.

peared as favours we had forfeited, and the least glimmering of hope was received with unspeakable wonder, as an instance of marvellous love. But again,

SECONDLY, If we consider the believer in his conversation, while passing through this world, we shall find that, as he grows in grace, he will encrease in humility. He is not only convinced, in his first setting out for God, that he is less than the least of all his mercies; but this in some measure abides upon him, and he carries it about with him, more or less, through the whole of his conversation. And this is manifested, (1.) In all that he doth for God, and all that he receives from him; and, (2.) In all that he meets with in the way of his providence, whether of an afflictive or prosperous nature.

I. THE man that is truly under the leadings of the Divine Spirit, walks humbly with God in all that he doth for him, and receives from him.

(1.) IN all that he doth for God: and this he evidences, partly by the apprehensions that he has justly entertained of his own insufficiency and impotency to do any thing that is spiritually good, by any power of his own; and partly by an acknowledgement of his unworthiness, when he hath been assisted to do his best.

I. HE walks humbly with God as a necessitous, weak, and helpless creature. One of the first lessons which the Spirit of God teaches us, is, that we cannot of ourselves either speak a good word, or think a good thought, and that *all our sufficiency is of God.*<sup>b</sup> No sooner do we feel, that *when we would do good, evil is present with us,*<sup>c</sup> or that the will may be present, when the power to perform is absent, but we must necessarily, if under the influence of grace, be led to acknowledge that *all our springs are in our God*, and our help alone can come from him. In the beginning of our profession, perhaps, through the strength of our affections, we thought that we had received grace enough for many days, that no duty could be too great, nor any service too hard for us: but, in proportion to our experience, we learn that if we do any thing acceptably, *it is God who must work in us, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.*<sup>k</sup> And as this gives the glory to him, to whom alone it is due; so it hath a natural tendency to humble the soul in itself; and the believer will be ready to say, “ To what a strange degree of  
 “ wretchedness and impotency am I reduc’d  
 “ by my original apostacy? That which I  
 “ believe to be my most reasonable service,  
 “ is now out of my power. *Adam*, like an  
 “ angel, could have once sung the praise, and  
 “ adored

<sup>b</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 5.<sup>c</sup> Rom. vii. 21.<sup>k</sup> Phil. ii. 13.

“ adored the grace of his God at pleasure,  
 “ without weariness or interruption; but  
 “ now, if a serious reflection, or a spiritual  
 “ meditation were to save my soul (as blef-  
 “ sed be God my salvation is not put on this  
 “ footing, yet were this the case) and were  
 “ God to leave me to myself, I cou’d not  
 “ command my heart into such an exercise.”

Thus in all the believer does, as far as he is led by the spirit of *Christ*, he remembers his own insufficiency, and his dependance upon God.

2. As he is humbled, as impotent or helpless, so also as an unworthy creature. Grace hath taught him that the law of God is holy, just, and good, and perfectly agreeable to the divine nature; and the same principle hath acquainted him with his engagements to obedience as a creature, and as an obliged creature, who hath been preserved and supplied through his whole life, by the care and bounty of heaven. Now, as he is sensible, after all his labour and industry to make some grateful returns, that there hath cleaved abundance of imperfection and defilement to every part of his service, this is made use of by the Spirit of God, to lead him out of himself, to an entire dependance upon the righteousness of *Christ* for acceptance. And is it not a very humbling consideration, altho’ there is great comfort attending it, that man now, being fallen, cannot possibly redeem his own soul; but if ever he is accepted, it must be

by the compleat atonement of the Son of God? What the apostle *Paul* says concerning the ceremonial law, is certainly as true of the moral; *If any other 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.* Well, what account doth he make of all this? why instead of boasting before God, says he, *what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.* And lest this should be confined to the ceremonial law, he adds, *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 mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*<sup>1</sup> Let our obedience be never so universal, or never so compleat, whilst there is but one flaw in it, it cannot be answerable to the demands of the divine law, and therefore will stand us in no stead in that respect. For a man to *rejoice in a few sparks of his own kindling,*<sup>m</sup> or to *sacrifice to his own net,* and  
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<sup>1</sup> Phil. iii. 4.—9.<sup>m</sup> Isa. l. 11.

to burn incense unto his own drag, <sup>n</sup> is to declare that he is a stranger, so far, to himself, and the power of divine grace. But where a man is under the guidance of the Spirit of God; he knows that, as his sufficiency for duty; so his acceptance is only in, and from the Lord *Jesus Christ*: by his power he is made ready to every good word and work; and by the sprinkling of his blood he is made acceptable in the sight of God; and therefore his language is, *Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but unto thy name be all the glory.* <sup>o</sup>. And the more he advances in grace, and in the knowledge of *Christ*, the more this conviction, and these dispositions increase upon him.

(2.) As in duty, so in enjoyment, the believer is made sensible of himself, and *walks humbly with God*. This I have shewed in some measure already; as what he is apprised of in his first conversion; and is improved afterwards. And I think I need only appeal for this to the experience of every child of God. Did the Lord ever speak peace to your souls? did he every say, in the whispers of his Spirit; *I am thy salvation*, and thus give you joy in believing? and has it not in this case been the constant language of your hearts, *Who am I, and what is my house that the Lord should thus manifest himself unto me?* <sup>p</sup> When God hath been

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pleased

<sup>n</sup> Hab. i. 16.

<sup>o</sup> Psa. cxy. 1.

<sup>p</sup> 2 Sam. vii. 18.

pleased to discover himself at any time in his greatness, or in the glory of his perfections, we find this hath been the consequence of it. Thus you know it was with *Job*, when the Lord answered him out of the whirlwind, and discovered to him the glory of his power, and wisdom; in the works of creation and providence. What was the reply he made him but this? *Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth, Once have I spoken, but I will not answer: yea, twice, but I will proceed no further.*<sup>1</sup> And again, he says, *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.*<sup>2</sup> And thus the prophet *Isaiab*, after he had been honoured with an extraordinary discovery of the glory of God, says, *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.*<sup>3</sup> Now if such a discovery of the greatness of God hath been attended with these effects, we may readily suppose that the apprehension of his goodness, and the believers interest in it, hath laid him still lower, if possible, in his own eyes. Nor need we have any other proof of this than a christian's own experience. He never enjoys communion with God, but he is sensible, in some measure,

<sup>1</sup> *Job* xl. 4, 5.    <sup>2</sup> *Ch.* xlii. 4, 5.    <sup>3</sup> *Isa.* vi. 5.

measure, of his unworthiness of it: and this is equally true of whatever grace he derives from God. If he increases in knowledge of him, or in love to him, or in faith and dependance upon him, he will still be ready to say, *By the grace of God I am what I am.* And thus, the greater progress he makes in true and vital religion, the more will he lose of that spiritual pride, which is, more or less, the disgrace and unhappiness of every one of us.

2. AND this humility will further be made manifest, in all that the christian meets with from God, in the way of his providence. If the Lord smiles upon him in the bounties of his goodness, as far as he *walks with* him, he will regard every mercy as afforded in the way of his gracious covenant, and designed to engage him more to his service: and whilst he remembers how unworthy he is of these things, he will be the more ready to acknowledge that he is indebted to pure sovereign kindness for the enjoyment of them. And thus in proportion to his improvement in communion with God, the addition of temporal blessings, instead of raising and increasing a vain opinion of himself, will serve as a means, in the hand of the Spirit of God, to make him walk more humbly, and more thankfully with him. He will be ready to say, "*What shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits to-*

“ *wards me?* ” what obligations doth he lay  
 “ me under? and how much have I reason  
 “ to be humbled, that I improve his boun-  
 “ ty no more, nor walk no more thank-  
 “ fully in the sense of it?”

BUT if the same wisdom and goodness should see it necessary to *empty him from vessel to vessel*, to strip him of all, and reduce him to extremity, if he *walks with God* in a humble way,

I. HE will be concerned to eye his sovereignty and equity, in his proceedings towards him, as one who hath a right to dispose of his own at his pleasure. It is only ignorance or pride that tempts the believer to think hard of God in this case, on account of the appearance of severity in his dealings towards him: for we have no reason to be angry at the removal of a mercy, till we can lay some claim to it. *Job* seemed to have a just sense of this, when he said, *Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.* <sup>w</sup> It was the Lord that gave, or who in a way of sovereignty bestowed the mercy, and he had a just right in the same way to remove it. *In all this*, it is said, *Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly, or as it is in the margin, attributed folly to him.* <sup>z</sup> And thus you find *Aaron*, when he  
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<sup>v</sup> Psa. cxvi. 12.

<sup>w</sup> Job i. 21.

<sup>z</sup> Ver. 22.

lost his two sons, *Nadab* and *Abihu*, by fire from the Lord; though it was a very severe dispensation, yet he *held his peace*,<sup>1</sup> he was silent because the Lord had done it. And you are well acquainted with the answer of *Eli*, when judgment was denounced against his family, *it is the Lord*, says he, *let him do what seemeth him good.*<sup>2</sup> There seems to be abundance of force in that expression, *Be still, and know that I am God.*<sup>3</sup> To walk humbly with him under afflictive circumstances, must needs include a willingness to view him as our sovereign, and the just judge of all, who can do nothing but what is right.

2. THE believer in such circumstances, is concerned to act faith upon the wisdom and goodness of God, which will make every thing to issue in his advantage. He shou'd not only manifest his humility in being *still*; but in *hoping against hope*, when there is but little probability of any appearance for him. This made the prophet *Habakkuk* conclude, *although the figtree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*<sup>b</sup> One would think he could

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have

<sup>1</sup> Lev. x. 3.<sup>2</sup> 1 Sam. iii. 18.<sup>3</sup> Psa. xlv. 10.<sup>b</sup> Hab. iii. 17, 18.

have but very little occasion to rejoice, in the want of every thing; but he gives us the reason of it: *The Lord God was his strength<sup>c</sup>*, and therefore he knew that his grace would be sufficient for him. And, methinks, this is the most genuine humility a christian can manifest, when, in very dark appearances, he is enabled to look to him who is the *head over all things to the church<sup>d</sup>*, and able to do exceeding abundantly above all that he can ask or think<sup>e</sup>. We are too apt to say, why should we wait for the Lord any longer<sup>f</sup>? But it is the desire of a true believer to wait upon God, and commit his way unto him, as one who doth great and marvellous things: this seemed to be the case of *David*, when he says to his soul, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God<sup>g</sup>*. He was ready to sink and give up all: but, as his last refuge, he encourages himself in his God. We are for hasty immediate deliverances, like the people of *Israel*, as represented by the prophet *Isaiab*, that took council, but not of the Lord: that walked to go down into *Egypt*, (but had not asked at his mouth) to strengthen themselves in the strength of *Pharoah*, and to trust in the shadow of *Egypt<sup>h</sup>*. Whereas, we are told their strength was to sit still<sup>i</sup>, not in a way of  
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<sup>c</sup> Hab. iii. 19. <sup>d</sup> Eph. i. 22. <sup>e</sup> Chap. iii. 20. <sup>f</sup> 2 Kings vi. 33. <sup>g</sup> Psal. xliii. 5. <sup>h</sup> Isai. xxx. 1, 2. <sup>i</sup> Ver. 7.

indifference, but of duty, to look and cry to God, and leave the event to him. And again, *thus saith the Lord God, the holy one of Israel, in returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; and ye would not*<sup>k</sup>. And we are further told, *therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him*<sup>l</sup>. Well, this is what the christian is longing after. He would be a *follower of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises*<sup>m</sup>: he would submit to the wisdom and judgment of God, and leave it to him to choose his lot for him, in a firm belief that he will issue every thing for his own glory, and to his advantage. And this is especially the case, when the believer is called out to hard services, for which he apprehends his entire insufficiency, or that, to all appearance, his way is quite blocked up. As it was with *Abraham*, who without doubt concluded, that God must work a miracle, or else his son *Isaac* could not be born, or restored to him, after his intended sacrifice. And yet he *staggered not*<sup>n</sup>, knowing the power, goodness, and faithfulness of him who promised. Well, in this we are to walk humbly, submitting our darkeſt concerns to him, who is able to ful-

<sup>k</sup> *Iſai.* xxx. 15.    <sup>l</sup> *Ver.* 18.    <sup>m</sup> *Heb.* vi. 12.    <sup>n</sup> *Rom.* iv. 20.

fulfil all his promises, and perform all his pleasure. Which leads us,

THIRDLY, To consider the temper of the soul, when all imperfection shall be done away, and it shall be admitted into the most intimate and eternal *walk*, or communion *with God*. And we have a very full description of this in that well known passage in the *Revelation*: *The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, 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*<sup>o</sup>. As it hath been observed by all the people of God in this world, that the nearer they have approached to him in a way of communion, the less they have thought of themselves; so we are sure there is no proud inhabitant in the *new Jerusalem*. There the Lord alone is exalted. All that dwell there are perfectly happy, and perfectly humble. Their humility justly arises from the sense they have of the infinite distance there is betwixt God and them. And thus I have considered the believer in his first setting out, in his walk in this world, and in his reward in a better. But to shut up all with a few reflections,

I. WE may learn from hence the sovereignty of divine grace, that God should never

• Rev. iv. 10, 11.

never invite offending angels to *walk with him*, but that *his delights* should be *with the sons of men*. As the capacities of those spirits are doubtless larger, so, had they been the objects of divine grace, they might have been furnished, for such a privilege as this, more fully than we are; and yet he dwells with man upon the earth, whilst they are *reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day*<sup>p</sup>. And thus, by the way, let me observe, that we have no reason to quarrel with the sovereignty of divine grace, in choosing one man and leaving another, till we can charge God with injustice, in leaving the angels to this perdition, and visiting sinful men with his mercy and salvation.

2. FROM hence we may learn, that most men begin at the wrong end, in their obedience. They are for obedience before reconciliation. Whereas, whilst God is our enemy, we can have no friendly correspondence with him. And,

3. WE may also discover the mistake of poor saints in the dark, who think it essential to *walking with God*, that they should always have the light of his countenance: whereas we are, for the most part, to *live by faith, and not by sight*. And our close, and uninterrupted enjoyment is reserved for a better world.

4. IF

4. IF there are such pleasures attending communion with God here below, what will be the joy of his presence in that blessed state?

5. HENCE we may also learn, that he who is a stranger to the Lord *Jesus* cannot be said to *walk humbly with God*, let his other pretensions to humility be what they will. Such may *walk humbly with men*, but they cannot be said to *walk so with God*; while they are practically opposing their pretended wisdom and authority, to that of their Creator, and are despising the only way of salvation which he has revealed.

6. THE greatest privileges, and the highest attainments have nothing in them, that should cause us to think better of ourselves, than is meet. The apostle's reasoning upon this head is so very just, that he that runs may read it. *For who, says he, maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?* With this you may compare what he says in his epistle to the *Romans*: *For I say, thro' the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith.* And surely, if all that we  
have

<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 7.

<sup>r</sup> Rom. xii. 3.

have comes from God, if we *glory*, it must be *in the Lord*.\*

7. MAY not this serve as a reproof to us, who have come so short in this grace. How many times have we gone forth in our own strength into a duty, or against a temptation? How many times have we boasted ourselves in our services, and abused our privileges? may this serve to lay us low in the sight of God. In one word,

8. AND lastly, Let what has been said engage us to admire that God should humble himself to *walk with us*; and let it stir us up to be importunate for more of his presence, grace, and assistance, that we may *walk* more becomingly with him.

\* 1 Cor. i. 31.





# S E R M O N VII.

*On the new birth.*

JOHN iii. 3.

*Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

The first SERMON on this text.

**Y**OU will easily observe, that these words are a part of that most surprising conference, which our Lord held with a certain *Jew*, who is described by his name, *Nicodemus*, by the party he espoused, he was *a man of the Pharisees*, as also by the public office he sustained, he was *a ruler of the Jews*<sup>2</sup>, or a master of the *Sanhedrim* or great council of that nation, as appears I think very plainly from the 7th chap. of this gospel ver. 50th : where an account being given of a meeting of the chief priests and pharisees in a judicial capacity, he is said to be *one of them*. He having heard the fame of Jesus,

<sup>2</sup> John iii. 1.

Jesus, and perhaps, seen some of the miracles which he had wrought; it is said *the same came to Jesus by night*, to escape, as it is probable, the resentment of his countrymen, who had agreed to reject every one who appeared to espouse his cause, or receive his doctrine. Then, we have the manner of his addressing our Lord; he says, *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God*: in which he speaks the sentiments of others, as well as himself. *Christ* had some friends, it is not unlikely, who did not publicly acknowledge him. His conduct, one would think, must needs gain him the favourable opinion of the more sober and judicious, though biased by temporal interests, they were afraid to venture all, and follow him. And what *Nicodemus* said, was not disagreeable to the general opinion of the people, nay, even to his enemies, as the apostle *Peter* observes, upon a very great and public occasion, *Ye men of Israel, says he, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know*<sup>b</sup>. And as it was very customary to give the title of *Rabbi* to teachers or instructors, lest our Lord should receive it as a bare compliment, or testimony of civil respect, *Nicodemus* adds the reason of his addressing him in this manner: *For no man can do these miracles that thou dost, except God be with him*<sup>c</sup>. Many  
very

<sup>b</sup> Acts ii. 22.<sup>c</sup> John iii. 2.

very surprising things may be done, which may carry a shew of being miraculous, without such a divine interposure. But the extraordinary works which were performed by our Saviour stand in no need of any appeal, carrying their own evidence, that the arm of the Lord was with him. Works indeed so many in number, so excellent in their kind, and so great in their degree, that nothing less than resolute infidelity, or direct scepticism could, one would think, have shut the eyes of those, who had an opportunity of being acquainted with them.

IN the text you have our Lord entering upon a most necessary and useful point of doctrine. The expression with which it is introduced, viz. *Jesus answered and said unto him*, seems indeed to be a reply to what was just before said by *Nicodemus*. But it is easy to observe many instances in the new testament, where this mode of speech is used at the very opening of a discourse, and is rather a transition from one subject to another, than a direct answer to a question proposed. So that, as I take it, we are to understand by it no more than this; when *Nicodemus* had thus acknowledged *Christ* as a teacher come from God, he sets immediately upon instructing him into the great things that concerned his everlasting peace, and opens the discourse with a very weighty sentence, *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* You

must have observed that when something of the greatest consequence and undoubted certainty, hath been delivered by our Lord, it was common with him to introduce it with this asseveration, *verily, verily, I say unto you*, intimating the weight and importance of it, and the attention it deserved. Now what he delivers here to this eminent person, was not merely for his own instruction and advantage, as if no other had any concern with it: for this certainly is one of those scriptures that are not of private interpretation. What therefore our Lord said unto him, he saith unto us all, *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*. Accordingly you will observe, that it is laid down in an indefinite way, *except a man*—that is, let his character, or his circumstances, be what they will; old or young, rich or poor, prince or subject, unless he is *born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*. By being *born again*, I understand a spiritual impress wrought on the soul, or a divine principle implanted in it, which before was *dead in trespasses and sins*. By *the kingdom of heaven*, I understand, either the kingdom of grace here, or glory hereafter, the state of the church militant, or triumphant. No man hath a right to church fellowship here, nor will ever have a part in the general assembly above, who hath not this new nature, or is not *born again*. The manner of our treating this subject, will be,

- I. To offer some things which deserve our attention respecting this new birth, and,  
 II. To consider the reasons why those who are destitute of it, and die in such a condition, cannot *see the kingdom of God*.  
 I begin,

I. WITH offering some things to your consideration concerning this new birth. And we have defined it to be a spiritual impress, wrought on the soul, or a divine principle implanted in it, which before was *dead in trespasses and sins*. Now, as a principle, it stands opposed to the particular exercise of grace, and is distinguished from it, as previously necessary to it. For as it is in nature, so it is in grace, a man must have life before he can move, or walk, or perform any of the offices of life: and thus in religion, the mind must first be made spiritual, and the soul be renewed, before it will either relish or breathe after any spiritual exercises or entertainments. Now in regeneration, or the new birth, you will observe.

I. THAT God is the author of it, and that man is entirely passive, in the first reception of this divine principle. I say, the work is altogether the Lord's, and man is only the recipient, and not the origin of it, or co-adjutor in it. What is observed of our first creation, is true of our regeneration. *Know ye,*  
 says

says the psalmist, *that the Lord he is God, it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture*<sup>d</sup>. And to this purpose the apostle *John* says, *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*<sup>e</sup>. Compare with this some other passages of the new testament: *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works*<sup>f</sup>. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures*<sup>g</sup>. *Blessed be the God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*<sup>h</sup>. *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God*<sup>i</sup>. And as this is the current language of the inspired penmen, in the new testament, so it is also agreeable to the antient promises of the covenant of grace, under the old. *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people*<sup>k</sup>. *A new heart also*

K 2

will

<sup>d</sup> Psal. c. 3.    <sup>e</sup> John i. 12, 13.    <sup>f</sup> Eph. ii. 10.    <sup>g</sup> James i. 18.    <sup>h</sup> 1 Pet. i. 3, 23.    <sup>i</sup> 1 John v. 1.    <sup>k</sup> Jer. xxxi. 33.

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<sup>1</sup>. The work is therefore the Lord's, and the glory of it must be ascribed to him. Should it be objected to this, that we are commanded to cleanse ourselves, as in that passage, *wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil<sup>m</sup>. And again, cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double minded<sup>n</sup>*. We answer to this, that these and such like expressions, are not to be opposed to the many scriptures we have already quoted, as though they were inconsistent with them: but they are to be understood rather as intimations of our duty, than of our ability; of what we ought to be, rather than what we are capable of being, by any might or power of our own; and at most they can signify no more, on our part, than the actual exercise of divine grace when received, and that under the influence of him that gave it. For *Job* says; *If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch; and mine own clothes shall abhor me<sup>o</sup>*. And the wise man adds, *who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin<sup>p</sup>?* which will yet further appear, if we proceed to consider, not only that God is the author of this work, but that

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 26. <sup>m</sup> Isai. i. 16. <sup>n</sup> James iv. 8. <sup>o</sup> Job ix. 30, 31. <sup>p</sup> Prov. xx. 9.

that man is entirely passive in the first reception of this divine principle. I allow, that after we are born again, it may properly enough be said that we believe in Christ, the act is ours, though even then the effectual influence and assistance is God's. But in our first conversion, the change which we receive in regeneration, is altogether of God, the creature has no share in this work. Which will more fully appear, if we consider,

(I.) THE state in which we are found, when God begins the good work in our hearts. This the scripture hath represented by a variety of metaphors, all which imply the greatness of our corruption and defilement. We are said, you know, to be *dead in trespasses and sins*<sup>a</sup>, to be blind, nay even darkness itself, as the apostle writes to the *Ephesians*. *For ye were sometimes darkness*<sup>r</sup>. And it is said, *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*<sup>s</sup>. We are also called *the servants of sin*<sup>t</sup>, and said to be *enemies in our minds by wicked works*<sup>u</sup>; yea enmity itself: *The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can be*<sup>w</sup>, since we cannot of ourselves so much as think a good thought. Nay it is said of man, *that every imagination of the thought of his heart was only evil continually*.

K 3

nually.

<sup>a</sup> Eph. ii. 1.    <sup>r</sup> Eph. v. 8.    <sup>s</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 14.    <sup>t</sup> Rom. vi. 17.    <sup>u</sup> Colos. i. 21.    <sup>w</sup> Rom. viii. 7.

nually<sup>x</sup>. Now this is really the state of our case, we may as well pretend to create a world, as to convert ourselves. And so far are we from helping on our conversion, or assisting in it, that we universally make all the head we can against it, and oppose the Spirit of the Lord in his first motions, with respect to this work, till, by the almighty power of sovereign grace, he gains the victory. As to the sum of what might be offered on this head, read at your leisure the third chapter of *Paul's* epistle to the *Romans*, and I persuade myself, comparing it with your own experience, you will have reason to conclude, that if ever you are converted, you must be entirely *God's workmanship*<sup>y</sup>.

(2.) ADD to this the consideration of the exceeding greatness of that power, which the scripture represents as exerted in our conversion. Thus it is stiled a *creation*, and we are said, in the passage just now mentioned, to be *created in Christ Jesus unto good works*. As also it is called a *resurrection*, or believers are said to be *risen with Christ*<sup>a</sup>, and God promises he *will take away the stony heart out of our flesh, and that he will give us an heart of flesh*<sup>b</sup>. It is called a being *drawn by the Father*<sup>c</sup>, a *receiving the Spirit*<sup>d</sup>. And there are other expressions of the same kind, made use of, which imply the utmost degree of power. You have a very remarkable passage to this purpose, in the

<sup>x</sup> Gen. vi. 5.    <sup>y</sup> Eph. ii. 10.    <sup>a</sup> Col. iii. 1.    <sup>b</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 26.    <sup>c</sup> John vi. 44.    <sup>d</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 12.

the apostle's prayer for the *Ephesians*; he prays that they may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints; and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power; which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead<sup>e</sup>, &c. The apostle seems here to want words to express the sense he had of the greatness of that might, which is exerted in the conversion of a sinner. How much think you did *Lazarus* contribute towards his own resurrection? no more can a sinner towards his conversion. The tree must first be made good, before it can produce the least good fruit.

(3.) THIS will yet more fully appear, if you consider, that, to suppose the creature hath a hand in his first conversion, is so far to oppose the main design of the gospel, which is, that God should have all the glory, whilst we have all the blessings of salvation. If a sinner could say, thus far, he changed himself, so far he would have matter of boasting, as having something of his own, that he had not received. And thus the honour of our conversion must be divided between the creature and his Maker; and an easy answer might then be given to the apostle's question, *who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive*<sup>f</sup>? Upon

K 4

the

<sup>e</sup> Eph. i. 18, 19.<sup>f</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 7.

the whole then, if the condition of the human nature is as the scripture represents it, if the work of conversion requires such power as no created being is possessed of, and if the design of the gospel will not admit of the creature's having any part in the work of his own regeneration, we may justly conclude that God alone is the author of it, and man the subject, and not assistant in it. Let a man but seriously look into his own soul, and consider how closely he is attached to sin, and he will find abundant reason to join in the prophet's question, *can the Ethiopian change his skin? or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil* <sup>2</sup>.

HAVING thus considered God as the author of this work, I should have proceeded to have treated on the extent of it. But I shall leave that to a future discourse, and close this with two or three reflexions, on what has been said. And then,

I. IF our assertion be just, that this whole work is the Lord's, we may very evidently see that mere moral suasion, or objective light, is not sufficient to convert a sinner. Some divines have been ready to think, that it is enough for God to set before us the reasonableness of religion, the beauty and excellency of godliness, which, if the mind is made thoroughly sensible of, it will of itself be inclined to pursue it. But alas! we find, that  
 though

though *Paul*, nay even *Christ* himself were the preacher, the gospel would be a dead letter, unless cloathed with the power of God. Many persons of the brightest capacities, and of the most eminent character for seriousness and morality, have yet remained ignorant of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and have, with *Nicodemus*, been stumbled at the first principles of true spiritual religion. When our Lord called to *Lazarus*, to come forth from the grave, all must acknowledge it was not the mere force of words, but a secret divine power that went with them, which effected the miracle. Thus we may hear the voice of the Son of God externally, all our days, and yet, be strangers to that secret and victorious power which attends it, when it brings life and salvation to the soul. And farther,

2. FROM hence we may also see, that if God will work, none can let it. Truly the new creation is too much for us to perform. But with the same ease, that the Lord *commanded the light to shine out of darkness*, he can *shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ*<sup>h</sup>. The apostle *Paul* was, you know, an eminent instance of this. He went on raging in his malice against Christ and his people, and doing his utmost, if possible, to destroy his interest in the world. Yet, of an enemy, he  
is

<sup>h</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 6.

is immediately made a friend; from a persecutor, he became a preacher of the gospel, and the chief of Christ's apostles, as a glorious monument of victorious grace. And, for my part, I cannot read without wonder, what we meet with among the mighty successes that are recorded in the acts of the apostles, at the first publication of the gospel, that *a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith*<sup>1</sup>, persons of all others most prejudiced against it. But,

3. LET not sinners, think it a light or easy matter, on the one hand, or an impossible thing on the other, to be *born again*. Satan hath often served his turn with both these suggestions: some apprehending conversion, to be nothing but an external reformation of life, have rested in a partial amendment, or in cutting off some branches, while the root or stock has remained entire. Corruption must be destroyed in the principle as well as the produce; and this is a work too hard for you. On the other hand be not discouraged, *what is impossible with man, is possible with God*.

4. LET not the christian be disheartened, who perhaps cannot assign any particular season, or remember exactly the manner in which God wrought this mighty work upon his soul. It is enough for us if we are conscious of the blessed fruits of the Spirit. As to the manner of the operation, it is described

<sup>1</sup> Acts vi. 7.

scribed to be like the wind, of which we know very little. *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit*<sup>k</sup>. And,

To conclude, if you have good reason to hope that you are *born again*, remember what you owe to God for such a mercy; let him have all the glory of his own work; remember what was his design in it; examine your hearts, and watch over your lives; that you may be able to make it appear that this great design has taken place in your souls, and that you are *cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*<sup>l</sup>.

<sup>k</sup> John iii. 8.

<sup>l</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 1.





# S E R M O N    V I I I .

*On the new birth.*

JOHN iii. 3.

*Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

The second SERMON on this text.



**A**FTER I had in a former discourse considered, that the particular view of our Saviour, in these words, was to instruct a master in *Israel* in the important doctrine of regeneration; I proposed, more largely, to explain the privilege itself, and then to attend to our Lord's reasoning upon it: that *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*. Accordingly, in order to explain the privilege, I observed,

1. THAT God is the author of this blessing, and that man is entirely passive in the first reception of it: or that this is one of those gifts  
which

which descends from the Father of lights, and in the bestowment of which, he will alone be exalted. This I endeavoured to confirm by several arguments, and closed with some practical reflexions. I proceed now,

2. To consider the extent of this privilege, which I apprehend is universal, as reaching to the whole soul. As the soul was created after the divine image at first, so it was defaced in every faculty, by our apostacy from God; and this image is renewed in part, in the whole mind, when we are born again, and effectually engaged to turn unto the Lord. The work indeed is not perfected at once, or compleat in its degree. But if it is genuine in its kind, it must be universal in its extent. Hence you find the Spirit of God, when speaking of this blessing, uses indefinite terms. We read of being *renewed in the Spirit of our mind*, that is, in the whole soul. And again it is called *the new man, which after God is created in righteousness, and true holiness*<sup>a</sup>; plainly intimating, its author, influence, and extent. Thus, as the whole compass of corruption is comprised in this term, *the old man*, so, the entire work of grace is represented by the *new man*. And as the poison of the one, so the influence of the other, is diffused through the whole soul. Some are so mistaken, as to confine the work of conversion to the understanding, as though it were sufficient

<sup>a</sup> Eph. iv. 23, 24.

ficient to denominate a person a servant, that he *knew his Lord's will*. Others mistake as much, when they limit it to the affections, as though a zeal for God, though never so blind and ignorant, was to *worship him in spirit and in truth*. But how much they are both deceived, we may learn from the instance of *Paul* on the one hand, who, in zeal for God, persecuted the church, and blasphemed the name of *Christ*, till he was renewed by the divine power; and then from *Judas* on the other, who could not be said to perish for want of knowledge, but yet was involved in ruin, his heart being untouched by the efficacy of sovereign grace. The light thrown in upon the understanding, if it is distinguishing and saving, is always attended with suitable impressions on the affections, whence the soul is at once improved and delighted, grows in grace, and advances in useful knowledge. Agreeable to this, we find the apostle speaking of *the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of Christ*, by which *the eyes of the understanding being enlightened, ye may know what is the hope of his calling*<sup>b</sup>, &c. And, you know, it is said of our Lord, with respect to his disciples, that *he opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures*<sup>c</sup>. Observe, it is not said that he opened the scriptures to their understanding, or, by a suitable paraphrase or comment, he

<sup>b</sup> Eph. i. 17, 18.

<sup>c</sup> Luke xxiv. 45.

he explained the great and spiritual import or design of them, tho' it may be well supposed he did that: but *he opened their understanding*: the work was internal, and the soul entirely passive in the reception of it. From whence we may gather, by the way, that objective evidence is not sufficient to enlighten the mind of a sinner. The veil must be taken off from the understanding, and the mind cleared from darkness and prejudice, before it will rightly apprehend, or receive the things of *the kingdom of God*. *David*, even after his conversion, prays to this purpose, *open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*<sup>d</sup>. Moreover, as the new man *is renewed in knowledge*; so also in *holiness*. Thus, you know the description we have of conversion in the covenant of grace, where God says, *I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh*<sup>e</sup>. It is a removing the obstinacy and enmity of our nature, and a bringing us into subjection to Christ. Agreeable to this, it is promised by the Father to him, in the covenant, that his *people should be willing in the day of his power*<sup>f</sup>. Nor is this blessing confined to the understanding and affections, but the judgment is rectified and established; conscience maintains its authority; and the memory becomes a treasury of sacred truth, and a repository

<sup>d</sup> Psal. cxix. 18.    <sup>e</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 26.    <sup>f</sup> Psal. cx. 3.

fitory of spiritual experience. No faculty is indeed without imperfection, but all are changed and altered. This is the new birth or regeneration. But,

3. I WOULD farther observe, that the privilege of regeneration is most valuable, not only in itself, but on account of the blessings which attend it. Its author bespeaks its excellency. Every thing that comes from heaven, must be divine, and highly deserving our attention. What subject should so much challenge our admiration and esteem, as the reparation of the divine image in the apostate creature? But if you add to this, the many precious advantages, which necessarily arise from, or are closely connected with this heavenly blessing, they must needs increase our apprehensions of it. And here allow me to be a little particular, in the following instances. And,

(1.) IN our conversion or regeneration, a vail, of worse than *Egyptian* darkness, is taken away, and we immediately become *light in the Lord*. What more melancholy, than to be deprived of natural sight? Every such object awakens our concern, and engages our compassion. But, by how much the interest of the soul, and the affairs of eternity, exceed those of time, and the body, by so much the more wretched is the condition of every unrenewed, ignorant sinner. Nor is it the least part of the misery of men, in this sad condition,

dition, that they cannot say, *Is their not a lie in our right hand?* Now in conversion, as the apostle expresses it, *ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord*<sup>h</sup>. It is a change, not more excellent, than surprising: hence the apostle calls it *marvellous light*<sup>i</sup>. It is hardly possible to conceive with what a transport of joy a person, who had been long confined to darkness, would welcome the returning light. Nor is it otherwise with an heir of salvation, when he looks back and observes, how *wise* he was *to do evil*, and how ignorant of, as well as averse to the paths of holiness and duty. The very review of his case affects him with horror, as the apprehension of its alteration strikes him with the most pleasing satisfaction. How ready is he to acknowledge, “ Alas, I lately knew nothing comparatively of myself, or my Saviour, my misery through sin, or remedy through grace! all was dark and gloomy; and had not grace prevented, would certainly have led me to the world of utter darkness and confusion!”

(2.) IN our conversion, we shake off the fetters of the worst of tyrants, and take upon us the yoke of the best of masters. Thus you read of the gospel as an instrument in the hand of the Spirit, not only *to open our eyes, and to turn us from darkness to light*, but also, *from the power of Satan unto God*<sup>k</sup>. Satan’s

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power

<sup>i</sup> Isai. xlv. 20. <sup>h</sup> Eph. v. 8. <sup>j</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 9. <sup>k</sup> Acts xxvi. 18.

power is so great in every unrenewed heart, that he may be said to rule and govern there, to have the ascendant in the affections, and the chief influence on the will. As his design is the ruin of mankind, so he suits his temptations to their corruptions; and while they ignorantly propose satisfaction to themselves, they are really, *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath*, pursuing that which, at the best, will not satisfy, and, if the mercy of God do not interpose, must certainly end in their destruction. Now this is the case of every one of us by nature, as the apostle describes it to the *Ephesians*, *Wherein*, says he, *in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*<sup>1</sup>. And from this sad and deplorable condition we are not delivered, till the Spirit of grace rests upon us, and breaks the union between us and this great adversary of God and our souls. There is then such a discovery made of his wickedness and malice, as begets a special and abiding fear of him, and aversion to him in the soul; and thus, renouncing the former subjection to him, the soul is engaged in the service of another, even the Lord *Jesus Christ*; whose service is not only our duty, but our honour and happiness, for the ways of wisdom *are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*<sup>m</sup>. *Satan*

<sup>1</sup> Eph. ii. 2.<sup>m</sup> Prov. iii. 17.

*tan* treats his greatest votaries with deceit and treachery; whilst our Lord is not only just, but gracious and merciful: *his yoke is easy*, for he assists us to bear it; and he treats us as friends, and not meerly as servants. And is it a valuable blessing to be delivered thus from the cruel tyranny of the hardest of all masters, and to be engaged in the service of a most just and bountiful benefactor? such then is the happy alteration the soul passes under, that is delivered from the captivity of this enemy, and subjected to the free and gracious government of our Lord *Jesus Christ*.

(3.) IN our regeneration, we arise from a death in trespasses and sins, to a life of holiness and religion. So says the apostle, *you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins*<sup>n</sup>. The meer light of nature teaches us the preference of good to evil, but it is revelation only which hath fully instructed us into the amiable excellency of grace, and the vile deformity of sin. Now as death spreads itself through the whole animal frame, so sin by nature entirely possesses the soul, and we are as lifeless and inactive in the things of God, as one, who is naturally dead, is in the affairs of this world. The removal of which is the great end of our conversion. Hence the apostle, writing to the believing *Romans*, observes, that the design of God in calling them was, that they should

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be

<sup>n</sup> Eph. ii. 1.

be *saints*, or holy persons. He writes his epistle *to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints*<sup>o</sup>. And he uses the same phrase, in his salutation to the church at *Corinth*. *To them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints*<sup>p</sup>. And agreeable to this, our calling is said to be an *holy calling*<sup>q</sup>, not only as it is the work of the *Holy Ghost*, but as it is *holy* in its tendency: and thus the *grace of God*, where it is received in reality, the same apostle says, will teach us, *that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world*<sup>r</sup>. And the apostle *John* adds, that *whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin*<sup>s</sup>; i. e. in the same way, or in the same degree, with those who are in the world. Thus such a one receives that instruction of the *Holy Ghost* by the apostle *Peter*, who says, *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*<sup>t</sup>. But again,

(4.) IN our conversion we exchange a burdensome conversation with vain company, and unsatisfying enjoyments, for spiritual and delightful communion with the Father, Son, and Spirit, with the saints, and with the world above. Perhaps before conversion, none more greedy after the world, or more  
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<sup>o</sup> Rom. i. 7.   <sup>p</sup> 1 Cor. i. 2.   <sup>q</sup> 2 Tim. i. 9.   <sup>r</sup> Titus ii. 12.  
<sup>s</sup> 1 John iii. 9.   <sup>t</sup> 1 Peter i. 15, 16.

earnest in the pursuit of sensual pleasure and carnal company. But when the mind is changed and renewed, instead of saying, to the world, *Who will shew us any good?* we are seeking for the light of God's countenance; being instructed in some measure, that the world hath nothing suitable to our spiritual nature, or sufficient to make us truly and eternally happy. The character of unconverted persons, you have in short in that of the *Ephesians*, *That at that time, they were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world*<sup>u</sup>. But the end of our conversion you may read in those words of the apostle, to the church at *Corinth*, *God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord*<sup>w</sup>. Now what greater honour or happiness than to have *Christ* manifesting himself unto us, as he doth not unto the world? But,

(5.) IN our conversion, from being under the curse as children of wrath, we visibly become entitled to heaven and glory. I believe I need not go far to prove that *he that believeth not, is condemned already*<sup>x</sup>: and that, whilst a sinner is unrenewed, he is, according to scripture, to look upon himself as *under the curse*. Now, in our conversion, one considerable part of our happiness is, that we are

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called

<sup>u</sup> Eph. ii. 12.    <sup>w</sup> 1 Cor. i. 9.    <sup>x</sup> John iii. 18.

called not only unto grace, but unto glory also; as the apostle exhorts the *Thessalonians*, to walk worthy of God, who had called them unto his kingdom and glory<sup>y</sup>. So likewise the apostle *Peter* speaks of the God of all grace, who hath called us into his eternal glory<sup>z</sup>. And here I might add,

(6.) AND lastly, the consideration of the permanency of this divine principle, and that it shall not be lost, as another infinite advantage that belongs to it. And this might be argued from the decrees of God, from the unchangeableness of his nature and his other attributes, from the account we have in scripture of the everlasting covenant, from the character and satisfaction of the great Saviour, and the interest the believer has in him and his salvation, from what he has already experienced, and what the faithful and powerful intercession of Christ, together with the promises of the gospel, give him leave to hope for. But as I intend to treat more particularly on this doctrine of the saints everlasting safety from another text, I shall proceed,

II. AND very briefly, to consider, why none, but such who are born again, shall ever see the kingdom of God. And,

THE necessity of it is fixed, *first* in the divine will, and *secondly*, in the reason of the thing itself.

I. IN

<sup>y</sup> 1 Theff. ii. 12.

<sup>z</sup> 1 Pet. v. 10.

1. IN the divine will, God hath determined that *without holiness no man shall see his face*<sup>a</sup>. He hath certainly a right to determine under what circumstances we shall enjoy eternal life, or to insist on what he pleases, as requisite to it. And he hath said, *the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God*<sup>b</sup>. They that die in an unbelieving and un sanctified condition, can have no portion in the land of purity, and eternal bliss. *Old things must pass away, and all things must become new*<sup>c</sup>, before we can ever have any foundation to hope for an enjoyment of the blessedness of that world. As those only who *have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb, can stand before the throne of God, and serve him in his temple*<sup>d</sup>; so it is the unalterable decree of heaven, that, *nothing that defiles shall enter into the new Jerusalem*<sup>e</sup>, but they only that do God's commandments have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city<sup>f</sup>. So that had we no other evidence but this, it might be sufficient to convince us, that God hath settled the way to everlasting life, in all ages of the world; and that where he gives glory, he always first gives grace as preparatory to it. But add to this,

2. THE reason of the thing itself. A man without this supernatural change, would be

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<sup>a</sup> Heb. xii. 14. <sup>b</sup> Psal. ix. 17. <sup>c</sup> 2 Cor. v. 17. <sup>d</sup> Rev. vii. 14. <sup>e</sup> Chap. xxi. 27. <sup>f</sup> Chap. xxii. 14.

absolutely unfit both for the employment and happiness of a better world. *Holiness becomes the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honour dwells*<sup>g</sup>; and certainly then, to admit a man, in his carnal, ignorant, and corrupt state, into the general assembly of the church of the first born, and even into the palace of the divine Being, would be most dishonourable to God, and most unfit in itself. *Isaiab* was not only a regenerate and spiritual man, but, I think, it is not to be doubted, had as much acquaintance with God, and conformity to him, as any one of his time; and yet, under a sense of the imperfect circumstances which attend the best of men in this world, when he was brought nigh to the throne of God in a vision, and saw the *Seraphims* bowing before it, and heard them, *crying to one another, and saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory*, he said, *Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts*<sup>h</sup>. Such is the holiness of God that *angels veil their faces, and elders cast their crowns before his throne*<sup>i</sup>, and acknowledge that *heaven is not clean in his sight*<sup>k</sup>, and that, in their most perfect condition, he may justly charge them with folly<sup>l</sup>. Now, what could a  
 finner,

<sup>g</sup> Psal. xciii. 1.    <sup>h</sup> Isai. vi. 1, 2, 3.    <sup>i</sup> Rev. iv. 10.    <sup>k</sup> Job  
 xv. 15.    <sup>l</sup> Chap. iv. 18,

finer, in his unrenewed state, do in such a world? what part could a man, dead in trespasses and sins, bear in such pure and spiritual services as these? The attention of an hour in this world to divine things is a grievous burden to a carnal mind, and the more spiritual the service is, the heavier is the burden: what then must such a man endure, through a long eternity, in the midst of the most exalted devotion, and the most holy and refined conversation? He could have no competent knowledge of the manner in which God is to be worshiped, no capacity for his service, nor any relish for the enjoyment of him. The company of angels would be wearisome to him, and he must needs be uneasy in the society of the spirits of just men made perfect. In a word, to such persons, heaven would be a most disagreeable place, instead of affording them any satisfaction and delight. Well therefore might our Lord say, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* But, to draw to a close, from what hath been said,

I. You will see, that there may be knowledge in the head, without grace in the heart. As many, in the present day, take pleasure in deriding the great fundamentals of religion, so others satisfy themselves with a bare speculative acquaintance with them. Suppose a man had the capacity of a fallen spirit, if he had his vicious nature too, would it not rather in-

crease his misery, than be any ground of rejoicing? It is very possible for a person to have very distinct apprehensions of the gospel, and yet to retain his enmity to the Lord *Jesus Christ*. Would you know therefore, whether your knowledge is saving? Observe what influence it hath upon your hearts and lives; whether in proportion to your improvement in knowledge, you grow in humility; or whether you are not rather puffed up with a fond conceit of your own attainments; whether your apprehensions of the evil of sin produce a growing abhorrence of it; whether this is attended with an increasing tenderness of conscience, and watchful diligence in your walk; whether your acquaintance with the gospel fills your hearts with love to *Jesus Christ*; and, in a word, while you improve in a speculative knowledge of the other world, you die the more to the things of this; and while your hopes increase respecting your interest in that blessedness, your confidence increases also in the merit of that Saviour, by which alone it is to be obtained.

2. Do not take a particular fit of zeal and affection, for this new birth. Many have seemed earnestly to set their *hands to the plough*, who have soon *looked back*. Some like the stony-ground hearers, *when they have heard the word, have immediately received it with gladness: but having no root in themselves, have endured but for a time*<sup>m</sup>. And where this is the case with any, *it had been better for them*

<sup>m</sup> Mark iv. 16, 17.

*them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them<sup>n</sup>.*

3. WHAT enemies are finners to themselves, while they are unconcerned and thoughtless about this blessing, without which they cannot serve the Lord aright, nor have any well grounded peace in their own breasts, or enjoy even the blessings of this life, in a way of true comfort and satisfaction, and much less the hopes of a better? O finners, finners, what are you pursuing! And what are you neglecting! Were you truly sensible of the deplorable condition you are in, you could neither eat your food, converse with your acquaintance, nor lie down on your beds with any composure. Or had you ever felt this saving change, had you ever seen a glimpse of pardoning love, or had a real taste of divine things, how unsatisfying would every vanity, in which you place your present hope, appear? Sad and deceivable state indeed, *to seek the living among the dead!* to sleep on the top of a mast, and sport on the brink of a precipice! And O what then will become of such who despise, and deride the efficacious operations of the Holy Spirit in the new birth! who brand the whole of the christian's experience, with the ignominious names of enthusiasm and delusion! Certainly

tainly our Lord was the best judge, and he says, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* To be strangers to the experimental power of this work upon their own hearts is bad enough surely, men need not enhance the misery of it, by such a daring contempt of its almighty Author, and of its genuine and gracious effects on the hearts of others. That word of *Paul* to the unbelieving *Jews* at *Antioch* may be very justly applied to such men, *Beware lest that come upon you which was spoken of in the prophets. Behold ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.* For, says the author to the Hebrews, *He that despised Moses's law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he is sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace* <sup>P</sup>? But to add no more,

4. WHAT ground of strong consolation have those, who have fled for refuge to the Lord *Jesus Christ*? They have the purpose, covenant, promise, and oath of God the Father, with all his perfections, the merit of the Redeemer's blood, the power of his intercession, and his own glory, together with the

° Acts xiii. 40, 41.

P Heb. x. 28, 29.

the honour of the Spirit, all interested in their happiness, and security. This should fill the hearts of God's people with joy, in the midst of all the afflictions they pass through in this life, give them courage in every danger, and raise their drooping spirits in their darkest hours. Happy indeed, and only happy is he who is *God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works!* In this blessing, we have all other blessings, let our circumstances otherwise be what they will: If God doth this for us, it is as much as our hearts can wish. This new nature makes the poor rich, the simple wise, and changes the sinner into a saint. This is food to the hungry, and cloathing to the naked. And though we pass through a thousand afflictions in this life, and even through the valley and shadow of death, we are still going to take possession of a kingdom. We are entitled to promises and comforts, which will support us in the way, and, being born from above, we shall shortly enter into our *inheritance among the saints in light.*



## SERMON IX.

*The character and privileges of  
Christ's sheep.*

JOHN X. 27.

*My sheep bear my voice, and I know them,  
and they follow me.*

The first SERMON on this text.



HERE are two reasons which our Lord assigns for his speaking in parables: one of which relates to his obstinate enemies, the scribes and pharisees, who wilfully shut their eyes against the clearest light. To these he speaks under these figures, *that seeing they might see, and not perceive, and hearing they might hear, and not understand*<sup>a</sup>; as a just punishment for that inveteracy and contempt, with which they treated his person and his doctrine, notwithstanding all the ratio-

<sup>a</sup> Mark iv. 12.

rational, the divine, and miraculous evidence, which he brought along with him. The other reason of *Christ's* speaking in parables refers to his disciples, who were *slow of heart to believe*<sup>b</sup>, and very dull and imperfect in their knowledge and understanding, and therefore, by this manner of instruction, especially when these parables were explained, the doctrines of truth became more familiar to them, and they were able to conceive and judge more readily about them. So that what was designed as a punishment to the adversaries of our Lord, by his wisdom and goodness, became a mercy to his disciples. In this manner, in the chapter before us, he acquaints his followers, with the intimate relation he stands in to them, and his watchful care over them, under the familiar similitude of a shepherd and his sheep. But this was an entire mystery, a hard and dark saying to the *Jews*. Thus you read, in the context, *This parable spake Jesus unto them, but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them*<sup>c</sup>. And it is very probable the disciples would have known little more of it, if our Lord had not more particularly applied it to himself, and explained it to them.

I SHALL not stay to enquire into the several parts of this parable at present. The most material things in it will naturally fall under our consideration, in the prosecution of the subject

<sup>b</sup> Luke xxiv. 25.<sup>c</sup> John x. 6.

subject before us. All that I shall farther observe, by way of introduction to it, is, that the *Jews* having solemnly asked our Saviour whether he were the *Christ*, he replies, *I told you and ye believed not : the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me*<sup>d</sup>. He refers them to the miraculous works which he had wrought among them. And moreover, assures them, that their incredulity was no surprize to him ; for he knew that they were not his sheep, and therefore it was no wonder that they did not hear his voice, or believe the report that he made concerning himself. *But ye believe not*, says he, *because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you*<sup>e</sup>. In opposition therefore to their character, and in contradistinction from his enemies, he adds concerning his disciples, in the text,—*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me*. As if he had said, “ If the wicked  
 “ despise me, and perish, if they see no form of  
 “ comeliness in me ; yet my friends, my dis-  
 “ ciples, they know the pleasure of conver-  
 “ sing with me ; and all mine elect shall  
 “ hear my voice, and live ; they shall fol-  
 “ low me, and I will make them to lie  
 “ down in green pastures, and lead them beside  
 “ the still waters.” And here then,

I. LET us consider with what propriety and affection our Lord speaks of his disciples : he calls them his *sheep*.

II.

<sup>d</sup> John x. 25.

<sup>e</sup> Ver. 26.

II. WHAT he asserts concerning them, and as peculiar to them: that they *hear* his *voice*. And,

III. OUR LORD's special regard to them, he *knows* them; and their duty and privilege, they *follow* him whithersoever he goes.

I. IT is remarkable with what propriety and affection *Christ* speaks of his disciples; he calls them his *sheep*.

THEY may be said to be *Christ's sheep*, as they were created by him. For we are to know that this Lord, *he is God, it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture*<sup>f</sup>. He it is, of whom it is said, *all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made*<sup>g</sup>. Now it is certain we must be the property of him who gave us our being, and especially as we live upon his providence continually, and are upheld by the word of his power. But this is not the sense of the words in the text, because in this view, our Lord might as well say it of his enemies as of his friends. The vessels which are fitting themselves for destruction, as well as those which are prepared for mercy, are in this sense, his *sheep*, as they are the workmanship of his hands.

THOSE therefore, of whom *Christ* speaks in this place, are his *sheep* in a peculiar sense,

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<sup>f</sup> Psal. c. 3.

<sup>g</sup> John i. 3.

those only, and all of those who are of the election of grace; part of whom are already brought in, many of them got safe to glory, and others there are who must yet be brought in, till they all become *one sheepfold* under the one great *shepherd*<sup>n</sup>, and *bishop of souls*, the Lord *Jesus Christ*. These may be compared to *sheep* on account of their natural, weak, and defenceless condition; they are like *sheep* among wolves, and were they left to themselves, would easily fall a prey to every enemy; and they are only safe, as under the shepherd's care. Moreover they, like sheep, are very subject to go astray. But perhaps, the principal reason of this comparison may be taken from the change that divine grace makes upon them. When, by that blessed influence, the pride and haughtiness, the passion and fury of their nature is effectually subdued, and they are made *meeke and lowly*, in some measure, like their humble Lord; when they are disposed, in some good degree, like him, to the tenderest treatment of others, while they are ready to forgive, and not apt to indulge a severe resentment of the injuries which they receive themselves.

THEY are *Christ's sheep*, as the gift of the Father to him. And this special propriety in them he frequently takes notice of in this gospel of *John*. *Thine they were*, says he, *and thou gavest them me*<sup>i</sup>. Here we might

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<sup>n</sup> John x. 16.<sup>i</sup> Chap. xvii. 6.

consider the Father's right to give them, and the delight and satisfaction of the Son in receiving them from his Father's hands. As God knew from everlasting what creatures he would form, so he had an undoubted right to dispose of them, according to his pleasure. These, by his everlasting purpose, were his *portion*, and; by his own appointment, were *the lot of his inheritance*<sup>k</sup>; and accordingly he gives them to his Son, in the covenant of grace, to which his Son consents, and doth it with a great deal of joy and pleasure, as having his heart fixed upon them. As the Father could bestow no greater testimony of his love on the church, than in the gift of his Son; so it was a peculiar mark of his affection to him, that he gave him all the elect, who were so dear to himself. Now you know nothing is freer than a gift, and what we obtain in this way we generally value, and may safely call our own: yea, it is as really ours, as it was the property of the donor, before he bestowed it upon us. Moreover, they were given to *Christ* as his care, and his reward, as a trust committed to his charge, and as an inheritance, that he should enjoy for ever.

AGAIN, they were his by purchase, as well as by gift. Thus he bought them out of the hands of justice, as sinful creatures. As they were given to him as creatures, so they were purchased by him as sinners. Now what a

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<sup>k</sup> Deut. xxxii. 9.

man buys, and pays an equivalent for, is certainly his own. This was necessary with respect to the elect, for the maintenance of the glory of the divine perfections, which were so much dishonoured by the fall. *He hath purchased the church unto himself, with his own blood*<sup>l</sup>.

AGAIN, his sheep are his by conquest, as well as by purchase, as they are made his *willing people in the day of his power*<sup>m</sup>. This is necessary in order to our happiness and his glory; to our happiness in the enjoyment of him, and to his glory in our subjection and obedience to him. And in this conquest he acts both powerfully, and tenderly; at once to secure the victory over them, and yet to do it with their own consent.

ONCE more, they are his by possession, and that partly in this world, and they will be fully so when they come to glory. According to which it is said of *Christ*, that God the Father *hath put all things under his feet, and given him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all*<sup>n</sup>. But I come now to the next general head, which is,

II. To observe what *Christ* asserts concerning his *sheep*, and which is peculiar to them; viz. that *they bear his voice*. In this, to be sure, he alludes to the usage of shepherds, and

<sup>l</sup> Acts xx. 28.<sup>m</sup> Psal. cx. 3.<sup>n</sup> Eph. i. 22, 23.

and especially of those in the eastern part of the world, where their custom was to go before the sheep; and every flock knew their own shepherd's voice, and followed him, and by his call he recovered them when they were going astray, and brought them into the fold when it was a proper time for them to take their rest. Thus our Lord *Jesus Christ* is as well the prophet of his people, as he is their Lord and governour. And as they are naturally without knowledge, and at best but very imperfect in it, so he hath several ways of speaking to them for their instruction, their reproof, and comfort. It is observable, that he asserts this in general concerning all his sheep. "*My sheep*, whoever  
" are so, not in name and profession only,  
" but indeed, and in truth, these, all these  
" *bear my voice:*" and then he plainly distinguishes them, in this, from the rest of the world, " these, and only these *bear my voice.*  
" Others either hear nothing at all of me,  
" or in hearing, understand not, and in seeing are utterly blind to the excellency of  
" my person, and the great and glorious  
" things which the gospel reveals concerning me; but these *bear my voice.*" Now here we may enquire,

1. WHAT the *voice* of *Christ* is? And
2. WHEN we may be said to *bear* it?

I. THEN, what is the *voice* of *Christ*? The *voice* you know is that by which we convey our ideas of things one to another. By this we impart the secrets of our minds, open our hidden purposes and works, and instruct and comfort those with whom we are conversant. And, in this sense, it was peculiar to the immediate followers of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, to hear his voice, when he was upon earth. As they were honoured with the sight of his person, so he indulged them with a great deal of discourse about spiritual and heavenly things. But then, we are to remember, that the bare hearing of *Christ* speak, though it was a great honour, yet it conveyed no necessary spiritual advantage: for thus *Judas* heard his voice, as well as the rest of the disciples, and a vast multitude of the *Jews*, who never received any saving benefit from him. They heard him cry out, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink*°, and yet they never tasted of the divine refreshment. Nay the worst enemies *Christ* hath will *hear* his *voice*, in the great day, but it will be to their utter confusion and destruction; when he will say unto them, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire*°.

AGAIN, there was a *voice* of *Christ* which the apostle *Paul* heard, after the ascension of our Lord to heaven, which was peculiar to him,

° John vii. 37.

° Mat. xxv. 41.

him, and which we are not to expect; and together with this *voice* he had a vision of his person, that he might be able to say he had seen our Lord, which was necessary to the character of one who was to be a witness of his resurrection. And I may add, that *John* the beloved disciple, in the revelation which was given him in the isle of *Patmos*, had some special discoveries, which we also are not to expect. *Christ* speaks to us in another and more familiar manner.

WE might here likewise observe, that *Christ's* voice was heard under the old testament dispensation. Thus, he spake in the first promise, and in all the sacrifices and other services of the tabernacle and temple; he spake in all the prophecies of that dispensation, and especially in those which relate more immediately to his person, righteousness, death, and satisfaction. His *sheep* then heard his *voice*, so as to *follow* him, and to commit the keeping of their souls to him, though he did not speak so plainly then, as he hath done since, under the present dispensation, when *life and immortality are brought more clearly to light* by the everlasting *gospel*. And now, that we may the better form a judgment of the *voice* of *Christ*, we are to consider him in the several capacities, in each of which he speaks to us. And,

(I.) WE may consider him as a prophet sent from God; and so, he reveals to us the

great mysteries of salvation, and the several glorious and important doctrines of the gospel; the knowledge of which we could obtain no other way. For this our Lord is well qualified, as he lay in the bosom of the Father, and was privy to all the counsels of his will: to this he was particularly appointed, as you find in the promise which God gave to his people of old, *The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me,* though superior in dignity and glory; *unto him shall ye hearken*<sup>9</sup>: and in this office he was actually engaged, as the apostle tells us, *God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*<sup>r</sup>. Now this he did, in part, by his own ministry, while he was upon earth, but more fully, after he was ascended into heaven, by his apostles, whom he inspired with the knowledge of those truths which before lay hid in the wisdom and counsel of God. Thus we are by them acquainted with the great doctrine of a trinity of persons in the unity of the divine essence, which is so full of instruction and comfort to the saints; as they observe how each of the eternal three is concerned in their salvation, and how every way equal they are to the work, which they were severally pleased to undertake. To this purpose, we might also take  
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<sup>9</sup> Deut. xviii. 15.

<sup>r</sup> Heb. i. 1, 2.

notice of the great doctrine of electing love, the wonderful mysteries of redemption, and justification, which are now set before us in the clearest light, together with the convicting and sanctifying influences of the Spirit: these things are, in all their saving efficacy, most clearly and fully revealed to us by *Jesus Christ*.

(2.) As a sovereign and a lawgiver, he speaks to us, in those directions which he hath given us for the worship of God, and for the regulation of our conduct in this world. That he hath a right to speak to us under this character cannot be disputed. It is certainly his prerogative to give laws to his subjects; and that he cannot err herein is plain, from his being perfectly acquainted with his Father's will and glory, and therefore a proper judge how we are to honour him. Now the voice of *Christ* herein is exceedingly plain, and easy to be understood, if we are enabled to attend unto it without prejudice, or partiality. Thus, let the true christian search the scriptures, and he will soon find the great ordinances of hearing the word, baptism, and the Lord's supper, revealed therein. And he need not be long at a loss in his enquiries after what manner these things are to be performed: for I think they are told us in the plainest language that can be. And the same may be said with regard to our personal conduct in all other respects towards the great God, towards our fellow-creatures, whether  
friends

friends or enemies, our families or strangers. Our Lord hath, in his doctrine and his example, told us what he requires of us in these several relations: and it is not because men want direction, or, in many instances, that they do not understand the matter of their duty, that they are so careless about it, but it commonly proceeds from other causes; it is owing to the hardness of their hearts, and the prevalence of their lusts and corruptions.

(3.) THERE is the *voice of Christ* as a redeemer, a saviour, and a friend, in those gracious discoveries, and glorious promises of the gospel, which are designed for the strong consolation of those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Thus he says to sinners, burdened with a sense of their guilt, *Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*<sup>s</sup>. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and be that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price*<sup>t</sup>. He tells them, that *his blood cleanseth from all sin*<sup>u</sup>. And his Spirit assures them, that *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*<sup>w</sup>. To his people in a backsliding state, he says, *Take with you words, and turn to the Lord, say unto him, take away all iniquity,*  
and

<sup>s</sup> Mat. xi. 28.    <sup>t</sup> Isai. lv. 1.    <sup>u</sup> 1 John i. 7.    <sup>w</sup> Heb. vii. 25.

and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips<sup>x</sup>. And he said to Peter, when he prophesied his fall, *I have prayed for thee; that thy faith fail not<sup>y</sup>*: and thus Paul, under the influence of his Spirit, saith to the Romans, *The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly<sup>z</sup>*. To his people, under ill usage from the hands of their enemies, or under any other trouble, he says, *Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me<sup>a</sup>*. And thus, when they are weak and distressed, he leads them to himself, as to the fountain from which, they are supplied with every needful thing.

(4.) THERE is the voice of Christ as the great disposer of providence. So he *speaketh once, yea, twice, yet man perceiveth it not<sup>b</sup>*. Thus he speaks both in merciful and afflictive dispensations. Sometimes he says, *My son, give me thine heart<sup>c</sup>*; at other times, *All things work together for good to them that love God<sup>d</sup>*; and *your light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for you a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory<sup>e</sup>*. Again,

(5.) HE speaks as God's power to his people, and then he speaks not to the ear only, but to the heart. This he doth sometimes with means, and sometimes without them.

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<sup>x</sup> Hof. xiv. 2.   <sup>y</sup> Luke xxii. 32.   <sup>z</sup> Rom. xvi. 20.   <sup>a</sup> John xiv. 1.   <sup>b</sup> Job xxxiii. 14.   <sup>c</sup> Prov. xxiii. 26.   <sup>d</sup> Rom. viii. 28.   <sup>e</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 17.

I take it, the first time he speaks to us effectually in our conversion, as it is in a way of power, so we are absolutely passive. And having removed our deafness, and enabled us to hear and welcome his voice, he teaches us every thing that is necessary, in order to his own glory, and our salvation. All the preaching of the apostles would have had no effect to the salvation of those that heard them, had not *the arm of the Lord been revealed*. *Peter* had never been so happy in the conversion of three thousand souls by one sermon, if *Christ* had not made way to their hearts by his Spirit. And the same may be said of the people of God now: they can receive no advantage by the most evangelical sermon they can hear, unless *Christ* speaks to them in it. So that whoever *plants or waters*, he only can *give the increase*. I should now go on to enquire,

II. WHEN we may be said to *hear his voice*.

BUT I shall leave that, and what follows to another discourse.





## SERMON X.

*The character and privileges of  
Christ's sheep.*

JOHN x. 27.

*My sheep bear my voice, and I know them,  
and they follow me.*

The second SERMON on this text:



HAVING considered in a former discourse,

- I. WITH what propriety, and affection our Lord speaks of his disciples, in the words of the text, when he calls them his *sheep*; I have proceeded,
- II. To enquire what he asserts concerning them, and as peculiar to them; and that is, that they *bear his voice*. And here,

1. I HAVE shewn you, what we are to understand by the *voice of Christ*. And I go on now,

2. To enquire when we may be said to *hear* it. And to be sure this expression means a great deal more than a bare attention to it, or general understanding of it. This we may have, and yet be in no better a state than that of the devils, of whom it is said they *believe and tremble*<sup>a</sup>. It supposes therefore that he hath given us ears to hear, and that he enables us to pay a proper regard to what he is pleased to say unto us. And we may be said then to *hear Christ's voice*,

(1.) WHEN we understand, in some good measure, the meaning, are satisfied of the truth, believe the importance, and favour the sweetness and excellency of the several doctrinal discoveries, which *Christ* hath made known to us, as a prophet, in the gospel. When I speak of knowing the meaning of the doctrines of *Christ*, I do not intend by it a comprehending the whole of any truth, or a being able to account for every difficulty. For the gospel, in all the parts of it, is a mystery, which hath something in it unfathomable, and which we cannot fully comprehend. And thus, when we meet with a doctrinal truth in scripture, our reason and understanding are to be conversant about it,

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<sup>a</sup> James ii. 19.

in a dependence on divine assistance, in our researches into the import or meaning of the terms, under which it is conveyed to us. As, for instance, I must have some notion of the words, *elect*, *ordain*, and *predestinate*, before I can form any just apprehensions of the great doctrine of God's free choice of his people, which is revealed to us in scripture under these terms. And the same might be said, as to the doctrines of *justification* and *sanctification*; we must know what these terms mean, at least in general, or we can form no notion at all of the things represented by them. But though we are, by our reason and understanding, to judge of the latter, or external representation of these important doctrines, yet, this is not enough to denominate us hearers of *Christ's voice*. We must be satisfied of the truth of these discoveries, and feel something of the power, and pleasure of them upon our hearts, or else, the evidence we receive would be knowledge, and not faith. We must entertain them with an entire confidence in his wisdom, faithfulness, and authority, who hath made known these things to us: and then our faith is not in man, but in God, who cannot lie. I take it, those men have no true notions of faith, who say they will not believe what they cannot comprehend, but will assent to a proposition only, as they clearly see the natural evidence of it. This may very well  
become

become them, perhaps, in the pursuit of natural knowledge, or in the study of the liberal sciences. But in things which are supposed to be divine, it is surely most absurd. God commands us to believe several things, because he hath made them known to us; he requires this as matter of duty in us; and as an instance of honour done to him. But these men say, they will not believe even God himself, unless he makes all clear and evident to their reason, than which nothing can be more daring and impious. For they do not treat their fellow-creatures in this manner, where they deem them just and honest. Now a believer hath his name in part from his receiving the several mysteries of salvation, as undoubted truths, upon the sole evidence of *Christ*, whose work it is to bring them forth out of the divine treasury. And such a man is enabled to reason thus with himself: “ Has *Christ* told me so and so? “ well, he dwelt in the bosom of the Father, “ was privy to all his secrets, and though I, “ who am a poor imperfect creature, cannot “ fully understand all the grace or glory contained in them, though I cannot tell how “ to account for many of these things, yet, “ I know, he is a faithful witness, and therefore I will believe him.” But this is not all, a man may go to hell with a great deal of knowledge of the mind of *Christ*, as to the letter of it, and may not scruple to give his

assent to any part of the truth *Christ* has revealed; he may be very orthodox in his judgment, and yet very unsound in his heart. So that we must be brought to know the importance and consequence of these things, and to favour them in their sweetness and excellency, if we attend to them as the language of *Christ*. We must not hear them as a tale that is told, but as containing the mind of God, the *voice* of his Son, the things of the utmost moment, in which our duty is revealed, and on which our comfort and happiness depend. *David* was a man, who greatly delighted in meditating upon the things of God: *O, says he, how love I thy law; it is my meditation all the day*<sup>b</sup>! And how often doth he speak of the pleasure and profit of these contemplations? And what is the reason, but his being enabled to taste and favour the sweetness of them? as he himself says, *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea sweeter than honey to my mouth*<sup>c</sup>. And thus, when *Christ* speaks in any doctrine, he can make it at once instructive and affecting; he can warm the heart with it, as well as enlighten the head,

(2.) To hear the voice of *Christ*, is to regard his laws, as just and righteous, as excellent and desirable, as those which we are obliged to comply with, or submit to, from the constraints of his love, and which we obey

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with

<sup>b</sup> Psal. cxix. 97.<sup>c</sup> Ver. 103.

with a sincere and earnest intention to promote his glory: and this supposes, that the Spirit hath influenced us faithfully, and impartially, to enquire into his will, or in what manner it is he requires, and expects to be served by us. And how disagreeable soever any thing that he commands may be to flesh and blood, to worldly interest, or carnal ease and pleasure, yet the *sheep* of *Christ* desire to have their ears open to his *voice*, and their feet ready to run in all the ways of his appointment. This they do from the regard they have to *Christ's* authority: he is the head of the church, the King of saints, and it is in this view that they obey him. Not because this obedience is the established law of the country where they live, or recommended by the custom of it, or the influence of their superiors; but from an inward persuasion, which they have from the Spirit of God, that this their obedience is just and reasonable in itself. Besides, their love to their Lord is such, that they would show it every way they can. This is the apostle's argument in his epistle to the *Romans*. He supposes they had received the doctrines of the gospel, and therefore were desirous to renounce the lusts of the flesh, as engaged to do so by the love of *Jesus Christ*. *But God be thanked*, says he, *that ye were the servants of sin; but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free*  
from

from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness<sup>d</sup>.

(3.) To *hear the voice of Christ*, is to attend to his counsel, and advice, and as wretched, miserable, and destitute sinners, to come to him, and to *buy of him wine and milk, and gold tried in the fire, without money, and without price*, to seek salvation of him, and receive it from him in all its parts, and branches, on his own terms, and in his own way. Thus, the returning sinner *bears the voice of Christ* in his first conversion, and, I am sure, it is the same *voice* to which he constantly attends thro' all his conversation afterwards. *Paul* had no sooner heard the voice of *Christ*, but he said, *What things were gain to him before, those he now counted loss for Christ*. And he continued always afterwards in the same judgment. *Yea doubtless*, says he, *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 mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith<sup>e</sup>*.

(4.) To *hear the voice of Christ*, is to attend to the meaning of all his providential dispensations, as designed to alienate our affections from sensual objects, and to fix them

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<sup>d</sup> Rom. vi. 17, 18.<sup>e</sup> Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9.

more strongly upon himself; to make us truly useful here, to preserve us, and to make us meet for future blessedness. In order to this, the believer is satisfied that nothing comes by chance, that all is under the direction of *Christ*; and though he sometimes deals with his people, as he did with *Peter*, when he said, *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter* <sup>f</sup>, yet he is convinced that he never doth any thing in vain; and therefore he attentively listens, if possible, to hear whatever *Christ* hath to say, in every mercy and affliction.

(5.) THE saints bear the voice of *Christ* in his ordinances, when they are taught and instructed by them, and by them admitted into communion with him. Here they have often had sweet and heavenly interviews, and therefore they rejoice at these returning seasons, and prepare for them, by washing their robes afresh, and making them white in the blood of the Lamb. They say, with the church of old, *Awake O north-wind, and come thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out: let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits* <sup>g</sup>. By humble and earnest prayer they seek after the free and gracious manifestations of his presence. And as they know his voice on these occasions, so they are filled with joy when they hear it, and cry out, in the language of the spouse in the same song,

<sup>f</sup> John xiii. 7.

<sup>g</sup> Cant. iv. 16.

song, *The voice of my beloved! behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills*<sup>h</sup>. And they rejoice still more when they hear him say, *I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice, I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink, abundantly, O beloved*<sup>i</sup>. But,

(6.) AND lastly, to hear the voice of *Christ*, is to be properly affected with the description he hath given of the heavenly world, and to long for that exalted blessedness, which will attend an everlasting communion with him there. As the *good shepherd* hath given his life for the sheep<sup>k</sup>, so they are persuaded, that he that brought him again from the dead, will make them perfect, through the blood of the everlasting covenant<sup>l</sup>. And as he has commanded his apostles and other shepherds, to feed<sup>m</sup> them, and to fold them, in their way through the wilderness; so they have heard his voice in the gospel, saying, *Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*<sup>n</sup>. And they rejoice greatly in the prospect of that day, when the chief shepherd shall appear<sup>o</sup>, and having separated them from the goats, shall conduct them into the land of rest, shall make them lie down in those green and delightful pastures,

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and

<sup>h</sup> Cant. ii. 8. <sup>i</sup> Ch. v. 1. <sup>k</sup> John x. 11. <sup>l</sup> Heb. xiii. 20, 21. <sup>m</sup> John xxi. 16. <sup>n</sup> Luke xii. 32. <sup>o</sup> 1 Pet. v. 4.

and lead them beside the still and pleasant waters<sup>p</sup> that flow there for evermore; when they shall, in a word, be made like him, for they shall see him as he is<sup>q</sup>, and when they shall sit down with him in his throne, as he is sat down with his Father in his throne<sup>r</sup>. They have heard him say, *Lo, I come quickly, and my reward is with me<sup>s</sup>*: they believe his word, and that the happy hour is not far off, when they shall hear the same voice, saying, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you—enter into the joy of your Lord<sup>t</sup>*. And in the glorious prospect of it they often cry out, *Even so come Lord Jesus<sup>u</sup>*.

BUT I proceed now to the last thing which I observed from the words, and that was,

III. OUR Lord's special regard to his sheep, he *knows them*; as also, their duty and privilege, they *follow* him whithersoever he goes. And,

I. OUR Lord says of his sheep, *I know them*. Knowledge in man may be considered, either as a habit in the mind, or as that habit is drawn forth into exercise, by being conversant with some object. Thus, when we say of a man, that he is a knowing and understanding man, we mean, that he hath good natural parts,

<sup>p</sup> Psal. xxiii. 2.   <sup>q</sup> I John iii. 2.   <sup>r</sup> Rev. iii. 21.   <sup>s</sup> Chap. xxii. 12.   <sup>t</sup> Mat. xxv. 33, 34.   <sup>u</sup> Rev. xxii. 20.

parts, or hath made considerable improvement in useful knowledge. Now as we are distinguished from other creatures by being reasonable, so we are distinguished from one another, according to our different measures of knowledge. And here we are to observe, that some men very much exceed others in clearness of understanding, solidity of judgment, and strength of memory, as gifts of providence, and for which they are indebted immediately to the great author of nature. Others have taken a great deal of pains in the improvement of these abilities, and especially in some particular sciences. And indeed, a tolerable measure of knowledge, in this way, cannot be attained by men without a great deal of time, observation, and experience. But when we think, or speak of knowledge in God, we are to separate from it all the imperfections which attend us, either in what we desire from him, or in what we attain, under his blessing and influence, in these pursuits, or in the use and enjoyment of what we attain. For it is essential to God to know, and to know every thing, and that at once; not by degrees, or one thing after another, as we do, but by an intuitive, perfect, and immediate view of them, in their natures, causes, effects, dependence, yea, every thing that relates to them. That this knowledge belongs to God, and to him only, reason as well as revelation confirms to us. And that

our Lord *Jesus Christ* is possessed of it, we learn, not only from what *Peter* said, to his master, *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee*<sup>w</sup>; but, also from what our Lord says of himself, *And all the churches shall know, that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts*<sup>x</sup>: Nothing more hid and secret, than the purposes, counsels, and devices of a man's heart: and if *Christ* knows these things, he must surely know every thing else: for God only knows the heart. And he who is possessed of one divine perfection, is possessed of them all. Besides, without this knowledge he would not be fit to judge the world. Some sins in that case might escape without due examination; some secret instances of love to, and zeal for his name might be forgotten, and be unrewarded; the hypocrite might continue to wear his mask, at the bar of judgment, and the godly be neglected and condemned. Now, if you take the words in this sense in the text, then the meaning is, that our Lord *Jesus Christ* is perfectly acquainted with the persons and all the circumstances of his people: and we may safely say, that there is no circumstance which concerns us from our birth to our death, but what *Christ* hath his eye immediately upon, and takes special notice of. The inward, spiritual life of a believer is hid indeed to the world, but it is hid with *Christ*,  
and

<sup>w</sup> John xxi. 17.

<sup>x</sup> Rev. ii. 23.

and he is perfectly well acquainted with it, in all its springs and actions, in all its motions and affections, in all its joys and sorrows. This knowledge of his reaches to them all, and to every one of them. He knows them at all times, and under all conditions; he knows all of them as perfectly as if there was but one for him to take notice of; and he knows every one of them, as if they were alone the objects of his concern. And as this knowledge is thus extensive and universal, so there are several properties of it which we may more particularly consider, as,

(1.) IT is a discriminating knowledge. Thus I take it, the word is understood in that passage, *Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his*<sup>y</sup>. What though *Hymeneus* and *Alexander* make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience? should this stumble the saints? No, God will take care of his own interest. We are told, *as many as were ordained to eternal life believed*<sup>z</sup>. And he that believes shall be kept, *by the power of God, through faith unto salvation*<sup>a</sup>. - And so our Lord tells the *Jews*, in the verse before our text, *But ye believe not; because ye are not of my sheep*. They came about him, with a great deal of concern, and said to him, *How long dost thou make us to doubt? if thou be the*

<sup>y</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 19.    <sup>z</sup> Acts xiii. 48.    <sup>a</sup> 1 Pet. i. 5.

*the Christ, tell us plainly*<sup>b</sup>. *Christ* answers them, that he had taken upon him that character, and appeals to his works for his right to it. *I told you, says he, and you believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name they bear witness of me*<sup>c</sup>. Well, they are resolved to shut their eyes, and *Christ* suffers them to go on in their blindness: but this was not the case with his sheep. Again,

(2.) THE knowledge *Christ* has of his sheep is an affectionate knowledge, a knowledge of approbation. Thus we are to understand our Lord when he says to the foolish virgins, *Verily I say unto you I know you not*<sup>d</sup>; that is, I never knew you, as my friends, or as my sheep. As to speculative and intuitive knowledge, *Christ* knew *Judas* in all his hypocrisy, as well as *Peter* in all his zeal, and in all his infirmity too. But the one, he knew as an object of his aversion, and the other, of his love. And this affection shews itself, in the acceptance of the persons and services of his people, and in a sympathetic compassion for them under all their infirmities, in a gracious care over them, and an affectionate communion with them, as a prelude of that acknowledgement of them, before the throne of his Father, in the important day of their account. But,

2. OUR Lord not only says he knows his sheep; but, he also adds *and they follow me*.

Now

<sup>b</sup> 1 Pet. i. 24.

<sup>c</sup> Ver. 25.

<sup>d</sup> Mat. xxv. 12.

Now to follow a person is, either the act of a friend, a disciple, or a servant. If a person, for whom we have an affectionate friendship, is going before us, one in whose company we take great delight, we shall follow him with diligence and speed: and so it will be with the industrious scholar, and the faithful servant. And thus our Lord intends by it, that the hearts of his people are towards him, and to the *remembrance of his name*, and that they desire to tread in his steps, and to follow him in a way of obedience and imitation: and this is their privilege as well as their duty. There are glorious perfections in *Christ*, which are above all imitation; but there are others, which though we cannot reach, we may strive, in our measure, to follow; such as his humility, he *made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant*<sup>e</sup>; his holiness and unblemished conversation; his resignation to his Father's will, and his zeal and fervency for his glory; his patience, constancy, and courage under his sufferings; his unalterable love to the church, and his persevering obedience to his Father, which held out to the end.

AND now to close all with some application, what hath been said may serve,

I. To encourage the weakest follower of the Lamb, when he reflects that he is under

<sup>e</sup> Phil. ii. 7.

der the eye of his Lord, who hath a heart to pity, and hands to help him. For *he knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust*<sup>f</sup>. He loves us, he has laid down his life for us, he has mercifully acknowledged us here, he has promised he will never leave nor forsake us; we have found him true to his word thus far; and we have no occasion to doubt, but that he will faithfully fulfil all the engagements that he has entered into on our behalf, with respect to his acknowledgement of us, if we appear to be his sheep, in the great day of account. But,

2. IN vain do we pretend to *bear Christ's voice*, if we are not concerned to *follow* him. These are the marks, by which his sheep are known now, and by which they must be tried hereafter; they *know* him, and they *follow* him. They must prove their knowledge of him, and their faith in him, by their obedience to him. Mere speculative knowledge will be of no avail, and the highest pretensions to an experimental acquaintance with him will only enhance the misery of their condemnation, who do not follow him in a faithful obedience to his commandments, and imitation of his example.

3. AND lastly, we may safely conclude that *Christ's* sheep shall never perish, since they are in his hands. And he says, in the  
verse

<sup>f</sup> Psal. ciii. 14.

verse following my text, *I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.* But as I intend some discourses from these words, I shall stop here, and leave what I have said to the blessing of the great shepherd, and bishop of souls.





# S E R M O N XI.

*On the final perseverance of the saints.*

JOHN X. 28.

*And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

The first SERMON on this text.



S I design to consider among you that most establishing and comfortable doctrine of the saints final perseverance in grace, and certain enjoyment of eternal glory, I have made choice of the words I have now read, as apprehending they are admirably well adapted to this purpose. If we enquire into the occasion of them ; we are informed a little before our text, that, as our Lord was walking in the temple, he was accosted by some of the Jews with this question, *How long dost thou make us to doubt ? if thou be the Christ, tell us plainly*<sup>a</sup>. What their

<sup>a</sup> John x. 24.

their immediate design was in this question, we cannot be absolutely certain. The generality of interpreters suppose, that hereby they would have ensnared our Lord; for had he acknowledged himself to be the *Messiah*, as their mistaken notions were terminated in his being an earthly prince, coming to deliver them from the *Roman* yoke, I say, had he professed himself to have been the *Messiah*, they would have gone and accused him to the civil governour. However, we find *Christ*, in his reply to them, upbraiding them with their unbelief, says, *I told you, and ye believed not*<sup>b</sup>: which crime was so much the more aggravated by the mighty works which he wrought, which carried their own evidence along with them, that they were effected by a divine power. Now as God cannot be supposed to set his seal to a lie, so the exceeding greatness of that power, that was exerted for the performance of them, was a sufficient testimony to the authority of *Christ's* mission, as coming immediately from the Father. And then, our Lord subjoins the great origin of this their incredulity, *But ye believe not*. Well, and why is it? but, *because ye are not of my sheep*<sup>c</sup>; or, no part of that trust committed to me by the Father, and so are left to the unbelief of your own hearts, and this, without the least reflection on the divine justice? For, as *faith is the gift*  
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<sup>b</sup> John x. 25.<sup>c</sup> Ver. 26.

of God<sup>d</sup>, so he is under no obligation to bestow it upon any person. It is an act of pure favour, which, those, who enjoy it, have no right to in themselves. Our Lord goes on to give an account of his sheep, and their privileges. And the first thing he mentions, is his propriety in them; *My sheep*, “ says he,” “ *hear* “ *my voice*; they are mine, as they are the purchase of my blood, because I formed them “ for myself; they are mine, as I have taken “ them under my care and patronage; they are “ mine, as I delight in them, and will rejoice “ over them to do them good. These, having “ hearing ears, and understanding hearts, given them from myself, attend *to my voice*; “ they can distinguish my voice from the voice “ of a stranger, and are in some measure obedient to my call.” To which he adds, “ *I know* “ *them, and they follow me* <sup>e</sup>. *I know them*, they “ are always before me, known unto me are “ their gifts and graces, all their joys and sorrows, all their dangers and infirmities: and as “ *I know them*, I love them, and delight in “ them. And as a consequence of my writing “ my laws in their hearts, *they follow me*. And “ *a stranger will they not follow* <sup>f</sup>.” Of these things I have spoken to you at large. Then our Lord adds the words of our text, as the greatest blessing of all, *and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them*

<sup>d</sup> Eph. ii. 8.<sup>e</sup> John x. 27.<sup>f</sup> Ver. 5.

them out of my hand. In which words we may observe,

1. THE great portion and privilege of Christ's sheep, and this of the weakest as well as the strongest amongst them; *eternal life* is theirs; *I give unto them eternal life*, says our Lord:

2. THAT this blessing comes to them in a way of gift, and not of merit: *I give*, &c.

3. THE glorious consequence of this: *They shall never perish*; which our Lord confirms, both by his own, and by his Father's care and power. *None is able to pluck them out of my hand*, says Christ in the text, and in the verse following, *none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand*. Each of these very well deserve our particular attention. But as that which may have a greater tendency to answer the design I have in view, I shall raise from them the following doctrinal observation:

*THAT Christ's sheep, being given to him by the Father, or committed to him as a great trust, his faithfulness is engaged, that not one of them, how weak, and how languishing or diseased soever in themselves, shall be finally lost, or fall short of eternal blessedness. I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

In the prosecution of this great and fundamental doctrine of the gospel we shall,

- I. CLEAR our way by some positions, that may have a tendency to explain what we mean by it.
- II. WE shall endeavour to confirm and establish it, by several arguments ;
- III. ATTEND to the most considerable of those objections, which are advanced against it ; and,
- IV. CONSIDER the great improvement, that is to be made of this blessed doctrine, and how far our peace and comfort depend upon the firm belief of it.

WE begin accordingly with the first thing, *viz.*

I. To clear our way by some general positions, which may serve as illustrations of what we mean by the saints *final perseverance*. And in order to state the question, observe,

I. THAT it is not disputed, whether persons, who have an appearance of religion, make large pretensions to an interest in *Christ*, and bear a great profession in the world, whether, I say, such persons may not, after all, fall away and be lost. For we allow that this will be the case with, alas! but too many who have called our Redeemer Lord in this world, and yet have never really been acquainted with his grace, nor indeed have had any lot or share in this matter. It is therefore allowed on all hands, that we may think we are something, and others

may think so of us too, yet all the while we may have only a name to live, and be really dead. Again,

2. THE question is not whether any man, even a renewed man, is in himself a match for the enemies he is surrounded with, such as satan, and the corruptions of his own heart. We are ready to acknowledge that we can no more think a good thought, as of ourselves, after conversion, than before; all our sufficiency being of God. No, view a man separate from the grace of God, and he is unequal to the least temptation. So that the question is not, whether he hath a sufficiency to overcome his enemies in himself, but whether at length he shall not gain a compleat victory over them. But again,

3. THE question is not whether, as to the acting, or exercising of grace, the soul may not many times seem to be in a very languishing condition, and in effect sometimes be at a very low ebb indeed. For this we readily grant hath been the case with some of the greatest believers in the world, such as *David*, *Peter*, and others. And, to add no more,

4. WE are not here disputing, whether a believer may not say, through the weakness of his faith, that he is exceedingly fearful, lest he should fall short, and never hold out to the end: we allow this also to have been often the case of the best of men.

BUT the question lies in this more especially; whether an elect vessel, having once tasted of the grace of God, can entirely lose that which was wrought in him, and so finally perish; whether in the issue, let his apprehensions or fears be what they will, he may either separate himself, or be plucked by any other out of *Christ's* hand. This we must deny, and hope to make it appear very evidently to you, that it is absolutely impossible. You see how express our text is. It is not said, perhaps, or it may possibly be, or there is good ground to hope that they shall not perish, if they hold on believing, or the like; but, in an absolute peremptory manner, *they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.* Which brings us to consider the next general head, and that is,

II. To confirm or establish this great truth, which our Lord himself so strongly asserts in the text. And here we have a very large field opened to us. For as God, in his abundant grace, hath taken special care to furnish his people, in every part of his word, with strong arguments, and gracious promises of consolation; so, as this is one of the main springs of the saints hope and joy, we have such solid, and abundant evidence of it in the scriptures, that one should stand amazed, did we not consider the weakness of faith in the

best of men, that any should entertain a scruple about it. However, we shall begin,

1. WITH the immutable purpose of God in election, as a foundation every way sufficient to build the position laid down in the text upon, *viz.* That none of Christ's sheep shall ever perish. And in order to illustrate this, observe,

(1.) THAT God himself, as in his essence, so in his determinations, is absolutely incapable of the least change or alteration. This is not only confirmed by the word of God, where he is represented as *the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*<sup>g</sup>, but may very easily be evinced from reason. For, let it be considered, if the Lord changes, it must be owing to something in himself, or in his creatures. As to God himself, you know, one of the primary ideas that we have of Deity, is, that he should be always that same wise, holy, just and powerful Being, that he ever was. Thus you know that God speaks of himself, *I am the Lord, I change not : therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed*<sup>h</sup>. As to his creatures, there cannot possibly be any thing in them, or done by them, but what was naked and open before him, even from everlasting. Add to this, that was he to alter on their account, or because of something that he did not fore-know concerning them, this would not only

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<sup>g</sup> Jam. i. 17.<sup>h</sup> Mal. iii. 6.

be to eclipse the glory of his omniscience, but, so far, to render him dependent on the creature; which, you know, is directly contrary to the nature of an infinite, sovereign, and unchangeable Being. This being allowed us, we observe again,

(2.) THAT this immutable Being hath, by a peremptory decree, determined the salvation of his chosen. This we might prove to you from that place, where we are told, that *as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed*: plainly supposing, that some certain number of persons were thus really *ordained* to eternal life. So that from hence it must necessarily follow, that they cannot perish, since an unchangeable Being hath thus decreed that they should enjoy eternal life, who says of himself, *My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure*<sup>k</sup>. This is then the first argument, God is an immutable being, who hath resolved that not one of his chosen ones shall perish. But this truth will be farther evident, if we consider,

2. THAT, the same *Jesus* who hath declared that they shall never perish, hath, by his glorious undertaking, and perfect accomplishment of it, for ever set them so far out of the reach of their spiritual enemies, that all those who would endeavour to *pluck them out of his hand*, shall not be able to effect it. But more particularly.

(1.)

<sup>†</sup> Acts xiii. 48.

<sup>‡</sup> Isai. xlvi. 10.

(1.) HE hath delivered them from sin, the worst of their enemies, that which hath a natural tendency to separate betwixt them and their God. Sin, as it is a violation of God's law, so it is an act of rebellion, and highly provoking in his sight. And he who hath once been guilty of it, by this means, has set himself at a distance from God, and declares open war with him. Now if any thing in the world hath a tendency to promote the destruction of a person, it must be sin. And as *Christ's* sheep, as well as others, have sinned against God, so they must have perished in their iniquities, had he not, some way or other, removed their transgressions from them. Well, this he did by the sacrifice of himself. View him then, as he is represented in the word of God, as taking upon himself the iniquities of his sheep, undertaking, by a voluntary act of his own, to answer for them; and then, though they have gone astray in themselves, yet God can be *just, and the justifier of them*, who thus believe in him<sup>1</sup>: and as he hath *by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified*<sup>m</sup>, there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in *Christ Jesus*<sup>n</sup>; that is, to any of his sheep. And thus, you may easily suppose the difference between God and them is made up, as the apostle speaks, *He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteous*

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. iii. 26.<sup>m</sup> Heb. x. 14.<sup>n</sup> Rom. viii. 1.

ousness of God in him°. They are now, become the objects of God's care and delight. And if sin, that enemy which wars against the soul, and which, if any thing in the world would pluck them out of *Christ's* hands, it must be that, if, I say, that hath entirely lost its power of destroying *Christ's* sheep; we may very safely conclude that they can *never perish*. Sin is undoubtedly that burden which makes *Christ's* sheep groan for deliverance. And tho' they may cry out, as the apostle did, *O wretched men that we are, who shall deliver us from the body of this death*<sup>p</sup>? yet, at the same time, in a view of their deliverer, they may well bless the name of the Lord, and with the same apostle say, *Thanks be to God, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord*<sup>q</sup>. They will carry sin to the grave with them; but as sin would hinder them from entering into glory, so they shall lay aside every degree of it, at their dissolution. Well, this is one, and the principal of the enemies of *Christ's* sheep, which their great shepherd hath overcome. But again,

(2.) *SATAN*, that roaring lion, O with what diligence, with what subtilty and malice, doth he endeavour to ruin *Christ's* sheep! He doth all he can to hinder them from coming into *Christ's* fold: and when they are brought thither, he will labour, if possible, not only to destroy their comfort, but even to pluck them out of their shepherd's hands. But,  
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° 2 Cor. v. 21.

<sup>p</sup> Rom. vii. 24.

<sup>q</sup> Ver. 25.

bleſſed be the Lord, he alſo is a conquered enemy. *Chriſt* as God, hath not only abſolute power over him, and keeps him within limits, which he cannot exceed in his tempting of the ſaints, without his permiſſion; but he hath triumphed over him, as a great conqueror, and that as the head, and in the name of his people. So that, though he may deſire to ſiſt, or even to deſtroy them; yet the glorious captain of their ſalvation, as he knows the neceſſities of his people, ſo alſo the ſtrength of their enemies, and on all occaſions, will appear, one way or other, for their deliverance. And though the deſtruction of this enemy indeed is not ſo entire, as that he ſhall never aſſault the ſaints, or never gain, in ſome meaſure, the advantage againſt them; yet this we know, that he ſhall never be able to ſeparate them from the love of God, or rob them of everlaſting life, which *Chriſt* hath, by his ſatisfaction and righteouſneſs, obtained for them, and ſecured to them.

THAT we may have a more full idea of the malice of this adverſary, he is repreſented in the word of God, not only as a tempter, but an accuſer alſo. He not only endeavours to ſeducer God's people from their obedience to him, but then preſently accuſes them of the crime, with all its aggravating circumſtances, and pleads it for their ruin. And this he is ſaid to do with unwearied diligence,  
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both *day and night* †. Now to counterpoise this, we are assured, that, *if they sin*, he himself is *their advocate* ‡, at the throne; not, as I humbly apprehend, to extenuate our guilt, but to represent continually to his Father, that great atonement, which he himself has made, whereby his people, though guilty in themselves, are become righteous in the sight of God. And in this he gains a renewed victory over *Satan*; for all his malice can never paint sin in such deep and dreadful colours, but *Christ* can plead his blood, and prove it to be capable of cleansing it away. His people may indeed have been greatly polluted, and their *sins of a scarlet dye*, yet as washed in his blood, they become *white as snow*.

THIS adversary may therefore roar, and threaten, and accuse, during the christian's pilgrimage, yet still here is his hope, and his city of refuge. And lest he should be dismayed with the terrible apprehensions of falling into the hands of this enemy, when he comes to give up the ghost, who would doubtless then, if possible, take the advantage, were it in his power, and hurry him into everlasting misery, *Christ* hath promised his presence at that time to secure his charge, and a guard of his angels, to conduct the souls of his people safe to that repose he designs for them, in the everlasting mansions of bliss. Thus then, as to this adversary, you see, that he shall never  
*pluck*

† Rev. xii. 10.

‡ 1 John ii. 1.

*pluck Christ's sheep out of his hand.* For, according to that ancient promise, the *seed* of the woman, has effectually *bruised the head*, or broken the power, of *the serpent* <sup>†</sup>. And then,

(3.) THE world, both as to its smiles and frowns, shall not destroy one of *Christ's* sheep. Sometimes good men seem to be so much glewed to this world, that one is at a loss to know whether they have any desires, or expectations, respecting a removal to their Father's house above. At other times they are so surpris'd, and distressed by unexpected afflictions and disappointments in outward things, that they can hardly believe the great shepherd takes any care of them at all. Thus, one while they feed upon husks, and another they repine at the blessings they enjoy, and murmur at the providence of God. Why, notwithstanding it may be, and is thus at times, with the best of God's people, and though they may be righteously and severely chastis'd for it, yet it is impossible it should effect their ruin. For as their shepherd often leads them over dark mountains, and in a way that they have known but little of; yet he hath engaged, and being in himself immutable, his word must stand, that these things instead of separating them from his presence, and care, and salvation, shall *work together for their good* <sup>‡</sup>. And as he is *the head over all things*

† Gen. iii. 15.

‡ Rom. viii. 28.

things to the church<sup>w</sup>; so it is in his power, you know, to bring good out of the greatest evil, and to bring to pass what is least expected by the creature. Thus, though the believer finds the world a snare to him, as having a great tendency to confine his regards to itself, and sometimes attacking him with its terrors; yet *Christ* bids his people be of good cheer, for he has overcome the world<sup>x</sup>: They may then be sure it shall not ruin or destroy them. It may eat out a great deal of their present comfort, but shall by no means rob them of their future and eternal happiness. And if,

(4.) AND lastly, you add to these death, as rather a supposed, than a real enemy, *Christ* hath also conquered death. And let the believer never so much shrink back, at the thoughts of dying, yet his Lord will be with him, more or less, in that dark valley, and lead him by the hand safe into the future glory.

WE might be much larger upon each of these, but you know they are matters more usually insisted on, and therefore what we are ready to hope you are well acquainted with. That you may see the force of this argument then, observe, that if *Christ* hath overcome all the enemies of his sheep, such as sin, satan, the world, and death; then he hath taken effectual care, that none of these should

<sup>w</sup> Eph. i. 22.

<sup>x</sup> John xvi. 33.

should ever *pluck them out of his hand*, and so, that *they shall never perish*. If he hath reconciled them to God, by the sacrifice of himself, if he hath rescued them from the power of satan, and if he will keep them from the evil of the world, and make them conquerors over death, then surely *they shall never perish*; which was the matter to be proved.

I SHOULD now proceed to arguments, drawn from the nature of the covenant of grace, the promises, and the perfections of the divine Being, with several other considerations which will serve to demonstrate the great truth in our text: but these I shall reserve to another opportunity. Let me only add these two reflections upon what hath been said. And,

1. HATH our Lord given his people *eternal life*? then, this at once destroys the doctrine of merit, on the part of the creature, and the pharisaical notion of working for life. Would it not be the most preposterous thing in the world for a person, who has a clear title to a free bounty from a prince, to set about attaining it by some meritorious piece of service of his own, and that too when he is already in the possession of it? Yes certainly, such a one would surely rather endeavour to testify his gratitude, by paying suitable homage to his great benefactor. And yet, so foolish is man, that though the Lord declares

clares, that he gives his sheep *eternal life*, he is too apt to seek it in a way of desert. This is doing great wrong to our own souls: for if we stay till we deserve this life, before we will entertain any comfortable apprehensions of our interest in it, we may assure ourselves we shall never enjoy it. And such a conduct is indeed a setting up our wisdom in opposition to that of God. He will have the glory of giving us eternal life freely, but we would have it as our own purchase, and in a way of dependance on our own personal merit. Thus then you see how, in this, men oppose the grace of God: and this is not only the temper of those, who are not *Christ's* sheep, but alas! too many that are really related to him, they are for deserving eternal life, and not receiving it as his gift, in a way of pure grace. But again,

2. ARE we in *Christ's* hands, and therefore secured from perishing? let this teach us then, where to go for every needful supply of grace, in our way to everlasting blessedness, and for strength against all our spiritual enemies, and victory over them. For, we are not only *more than conquerors, thro' him that hath loved us*<sup>†</sup>; but of his fulness, we are to receive, and grace for grace<sup>z</sup>.

† Rom. viii. 37.

z John i. 16.



## S E R M O N XII.

*On the final perseverance of the saints.*

JOHN X. 28.

*And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

The second SERMON on this text.



HAVING considered the connexion of these words in a former discourse, I observed the following things as more immediately contained in them :

1. THE great portion and privilege of Christ's sheep : *eternal life* is theirs :

2. THAT this blessing comes to them in a way of grace, and not of merit ; *I give unto them eternal life* : And,

3. THE happy consequence of this ; *they shall never perish* ; which our Lord confirms, first, by an assertion of his own power, *nei-ther*

ther shall any pluck them out of my hand; and then, in the verse following my text, from his Father's care and power also; *My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all: and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand*; and then sums up the whole by asserting his equality with the Father, both in power and glory; *I and my Father are one*<sup>a</sup>. Instead of insisting on these particulars, I chose rather to raise and prosecute the following doctrinal observation, as the subject of our discourse, viz.

*THAT Christ's sheep, being given him as a trust by his Father, his faithfulness is engaged, that none of these should perish.*

For the illustration of which,

- I. I LAID down some general positions, that had a tendency to explain this important doctrine, which I shall not now repeat; and then,
- II. I ENDEAVOURED to establish the truth of it,

1. FROM the immutability of God's counsel, who hath determined their salvation; and,
2. FROM the effectual care which our Lord *Jesus Christ* hath taken to subdue all their enemies.

Not to detain you therefore, with what was then delivered; we proceed now to another argu-

<sup>a</sup> John x. 30.

argument to prove the saints final perseverance, or their never losing, either grace in this world, or glory in the other; and that shall be taken,

3. FROM the nature of the everlasting covenant, which being founded in the grace of God, and not in the obedience of the creature, is therefore *ordered in all things and sure*<sup>b</sup>: and every blessing arising from it, must undoubtedly be secured to all those who are interested in it. If you ask what I mean by the covenant of grace, you need only turn to that remarkable account the prophet *Jeremiah* hath given us of this matter, *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people*<sup>c</sup>. Compare with this the following passage. *And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me*<sup>d</sup>. That this is to be understood of the covenant of grace, or a new covenant (so called, for this reason, amongst others, because there was now a more distinct or *new* display of it) I say, that this covenant is referred to by these passages,

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<sup>b</sup> 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.    <sup>c</sup> Jer. xxxi. 33.    <sup>d</sup> Chap. xxxii. 38, 39, 40.

the apostle to the *Hebrews* puts beyond all doubt, where he says, *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day when I took them by the hand, to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people<sup>e</sup>.* Now observe what the Lord promises here; it is not only that he will put his fear in their hearts, and his law in their inward parts; but an assurance is subjoined, that their souls shall cleave unto him; *They shall not depart from me.* See how effectually God has secured the whole of their salvation to them. Are they guilty? saith he, *I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more<sup>f</sup>.* Are they in fear of losing my favour? *They are born of incorruptible seed, and that seed abideth for ever<sup>g</sup>: and, I will not turn away from them, to do them good<sup>h</sup>.* Are they apprehensive of falling, or departing from me? *I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people<sup>i</sup>.* IT is not said,

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<sup>e</sup> Heb. viii. 8, 9, 10.    <sup>f</sup> Jer. xxxi. 34.    <sup>g</sup> 1 Pet. i. 23.

<sup>h</sup> Jer. xxxii. 40.    <sup>i</sup> Heb. viii. 10.

*perhaps they may; but they shall be to me a people.*

BUT some may object, that this refers to the bringing back the *Jews*, from their captivity. We allow that this may be the literal signification of the words. But they must have a further reference, as appears from the last quotation out of the epistle to the *Hebrews*, and from what our Lord himself says, by which he extends it to the whole election of grace. *It is written in the prophets, says he, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me*<sup>k</sup>. As a confirmation of this covenant, the Lord hath given us many great and precious promises, wherein he hath engaged his faithfulness for the security of his people, and which promises are all *yea and amen in Christ Jesus*<sup>l</sup>. Thus, as the origin of this covenant was meer sovereign grace, so its foundation is established on the divine faithfulness, and the blessings contained therein have an undoubted security, as put into the hands of the mediator, and made over to us by the promise, and oath of him, who cannot possibly lie, or deceive. *He is not a man that he should lie, neither 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*<sup>m</sup>? *For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall*

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<sup>k</sup> John vi. 45.

<sup>l</sup> 2 Cor. i. 10.

<sup>m</sup> Num. xxiii. 19.

the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee<sup>n</sup>. And thus saith the apostle Paul, He is faithful by whom ye are called into the fellowship of his son, who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>o</sup>: And again, Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ<sup>p</sup>: And again, The very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he who calleth you, who also will do it<sup>q</sup>. And to this the apostle Peter gives in his evidence, when he says, We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation<sup>r</sup>. But I go on now to another argument to prove this point, and that is,

4. THE saints union with *Christ*, as members of his body. The strictness of this union is such, that, what he did is accounted to them, and their sins imputed to him. Now, as this union was founded in grace, so it is indissoluble. And as all things are present in the view of God, he knows what will be the temptations and corruptions of his people; and notwithstanding the saving change that passes on them, and the sanctification of his Spirit, he knows what will be the weakness

<sup>n</sup> Isai. liv. 10. <sup>o</sup> 1 Cor. i. 8, 9. <sup>p</sup> Phil. i. 6. <sup>q</sup> 1 Theff. v. 23, 24. <sup>r</sup> 1 Pet. i. 5.

ness and sinfulness of their conduct; but as this has not hindered their being brought into this relation, so it never can influence him utterly to cast them off; for he is unchangeable, and his *gifts and calling are without repentance*<sup>s</sup>. Our Lord gives us an account of this particular, where he speaks of himself under the character of a vine. *I am the vine,* saith he, *ye are the branches*<sup>t</sup>. Here some may object, that *Christ* commands his people to *abide in him*<sup>u</sup>, implying that it must be their act. In answer to this, observe he adds, *and I in you*; and read also those words in the same context, *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you; and ordained you, that you should go, and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain*<sup>w</sup>: Now as the security of the branch is in its union to the stock, so there can be no failure of life, whilst the root suffers no decay, and is constant and large in its supplies to every part, since *It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell*<sup>x</sup>, *that from his fulness we might receive and grace for grace*<sup>\*</sup>. A christian indeed would soon lose all the grace he has, were it not for that connection there is betwixt his Lord and him. *Christ*, related to us as our head, may well be said to be *the author and finisher of our faith*<sup>y</sup>. As he is pleased by his Spirit to give the principle, so he will se-

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cure

<sup>s</sup> Rom. xi. 29. <sup>t</sup> John xv. 5. <sup>u</sup> Ver. 4. <sup>w</sup> Ver. 16.  
<sup>x</sup> Col. i. 19. <sup>\*</sup> John i. 16. <sup>y</sup> Heb. xii. 2.

cure the finishing stroke in our compleat sanctification, and glory. Thus he says, *Because I live, ye shall live also; and in that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you*<sup>2</sup>.

5. WE may argue the final perseverance of the saints, from the intercession of our Lord *Jesus Christ*. And here, that you may the better understand the force of this argument, you may observe,

(1.) THAT our Lord *Jesus Christ*, considered as our mediator, doth intercede in the behalf of his chosen, and more especially, as to their final perseverance. And then,

(2.) THAT this intercession of his, as being founded in his own merit, and the shedding of his blood, is always efficacious. From which we may safely conclude, that all those for whom he thus interceeds, shall inherit everlasting life, or *shall never perish*. Our first position, I believe is allowed on all hands, *viz.*

(1.) THAT our Lord *Jesus Christ* interceeds, or is represented in the scripture, as pleading in the behalf of his people, and especially as to their final perseverance. This matter is put out of all doubt, by that passage in the evangelist *Luke*, where our Lord says to *Peter*, *Simon, Simon, behold, satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith*

<sup>2</sup> John xiv. 19, 20.

*faith fail not*<sup>a</sup>; that is, that it should not finally fail, or the principle, or habit of it be lost. For as to the exercise of it, you know it failed him in a great degree, when a little after he so obstinately denied his Lord. Now if *Christ* thus prayed for *Peter*, the same reason that engaged him to exercise this office of an intercessor on his account, must have the same influence with respect to all the rest, even to the weakest of his flock. For why was it that he prayed for *Peter*, but because he was part of the trust committed to him by the Father; and therefore he was engaged not to lose him? If any should say, this proves nothing, being a particular case, wherein *Peter* only was concerned: it may with ease be replied, that our Lord mentions that which is equivalent to it, concerning all his disciples. *I pray for them* says he, *I pray not for the world*<sup>b</sup>; plainly making a distinction betwixt his disciples, and those, who were not of that happy number. Well, and what is the reason? Why, see what our Lord adds, *for they are thine*, thy chosen beloved ones. In a general sense the whole world is the Lord's, as the cattle upon a thousand hills are his. But these are his in an intimate peculiar sense, as himself expresses it, *All mine are thine, and thine are mine*<sup>c</sup>. They were his also, and, that not only as their creator, but more especially here as their redeemer,

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and

<sup>a</sup> Luke xxii. 31, 32.<sup>b</sup> John xvii. 9:<sup>c</sup> Ver. 10:

and covenant-head. Upon which you may observe, what he says further concerning them. And it is worthy your notice, that this was the parting request which he put up for them, when he was just about to leave them, *And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me, I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition: that the scripture might be fulfilled*<sup>d</sup>. And then a little further, he adds, *I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. And again, Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth*<sup>e</sup>. And then, lest any should confine this to the disciples, he says, *Neither pray I for these alone; but for them also, which shall believe on me through their word*<sup>f</sup>. And as the sum of the whole prayer, he adds, *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me*<sup>g</sup>. Now this would be impossible, unless they were kept by his mighty power, through faith unto salvation<sup>h</sup>. Thus then you see how our Lord interceded for his people while he was on earth. And, though

<sup>d</sup> John xvii. 11, 12. <sup>e</sup> Ver. 15, 17. <sup>f</sup> Ver. 20. <sup>g</sup> Ver. 24.  
<sup>h</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 5.

though now heaven conceals him from our sight, yet he is not unmindful of us, he makes the same requests for us in that world which he did in this. See to this purpose a passage in the *Hebrews*, *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*<sup>i</sup>. And this the apostle *John* confirms, when he says, *If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*<sup>k</sup>. Thus then we have largely proved our first position, that *Christ* interceeds for his people, and that he not only did so while he was on earth, but that he doth it now he is in heaven, and more especially for their final perseverance. Our next position is,

(2.) THAT this intercession of our Lord, being founded in his blood and righteousness, cannot but be efficacious, and so proves the point under our consideration. Observe, it was not an affectionate prayer only that *Christ* put up to his Father for these blessings on his people, which, by virtue of his interest in him, will be answered, but it is attended with something, that farther assures us that the blessings be prayed for will be bestowed; for, says he, *I not only pray for them, but, Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me, &c.* And, the apostle *John* informs us, that *we have an advocate with the Father*, and he gives us this description of him, that  
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<sup>i</sup> Heb. vii. 25.

<sup>k</sup> 1. John ii. 1.

he is *Jesus Christ the righteous*<sup>1</sup>: one who stands before the throne, as the righteous head of the church, who though guilty in themselves, are yet righteous and comely in him. And this it is, that makes his intercession effectual; for as our Lord *Jesus Christ* could not ask any thing of his Father but what is consistent with his glory to bestow, so, for instance, the pardon of sin, the removal of guilt, and the gift of everlasting life, could not be obtained by his intercession, for those who deserve everlasting destruction, unless it were attended with the effectual plea of his own merit. Sin lying at the door, all mankind are naturally and justly condemned, and exposed to ruin, till that is removed by our Lord *Jesus Christ*; and without that it is impossible either that he should pray for such souls to be admitted to glory, or that such a petition, if made, could be answered. For God's justice, being offended, that must be appeased, before he can be reconciled, or the sinner be admitted to his favour. We are to consider our Saviour therefore, as *having by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified*<sup>m</sup>. In the virtue of which atonement he is now gone to his Father's right hand, and there pleads in the behalf of his chosen, and that his plea is most prevalent he himself lets us know, by what he says, as it is related by the evangelist *John, And Jesus*

<sup>1</sup> 1 John ii. 1.

<sup>m</sup> Heb. x. 14.

Jesus lift up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou bearest me always<sup>n</sup>. Now if so, then he must needs hear him, when he put up that prayer for the whole election of grace, Father I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me, where I am; that they may behold my glory<sup>o</sup>. From which we may very safely conclude the final salvation of God's elect: *Christ* interceeds for them that they should not perish, and his intercession is most prevalent, therefore they cannot perish. But to proceed to another argument,

6. THE glorious truth contained in our text, may be confirmed by this consideration; that *Christ's* sheep have his Spirit promised to them, to take up his abode in their hearts, and to remain with them, not for a day or a year only, but for ever. Now if this be true, and we believe him to be possessed of infinite power, wisdom, and grace, his habitation cannot but secure, to all those who partake of such a blessing, a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. This meetness, lest we should mistake, may be considered, in a two-fold way; either as to worthiness, and then it is in *Christ's* righteousness that we expect to behold the glory of God to our comfort another day. But then as flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, that is, a principle of carnality is not consistent with

<sup>n</sup> John xi. 41, 42.

<sup>o</sup> Chap. xvii. 24.

with the perfect purity and happiness of the saints in the world above; so here we are to consider it as the work of the Spirit. He it is that brings the salvation wrought out by our Lord, to our souls, subdues our enmity against it; enables us to receive it with pleasure and satisfaction, and then works all our works in us, and for us. Now if we prove that he is not only sent and given to *Christ's* sheep, but that he abides with them all for these blessed ends, then I think it will naturally follow, that they can *never perish*.

OBSERVE then what our Lord says, to this purpose, in the 14th of *John*. He was now about to depart; well, he will not leave his disciples comfortless: and which way does he take to encourage them? Why, says he; *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you*<sup>p</sup>. Observe, it is not said, he shall abide with you, unless you grieve, affront, and drive him away; and if so, he shall utterly forsake you; but in a peremptory way, *he shall be in you, and abide with you for ever*. He may be as it were quiescent, and for a time withdraw his consolations, but he will never utterly leave you. And then, that this must not be confined to  
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<sup>p</sup> John xiv. 16, 17.

the apostles will appear very plain, if we consider, that the glorious effect or consequence of this blessing, our Lord hath equally secured to all his sheep, when he says, *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one, &c.*<sup>a</sup> And if they are all to enjoy eternal life, then they must all partake of the same Spirit, for *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*<sup>r</sup>. And he who is not *Christ's* shall never see his glory, in a way of peace and comfort. Thus then we see that the whole election of grace have *Christ's* Spirit secured to them, yea, as one that is to remain with them, and that for ever. Now, if so, it is impossible that they should *ever perish*. For observe, this good and glorious Spirit is no less than the most high God, and therefore able, surely, to effect what he pleases. Are they ignorant? he can reveal what he pleases to them; *for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*<sup>s</sup>. Are they disconsolate, or unbelieving? he can enable them to cry, *Abba Father*<sup>t</sup>, and lead them to the Son of righteousness for joy and comfort. Are they subject to fall? he can keep them by his own power, make them more than conquerors, and at length accomplish *the good pleasure of his goodness in them*<sup>u</sup>, and with the dissolution  
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<sup>a</sup> John xvii. 20, 21.    <sup>r</sup> Rom. viii. 9.    <sup>s</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 10.  
<sup>t</sup> Gal. iv. 6.    <sup>u</sup> Eph. v. 9.    <sup>2</sup> Thes. i. 11.

of their bodies destroy even the principle of corruption, that gives them so much uneasiness, while they are on this side the grave. This we might also confirm, by considering the nature of those gifts which this Spirit bestows upon us; such as faith, repentance unto life, and the like. Now as these arise from the free grace of God, as abiding favours, so they are given never to be taken from us, as the apostle *Paul* expressly asserts, when he says, *The gifts and calling of God are without repentance*<sup>w</sup>; or, without a possibility on God's part to repent that he has bestowed them upon us. And if so, if life and salvation are connected with these, then those who are made partakers of them can *never perish*. Now, nothing can be more evident from scripture than that salvation is connected with faith and repentance, or that the same God that gives us to believe in his Son, will also, as another blessing, give us an entrance into glory: for evangelical repentance is unto life: and as *he that believeth shall be saved*<sup>x</sup>; so *we are kept by the power of God thro' faith unto salvation*<sup>y</sup>. Thus then he who is partaker of the former will be of the latter, unless it repents the Lord that he hath bestowed these gifts upon him, which is utterly impossible. Observe, we are to consider faith, repentance and eternal life, as the gifts of God. They are all

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<sup>w</sup> Rom. xi. 29.<sup>x</sup> Mark xvi. 16.<sup>y</sup> 1 Pet. i. 5.

represented to us in his word, under that view. Thus the apostle *Paul* says, *By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*<sup>a</sup>. And the apostle *Peter* speaking of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, says, *Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins*<sup>a</sup>. And as to eternal life itself, we find our Lord, in our text, acquainting us that we have it as an act of favour; *I give unto them eternal life*. You may also further observe, that there is a certain order and connection betwixt these blessings, not in a way of merit, but in a way of priority. Thus he whose sins are done away by the death and satisfaction of *Christ*, shall in time be effectually called, and this as an act of grace in God, and of power in the Spirit; and then he who is called, shall be kept through faith; and he who is so kept, shall at last be compleatly saved. All these blessings are entirely independent on the creature; and where one is given, all the rest necessarily follow. And the reason is because, as I have said, *the gifts and calling of God are without repentance*<sup>b</sup>. If therefore *Christ's* sheep have these gifts bestowed upon them; then they cannot but enjoy eternal life, which was the matter to be proved. But I proceed now to the last argument.

## 7. AND

<sup>a</sup> *Eph.* ii. 8.<sup>a</sup> *Acts* v. 31.<sup>b</sup> *Rom.* xi. 29.

7. AND this may be drawn from the absurdity of the contrary opinion. As one well observes, “ that doctrine is undoubtedly to  
 “ be received, that hath the greatest tendency  
 “ to illustrate the glory of the divine per-  
 “ fections; and no sentiments are to be en-  
 “ tertained that in the least reflect on the  
 “ mercy, sovereignty, immutability or any  
 “ of those peculiar glories of God, which he  
 “ will not give to another.” Now I hum-  
 bly apprehend, that to suppose the possibility  
 of any of *Christ’s* sheep perishing, or that  
 any of those committed to him by the Father,  
 may finally fall from their interest in his favour,  
 carries in it not only an impeachment of every  
 perfection in the Deity, but the greatest slur  
 upon the glory of each of the divine persons  
 in the blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Spi-  
 rit. And,

(1.) As to the Father, to suppose he hath  
 not absolutely determined the final salvation  
 of the elect, is to render him uncertain as to  
 this very important event. For, according to  
 these men, the Lord hath rested eternal life  
 upon certain conditions, which entirely de-  
 pend on the free-will of the creature, whe-  
 ther he will accept them or not, and accord-  
 ing to his acceptance or refusal of these con-  
 ditions, God deals with him, and either be-  
 stows eternal life or excludes him from it.  
 Now observe what this necessarily implies, to  
 wit, uncertainty even on God’s part, whether  
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this blessing is to be his or no. For having given him a condition which is at his pleasure, he may either accept or refuse it. But that the Father has determined the final salvation of his people has been already abundantly proved; and as the purpose is from everlasting, and the decree is gone forth, to suppose it shall in any instance fail of success, and prove abortive, is to suppose an imperfection in the Father's wisdom, a defect in his power; or a disregard to strict justice and faithfulness, or rather indeed a deficiency in all these glorious attributes. And can there be a greater, or a more unworthy reflection on the divine Father? Again,

2. To dispute the certainty of the saints final perseverance reflects great dishonour on our Lord *Jesus Christ*. It is to suppose the insufficiency of his capacity as a Saviour, and the uncertainty of the success of his undertaking; it is to conclude, either that he has not fully answered the demands of divine justice, fulfilled his engagements in the everlasting covenant, and *brought in a perfect and everlasting righteousness*<sup>c</sup>, or that he has not taken care to secure his own purchase, tho' it has been obtained at so inestimable a price; it is to suppose that he will be unfaithful to his own promises, and, tho' he has said he will *love his own to the end*<sup>d</sup>, that yet he will not make it good; it is, in a word, to suppose, after  
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all

<sup>c</sup> Dan. ix. 24.

<sup>d</sup> John xiii. 1.

all he has gone through in order to present the body perfect of which he is the head, he will be content to do it in maimed and dismembered circumstances at last. And again,

3. THIS doctrine casts great reflection either on the ability, or the faithfulness and goodness of the holy Spirit, who has undertaken effectually to *shew the things of Christ* to his people<sup>e</sup>, to purge and *sanctify*<sup>f</sup> them, to give them *new hearts*<sup>g</sup>, to *inhabit them*<sup>h</sup>, and *make his abode* with them, to communicate to them the *spirit of adoption*<sup>i</sup>, to *guide them* by his hand<sup>k</sup>, to conduct them in the way through this howling wilderness, and at last to deliver up his charge safe into the hands of *Christ*, and into the possession of that glory for which he undertook to make them meet<sup>l</sup>.

HAVING thus explained this blessed doctrine, and endeavoured to establish the truth of it, I should have proceeded to consider the principal objections against it, but that I must leave to another discourse, and close what I have said with a few words of application. And,

1. LET this be matter of comfort to christians who have backslidden, and whose hearts mourn on that account. They *have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*<sup>m</sup>. This can be no encouragement to

<sup>e</sup> John xvi. 13, 14. <sup>f</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 11. <sup>g</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 26.  
<sup>h</sup> Rom. viii. 9, 11. John xiv. 16. <sup>i</sup> Rom. viii. 15. <sup>k</sup> John xvi. 13. <sup>l</sup> Psal. lxxiii. 24. <sup>m</sup> 1 John ii. 1.

to sin, but may be a blessed preservative against despair. That there is a necessity for such an advocate, who can plead a perfect atonement and righteousness on our behalf, is such an evidence of the strict justice of God, and his perfect holiness, that it is the best argument for the necessity of purity to the christian character, and the greatest motive to engage us to aspire after growing improvements in it. And since in our best condition, in this imperfect state of things, we are still groaning under a law in our members, which wars against the law of our minds<sup>n</sup>, and we are liable to miscarriages which bring us sometimes even into doubt of our state; what a blessed provision of grace is it, to prevent the dreadful consequences of a state of desperation, that we may apply ourselves to such a powerful and successful intercessor, who is always before his Father's throne to plead for us? But again,

2. LET us try ourselves by this way, whether we are of that happy number, who *shall never perish*. Have we the Spirit of *Christ*? If so, then we are *his*. And would you know whether you have the Spirit? why, he always exalts *Christ*, and humbles the creature. If the more we advance in the appearance of religion, the more vain we grow in the opinion we have of ourselves, and the less we improve in our value for *Christ*, our love to him,

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and

\* Rom. vii. 23.

and our experimental reliance on him, it is a sad proof that our pretensions are not founded on the work of his Spirit, whose proper business it is to lay the creature in the dust, and to take of the things of *Christ*, and shew them to his people. But if, in the midst of all our weakness, we daily improve in humility, and in our honourable esteem of *Christ*, and love to him, it is a good sign that we are under the influence of his Spirit, in whose hands we can *never perish*. Once more,

3. AND lastly, can any of us say, that we have had the experience of *the gifts and callings of God*, and believe them to be *without repentance*? let us then be looking and longing for *Christ's* appearance: for *unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation*<sup>o</sup>. And, in the mean time, let us labour to walk as those who have received so glorious an inhabitant into our hearts, as the Spirit of God. Are we *temples of the Holy Ghost*<sup>p</sup>? O what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness<sup>q</sup>? How should we labour, by our living testimony, to refute the cavils of those who cast contempt on his glorious person, and his almighty work? How should we constantly endeavour to preserve and improve the divine consolations he came to ensure, by a watchful, tender, humble and holy walk? Then may we hope for growing light, and  
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<sup>o</sup> Heb. ix. 28.

<sup>p</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 19.

<sup>q</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 11.

growing comfort; and, in one word, then may we hope to be instruments to spread the glory of rich grace, and maintain a steady confidence of our personal interest in the eternal love of the divine Father, in the perfect atonement of our great Redeemer, and our everlasting safety in the hands of his Spirit.





## S E R M O N XIII.

*On the final perseverance of the saints.*

JOHN X. 28.

*And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

The third SERMON on this text.

 HE doctrine, which from this subject I have been endeavouring to explain and confirm, is the certainty of the saints final perseverance; which I have inferred, at large, from the unchangeableness of the nature of that God, who, as he hath power to bring to pass what he pleases, so he hath by a peremptory decree secured this blessing to all his chosen; from the effectual care which our Lord *Jesus Christ* hath taken to secure them from all their enemies; from

from their interest in the covenant of grace, established upon the best promises; from their union with *Christ*, their interest in his intercession, and their enjoyment of his Spirit to abide with them, the nature of whose gifts and graces are incorruptible and have everlasting life connected with them. And I have proved it also from the absurdity of the contrary opinion, and the dishonour it reflects on the divine Being; on Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

To which I may add, that the reason which is assigned why any, who have made a profession of religion, are left to final apostacy is, their not being of the number of God's chosen; plainly implying that those who are, should be preserved from it. Thus *Judas* was *the son of perdition*<sup>a</sup>. And the apostle *John* says of such, *They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But ye have an unction from the holy One, &c*<sup>b</sup>.

I MIGHT also, in the last place, confirm this doctrine from the various similitudes by which it is represented to us in the word of God, which are abundant evidences that *Christ's* sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand. They are the Lord's own portion, and the lot of his inheritance<sup>c</sup>;

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they

<sup>a</sup> John xvii. 12. <sup>b</sup> 1 John ii. 19, 20. <sup>c</sup> Deut. xxxii. 9.

they are his jewels<sup>d</sup>; they are set as a seal on his heart, and on his arm<sup>e</sup>; they are graven on the palms of his hands, and their walls are continually before him<sup>f</sup>; they are the members of that mystical body of which Christ is the head<sup>g</sup>; the living branches of the true vine<sup>h</sup>: Christ is the bridegroom<sup>i</sup>, and they are espoused to him<sup>k</sup>; they are the Lord's building<sup>l</sup>, founded on the rock of ages<sup>m</sup>; God himself is a wall of fire round about them<sup>n</sup>, their place of defence is the munition of rocks<sup>o</sup>, and the gates of hell shall never prevail against them<sup>p</sup>: their faith is more precious than gold that perisbeth<sup>q</sup>, their hope as an anchor sure and steadfast, cast within the veil, whither Christ as their forcrunner is for them entered<sup>r</sup>: and whosoever drinketh of the water he gives, shall never thirst; but the water he shall give him shall be a well of water in him springing up into everlasting life<sup>s</sup>.

HAVING thus at large established the doctrine itself, I come,

## II. To consider the most material of those objections which are raised against it. And here,

1. SOME argue from the fall of our first parents from their state of innocency, and say, if

<sup>d</sup> Mal. iii. 17.   <sup>e</sup> Cant. viii. 6.   <sup>f</sup> Ifai. xlix. 16.   <sup>g</sup> Col. i. 18.   <sup>h</sup> John xv. 1, 2.   <sup>i</sup> Chap. iii. 29.   <sup>k</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 2.  
<sup>l</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 9   <sup>m</sup> Ifai. xxvi. 4.   <sup>n</sup> Mal. vii. 24.   <sup>o</sup> Zech. ii. 5.  
<sup>p</sup> Ifai. xxxiii. 16.   <sup>q</sup> Mat. xvi. 18.   <sup>r</sup> 1 Pet. i. 7.   <sup>s</sup> Heb. vi. 19.   <sup>t</sup> John iv. 14.

if they, in the rectitude of their nature, were subject to fall, much more a poor weak believer, who has the same enemies, and less strength with which to encounter them. To this it is replied; that there is a vast deal of difference between grace in the believer, and innocency in *Adam*. The one was in its own nature mutable, the other is incorruptible. The condition of *Adam's* standing was settled; the possibility and danger of his fall represented, and the punishment that was to follow. He stood in his own natural strength, and so he fell. But it by no means follows, that the believer should perish from that state, his stability in which is secured by the immutability of God, the steadfastness of the everlasting covenant, the satisfaction and strength of *Christ*, and the habitation of the Spirit. But I proceed,

2. To the consideration of the scriptures, which are principally brought in defence of the possibility of the saints final apostacy. Such as,

(1.) THAT account we have of the stony-ground hearers, who *received the word with joy*, and yet afterwards *fell away*<sup>†</sup>; where I need only observe, that of these it is only said, that they *received* the external message of the gospel *with joy*, which is very consistent with the want of that faith in our Lord *Jesus Christ*, which is absolutely necessary to salvation. And  
you

† Mat. xiii. 4, 5, 6, and Ver. 20, 21.

you know it is added that they *had not root in themselves*; and so only *endured for a while*. To which I will add, that when *Paul and Barnabas* preached to the gentiles at *Antioch*, it is said of them *all in general*, that they *were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord*; but it was only *as many among them as were ordained to eternal life* that *believed*<sup>u</sup>. But this we shall confirm at large under another head, and proceed,

2. To consider that passage in *Ezekiel*, where it is said, that *when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die*<sup>w</sup>. And here it is to be first of all observed, that it appears from the whole scope of this context, that the prophet is vindicating the equity of the divine proceedings with respect to the people of the *Jews*, on whom he had brought heavy temporal judgments, for the heinous instances of their rebellion against him, and departure from him. And if we take the words in a still larger sense, it is very evident they are not to be referred to the covenant of grace, because they speak not the language of it, but of the law. They say *the soul that sins shall die*<sup>x</sup>: whereas the  
voice

<sup>u</sup> Acts xiii. 48.

<sup>w</sup> Ezek. xviii. 24.

<sup>x</sup> Ver. 4.

voice of grace is, that *God hath sent forth his Son to be a propitiation for us*<sup>y</sup>, and that whosoever *believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life*<sup>z</sup>. In one word, there is nothing said here of the imputed righteousness of *Christ*, which is that alone that justifies, but of a righteousness which is a man's own; and which is not the fruit of faith, or of a principle of grace wrought in the heart, but a meer moral, partial, temporary reformation, which however useful it may be, often deceives others by its appearances, and will fatally deceive that man himself who depends upon it. And as a man may fall from it, into open practical wickedness, contempt of all his outward profession, and into obdurate and final apostacy, and receive suitable punishment; all this we allow: but no argument can be drawn from hence in opposition to our text, and the current of the scriptures, which assure us of the eternal safety of *Christ's* sheep. I go on now to consider,

3. THAT passage in the epistle to the *Hebrews*, where it is said, *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an*

<sup>y</sup> Rom. iii. 25.

<sup>z</sup> John iii. 16.

*an open shame*<sup>a</sup>. The argument advanced from these words is to this purpose: If the persons mentioned in the text are true believers, then believers may fall away; but the former is true, therefore the latter. As a confirmation of which, it is observed that the persons spoken of here, are not only said to be *enlightened*, but to have *tasted of the heavenly gift*, that, is say they, to have been fed by faith, on the Lord *Jesus Christ*, and have been *made partakers of the holy Ghost*. Now these are discriminating privileges of believers; therefore the apostle must be supposed to have his eye upon those in this passage, and if so, then there is a possibility for the most eminent saint to apostatize. This is the sum of the objection, I think, in its greatest force.

In answer to which I would first observe, and that only for argument sake, for I hope to shew you the contrary, that though we should grant that what the apostle says here might be referred to the believer; yet I humbly apprehend, that the words being proposed conditionally, to argue any thing from thence, in a matter of disputation, is little more than begging the question. For I cannot but apprehend that it is highly consistent with the glory of God, as a holy Being, to declare in his word the connection there is between final apostacy and everlasting punishment,

<sup>a</sup> Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6.

ment, without supposing the one or the other as necessarily the case and portion of any of his children. And that he may have wise ends in this is equally evident; for as the believer may be considered under a two-fold view, either as in himself, or in the Lord *Jesus Christ*, so the Lord may bespeak him as thus considered in his word. Thus for instance, as to the matter in hand, the most eminent saint while in a state of conflict, view him in himself, separate from the grace and strength of *Christ*, and he is liable every moment to apostatize, because of that propensity there is in his nature to turn aside from God; but view him, on the other hand, as related to, and united with *Christ*, as standing in and by his strength, and it is absolutely impossible. Which though it be undoubtedly the case, yet doth this hinder the Lord from declaring in his word the inseparable connection there is betwixt final apostacy, and the punishment of it? This he may do for the humiliation of his children, and the exalting his own grace. Thus what is more natural than for a child of God, when looking round on all his enemies, in the sense of his own inability to encounter them, to lie in the dust before the Lord, adoring his grace that ever he should be preserved by his mighty power unto salvation, and all this without the least doubt or hesitation as to the security of the blessing itself? May I not say, that unless the

Lord keep me I shall certainly fall, and if I do fall finally, I shall certainly perish, without contradicting my well-founded faith and hope, that he who hath kept me hitherto is able to preserve me, and bring me off victorious, and that he will do so? You see then, that if we refer it to believers, the objection proves of no force, since it is only a declaration of the connection there is between sin and punishment.

BUT as I cannot but apprehend that the design of the holy Ghost here was not to speak of believers; so, if I shew you that there is nothing in the text which can give us just ground to confine it to them, and give you some instances of persons who have arrived at all these attainments, and yet have been strangers to faith in the Son of God, that faith which denotes a man an heir of salvation, then I hope it must be allowed that the passage is entirely out of the question. For though a person, how exceedingly soever distinguished from the rest of the world by his profession and outward appearance, nay by the eminency of his talents, but wanting the root of the matter, may apostatize; yet we are not from thence to conclude, that true believers may.

AND here, for your better understanding the mind of the holy Ghost in this passage, let me observe in general, that, as every gift comes from God as a sovereign Being, he  
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distributes these according to his own pleasure; to some he gives greater, to others less attainments: just as it is in the common bounties of providence, some have as much as heart could wish, while others are in great straits. This we see also confirmed as to natural abilities: some the Lord endues with quick apprehensions, solidity of judgment, and exceeding retentive memories; while others are in want of all these, and this without the least reflection on the justice of God, because they are favours which we have no right to, and he may do what he *will with his own*<sup>b</sup>. And thus it is also as to spiritual abilities, or attainments in religion: some shall be under unavoidable necessity of remaining strangers to the sound of the gospel, as the heathens; while others shall enjoy it, and attend all their days upon it, and yet be almost as ignorant of the great things contained in it, as the very pagans themselves: others again, and which comes to the matter in hand, shall receive the gospel in the letter of it, and arrive at a competent measure of knowledge as to the way of salvation by *Christ*, and yet, contenting themselves with this, are very far from the kingdom of God. Others, again, shall go one step higher, and receive the message, as it brings happiness with it, with pleasure, and satisfaction, and perhaps continue to *rejoice in it for a season*, till afterwards it

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<sup>b</sup> Mat. xx. 15.

appears that they had *no root in them*<sup>c</sup> by their apostacy from it. Some of these have been found, in all ages of the church, to have been favoured with many eminent gifts, such as freedom of expressing themselves either to God in prayer, or for God in the work of the ministry, and which perhaps, though coming from a dead unrenewed heart, being clothed with the energy of the holy Ghost, hath brought life with it to other souls, while the instrument hath been left in the natural enmity of his mind against it. That this may be, and really hath been the case with many, is too well known to be disputed. However our Lord puts it out of all doubt, when he assures us, that *many* will plead their right to the kingdom of heaven in the day of account, in that they *have professed in his name, and in his name have cast out devils, and done many wonderful works*; but notwithstanding all this, shall be rejected by him<sup>d</sup>. Now it is evident, that, without some more than common gifts, these persons could not be said to do these things. Thus *Judas* doubtless preached *Christ*, and very likely wrought miracles, when at the same time his heart was under the government of the basest covetousness, and in order to gratify this wicked principle, he had entertained in his mind the most detestable purpose of betraying his Lord and master. And, as the  
last

<sup>c</sup> Mat. xiii. 20, 21.

<sup>d</sup> Chap. vii. 22, 23.

last thing I shall mention under this head, see the account we have of this matter from the prophet *Isaiab.* *Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice: they take delight in approaching to God*<sup>e</sup>. Here were persons, not only under a profession of religion, but who seemed to bid very fair for sincerity, and yet were all the while guilty of the greatest hypocrisy and deceit.

Now observe, if this may be, and hath been the case with many persons, then, if I shew you that the apostle in this passage hath his eye to such professors as these, and not to true believers, the objection, how forcible soever in its first appearance, will prove invalid. That he hath not then his eye to believers in this place I prove thus: There is nothing, in the whole of it mentioned, either of faith in the Lord *Jesus Christ*, or what is equivalent to it: nor on the other hand any of those privileges by which believers are described, such as their being chosen, *called*, and *saved*, according to the purpose of his grace<sup>f</sup>, *elect* according to the foreknowledge of God<sup>g</sup>, *chosen in Christ*<sup>h</sup>, and the like; but those things only are mentioned, which persons, making a bare profession of religion, may attain unto, in common with those who are really regenerated. Now you will

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<sup>e</sup> *Isai.* lviii. 2. <sup>f</sup> *2 Tim.* i. 9. <sup>g</sup> *1 Pet.* i. 2. <sup>h</sup> *Eph.* i. 4.

plainly see, that we are not to argue, from that which is common to unbelievers with believers, any thing whereby we may properly infer a man to be really born of God. Thus, for instance, all that are born of God have their measure of light and knowledge in the things of God. But all that have light and knowledge are not born of God, as we have before proved to you. And taking this remark along with us, let us now proceed to examine the passage itself.

AND here observe, that the persons spoken of are said to be *enlightened*. The original is φωτισθέντες, which some have chose rather to render *baptised*, than *enlightened*, because of the frequent use of the word in that sense among the ancients, who very commonly when they speak of a person's being baptised, and so received into the christian church, make use of the same word which we translate here *enlightened*. Now if you understand the word here in this sense, you remember that, as in the *jewish* church, *all were not Israel, who were of Israel*<sup>i</sup>; so, in the *christian* church, all are not members of *Christ* who come under that ordinance: this is so apparent that none deny it. But taking the word, as it is translated, I hope none will dispute whether *Judas* must not be supposed to be, in some measure, *enlightened* (and the degree is not set down here) before he could preach *Christ* with the rest of the apostles: and yet

<sup>i</sup> Rom. ix. 6.

yet who have supposed him to have true grace? And thus, though all believers are *enlightened*, as we observed before, it doth not follow that all enlightened persons are believers. So that the first expression hath nothing in it but what the christian enjoys in common with many, who are not in the same relation with himself to the Lord *Jesus Christ*; and this character cannot therefore be brought as an argument that the apostle's design is to speak of believers.

THE next expression is their having *tasted of the heavenly gift*. By *the heavenly gift* the objectors for the most part understand the Lord *Jesus Christ*, and thence infer that these persons must be believers. To this I answer, that persons may be in some measure convinced of their sins, and be full of trouble and anxiety about their condition, and so be looking out after a remedy, and hearing of *Christ* in the gospel as the saviour of sinners, may find some pleasure and satisfaction in the message, and so be said to *taste the heavenly gift*, who yet are never made saving partakers of it. Observe, it is not said having *fed on Christ by faith*; for, were that the case, our Lord soon puts an end to the controversy, by assuring us, that whoever *eateth his flesh and drinketh his blood hath life eternal*\*. So that *tasting* in the text must be something different from *feeding on Christ*; or else apostacy, final apostacy I mean,

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\* John vi. 54.

and that is what we are contending about, would be impossible. This expression therefore hath nothing in it that proves the persons to be believers. For a person may have some slight superficial *relish* of *Christ* in the gospel, and yet never be *drawn* to him by *the Father* <sup>1</sup>.

THE next expression, and that which they most rely upon, is their being *made partakers of the holy Ghost*. Now, observe, the holy Ghost in scripture is put either for the third person in the sacred Trinity, as one with the Father, and the Son, *God over all blessed for ever*; or else for those gifts and graces which he bestows upon mankind. That he is thus to be understood in scripture is universally allowed. If therefore you understand the words in the former sense, we have before at large proved to you, that wherever he comes, it is to *take up his abode* for ever, which must necessarily prevent final apostacy. So that it must be referred to those gifts, which, in a sovereign way, as I have before shewn you, he gives to many, whom he never designs to bring to glory.

As to the next expression, *viz.* their *tasting of the good word of God*, I have already explained it, by observing, that persons may receive the gospel with joy, and yet not mix it with faith. And as to *the powers of the world to come*, if you understand this of the doctrines  
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<sup>1</sup> John vi. 44.

of the resurrection and the final judgment, these may influence a person to a considerable degree of morality in his conversation, who may be yet wholly *ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish a righteousness of his own*<sup>m</sup>, and seeking salvation, *as it were by the deeds of the law*<sup>n</sup>, may fall short of it.

THUS then I have shewn you that there is nothing in all this passage that contradicts the proposition laid down in our text: for though persons arriving at all these attainments may fall away, yet the least of *Christ's* sheep shall not, being under his care and patronage. And as a further confirmation of it, let me only add, what the apostle says to these very *Hebrews*, in the words just following those under our consideration, *But beloved we are persuaded, that is, we are confident*<sup>o</sup>, *of better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak*<sup>p</sup>. As if he had said, “ Though we speak to you all as pro-  
 “ fessors of religion, and assure you, that if  
 “ any of you having made such a profession,  
 “ and rest in external attainments, and after-  
 “ wards fall away, and apostatize, it will be  
 “ next to impossible, that is very difficult,  
 “ that you should be renewed again to repen-  
 “ tance; yet for your encouragement *who are*  
 “ *beloved*, we are persuaded that this will ne-

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<sup>m</sup> Rom. x. 3.    <sup>n</sup> Rom. iii. 20.    <sup>o</sup> *πεπεισμεθα*.    <sup>p</sup> Heb. vi. 9.

“ ver be your case, God having now bestowed  
 “ upon you those graces of the holy Ghost  
 “ which accompany salvation.”

AND here, lest any doubting soul should from this text write bitter things against himself, remember, that though the words seem to run in an absolute way, yet the word we translate *impossible* hath been taken in other places, and I apprehend it must in this, with limitation. Thus our Lord says, *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*<sup>§</sup>; and yet we know that many who have been rich, and for a time have trusted in their riches, are now set down with *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, in that blessed kingdom. And besides our Saviour adds, when his disciples were astonished at these words, *with men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible*<sup>¶</sup>. So that all allow, that our Lord is only expressing the great difficulty that attended it: and why may not the word have the same sense here? Thus then I have largely considered this passage, and I have been the more particular upon it, not only because of its difficulties, but the very great applause it hath met with when produced in favour of the apostacy of the saints; whereas in reality it hath no manner of reference to them, and if it had, it is only an intimation of the connection between apostacy

§ Mark x. 25.

¶ Ver. 27.

stacy, and the punishment of it, for the humiliation of the faint, and the exalting the glory of the grace of God.

(4.) THE same answer may be given to that passage, where the apostle says, *For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment; and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries:* which, if you understand it of final apostacy, it supposes nothing, in fact, as to the possibility of the saints falling under it; but only, in general, that wherever any fall from their profession, if they renounce the sacrifice of *Christ*, there is no other provision for their salvation. And should any man infer from my saying to a fellow-christian, If you should appear in the end to be no true believer, by your final apostacy, you will certainly be damned; would it, by any rational conclusion follow, that therefore the faint that is really so, may be liable to so dreadful a condition? Thus then I hope I have let you a little into the fallacy of the reasonings that are made use of from this passage.

(5.) THE next portion of scripture I shall turn you to, that is advanced in favour of the saints apostacy, is that where it is said, *Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure*

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in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition : but of them that believe, to the saving of the soul<sup>t</sup>. Those who plead for the possibility of the saints falling from grace, find fault here with our translation of the words, and render them thus : *Now the just shall live by faith, but if they draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in them.* From whence they form this argument ; If by the *just man* here is meant the believer, then, if there is a possibility of his falling, there is also a possibility of the falling of the greatest saint upon earth. But the former is true, therefore also the latter. As to the first proposition, that it is spoken of believers is evident, from the character that is given of them ; they are *the just*, and they *live by faith*. So that they think they have good ground to conclude, that the meaning of the words runs thus : *The just shall live by faith*, that is, if he continues in his faith, *but if he draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.* This I take to be the sum of what is produced from this text in their favour.

IN answer to which, what I said under another objection will, I think, solve every difficulty that can remain in this. For, observe, if you suppose it to refer to the believer, what doth it conclude, but this, that God may declare, for the humiliation of the saint, and the exaltation of his own grace,  
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<sup>t</sup> Heb. x. 38, 39.

the connection there is betwixt sin and punishment, without supposing either the one or the other necessarily in his chosen? It is evident to every one, that the words are proposed in a conditional form: and to argue any thing from thence to a matter in dispute, as I have before shewn you, is begging the question. Were this all that we could say to the objection, for my own part, I cannot see but it might be sufficient to convince every one acquainted with the word of God, and duly attending to it. But if, on the contrary, I shew you, that the design of the holy Ghost was to speak of the believer only in the first expression, and of a person making only a profession of religion, and having only a form of godliness, in the next; it must be allowed, that the argument drawn from hence to support the final apostacy of the saints cannot but be entirely inconclusive. For though some may *draw back* in the sense of the text, yet it doth not therefore follow, that the true believer may.

BUT that you may better understand this passage, you may observe, that the apostle is, through the whole of this chapter, speaking of two sorts of persons, both having a form of godliness, and one of them no more than a form. Thus he speaks a little before of some who *forsake the assemblies of Christ*, and this, in contradistinction from the true members of his mystical body, who desire to preserve

a due regard to the honour of his institutions<sup>u</sup>. And many other instances might be mentioned in the context, were it needful: but I believe, if you consult it at your leisure, you will easily perceive the truth of this observation. Well, taking this along with us, we may see how beautifully the apostle carries on the same design in the words before us. There are two different states mentioned which are applicable to two different sorts of persons. These two states are *πίστεως* on the one hand, and *ὑποσολῆς* on the other, of them that *believe*, and of them that *draw back*.

OBSERVE again the different ends that are assigned to these persons; the one shall *live*, and *believe to the saving of their souls*; and the other shall be disowned by God; he *will have no pleasure in them*, notwithstanding all their pretensions, and in the issue shall fall into *perdition*. And now what can any infer from all this, but that the believer, being *kept by the mighty power of God*, shall in the end obtain everlasting *salvation*; whereas, on the contrary, persons who *draw back* shall certainly be destroyed? which may with the utmost freedom be allowed, without denying the doctrine of the saints final perseverance. Thus then you see how foreign this passage is from the purpose for which it is brought; for instead of containing any thing of that nature, it appears to carry in it a plain evidence of the con-

<sup>u</sup> Heb. x. 25, 26.

contrary truth, which I have been endeavouring to confirm. For you will observe, what the apostle says, *We are of them that believe to the saving of the soul*; that is, eternal life will be our portion. And what is the reason? Why it is given to us to believe in the Lord *Jesus Christ*, as an instance of his kindness to us, and as he hath begun his good work in us, we may depend upon the full inheritance, as well as the first pledge of it. But,

(6.) THE next considerable passage that is brought to prove the saints apostacy, and indeed the last that I shall mention, is in the writings of the apostle *Peter*, when describing the dreadful character and condition of the apostates of those times, he says, *When they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure, through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error: while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them accord-*  
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ing to the true proverb, *the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire*<sup>w</sup>. The argument drawn from this passage is of the same nature with the preceding, *viz.* If the persons spoken of in the text are said to *have escaped the pollutions of the world, and that through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*, they must be believers: and if so, then believers may turn as *dogs to their vomit*, and so be lost.

IN answer to this I shall only observe, that it is so very evident, even upon the bare reading of the text, who the persons are that the apostle would describe, that one would wonder any man should ever suppose them to have really believed in the Son of God. Who knows not but persons may have escaped from error, and have arrived at a moral conversation, and so may be said to have *escaped the pollutions that are in the world*, and yet afterwards make it appear that this was not upon a right foundation, by a returning to their former course? May not a man that never tasted of the grace of God, know the way of righteousness, and seemingly set out with much zeal in it, and yet all the while be an enemy to God in his heart, and so turn again to his folly; whose knowledge instead of profiting him may prove an aggravation of his guilt? These things are so commonly insisted on in  
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<sup>w</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 18,—22.

practical discourses, that you cannot but be well acquainted with them. And now, understanding the passage in this sense, and if you read the context at your leisure, you will see how consistent it is with the design of the apostle. What is there in it to oppose the saints perseverance? Though some, who may have the name of saints, and also a degree of knowledge in common with those who are really so, may *turn away from the holy commandment*; yet it doth not hence follow that saints may.

AND thus I have gone through the most considerable texts of scripture which are produced by the adversaries of the saints final perseverance. I should now have gone on to the consideration of those instances that are given, by which they think they can demonstrate that this hath been the case with some, and therefore may be with all. But this I must leave till another opportunity, only let me drop these two reflections.

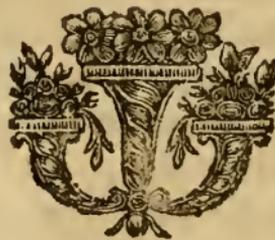
I. ARE there many who may go a great way in religion, and yet not one spiritual and believing step towards the kingdom of God? How earnestly then should we beg of God, that we may not be left to deceive our own souls? Every grace hath its counterfeit; and we know *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*<sup>x</sup>. But would we judge safely concerning our own state; let us ask ourselves where we are putting our trust

<sup>x</sup> Jer. xvii. 9.

trust and dependance. Is it in *Christ*, or in ourselves? do we look for glory, immortality, and eternal life in him, as the only refuge set before us? Why then,

2. WE may assure ourselves, that he who hath been *the author*, or *beginner*, will be *the finisher of our faith*<sup>y</sup>. Though many shall appear in this world like stars for their brightness, and in the issue lose their lustre and fall into hell; yet, where grace hath once taken possession of the soul, it shall never be lost. Though many may have received light and seeming satisfaction under the means of grace; and may have had eminent gifts of the holy Ghost, and yet after all *fall away*, and are never *renewed unto repentance*; yet that soul who has those things which necessarily accompany salvation, shall certainly in the issue arrive at the full enjoyment of it.

<sup>y</sup> Heb. xii. 2.





# SERMON XIV.

*On the final perseverance of the saints.*

JOHN X. 28.

*And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

The fourth SERMON on this text.



HAVE, in some former discourses from these words, endeavoured to explain the meaning of the great doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, and to establish the truth of it by several arguments; and then I came to answer the most considerable of those objections which are advanced against it. And here, I have gone through the most remarkable texts of scripture, which are produced by the enemies of this doctrine in order to overthrow it, and shall now go on,

3. TO the consideration of those personal instances, which are found in the word of God, of defection and apostacy, by which they think they can demonstrate that final falling from grace hath been the case with some, and therefore may with all. And here, before I come to a particular examination of these instances, allow me to lay down a distinction or two, which may have a tendency to lead us through this part of the argument. And,

(1.) LET it be considered, that two principles, though in their own nature perfectly distinct, and contrary to each other, may subsist, at the same time, in the same person. This I think the apostle *Paul* proves at large to be his own case, in his epistle to the *Romans*, where he speaks of a two-fold law that subsisted at the same time in him: *I delight*, says he, *in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members*<sup>a</sup>. And I cannot but think, that every man, who hath been acquainted with the plague of his own heart, and is himself in the experience of the grace of God in his soul, will set his seal to the same thing; that he finds two laws, or two principles within him, the one arising from the depravity of his nature, the other from the Spirit of God. Which

<sup>a</sup> Rom. vii. 22, 23.

Which, though it is an entire mystery to a man unacquainted with the things of God, yet none, I think, ever disputed the possibility of it. And when we have the testimony of the word of God, and the universal experience of the saints for the proof of it, I think we may, without being charged with prejudice for our own scheme, acknowledge our belief of it. Which being allowed, I observe again,

(2.) THAT the exercise of either of these principles, upon this or that occasion, doth not necessarily imply the loss or deprivation of the other. Thus when *Paul* was in the experience of the striving of the law in his members, it doth not imply the cessation of the other principle, to wit, the principle of grace in his mind. Observe, grace and corruption may be compared to two contending parties. The field that they engage in is the soul of every renewed man, while here below; and sometimes one, and sometimes the other prevails: and yet both remain, till, at death, one is entirely vanquished by the great Captain of our salvation. So that we are not to say because the law in the members of a good man hath had the better of him to day, tho' a very humbling consideration, that therefore he never had grace, or hath entirely lost it, any more than, because, upon another occasion, when in the exercise of grace, he may be perhaps a stranger to any

remarkable power of corruption, at that season; that therefore, either he never was depraved, or hath now entirely got rid of his corruptions.

WELL, taking these two things along with us, let us now consider the examples which are produced of the saints apostacy. And here we shall confine ourselves to those of *Noah*, *David*, *Solomon*, and *Peter*, who are all of them so many instances indeed that the saints may fall, and fall very low, and yet not fall from grace, either as to their interest in the favour of the Lord, or the principle of it in their souls.

To begin then with *Noah*; and you have the account of his sin at large in the book of *Genesis*<sup>b</sup>. The sum of it is this, that after his great deliverance he planted a vineyard, which became a snare to him, and accordingly he was drunken with the wine of it. Now take the sin in all its aggravations, *viz.* that it was an instance of the greatest ingratitude to God, who had shewn such miraculous and distinguishing kindness to him, in delivering him, and only him and his family from the common and universal destruction; view it again as an ill precedent to his family, and with all the other aggravating circumstances that can be supposed; and doth it any more prove that he had lost the principle of grace, than that his ready compliance with God's command

<sup>b</sup> Gen. ix. 20,—29.

mand in building the ark for the safety of his house, and afterwards his sacrificing to the Lord as a testimony of his thankfulness, prove that the principle of corruption was entirely rooted out of him? Alas! when *Noah* was sacrificing, and that acceptably too, he still had the seeds of corruption in him, or else he had never been drunken. And when he was overtaken by this sin, though grace seemed to lie inactive in his soul, he had still the principle, otherwise (and which, notwithstanding his great fall, puts his final perseverance out of all doubt) he could not have been reckoned by the apostle among those, who *died in faith*<sup>c</sup>. The same might be said with respect to *Lot*, upon a like occasion.

BUT to come to the case of *David*. I will allow them to consider his sin with all imaginable aggravations. Suppose him then a special favourite of God; taken from the sheepfold, and exalted by God's own hand to be captain of his host, and king of all *Israel*; preserved from the envy and rage of *Saul* upon many occasions, even in a miraculous way, and from a thousand other dangers; partaker of the richest spiritual as well as temporal blessings; under the strongest vows as well as the strongest obligations; see him now in the enjoyment of all things heart could wish, seated in a state of peace and tranquillity upon the throne of *Israel*; and then suppose him

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<sup>c</sup> Heb. xi. 13.

contriving the wicked gratification of his sensual appetite, and the most cruel method of concealing it with the utmost foresight, engaging in it with the greatest pleasure, and remaining afterwards under the most amazing stupidity, insensible, in a great measure, of what he had done. And doth all this prove that he had lost entirely what was wrought in him by the Spirit of God? I say this transgression, great and complicated as it was, doth no more suppose him to have been without grace; than when he said, *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day*<sup>d</sup>, or when his soul was thirsting and panting after God, that he was then without a principle of corruption. But, as his humiliation was deep, so let me observe, that he not only had pardon of this sin declared to him, almost as soon as he was made truly sensible of it; but we find him afterwards speaking to this purpose, *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me*<sup>e</sup>. Which supposes that he had then some experience of God's presence, and some enjoyment of his Spirit, and is, as tho' he had said, "Truly Lord, I deserve  
 " that thou shouldest throw off any concern  
 " for me; but I flee to thy grace, to thy  
 " covenant, to thy promises, and to thy faith-  
 " fulness, in which thou hast caused me  
 " to hope." And so it is rather expressive of the becoming sense he had of his own  
 guilt,

<sup>d</sup> Psal. cxix. 97.<sup>e</sup> Psal. li. 11.

guilt, than any fear of his losing the habitual presence of the holy Ghost, which was impossible. And the happy event is abundantly proved by the account we have of his death, in the old testament <sup>f</sup>, and the character given of him in the new <sup>g</sup>.

THE same may be said as to *Solomon* and *Peter*; corruption had the upper hand in them both, on sad occasions indeed; but it is not difficult to prove that they were not then without grace in the habit.

As to *Solomon*, tho' his sins were very great, yet the many gracious experiences that are recorded in his life, and the testimony he bore to true religion in his inspired writings, especially in the close of it, abundantly shew that the principle of grace in his soul was still preserved to the last.

AND then as to *Peter*, if you will take our Lord's word for it, he assures us, that he had *prayed* for him *that his faith should not fail* <sup>h</sup>: and you know his prayer is always prevalent, being founded in his own merit, as I have before proved at large. Now view *Peter's faith*, as to the exercise of it, and you will find it did *fail* him, and that in a most lamentable manner; so that our Saviour's prayer must refer to the principle, which, though covered with abundance of corruption, was not so entirely defaced, but the author of it soon renewed it, and it appeared again in fresh, illustrious

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<sup>f</sup> 2 Sam. 23.    <sup>g</sup> Heb. xi. 32.    <sup>h</sup> Luke xxiii. 32.

lustrious exercise. Thus then you see how little these examples serve to their purpose, who would prove from them the possibility of the final apostacy of true believers : whereas all that can be concluded from them is only this, that the most eminent saint, when left to himself, may fall into sin, into great sin ; and that it is not grace received that will preserve them, when under the power of temptation, but they must have fresh measures from the fountain. But then, on the other hand, these instances will also prove, that tho' they may fall, and sink very low, yet they shall not be swallowed up, and utterly lost : for the hand of the Lord still in a measure sustains them. And let me add this, that instead of weakening, they serve exceedingly to strengthen our cause. For if persons falling thus low, have been raised again, then the foundation of God cannot but stand sure, and the truth in our text be confirmed, that *Christ's sheep shall never perish*, being under his care. I proceed now,

4. To another objection against this doctrine. And you may take the force of it in this proposition, That the doctrine which is according to godliness, and hath the greatest tendency to promote practical religion, is undoubtedly from God ; and whatever is of a contrary nature is not from him. And thus they who plead for the possibility of our falling away, even after the greatest measures

of grace received, conclude that their doctrine has a natural tendency to excite caution and circumspection, whereas the contrary leads directly to a sinful carelessness and security. Or you may take it thus, Religious fear is the main spring of obedience: but the doctrine of the saints final perseverance takes away occasion of fear, and accordingly tends to destroy instead of promoting true godliness, and therefore is not of divine authority. This I take to be the sum of what can be offered from this head. And that we may the better come at a full and satisfactory answer to it, we must,

FIRST, Endeavour to explain what we mean by true gospel-obedience, or consider what we are in reality to understand by it. And then,

SECONDLY, Shew you that the doctrine of the saints final perseverance has the greatest tendency to promote it. Accordingly I begin,

FIRST, With the thing itself that is the foundation of this objection, *viz.* gospel-obedience: and we are to inquire into the true nature of it. And in general it consists in conformity to the will of God, as revealed in his word. And would we know concerning this or the other particular action, whether it be a part of this gospel-obedience, we must enquire,

(1.) INTO the matter of it, whether it be an human appointment, or commanded by

God. For the most exact adherence to any thing in religion, which is of our own invention, and that is either contrary to, or not revealed in God's word, is very far from deserving the character of gospel-obedience. What is so, must have God's authority stamped upon it, as a warrant for our regard to it. Again,

(2.) As the matter of it must be good, and appointed by God, so it must arise from a right principle, or else, though it may be called obedience, yet it is not gospel-obedience. A man must first have his heart renewed by grace, before he can serve God, in any sense acceptably. Thus you know the apostle says, *Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin*<sup>1</sup>. *And without faith it is impossible to please God*<sup>2</sup>. So all things, of a religious kind, in which we engage, if our obedience be acceptable, must arise from a principle of affection to God, who commands them, as well as a becoming sense of our duty to him, as our Lord and King. And they must also be done in faith; that is, not only in dependance upon the merits of *Christ*, for our acceptance therein, but with a believing regard to him for assistance in the discharge of them. Thus, suppose a person setting about any religious duty, such as prayer for instance, if he is sensible that prayer is his most reasonable service, that as God is the giver of his mercies, so he hath an indisputable right to all the ho-

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xiv. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xi. 6.

homage he is able to pay him ; if he is convinced that it is most reasonable, that as he *lives and moves and has his being* in, and from God, so he ought in an humble and explicit manner to acknowledge his dependance upon him ; and if to this he adds the remembrance that God hath commanded this at his hands, that thus *saieth the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them*<sup>1</sup> ; and if what he does is under a sense of duty, he may be said to act from right principles. Well, but this is not all, for he must act also from a principle of love to God, such a principle as, under the influence of the Spirit, leads him as a child to his father : and as he knows that without him he can do nothing, so at the same time that he is bowing before him in a way of duty, he must look for assistance from him in a way of grace : he must eye not only the precept, but the promise ; the one as the warrant, for what he does, and the other as an encouragement to the performance of it. Thus not only the matter of the action must be good in itself, and commanded by God ; but the principle from which it arises must be the new creature formed in the soul, a principle of faith and love, implanted there by the Spirit of God. And this might be confirmed by many places of scripture : but the very nature of the thing shews the necessity of it :  
for

for how can we suppose a man to draw nigh to God as a child to a father, whilst he hath a reigning principle of enmity in his soul against him? Or how can he come to him acceptably, unless it be in the exercise of that *faith*, which is his gift <sup>m</sup>, and *without* which *it is impossible to please him* <sup>n</sup>? An unbeliever, a man that hath never tasted of the grace of God, may indeed come up to the letter of many of God's precepts, but while in that case, he is, in God's account, a stranger to gospel-obedience. For the first act of evangelical duty, or however one of the first, is to obey God in that great command of his, that we *honour the Son, even as we honour the Father* <sup>o</sup>, and that is by believing on him; which we cannot possibly do, but by the influence of the Spirit of God. And till he hath given us thus to believe in the Son of God, though we may boast, or pride ourselves ever so much in our conformity to the divine law, we shall find, in the issue, that it is not sufficient to entitle us to the character of christians. But, then again,

(3.) OUR obedience must not only be thus good, both as to the matter and principle of it; but also it must be genuine as to the end we have in view, which must be the glory of God. I know to this it is said, that were there no heaven in view, perhaps none in the world would trouble themselves about obedience: so that while we deny seeking ourselves

<sup>m</sup> Eph. ii. 8.<sup>n</sup> Heb. xi. 6.<sup>o</sup> John v. 23.

selfes, this is only in pretence, and the fact is far otherwise. But to this I think it is easy to reply, that what God hath joined together no man should separate; and we know it is impossible to seek the glory of God as our ultimate end, without pursuing our own greatest, and best interests: and the regard a believer hath to heaven and eternal life, naturally arises from a principle of grace, and the love of *Christ* shed abroad in his heart, by which he concludes that the Lord hath loved him with an everlasting love, and that he hath in reserve for him more than heart can wish: and if this reflection draws forth his desire to walk becoming the gospel, and animates his obedience, it is by no means in a way of merit, but of gratitude. He may have regard to God as a rewarder, in a way of grace, and from this be encouraged in his duty, while the glory of God is the great end he has in view; and while he firmly believes that the blessedness he hopes for, is secured beyond the possibility of his losing it; that heaven and happiness are his; that God hath given him eternal life; and therefore, as the best evidence of his love to God, he desires to keep his commandments. This I say is the principal end a good man purposes in the discharge of his duty, *viz.* to glorify God: and here we may see a very material difference betwixt evangelical and legal obedience, for in the latter men seek  
their

their own things, and little else but their own; they are looking for an interest in the favour of God in a way of merit, and, by mistaken apprehensions of themselves and their services, and of the nature of the divine Being, they are ready to conclude, that he is to be appeased by this or the other instance of obedience, and his glory has the least share in their view. Thus then I have endeavoured to state the true notion of gospel-obedience. And this leads us to the next thing, which is,

SECONDLY, To shew you that the doctrine of the saints final perseverance has the greatest tendency to promote this obedience in the christian; for it is only of such we are speaking. And, in general, I think it must be allowed, that if, as we have before proved, this obedience flows immediately from love and confidence in God, then, whatever principles have a tendency to, draw out and increase these graces in our souls, must be allowed to have the greatest likelihood to promote gospel-obedience. For, observe, as it cannot be perform'd without them, so in proportion to the increase or diminution of these graces, it hath been experienced, that we either run the ways of God's commandments with delight and pleasure, or are careless, cold, and indifferent. And here, that we may guard against all mistakes, observe, that no doctrine in itself, how great a tendency so ever it may have to promote any good ends in us, will

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be of any service to us, but as it is set home by the Spirit of God. Christians themselves may sit under the clearest displays of God's love in the gospel, and yet be unmoved, unless the Spirit of God set home the word, and attend the discovery with power and energy from himself; but, when in the hand of the Spirit, it must be allowed, that the doctrine of the saints perseverance has the greatest tendency imaginable to promote evangelical obedience. Since it is not only every where in sacred scripture recommended as an argument to excite us to it; but it gives us such evidence of the infinite greatness of the love of God to us, that must, in its own nature, powerfully tend to draw forth our love to him, which is the great hinge upon which all our obedience is to move. To reduce this to an argument you may take it thus, The more we see of God's love to us, the more we shall love him; and the more we love God, the more conscientious we shall be in obeying him. Now nothing hath a greater tendency to discover God's love to us, than what we have revealed to us in the comfortable doctrine of our perseverance. Therefore this doctrine, instead of obstructing, encourages, and promotes our obedience. The truth of this will more fully appear, if we consider how this doctrine abounds with intimations of God's special, and particular regard to us. And,

(1.) IT

(I.) IT sets before us the immutability of God's love to us. And can any thing in the world encourage a christian more in a walk becoming his profession and character, than this? What says the child of God with regard to it? "Hath the Lord not only  
 " loved me from everlasting, but is it conti-  
 " nued for ever? Is he ever mindful of me?  
 " Oh how vile, how disingenuous, and un-  
 " grateful have I been, to forget my duty to  
 " him, or to perform it in so careless, and  
 " negligent a manner? Surely the former part  
 " of my conversation shall suffice, that I have  
 " walked in rebellion and disobedience against  
 " him, or in a cold and indifferent discharge  
 " of any duty. Oh that I may now begin to  
 " act as one that hath been the object of such  
 " remarkable grace! O I am ashamed of my-  
 " self," says such a soul, "that when the  
 " love of God to me hath been like *moun-*  
 " *tains of brass*<sup>p</sup>, my *goodness* and love to  
 " him hath been *as a morning cloud, and as*  
 " *the early dew, it goeth away*<sup>q</sup>!" Whereas,  
 on the contrary, suppose the poor soul regard-  
 ing his interest in the love of God, as founded  
 on his obedience, and therefore liable to be  
 lost; suppose him to be never so certain of his  
 present interest in it, may he not justly argue  
 thus with himself? "I am now in the favour  
 " of God, but alas how soon may it be other-  
 " wise! The devils themselves were once in  
 " the

<sup>p</sup> Zech. vi. 1.

<sup>q</sup> Hosea vi. 4.

“ the same case with me, but are now re-  
 “ served in everlasting chains under dark-  
 “ ness, unto the judgment of the great day<sup>r</sup>.  
 “ They had no enemies to encounter with,  
 “ no subtle tempter, no indwelling corrup-  
 “ tions, no alluring world; and yet they  
 “ fell; and oh how much more then, may  
 “ I expect the same portion, who have  
 “ a heart that is deceitful above all things,  
 “ and desperately wicked<sup>s</sup>! who have no  
 “ strength to look to, that I can depend upon  
 “ for certain assistance, no established pro-  
 “ mise upon which to ground my hope of  
 “ standing! Surely it is preferable for me to  
 “ take my fill of present enjoyments, since  
 “ I have no certain security of better in ano-  
 “ ther world.” This I humbly apprehend is  
 the very natural language of a person under  
 apprehensions of the possibility of his falling  
 away, after grace received. And I believe I  
 may, in this appeal to the experience and  
 observation of the most thriving christians, of  
 those that are the best established in the im-  
 mutability of God’s counsels, that in the view  
 of their interest in his unchangeable love,  
 they walk most chearfully and thankfully.  
 But again,

(2.) THIS doctrine represents to us the  
 nature of God’s love, as perfectly free, as  
 well as unchangeable; and thus it hath a  
 tendency to draw out our love to him, and  
 con-

<sup>r</sup> Jude 6.

<sup>s</sup> Jer. xviii. 9.

consequently our regard to his will. It represents God's love to us as a favour that we never deserved, and that was never bestowed upon us, with regard to any thing that was excellent or valuable in us, or that God expected from us: for God loved us, and so quickened us, *when we were dead in trespasses and sins*<sup>t</sup>; he foresaw nothing good in us, but what he designed to bestow upon us; and could not therefore be said to love us because of those qualities, but to love our persons, and from that to bestow them upon us. And therefore a soul, duly affected with this, will say, "Hath the Lord thus acted towards me? what, to love me when vile and exposed to his wrath! Oh what shall I render to him for all his mercies! Can I ever think any thing too dear to be sacrificed to such grace! Oh who shall deliver me from this law that leads me aside from God, when I should by such goodness be every day more effectually, and intimately drawn to him!" But then again,

(3.) THIS doctrine represents the love of God to us as pregnant with the best of fruits. It is not a disposition of kindness only, but a love that influenced the Father, when nothing less would do for our salvation, to part with his only begotten Son out of his bosom to die for us; to provide the sacrifice, and then to accept it in our room and stead. It is a love also that influenced the Son of God, in this manner,  
 freely

<sup>t</sup> Eph. ii. 1.

freely to give his soul an offering for our sins; and by his sufferings and death to make atonement for us. And is it possible that we can be properly acquainted with this love, and not be constrained by it to some suitable returns? What can fill us with greater detestation of sin; than a believing view of it, as done away by the blood of the Son of God? When we consider that it was no less than this blood that was sufficient to cleanse us from it, and are apprised of the grace of God in providing it for us; I say, what monsters in nature must the children of God be supposed to be; to draw from thence encouragement to commit it? Would not that man be justly branded as an instance of unparalleled brutishness, who; when his friend had laid down his life for him, should from thence take the greater liberty to treat his counsels with neglect, and his name and memory with contempt? And can we suppose a child of God to behold his very creator bleeding; or the Son of God, in his nature, dying on the cross; to remove his guilt, and from thence be the more attached to those sins which cost his Saviour so dear; and the more encouraged to commit them? No; you must see, that whatever abuse men may make of this doctrine, yet it is very far from having any such tendency in its own nature. Whereas the contrary doctrine, which tells a man that God hath loved him indeed,

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and *Christ* hath died for him, but notwithstanding all this, his salvation depends on his own doings, and, tho' his faith be of the right kind, it may fail, his hopes may be dashed in pieces, and he may perish at last; I say, if a man is at all acquainted with his own heart, this doctrine must lay him under great discouragement. "What," says he, "hath *Christ* died for me, and yet am I left at such an uncertainty about my salvation? Can I do nothing without him? and have I no security that he will assist me; though if he doth not I must perish? Why, as this is but a very small intimation of his love to me, who might have entirely secured my salvation, had he pleased; so it is likely to have but a proportionable influence on me." Thus then you see, upon the comparison, which doctrine hath the greatest tendency to draw out our love to God, and to promote our obedience to him. To sum up the argument then, let me add, in the last place,

(4.) THAT we may safely conclude, that the doctrine of the saints perseverance, or that doctrine wherein we are assured of the everlasting continuance of our interest in the love of God, must be according to godliness; because the holy Ghost hath been pleased to make use of this very way of reasoning, all along, to unbelievers. I believe there is hardly any observation more common than this, that

in almost every epistle we have extant, and in almost every other place, where we have any duty recommended, we have some privilege laid down as an inducement to it. Now, if it may be allowed that the Spirit of God best knew what was the greatest inducement to obedience, I believe we shall find it almost universally fall on our side. I might turn you to many places; but a few that are most remarkable shall suffice. See particularly that passage in the epistle to the *Romans*, *How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein*<sup>u</sup>? that is, we that are intirely delivered from the power and dominion of it, as bringing condemnation along with it, how shall we continue in it? And again the apostle says, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*<sup>v</sup>. And once more, in his epistle to *Titus*—*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*<sup>x</sup>. I thought to have concluded this subject at this time; but there yet remains one head, and that is, to set before you the way in which we are to account for the exhortations and threatnings, which are scattered up and down in the word

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† Rom. vi. 2.    <sup>v</sup> Chap. xii. 1.    <sup>x</sup> Titus ii. 11, 12.

of God ; how these are consistent with the absolute security of salvation ; which, together with some general remarks upon the whole subject may serve for another discourse. I shall conclude therefore at present with a reflection or two. And,

1. FROM hence we may see how easy it is to have mistaken notions of obedience. When we act from any other principle, but love and duty to God, we may think what we please, but it is far from being acceptable to him. The matter of the act may be good, and the manner of the performance in our apprehensions may be right, and yet the end may be foreign to what it ought to be. Our obedience was never designed, under the covenant of grace, as the matter of our acceptance. No, this is *Christ* alone, in his mediatorial character, in the virtue of his blood and righteousness. And, if our obedience is well-pleasing in the sight of God, it must spring from faith in this all-sufficient Saviour, from a sense of the love of God in this salvation, and be the product of a principle of grateful love, wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God. Which, leads me to add,

2. THAT, if we would grow and flourish in religion, we should earnestly pray for larger discoveries of the divine love. This is not only of the greatest consequence to support and comfort us under the various afflictions, and

and dispondencies we are subject to, in our passage thro' this vale of tears; but to animate us in the various conflicts with which we must be tried, to fortify us against temptation, and to enable us to maintain a steady, constant, and unfainting obedience to God's righteous, and reasonable commandments.





# S E R M O N X V.

*On the final perseverance of the saints.*

JOHN X. 28.

*And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

The fifth SERMON on this text.



**I**T is mentioned, you know, by the apostle *Peter*, as a very great and honourable circumstance in the character of *Lot*, that he was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked<sup>a</sup>. And I think it cannot but sensibly affect the minds of the truly serious, who have felt the divine energy of the holy Ghost, to observe the increase of impiety and profaneness among mankind. Perhaps it hath been from this prin-

<sup>a</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 7.

principle, that in all ages, it hath been the common voice of the church, that the day wherein they lived exceeded that which went before, for daring instances of rebellion against God. But I am fully persuaded, as to his day, that a man must be a stranger in our *Israel* indeed, if he is not apprised, that error and iniquity, those two inseparable companions, seem, the one to have seated itself in the minds, and the other to have possessed the conversation, alas! but of too many, from whom, some time since, we were ready to hope better things. And can we, ought we, who are set for the defence of the gospel, to hold our peace, and not bear our testimony against them? Shall the foundations of our hope be assaulted, with daring arrogance, in public, and every thing, of a religious nature, prove the subject of raillery and banter in private, and we sit looking unaffected on? Some indeed gild over such a conduct with the specious title of charity. But I wish, how exceedingly fond soever, for the present, they may seem to be of this pretended charity, it may not be charged upon them, as an instance of unfaithfulness at the great day. With this view, in order to bear my testimony against error, I have been endeavouring, for some time, to establish the glorious truth, that shines forth with so much brightness in the words of our text, I mean that of the saints final perseverance. Which doctrine, as it is the very basis of our comfort, and has been so, in the esteem

of the saints in all ages; so we can never be too well established in the belief it.

IN some former discourses I have endeavoured to confirm your faith in this truth by a variety of arguments, which, if thoroughly understood, and weighed in the scripture-balance, may sufficiently arm, even the weakest of *Christ's* sheep, so that they need not be afraid or ashamed, when called by the providence of God, to contend with the wise and prudent, for this part of that faith which was once delivered to the saints. I shall give you a very short recapitulation of what I have delivered, for the refreshment of your memories, and then proceed to the last thing, with which we shall close our thoughts upon this subject. Our proposition then was to this effect,

*THAT Christ's sheep, being given him by the Father, or committed to him as a trust, have such a security in him, that not one of them shall ever perish, but Christ will give unto them all eternal life.*

AND I told you the question lay in this: whether an elect vessel, having once tasted of the grace of God, can entirely lose that which was wrought in him, and so finally perish. The impossibility of this, and the truth of our proposition we established from the immutable purpose of God in election; from *Christ's* having, by his glorious undertaking, and the accomplishment of it, set them out of the reach of

all their enemies, viz. sin, satan, this world, and death itself; so that of none those who would pluck them out of *Christ's* hand, shall be able to effect it. We further established this truth from the consideration of the nature of the covenant of grace, which is *ordered in all things, and sure*; from the saints union with *Christ*, as members of his body; from *Christ's* intercession for them, which being founded in his blood and righteousness, cannot but be efficacious; from the promise of the Spirit to take up his abode in the hearts of *Christ's* sheep, and to remain with them for ever; and lastly, from the absurdity of the contrary sentiment, as derogatory to the glory of Father, Son, and Spirit. And then we came to answer objections made against it; and, in the last discourse, considered at large the tendency this doctrine hath to promote practical religion, or gospel-obedience, in answer to that cavil of our opponents, that it opens a door to licentiousness. And here I observed to you, that as love to God, and faith in him are the great springs of evangelical obedience; so, this doctrine, as revealing God's love to us, and his ability to assist us, hath the greatest tendency to draw forth those graces in our souls, which cannot but be most likely to encourage the christian in a conversation becoming the gospel. And I confirmed this by observing, that it is the very same way in which the holy Ghost always  
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proceeds. Thus you find the inspired apostle speaking, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service<sup>b</sup>.*

WHAT remains at present to be attended to, is the objection arising from the exhortations and threatnings which are scattered up and down in the word of God. And you may take the sense of it, in its greatest latitude, thus: The doctrine of the saints perseverance, considered in that absolute, unconditional way, in which we have represented it, renders all the exhortations to duty, and threatnings of punishment, in case of failure; perfectly useless and insignificant, not to say impertinent. What avails exhorting me (says such a person) to take heed lest I fall, if I am sure this shall never be my case? or such an exhortation as that of the apostle, *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God<sup>c</sup>*, if I am assured that God will hold me so fast, that I never shall depart from him. All that fear and circumspection, which the christian is commanded to be in the exercise of, is entirely useless. For why should he be afraid of that, which he is fully assured shall never come to pass? Thus, I think, (our adversaries themselves being judges) the objection is represented in its full force. And,  
if

<sup>b</sup> Rom. xii. 1.

<sup>c</sup> Heb. iii. 12.

if I mistake not, it is in the very words of one of their greatest champions. And now, that I may give a distinct and full answer to it, I shall,

1. PREMISE something in general concerning the fear of God. And,

2. LAY down some positions concerning the will of God in his exhortations and threatnings. And, from the consideration of both these, I hope to make it evident, that this objection, notwithstanding all its appearing force, is really invalid. I begin,

1. WITH endeavouring to state the true meaning of the fear of God. And I cannot but observe,

(1.) THAT there is a fear of God, which, in a believer, is absolutely unlawful, and therefore is expressly prohibited. This I think must be universally allowed, being so evident from many passages of sacred scripture. So, for instance, in *Isaiah's* prophecy, for the encouragement of the timorous soul, it is said, *Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not<sup>d</sup>*: and again, *Fear not, for I am with thee<sup>e</sup>*: and so in the prophecy of *Zechariah*, God says, *Fear not, but let your hands be strong<sup>f</sup>*. And *Christ* says to his disciples, *Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure*

<sup>d</sup> *Isai.* xxxv. 3, 4.    <sup>e</sup> *Chap.* xliii. 5.    <sup>f</sup> *Zach.* viii. 13.

sure to give you the kingdom<sup>e</sup>. And in another place, *Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me<sup>h</sup>*. This then being a slavish fear of God, must be looked upon as a sin, else it would not be prohibited. And if this fear is a sin, then none of those exhortations to fear God, that we meet with in other places of scripture are to be understood in this light, because that would be charging the holy Ghost with the most palpable contradiction in the world, in commanding in one place, what he expressly forbids, and that in the same persons, and under the same considerations, in another. I might also shew you, that the children of God, being very prone to this sinful fear, the Lord hath in many places promised them deliverance from it. You have a remarkable passage in the prophecy of *Jeremiah*, wherein this matter is set before us in a very beautiful light. *Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the Lord, neither be dismayed, O Israel: for lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest and quiet, and none shall make him afraid<sup>i</sup>*. And you know what is said of the good man; *he shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord<sup>k</sup>*. Now if God hath thus expressly forbidden it in his children,

<sup>e</sup> Luke xii. 32.    <sup>h</sup> John xiv. 1.    <sup>i</sup> Jer. xxx. 10.    <sup>k</sup> Psal. cxii. 7.

dren, and given them promises of deliverance from it, it must necessarily follow, that such a fear is displeasing to him. To which I add,

(2.) THE contrary to this slavish fear, is an humble reverential awe of God, arising from a due sense of the infinite distance there is between him and us; and this is perfectly consistent with the greatest confidence in him, both as to grace here, and glory hereafter. It is an empty conceit of the enemies to this doctrine, that because a believer is not to fear God as an enemy, or to be under a slavish apprehension of losing his favour, therefore he is not to fear God at all. There are other considerations that put him upon this duty. As he labours to set the Lord always before him, so it is in a way of filial, religious fear, and holy awe of him, not as an enemy, but as a friend, infinitely glorious. As an evidence that perfect love to God, nay, the greatest sense of our interest in his love, doth not exclude, but indeed fill the soul with this fear, see what the prophet *Isaiab* says. After he had been favoured with a most intimate discovery of God's glory, he cries out, *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*<sup>1</sup>. God's absolute purity carried a convincing evidence along with it to the prophet's mind that he

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<sup>1</sup> *Isai. vi. 5.*

was defiled. And thus it will be with us; the more intimate our communion with God is, the more we shall see of his purity, and our own pollution: and in proportion to it, we shall abhor, and humble ourselves in dust and ashes; and the more we see of his glory, the more we shall be filled with holy awe and reverence. When the Lord draws nigh to us in a way of gracious discovery, we shall be ready enough to say, that *God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints: and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him*<sup>m</sup>. One main thing wherein this fear differs from that which is slavish, is, that the one springs from love to God, and delight in him, and the other is always attended, either with some aversion to him, or exceeding hard, and unbecoming thoughts of him.

THESE things being premised, I come now more immediately to attend to the objection. And I cannot but think that an absolute assurance, that the God who hath begun, will carry on his work in our souls, is perfectly consistent with an holy awe, and a proper degree of a reverential fear of him, who by exhortations and threatnings hath acquainted us with our duty, as well as by promises of assistance hath encouraged our faith. For your farther satisfaction respecting this truth, I shall now proceed,

2. To

<sup>m</sup> Psal. lxxxix. 7.

2. To lay down the following positions, which will, I apprehend, abundantly confirm and illustrate this matter. And,

(I.) THE saints special relation to God, as children, doth not disannul, or abrogate their obligation to fear and serve him, as their creator, but indeed confirms, and establishes it. Take a view of man, as the workmanship of God's hands, and as in this respect he is God's property, so he is bound to be subject to the pleasure of his Creator, in all those laws that he shall prescribe: a failure in which you know properly calls for punishment, but does not imply a freedom from prior obligation. Thus, for instance, if we take a view of *Adam* when fallen, why, he had indeed broken God's law, and so contracted an inability, ever again, to come up to the spiritual part of any of its precepts, in his own strength. But this weakness or infirmity doth not suppose a cessation of his obligation to obedience, according to that known observation,

*THOUGH man has lost his power of obeying, God hath not lost his right of commanding.*

AND now let us transfer this to a child of God. Our Lord *Jesus Christ*, he hath fulfilled the law, indeed, for him, removed the curse, that so he might inherit the blessing; but hereby, he hath not dissolved God's right, as a sovereign, to the obedience of his children. For observe, though it is absolutely impossible that they should *do good and sin not,*

not<sup>d</sup>; and though this shall not be the matter of their condemnation, *Christ* being made *sin* for them; that they might be made the righteousness of God in him<sup>o</sup>; yet it doth not follow; but that God has a right to all the obedience they are able to perform. Their being redeemed ones doth not dissolve their relation to God, as his creatures; though it secures them from the punishment which would otherwise be the result of their deficiency in their obedience. This I need not dwell long upon; for concerning even the blessed spirits above, though they are in a state of perfect felicity, and in the full possession of everlasting life, yet the Lord hath the same right to homage from them, as ever. For as the obligation arises from the relation between God and them as creatures, so it remains for ever. And the work of eternity will be not only to enjoy, but to fear, and adore, the author of all our happiness. So that though, I say, we are delivered from the law, as a covenant of works, yet I very readily grant that we are obliged, in point of duty, to be found in the performance of the precepts of it. And at the same time, we can bless God, that though we come short in every thing, yet this shall not be the matter of our condemnation, *Christ* having fulfilled the law for us. Nay, this relation of ours to God, as children, is so far from destroying, that it abundantly confirms, and

<sup>d</sup> Ecclesi. vii. 20.

<sup>o</sup> 2 Cor. v. 21.

and establishest our obligation to him, according to that saying of our Lord, *If you love me keep my commandments*<sup>p</sup>. As if he had said, “ If you are sensible of the greatness of my love to you, in giving myself for you, and this hath a tendency to excite your affection to me, shew it by endeavouring to keep my commandments; this do in my strength, *for without me ye can do nothing*<sup>q</sup>; follow me in those ways, in which I have gone before you.” This then is our first observation, that the saints relation to God, as children, doth not destroy, but abundantly confirm their obligation to serve him, as they are his creatures. And this being allowed us, we go on to observe,

(2.) THAT an exhortation to that which is our duty, may be perfectly consistent with an absolute promise of grace to assist us in the discharge of it. This is so evident from the general current of the word of God, that I think it must remain indisputable. Thus, you know, we are commanded to *sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and to let him be our fear, and to let him be our dread*<sup>r</sup>; and it is said, *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*<sup>s</sup>; and thus we are commanded to put our trust in him, and serve him, and

<sup>p</sup> John xiv. 15. <sup>q</sup> Chap. xv. 5, <sup>r</sup> Isai. viii. 13. <sup>s</sup> Mark xii. 30.

and the like. Well, and are not the very same things mentioned in a way of free and gracious promise? Doth not God say, *I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.*<sup>t</sup> and again, *I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them*<sup>u</sup>? Now, either these must be consistent with each other, or the Spirit of God must contradict himself. For you see that the very same things which God requires in a way of duty, in one place, he promises in a way of favour in another. Which being granted, we observe in the next place,

(3.) THAT all the threatnings, which are to be found in the sacred scriptures, were never designed to excite a slavish fear of God in the believer, either as to his losing his interest in him, or falling from grace: this being directly contrary to that joy, peace, comfort and satisfaction for which the Lord hath made abundant provision in his word. We cannot suppose a Being infinite in wisdom, in one place, exhorting us to rejoice in him, and in another, to be filled with the most tormenting apprehensions of his being an enemy to us, these two are incompatible. If it is our duty to joy and rejoice in the Lord, and place our confidence in him, then certainly it is not so, to be tormenting ourselves with melancholy

<sup>t</sup> Jer. xxxii. 40.

<sup>u</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

choly apprehensions, that, through the imperfection of our obedience, we shall lose our interest in the divine favour. Nothing can be more apparent, than that the design of the Lord is, that his people should honour him by believing, and rejoicing in him. And for this reason it is, that we have such repeated exhortations thereto. *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord<sup>w</sup>*, says the apostle *Paul* in his epistle to the *Philippians*; and a little after, *Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say rejoice<sup>x</sup>*; and thus he exhorts the *Thessalonians* to *rejoice evermore<sup>y</sup>*. Now if this is our duty, as redeemed ones, it cannot be the design of the holy Ghost, in the threatenings which are in his word, to excite that which is contrary to it, even, a strangeness to God, and a slavish fearfulness of him. But,

(4.) AND lastly I observe, that, notwithstanding what I have before said, these exhortations and threatenings are not without their use even to believers themselves. As in the one, they have their duty laid before them, and are admonished to the discharge of it, as obedience is their own act, while, at the same time, by the promises of God, their faith is encouraged to look to him for assistance; so in the other, they have the connection there is between sin and punishment set before them,

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<sup>w</sup> Phil. iii. 1.<sup>x</sup> Chap. iv. 4.<sup>y</sup> 1 Thess. v. 16,

for their humiliation on the one hand, in a just apprehension that, unless the Lord was to keep them, this would certainly be their case, as well as it is the case of those who perish; and on the other hand, it is to excite their gratitude to God, by whose grace and assistance they are sensible they shall be preserved.

THUS, for instance, when they consider such a passage as that, *If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*<sup>z</sup>, they are instructed first, that they should certainly fall back, even to perdition, unless kept by the mighty power of God; and then, from the dreadful condition of those nominal professors who fall in that sort, they are quickened to holy watchfulness, and circumspection. And then, in the view of their being of that number who hold on believing to the saving of their souls, they cannot but admire the grace of God, that this distinguishing favour should be thus given to them. Thus then you see how weak this objection is. For though the exhortations to duty suppose no sufficient power in a man of himself, and without the divine aid, to discharge it; nor threatenings, in case of failure, are any just ground for the believer to fill himself with slavish and tormenting fear; yet they are not without their use, in the hand of the Spirit of God. For as be-  
lievers,

<sup>z</sup> Heb. x. 38.

lievers, in their relation to God as children, are under equal, if not superior obligations to serve him, as his creatures; and therefore may and ought to be acquainted with, and exhorted to their duty, these exhortations being perfectly consistent with promises of grace for the discharge of it; so they may converse with the threatenings of God, without sinking into a slavish fear of him, as an enemy; those threatenings being designed for their humiliation before God, *that no flesh should glory in his presence*; but, *that, according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord<sup>a</sup>*: and that, from a consideration of the terrible consequences of the final apostacy of others, they may be excited to holy diligence in duty, and a grateful discharge of it, in some proportion to such distinguishing grace.

AND, thus then, I have finished what I designed, in a doctrinal way, from this subject. I intended to conclude the whole with a more large and general improvement; but as I have made some remarks on each part of this glorious truth, of the saints perseverance, as I have gone along, so I shall close all with a few reflections on this last discourse. And,

I. HENCE we may see the wisdom and grace of God, in this remarkable instance of

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<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. i. 29, 31.

it, the connection he hath been pleased to make, between what is our duty, and the promises of his grace to assist us in the discharge of it. As the one might make us afraid, when we consider our inability, so by the other we can converse with our duty with pleasure, knowing where our help is laid. But,

2. WE may also here see the preference of the covenant of grace to the covenant of works. The one like the *Egyptian* task-masters, requires the full tale of bricks, without affording the least straw to assist: the other gives every thing freely; first, an interest in the favour of God; and then grace to help us to walk becoming the dignity of our character.

3. HATH *Christ* engaged that his sheep shall never perish, what a distinguishing instance of grace must it be, to be one of his flock; and to have some comfortable assurance that this is our case? How may this comfort the weakest in the fold? And how may it support them under all the trials and dangers, they pass thro', in their way to the everlasting rest?

4. AND lastly, let us be ashamed of ourselves, that we walk no more worthy of this privilege, and that our hearts are no more filled with praises to this Redeemer, whose trust we are. Let him have all the glory of his own work. Say not, my mountain stands

so strong that it shall never be moved, in a way of presumption, but in a way of triumph, and thankfulness. And while you maintain this temper of mind, you will find yourselves, under the influence of the strongest obligations, to behave agreeably to your believing character, and to your glorious, and your well founded expectations.





## S E R M O N   X V I .

*The grace of the gospel no encouragement to sin.*

ROMANS vi. 1, 2.

*What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid: how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*



HE great apostle of the *Gentiles*, having, in the foregoing chapter, asserted the free grace of God, in the justification of a sinner, by *Jesus Christ*, and by him a alone; he comes in this to answer an objection that some had raised against this doctrine, as if it had a tendency

to encourage sin. They were ready to say, "If *Christ*, as our surety, is exalted, by bearing "our iniquities, then let us go on in sin:" and since, the apostle had said in the preceding chapter, *where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*<sup>a</sup>, some might be ready to say, "If such propositions as these are true, we "have from hence encouragement to gratify "our corruptions, and transgress without fear." To which the apostle answers, with detestation, in the words of the text, *Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.* This objection to the doctrine of grace was not confined to the days of the apostles, but you know, nothing is more common in our own, than to hear it brought as a charge against those, who *have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God*<sup>b</sup>. If a person speaks of the perfection of *Christ's* sacrifice, and of the free justification of sinners by his blood and righteousness alone, without their works having any share in the honour of it; I say, if he represents our acceptance thus alone, *in the beloved*, it is much if he is not branded with the name of an *antinomian*, and his doctrine rejected, as having a direct tendency to encourage sinners to continue in their sins. But how unjust a censure, and how unreasonable a reproach this is on the free grace of God, which

<sup>a</sup> Rom. v. 20.<sup>b</sup> Acts xx. 27.

which hath abounded towards the elect, I shall endeavour to make appear.

IN the words we have,

FIRST, the objection itself, and that is, that the aboundings of sovereign grace, have a tendency, to encourage sin. The apostle tacitly supposes some offering this, by way of objection. And,

SECONDLY, we have his answer to it, with, *God forbid*, and by shewing the unreasonableness of it; *How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* I shall consider each of these, and then draw some inferences from the whole, by way of application.

I. I SHALL consider the objection itself; and it may be reduced to two heads :

1. SOME may say, “ If this doctrine be true, that if rich grace has provided for the pardon of all our sins; and if, by the settlements of the covenant, and the satisfaction of *Christ*, we are certainly delivered from the righteous punishment they have deserved; then we may with safety indulge ourselves in the vilest of practices.” This, you know is an inference, that corrupt reason draws from such glorious premises. “ If the debt is paid,” some will be apt to say, “ as you assert it is, then where is the harm of increasing it? If *Christ* hath so secured us from wrath to come, that we shall never come into condemnation, and sin shall never be able to divest us of our interest in  
“ him,

“ him, then, away with all duty, and every  
 “ thing of a religious nature. We will go on  
 “ in sin, since we may do it with safety.” This  
 is one part of the objection.

2. IT will be also argued by way of objection, if, as the apostle says, *where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*, then, men may be naturally led to go on and increase their sins, that so the riches of grace may shine forth with greater lustre. “ You allow with us,” will such say, “ that it is good to labour that grace may abound, or that God may be exalted in pardoning our iniquities: and if he is so much the more exalted, by how much the more our offences have abounded; then we will indulge sin, and that even in flagrant instances, that so rich grace may appear the more glorious.” This is putting the objection in its full strength, and let me tell you, it has constantly been so, from the apostles days even until now. As there have not been wanting some persons, who have been so far abandoned, as to turn the grace of God into such wantonness, as this, so others there always have been, who have dared to charge the doctrine of the grace of God, with having in itself a tendency to promote it, and have therefore rejected that doctrine. I persuade myself, there are very few of you but have met with this latter objection, especially when you have been engaged to plead for the exaltation of *Christ* alone, separate from our frames,

or duties, in point of acceptance, and justification in the sight of God. And indeed, when the Lord calls you to this, you are to expect such sort of opposition and reproach. And what is the reason? Why, suffer me to say, with regard to some persons, it is not much to be wondered at, since we have cause to fear, that in destroying their own righteousness, or excluding it from a share in their justification, you even take away their Gods: and what have they more? You destroy the foundation, perhaps, upon which they have been building for many years. And to go about to convince them of its insufficiency and danger, you will too often find, it rather exposes you to their scorn and contempt, than produces the good effect you would hope for. We are all of us so naturally fond of endeavouring to establish a righteousness of our own, that, it is no wonder we cannot easily bear the discovery of its being a bed *shorter, than that a man can stretch himself on it*<sup>c</sup>. And unless we are taught by the Spirit of the Lord, I am sure that the man who will venture to tell us that all our prayers, our tears, and the like, are even worse than nothing, when made the matter of our justification, and acceptance with God; I say, a man that tells us thus, will be deemed by many, a licentious preacher, who opens a door to the gratification of our sensual appetites. How far, in reality, this is from  
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<sup>c</sup> *Isai. xxviii. 20.*

being the case, I shall endeavour to shew you under the next general head: which is,

II. To consider the weakness and folly of this objection, both from the nature of things, and from the scriptures. And here let me intreat your most serious attention; and excuse me, if I am somewhat large, since this matter is of no small importance, and the odium which is cast upon us, is such, that unless the word of God will help us in wiping it off, I am sure instead of being fit to preach the gospel, we should not be fit even for christian society. The objection then is, that what we lay down is of the same nature, as if we should say, that we may *sin that grace may abound.* In answer to which,

I. WE absolutely deny the thing to be fact. For there never was a true believer who maintained it, as his avowed principle, that because of the riches of the grace of God he might go on to throw the reins on the neck of his corruptions. Observe, I do not say, that there never was a christian, who hath, when under strong temptation, been left of God, so far, as at sometimes to draw very bad conclusions, from the riches of divine grace; and how far such temptations, under a suspension of grace, have prevailed, I will not pretend to say. But, what I assert is, that it cannot be his avowed principle, which he ad-

adheres to, that he hath therefore reason or occasion given to indulge himself in sin, because it cannot do him any real damage. This is not the reasoning of God's children, or what they dare plead for. So that we absolutely deny the fact. Men may talk at this rate who have a name to live, and yet are dead; but it is not the language of renewed souls. The holy Spirit, indeed teaches, from the stability of the covenant, that sin shall not ruin us; but then the argument is always so handled, as to lead us into a solicitude for grace to walk, as becomes the gospel: And indeed the strongest motives are drawn from it to induce us to an holy, humble, and constant obedience. But again;

2. WE observe, that those who make this objection, look upon all imperfections of the christian through a wrong glass. If a man who pleads for the honour of *Christ* in our salvation, is suffered to fall into temptation, how ready are the enemies of free grace to say, "We see what is the consequence of these notions; we expected no better; the man has now plainly shewn us, that his principles lead to licentiousness, since he indulges it in his own practice?" But how unjust is this conclusion? Alas! where is the man, that *doth good and sinneth not* \*? Where is the opposer of these doctrines but what sometimes falls? And how hard is it, that all the misconduct of those that defend them must be charged upon the grace of

\* Eccles. vii. 20.

of the gospel? No, *God forbid.* I am sure if a man falls, it is not the grace of God that teaches him to do so: though the grace of God tells him, if he is a believer, that he shall rise again. It is true, when he falls into sin, instead of depending on his repentance, and performances to expiate and atone for it, he desires to repair to the great sacrifice, whereby *Christ* has perfected them that are sanctified. And thus, because he cannot think of making a Saviour of his duties, must he, from thence, be charged with a contempt of them? What, is there no difference between neglecting, and despising duties? Where persons conclude thus, they judge without knowledge, and censure without reason. For remember, tho' we look not to our duties to satisfy for our sins, yet we have, we humbly hope, a strict regard to them in their proper place, and it will be bad with us, if this regard is not really superior to that of those who make their all to depend upon them. But then, again,

3. ADMIT that among those who stile themselves advocates for free grace, there were some, who, should not only talk, but even act thus; must the grace of God, from thence, be sullied, as if that grace led them to this sinful conduct? No, we may much safer judge concerning such persons, that they have only a name to live, and never tasted of the grace of God; than to charge this conduct on principles, which, if received in faith, will

be necessarily productive of holiness. Might we not, with the same justice, charge a good, a wise, and gentle administration of civil government, with all the enormities that are committed by licentious men under it? You see how this would be looked upon, by men of the least sense in the world. It is, you know, always esteemed as an act of the highest injustice, to charge the irregularities of a few particular members of a community, as a brand of infamy on the constitution; and if it is so in civil societies, why not in religious ones, and where *Christ* and his interest are concerned? There have been from the first, and will continue to be, perhaps, as long as there is a church in the world, some who have crept in at unawares, who, under specious pretences of exalting *Christ*, have, not only pleaded for great irregularities, but have been chargeable with them themselves. But from thence, are we to conclude that the grace of God instructed them into this, or that the doctrines of the gospel had this influence upon them? This is not only the most monstrous absurdity imaginable, but is an act of such injustice, that we should be ashamed of in other cases. I most freely confess, there have been persons of the vilest characters, who have screened themselves under the notion of being warm pleaders for the great doctrines of the gospel: but, I am ready to persuade myself, that there are but very few, even of those that only bear the  
name

name of christians, who will ever pretend to say, they committed this or the other sin, with that view, that grace might abound, and therein think they did well. However, I am throughly convinced that, upon the least examination, it will be found, that where there is one who is left of God to so great a wickedness as to plead for such unlawful liberty, there are multitudes who are building upon the sandy foundation of their own works, and strength to perform them, in the contempt of Christ's sacrifice and righteousness, and the aids of his Spirit, who have fallen an easy prey to the temptations of *Satan*, and the gratification of their own corruptions. But to proceed,

4. WE observe, that, whatever may be the sentiments of carnal professors, a true christian cannot possibly *continue in sin*, or avowedly do so, *that grace may abound*, because he is not in his own, but Christ's keeping; as the apostle tells the *Corinthians*; *Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price<sup>d</sup>. And if we are Christ's, we have his spirit\**, and if we have his spirit, he will teach us otherwise. Were we indeed left to ourselves, we might join with the profane, in drawing such abominable inferences from the richest grace; and not only do so in argument, but in practice too; but, blessed be God, the case is

\* Rom. viii. 9.

<sup>d</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

is quite otherwise. The believer is under the care of the great shepherd, who will make him hear his voice, and instruct him, not only into the way of salvation, but so influence his heart and life, that instead of drawing such conclusions, as the world would fain persuade us he doth, that he will from the love of God manifested to him, be so much the more solicitous for grace to walk as becomes his relation to *Christ*, and his character as a christian; and instead of thus vilely abusing the grace of God, it will be the business of his life and conversation to exalt and recommend it. He will, by the grace of *Christ* say, “What, did my Lord shed his blood for my sins, and shall I from thence fetch occasion to multiply my transgressions? By no means.” “*Shall I continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. I cannot so much as admit the thought: this would be so flagrant an instance of the basest and vilest ingratitude, that I cannot but abhor it.*” And how comes he indeed to say so, but by the mighty grace of God that has made him to differ? Thus I have laid down some propositions, that may serve as an introduction, to assist us in our search into scripture concerning this matter; such as, that it is absolutely false, that a christian as such, can or doth allow it as his avowed principle, to *continue in sin, that grace may abound*; that the imperfections of believers, in order to

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establish this charge are viewed in the most invidious light; and notwithstanding there may be, or really are some, that call themselves christians, who have the daring impiety to adhere to such an abominable principle, and bring forth the scandalous fruits of it; yet this cannot in any justice be charged on the doctrines of grace, however such men boast of their regard to them. For the devils themselves believe there is a God, and yet their enmity against him must, in no sense, be charged upon their belief of his being. I have also observed the impossibility of this, from the union between *Christ* and the believer, and his care over, and concern for him; and that he, not being in his own keeping, but in that of the great shepherd of the church, cannot, therefore, avowedly continue in such an abuse of the grace of God.

LET us now look into the scriptures, and see what arguments the Spirit of God, makes use of there, in order to press us to holiness. And if he uses the very same arguments to this purpose, which these persons think have a tendency to destroy holiness, then; either they must be mistaken, or the holy Spirit. The latter of which, God forbid that we should so much as admit the supposition of. See how the apostle argues in this same epistle where our text is; says he, *God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have*

mercy upon all<sup>e</sup>. And accordingly he breaks out into holy admiration of the riches of divine grace. *O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God<sup>f</sup>!* Well, and what follows? Why, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service<sup>g</sup>.* Here is an exhortation, enforced with an argument, that the wise men of this world may treat with contempt. He does not say, “I beseech you, if you mean to get to heaven, and escape eternal destruction,” which are, no doubt, just arguments, and very properly and frequently used in the holy scriptures, but, “*I beseech you by the mercies of God, by those extraordinary instances of his favour, that he has manifested to you.*” The apostle knew well enough, that unless these would influence them, all other arguments would be to no purpose.

So, to the same purpose, is what you have in the first epistle to the *Corinthians*. The apostle had been exhorting them to *flee fornication<sup>h</sup>*. Well, he adds this as a reason, *for ye are bought with a price: or which is the same thing, your sins are pardoned, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are Gods<sup>i</sup>.* What a sad sort of a person would the apostle have been thought, and how

<sup>e</sup> Rom. xi. 32.    <sup>f</sup> Ver. 33.    <sup>g</sup> Chap. xii. 1.    <sup>h</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 18.    <sup>i</sup> Ver. 20.

how preposterous his reasoning, had he lived in our days! You see, in this passage, the argument is not taken from the terrors of hell and destruction, but the very choicest blessing that we are favoured with, and that which effectually secures the soul from destruction: *Ye are bought with a price.* “You are redeemed from wrath to come, therefore glorify God, or, be solicitous for his grace, being thus purchased, as a testimony of the great sense you have of your privilege: look to the Lord for grace that you may be enabled to glorify him.” Had the apostle thought of the consequences, that some men draw from such a doctrine, he would certainly have concealed it, or however, have been very far from mentioning it as a motive or argument to the practice of holiness; when he must be sensible, that it would rather encourage to the contrary disposition and practice. However he thus manifests how different his sentiments were, from those of the objectors with whom we have to do.

SEE also what the same apostle says to *Titus*, *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, what? not to live as we list, but, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world<sup>k</sup>.* Observe, it brings us salvation, and then teaches us, as the consequence of our having this great blessing, to walk as becomes those

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<sup>k</sup> Tit. ii. 11, 12.

those that enjoy it. And again, *Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity.* And what is the result of this? Why, it follows,—*and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*<sup>1</sup>.

UNTO the same purpose, we have a remarkable passage in one of *John's* epistles, *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not*<sup>m</sup>. *These things*, what things? Why, look into the preceding chapter, there he tells those to whom he writes, that, *the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin*<sup>n</sup>. This is you know the very doctrine, that these persons think would abound with such ill consequences. Well, *these things write I unto you*, says the apostle, *that ye sin not*. Some would say, were we thus to argue, that we aim rather to establish sin, than to dethrone it in the soul.—*And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*:<sup>o</sup> Observe, his design in writing to them, is, that they should not sin, his argument is, *Christ* is their *propitiation*<sup>p</sup>, and is entered into glory for them, as their *advocate*. So, that you see very plainly, for any to say, that the preaching of free grace, as the great argument that is to influence us in our new obedience, is so far from being a licentious doctrine, that it is the very same, that the Spirit of the Lord himself makes use of.

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<sup>1</sup> Tit. ii. 14.    <sup>m</sup> 1 John ii. 1.    <sup>n</sup> Chap. i. 7.    <sup>o</sup> Chap. ii. 1.  
<sup>p</sup> Ver. 2.

THE last instance I shall give you, shall be that made use of in our text, and context. The apostle had told us, *that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*<sup>1</sup>: and that *where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*<sup>r</sup>; or, by how much the more our sins have abounded, by so much the more glory will be brought to *Christ* our great propitiation. He comes then in our text, and brings in an objection, that might be made, *What shall we say then?* or is this the conclusion we shall draw from it, *shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?* God forbid, Says the apostle, *let it not be*<sup>s</sup>, or, *far be it from us; how shall we who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* That is, as I humbly apprehend, “ How shall we who are dead to it, “ as being delivered from its ruining power “ by the satisfaction of our blessed Lord: “ how shall we, who have received a principle of grace, and so, our renewed part “ is dead unto sin, how shall we now live “ any longer, or continue with delight, and “ pleasure therein? *How can we, who are “ thus freed from condemnation and from “ the dominion of sin, live any longer “ therein?*” And thus he argues, *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead; and your members as instruments of righteousness*

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 8.<sup>r</sup> Ver. 20.<sup>s</sup> μή γένοιτο.

unto God. For *sin shall not have dominion over you*: for ye are not under the law but under *grace*†. “Ye are,” as if the apostle had said, “freed from the law as a covenant of works, or from its curse as broken, and instead of being in bondage to it, ye are now under grace. And what is the consequence of this? Why, *sin shall not have dominion over you.*” Thus you see how the holy Ghost argues for holiness constantly, from the rich aboundings of sovereign grace, and from hence we have sufficient ground to conclude, that the wisest way to engage christians to an holy obedience unto God, is to convince them of what he has graciously done for them.

AND thus, having given you so many instances out of the scripture, of arguments taken from the free unmerited grace of God, manifested to us in the Son of his love, in whom we are all accepted, to engage us to holiness in life and conversation, you see when we take this method, we tread in the very steps of those persons, who are allowed to be inspired. And you must forgive me, if upon this occasion, I cannot forbear expressing my wonder, that any of those, who I dare not but believe have a regard for the scripture, should raise such clamours at dispensing the mysteries of the kingdom in their own light and beauty, as if they had a tendency to encourage immorality: when  
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† Rom. vi. 13, 14.

unless these are the proper motives of our obedience, and they operate on our minds by the grace of God given to us, whatever our pretences may be to strictness of life, there will be no more of it, than will just suit with our carnal interests. It is true indeed, that *knowing the terrors of the Lord we persuade men*; but surely no arguments seem so likely to influence ingenuous minds, which we suppose those of believers to become by the work of God's Spirit, as those which are drawn from the love and grace of God, and the security of their eternal state as in *Christ Jesus*. But, whatever be the effect of this reasoning, I think, I have sufficiently shewn that these, and such like motives, were those used by the apostles of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, or rather the Spirit of God by them. And thus I have endeavoured to shew you the weakness of this objection, both from reason and from scripture. What I shall further add shall be by way of application. And,

1. How abundantly doth it appear that *the carnal mind is enmity against God*<sup>u</sup>? The scripture abounds in nothing more than the declarations of the free grace of God; and the men of this world level all their wisdom against it. There is no doctrine that is charged with such abominable consequences, as the clear declarations of the sovereign grace of our heavenly Father, in taking

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<sup>u</sup> Rom. viii. 7.

us into so near a relation with himself, and laying our sins on his Son: nor need we wonder at it, that, with regard to most men, this doctrine is esteemed but foolishness; but it is very sad indeed, that, of those who have tasted of the truth of grace, any should have a share in such ungrateful treatment of it. To me it appears very plainly, that they are so far left of God. Were the matter represented in scripture under any obscurity, or would it admit of the least dispute, we might be esteemed rash for saying so: but being wrote as with a sun-beam, and being allowed in a degree, by almost all that own the authority of scriptures, that it should be disputed as it has been, plainly proves that the *carnal mind is enmity against God*: otherwise it could not but receive what is so plainly revealed.

2. How cautious should we be of admitting prejudices, against any particular truth, because of the slander that is cast upon it by the world. If the sentiments of carnal men, or of the generality of the professors of christianity, were to be the standard of truth, what the apostle says, that *when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*<sup>\*</sup>, had long ere this been banished, not only out of the world, but also out of the word of God. Instead then of entertaining an ill opinion of any sentiment because it is not received by the world, let us look very care-

<sup>\*</sup> Rom. v. 10.

carefully, and see whether there is sufficient foundation for it in scripture. Because, for the most part, it will be found, that those truths which are the least esteemed in the world, are the most agreeable to the mind of God. And then,

3. AND lastly, let me entreat you, who make a profession of these truths, *by the mercies of God*, to be so much the more cautious, that there may not be so much as an appearance of reason for this objection. Be not only distinguished for your sentiments, but *let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ*<sup>x</sup>. The enemy will indeed be apt to reproach you, let your conduct be what it will: but O that I could say, concerning all christians, if it were the pleasure of the Lord, that their conversation bore a sufficient testimony to the reality of those truths they profess! Remember, believer, the eyes of the world are upon you, and especially if you plead for *Christ* and his salvation, and bring your testimony against any thing else being set up in his room. I say, remember the least failure in your conduct, will have the worst construction put upon it. Look to the Lord *Jesus* then, as to a Saviour who has a fulness of grace lodged in his hands, that you may be enabled to make it appear that you *are bought with a price*, even the precious blood of *Christ*, this great sacrifice, *that denying un-*

<sup>x</sup> Phil. i. 27.

*ungodliness and worldly lusts, you live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world<sup>y</sup>. And when this is the case, let the world go on to reproach, or say what it pleaseth. Yet, since, through grace, you abhor the thought of sinning that grace may abound, walk on in the light of God's countenance, and let *Christ*, as your righteousness, be exalted in your souls; till you come to that world, where every sin, every sorrow, and all contradiction and calumny, shall eternally be done away, and you will join the spirits of just men, in that song of grateful praise, *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory, and dominion for ever and ever. Amen<sup>z</sup>.**

<sup>y</sup> Tit. ii. 12.

<sup>z</sup> Rev. i. 5, 6.





# SERMON XVII.

*Self-examination recommended.*

PREACHED at a monthly EXERCISE,  
in the Year 1744.

JEREMIAH viii. 6.

*I bemarked and heard, but they spake not aright:  
no man repented him of his wickedness, say-  
ing, What have I done? every one turned to  
his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.*



THE importance of the work we are  
professedly engaged in this day, will  
by no means admit that I spend your  
time in a large explication of the  
context. It is sufficient to observe, that God  
was now reasoning the point with his peo-  
ple: they had sinned, and greatly rebelled  
against him, and their provocations were at-  
tended with most heinous aggravations: he

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was coming out of his place to execute judgment against them, which he had often threatened, in case of their continuance in disobedience. And, tho' there were awful signatures of his resentment already upon them, but few comparatively attended to them, and laid them to heart. So that God seems to be speaking after the manner of men, as surpris'd at their obstinacy and stupidity; and yet mercy being his delight, and judgment his strange work, there seems to be some relentings and an unwillingness to proceed to extremities. *I bearkened and heard*: these are expressions after our manner; and are to be understood with security to the glory of the divine immensity and prescience. God, as it were, stooped down from heaven, bent his ear in a way of attention to their discourse, to know whether there were any righteous holy persons among them, any who were lamenting over their own sins, or exciting one another to acts of solemn humiliation, for the transgressions of the people. *But none of them spake aright*: that is, none, if compared with the great multitude who spake against God, or whose lips uttered vanity and falsehood. *No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?* Every one was ready to shift off guilt from himself; but few, very few, hardly any mourned over their own iniquities; on the contrary, almost every one turned to his own course; turned away from God, from all advice and reproof, to his own course of folly and rebellion, according to his particular

cular appetite and inclinations, and this with impetuous violence, *like the horse rushing into the battle*, not knowing it was to the hazard of his life. From the words, thus opened, we may,

FIRST, observe, that sin, in every instance of it, is evil in the sight of God, and most hurtful to the souls of men; its wickedness is great, in the account of an infinitely wise and holy judge, and will cost the sinner dear, either in the bitterness of repentance in this world, or everlasting misery in the world to come. The original word, which we render *wickedness* in the text, signifies, what divines call *malum culpæ*, & *pœnæ*, both criminal evil, and the punishment of it. And most true it is that there is the essence of the one, and the desert of the other, in every violation of the law of God. Many sins may appear to us little and inconsiderable, but there is not one of them, but which is abominable in the sight of God, and exposes the guilty creature to the curse of his law, and to the fury of his indignation. *The wages of sin is death*<sup>a</sup>. Further,

SECONDLY, every man hath *his own* wickedness.—*No man repented him of his wickedness*. There are some sins which may be more properly said to be a man's *own* sins, or as the apostle *Paul* says, *the sins which do easily beset us*<sup>b</sup>; to which, by constitution, or situation,

<sup>a</sup> Rom. vi. 23.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. xii. 1.

tion, we are most inclined, or most exposed. It is true indeed of all the transgressions we commit; that we are personally charged with the guilt of them, and must answer for them before God: But how apt are we to soften the language; when we are speaking of our *own* sins? This is a common case: what men call wickedness in others, they are ready to stile unavoidable failures; or mere human infirmities in themselves. But let us remember, that sin found with us is as real *wickedness*; as when committed by others; as hateful to God, yea, if possible, more so in professors, than in the profane. Sin as sin; abstractedly considered, where ever it is found is infinitely odious in the pure eyes of that God with whom we have to do: but a profession of religion aggravates it greatly. Moreover,

THIRDLY, we may further observe that, tho' we cannot make satisfaction to God for our sins, it is our indispensable duty, and, when enabled by his Spirit, a very great and invaluable mercy to repent of them. Or, as the original word signifies, to grieve for them, as having changed our minds concerning them. God complains in the text, that *no man repented him of his wickedness*: plainly suggesting, that this ought to have been the case. And what more reasonable than that a creature wholly dependent upon his Maker, and infinitely obliged to his goodness, when  
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he hath ungratefully departed from him, and rebelled against him, should repent, or, as *Solomon* expresses it, *betbink himself*, and turn to the Lord, saying, “*I have sinned, I have done amiss, I have dealt wickedly<sup>c</sup>*; but, won over by thy grace, I would return to thee with all my heart, and with all my soul: bear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, and forgive thy servant who hath sinned against thee<sup>d</sup>?” And, for our encouragement, there is very special notice taken of the true penitent by God, who, tho’ he is *the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity<sup>e</sup>*, yet he saith *to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word<sup>f</sup>*. So, in the text, God *bearkened and heard whether any spake aright, and repented him of his wickedness*. The expression may not only intimate the accuracy of the inquiry, but the great pleasure God takes in it. Wherever this is truly the case, he says, *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth<sup>g</sup>*. In what melting, pathetic language doth

<sup>c</sup> 2 Chron. vi. 37. <sup>d</sup> Ver. 39. <sup>e</sup> Isai. lvii. 15. <sup>f</sup> Chap. lxvi. 2. <sup>g</sup> Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

doth God speak upon *Ephraim's* making this acknowledgement? *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord<sup>h</sup>.* Thus, in order to repentance of the right kind, it is absolutely necessary that things should be brought home to ourselves, each of us saying, "What have I done? wherein have I departed from the Lord? what am I chargeable with in his sight?" God *bearkened and heard, but they spake not aright.* Many might be making acknowledgements of the iniquities of the public, and of a general departure from God; but none repented him of *his own* wickedness, saying, *what have I done?*

AND thus I am brought to what I had chiefly in view in the choice of these words, I mean the great duty of self-examination, in order to humiliation and repentance. If ever we would rightly humble ourselves before God, we must, every one of us, put this question to his own soul, *What have I done?* That this is our duty, will not be disputed in the theory, how much soever it be neglected in the practice. We are to commune with our own hearts, to *examine ourselves, to prove our own selves*<sup>i</sup>. We are to look back upon the words of our lips, the actions of our lives, and the ways we have walked in; and not only

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<sup>h</sup> Jer. xxxi. 20.<sup>i</sup> 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

fo, but we must enquire into the frames, the dispositions, and workings of our hearts, in order to discover of what kind, and nature they have been, whether good or evil. As to the manner of the performance of this duty,

1. IT should be done secretly, or in our retirements, at a distance from the business, the noise, and hurry of the world; where no eye sees us, but that of the great God. A merchant is not willingly interrupted when he is settling his accounts, and casting up his books. The most desirable company, and the most welcome at other times, is then unseasonable. And thus we should say to the world and every thing in it, Keep at a distance till the enquiry is finished. Far be it from me to suggest that a christian should live out of the world, and throw up all his temporal concerns, in order to devote his life wholly to meditation and reflection. But there are some seasons in which he is called to be alone; some things which are to pass between him and his own soul, as well as betwixt God and him, things that will admit of no earthly witness. And when this is the case, every thing else should stand still. And, by the way, it is a sorrowful sign, that the affairs of our souls are but in a bad condition, when we are afraid, or unwilling to go into our retirements, and enter into a close examination of ourselves.

2. THIS duty calls for great seriousness of spirit; for it is a business of the last importance, and therefore should be attended with

suitable solemnity. The honour of God is nearly concerned, as our lawgiver and judge. It is no trifling affair when we come, as under the eye of an infinitely righteous, and heart-searching God to say, *What have I done?* Moreover, the importance of the enquiry should make us search with the utmost deliberation, and with the severest strictness and impartiality. It is not enough that we recall the matter of our actions, but the manner, principle, and end of them are to be attended to; what knowledge we have sinned against, what convictions of our own consciences, and how often we have resisted the Spirit of God; what professions we have made, and what obligations we have been laid under to live to God, and walk closely with him, and the like. The self-love, that is found with every one of us, may tempt us to put more favourable constructions on things than we ought; as on the other hand, unbelief, and the malice of satan may swell the charge beyond measure, and aggravate circumstances beyond the truth. But the word of God is to be our rule of judging: this is the grand directory of obedience; every deviation from the precept is evil: *the law of the Lord is pure*, and spiritual, reaching to the inward man; to our desires and affections as well as our words and actions; and, if we would come to a right knowledge of ourselves, we must, with the *psalmist*, lift up our voice to the Lord, and say, “ *Search me, O God, and*  
“ *know*

“ *know my heart : try me, and know my thoughts :*  
 “ *thou, whose eye nothing can escape, shew me,*  
 “ *every evil that is in me, or hath been commit-*  
 “ *ted by me, and lead me in the way everlasting<sup>k</sup>.”*

Once more,

3. THE enquiry should be entered upon with a determination, in the strength of grace, to charge ourselves with every evil we discover, to take shame to ourselves for it, to judge and condemn ourselves, and to apply to the fountain of *Christ's* blood for pardon, and to his Spirit for cleansing, and preservation, for the time to come. Duty is enjoined, not merely to throw a man into confusion, much less to drive him to despair ; but to make him loath himself in his own eyes ; to bring him to acknowledge the mercy and forbearance of God ; that *Christ* may be exalted in the character of a Saviour ; and that, under deep conviction of guilt and unworthiness, the soul may fly for refuge to him, and shelter itself, under the shadow of his wings. Nor can the case be so bad, where the heart is right with God, and solicitous to pass a righteous sentence on itself, as to admit of no relief. *The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin<sup>l</sup>* : and we have promises from the God of truth, that if, from an humble and an heart-affecting sense of the error of our ways, *we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness<sup>m</sup>.* *There is no man that lives, and*

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*sin.*

<sup>k</sup> Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24.    <sup>l</sup> 1 John i. 7.    <sup>m</sup> Ver. 9.

*sinneth not<sup>n</sup>*: but if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous<sup>o</sup>: we have a fountain set open, to which faith may apply with comfortable assurance, that God, for *Christ's* sake, will forgive all our sins, and heal all our backslidings. Neither can we regularly come at comfort, I mean such as God gives and approves, but as having first judged ourselves, and acknowledged our guilt. Thus I have considered the duty itself, with the manner of its performance.

I go on to observe, that there are some seasons in which we are more especially called to attend to it. As,

I. WHEN conscience is stirring, and charging us with any new guilt, instead of putting off an enquiry, we should endeavour immediately to enter upon it. It is a wonderful instance of the wisdom of God, that he hath lighted up this candle in the breast of every man; and though, through the fall, this light is greatly impaired, and, till sanctified by the Spirit of God, it will not regularly and effectually do its office; yet there is not a man in our world, except those who are given over to judicial blindness, whose consciences are *seared as with a hot iron*, but feels it accusing him more or less, at one time or other, for the evil he commits. But an enlightened and a tender conscience is peculiar to the saints; and when this speaks it is the voice of God, and ought immediately

• 1 Kings viii. 46.

• 1 John ii. 1.

mediately to be attended to. When perhaps we have hastily concluded a matter, or unwarily taken this or the other step, we have often had a sudden whisper in the soul, *This is not right, you have not done well.* Whenever this is the case, the believer should immediately retire, and take a careful and serious survey of his temper or conduct, compare it with the rule, and judge himself accordingly. This is the way to maintain peace in the conscience, and a method which God greatly owns for the advantage, and improvement of his servants. Let us then be willing our own minds should charge us, when there is a proper call for it: and, on every such occasion, let us seriously enquire, *What have I done?*

2. WHEN any thing unusual befalls us, as to our persons, families, or friends, which hath the appearance of chastisement, and looks as though God was displeas'd with us. In time of *affliction* we are *to consider* what may be the voice of God, wherefore he is contending with us, whether we have not provok'd him by some neglect of duty, or commission of evil. It is certain God may exercise his people with affliction for the tryal and improvement of their graces: but, upon strict inquiry, we shall find guilt enough in us at all times, to justify him in his afflictive dealings with us; and sometimes he may point at some particular instances of it by his rod. And when this is discern'd, we should take up the language of the church, and say,

*I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him*<sup>p</sup>. Elibu's description of a sick man is full of instruction to our purpose. *He is chastened, says he, with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away,—and his soul araweth near to the grave*<sup>q</sup>. To which he adds, that in this the Lord *looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not: he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light*<sup>r</sup>. It is highly proper that God should be justified in all his ways, as well those of rebuke, as those of mercy; and when the hand of the Lord is upon us, or upon any that are dear to us, we should say, *Behold we are vile, shew us wherefore thou contendest with us.*

3. WHEN God hides his face from us, and we seek him in the way of his appointments, and find him not; when those duties and ordinances, which have formerly been eminently owned for our consolation and joy, are now become barren and uncomfortable; surely every child of God who values the presence of his Father, and hath sweetly tasted that the Lord is gracious, should, in this case, with his eyes directed up to heaven, lay his hand on his heart and say, “*What have I done? What hath provoked my God to suspend the visits of his*  
“ *love?*”

<sup>p</sup> Mic. vii. 9.    <sup>q</sup> Job xxxiii. 19, — 22.    <sup>r</sup> Ver. 27, 28.

“ love? Why is it that *Jefus*, who is my best  
 “ friend, the lovely object of my supreme af-  
 “ fection, oh why is it that he keeps at such  
 “ a distance! that he is fo long before he re-  
 “ turneth to my weary, thirfty foul? Have I  
 “ not been carelefs, and drowfy, carnal, and  
 “ worldly? Is there no idol indulged, no ri-  
 “ val to his glory admitted? Whence is it that  
 “ I go mourning all the day long? Shew me O  
 “ Lord the matter of the controverfy, and take  
 “ it away.” Here the believer is loudly called  
 upon to fearch his heart, and examine his ways;  
 and whilft he is faithfully attending to this,  
 there is good reafon to expect, from the ufual  
 conduct of our gracious Saviour, that he will  
 furprife him with his love, and, *before* he is  
*aware*, by the returning prefence of his Lord his  
 heart fhall be made *like the chariots of a willing*  
*people.*

4. ANOTHER feafon for this is, when God  
 is coming *out of his place*, in a way of national  
 judgments, and threatens, or begins to execute  
 deferved vengeance: *for when his judgments are*  
*in the earth, the inhabitants of the world fhould*  
*learn righteousnefs*<sup>s</sup>: and this cannot be, with-  
 out fearching our ways, in order to mend  
 them, and turn to the Lord. The believer  
 is fafe in the hands of *Chrift*, and the bonds  
 of the covenant: let what will come in the  
 courfe of providence, *all things fhall work toge-*  
*ther for good to him*<sup>t</sup>. But as he may have his  
 part

<sup>s</sup> Ifai. xxvi. 9.

<sup>t</sup> Rom. viii. 28.

part in outward calamities together with others ; so it highly concerns him to see whether he hath not contributed to the public guilt. Good men have always humbled themselves before God in times of public calamity, and God hath encouraged them to do so : for, says he, *If I shut up heaven, that there be no rain ; or if I send pestilence among my people : if my people shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways ; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land* <sup>v</sup>. On the contrary, when God is calling by public visitations to *weeping and mourning, and behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen, killing sheep, and drinking wine, &c.* he looks upon himself as greatly affronted, and threatens, *Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die* <sup>w</sup>. Once more,

5. WE are called to this duty, when, by the authority of the magistrate, or our own mutual agreement, on account of the judgments of God, we meet together professedly to humble ourselves before him. It is indeed one great part of the service, and ought always to accompany our days of fasting and prayer. Without this, we rather mock God with declaiming against the sins of others, than honour him by taking shame to ourselves. And as we are now in the house of God on purpose to bewail our own sins, as well as the sins of all the churches in this land, and of the

<sup>v</sup> 2 Chron. vii. 13, 14.

<sup>w</sup> Isai. xxii. 12, 13, 14.

the nation in general, shall we not engage our own souls? Oh that I could engage mine and yours in this service! Let each of us put the question then to ourselves, and say before the Lord, *What have I done?* And here, I pass over the more enormous instances of vice, hoping that, through the goodness and mercy of our God, we have none of this kind to charge ourselves with. And it is a great favour that we are not running into all excess of riot, and abandoned, with the profligate, to open prophaneness and impiety. I would further hope that, by far, the greater part of this assembly have truly received the grace of God, have true love to the Lord *Jesus*, entire dependence on his blood and righteousness, and some good hope, through grace, that the Lord is their God, and will be their guide in this world, and their everlasting portion in the next. But let us consider, that we are not only called by the name of *christians, children of God, and friends of the bridegroom*; but have entered into a solemn profession of religion, on well-founded hope, of a saving change, wrought by the Spirit of God upon our hearts: and let us take into view the special obligations we are under from privilege and experience, from what we have in hand, and what we have in hope. Has God chosen us unto everlasting life in his Son; called us by his grace; and revealed *Jesus* in us, as the hope of our glory; spoken peace to our troubled consciences; indulged us with the light of his countenance, and given us some *Pisgah* views  
of

of that glory, which will be hereafter more fully revealed, some realizing and appropriating exercises of faith? have we sat under the Redeemer's shadow with great delight, and been sealed by the Spirit of promise to the day of redemption? I say, supposing all this to be the case, the question then returns, *What have we done?* I do not say, for God, alas, how little! But *What have we done* against him? Let us a little look back upon our thoughts; how vain and unprofitable have they been; engaged about trifles, things of no moment, neither tending to our own good, nor the advantage of others? May it not truly be said, of the thoughts of our hearts, they are little worth? Were all the ravings and musings of our minds set down, how surprisngly vain and unprofitable would the greatest part of them appear? But that is not the worst. Have there not been many base and unworthy imaginations stirring in our hearts? And whatever hand the enemy may have had in them, have they not almost at all times, met with too much indulgence from us? True, there is, thro' mercy, a law in our minds opposing these things, but how doth sin and corruption seem to prevail? Again, *What have we done?* Has there not been too much irreverence of God in our solemn acts of worship? With how much difficulty are we sometimes brought to our religious duties, even those in which we have often found the greatest pleasure and advantage? How thoughtless of the glory of  
God,

God, the object we profess to worship? what confusion in our spirits? what distraction in our affections, and strange wanderings from God, even whilst his name has been in our lips? how ready to be satisfied with the work done, though performed at a poor rate, and in a lame and imperfect manner? Farther, *what have we done?* as to our love to *Jesus*? as to faith in his blood, desire after communion with him, and zeal for his glory? Has there not been an abatement as to each of these? Once his person, righteousness, and offices were truly and abundantly precious in our esteem; we saw his superlative excellence and glory, and we could not satisfy ourselves without going out after him in a way of dependence, and reaching forth the desires of our souls after fellowship with him, were glad to do every thing we could for the glory of his name, and willing to suffer any thing for his cause and interest. But how is it now? How hath it been for months, or perhaps years past? Hath not *Jesus* been too much neglected? And have not our hearts gone after other objects? Has there not been too great an attachment to the things of time and sense, and too eager a pursuit after this perishing world? How justly may he complain of us, as having *lost our first love*? Again, how have we behaved in the day of prosperity? Hath every mercy, especially those of a distinguishing, remarkable nature filled our souls with

adoring apprehensions of the loving kindness of God? Have our hearts been turned towards him with grateful acknowledgements, and our lives shewn forth his praise? Or rather, have we not been proud, vain, and forgetful of God, even the God of our mercies, and of ourselves too? But further, what advantage have we made of the means of grace? and how have we improved under the droppings of the sanctuary? Hath our fruitfulness bore any proportion to the care the Lord has taken in our cultivation? When we have attended on divine ministrations of the word preached, or at the table of the Lord, have we looked for God, for the living God? Have we desired the presence of the Redeemer, and the awakening, purifying, comforting influences of the Spirit? I am afraid the enquiry must issue, as to many of us, in this mournful acknowledgement, "O my leanness, my barrenness, under rich means of fruitfulness, and profit?" Yet again, *What have we done?* Have we not been apt to envy the prosperous state of others, and to fret, and be uneasy at the dispensations of providence towards ourselves? Have there been no heart-risings when others have been loaded with honour, have increased in riches, and enjoyed a great share of health, whilst we have been disappointed, impoverished, and despised, or have groaned under pining sickness, and fore pain? And, to add no more, *What have we done?* If we have had a little comfort, or

a spiritual frame, how apt have we been to *sacrifice to our net, and burn incense to our drag* \*? And when denied it, have we not grown fullen, peevish, and been ready to quarrel with God and all about us? This may serve as a specimen of the reasonableness of this inquiry. Many other particulars might be mentioned, in which the best of us may, with great propriety, put the question in the text to ourselves, *What have I done?* and upon a serious, and faithful answer to it, find reason for repentance and humiliation.

AND, with great deference to the serious piety, exemplary usefulness, and zealous spirit discovered by you, my honoured fathers and brethren, who are engaged in the great work of the ministry, suffer me, without offence, to say, that perhaps there may be yet some reason for each of us, sure I am there is great reason for me, to say with deep concern of soul before the Lord, *What have I done?* You are sensible of the great honour God has put upon us, in calling us to preach the gospel; our obligations are of a peculiar nature, and our account very awful. If I ask my own soul, “ *What have I done with God in secret? have I been wrestling for*—  
 “ *niture, assistance, and success, crying for souls*—  
 “ *to be gathered, and edified? what have I done*—  
 “ *in preparation? have I studied with depend-*—  
 “ *ance on the Spirit, and laboured hard to find out*—  
 “ *what might be suitable to every case, and useful*—  
 “ *to all? what have I done in my publick ministry?*—  
 “ *what*—

\* Hab. i. 16.

“ what seriousness and reflection of spirit have I  
 “ used; what earnestness and zeal for the honour  
 “ of *Christ* and the good of souls? *what have I*  
 “ *done* in the oversight of the flock? have I  
 “ watched over them in love, taking every op-  
 “ portunity to advise and reprove, as the case  
 “ called for it? *what have I done* by my example;  
 “ in following after righteousness, and godliness;  
 “ faith and love, patience and meekness? what in  
 “ every other particular of my important office?  
 “ so much hath been amiss, that shame may  
 “ well cover me, and there is great reason for me  
 “ to cry out, *Enter not into judgment with thy*  
 “ *servant* <sup>x</sup>, O Lord, but *according to the multi-*  
 “ *tude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgres-*  
 “ *sions* <sup>y</sup>.” But, to draw to a close, from what  
 has been said we may learn,

I. WHAT a poor miserable creature the  
 hardened impenitent sinner is. He is taking all  
 the pains he can to stifle the convictions of his  
 own mind, to put away the threatnings of God’s  
 word from him, whilst he is every day *treasur-*  
*ing up wrath against the day of wrath, and the*  
*revelation of the righteous judgment of God* <sup>\*</sup>.  
 Should I be speaking to any such at this time,  
 remember there is a long eternity before you.  
 Perhaps you are too much engaged in the busi-  
 ness of the world, or too much immersed in the  
 pleasures of it, to attend to the voice of con-  
 science now: but you will have nothing else  
 to do hereafter. If you die in this condition,  
 the worm will never cease gnawing, and with  
 bitter

<sup>x</sup> Psa. cxliii. 2.

<sup>y</sup> Psa. li. 1.

<sup>\*</sup> Rom. ii. 3.

bitter howlings you will cry out for ever, *Ob what have I done! the summer is gone, the harvest over, my soul is lost for ever, and that for trifles, for vanity, for worse than vanity! Wretch that I am, what have I done!*

2. WE may farther learn, from what hath been said, the utter impossibility of being saved by any righteousness of our own. How shall a creature, who cannot stand before the bar of his own conscience, if it is faithful, pretend to meet his judge, a God of infinite knowledge, and infinite purity? Alas, we see but little comparatively of ourselves! but God *searches the heart*, and understands our errors in another manner than we can do. How *shall man then be just with God?* Let us therefore thankfully embrace *Jesus as the end of the law for righteousness*<sup>2</sup>, and with the apostle disclaim, and give up our own, and *count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, that we may be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is thro' the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*<sup>a</sup>.

3. WE may infer the necessity of the operations of the holy Spirit, and the marvellous success which attends them in the work of grace wrought upon the hearts of sinners. The *heart of every natural man is fully set in him to do evil*: none of them say, *is there not a lie in*

Z

my

<sup>2</sup> Rom. x. 4.

<sup>a</sup> Phil. iii. 8, 9.

*my right hand*<sup>b</sup> ? But they speak peace, and promise happiness to themselves, even in the ways which lead to death, and say, in a very different spirit, *What have I done* that should deserve the divine resentment ? What less than almighty efficacy can bring such a one to say, *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight*<sup>c</sup> ? And how often have we seen such an haughty, obstinate rebel brought, with tears of contrition, to cry out, *God be merciful to me a sinner.*

4. AND lastly, From hence we may learn the happiness of the heavenly state. The believer will have nothing there to charge himself with; will be in no danger of offending God, or grieving his spirit. Every tear will be wiped away from his eyes, every corruption banished from his soul, and he will be always in a spiritual frame, and his joy full, and without interruption. Bless God for *Jesus your hope of glory*; live more upon his Spirit, the author of all grace; look frequently into the promises; believe the word, and the oath of a faithful God; reach out the arm of faith, and let your desires go before you into that world, where your everlasting employment will be, not as at present with tears of grief to say, *What have I done?* but with an elevation of triumph, *What hath God done? what hath Christ done? what hath grace, sovereign, matchless*  
grace

<sup>b</sup> *Isai, xliv, 20.*

<sup>c</sup> *Luke xv, 21.*

grace *done* for our souls? Oh the riches of the glory of what is *done* by Father, Son, and Spirit! Happy now in the contemplation of it; but thrice happy then, in the ineffable enjoyment of it, you will for ever say, *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be all the glory!*





## SERMON XVIII.

*Of communicating christian experience.*

PSALM lxi. 16.

*Come and bear all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.*



HIS psalm you will easily discern is made up of praise and thanksgiving, and what indeed should be the habitual employment of christians when the Lord hath *dealt* thus *bountifully* with them, as he had done with the inspired author. In the words, more particularly, we may observe,

FIRST, the person speaking. And I think it is generally agreed it is king *David*; one who, though he enjoyed the crown of *Israel*, was not ashamed of the cross of *Christ*, nor the experience he had of the grace of God; but calls upon all that feared the Lord to come, and attend to what he could declare of his

Fa-

Father's love to him. And in this he may well shame, alas! but too many christians in our day, who either are too rich or too poor, too great or too mean, for serious and friendly conversation about the things of God. *David* thought it not beneath him to invite not this or the other favourite only, but all them that feared the Lord, to this entertainment. You may also observe,

SECONDLY, the invitation itself; it is to a spiritual entertainment, a feast that to the world looks mean, but when the Lord owns it with his presence, it is in reality a *feast of fat things*. Observe he did not call them to hear an enumeration of the mighty feats of war in which he had been engaged, of the exploits he had performed, and the victories he had won; but, *come, says he, and hear what God hath done for my soul*. He invites them to attend to the account he had to give of his religious experience. From which we may learn, that we are not to hide the dealings of God with our souls from our fellow-christians, but, upon every proper occasion, to be ready to open our hearts, and with the utmost freedom declare the gracious experience we have had of his goodness to us. Again,

THIRDLY, we may take notice of the persons *David* addresses on this occasion. And it was not confined to the princes and lords of his court, or to the mighty men that fought under his banners; but directed to them *that*

*feared the Lord*; and to *all* of them, which may be understood as the general character of believers, who *rejoice with trembling*, or approach to the Lord in every duty with humble reverence, at the same time that it is with holy boldness; who fear the Lord with a filial awe, though they are strangers to a slavish bondage; these in general he calls to hear what God had done for him. Or else, it may be an intimation of his desire that the *fearful in Zion*, and more especially those believers who were ready to entertain dreadful imaginations, whose souls were oppressed with fear, should attend to the account he had to give of his religious experience. “*Come, says he, all ye that fear the Lord, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul.* Perhaps there may be something in my case that may suit your souls, or encourage you in the way of the Lord: however, you will certainly hear something that may tend to glorify the riches of his grace. *Come therefore and hear, and leave the success to the Lord.*”

FROM the words thus opened and introduced, we have the following doctrinal observation:

*THAT a child of God, under the influence of his Spirit, reflecting on the great things God hath done for him, cannot but be much affected himself, and exceedingly desirous that, for the glory of God, and the good of others, they should be acquainted with it.*

*Come,*

*Come, and bear all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my Soul.* And here,

- I. I SHALL consider the matter of this declaration, and some instances that the believer, on such an occasion as this, may be supposed to have his eye more immediately upon, when he expresses himself in this manner.
- II. THE several sorts of persons to whom a christian, when led by the same spirit with the psalmist, would declare these things.
- III. THE ends he should propose in this duty. And,
- IV. THE manner in which it should be performed. And then,

I. I SHALL consider the matter of this declaration, and some instances that the psalmist might be supposed to have his eye more immediately upon, when he expresses himself in this manner, which may very well be supposed to take in two heads.

1. WHAT God had done *for* his soul in his covenant, and by his Son. And,

2. WHAT he had wrought *in* his soul, as a consequence, and manifestation of his interest in those blessings.

I. WE may suppose the psalmist here had a special regard to what God had done *for* his

soul, in his covenant, and by his Son. And here doubtless he was not unmindful of his having loved him with an everlasting love, and chosen him to everlasting life. And accordingly every believer, under the like spiritual influence, is ready to address his fellow-christians in some such language as this :

“ See here a poor unworthy creature whom  
 “ the Lord set his love upon even from ever-  
 “ lasting. Notwithstanding he was thoroughly  
 “ apprised, I should forfeit every thing by my  
 “ rebellion against him ; yet this was no ob-  
 “ struction to the kind designs of his grace. See  
 “ one whom he has distinguished as the object  
 “ of his special favour. He hath chosen me  
 “ from before the foundation of the world, and,  
 “ as a consequence of this, has provided a  
 “ powerful and suitable Saviour for me, one  
 “ who was able and willing to sustain the  
 “ weight of my guilt, and to make sufficient  
 “ atonement for it. He was at the expence  
 “ of parting with his own Son out of his bo-  
 “ som upon my account : and, when there  
 “ could be no possible relief any where else,  
 “ he laid help upon him, who was in himself  
 “ mighty to save ; when he could not save  
 “ me consistent with his own justice, without  
 “ a sufficient satisfaction, he himself provided  
 “ a lamb without spot to die for me. And  
 “ when I had nothing to induce the Lord  
 “ *Jesus* to take the burden of my iniquities upon  
 “ him, being all polluted and in my blood,  
 “ he freely offered himself, and said to the Fa-  
 “ ther

“ ther, *Lo I come, in the volume of the book it is*  
 “ *written of me, to do thy will O God<sup>a</sup>!* The  
 “ proposal was no sooner made in the cove-  
 “ nant of peace, that was between them both,  
 “ than it was agreed upon, and accordingly the  
 “ Lord *laid on him my iniquities*, and so I  
 “ was preserved in *Christ* safe from the hands  
 “ of avenging justice, as interested in his me-  
 “ diatorial undertaking. But that was not  
 “ all. In the fulness of time, this same *Je-*  
 “ *sus* came, and was content to take upon  
 “ him the form of a servant, to submit to all  
 “ the ignominies that sinful and abandoned  
 “ men could inflict upon him. He *hid not his*  
 “ *face from shame and spitting*, he endured  
 “ the rage of devils, and drank the cup of his  
 “ Father’s wrath, was *bruised for my iniqui-*  
 “ *ties, and the chastisement of my peace was*  
 “ *upon him, that so, by his stripes I might be*  
 “ *healed<sup>b</sup>*. He hath thus *by one offering for*  
 “ *ever perfected* this great work<sup>c</sup>. And as  
 “ justice has discharged him, by raising him  
 “ from the dead, and fixing him at the right  
 “ hand of God; so now I am even risen with  
 “ him, and set down with him, as he is my  
 “ head, and I am a living member of his  
 “ body. See, O my friends, the Lord hath done  
 “ all this for me; and if you consider the vast  
 “ disproportion between him and me, that he  
 “ is *the high and lofty one who inhabiteth eter-*  
 “ *nity,*

<sup>a</sup> Heb. x. 9.<sup>b</sup> Isai. liii. 5.<sup>c</sup> Heb. x. 14.

“ nity, and I a poor despicable worm, not wor-  
 “ thy of his notice ; what grace is here ! Nor  
 “ is this all ; I am not only, *in my best estate, but*  
 “ *vanity, yea less than nothing and vanity* ; but in  
 “ my natural state I was an *enemy to God*, and  
 “ he did all this for me while I was such. This  
 “ is love indeed ! Herein he *commends his love*  
 “ *to me, that when I was without strength*  
 “ *Christ died for me*<sup>d</sup>.” Thus the believer,  
 upon proper occasions, runs over the wonders  
 of redeeming grace, and considers the love of  
 God in its origin, as arising merely of his own  
 good pleasure, and in its consequences as reach-  
 ing to the soul’s welfare in time, and to eternity.  
 And while he is reflecting on these things, his  
 heart burns within him, and from what he  
 feels in himself, he cannot but be solicitous  
 that others should join with him in his won-  
 der and thankfulness : and accordingly *from*  
*the abundance of his heart his mouth speaketh,*  
*Come and bear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell*  
*you what he hath done for my soul.* He hath re-  
 deemed me from destruction, and crowned me with  
 loving kindness and tender mercies<sup>e</sup> ; set me  
 above princes, in admitting me to a place in his  
 favour ; and he can now smile upon me with due  
 glory to his justice, and delight over me to do me  
 good, consistent with the purity of his nature,  
 and the righteousness of his law. But again,

2. WE may suppose the good man to have  
 regard to what the Lord had wrought *in his*  
 soul,

<sup>d</sup> Rom. v. 8.

<sup>e</sup> Psal. ciii. 4.

soul, as well as what he done *for* him; and so he may be looked upon as calling to his friends to attend to the account of his experience of the goodness of God to him. And then you may suppose him to bespeak them to this purpose.

“ I was once by nature a *a child of wrath* as well  
“ as others, *an enemy to God thro’ wicked works*;  
“ running into all excess of riot, sinning against  
“ him without remorse, or any sense of my  
“ danger, without God and without *Christ*,  
“ and so without hope, in the world. Once  
“ I was in worse than *Egyptian* darkness, ig-  
“ norant of God, a stranger to myself, un-  
“ acquainted with the way of God’s salvation,  
“ a professed enemy to the divine law, and a  
“ thorough adversary to every thing that is  
“ good: but, through almighty grace, it is not  
“ so with me now. The Lord came at such,  
“ or such a time, and touched my soul with  
“ his powerful hand, and I began to find the  
“ terrors of the law stick fast in me. I could  
“ not sin at so cheap a rate as before: no, as  
“ I began to see the purity of God’s law I was  
“ most severely lashed by it, and thought hell  
“ and destruction must inevitably be my portion.  
“ While it was thus with me I found no rest  
“ for my soul, nothing but darkness and con-  
“ fusion, horror and despair, till the Lord led  
“ me to the city of refuge, and discovered him-  
“ self in his Son to my soul: and then it was  
“ that I emerged from darkness, and began  
“ to find myself light in the Lord, beholding

“ a beauty in the method of my recovery re-  
 “ vealed in the gospel: then it was that I wil-  
 “ lingly cast down all the weapons of my  
 “ opposition, and desired to be subject to  
 “ none but *Jesus*. How much soever before  
 “ I was for saving myself, now, it was the  
 “ desire of my heart that *Christ* alone should  
 “ be exalted; that he should have all the  
 “ glory, as the work was all his. Thus the  
 “ Lord has led me in his own way, and  
 “ brought me to his Son, enabling me to see  
 “ my need of him, and his meetness to assist  
 “ and save me, as *made of God to me wisdom,*  
 “ *righteousness, sanctification, and redemption* <sup>f</sup>;  
 “ and, at the same time, I hope, revealed him  
 “ in me as the hope of my glory, and shewed  
 “ me, in the discoveries of his love, that he  
 “ was mine. Then this, or the other promise  
 “ was brought to my soul, and set home with  
 “ peculiar warmth. He said unto me, *Be of*  
 “ *good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee* <sup>g</sup>, *I have*  
 “ *blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions,*  
 “ *and as a cloud thy sins* <sup>h</sup>: *Be not dismayed, for*  
 “ *I am thy God* <sup>i</sup>, *I have made an everlasting*  
 “ *covenant with thee, even the sure mercies of*  
 “ *David* <sup>k</sup>: *I have loved thee, with an ever-*  
 “ *lasting love; therefore with loving kindness*  
 “ *have I drawn thee* <sup>l</sup>. Thus with cords of  
 “ love was I won to *Jesus Christ*, as with the  
 “ bands of a man; and at this, and the other  
 “ time,

<sup>f</sup> 1 Cor. i. 30.    <sup>g</sup> Mat. ix. 2.    <sup>h</sup> Isaï. xlv. 22.    <sup>i</sup> Chap.  
 xli. 10.    <sup>k</sup> Chap. lv. 3.    <sup>l</sup> Jer. xxxi. 3.

“ time, he told me, in the secret whispers of  
 “ his Spirit, that *my beloved was mine, and I was*  
 “ *his* <sup>m</sup>. And not only so, but, ever since, he  
 “ hath guided me by his counsel, and com-  
 “ forted me with his love: and though, alas!  
 “ but too often, through the strength of cor-  
 “ ruptions, I have sinned against him; yet he  
 “ hath not been wanting in the discoveries of  
 “ pardoning grace, hath shed abroad his love  
 “ in my heart, and bid me return unto him  
 “ for he had redeemed me.” Thus we may  
 suppose the good man addressing his friends  
 when he says “ *Come and hear what the Lord*  
 “ *has done for my soul.* He hath brought me  
 “ *out of darkness into his marvellous light* <sup>n</sup>; he  
 “ *hath set my feet upon a rock, and established*  
 “ *my goings* <sup>o</sup>. And now with pleasure I can  
 “ look forward; and, from what I have for-  
 “ merly felt of his goodness, with comfort  
 “ conclude, that he will *never leave me, nor*  
 “ *forsake me* <sup>p</sup>.” And in this we must suppose  
 the psalmist was very far from being alone: for  
 there never was a believer in the world but  
 (tho’ he might not be able to be so very parti-  
 cular, yet) could set to his seal that he had  
 experienced somewhat of this nature. And I  
 am sure, those that are thus led by the Spirit  
 of *Christ* will be solicitous that others should  
 hear, and know what the Lord hath done for  
 them. And thus I have finished the first ge-  
 neral

<sup>m</sup> Cant. ii. 16.    <sup>n</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 9.    <sup>o</sup> Psal. xl. 2.    <sup>p</sup> Heb.  
 xiii. 5.

neral head, concerning the matter of this declaration, or what it was *David* must be supposed to have his eye upon, when he says, *Come, and bear what God hath done for my soul.* I come now to consider,

II. THE several sorts of persons to whom a christian, when led by the same spirit with the psalmist, would *declare* these things. And,

I. THE saints would *declare* them to sinners, making no profession of religion, when they observe them concerned about their eternal welfare. And I am thoroughly persuaded the Lord hath owned this to many souls. If we hear sinners enquiring the way to *Zion*, with their faces ever so little inclined thitherward, methinks, we should gladly lay hold on any such opportunity to declare to them what God hath done for us, and the way he led us, when we were in the same case. It is true we may exhort, advise, and direct them; but as example generally influences more than precept, so, if we can say to them not only, we would have them do this or that, but at the same time, declare to them the remarkable dealings of God with our own souls, when we were in the same circumstances, it will be very likely to have a salutary effect. And if we relate the comforts with which we have been comforted, it may prevent them from sorrowing as those who are without hope, since the same Lord, who sup-

supported and delivered us, is able to do the same for them. It is true we are not to *cast our pearls before swine*; that is, we have no call to tell our experience to every profligate sinner, for, as such feel nothing of it, so they would rather turn it into banter and ridicule. But methinks, it should be no objection to us, when we see persons seriously inquiring after the way of salvation, that they are ignorant and weak. No, if we have but the least apprehension that any degree of the fear of God is before their eyes, we may safely follow the psalmist's example, and call upon them, to *come and hear what God hath done for our souls*. Thus, for instance, suppose we hear a poor soul crying out. "O  
" I feel my sins as a burden too heavy for me  
" to bear! I could be glad to know which way,  
" if it were possible, I might be pardoned and  
" accepted. But alas! I am ready to fear the  
" Lord hath cast me off, that he will never  
" have a gracious thought towards me." Upon such an occasion, what can be more natural than for us to begin, and declare, that when we were in this very case, the Lord led us this, or the other way, into the knowledge of the compleatness of *Christ's* satisfaction, and shewed us where we were to flee for refuge, so as to find peace? And thus we should seize such opportunities not only to preach *Christ* as the only way of salvation, but to declare that we have, in our own experience, found him to be so, and have obtained relief and safety in trust-  
ing

ing in him. Thus we are to *declare what God hath done for our souls*, to assist and encourage poor awakened sinners; but more especially are we to do this,

2. To believers. And,

(1.) To those who are but babes in *Christ*, weak in faith, that are full of doubts and hesitations, who cannot venture to conclude they have an interest in the Lord *Jesus Christ*, and yet dare not cast away all their confidence. That it is the pleasure of the Lord that the church should abound with these, every day's experience confirms. For where you meet with one strong christian, perhaps you may find many weak and trembling ones. Well! we should never hear one of these complaining, but, as a proper relief, we should look back upon our own experience, and ask ourselves, "Was I never in such a case as this? And  
 " if so, then let me endeavour to strengthen the  
 " weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees,  
 " and say to them, *Come and bear what God  
 " hath done for my soul.*" And it hath been often observed that the Lord has owned this, to the comfort and establishment of his little ones. "What! saith the poor soul, was this  
 " or the other friend in the same case with  
 " myself? And hath the Lord delivered them?  
 " As I am sure he had no regard to any su-  
 " perior qualifications that might be as an ar-  
 " gument to it; so I am resolved, in the  
 " strength of his grace, to put my trust in him.

" Why

“ Why should I be cast down, since he who hath delivered this, or the other believer, can, if he pleases, deliver me ? ” Thus we should declare what God hath done for our souls to the weak in *Christ's* flock. But again,

“(2.) THIS is also a duty even to the strongest faint in the world, to those who are got into the highest class. You know this is the character of the children of God, that *they speak often one to another*<sup>a</sup>; and that not only about the things of God in general, but about what they have felt in their own souls. They should, as often as they have opportunity, and especially in their best frames, recount what God has done for them in times past, and communicate also their present experiences to their fellow-christians. Thus I have gone through the second general head, and have shewn you to whom the believer should declare his experience; to enquiring sinners, trembling faints, and growing christians. I come now,

III. To consider the ends which a believer should propose in the discharge of this duty. And,

I. ° THE principal end he should have in view, when he declares his experience, is the glory of that God, who hath dealt so bountifully with him. He would surely have the Lord exalted for his faithfulness and goodness to him; he would have it published, that the  
name

<sup>a</sup> Mal. iii 16.

name of the Lord might be great; that sinners might know that his God is faithful to his word; that he hath not only engaged to be *a present help in time of need*, but that he hath found him in reality to be so. As he knows the enemies of God are ready enough to charge him with neglect of his people, because of the trials and afflictions they are exercised with; so he would, in contradiction to them, declare what he hath found in his own experience, that in very faithfulness he afflicts those that are dearest to him. And with what lustre does the glory of God shine, when his children are ready to acknowledge, that he never called them out to any duty, but his grace was sufficient for them; that he never laid his hand upon them in any afflictive exercise, but he at the same time, supplied them with all those supports which they stood in need of? I say, for christians thus to stand up, on proper occasions, and bear their experimental testimony to the faithfulness and goodness of God, what a tendency hath it to make the name of the Lord, who hath been their strong tower, glorious in the midst of the earth? This is what the christian chiefly aims at. But again,

2. ANOTHER end he hath in view is to humble his own soul, as well as the vanity of other men, by declaring how little he has deserved at the hand of the Lord, and yet how much he hath done for him. The believer knows too well the pride that is naturally in man. In

order

order therefore to lower his sentiments of himself, he will be ready to acknowledge his own vileness, that he was worse by nature than the beasts that perish, and unless the Lord had been merciful to him, when he was in his blood, he could never have been partaker of such favour at his hands. And thus, while others boast of their own power and worthiness, he cannot forbear declaring, that, how much soever the Lord hath been pleased to favour him with his presence, yet, that he is obliged to discard all pretensions to merit, and says, *Not unto me, not unto me, O Lord, but unto thy name be all the glory.* And by this means he many times puts to silence the vanity of other men. But then again,

3. ANOTHER end is to promote the welfare of his fellow-christians. As he loves the head, so he also loves the members. In whomsoever he sees the image of *Christ* formed, he desires his heart may be knit in love to such an one. And as he would not have it inactive love; so, upon every proper occasion, he would open to his christian brother what he hath felt of the joy, that a stranger intermeddles not with, that he might be a sharer with him, and be comforted by his experience, when darkness comes upon him. And thus he is likewise glad to improve every opportunity of helping the joy, and assisting the comfort of his brethren in the Lord. There are so many difficulties that the christian is beset with, in the present

state, that he can never follow the Lord fully, and have the world to be his friend. So that, methinks, since there are so few who name the name of *Christ*, and yet much fewer that love him in sincerity, where this disposition is in truth, it should have the greatest tendency to enkindle the most engaging affection; an affection which should shew itself, in a readiness to do all that lies in our power, towards mutual growth in the knowledge and comforts of the holy Ghost. And as christian conversation about the dealings of God with our souls hath often been owned with this good effect, methinks we should not be such strangers to one another; but cultivate this heavenly commerce with all our interest and power. Thus you see what are the ends that believers should propose in their discharge of this duty. But then I come,

IV. To speak of the manner in which it should be performed; or how a christian is to tell *what God hath done for his soul*. And it may be reduced to two heads.

I. It should be with the greatest humility. There is too much spiritual, as well as carnal pride among the professors of religion: and it is well if too many of us may not have reason to lay our hands upon our mouths, and acknowledge ourselves more or less guilty in this respect. We had much better let such conversation alone, than

than declare our experience with a view to exalt ourselves by it. If we aim at raising ourselves in the esteem of our fellow-christians, or to gain reputation among men, if this is the end we propose, in declaring *what God has done for our souls*, it cannot but be nauseous in the sight of the Lord. No, when we say any thing of what the Lord has done either for us, or in us, let us remember *the rock from whence we were hewn, and the hole of the pit from whence we were digged*; let us lay ourselves in the dust; and when we call to those who fear the Lord to hear *what he hath done for us*, let our souls be filled with the deepest sense of our unworthiness. Let us remember who did it, and give all the glory, where it is justly due. But again,

2. IT should also be attended with the greatest thankfulness, wonder, and adoration at the riches of God's grace. I am sure, if we have felt any thing of it, we shall not be able to declare it, without some good degree of thankfulness. The impression will be too lively to be forgotten entirely, and the grace will be too illustrious to be recited without some measure of gratitude. And thus I have gone through what I designed in a doctrinal way, and shall close all with an inference or two. And,

1. LET us each of us ask ourselves, What hath the Lord done for my soul? And in order to determine this, let us ask, What hath he

wrought in my soul? For though the work of God's grace in the heart is not causal of God's love to us, or to any act of grace towards us, yet it is declarative of it. And, I am sure, if we always remain in darkness, concerning these things, we shall have no reason to conclude that we are the Lord's. If we would hope that God hath loved us with an everlasting love, we should enquire whether he has declared it, by drawing us with the cords of his love. It is not indeed essential to our happiness, that we should be able to give an exact account of our experience, or every particular circumstance attending our conversion: but unless we know that whereas we were once blind, now we see, whereas *we were once darkness, we are now light in the Lord*<sup>r</sup>, I know no ground we have of consolation, as having any lot, or share in the riches of pardoning grace. Again,

2. How may we blush and be ashamed, that we have so much conversation in the world, and so little about what God hath done for our souls? It is a very bad sign upon us, in our day, that the things of God are generally postponed, while either the affairs of state, or the circumstances of outward life, or something perhaps of a more trifling nature, are the general subjects of our conversation. What! are we ashamed of the noblest, the most interesting sub-

<sup>r</sup> Eph. v. 8.

subject? It is but a poor sign that we have felt any thing of it, if we think it unnecessary to declare it to our fellow-christians. What think you? suppose any two of us were cast upon a barbarous shore, where we neither understood the language, nor the customs of the inhabitants, and were treated by them with reproach and cruelty, do you think we should not esteem it a happiness, that we could unburden ourselves to each other, and communicate our griefs, and troubles? And shall we think it less so, while we are in such a world as this; in a strange land, and at a distance from our father's house? shall we neglect conversing with each other? No, let our conversation not only be in heaven, but about spiritual and heavenly things. But,

3. AND lastly, bless God for the Lord *Jesus Christ*. You would never have had any experience to declare, but a fearful looking for of God's righteous judgments, were it not for him. Well then, when you consider what God hath done for you, remember him thro' whom every blessing has been communicated to you; remember him whom the Father gave out of his bosom for your salvation, *whom he sanctified and sent into the world*<sup>s</sup>; remember him, *who tho' he was rich, for your sakes became poor, that ye thro' his poverty might be rich*<sup>t</sup>. Remember all he did, and all he suffered, that

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you

<sup>s</sup> John x. 36.<sup>t</sup> 2 Cor. viii. 9.

you might be partakers of a rich experience of grace here, and that you might afterwards enter into the glory, which he is gone to prepare for you. And when you consider these things, I am sure, a crucified, risen, and exalted *Jesus* will be the principal subject of your conversation.





# S E R M O N XIX.

*The strong man conquered.*

LUKE xi. 21, 22.

*When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace : but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*



THE occasion of these words was this; our Lord, whose business it was to go about doing good, and whose miraculous power was continually exerted to support his mission, and confirm his doctrine, had dispossessed a man of a devil, to the great astonishment of the one part of the people, and the envy and confusion of the other; who, though they could not deny the matter of fact, that the devil was really cast out, this being done

in the fight of all the people ; yet they endeavoured to lessen the miracle and its author in their esteem, by malicious suggestions, that it was done by the power of *Satan*. *But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils*<sup>a</sup>. On this our Lord, who was intimately acquainted with the thoughts of their hearts, shews the absurdity of their reasoning, by observing, that *Satan* was a wiser tyrant than to destroy his own kingdom, and that the true reason why he made no effectual resistance was, because he was attacked by a force superior to his own. This he illustrates by a very apt similitude, part of which I have now chosen as the subject of my discourse. In which we may observe,

- I. THE description given of *Satan*. He is, as a *strong man armed*.
  - II. THE misery of every natural man, while such, set forth by *Satan*, this cruel tyrant's *keeping his palace*, in the soul. There he sits as lord and king.
  - III. WE may observe the fatal security that attends the soul in this miserable condition. All the while, *his goods are in peace*.
  - IV. WE have a glorious description of our blessed Saviour, as one that is *stronger than this strong man armed*. *When a stronger than he shall come upon him, &c.* And then,
- V.

<sup>a</sup> Luke xi. 15.

V. AND lastly, we have an account of the method, in which the captain of our salvation conquers, and dethrones this *strong man armed*, and that is, *he comes upon him, and overcomes him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*

THUS I have given you the division of the text; each part of which might furnish us with sufficient matter for a discourse: but I shall chuse rather at this time to insist somewhat briefly upon them all, and to make some suitable application as I go along. But before I proceed, it may not be amiss to observe, that the immediate design of our Lord in these words, when compared with the context, seems to be to confute the unbelieving *Jews*; and so they carry in them a direct proof of the superior power of *Christ* to that of *Satan*; that at his pleasure he could dispossess him. But, as *all scripture is given by inspiration of God*, and is of *no private interpretation*, and as other miracles of our Saviour were not only real in themselves, and designed to confirm his mission and doctrine, but are frequently used to convey spiritual instruction in a figurative manner; so we may safely take the words in the sense I have already given of them, as presenting us with a very lively description of the miserable condition of a sinner, in his natural and unregenerate state, and of his deliverance by the power and grace of *Christ*.

*Christ.* This I thought necessary to premise, that none might charge me with fathering a sense of my own upon scripture, in contradistinction to that of the holy Ghost. But to begin,

I. WITH the account we have here of *Satan*: he is compared to a *strong man*, yea, to a *strong man armed*.

I. SATAN is compared to a *strong man*, and that because of his natural strength as an angel. It is true, he hath undoubtedly lost a great deal by his fall; but how far this hath had an influence upon that original strength which he had as an angel of the highest rank, is what neither I, nor any man can pretend peremptorily to determine. That he is still exceeding powerful will appear, if we consider the names which are given him in scripture, such as *the prince of the power of the air*<sup>b</sup>, *the God of this world*<sup>c</sup>, and *a roaring lion*<sup>d</sup>, which you know is allowed to be one of the strongest of the brute creation. He is also called *the dragon*, *that old serpent*<sup>e</sup>, and the like. All which plainly imply, that he still retains abundance of strength. So that he may justly be compared to a *strong man*. Again,

2. HE is said to be a *strong man armed*; and this may be upon many accounts.

(1.) As he is *armed* with power: this I have shewn you under the last head, as he is compared to a *strong man*.

(2.) HE

<sup>b</sup> Eph. ii. 2.    <sup>c</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 4.    <sup>d</sup> 1 Pet. v. 8.    <sup>e</sup> Rev. xx. 2.

(2.) HE is *armed* with malice ; he is an inveterate enemy to God, and all his creatures. Thus *as a rearing lion he walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*<sup>f</sup>. He would doubtless be glad, if we can suppose a spirit in the utmost torment, to be capable of any kind of joy, I say, if any thing could give him any pleasure, it would be, to see God dethroned, and the whole creation destroyed. Again,

(3.) HE is *armed* with policy. On this account the apostle says to the *Ephesians*, *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*<sup>g</sup>. And so in the epistle to the *Corinthians*, he is represented as having *blinded the minds of them which believe not*<sup>h</sup>. He is not only a powerful enemy, and so compared, as you have heard, to a *roaring lion*, but a subtle one too, and thus he is compared to a *serpent* which lies in wait to deceive. The apostle says, *we are not ignorant of his devices*<sup>i</sup> : by which he signifies that he is an artful adversary, and that he makes use of all possible stratagems to deceive poor souls. And he is the better fitted for this, as in the next place,

(4.) HE is armed with experience. He hath not been the grand deceiver of mankind, down from his first fatal attempt upon our first parents until now, without vast improvements in this wicked and destructive work. Every day increases his experience, and every sinner he tempts

<sup>f</sup> 1 Pet. v. 8.    <sup>g</sup> Eph. vi. 11.    <sup>h</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 4.    <sup>i</sup> Chap. ii. 11.

tempts furnishes him with more knowledge how to suit his baits to the various constitutions and circumstances of men. If one snare will not do, he will try another. And remember withal that he is an incessant enemy, who *continually* goes about endeavouring to do mischief. Thus this cruel adversary is justly said to be *armed*, as he is armed with strength, with malice, policy, and experience.

AND is he so? To apply it as we go along, then from hence we may learn, how unequal a match we are, in ourselves, for him. The strongest saint, as well as the most daring and self-sufficient sinner, is in himself as nothing before him. Know we not in ourselves how to think a good thought, how much less then, to encounter so crafty and potent an enemy? Is it not a piece of the highest presumption, for any of us to enter the lists with him in our own strength? This, let me tell you, is one of the strong holds of *Satan*: if he can persuade the soul that he is equal to the combat in his own strength, then it is that he is almost sure of victory. Let us then, as this is our duty, nay, and let me add, our privilege too, when we are tempted, look unto *Jesus* who only can secure us. But,

II. THE next thing observable in our text, is the miserable state of a sinner before conversion; *the strong man armed keepeth his palace*, or reigns in his soul: he takes up his residence there,

there, as a king; doth his pleasure, all things go according to his will; he rules as lord, and reigns without controul in the heart, till it is renewed by divine grace. It is observable, that it is not only said that he *dwells* there, as *in his palace*, but he *keeps* it, he keeps it to himself. God and *Christ* shall not have the least room there; no, *Satan* will have it all; he *keeps his palace*, or the soul of the sinner from every thing that is good, and, as far as he is permitted, fills it with every thing that hath a tendency to procure its ruin. Thus he *keeps his palace*. And I perswade myself, I need not go about to shew you, that, while this is the case, the soul must needs be miserable. For can a person be otherwise than miserable, who is a slave to the worst of tyrants? Are we ready to say, and with the greatest reason, that the condition or state, even of a private person, that is in subjection to a cruel tyrant, is miserable? How much more must that soul be so, who is under the bondage of sin and *Satan*? An earthly tyrant, at the worst, can only kill the body; but this enemy levels his greatest force against the soul. He is not content with bringing the sinner often into shame and poverty here; but nothing less than everlasting destruction hereafter, will satisfy this cruel adversary. Death you know puts an end to all the malicious pursuits of other enemies; and this to a good man, when under the most sensible ill usage he can meet with in this world,

is a very quieting consideration, that he shall meet with a secure retreat in the grave, whither he is hastening; for *there*, as *Job* speaks, *the wicked cease from troubling: and there the weary are at rest*<sup>k</sup>. But alas! when a man is a slave to *Satan*, unless grace prevent, the result will be such horror and misery as are beyond all description, and of which the heart of man can form no proper conception. Thus you see in how miserable a state and condition that man is, whose soul is *the palace* of the devil. It is without doubt abundantly more deplorable, than for a person to be bodily possessed by that mischievous and mighty adversary. The case that we have in our context, before our Lord administered help to the poor creature, was not by a thousandth part so sad, as is the condition of every unregenerate soul; for that was only an unhappiness, involving no crime or guilt in it; whereas guilt is inseparable, where *Satan* has the possession of the soul. Again, in the one, *Satan's* principal influence is on the members of the body; in the other, the faculties of the soul are under his direction, and abused at his pleasure. Thus miserable is the case of those who are willing slaves to sin and *Satan*, in whose souls he *keeps his palace*.

AND is it so then? how natural is it from hence to infer, the grand mistake of those, who from their being in easy circumstances, though utter strangers to the grace of God, conclude

<sup>k</sup> Job iii. 17.

clude they are really happy? It is true, as to this world, perhaps, they may have more than heart could wish: though this rarely happens, for riches, as they are in themselves uncertain, so they are in their enjoyment unsatisfying. But, I say, admit they may look upon themselves as compleatly happy, or let this be the judgment of others concerning them, yet, if this is the true state of their case, that the *strong man armed keeps his palace in their souls*, they are of all persons the most miserable. Which leads us to the next thing I proposed to consider in the words, to wit,

III. THE aggravating circumstance that heightens, nay, may we not say, compleats their misery, namely, their fatal security: while in this sad condition, their *goods are in peace*, their souls are easy and calm, as if all were right and well. They have peace indeed, such an one as it is; not that *peace of conscience that passeth all understanding*, which is the result of an interest in pardoning love; no, their peace is merely external, ungrounded confidence, arising, either, from a want of thought, or else from wrong notions of God himself; as, that he is all mercy, and has little or no regard to justice, or that they stand upon very good terms with him, since they are such as are commonly called morally honest, and good natured men. Thus they hug themselves in a false peace, *few pillows of deceit under their*

own *elbows*<sup>l</sup>, and say, as the fool in the gospel, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry*<sup>m</sup>. And observe it, while this is the case, *Satan* careth not how little he disturbs them. He is well enough contented, so he may but *keep the palace*, whatever the soul may think of it; because he knows what will be the fatal consequence of it in the end, unless grace prevent. And is not this a most melancholy condition indeed? What! *Satan* *keep the palace*, or reign lord supreme in my heart, and yet I as easy as if *Christ* had set up his throne there! Should we not say concerning a person intoxicated with liquor, or in a dead sleep in the midst of flames, alas! poor creature, he doth not know his own danger? Why, let me tell you, and it is enough to make every unregenerate soul tremble, this is but a faint resemblance of the real misery of poor sinners. Should we be easy in the paws of a furious wild beast? And shall we then be calm and unaffected while our souls are under the power of *Satan*, that savage and devouring lion? This is a most melancholy case indeed! I know no more how to set forth the danger and misery of such a condition, than I know how to paint all the glories of the heavenly state. The Lord grant that what I have said of it may not prove without its use, if there should be any here, of whom it may be said they

<sup>l</sup> Ezek. xiii. 18.<sup>m</sup> Luke xii. 19.

they lie as it were fast asleep upon the very brink of hell. But to apply this to ourselves,

1. WAS this once the case of all of us? that is, did we, whilst in an unconverted state, hug our chains, rest easy and satisfied with our bondage, without either considering or regarding the consequences of it? what an humbling consideration should this be? how may this convince us of our natural blindness and stupidity? O let us frequently remember *the rock from whence we were hewn, and the hole of the pit from whence we were digged*, in order to keep us low in our own eyes and esteem, and to raise our thoughts and apprehensions of rich and sovereign grace! But then,

2. SHOULD there be any here, who just begin to be blest with some glimmerings of light, so that they are convinced that their state as sinners, is the most deplorable in the world, why, what shall we say to such, but as it was said in another case, *Look to Christ for strength to enable you to escape for your lives<sup>n</sup>*, to flee from the slavery of sin and *Satan*, into the glorious liberty of the children of God? That is, pray earnestly for the Spirit of God to lead you to *Christ*, and *if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed<sup>o</sup>*. And give me leave to say, if you have peace spoken to you any other way, but as interested in *Christ*, or as justified through his righteousness, unless grace prevent, it will issue in nothing,

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<sup>n</sup> Gen. xix. 17.

<sup>o</sup> John viii. 36.

thing, but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. But,

IV. THE next thing remarkable in our text, is the account we have of our dear Redeemer, as one who is *stronger than this strong man armed*. As we are told there is a *roaring lion, walking about seeking whom he may devour*, so likewise we are informed that there is *the lion of the tribe of Judah<sup>p</sup>*, who is *stronger than he*, and who is *mighty to save*. And that,

1. As he is the *most high God*. In this view, the devils are as nothing before him. He holds the end of the chain with which they are bound, and can restrain or enlarge their power at his pleasure. As he was the creator of all things, so he not only made all the angels in heaven and devils in hell, but he hath them all under his absolute command, and can do with them what he pleases. Thus he is *stronger than this strong man armed*. Again,

2. HE is so, when we consider him as our Mediator and surety. As he is *King in Zion*, so he is *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<sup>q</sup>*. It is true, he, for wise ends, permits *Satan* to set up his strong holds in the hearts even of his own children; yet he can at his pleasure dispossess him. As cunning,  
as

<sup>p</sup> Rev. v. 5.

<sup>q</sup> Eph. i. 21.

as malicious, and as powerful as our great enemy is; yet, it is our comfort, that in all things our blessed *Jesus* is above him. And is he thus stronger than the strong man armed? Then,

(1.) WHAT high thoughts should we entertain of our dear Lord? Let us not only view him as our Surety, but as our Maker, our Lord and Governor, and so be filled with awful apprehensions of his Majesty. Again,

(2.) WHAT a comforting consideration should this be to those who are followed with temptations? To whom should they look, but to *Jesus* who is above this *strong man*, and can restrain his attempts on his people, when, and how he pleases? But then,

V. AND lastly, we have here an account of the method, in which this *lion of the tribe of Judah* subdues, and dethrones the old serpent the devil, and drives him out of the hearts of his people.

1. IT is said; *he will come upon him and overcome him.* And this he did, if we refer it to the atonement which he made to divine justice, upon the account of sinners, in order to redeem them from the course of the law, and the wrath of God; for *there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.* And, says the same apostle, *having blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, he took it out of the way,*

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nailing it to his cross: and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it<sup>s</sup>. This he did, I say, as by one offering he paid their debt, and rescued them from impending vengeance. Thus, according to that antient promise, *the seed of the woman bruised the head of the serpent*. Satan perhaps thought all was sure, upon the fall of man, that he had fully accomplished his design: but he finds himself mistaken with respect to the elect. *Christ comes upon him and overcomes him*, by pouring out his own soul unto death, and making it an offering for their sins. And as the result of this,

3. HE despoils *Satan* of all his armour; he takes from him all his armour wherein he trusted. That is, having come upon him and overcome him, by working out a compleat salvation by his satisfaction for his people; when, in consequence of this, the appointed time comes, the day of their being brought home to God, he dethrones *Satan* as to his dominion in their souls: and this he doth, not only by restraining and preventing the effects of his malice and power, but by the continual communications of grace and strength, by which the believer is enabled to overcome him. Thus if you refer it to *Satan*, *Christ* takes away his armour. But if we should apply this, (as I do not see any reason why we may not) to sinners themselves, the meaning is this: He takes away their armour  
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<sup>s</sup> Col. ii. 14, 15.

in which they trusted. That is, he shews them the vanity of their former confidence, and, instead of suffering them to lean on their own righteousness, as in time past, he leads them to himself, as the only object of their trust, and foundation of their comfort. Thus he *takes away their armour wherein they trusted.* That which before was gain to the souls of men, now they count as loss. They are brought to look upon themselves as destitute of every other refuge, save what they find in *Jesus Christ.* And then,

4. HE *divideth his spoils.* *Christ* justly takes the triumphs of the victory to himself, the spoils of principalities and powers, of which he makes an open shew; he divides them in a proper proportion among victorious believers. And, according to the other view also, with respect to gracious converts, having stripped them of all their former confidence, he bestows on them such graces as are the blessed fruits and effects of the victory. In one word, just as the general of an army, after the battle is over, and a conquest is gained, distributes the spoils among the victorious soldiers; so our Lord *Jesus* the great Captain of our salvation, having taken away all *Satan's* soul-destroying armour, gives to the soul some special tokens of its interest in this blessed victory. And having by his spirit dethroned *Satan*, he sets up his own kingdom in the hearts of his people. From the whole we may infer,

B b 4 (I.) THAT

(1.) THAT if it must be a *stronger than the strong man armed* that must come upon him, in order to his being overcome; then, how plain is it, that in the conversion of a sinner there must be a divine power exerted? It is a piece of the highest folly and presumption, for any of us to think, that we can change our own hearts, or dethrone *Satan* by our resolutions, our reasonings, the performance of duty, or the like. No, it is nothing but the power of him who is almighty that can effect it. It must be *one that is stronger than Satan* himself that can do this. And who is that, but the Lord of heaven and earth? Again,

(2.) HAVE any of us felt the power of God's grace in the removing *Satan* from the throne he had set up in our hearts? This is surely a comfortable evidence that *Christ* hath taken from him all his armour, so as that he shall never be able to do us any final damage. If this be our case, O how highly are we privileged! under what obligations are we to love and rejoice in our God! O how solicitous should we be to be the most thankful and fruitful of all persons in the world! Should we not look back to *Egypt*, and consider from whence we have been delivered? Believe me, the tyranny of this adversary is a thousand times worse than *Egyptian* bondage. And have we obtained a deliverance from it? is this the happy case of any of us? should not then the high praises of God dwell upon our hearts? And,

(3.) AND

(3.) AND lastly, is not this a sufficient encouragement for us to wait upon the Lord, and believe, that as he hath thus far delivered, so he will go on to deliver? It is surely our duty, and privilege, under the remains of indwelling corruption, and the temptations of *Satan*, to look unto *Jesus*, who will bruise him still more under our feet, and will do it shortly. He has engaged, in the end, to make his people *more than conquerors*. To whom then should we have recourse, on all occasions of danger, but to him who knows how to restrain the power of this outrageous and malicious enemy, or to administer proper support, when we are assaulted by him? Remember he is *stronger than the strong man armed*. And though, at times, *Satan* presses very hard upon us, and, God knows, too often gains the victory, yet, as our dear Redeemer can bring good out of the worst of evils, so remember he hath told us, that *all things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose* †.

† Rom. viii. 28.



## S E R M O N XX.

*The nature and privileges of adoption.*

The last sermon the author preached at his own meeting-place, in *Goodman's-fields*.

GALATIANS iv. 6.

*And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*



THE great design of the holy Ghost in this epistle was, you know, to relieve the churches of *Galatia* from the burdensome yoke of the ceremonial law, which was imposed on them by some of the judaizing teachers of those times, as necessary, together with the gospel, to salvation. Christianity having spread itself, by the ministry of the apostle *Paul*, to this part of the

the world, *Satan*, the great adversary of souls, threw in his tares with the seed of the word, exciting some, under a profession of religion, to invade the glorious liberty of the gospel; and, as a sanction to their impious conduct, to abuse the names of *Peter*, *James*, and other apostles, by whose authority and commission they pretended to act, when they endeavoured to engage the churches to continue the practice of circumcision, and other rites of the legal dispensation. And as persons corrupted in principle very rarely confine themselves to truth, or decency, they reproach the great apostle of the Gentiles, as a man of unreasonable singularity, and of a dying reputation in the church of *Christ*. Now to remove these false aspersions, and vindicate his character from so unjust a charge, the apostle, under the special direction of the infallible Guide, writes to them, expressing his wonder, that they, of all others, should be so soon turned aside, before *whose eyes Jesus Christ had been evidently set forth, crucified among them*<sup>a</sup>. Upon which, in the three first chapters of this epistle, he sets himself to undeceive them, by assuring them that *Christ* had abolished the whole legal dispensation, which was but *a shadow of good things to come*. And having observed, that *as many of them as had been baptized into Christ had put on Christ*<sup>b</sup>: he then shews them that there was no difference, in God's account, *whether they were Jews*

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<sup>a</sup> Gal. iii. 1.<sup>b</sup> Ver. 27.

or *Greeks, bond or free, male or female*; for they were all members of the same body, and united to the same person, as their head, even *Jesus Christ*. Upon which he argues, that *if* they were *Christ's, then were they Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise<sup>c</sup>*. In the chapter before us he considers the state of the church, antecedent to the coming of *Christ*, as that of an heir or child under age; and observes, *that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though, in right, he be lord of all, being in his nonage, and under tutors and governours, until the time appointed of the Father*. Even so says he *we, Jews, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements, or in subjection to the ordinances and institutions, of the world. But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, and of the seed of Abraham, according to the promise, made under the law; that by his obedience to it, he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons<sup>d</sup>*. We are all by nature desirous of being under the law as a covenant, but *Christ* having fulfilled it, we now *receive the adoption of children*; which invaluable privilege, together with our interest in it, is proved in that, *because we are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father*. In the consideration of which words I shall,

## I. EN-

<sup>c</sup> Gal. iii. 28, 29.<sup>d</sup> Chap. iv. 1,—5.

- I. ENQUIRE into the meaning of the term that is here applied to the people of God ; they are called *sons*.
- II. I SHALL endeavour to shew you, that all such either have, or shall have, *the Spirit of Jesus Christ sent into their hearts*.
- III. TREAT this privilege, is a fruit of their adoption or sonship ; — *because ye are sons ; therefore, or being sons of God, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts*. And then,
- IV. CONSIDER the Spirit as an intercessor within them, *crying*, in the language of adoption, *Abba, Father*.

I. I BEGIN with the meaning of the term applied here to the saints ; they are stiled *sons* ; a word peculiarly significative of the distinguishing and inestimable privilege of God's chosen people. And this term very plainly implies,

I. LIBERTY, in opposition to bondage. They are called *sons*, and not *servants*.

As God is the great parent of the whole creation, and especially the Father of the spirits of all flesh, he hath a sovereign, indispensable right, at his pleasure, to command us as his servants : but then this service, in a state of innocency, would be perfect freedom. So that though *Adam* in paradise was a servant,  
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yet at the same time he *was the son of God*<sup>e</sup>. And the angels themselves, in all the heights of happiness and glory they enjoy, are represented as ministring spirits, and the saints not only serve God in this world, but will do so, day and night, throughout the endless ages of eternity, in his temple above. But this service is so far from debasing them, that it exalts them to the highest dignity, as it is attended with a special interest in the favour of that God whom they serve; and every act of homage and obedience will be justly esteemed the glorious privilege of him that pays it, as well as the undoubted right of God who receives it. So that this service of ours, being founded in our relation to God as creatures, is confirmed, and by no means destroyed, by our relation to him as children. But as we have all forfeited our interest in God as a Father and Creator, by our apostacy; so we have enslaved ourselves, and are become servants of sin and *Satan*. Which thralldom we are only delivered from, as we are the sons of God. The great author of our liberty is the Lord *Jesus Christ*, the great Captain of our salvation, *the lion of the tribe of Judah*; and to this office he was anointed and commissioned by his Father, agreeable to that well known passage in the prophecy of *Isaiab*, *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tydings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind*  
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<sup>e</sup> Luke iii. 38.

up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound<sup>f</sup>. The way in which he procured it, was by a voluntary susception of our debt, whereby he became bound to divine justice, to answer for our offences; and thus, by his own death, *destroying him that had the power of death, he is the author of a glorious liberty to every soul that flees for refuge to him* <sup>g</sup>. There being now no condemnation to the children of God <sup>h</sup>, Satan can have no power to destroy them, though he may disturb their peace. The glorious instrument that conveys this liberty to the soul, is the Spirit of *Christ*, sent forth by the Father to all the heirs of salvation. Thus we are told, *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty* <sup>i</sup>. Before conversion, the man may be terrified by the threatenings of the law, and too often afterwards, may for a season, thro' the prevalence of unbelief, be led into bondage; but when the Spirit comes, and reveals *Christ* to him as the hope of his glory, he is introduced into the glorious liberty of the children of God. To this purpose you find the apostle speaking, *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* <sup>k</sup>.

2. THIS term implies the nearness of their relation to God. They are not only regarded  
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<sup>f</sup> Isai. lxi. 1.    <sup>g</sup> Heb. ii. 14.    <sup>h</sup> Rom. viii. 1.    <sup>i</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 17.    <sup>k</sup> Rom. viii. 15.

by him as if they were his children, but he is indeed their Father. This you know is a title frequently given to God in scripture. And I think our Lord gives us the sum of it, where he says to *Mary, Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God*<sup>1</sup>. A passage that has been full of comfort to his people in all generations. This relation, as it is near, and intimate, so being founded in the sovereign grace of God, it is indissoluble; for whom the Lord loves once as a child, he will love, and delight in to the end: And *the strength of Israel will not lie, nor repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent*<sup>m</sup>. This supposes him to be reconciled to us in his Son, for otherwise he is our enemy, and not our Father. . Again,

3. THIS implies an intimacy of communion, or familiar converse. It is not thought proper indeed by prudent earthly parents, to indulge their children with too great an intimacy with their secrets, while they are in their nonage, or to let them know how much they love them: and so our heavenly Father doth not always see it good, that we should dwell in his smiles, and enjoy the unclouded view of what he has provided for us. But as we grow up in *Christ* our head, we shall find nearer access unto God as our Father. Of this our Lord gives us an intimation, in that condescending speech

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 17.

<sup>m</sup> 1 Sam. xv. 29.

speech of his to his disciples, *Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doth, but I have called you friends: for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you*<sup>n</sup>. Compare this with that passage in one of *John's* epistles, *That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ*<sup>o</sup>. And upon this account the author of the epistle to the *Hebrews* speaks of *having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus*<sup>p</sup>. Should it be enquired what this converse or communion with God is, we must answer in general, that it is better felt than expressed. And I think the best way of conceiving of it is, to consider the soul as led forth by the spirit of *Christ*, in the exercise of faith and prayer, to God as its Father, and meeting with a gracious answer, whereby it is filled with *joy unspeakable and full of glory*. It is, in a word, God's filling the spiritual desires that he puts into the hearts of his people, with himself. Thus he lets them know the greatness of his love to them, and the designs of his grace, which are to be accomplished when they come to glory. But then,

4. THIS farther implies a right to an inheritance. Now the inheritance that God bestows on his people, is himself. Thus you know he revealed himself to *Abraham*; *Fear not,*

<sup>n</sup> John xv. 15.<sup>o</sup> John i. 3.<sup>p</sup> Heb. x. 19.

not, Abram: *I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward*<sup>a</sup>: and in the verse following my text the apostle adds, *Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God, through Christ*. By this we are not to understand an enjoyment of his perfections, but a possession of all that good in, and from the fountain of goodness, that we are capable of enjoying. Now our right to this, is antecedent to the enjoyment of it. We are heirs when under age. Thus the apostle speaks,—*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: if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together*<sup>c</sup>. That is, *Christ*, as our head and fore-runner, hath taken possession of the inheritance for us, and the very same inheritance that he enjoys we shall, in our measure, be admitted to, since we are to be glorified together. And he will confer the same kind of glory upon his chosen, that he hath received from his Father himself. This he declares expressly in his address to the Father, *And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them*<sup>d</sup>. The beginning of this, or the first fruits, we have now, we have joy and peace in believing: but the full possession is in reversion for us. Thus then I have considered the general meaning of the term *sons*, as supposing a perfect freedom, in opposition

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<sup>a</sup> Gen. xv. 1. <sup>c</sup> Rom. viii. 16, 17. <sup>d</sup> John xvii. 22.

to bondage, a near and indissoluble relation, intimate communion, and a right to the inheritance of our God and Father.

II. WE are now to shew you that all those who are *sons*, in this sense, either have, or shall have *Christ's* Spirit sent into their hearts. As to those of God's chosen, who are not yet called, the great ground of their security lies in this, that *the Lord knoweth them that are his*<sup>t</sup>: and he can send his Spirit into their hearts, at his pleasure. But as to those who call themselves his children, the great criterion of sonship, is the inhabitation of the Spirit: agreeable to these passages in the epistle to the *Romans*; *for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*<sup>u</sup>. *But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*<sup>w</sup>. It is observable that the Spirit is said to be sent forth into their hearts; by which, I apprehend, we are to understand not only, that the understanding is enlightened, but the will subdued, and the whole soul brought into subjection to *Christ*. For he is sent as the Spirit of *Christ*, to take of his, and shew it to the poor necessitous soul. After he hath convinced a man of sin, his great office is to reveal a righteousness for his refuge and comfort. This you know was all along promised as a blessing of

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<sup>t</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 19.<sup>u</sup> Rom. viii. 14.<sup>w</sup> Ver. 9.

the covenant of grace, in the old testament: and we are told by our Lord expressly in the new, that *except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter in the kingdom of God*<sup>x</sup>.

THE necessity of which, is not to justify us in the sight of God, or to give a right to his favour, but to destroy the enmity of the carnal mind against God, and to root out our pride and self-confidence; to lead us to *Cbrist*, and make us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. And then we may observe, that he is sent as a gift of grace from God as our Father; by which we are not to understand, that before he is sent, he is not present with the soul, for as he is one with the Father and Son, he fills all places with his presence. But it is to be understood of his efficacious operations, whereby the soul receives a new principle, becomes alive unto God, and full of love to the Redeemer. Which leads us,

· III. To consider that the Spirit, as sent forth by the Lord into the hearts of his children, is the consequence or result of their adoption, *because ye are sons, &c.* For the better understanding of which it will be necessary to premise two things.

I. ALL the gifts of God, and the blessings of the covenant of grace, and so, as one of the principal of them, the influences of the Spirit, are

<sup>x</sup> John iii. 5.

are free and sovereign on his part, and undeserved on ours. This truth hath been received, and humbly acknowledged by the people of God in every age; and the man that disputes it, declares but too evidently his ignorance of himself, and the desert of his iniquities. If we look into ourselves, view the plague of our hearts, and reflect on our conduct, as perverse and rebellious, which is the case of the best of us, one would think it would even force an acknowledgment of our unworthiness, and oblige us to own that we are indebted to divine grace, for every blessing, whether of the upper or the nether springs. But as an additional confirmation of this, to leave those that deny it without excuse, we find it so often inculcated in the word of God, that he that runs may read it. Thus as to our election in *Christ* from before the foundation of the world, our Lord says, *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you*<sup>y</sup>. And therefore *we love him; because he first loved us*<sup>z</sup>. As to our redemption, or salvation the apostle says, *By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God*<sup>a</sup>. And as faith in *Christ* is the gift of God, so we are told of our Lord, that *him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins*<sup>b</sup>. As to our acceptance and adoption, we are said to be *justified freely*

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<sup>y</sup> John xv. 16. <sup>z</sup> 1 John iv. 19. <sup>a</sup> Eph. ii. 8. <sup>b</sup> Acts v. 31.

freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ<sup>c</sup>: And, to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name<sup>d</sup>. And again, as to our spiritual knowledge, to us it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God<sup>e</sup>. And to add no more, as to eternal life, we are assured that though, the wages of sin is death, yet, the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord<sup>f</sup>: And our Lord says of his sheep, I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand<sup>g</sup>. Thus you see all those spiritual blessings which we have in hand, and all that glorious reward that we have in hope, are derived to us in a way of undeserved favour. And it can be no otherwise, as we are fallen from our state of integrity, and are under the curse of the law that we have broken. But,

2. You are further to take notice, that all these gifts of God are bestowed on us, as we stand in the relation of children, or as he is reconciled to us in *Christ*. He is his God and Father, and so our God and Father. This naturally arises from comparing what we observed under the former head, that we are guilty before him, and the discovery God hath made of himself to us in his word, as being of purer eyes than to behold evil<sup>h</sup>, and that

<sup>c</sup> Rom. iii. 24.<sup>d</sup> John i. 12.<sup>e</sup> Mark iv. 11.<sup>f</sup> Rom. vi. 23.<sup>g</sup> John x. 28.<sup>h</sup> Hab. i. 13.

*that will by no means clear the guilty*<sup>i</sup>, is founded in his very nature: and he must deny himself, before he can cease to will to punish sin. Nay his people, being in themselves sinners, are, under that view, subject to his wrath, and and can inherit no blessing from him. For it must be a direct contradiction, to suppose, that, in the same sense, God wills to punish, or which is the same thing, to curse, and to bless the same person, under the same consideration. As sinners, therefore, we have forfeited his favour, lost our title to the common mercies of life. And we are entitled to his favourable regard, only as washed in the blood of *Jesus*, or as accepted in him.

THE most material objection against this is founded in such passages as that, wherein it is said, *God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ, died for us*<sup>k</sup>. But I think it is very easy to reply to this, that the children of God were in this state before their conversion; and moreover, that the same persons may be very justly viewed under a twofold character, or in a twofold relation. None I believe will dispute, that have tasted of the grace of God, whether the same persons may not be related to *Adam* as their first head, and to *Christ* as their second head, as the apostle expressly asserts, that *as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*<sup>l</sup>.

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<sup>i</sup> Exod. xxxiv. 7.    <sup>k</sup> Rom. v. 8.    <sup>l</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 49.

Now in *Adam*, or considered in our relation to him, the very elect themselves, *the chosen of God and precious*, are ungodly; and God commendeth his love towards us in sending his son to save such lost creatures. But then again, consider the same persons in their relation to *Christ* the second *Adam*, and they are compleat in him, comely with his comeliness put upon them, and therefore accepted of God, and in that relation made heirs of the blessings of the covenant of grace. For out of *Christ* God is a consuming fire to every sinner. These things being premised, let us now consider the Spirit of *Christ*, being sent into our hearts, as the fruit of adoption. *Because ye are sons, he hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, &c.* By which you are not to understand,

(I.) THAT because you have the tempers and dispositions, and are enabled in some measure to pay to God the obedience of children, therefore he hath sent his Spirit into your hearts. Were this the case, this part of our salvation would be of works, and not of grace, and would oppose what we have established, that all the blessings of the covenant of grace are sovereign, undeserved gifts. For then, these might be expected as of debt, and not of favour. Besides, were we brought into subjection to *Christ*, by our own might, or power, or resolution, and could renew and sanctify ourselves, what need would there be for this blessing? But to let you see how contrary this notion is to the  
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mind of the holy Spirit, I shall turn you to several passages, from which I hope to make it evident, that our obedience to God, as children, is not the spring, but the consequence of our receiving the Spirit of adoption. See to this purpose that passage in the prophecy of *Ezekiel*, where it is said, *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean*<sup>m</sup>. Well, lest the people should assume the honour of this privilege unto themselves, or attribute it to any worthiness or righteousness of their own, God says to them, *I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake*<sup>n</sup>. And this is repeated again, *Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you : be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel*<sup>o</sup>. And therefore you find that the Spirit is first to be poured forth, before we shall *look on him* whom we *have pierced* by our iniquities, and *mourn*. And this is confirmed by our Lord, when speaking of the holy Spirit, the Comforter, he first promises his disciples, *I will send him unto you*, and then he adds, *And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*<sup>p</sup>. And to let us know that we cannot deserve this favour from the Lord, the Spirit is said to be *given unto us*<sup>q</sup>, and it is said also, that *the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness*

<sup>m</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 25. <sup>n</sup> Ver 22. <sup>o</sup> Ver. 32. <sup>p</sup> John xvi. 7, 8. <sup>q</sup> Rom. v. 5.

*ness, and righteousness, and truth*. From all which it is very evident, that the Spirit of God is given us to excite gospel-obedience in us, and not because of any worthiness in us: for before he comes, we are disobedient children. Nor,

(2.) ARE we hereby to understand that our relation to God, is the meritorious, deserving cause of the gift of the Spirit. For though there is a great deal of honour and glory attending this relation, yet we are indebted to *Christ*, our elder brother, for the whole that we enjoy. It is he that deserved it, by dying; and so, as the reward of his sufferings, he *received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them*. And it is in him only that God is reconciled unto us, and thro' whom we regain our title to his favour, and to all the blessings we receive from him. But,

(3.) HEREBY, as I apprehend, the holy Ghost intends, that in our relation to God as children, as an additional blessing, consequent upon our adoption, we have the Spirit sent down into our hearts. God having fixed an inviolable connection, between our adoption and our sanctification. As he hath given it to us to be heirs of himself, and joint heirs with his Son, so the same spirit that eminently dwelt in him as Mediator, is sent into the hearts of all the members of his mystical body. And thus we are to understand the apostle here,

*Be-*

*Because ye are children, or in being children, that ye might have the disposition of children, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.* And that our enjoyment of the Spirit of *Christ* is thus a consequent blessing upon our adoption, is very evident from scripture. This I think may be very fairly collected from some passages in one of *John's* epistles. *But, says that apostle, ye have an unction from the holy One, and ye know all things. But the anointing which ye have received of him, abideth in you<sup>t</sup> : the persons who are here said to have an unction from the holy one, he had before spoken of, as having their sins forgiven them, and to have known the Father<sup>u</sup> : which is more fully asserted in the same epistle, Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit<sup>w</sup>.* Here, the great evidence of our dwelling in God as children, and his dwelling in us as a Father, is put upon this, his having given us his Spirit. And thus I have endeavoured to explain to you our third general head, *viz. that because we are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.*—That the same grace that was the origin of our relation to God as children, gives us as a consequent blessing, the Spirit, as a Spirit of adoption, which leads us to the last thing which I proposed; and that is,

IV. THAT wherever this Spirit is given as a Spirit of grace, he resides or dwells in that soul,

<sup>t</sup> 1 John ii. 20 —27.    <sup>u</sup> Ver. 12, 13.    <sup>w</sup> Chap. iv. 13.

soul, as a Spirit of prayer, and supplication, *crying*, in the language of adoption, *Abba, Father*. And here we have two things more especially.

1. HE is in us as a Spirit of prayer: this is intimated by the term *crying* and,

(1.) THIS supposes a person to be necessitous, and dependent. No wise man will ask, much less cry earnestly for a blessing that he sees no want of. Now that it is the Spirit of God that acquaints us with our necessities, is evident from what the apostle *Paul* expressly asserts. *Likewise*, says he, *the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*<sup>x</sup>. Again,

(2.) As it supposes a person to be in want, and to be convinced of it; so it includes in it a view of the ability of him that is applied to, to give relief: and that none but the Spirit can convince us of this, is evident to me, from that passage in the epistle to the *Corinthians*; *The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God*<sup>y</sup>. Again,

(3.) As the Spirit shews us what is the mind of God, and *the things that are freely given to us of God*<sup>z</sup>; so he excites spiritual desires after this good. Thus we find it in the experience of the apostle *Paul*. Before conversion, he was full, and stood in need of nothing. *I was alive* says he, *without the law once: but when the commandment came, with*  
power

<sup>x</sup> Rom. viii. 26.

<sup>y</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 11.

<sup>z</sup> Ver. 12.

power, *sin revived, and I died*<sup>a</sup>. He was stript of his false confidence; and the same Spirit directed him to the proper fountain for relief; and in the apprehension of *Christ's* fulness, he makes his prayer unto him. Thus it is said by the Lord himself of him, as an extraordinary thing, *behold he prayeth*<sup>b</sup>.

2. As the holy Spirit is in us a Spirit of prayer, so of adoption too; he not only *crieth*, but *crieth Abba, Father*. And this supposes,

(1.) A DISCOVERY of God to the soul as a Father, or the love that is included in that relation. For he must first be convinced that God is a Father to his people, before he can call upon him as such. And,

(2.) IT supposes a discovery of the way in which he comes to be a Father unto sinners, that it is only in, and thro' *Christ*, that he is our God, and our Father. For to call him Father as the God of nature, is rather to affront him than to glorify him: since we have forfeited our right to his care as children, and have sinned away that relation, by our disobedience. *Christ* must therefore be revealed in us, as *the hope of glory*<sup>c</sup>, before we can call God *Father*...

(3.) THIS includes in it a particular discovery to the soul, that God is *his* Father; and under this character the Spirit is spoken of as *the earnest of our inheritance*<sup>d</sup>, by whom we are sealed unto the day of redemption<sup>e</sup>. And of him it is said, that *the Spirit itself beareth witness*

<sup>a</sup> Rom. vii. 9.    <sup>b</sup> Acts ix. 11.    <sup>c</sup> Col. i. 27.    <sup>d</sup> Eph. i. 14.  
<sup>e</sup> Chap. iv. 30.

ness with our Spirit, that we are the children of God<sup>f</sup>. Which privilege, when he whispers it in the souls of God's chosen, all their unbelief will not be able to destroy the evidence.

SHOULD it be objected here, that the Spirit being said to *cry in us*, takes away the liberty of the creature, and makes us act necessarily, and not voluntarily: To this I answer, that as the consequence of the Spirit's abiding in us, it is he that, not only gives eyes to see, and understanding to know the things of God, but he excites holy breathings in the soul after him, and leading it to its proper object, God in *Christ*, as its Father, testifies to the soul its privilege. It is the christian indeed himself that prays, but it is *the Spirit* that helpeth his *infirmities*, otherwise he would not be able so much as to utter an acceptable or prevalent sigh or groan before the Lord<sup>g</sup>. And therefore we are said, by the same apostle, to pray in the Spirit: *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit*<sup>h</sup>. And thus I have finished what I designed in a doctrinal way from this subject, and shall close all with a few reflections. And,

I. FROM hence we may learn the distinct personality of Father, Son, and Spirit. They are all three mentioned in our text, and there are three distinct acts assigned them. The Father is said to send the Spirit, and the Spirit is said to be the Spirit of the Son, and as such takes possession of the hearts of his children. The manner indeed in which they sub-

sist,

<sup>f</sup> Rom. viii. 16.

<sup>g</sup> Ver. 26.

<sup>h</sup> Eph. vi. 18.

sist, is allowed to be a mystery, concealed from us: but the reality of it, is very evident; not only from the several works, which are here ascribed to each of the sacred Three, and which imply a possession of divine perfections; but, in many other places of scripture we may observe, that God hath particularly and clearly revealed himself to us in this way, of which our text is no inconsiderable proof; where you have, God the Father sending the Spirit of God the Son, and this Spirit resting upon, and dwelling in the hearts of his people. Now if from this and other passages of scripture, we can prove, that each of these possess all possible perfections, and at the same time we allow that there is but one God, it necessarily follows, that this one God subsists in three persons, intimately related to each other, but distinct, and without confusion.

2. FROM hence we may learn the great reason why we meet with so many that deny, and some that deride the influences of the Spirit of God. They must surely be strangers to any experience of his divine impressions. And let their reason be never so much refined, while this is the case, their hearts are in a state of enmity with spiritual things<sup>i</sup>; and this accounts for every kind of opposition they make to them. For *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*<sup>k</sup>. And thus you see, as he

under-

<sup>i</sup> Rom. viii. 7.<sup>k</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 14.

understands them not; so neither will he ever truly esteem them.

3. FROM hence we may also gather, that to be a son of God, is a privilege of the highest nature, much more than to be heir to the greatest prince upon earth. All the pleasures of time are suited only, or principally to our carnal part: but, as the inheritance of the saints is spiritual, so it is of a most sublime and exalted nature. And though a believer, in his own apprehension, is unworthy the name of a son; yet, in the language of adoption, he may without presumption, when led by the Spirit, call God Father, and, as a joint-heir with *Christ Jesus*, entertain his mind with the firmest hope of an inheritance with the saints in light. To conclude,

4. FROM hence we have a very good evidence, by which we may judge whether we are interested in this privilege, or not. Have we the knowledge of *Christ* in our heads only? or the Spirit of *Christ* also in our hearts? Do we idolize our attainments, and forget *Christ* and his righteousness and strength? or do we lie in the dust, and give all the glory where it is justly due? If we have the Spirit of *Christ*, he will empty us of ourselves. And, in proportion to his gracious and powerful operations on our hearts, so shall we be more and more filled with the glory of *Christ*.

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