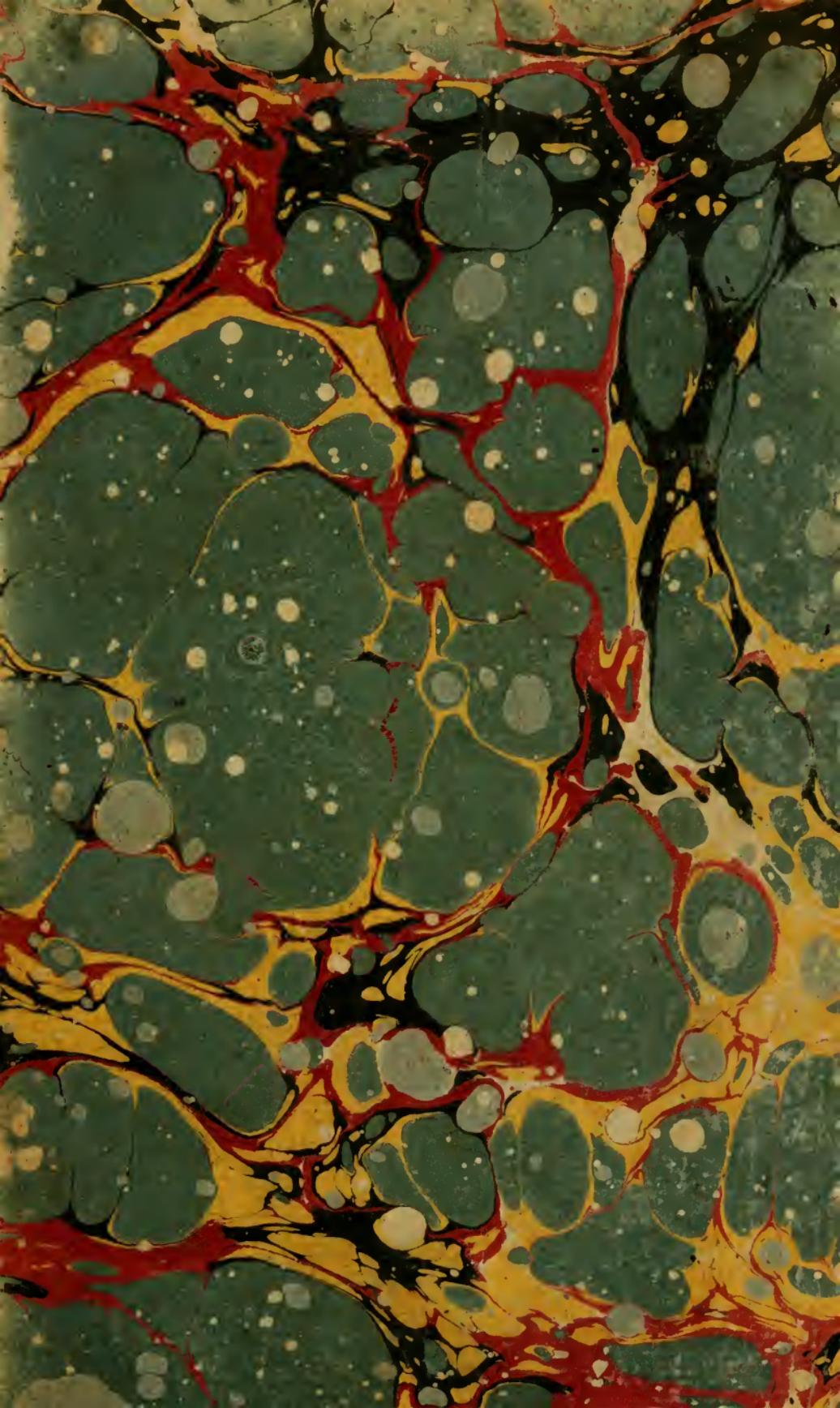




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S E R M O N S

O N

Various USEFUL and IMPORTANT

S U B J E C T S,

Adapted to the

F A M I L Y and C L O S E T,

In T W O V O L U M E S.

By G E O R G E L A M B E R T.

V O L U M E I.

*I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel
of God.*

PAUL.

*Look to yourselves, that we lose not the things which
we have wrought, but that we receive a full
reward.*

JOHN.

Y O R K:

Printed by A. WARD; and sold by C. DILLY, Lon-
don; J. SMITH, Sheffield; also by T. BROWNE and
the other Bookfellers in Hull.

MDCCLXXIX.

TO THE
CHURCH and CONGREGATION,
Meeting in *Blanket-Row*, HULL.

My dear Brethren and Friends,

IT is now about ten years since I had the honour and happiness of being first acquainted and connected with you, during which space the Lord has been pleased to smile upon us in a very gracious manner. We have seen his power, and have been blessed with his presence in our solemn meetings: And from a very small beginning, by the good hand of our God upon us, our numbers are considerably increased. Our society is enriched, with what may properly be stiled the glory of every religious connection, *unity of sentiment and disinterested affection*. Privileged with the presence and blessing of God in his ordinances, sinners have been convinced, saints comforted, and some ripened for glory: They have been removed from us, without leaving even a suspicion of their sincerity, or a doubt that they were gone to Jesus. May we be followers of
them,



them, who, through faith and patience, do now inherit the promises.

Under the solemn weight of the ministerial charge,—the infirmities of a feeble body, and the discouragements which are the inseparable companions of a timorous disposition, I have often found myself ready to sink. But next to those supports which come more immediately from above, (without any design to flatter, which I would studiously avoid) I am bound in duty to declare that your prayers for me, and carriage towards me, have in no small degree contributed to my relief.

The most warm, steady, and uniform respect both to myself and ministry, has not only been professed in words, but confirmed in your conduct. It has been your study to keep my mind serene, and to make me happy in your connection: And on the other hand, it has been my desire to commend myself to the conscience of every one amongst you as in the sight of God; convinced of this truth, that faithfulness commands respect.—And as the affection was real, mutual, and increasing, by your prayers my heart was encouraged, and my hands strengthened. This has often been a refreshing thought to me in my studies; that while I was engaged in searching the scriptures for your profit, you were pleading for me before the throne, that God would assist, guide,

EPISTLE DEDICATORY. v

guide, and prosper me. The people's prayers are a sure presage of a minister's success.

Truly I may say, the lot is fallen to me in pleasant places. Happy not only in the friendship and connection of my own congregation, I feel that happiness increased by that favour which the Lord has evidenced to the town of HULL in general. He hath not dealt so with every people; and the singular appearances of divine providence for us in this respect, call for our most grateful admiration. How has the King of Zion sent one minister after another, till almost every pulpit, both in the establishment and out of it, is filled with the proclamation of complete redemption and free salvation. Sinners are invited,—Christ exalted,—bigotry in a great measure banished, and the spirit of forbearance prevails. An agreeable harmony subsists between the several ministers: An harmony which I trust is more than the shadow of ceremony, or the sound of report.—As their aim is one, so (circumstantials apart) they wish each other success in the pursuit of it.

With respect to the following discourses, they are now delivered into your hands as an answer to your earnest and repeated request. Although I am fully convinced of the many defects which attend them, I could persuade myself to do little more than give
you

you a bare transcript of what you have heard before from the pulpit. You well know, I have not been forward to appear in this public manner; and complied with your request, when I could resist it no longer. However, if the following discourses, by a divine blessing, should prove any way useful either to yourselves or others, I have my reward, and hope that God will have the glory. I would wish to sacrifice every thing to the honour of God, and the good of souls; being persuaded that “ministers
 “ should *live* to the same end for which
 “ Christ *died*, viz. *the bringing men to God*,—
 “ to the knowledge, love, and friendship of
 “ him in this world, as the beginning of
 “ their compleat and final blessedness in his
 “ communion and presence in the world to
 “ come.”

Perhaps some advantages may be derived from the present publication.

Hereby you will have an opportunity of weighing, with greater care and deliberation, what you have heard in public, and thereby may be led more closely to examine what improvement you have made of those solemn truths, which have been delivered to you from time to time.—By these sermons I hope likewise to converse with some of you, when both my life and ministry shall be ended: And be admitted to audience with you in the Family and Closet, when I shall

EPISTLE DEDICATORY. vii

shall be no more permitted to meet with you in the sanctuary.—Another advantage may respect the rising generation. When the solemn summons shall call you into eternity, and permit you no longer to instruct and watch over your children; these sermons, published at your request, and handed down to your posterity, may induce them to take notice of the doctrines you have embraced, and the blessed truths by which your minds were supported, and your conduct influenced.—Leaving them in his hands, who alone can make them useful, may the blessing of God go with them.

I am,

Sirs and Brethren,

Your sincere Friend,

And unworthy Servant in the Gospel,

KINGSTON-UPON-HULL,

G. LAMBERT.

April 20, 1779.

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ERRATA:

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- 23 1 *for* truth, *read* faith.
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S E R M O N I.

Sacred Logic ; or, The Comfort of
Revelation supported on the Basis
of Reason.

R O M. V. 10.

For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son: much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life.

ENcouraging doctrine, supported by solid argument ! Here Reason lends her aid to glorify God her Author, and to comfort “ those who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them ” in the Gospel. The most important truths are here, like the boards of the tabernacle, united together, and set in sockets of gold.—All is harmony, all is beautiful—and, to crown the whole, all is Immutable and Immortal. The fair Temple of Truth must stand for ever ; it is that Tabernacle which shall never be disjointed, never taken down ; it is that Structure in which all the marvelous

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lous of the Deity is displayed, and on which his glory shall be everlastingly exalted.

What a glorious connection do these words of the Apostle present to our view!—A connection between an injured God and an intervening Saviour!—A connection between the sovereign Lord of Nature and sinners of the human race!—A connection between the sufferings and glory of the Redeemer!—A connection between free reconciliation and complete salvation!—Beautiful, surprising, ever-glorious harmony! O that it was more studied, admired, and improved by all that call themselves Christians.—Here sacred Truth shines forth in all her native excellence and unfullied lustre; the whole œconomy of the divine conduct is unveiled; the mystery of redeeming love displayed; and all the wise (and no less wonderful) effects of *that* love are evidenced for our encouragement, comfort, and support. A smiling God and the redeemed sinner (like the Father and the Prodigal in the parable) rejoice together.—The sacrifice is *slain*—both are reconciled—the *one* is honoured, and the *other* saved.

Permit me, Brethren, to invite you at this season, under the reviving beams of Truth—Truth, sacred, saving Truth—Truth, with all its surrounding rays, beams forth in the words of the text.—In this light let us view objects of the greatest importance; objects, truly diverse, but in which we are
greatly

greatly interested. Here let us contemplate ourselves as sinners fallen, and the great Author of Being, as in Jesus, reconciled unto us.—And, in the light of Truth, all that we can see in the creature is MISERY, and the very opposite of MERIT: all that we can see of God is gracious, wonderful, and immutable. Here we have no discouraging uncertainties for believing sinners; but where they are reconciled, they shall be saved. Dying, Christ procured the former; and, living, he secures the latter. There is no *peradventure* to them that are really reconciled by Christ, and through the operation of the spirit. If this is sure, all is sure; if there be a mistake, it lies elsewhere. Be it therefore your great concern to make this matter sure to yourselves;—keep not disputing about the truth or falshood of this or that doctrine, but see that your ground-work be good;—examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith;—whether you are reconciled to God; whether you have gone as poor, sin-convicted, self-condemned sinners, to submit to him through Christ;—to be pardoned, accepted, and approved by Him through Christ; to be interested in his favour, saved by his grace, and made happy, both by him and with him, in his palace.—If this be *really* your state and character, I will leave the Apostle to speak my sentiments concerning your security. “For if when we were ene-

mies, &c.”—You see HOLINESS, PERSEVERANCE, and SALVATION, are but so many blessed fruit-bearing branches that grow out of the root RECONCILIATION; and, consequently, such as do not fully persevere *in* holiness and *to* salvation, either they were never *actually* reconciled to God, or the Apostle was mistaken in his doctrine. But seeing he was called, instructed, and commissioned by Christ, and guided by the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation, we ought, notwithstanding the positive assertions of many, to acquiesce in the declaration of *one* who was sent from God, and owned by him as his Ambassador to our sinful world.—Let God be true though thousands should be found liars.—*All*, and every one, who is brought into a state of reconciliation, *shall* be saved;—saved abundantly,—saved completely, —saved *by* Christ, *in* him, and *through* him, by his death, in his right, and through his grace, power, and intercession. “For if when we were enemies, &c.” In which words we have,

- I. The character of the persons for whom this privilege is obtained, and who, by grace, are eventually advantaged by it, *Enemies.*
- II. The invaluable privilege procured for them, *Reconciliation to God by the death of his Son.*

III. The

III. The encouraging inference deduced from, and founded on this, *much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life.*

These things considered, will make way for a few inferences from the whole.

I. Let us consider the condition and character of the persons referred to by the Apostle;—they are described as “without strength and ungodly.” Ver. 6. “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” As *sinners*; ver. 8. “God commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” And as *enemies* in the text;—each of which expressions is awfully important;—being *without strength*, intimates that they have lost that ability to serve God, which they had in their creation-state;—being *ungodly*, that they are deprived of that likeness to God, which was their glory as creatures;—being *sinners*, it is evident they are transgressors against God and his law;—but when they are stiled *enemies* the idea is heightened: it shews them to be malefactors of the vilest sort; rebels against God, and traitors against his government; in arms against their lawful Sovereign, and contending with the Author of their being.—The nature of this enmity will perhaps be best explained by advert-
ing to a similar passage in the writings of
the

the same Apostle. Such a one we find, Coloss. i. 21, 22. "And you that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy, and unblameable, and unreprouable in his sight." In considering mankind therefore under the notion of *enemies*, we may take notice both of the *evidences* of this enmity to God, and of the *seat* of it—Enemies in their *mind* by *wicked works*.

1. Sinners evidence themselves to be natural enemies to God by their conduct;—their deeds testify of them that they are vile, the members of the body are become the instruments of unrighteousness, and devoted to the service of the Devil, in opposition to the Creator.—How is the great God abused, insulted, injured by his creatures! Look round the world, and however its inhabitants differ in climate, complexion, language, or profession, their design, their aim is one, viz. opposition to God. Behold one with eyes full of adultery; another with his lips belching out blasphemies; a third raising up an idol with his hands, while a fourth falls down before it, and on his bended knees adores *that* which can neither succour the indigent, nor save the distressed.—*This* man opposing the Truth of God with his tongue, and *that* engaged in the same pursuit with his pen.—One bidding defiance to him in
words,

Sacred Logic.

words, and another rebelling against the disposals of his providence with all the marks of rage and disappointment.—What a general opposition is there to that subjection which constitutes a creature's happiness! what a sinful desire after that independence which to obtain would be consummate wretchedness! How are the children of men groaning to be delivered from that easy yoke, that honourable service, which is both the dignity and happiness of a sinful creature to delight in! Take a view of every natural man's conduct in the glass of God's law, and what a contrast do we discover! For what is the law? Is it not the transcript of God's Nature, as well as the revelation of his will?—If so, we are reduced to this painful necessity to pronounce all the un sanctified part of Adam's race enemies against God, and opposite to his image. What is every *wicked action*, but a battery erected against the authority and holiness of God revealed in his law? And many of those actions may be called unmasked batteries, or, to use the expression of the Apostle, "the works of the flesh are *manifest*, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like^a." Each of these is a strong fortress erected against God, supported by a garrison of infernal spirits, and

^a Gal. v. 19—21.

furnished

furnished from the magazine of a desperately wicked heart: In support of *these*, thousands have fallen already by the sword of vengeance, and have been frowned into hell by a God of judgment; and yet they are succeeded by others equally desperate and infatuated.

It is true, all do not arrive at the same excess of wickedness; some through the restraint of a religious education; others from a desire to attain, or preserve, a good character amongst men; some for want of *suitable* temptations, and others, from checks of natural conscience, are restrained from the gratification of their lusts: Yet all have sufficient in their conduct to evince, that previous to the renovation of their hearts by the spirit of the Lord, they are enemies to God by wicked works—and however specious their character, however regular their conduct, harmless their conversation, or exemplary their lives may have been in the sight of their fellow-creatures, before God they are guilty, polluted, and unclean.

2. If we take a view of the seat of all this opposition, the character will appear, if possible, more odious—*Enemies in the mind* by *wicked* works—Wicked works are but the ebullitions of a depraved heart—the mind is the spring of all the evils we have named already. Rom. viii. 7. “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject

to the law of God ; neither indeed can be." Hence we read, that they " like not to retain God in their knowledge^b ;" they contemn God^c ; they practically *say unto God*, " Depart from us : for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways^d ;" yea they are said to be " HATERS of God^e." Haters of that adorable Being, who is the perfection of Beauty and Blessedness.—Haters of that God who is goodness in the very abstract.—Haters of that Father that beget, supports, and provides for them.—Haters of the God of love. Should it be said, The Apostle is there speaking of Heathens who had not the knowledge of the true God.—The fact must be confessed ; but I presume this character is in no wise peculiar to Heathens, as such ; but to Heathens in common with all unconverted, unrenewed men. If we go back as far as the time of David, which was near eleven hundred years before St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, we shall find men of the same character, and men who probably lived within the pale of the Jewish Church. " Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God : depart from me therefore, ye bloody men ; for they speak against thee wickedly, and thine ENEMIES take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee ? and am not I grieved with them that rise up against thee^f ?"—The reason why the Royal

B

Psalmist

^b Rom. i. 28.—^c Psal. x. 13.—^d Job xxi. 14.—^e Rom. i. 30.
^f Psalm cxxxix. 19, 20, 21.

Pfalmist hated them, was, because they reviled, blasphemed, and hated his God.— This enmity, indeed, cannot always appear in a direct manner against the Most High, yet it evidences itself against his image wherever it is found. All persecution, whether of particular persons, or of the church in general, is to be ascribed to this vile principle, “Hatred of God.” Thus Asaph sings, “Lo, thine ENEMIES make a tumult, and they that HATE THEE have lift up the head. They take crafty counsel against thy people, and consult against thy hidden ones. ^g” — “They that are after the flesh do persecute those that are after the spirit ^h.”

The mind then is the seat of that enmity which appears against God. “Every imagination of the thought of the heart is only evil continually ⁱ :” not only *some* thought, but *every* thought; not only the thought, but the imagination, where thought is first delineated.—*They are only evil*; evil without any mixture of good; and not only evil in the fullest sense, but evil continually.—The fountain is inexhaustible, and the stream perpetual. With the greatest propriety is the heart described by the Prophet to be deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ^k. — “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses,

^g Pf. lxxxiii. 2, 3. — ^h Gal. iv. 29. — ⁱ Gen. vi. 5. —
^k Jer. xvii. 9.

witness, blasphemies¹ ;”—that is, all those works of the flesh, specified under the former particular. Men are *enemies, in their mind*, to the law, the government, the providence, the perfections, the nature, and the image of God. What a cage of unclean birds, a den of ravenous beasts, a cockatrice nest, a sink of iniquity, a sepulchre of corruption, a repository of enmity, a magazine of lust, is the un sanctified heart of the sinner ! Think not that I make use of too strong language, if I call it the throne where Satan ruleth at will his miserable vassals.

Disagreeable as this representation may appear, and from which some of you may be ready to turn away with disdain, permit me to observe, that, deformed as this portrait may seem, it either *is*, or *has* been, the just representation of us all. It is impossible to fix upon a more vile character than this, “ Enemies of God ;” and yet the Apostle informs the church at Rome, that this was once their condition ; yea, he goes further, and includes himself in the same class. There was a time, says he, when *we* were *enemies*, *i. e.* not only enemies to each other, but enemies to that God, to whom we are now reconciled by the death and spirit of Christ. But to bring this part of the subject to a close. Have you, my Brethren, been ever led to see this awful truth realized in your-

B 2

selves ?

¹ Matt. xv. 19.

felves? Seeing it, have you been humbled in the dust of self-abasement? And is it a subject of frequent reflection and suitable concern, that you have ever been enemies of God? Do you mourn over it, and loath yourselves for it? From the persons let us pass on to

II. The invaluable privilege procured for them, *Reconciliation to God by the death of his Son*.—In which we have to consider the privilege itself, *Reconciliation*; the object to which it relates, *God*; and the means whereby it was procured, *the death of his Son*.

I. The privilege is Reconciliation: And if we consider the character and condition of the persons here described, it is evident that they have no claim to the honour of the work, though the advantage arising from it is properly theirs. Reconciliation to God, may be considered either as *virtual* or *actual*, *procured for us* by the death of Christ, or *wrought in us* by the Spirit of holiness. In each view it is described in the text, but the former is particularly intended in the words we are now upon*.—Virtual reconciliation then,
or

* The pious Dr. Guyse has the following note subjoined to his excellent Paraphrase on the words. *Reconciliation to God by the death of his Son*, in the former part of this verse, seems to relate to Christ's having wrought out our reconciliation, or completed all, in a way of merit by his death, that was necessary to appease the wrath of God, and make way for the riches of his grace to be communicated to us, in full confidence with the honour of all his perfections, and of his law and government,
which

or that which was procured for sinners by Christ's death, consists in full satisfaction made to justice for sin; and in that complete obedience which *he*, as the sinner's substitute or surety, rendered to the law.—That he made satisfaction to justice, is evident from the following scriptures: “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all^m.”—“He bore our sins in his own body on the treeⁿ.”—“He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed^o.”—“He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God^p.”—And that he rendered full obedience to the law, in their room and place, is no less clear: “The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake, he will magnify the law, and make it honourable^q.”—“By the obedience of one (viz. Christ) shall many be made righteous^r.”—“Sinners are made the righteousness of God in him^s ;”—and this “righteousness is unto all, and upon all them that believe^t.”—As
finners,

which the Apostle had called, ver. 6 and 8, *Christ's dying for the ungodly, and dying for us*: But being reconciled, in the last clause of the verse, seems to relate to the reconciliation's taking place upon us; or to our being brought into a state of actual reconciliation and peace with God, and justification in his sight, through faith in Christ's blood, which the Apostle had spoken of, ver. 1, 9, and which in the verse after this (ver. 11) he calls our *receiving the atonement*.

^m Isa. liii. 6.—ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 24.—^o Isa. liii. 5.—^p 1 Pet. iii. 18.
^q Isa. xlii. 21.—^r Rom. v. 19.—^s 2 Cor. v. 21.—^t Rom. iii. 22.

finners, we have as much need of the obedience of Christ, in order to our being admitted into heaven, as we have of his death to deliver us from hell:—For, as we are unable to render satisfaction to divine justice for sin, seeing we are *without strength*, so even after we are brought into union to Christ, all our services are imperfect, and therefore can never give us a title to heaven. As sincere, they may be the evidences of our claim, but the title is in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. “Eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—And in the whole scheme of a sinner’s salvation, “Grace reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” There seems to be sufficient ground from scripture to conclude, that eternal life was held forth to man in paradise as the prize to be obtained;—but, sinning in him, “we came short of the glory of God.” We lost both righteousness and strength.—If Christ therefore only died to deliver us from misery, without a perfect obedience we can never enter the realms of blessedness.—But the truth is, Christ having obeyed the precepts of the law, as well as suffered the penalty annexed to disobedience, “he becomes the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth^x.” And the sinner, looking

^u Rom. vi. 23.—^w Rom. v. 21.—^x Rom. x. 4.

ing to him, by faith, may say, "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength'." Had Christ failed in one point, either in obeying, or in suffering, not one sinner could have been reconciled to God; not one admitted into the kingdom of glory.

O what a great, important, interesting work was *this* which Christ undertook!—for *this* he left his throne of glory;—for *this* he laboured through life, and groaned out his soul in death, and became a spectacle of reproach to men and devils;—for *this* he prayed, and wept, and sweat, and sighed, and bled;—for *this* he hung upon the cross, and descended to the grave.—“He made peace by the blood of his cross^z,” and “hath redeemed us to God by his blood^a.”—Redeemed us to the service,—to the favour,—and to the enjoyment of God. He laid his hand on the contending parties, — became a mediator between both, — and sunk under the weight of the undertaking into the grave; but sunk, like Sampson, for the salvation of Israel.

2. The object to which this reconciliation relates, is God.—Reconciled to God,—that Being, that awful, glorious Being, whose frown is hell, whose smile is heaven.—That God who, by a sovereign act of his will, can strip us of every possession; exclude us from every ray of hope; and blot

blot our names out of the list of life :—That God whose will is fate ; whose arm is power ; whose glories are infinite ; whose riches are immense ; whose perfections are immortal ; and whose existence is eternal :—That God in whom every perfection centers, and from whom all that is excellent derives its beauty and usefulness :—That God who is ALL ; who is BEING in the very abstract, and all other beings but like so many lamps hung round the temple of the universe ; all kindled *by* him, all supplied *from* him :—That God (was I to say, *in whom* is light, love, truth, greatness, and goodness, would be only to skim on the surface) ; rather let me say, that God, who *is all this*, and infinitely more than angelic language can express ;—to this God we are reconciled by the death of his Son. O what a privilege is this, my Brethren !—to have a faithful friend, an affectionate father, a powerful defender, and an everlasting portion in God ! To have all that truth, and power, and wisdom, and faithfulness engaged for us, which were once against us !—To be brought into his fold, his family, his favour, his presence, his palace !—To have an interest in God, in his wisdom, in his truth, in his heart, in his glory ! what an invaluable blessing is it ? Yea, to know it fully, is the sum of blessedness. Reconciliation to God, is the glory of the cross :—Reconciliation to God, is the riches
of

of the Bible.—Reconciliation to God, is the comfort of the church militant:—Reconciliation to God, is the song of the church triumphant.

3. The *means* whereby this sacred privilege was obtained, is the death of Christ.—“Without shedding of blood there is no remission^b ;” and without remission of sins there can be no reconciliation to God.—Death then was necessary, in order to give birth to so great a blessing:—But the death of what? not of bulls and goats,—not of creatures like ourselves;—but the death of him who is greater than all sovereigns;—of him, to whom sovereigns are subject;—of him, to whom Cherubim and Seraphim minister.—The death of him who is stiled God’s Son, and the Father’s Fellow. O death! never wast thou so honoured,—so disgraced before! With what a train of sorrows does he descend into thy mansions, with what triumph does he unhinge thy formidable gates! Come, Sirs, let us turn aside and behold the sorrowing sufferer.—See that face defiled with spitting, in which angels behold the brightness of glory;—that head encircled with thorns, the fruit of the curse, which was entitled to a dignity of a different nature;—those hands which held the reins of universal government, and parcels out the several boundaries of the

C nations,

^b Heb. ix. 22.

nations, nailed to the accursed tree ;—that side which beat with ardent love to sinners, pierced by the Centurion's spear ;—and that body, the extraordinary production of Omnipotence, bathed in blood ; his ears offended with horrid blasphemies, his eyes with the cruel insults of the surrounding rabble, and his lips with the vinegar and gall.—Solemn scene !—But as yet we only begin to enter the cloud ;—behind all this there is found an anguish too great for description.—His soul, his spotless soul, sorrowful, amazed, overwhelmed. His heart melts beneath the scorching beams of justice, and for us he felt, that which, if we had endured, would have been death eternal, misery complete.—He cries ;—the rocks had echoed back the sound, could they have stood the shock, but they rend before it.—The marble monuments of the dead are broke up by that voice, which, in the great day, will *dislodge every grave* of its inhabitants.—*He cries!* Heaven and earth attend the call of their Creator ;—the one clothed in unusual mourning, the other convulsed with agnozing throes :—*He cries!*—How would angels wonder and devils triumph, while he shouted, “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken men.”—O awful season ! Matchless suffering ! Wonderful love !—God spared not his own Son ;—Christ spared not himself for your sakes, but cheerfully
paid

paid that which he took not away. "Reconciled to God by the death of his Son."—How awfully important is the subject!—"The death of Christ is the noon-day of eternal mercy:"—the death of Christ is the door to hope, to happiness, to heaven:—the death of Christ is the price of our purchase:—the death of Christ is the propitiation for our sins.—*When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.*

III. From such premises, what may we not infer? *Much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life.*—Here we have the *state*, the *end*, the *certainty* of real believers.

1. Their state, they are *reconciled*.—You have already heard that reconciliation may be considered either as virtual or actual; meritorious or efficacious.—In the former view, God is reconciled to us through the obedience and death of Christ: But when the Apostle speaks here of their *being reconciled*, he means the soul's being reconciled to God by the effectual application of Christ's blood to the conscience, and the renovation of the heart by the Spirit of the Lord.—To be reconciled in this view, is to have the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience; to have peace with God;—to approve of his method of glorifying himself and saving sinners through Christ, by grace alone;—to love
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the law we hated ;—desire the image we once despised, and to submit to be taught by him, to be led by him, to go to God for all, to devote all to God, and to enjoy all in him ; to seek him as our treasure, to serve him as our Master, to love him as our Father, to live to him as our end, and, if called to it, to die for him as our best friend.—Cheerfully to submit to his will at all times, and in relation to all things : or, as a grave divine of the last century expresses it, “ to be freely at
 “ the disposal of the highest mind, conform-
 “ able to the highest good, and cheerfully
 “ compliant with the uncreated will.”—
 What a blessed state is this ! “ Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile^c.”—Every converted person is in this state ; although he may not have attained to his full stature. We are to distinguish between the state and the growth of a person in that state.—Every one that is actually reconciled to God, has a degree of all those privileges we have now insisted on.

2. The end such have in view is salvation. *Being reconciled we shall be saved.* Saved from sin, from suffering, from sorrow, so far as it is penal ; saved from curse and condemnation, from the tyranny of Satan, the bondage of

^c Psal xxxii. 1, 2.

sin,

sin, and the terrors of an evil conscience. *We shall be saved* to God and glory;—saved with honour;—saved by grace and power;—saved *in* Christ and *with* him;—saved from the ruins of the fall, the wreck of worlds, the reign of death, and the rage of devils;—“saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation,” so as “not to be ashamed or confounded, world without end^d.” How does this argument prevail over every fear and doubt! They that are *reconciled are renewed but in part*; they experience the remains of corrupt nature, the imperfection of grace, the wiles of satan, and the difficulties of persevering; but they shall be sanctified,—shall be preserved,—shall be perfected. God is reconciled to them, and they to God: and therefore they may sing with David, “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the work of thine own hands^e.” “He which hath begun a good work in them will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ^f.”

3. The certainty of this end depends upon the life of Christ. *Much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life.*—The argument seems to run to this purpose: Has he done the greater, and will he not do the less? Did he die to redeem his enemies? and, living, will he not save his friends? Is it not as easy
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^d Isa. xlv. 17.—^e Pf. cxxxviii. 8.—^f Phil. i. 6.

(if possible more so) to glorify a saint, than to reconcile a sinner?—Can we admit the one, and doubt of the other? If when God pardons he takes you with all your faults, sure he will much more glorify them that are reconciled, that are sanctified. Christ ever lives as a Priest, and his intercession renders their salvation certain. “He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them^g.” Christ lives as an advocate^h; an intercessor founds his arguments on mercy, an advocate upon equity; and Christ will exert all his wisdom to bring about their salvation.—Christ lives as a King, the government is upon his shoulderⁱ; all power in heaven and earth is delivered into his hands^k, and he will evidence his authority, and exert his power in their salvation.—Christ lives as our fore-runner^l, and, like Joseph, he will provide for the family in the land where he is gone to dwell;—because he lives they shall live^m, and where he is, there shall they be alsoⁿ. He is gone before to prepare the heavenly mansions for them, and in the end will receive them to himself.

From this subject, how should we glory in the cross, and in the crown of the Lord Jesus Christ!—What a foundation hath he
laid

^g Heb. vii. 25.—^h 1 John ii. 1.—ⁱ Isa. ix. 6.—
^k Matt. xxviii. 18.—^l Heb. vi. 20.—^m John xiv. 19.—
ⁿ John xiv. 3.

laid for truth ; what a door has he opened for hope !—O blessed Saviour, how valuable do souls appear, when we consider what thou hast done to redeem, and art doing in order to their salvation !—Thou hast a claim to the love and service of those souls whom thou hast thus distinguished.—Assert thy right ;—help us to admit the claim, and serve thee in spirit and truth, with growing zeal and ardour ;—serve thee in some measure on earth, as we hope to do more perfectly in heaven.

Here likewise let the unconverted make a solemn pause, and consider their state.—You have again heard of the happy, the honourable privilege of the real Christian, but all you know of it is by report.—You hear of a Saviour, but are not saved ;—of the most interesting subject, but I fear are not suitably concerned ;—of reconciliation to God, but remain enemies unto him—Wherefore spend ye your labour for that which satisfieth not ?—How awfully are your minds infatuated, to prefer the body to the soul, time to eternity, and sordid pleasures to permanent delight !—What ! Can ye hear of the suffering of Christ without concern ;—hear, and, as much as in you lies, crucify him afresh ?—Will you turn away the eye from infinite beauty, the ear from the calls of a condescending God, the heart from true honour, pleasure, and profit ?—Ye enemies of
God

God and goodness; how will you stand when the heavens depart?—How will you answer, when you are necessitated to obey the summons of the God of judgment?—How will you bear, when you fall into the hands of the living God; condemned by the Law and by the Gospel likewise?—May Almighty Grace captivate your heart, and make you willing to surrender yourselves to be saved in the Lord.—May the Omnipotent Spirit convince you of your enmity, and convert your heart to friendship with God.

From this subject we also see, that in the enjoyment of the greatest privileges, it is our duty ever to remember what we were.—*Ye were enemies and aliens*,—far from God, and opposite to him.—It was his grace that fought you, that saved you; that pardoned your iniquity, and privileged you with his favour;—snatched you from ruin, and separated you to everlasting glory.—O admire the wisdom, adore the love, exalt the power, and glorify the grace of God which has made you to differ.—Remember, “ye are not your own, but bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

Finally. From this subject we may infer; that in the work of salvation all things are of God.—He lays the foundation, and brings forth

forth the top-stone with shoutings, Grace, grace unto it^p.—All things are *through Christ*, who died to reconcile, and lives to save;—all things are by the spirit, who convinces, converts, and confirms the soul to the day of Christ.—May the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen^q.”

D SERMON

^p Zech. iv. 7.—^q Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

S E R M O N II

God bestowed his gifts freely
On Freedom's righteous

THEM

I will show that the
liberty the law
will provide us with
has made a great
gift to us all
and we should
all be glad to
accept it.

THE law of liberty
is a gift to us
by the great
God who has
freed us from
all our sins
and we should
all be glad to
accept it.

S E R M O N II.

God honoured and Sinners pardoned :
Or, Free Grace magnified.

J E R E M I A H xxxiii. 8, 9.

I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me, and I will pardon all their iniquities whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me. And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall bear all the good that I do unto them.

THE desire of honour is a principle which is deeply rooted in our nature, by the great Author of our being; and, as received from him in our primeval state, it was a laudable virtue, an excellent grace:—A grace, the exercise of which was calculated to stir up the powers of the soul to serve and glorify God;—to aim at his approbation as our felicity, and his glory as our highest attainment.—The scripture informs us that man was made in honour^a; all things were

placed in subjection under him^b, and contributed to his support and happiness;—his situation was pleasant,—his mind serene,—his service reasonable,—and his obligations infinite.—It was man's honour, while in that happy state, to be the servant, the friend, the representative of the Deity;—but we have ground to conclude, that honour more exalted, and happiness more enlarged, than what he then experienced, were set before him, as an object worthy his desire and pursuit.—In his mind innocence and ambition kept their court,—and while this was the case, it was no more vicious in man to desire to advance in the knowledge, communion, and enjoyment of God, than in those pure spirits that are around his throne. It is the nature of sin to abuse the greatest privileges, and convert real excellencies into absolute deformity. Hence those endowments of wisdom, power, and activity, in which even the apostate angels excel, are to be admired as gifts from God; and their abuse to be attributed to its proper cause, *sin*.—Ambition then was a fair plant in Paradise*; sin alone has armed it with those thorns,

^b Psalm viii. 6.

* ————— I see,

I feel a grandeur in the *passions* too,

Which speaks their high descent, and glorious end;

Which speaks them rays of an eternal fire,

In Paradise itself they burnt as strong,

Ere ADAM fell; tho' wiser in their aim.

Night Thoughts, N^o. 7.

thorns, and caused it to bring forth those fruits unto death, on account of which we are now cautioned against it.—But grace is pleased to approve the plant, and give it a place in her own Garden.—Hence it is no vice in a good man to seek the honour that cometh from God;—to desire his approbation,—and aim at immortal glory and happiness.

But take a view of the fallen race of Adam, and how are the very features of this once sacred passion altered from their original form?—From being the friend of holiness, and the favourite of the Almighty, it is now become the avowed enemy of both.—Its object,—its course, are entirely altered; and now man seeks to excel in wickedness, and marks his steps to honour with impiety and cruelty. To obtain a name Pharaoh enslaved the people of God; and employed their hands to make bricks and build pyramids, in order to render his fame immortal.—To obtain a name, Babel's tower was erected;—Alexander unsheathed the sword; and wars and slaughters have been perpetuated to the present day.

But amongst the various pursuits after honour, there have been, comparatively, few who have sought to obtain a name by real and disinterested acts of goodness and mercy;—they have been famed for oppression, for cruelty, for blood;—and, like Sampson's foxes,
they

they have spread distress and ruin, firebrands and death. These have attended their steps and stained their arms,—and now their names are immortalised, rather for their vices than their excellencies.

But it is with pleasure that, at this season, I can call your attention to a very different character.—A Being, who, like the sun, while he excels in glory, excels also in doing good wherever his beams penetrate.—God aims at his own glory in all his conduct towards his creatures; but he will be honoured in doing good,—honoured in the free pardon, justification, and salvation of sinners of mankind.—Herein God honours his wisdom, grace, and holiness; his justice, truth, and mercy. In this he displays his nature, as love, and aggrandizes his name as the God of pardon^c.—*I, saith that God, whose authority is the foundation of his grace;—I, who can both vindicate my justice, and magnify my mercy in the same act of grace, I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me, and I will pardon all their iniquities whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me; and it shall be to me a name of joy, &c.*

The chapter from whence we have taken these words, for the subject of our present meditations, contains several prophecies, of great and spiritual blessings, which relate to

the church of God.—In the first verse we have an account of the time and place in which the Prophet Jeremiah received a message from the Lord. Though confined within the walls of a noisome prison, he is honoured and comforted with the presence of the God of glory and of grace, who is described, ver. 2, “Thus saith the LORD, the maker thereof, the LORD that formed it, and established it, the LORD is his name.” The great speaker is no other than Jehovah, the Maker thereof, *i. e.* either of the earth, or rather, of the church.—He that drew the sacred model of the spiritual building in his everlasting mind.—He that forms it for himself, and establishes it by his power and providence:—He that is Jehovah, the self-existent and self-sufficient Being:—He who has wisdom and power to ripen the schemes of his infinite understanding.—He appears to encourage his servant to seek wisdom from him concerning things to come;—not so much concerning the destruction of the city by the Chaldeans, which was revealed before; but concerning the special and spiritual blessings which God had in reserve for his Zion. Ver. 3—7, “Call upon me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not: For thus saith the LORD, the GOD of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the Kings of Judah,

Judah, which are thrown down by the mounts, and by the sword. They came to fight with the Chaldeans, but it is to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury, and for all whose wickedness I have hid my face from this city." — But in wrath he remembers mercy.—Threatnings are no sooner denounced than they are succeeded by the most encouraging promises;—which evidences that as they flow from grace, so the accomplishment of them is all of grace. "Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cleanse the captivity of Judah, and the captivity of Israel, and will build them as at the first." From which promise some conclude, that the words look much farther than the restoration from the Babylonish captivity;—for though the captivity of Judah then returned to their own land, yet the chief part of the other tribes did not; but Israel was then so broken as to be no more a distinct people. But in that day when all Israel shall be saved, this promise, and the words that succeed it, will be most fully and gloriously accomplished.—Then God will be exalted in the pardon, conversion, and salvation of his ancient people.

But though the words of the text will then be more eminently fulfilled, yet they are not
without

without their accomplishment in the present day.—In every sinner that is pardoned and saved, the name, the honour, the glory of God is advanced. *I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, &c.* in which words we have

I. A gracious promise of what God will do for sinners. *I will cleanse them, &c.* ver. 8.

II. That in doing this, he aims at the advancement of his own glory. And

III. In order to bring about this desirable end, he will have it published unto all nations.—*It shall be a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall bear all the good I do unto them.*

I. The first thing we have to consider in the words, is the full and gracious promise, which God is here pleased to make of what he will do for sinners.—The expressions are varied, and the same truth repeated; but the reason is, because the great Promiser knows how backward we are to receive the comfort, or give him the glory of a pardoning God; therefore he is pleased to say, *I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, &c.*—In which words we may take a view both of the nature of sin and the nature of pardon, as here held forth.

1. Of the nature of sin.—Sin is the disgrace of a rational creature, and the defilement of an immortal soul.—It is that spiritual leprosy which provoked the Almighty to cast us out of his favour, and which, unless pardoned, must separate us from his presence for ever. The very promise of *cleansing* contains a supposition of filth contracted. Which condition is strongly represented to us in the prophecy of Ezekiel, under the metaphor of a female infant cast forth into the open field, all covered with blood and defilement, to the loathing of its person^d.

Sin renders us vile and odious in the sight of a holy God; and as nothing is more disagreeable to a person of remarkable delicacy than a loathsome object, or a disagreeable smell; so nothing is so hateful to God as sin. Did I say nothing so hateful? The expression is too languid, for there is nothing in the whole system of the universe that he hates but sin.—Sin defiles our garments;—sin has deformed our nature;—sin has degraded all the faculties of the soul, and sown the seeds of death in every member of the body.—So that there must be a renovation of the whole man;—the soul must be cleansed by the blood of Jesus, and the body purified in the grave, before we can be admitted into the blissful presence of God, or hold full communion with him above.—Let the pencil of fancy picture up-

^d Ezekiel xvi.

on your imagination the prospect and condition of a poor Lazar covered from head to foot with ulcerous sores.—What a mass of corruption!—how are mortality and misery united in his countenance!—life gushing forth in a thousand putrid streams, at once excites our pity and shocks our delicacy.—Every groan pierces us to the heart, and we are almost ready to wish that every sob may be the period of his distress.—Such a scene is not less offensive to the smell, than shocking to the eye.—While living, such are a nuisance, and, when dead, inexpressibly offensive.—But this, heightened into all the awful colours of reality, is but the scriptural image of every natural man. “Dead in trespasses and sins^c.” These are the ulcers,—these the death wounds,—these the rottenness and stench of souls that are dead to God.

By cleansing in the text, I apprehend we are not so properly to understand sanctification as justification.—It means the same that is afterwards expressed by pardon; only is distinguished in order to set forth sin in a different point of view. This promise to cleanse from iniquity, is of the same nature with David’s petition in Psal. li. 7, “purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

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^c Ephesians ii. 1.

But further, Sin is in this promise represented not only as our *defilement*, but as our DEBT;—therefore God says that he will *pardon* as well as *cleanse*. Sin is a debt,—a great debt,—a daily increasing debt,—a debt which, in our own person, we can never pay;—a debt which will prove our everlasting ruin, unless it be discharged by a pardon.—And God cannot pardon, unless his justice be satisfied in and by Christ.—We owe ten thousand talents, and have nothing to pay. What multiplied transgressions have we been guilty of!—Transgressions aggravated by many instances of surrounding kindness. Every sin is a transgression of the law^f, and every transgression, is a fresh mortal wound to the soul; so that when Christ visits a soul with his grace, he finds us bleeding to death at ten thousand wounds, and laying under a debt, which, unless cancelled, will ruin us for ever.—But he heals the wounds, discharges the debt, and proclaims health and deliverance.—He blots out our iniquity for his own sake, and remembers not our sin against us^g.

But more than all this,—Sin is here described not only as our *disease* and *debt*, but as being *against God*. This is what the Apostle means by “the exceeding sinfulness of sin^h;” and to strike us the more it is mentioned twice. “They have sinned against me;

^f 1 John iii. 4.—^g Isaiah xliii. 25.—^h Romans vii. 13.

me; they have transgressed against me." Sin is against God; against his nature, his authority, his government, his law, and his service.—Sin is a turning away from God, who is *equity, authority, and goodness* in the very abstract:—It is our opposing ourselves against him;—against his judgment,—his orders,—his glory:—It is a setting up our will, against his judgment;—our corrupt inclinations, against his orders;—and the gratification of our vile lusts, against his glory.—O what a monster is sin!—We say the most we can of it, when we say it is a perfect contrast to the will, and opposite to the nature of God.—And in proportion as we are led into the discovery of the glory, purity, and perfection of his nature; so will be our prospect of the deformity of sin, and our hatred to it. In consequence of this, Saints, though renewed but in part, will hate sin greatly; those who are made perfect in glory, having a fuller view into its nature, will have a greater aversion to it; but God being essentially, originally, and immutably holy, must hate it with perfect hatred.—From the nature of sin, let us pass on

2. To consider the nature of pardon, as here described, *I will cleanse, &c. I will pardon, &c.* "Pardon is a total suppression of all
 " desires to punish,—a kind disposition to do
 " the sinner good, and an admitting him in-
 " to the favour and friendship of God."—Or,

to keep to the idea of the text, it is God's *freely* and *fully* forgiving the sinner for his own name's sake.—These are the properties of pardon, as it is here promised.

(1.) It is FREE. Founded on no other cause than his meer grace and sovereign will, *I will cleanse, I will pardon.* Can language be more expressive of its freeness? *He is merciful because he will be merciful, and gracious because he will be gracious*¹.—He never sought the cause of any favour conferred upon his creatures, out of himself;—nor ever granted a favour, but in the event it terminates in his own glory.—Should he mitigate of his demands as a law-giver; or suspend his favours on any condition previously performed by the creature:—This would not be to pardon, but compound.—To pardon is to cross the debt,—to quash the indictment, or to absolve the criminal.—Amongst earthly princes, to pardon is to dispense with the law, and exert the authority of the sovereign. But when God pardons, he secures the honour of his law, and yet evidences the freeness and sovereignty of his grace. In the Surety he vindicates his law, and in the sinner magnifies his mercy.

(2.) As it is free, so it is FULL. *I will cleanse them from ALL their iniquity,—I will pardon ALL their iniquities, &c.*—When God pardons he extends it to all sin; original and actual, secret or open, lesser or greater, of

¹ Exodus xxxiv. 19.

omission or commission, of infirmity or inattention, of distrust or backsliding. Was there one sin unprovided for in the covenant of grace, in the sufferings of Christ, or in the act of oblivion; that soul would be undone for ever. The manifestation of this to the understanding, the application of this to the heart, may be, and indeed is, at different times and in different degrees; but in the mind of God, it is one instantaneous and complete act. And this is one of those comfortable doctrines, which the Apostle Paul laid before the churches for their establishment. "And you being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision in your flesh, hath he quickened together with Christ, having forgiven you *all* trespasses^k." As we have nothing to pay, he freely and for ever forgives the whole. The blood of Christ and God's promise of pardon, are of equal extent: The one cleanseth from all sin^l, and the other extendeth to all. "I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more^m." So that you see, it extends to all that comes within the pronoun *their*. If it be *their sin, their iniquity*, that will I forgive, that will I remember no more.— But let us proceed

II. To shew, that in doing this, God aims at the advancement of his own glory. *And*

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^k Col. ii. 23.—^l 1 John i. 7.—^m Jer. xxxi. 34

it (that is my church thus pardoned, and made the subject of my grace) *shall be to me a name of joy, a praise, and an honour before all the nations of the earth.* He looks upon pardoned finners as kings do upon their honour and royal ornaments.—He compares them to a *girdle*. “As the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man; so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord; that they might be unto me for a people, for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory.” He compares them to a *crown*. “Thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, a royal diadem in the hand of thy God^o.” Yea, the very design he had in view, in the sending his Son into our world, was to exalt his grace:—To this end he proclaims pardon and liberty to captive finners:—Peace and comfort to troubled souls; and all “that the Lord may be glorified^p.” Hear him, with all the pomp of majesty, proclaim his grace and glory. “I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions *for mine own sake*, and will not remember thy sins^q.” This is the name in which he rejoices to make himself known; and in which he will be honoured and exalted by his people.—*It shall be a name of joy,—a praise,—and an honour.*

I. It

ⁿ Jer. xiii. 11.—^o Isa. lxii. 3.—^p Isa. lxi. 1, 3.—^q Isa. xliii. 25.

i. It shall be a name of joy:—That in which he rejoiceth himself, and will have sinners to rejoice in likewise.—That he rejoices in the name himself, is evident from the numerous promises and gracious declarations contained in his word, which relate to the pardon of sin.—He rejoiceth over them to do them good^r, and is pleased with an opportunity to shew himself gracious, and to frustrate the designs of our spiritual enemies. A benevolent heart can hardly conceive a greater pleasure than to have an opportunity of doing good; it delights to make others partakers of its own happiness. But this is eminently the case, even to an infinite degree, with respect to God. “He waits to be gracious^s :” “Is ready to pardon^t :” And condescends so far, as to entreat sinners to accept it freely at his hand^u.

It is a name in which he not only rejoices himself, but proposes it as a subject of joy to sinners.—How frequently does he call upon them in his word to look to, and to rejoice in him, as a God of pardons;—to venture upon his promise;—to triumph in his grace, and to glory in his salvation? Hence the church is introduced as exulting in this God of salvation. “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments

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^r Jer. xxxii. 41.—^s Isa. xxx. 18.—^t Neh. ix. 17.
^u 2 Cor. v. 20.

of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness^w." "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory^x." O brethren, is it not matter of daily joy to your souls, that "with the Lord there is mercy, and with him plentiful redemption^y?"

2. It shall conduce to his *praise*. And is it not to the praise of the glory of his grace, that he hath made us accepted in the beloved^z?—To the praise of his *wisdom*, that devised the admirable plan to bring sinners to God?—To the praise of his *mercy*, which pitied, provided for, and abounds towards us?—To the praise of his *power*, whereby Satan is restrained and vanquished, and saints kept to the enjoyment of complete salvation^a?—It is to the praise of each Person, and of every perfection in the Godhead. The pardon of sin, will be matter of praise and wonder, not only to the church on earth, but to all the saints in heaven, even to all eternity. The language of the prophet will be the perpetual sentiment, and delightful theme of all the saved of the Lord. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy^b."

Heaven

^w Isa. lxi. 10.—^x Isa. xlv. 25.—^y Psalm cxxx. 7.—
^z Ephes. i. 6.—^a 1 Peter i. 5.—^b Micah vii. 18.

Heaven will ring through all eternity, with the praises of the God of Salvation.

3. His pardoning of sin will not only be a name of joy and a praise, but also bring *honour* to him.—Will not this, think you, be the case, when all the ransomed of the Lord are brought safe to glory? Myriads of myriads, who, but for his pardoning grace and saving arm, had been cast into hell,—all freely forgiven,—all filled with his glorious grace,—all employed in hymning his praise,—all feasting upon his infinite fulness,—all saved to the honour of his justice, and saved from the rage of their enemies.—O what an honour will it be to have “plucked so many brands from the burning^c! to have formed and polished so many pillars to adorn his temple above!—If, to magnify his greatness, on the day of festivity, Belshazzar brought forth all the vessels of gold and silver, which his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken out of the temple at Jerusalem;—surely, in the grand jubilee above, the great God will set forth all the vessels of mercy, with this motto deeply engraven on each, *pardoned,—saved,*—and both to the *honour* of God.—The last thing we have to attend to is

III. That, in order to bring about this great design, he will have it published to all nations.—*It shall be a name of joy, a praise*

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and

^c Zechariah iii. 2.

and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall bear all the good that I do unto them. This shall be effected, partly by the preaching of the gospel, but completely in the day of judgment.

1. In measure this shall be brought about, through the preaching of the gospel. The design of the gospel is to evidence that there is “redemption in Christ’s blood, the forgiveness of sin according to the riches of grace^d.” And this shall have an universal spread; so that the knowledge of the Lord, and salvation by him, shall cover the earth, even as the waters cover the sea^e. The word of reconciliation shall be preached to all nations for the obedience of faith^f.—But, if this is the design of the gospel, let us enquire whether it is answered in us.—Brethren, is it matter of joy to you to hear that God has pardoned as great sins, and saved as great sinners as yourselves?—Do you praise him for the tidings of his grace sent to your land, and to your ears?—And do you honour him, by receiving the report, reclining upon his grace, and adorning the doctrines of God your Saviour^g, in your life and conversation?—In short; do you, from the heart, bless God, for Jesus Christ, and approve of his method of saving sinners by grace alone? In the death of Christ, “the Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations,

^d Ephes. i. 7.—^e Isa. xi. 9.—^f Rom. xvi. 26.—^g Titus ii. 10.

tions, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God^h.”—But,

2. This shall be more fully and awfully displayed in the day of judgment:—When all the hosts of hell,—the angels of heaven,—and the numerous inhabitants of the four quarters of the globe, are convened together in one vast assembly; then God shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.—Yes, my brethren, his grace shall be honoured in the salvation of such, in the midst of that universal assembly without one dissenting voice.—Angels will approve, and devils and wicked men will have nothing to object to this great transaction.—The accuser of the brethren, who accused them before their God day and nightⁱ, shall be confounded for ever, and all that despised and persecuted them shall be silent in darkness^k.—He will lead up his redeemed to glory, where “they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away^l.”—From this subject we may infer

1. That it is a great and special privilege to hear that God can be just, and yet justify the ungodly.—To you is the word of Salvation sent;—while many are left to grope in Pagan darkness, the clear rays of gospel truth beam upon you.—Blessed are your ears for they hear, and your eyes for they see the admirable plan in which mercy and truth,
righteousness

^h Isa. lii. 10.—ⁱ Rev. xii. 10.—^k 1 Sam. ii. 9.—^l Isa. xxxv. 10.

righteousness and peace, can meet in harmony and with honour.—O what a valuable blessing is the Bible, which lays open to our view the treasures of mercy and the riches of grace.—This reveals the most needful discovery that a guilty sinner could wish, viz.

Pardon for infinite offence! and pardon
Thro' means that speaks its value infinite!

What can be more acceptable to the condemned, than pardon; to the diseased, than health; or to the slave, than liberty:—But the gospel publishes free pardon, perfect health, and everlasting liberty, to all that flee for refuge to the hope set before them. Ye sin-sick, Satan-stung souls, let me drop the balm of gospel grace into your wounds;—it is the disposition of God's nature, it is the joy of his heart, and the honour of his name, to pardon, to save sinners that apply to him in Christ.—He encourages you to look to him for salvation, and gives you his word that you shall not do it in vain. “Look to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else^m.”

2. If this is the honour of his name,—then meditate much upon it, and trust in it. They that know his name will put their trust in himⁿ. And you cannot honour God more than by a simple dependance on his grace and mercy.—This is that humility of heart that he requires and approves.—This
is

^m Isa. xiv. 22.—ⁿ Psalm ix. 10.

is that childlike frame which fears his anger and confides in his mercy.—This, the Psalmist being judge, is that character which God approves. “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him; in those that hope in his mercy.”

3. If the church of God shall be more extensive, and more honoured in some distant period; how should we pray for the peace of this Jerusalem?—Our duty is to open a passage for larger communications of his grace by our prayers: And therefore “ye that make mention of the Lord keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth^p.”

SERMON

* Psalm cxlvii. 11.—^p Isa. lxij. 7.

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S E R M O N III.

The Saviour's Honour and the Saint's
Happiness united: Or, Christ al-
ways the same.

HEBREWS xiii. 8.

*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day,
and for ever.*

IT is the tarnish of all sublunary things, the foil of the fairest characters amongst the sons of men, that they are mutable, or mortal. As we gaze upon the ruins of once stately buildings, we admire their former grandeur and magnificence; we weep over the tombs of men, once famed for learning, usefulness, or piety; but ah, what a change has death or time made on them! What they *were*, they *are not* at present; their names live in our memory, but their hands and hearts are no longer directed towards heaven to plead for us: Nor their lips employed to warn or invite us in the name, and as the representatives of the great God. Prophets

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live

live not for ever, to see their predictions accomplished^a; nor ministers, to receive the answer of their prayers, or reap the fruit of their labours in the conversion of their hearers.—Parents have to quit their post of care and trust, and kings to abdicate their thrones, and leave the rein of government to the management of others.—They were men, they were Mortal; and therefore have finished their course, have ended their service, and concluded their reign.—But in the text we are called to behold a character that is always the same,—and a person whose beauty is permanent, his glory unfullied, his power infinite, his perfections immutable, and his reign eternal.—In the person of the Redeemer we contemplate true glory, consummate beauty, and absolute perfection.—The state and customs of nations, yea the very form of the world, may be greatly altered; the former through the lusts of men, the latter by the convulsions of nature. The beams of the sun may be obscured by storms, or hid from our view by the intervention of bodies inferior both in size and glory:—The sea may be contracted in one place, and enlarged in another, so that where once stood famous cities, ships may sail, or, on the contrary, where ships formerly sailed flocks may now graze.—In short; all things are subject to change, but God and Christ, the covenant of Grace, and

the happiness of the blessed. What the Redeemer *was*, he *is*, and ever *will be*. He is the same, in nature, in office, in care, and love; in strength, wisdom, and sufficiency; in himself, and to his believing family, in every age, place, and circumstance.—How full of glory and consolation is this short sentence now before us, *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, &c.* May the Lord the spirit write it deep in our memory, keep it constantly in our view, and increase our comforts, by enlarging our minds in meditating on it.—Is it not blessed tidings to a soul burdened with sin, distressed with corruption, and assaulted by Satan, to hear that Jesus Christ is the same? That he can now sympathise, succour, support, and save all that come unto God by him, as well as formerly^b.

This truly valuable epistle may be considered as the key to the whole Bible: It opens the great designs of God in all the institutions, ordinances, and services of the Mosaic dispensation. Like the rising sun, it enlightens and discovers objects obscure before. It gilds the face of prophecy, causes the buds of the promises to swell and break forth in all the fragrant blossoms of sovereign grace, in all the rich fruits of everlasting love; and realizes the Old Testament shadows, by presenting to us Jesus as their glorious substance.

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stance.

^b Hebrews vii. 25.

stance. This is the divine Mirror, in which we behold reflected to our view the glories of the great Mediator; and the sacred repository in which the wisdom and honour of God; the comfort and support of the church, are laid up. The volume of inspiration had scarce been complete without this epistle; seeing it throws a light upon all, and greatly contributes to render some parts of Scripture far more intelligible and useful than they would otherwise have been.

With respect to the part of this epistle we have now under consideration, expositors are not agreed about the connection: Whether the words relate to the preceding or the subsequent verse, or stand alone.—Without fixing particularly on either; what if we compare it to the sun in the heavens, which, if considered by itself, appears exceedingly glorious, yet, when viewed in connection with the other parts of the universe, is incomparably more so.—So, if we consider the words separate and alone; they contain the sum of christian knowledge, of christian comfort, and of christian experience. It is all collected in this, *Jesus Christ is the same.*

If we rather incline to read them in connection with the preceding verse, the sense will be this, while you remember the faithful ministers of the gospel, who either now, or formerly preached unto you the word of life; while you see them to be frail,
dying

dying men like yourselves ; never forget, that the immortal, the immutable Jesus was the substance of their sermons,—the object of their faith,—and the end of their conversation. Ver. 7, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God : whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. *Jesus Christ the same, &c.*”

They may stand in connection with the 9th verse, in which, guarding them against unsettled notions in religion, he says, “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines : for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.” Now the best preservative against error, the surest stay to a deceitful heart, is this, to know, believe, and depend upon that *Jesus who is the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*

But, leaving the connection, my endeavour shall be, with the help of God,

- I. To open and explain the words.
- II. To point out the great comfort and encouragement included in them for the people of God.

I. In order to open and explain the words, it may not be improper to observe, that some apply the text either wholly to the doctrine of Christ, or, if they explain it of his person, it is in such a manner as tends rather

ther to degrade than exalt him. They say he is *the same yesterday, i. e.* from his conception to his resurrection: *To day*, from his resurrection to the present season,—*and for ever*, viz. to eternity. But if we take the word yesterday in this limited sense, there is scarce an expression in the whole Scripture of a more humiliating aspect. What can be more expressive of the insignificance of a person than to say he is of yesterday? Hence Bildad, in order to humble the pride of man, says, “We are but of *yesterday* and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow^c.” But whoever reads over the preceding part of this epistle, with care and without prejudice, will, I presume, scarce admit such a thought; that the glorious person, of whom the apostle speaks in such high and honourable terms through *twelve* chapters, should thus be disgraced in *one* verse: Yea, in *one word* almost at the end. Is this to exalt him that is the brightness of glory^d? and who is described, as before Abraham, greater than Moses, Aaron, or any of the Prophets; in immortality like to Melchisedec, and, in honour, above the Angels? No, this would be to degrade him into the rank of creatures, and set him upon a level with ourselves.

Others, eminent in the church both for piety and learning, explain the text thus,

Jesus

^c Job viii. 9.—^d Hebrews i. 3.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, from the birth of time to the first publication of the gospel;—*to day*, under the present evangelical dispensation;—*and for ever*, in all the opening ages of eternity.

But not to dwell upon words, it is the sense of them we enquire after; and this seems to be comprehended in two things; for in the text Christ is described both as to what he is in himself, and what he is in his office-character, in relation to his people.

1. They express what he is in himself. The eternal, immutable Jehovah,—the origin of being,—the end of all things^c,—the creator of the ends of the earth^f,—God over all blessed for ever^g. If the words mean what they express, they evidently hold forth the proper and eternal Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ; and if they do not, they are calculated to lead us into error, and plunge us into idolatry; and, after all the arts of refinement, it will be exceedingly difficult to exculpate them from absolute blasphemy. While they assert that he is the same, do they not in reality ascribe to him, one of the most essential attributes, one of the most exalted titles of Deity? A name which he assumes to himself, and claims all its honour as his own. The name I have a reference to, you will find in Exod. iii. 14.

“And

^c Rev. i. 8.—^f Isa. xl. 28.—^g Rom. ix. 5.

“And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” Compare this with Isa. xlii. 8, and you will find he claims this honour as his own peculiar property. “I am the LORD”, (Jehovah, the self-existent Being, the eternal I AM) “that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another.” But this name, this glory, is, I apprehend, given to Christ, when it is said that he is the same; that is, in other words, immutable, independent, and eternal. But, that we may not be supposed to force a sense upon the words, which the apostle never intended, let us hear St. Paul explain himself. The enquiry then you will observe is this, when he says Jesus Christ is the same, does he intend his proper divinity or not? To determine this let us look back to the first chap. ver. 10—12. “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest: and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but THOU ART THE SAME, *and* thy years shall not fail.” Can any thing be more expressive of wisdom, power, and majesty, than the creation of the heavens and the earth? Or can language more strongly describe the immutability

tability and eternity of the great Former of all things, than to say, *He is the same*. In all places, changes, periods;—in time—before time, and when time shall be no more, *he is the same*:—*He*, the author, supporter, director, and end of all things. *He is*, which is expressive of being, and *he is the same*, which proves him to be, that supreme, independent Being we call God.

He is the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. It is, I presume, sinking this august description too low, to begin the exposition of it with the birth of time. Let me rather refer you to an Expositor, whose authority is great and his judgement to be depended on;—one who speaks with the utmost precision, one who means what he expresses, and expresses what he means; who declares the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.—You will easily perceive that I mean the adorable Jesus, who, while he proclaims his incommunicable honours, furnishes us with a proper comment on these words, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty^h,” *i. e.* in other words, equal to all things, and existing in all seasons; *the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*. “From everlasting to everlasting he is Godⁱ;”

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“All

^h Rev. i. 8.—ⁱ Psalm xc. 2.

“All things were created by him, and for him.—He is before all things, and by him all things consist^k.”—His throne abides for ever, his crown is righteousness, and his sceptre truth. The names and attributes, the works and worship proper only to Deity, which are ascribed to him in the fullest sense, and with the greatest frequency in the scripture, prove him to be God; not in a metaphorical or limited, but in a full and proper sense, originally and everlastingly so. “He is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords^l.” In short; no words can more fully describe what he is, than when he is said to be, *the same yesterday, &c.*

Remember then, my dear brethren, that the proper divinity of Jesus Christ, is the grand hinge—the sure foundation—the main spring—the central point of all practical and experimental christianity. Other doctrines are no further advantageous to, or influential on us, than as viewed in connection with this. If he is God, we do well to trust in his wisdom, power, and grace: His death and intercession, his blood and righteousness can then avail us. But if he is no more than a titular God, his death was no more than a figurative sacrifice, and we are left to sink for ever, under the guilt of our sins and the frown of the Almighty. Sirs, search the scriptures,

^k Col. i. 16, 17.—^l 1 Tim. vi. 15.

scriptures, examine with care, in order that you may improve with constancy, this grand article of christianity. Other doctrines are subjects of faith and means of comfort no further, than as supported by this. If Christ is God, he had wherewithal to pay to law and justice, that which was required by them: But if only a man; however pure his doctrine, perfect his example, or superior to us in some respects, he owed the whole of his obedience for himself. But he *was* from everlasting, what he is at present, the great I AM:—He *is* what he was, without change of nature or abatement in perfection, “Jehovah our righteousness^m,” and through the rolling generations of time, and succeeding ages of eternity, he *will be* unchangeably the same, the Almighty. Thus we see that in himself he is *the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*

2. Being the *same* in himself he is so likewise in his office, from the entrance of sin to the consummation of all things: for there never was more than one proper mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. In this office was he set up in the counsel of God from everlasting, and began to act as such, as soon as sin was committed. This was that sure foundation laid before the first human pair in Paradise; and “other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is

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Jesus

^m Jeremiah xxiii. 6.

Jesus Christⁿ ;” “ Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved^o.” He is the only appointed Saviour—the only anointed Priest—the only authorized Redeemer. He is, ever was, and ever will be head over all things to his church^p ; and his love to, his care over the church, is the same in all ages, in all places, and under all dispensations. All wisdom, all power, all merit dwell really and properly in Jesus Christ : And I should not exceed the bounds of truth, was I to say, that all sacrifices offered before his death were shadows of his ;—all the Prophets that went before were but figures of him, the true Prophet ;—from him they received all that authority and wisdom, whereby they pointed the faith and expectation of the church unto him. “ The words of the wise are as goads and as nails fastened by the master of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd^q.” Yea ; all that David, or Solomon, or Hezekiah ever ordered or instituted in the church, they did as types and representatives of him. There never was a proper priest or sacrifice but Christ : All but his were metaphorical sacrifices, his alone was real.—His oblations could take away sin as pertaining to the conscience, and so fully atoned for
for

ⁿ 1 Cor. iii. 11.—^o Acts iv. 12.—^p Ephes. i. 22.—^q Eccles. xii. 11.

for it, that there needs no repetition of the work. Having "by himself purged our sins," he "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Thereby evidencing that God was satisfied, Satan spoiled, and Man redeemed.

Comfortable truth! encouraging declaration! *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*: A free, a merciful, a compassionate, a condescending, a complete Saviour. Willing to receive, able to succour, and mighty to deliver all that come unto God by him.—His commission from the Father is not out of date;—his merit is the *same* to pardon,—his heart the *same* to pity,—his arm the *same* to support,—his word the *same* to encourage,—his interest with his Father the *same*, which renders his plea for us prevalent,—his fulness the *same* to comfort, sanctify, and save us now, as it was formerly,—and his authority the *same*, to render his commands binding, and his ordinances useful;—what he was to our fathers, he *is* to us that believe at present; and what he is to us, he will be to our children also, who are brought to depend on and rejoice in him, as an almighty Redeemer, and all-sufficient Saviour. Comfortable thought! That gospel we hear, receive, and rejoice in,—that Saviour we depend upon,—that salvation, the comfort of which we taste,
and

and the fulness of which we hope for, has been preached, and shall be preached, even to the utmost bounds of the habitable globe, and to the last period of expiring time; for *Jesus Christ*, the friend of sinners, is *the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*.—Proceed we in the second place,

II. To point out the great comfort and encouragement included in the words now before us,—*Jesus Christ the same, &c.*—*i. e.* As he has been the *delight*, the *support*, and *comfort* of his people in time past, so he is the same still, and ever will be.

1. Have the people of God, in past ages, been *delighted* with the discovery of his personal excellencies and mediatorial fulness? Did they view him as the brightness of glory^s,—the chief of ten thousand, and altogether lovely^t? View him as the wisdom, the power^u, the love of God? As full of grace and truth^w, yea, as having the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him bodily^x.—Brethren, he is the *same* still:—and as millions may gaze at the same sun and receive equal advantages from it; as thousands may drink at the same spring and all be refreshed by it: So there is *that* in Christ, which is sufficient to make myriads of myriads of saints completely, yea, everlastingly, happy.

He

^s Heb. i. 3.—^t Song v. 10, 16.—^u 1 Cor. i. 24.—
^w John i. 4.—^x Col. ii. 9.

He is that tree of life which is always in bloom, and which bears fruit at all seasons^y. O what pleasing wonders! What unparalleled excellencies harmoniously unite in his adorable person and glorious work! A view of Jesus is the astonishment and admiration of the angelic choir;—a view of Jesus swells the happiness, and puts an accent upon the song of all the glorified spirits;—a view of Jesus is the *life* of faith, the *soul* of joy, the spring of comfort, the ground of peace, and the threshold of expectation to his people below.—A view of Jesus quenches the fiery darts of Satan,—exhales the mists that arise from a depraved heart,—disentangles our affections from the world, and makes the soul pant for more intimate and enlarged enjoyment. O what pleasure! What privileges! What a Paradise is opened to the soul in the saving knowledge of Christ! It is life eternal^z; the principle,—the first fruits,—the fore-taste of it. To them that know him he is altogether lovely; and to them that believe in him he is precious, yea, preciousness in the very abstract^a. All the perfections of Deity,—all the purposes of Jehovah,—all the promises of grace,—and all the glory that shall redound to God, in the salvation of sinners by his grace, even to eternity, are all in Christ. And when the eyes of the understanding are opened to see, and

^y Rev. xxii. 2.—^z John xvii. 3.—^a 1 Pet. ii. 7.

and the heart directed into the wisdom, the love and glory of God as displayed in Christ; O what sacred delight! What solid satisfaction does it afford to the mind! Brethren, look to Jesus: The reason we live so low, is because we look to him so little.—Would you therefore sing with David, or rejoice with Job^b, or triumph with Paul, or, like John, lie in the bosom of love; converse much with that Jesus, who is an incessant subject of delight.—He *is* the same he ever was; seek then to find him *that*, to your souls, which former saints have found him to theirs.

2. Have the people of God, in past ages, been *supported* by Jesus in a time of temptation, or preserved in a season of persecution? He is still *the same*, and will ever evidence the same affection for them, and care over them. Did he pray for Peter that his faith might not fail^c? And promise to Paul that his grace should be sufficient for him, and his strength made perfect in weakness^d? Did he preserve Jeremiah in the Dungeon,—accompany Shadrach and his companions in the furnace,—and guard Daniel in the Lion's den? Has he made temptations profitable to his people? Enabled them to rejoice in tribulation, and triumph under persecution? Come then thou fearful soul, who art ready to conclude that thou shalt never reach the prize; or if brought under the lash of persecution,

^b Job xix. 23—27.—^c Luke xxii. 32.—^d 2 Cor. xii. 9.

secution, shall deny the faith;—Come, read meditate on,——believe and depend upon the truth of what the Apostle says of that Saviour you love, *Jesus Christ the same, &c.* The same to succour, to support, to preserve, to protect you, that ever he was. And if the same, the weakest believer may say with the greatest Apostle, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me^e :” —May say with the Royal Poet, “the Lord will perfect that which concerneth me^f.” Encouraging truth! He that enabled the worthies of old to persevere through dangers and distresses: He that armed them with faith, and enabled them to triumph over unbelief in themselves;—opposition from others, and the rage of devils.—He is the same.—His will the same;—his power the same;—his engagements the same;—his honour the same;—and his relation to his church the same that ever it was. And therefore, whatever you are called to, he will protect you in it, support you under it, and give you an honourable issue out of it;—for as he ever was,—so he is, and in every future difficulty and period will be, the support of his Church, the defender of the faith, and the deliverer of his Zion.

3. Have the people of God, in past ages, experienced Christ to be their *comfort*? Have they conversed with him, rejoiced in him,

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and

and depended on him? Have they built all their hopes of acceptance on the merit of his blood? All their dependence on his grace? All their comforts on his promises? All their successes on his power? And all their encouraging expectations on his fulness? My Brethren, Jesus Christ is the same still: his blood cleanseth from all sin^g;—his grace is free;—his promise firm;—his power infinite;—and his fulness inexhaustible; and therefore confide, rejoice, and glory in him. “He will supply all your wants according to his riches in glory^h ;” —“will never leave you nor forsake youⁱ ;” —will preserve that which you have committed to him^k ;—will accompany you through life;—support you in death,—and bring you to glory.—O ye real followers, ye honoured friends of Jesus, meditate on his grace,—his glory,—his fulness; till your ideas swell, your affections soar,—your peace flow as a river, and your joys abound. The humble birth,—the spotless life,—the solemn death,—the honourable resurrection,—the glorious ascension,—the perpetual intercession,—and the eternal glorification of Jesus, are all subjects of comfort to a real Christian.—His presence in all places,—his power to do all things,—and his promise to be with them in all their trials, are so many breasts of consolation to them.

^g 1 John i. 7. — ^h Phil. iv. 19. — ⁱ Heb. xiii. 5. —
^k 2 Tim. i. 12.

them.—In short, as was hinted before, to them that believe he is precious; and they really find him so, in all their access to God, in all their conflicts with Satan,—in all their opposition to sin. He is precious to them in all ordinances, and above all things.—He is a precious *Treasure*, in which they lay up their All;—a precious *Saviour*, to whom they are indebted for all;—and a precious *Portion* both here and for ever. He is that precious foundation on which they build their faith, and hope, and comfort.

On the whole; Is Jesus Christ the same? then, in every difficulty, cry, with the converted Paul, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do¹?” Cry, with the expiring thief, “Lord remember me^m.” Go to him for wisdom, for righteousness, for sanctification, and for redemptionⁿ. Go to him for pardon, peace, and perseverance; go to him for grace, guidance, and glory.—In fine; go to him, for he receiveth sinners;—he saveth sinners;—he honoureth sinners;—honoureth them with an interest in his favour, in his family, in his fulness. O come to Jesus, sinners; converse much with Jesus, saints;—receive *delight*, *support*, and *comfort* from Jesus; for he is the same *in himself*, and *to sinners in his office*, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

¹ Acts ix. 6.—^m Luke xxiii. 42.—ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 30.

S E R M O N I V.

The Saint's Treasure: Or, Help
found in God.

2 C O R. iii. 5.—Last Clause.

Our Sufficiency is of God.

THE short sentence now before us, may be stiled the marrow of christian experience, the moral of the whole history of the Bible, and the motto to the believer's arms.—It is that key which admits the soul into the sacred chambers of communion, explains the most surprizing events, and discovers what always *was*, and ever *will be*, the strength and comfort of the church of God.—Divine all-sufficiency is the rock on which Abraham built his hope, and the refuge to which David fled in a time of trial and difficulty.—This is that sacred treasure, which feeds the lamp of grace in the soul, and causes it to send forth its light to the glory of God, and to the honour of his cause.

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It is this that is the strength of Faith, Hope, and Patience. This enables the feeble faint to pursue the prize: and, if not sensibly to prevail against his numerous adversaries, yet steadily to maintain the opposition; till grace shout the victory, and Jesus admit the conqueror into the mansions of blessedness.—It is the all-sufficient God, to which the most eminent believer is indebted for light, liberty, comfort, and holiness; and by whom the weakest is supported under every fear, in every difficulty, and for the discharge of every duty.—Though often assailed from without, and much discouraged from within, blessed be God, they can erect their monument of praise inscribed with this sentence, “Having obtained help from God, we continue to this day^a.”—Though in themselves they find nothing but weakness, ignorance, and contrariety; yet, when faith is in exercise, they can point to a never-failing fountain,—to an immutable God, and say, “All my springs are in him^b.”—“From him is my fruit found^c;” and while he is incapable of change, I shall never want a supply: Or, in the language of David, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want^d.” With sacred confidence, such may look to those immortal hills, from whence cometh

^a Acts xxvi. 22.—^b Psalm lxxxvii. 7.—^c Hosea xiv. 8.—
^d Psalm xxiii. 1.

cometh their help, and in the lowest valley
adopt the poet's song :

Let waves and thunders mix and roar ;
Be thou my God, and the whole world is mine :
While thou art Sov'reign, I'm secure ;
I shall be rich, till thou art poor ;
For all I fear, and all I wish, heaven, earth, and hell
are thine.

Such as live on the liberality of men, may find their treasure fail them, but "he that trusteth in the Lord, shall never be confounded^c." Such have his promise that "as their day is, so shall their strength be^f," and that he will never leave them nor forsake them^g.—Favours received from him already, are but arguments to prove, that greater blessings are treasured up with him for future exigencies. "God is their refuge and strength, a present help in every time of trouble^h," his arms are underneath to support and strengthen them.—He is the hope of the hopeless, and the help of the helpless.—He is our refuge and strength; and when Omnipotence is engaged on our side, out of weakness we shall be made strong; and having nothing in ourselves we shall possess all in God.—He is *our help*, a *present help*, a present help in *trouble*; yea, a *very present help* in *every time of trouble*.—Be the demand
what

^c 1 Pet. ii. 6. — ^f Deut. xxxiii. 25. — ^g Heb. xiii. 5. —
^h Psalm xlvj. 1.

what it may,—the season when it will,—the perplexity ever so great,—the requirement ever so frequent,—our God is equal to it:—Help, suitable, seasonable, sufficient, is to be found in him.—To him nothing is impossible; with him every thing is easy: And therefore the church might well sing, “Our help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”—How safe! How secure! How happy the people that are in such a case! Yea, blessed are the people whose God is the Lord¹.

There are two principles, the truth of which all that are taught of God are deeply convinced of from experience, however they may disagree in other things. All real Christians have a divine and practical conviction of their own *insufficiency*, and God's *all-sufficiency*.—They may disagree about phrases; but bring the matter to experience, and all who know any thing about it, will not hesitate to say, with the Apostle in the words before us, *we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.*

In the preceding verses of this chapter, St. Paul appeals to the Church at Corinth, for the evidence of his authority as an Apostle, and the success of his labours, as a minister of the gospel.—“Do we (says he) begin again to commend ourselves, or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation

¹ Psal cxliv. 15.

to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men. For as much as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart." It is a supporting consideration, when a minister can read the evidences of his call from God, and at the same time reap the fruits of his labour, in the conversion, and exemplary conversation of his hearers: when he can point to them, as the seals of his commission, and as the joy of his soul in the day of Christ.

From a view of the success of his labours at Corinth, he derives fresh confidence in God, through Christ, that he should be directed, assisted, and succeeded in other places also. "And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Ver. 4." This trust was not founded on his learning, study, or oratory; for he immediately declares, that, if left to themselves, the wisest would evidence their folly, and the strongest discover their weakness: For (says he) so far from converting one soul, so far from producing an universal and abiding change in the hearts of others, *we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves.* Whatever has been, or may be done, either *in us*, as the subjects, or *by us*, as the instruments,

is to be resolved wholly into the sovereign grace and power of God. We are nothing, *but our sufficiency is of God.* The comfortable doctrine contained in these words, is not more true of Ministers, of whom it is immediately spoken, than of Christians in general, to whom it may very properly be applied; the work may be different, but the strength is the same. Your sufficiency, as well as ours, is of God. And taking the words in this more extensive sense, we shall pursue the following method.

- I. Shew what kind of sufficiency there is in God.
- II. The ground all true saints have to take encouragement *from*, and build all their confidence *on* this.
- III. That a proper view of this truth, will have a powerful influence upon those who believe, and depend upon it.

I. We are to shew that there is a sufficiency in God, which is calculated to comfort, support, and encourage his believing family.

The sufficiency which is in God, may be considered either as *proper*, or *communicative*; as it respects himself, or relates to us.—As it respects himself, it means that he is self-existent, self-sufficient, independent, and eternally happy in himself.—Angels and inferior

ferior creatures may *express*, but cannot *increase* his glory and honour; their highest praises, and most extensive services, are, but a reflection of the beams of that glory, which dwells originally in himself. It is condescension, for him to look out of himself; it is humility, “to behold the things which are in heaven and in earth^k.” However, in this discourse, we have to consider the divine sufficiency, not so much as it respects himself, as in relation to his creatures. And in this sense, it is like the gentle dew which descends upon the whole garden of the creation, waters, refreshes, and invigorates every plant. From this universal storehouse all receive, from the highest to the lowest order of created beings. But when the Apostle says, *our sufficiency is of God*, we are to take it in a more limited sense, as having a particular respect to the church of God, the faithful followers of the Redeemer.—And O what a noble, animating, and encouraging subject, does this present to our view! We cannot but feel our inequality to it, even as we enter upon it. For, “Who by searching can find out God? Who can find out the Almighty to perfection^l?”—And sure, it is scarce more difficult to comprehend his nature, than fully to describe the sufficiency that we have in him. What line can fathom that ocean! What thought can penetrate the veil that inter-

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venes

^k Psal. cxiii. 6.—^l Job xi. 7.

venes between us and our treasure ! What language can speak forth all this glorious subject ! With the Apostle we may say in the general, *our sufficiency is of God* ; but who can describe it as to particulars ?

However, without presuming to this, let us so far attend to the subject, as, with a divine blessing, may conduce to our encouragement at present ; and wait to see the whole displayed in the uninterrupted enjoyment, of himself above : For what is heaven ? but an eternal experience of the privilege described in the text ? It is a perpetual view, a continual draught of the divine sufficiency. They find *that* in God, which fills, and satisfies all the desires of the soul, completely, and constantly, without either interruption, or end.

Without presuming then to launch forth into the Depths of this ocean ; let us, like the ancient navigators, keeping near the shore, endeavour to collect some of these valuable Treasures, which are to be found in God.—*Emptiness* is proper to all the creatures ; but *sufficiency* is in God, who is reconciled to sinners by Jesus Christ. If we only attentively read over the words of the text, we shall find the three following things upon the very surface : *Our sufficiency is of God* ;
i. e. He is

All-sufficient, as to things ;

Always sufficient, as to times, and

Sufficient for all, as to Persons.

And

And though we presume not to call this a full description of the apostle's words ; yet it contains that, which should inspire us with gratitude, fire us with devotion, and prompt us to praise and obedience.

God is all-sufficient as to things. All things were made, are managed, and disposed of by him ; he grasps all the treasures of nature and grace, as his property, and parcels them out, when, where, and to whom he pleases. We live upon the bounty of him, who can say with propriety, *all the earth is mine* ; on him, who has promised that “ bread shall be given, and your water be sure^m :” That “ they that seek him shall not want any good thingⁿ ;” “ that he will withhold no good thing, from them that walk uprightly^o.”— And as to spiritual blessings ; he is the God of all grace and comfort, and causes all that grace to abound towards us, that we may have a sufficiency, for the wants of the soul, as well as of the body : He supplies all our wants as creatures, and as children, according to the riches of his glory by Jesus Christ. With the Father of mercies is found grace to pardon, sanctify, and save all that apply to him through Jesus the mediator. — O soul ! thou hast not one desire, but there is an answer to be found to it, in this all-sufficient God.

He is not only all-sufficient, but *always* sufficient. In all ages, nations, and places,
this

^m Isa. xxxiii. 16.—ⁿ Psal. xxxiv. 10.—^o Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

this is the name whereby he will be known, this the character in which he will be honoured by all his saints. In times of prosperity or adversity, peace or persecution, affluence or want, the church may boldly say, “the Lord is on my side, I will not fear what man can do unto me^p.”—The lustre of this character is not diminished by age, nor its glory eclipsed by time.—He always was, is, and ever will be, the glory of Zion and the support of his church.—He must be always sufficient, seeing he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^q.—His name is Jehovah, and it is the glory of his nature, the honour of his cause, that “he changeth not^r.”

His sufficiency relates to *persons*, as well as to things and seasons; for ministers and people; weak and strong; babes, young men, and fathers; yes, the most fearful, those who see themselves most empty, and most unworthy, may find a sufficiency here: “who-soever will, let him come^s ;” and he (saith the compassionate Saviour) “that cometh,” however great his guilt, large his wants, or complicated his fears and doubts, “I will in no wise cast out^t.—This is an encouraging declaration to us all; but while it encourages, does it not likewise sharply reprove us, that we attend to it so little? How prone
are

^p Psalm cxviii. 6. — ^q Heb. xiii. 8. — ^r Mal. iii. 6. —
^s Rev. xxii. 17. — ^t John vi. 37.

are we to dwell in our thoughts upon our own insufficiency, to our great discouragement; instead of applying to that God, who is both able and willing to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

In God there is a sufficiency of wisdom, of power, and of grace.

1. Of *Wisdom*, for there is no searching of his understanding; and yet he that is infinite in knowledge, has engaged to guide us with his counsel. This adorable Being takes in at one immense survey all persons, things, nations, characters, in all worlds, from eternity to eternity, in the vast depths of his understanding and knowledge, which is clear without darkness, distinct without confusion, infallible without doubt, easy without labour, has pleasing perceptions without pain, and is universal without limits or bounds*; and if so, who would not be ambitious of such a correspondent? Who would not depend on such a counsellor? Who would not cheerfully follow such a guide? O my Brethren, in all your straits and difficulties, act the part of the true Israelite, and ask counsel of the Lord.—Large are his promises, and great his condescension, that he will be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do that for them, which he hath spoken to them of". If therefore ye would be wise unto salvation, apply much to the book of
God,

* Ryland's Contemplations,—"Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

God, and to the throne of God. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of the Wonderful Counsellor; for the wisdom which is from above, is pure in its principle, and purifying in its effects^x. He has wisdom to guide you, to govern you; to save you; and applying to him your doubts shall be removed, your darkness dispersed, and your souls enlightened and enlivened to run the way of his commandments.

2. As there is a sufficiency of wisdom, so also of *power* to be found in God; these are inseparably connected for the comfort of God's people: Hence, in the 40th of Isaiah, we are told "there is no searching of his understanding;" and it is added immediately after, ver. 29, "he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." Hence also, the Apostle Paul prays for the Ephesians, that "they might know the exceeding greatness of God's power toward those that believe, according to the working of his mighty power^y;"—which may evidence, not only that the mighty power of God is displayed in producing faith in the heart at first; but, that the same attribute of power is drawn forth even to exceeding greatness, in the support, and for the encouragement of the faith already wrought. To the same purpose Peter asserts, that believers "are kept by the power of
God

^x James iii. 17.—^y Ephes. i. 19.

God through faith unto salvation^z; *i. e.* weak faith is supported by Almighty power; supported both in its principle and actings till it is made to triumph over all opposition: So that we may boldly put the question, Is any thing too hard for the Lord? And upon the answer build this inference, "All things are possible to them that believe^a," for "if God be for us, who *can be* against us^b?" The power of God is sufficient to preserve, protect, and perfect that which concerneth us; if the Lord of Hosts is on our side, and engaged in our cause, the church may adopt the language of the poet,

—————As long
As he shall reign Almighty, we are strong.

3. There is an all-sufficiency of *grace* in God, as well as power and wisdom for his people. Now, grace may be considered either as his good-will towards sinners, or the effects of that will, in favours actually conferred, or to be conferred upon them: In the former view, it signifies *that*; which like the grand spring sets omniscience and omnipotence to work for their good and benefit: The good pleasure of God is the cause of all that he works in, or confers on us: It was this, that induced him to make a covenant ordered in all things and sure; and it is in virtue of this, that he works in us all the good pleasure of his will^c, and loads us

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with

^z 1 Pet. i. 5. — ^a Mark ix. 23. — ^b Rom. viii. 31. —
^c Phil. ii. 13.

with the blessings of his goodness and grace.—He is full of grace, the streams never fail, and the treasure is never to be found empty: His grace is sufficient to pardon, succour, and save completely, all that depend on it; all that desire to glory in it.

On the whole, in the daily discoveries of our ignorance, the conviction of our weakness, and the sensibility of our imperfections, we are called to look above every doubt, discouragement, and defect, and say *our sufficiency is of God*. He can, and more than that, he will guide us by his counsel; keep us by his power; and save us through his grace.—I pass on

II. To shew the ground that all true saints have to take encouragement *from*, and build all their confidence *on*, *the sufficiency which is of God*. And this may be evinced from the express intimations,—exhortations,—reproofs,—and examples contained in the sacred volume.

1. That there is encouragement for every believing sinner, as well as the apostle, to depend on, and glory in God's sufficiency, is evident from the most clear *intimations* of scripture. Hear what the great God says to Abraham his friend, and the Father of all the faithful, "I am the Almighty (all-sufficient) God; walk before me and be thou perfect^d." To Jacob, "Behold I am with thee, and

^d Gen. xvii. 1.

will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of^e." To Paul, when pleading with fervency and humble importunity, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness^f." In short, whatever encouragement God ever gave to particular saints against their fears, or for the support of their faith, he intended it for the advantage of *all* being in similar circumstances. And therefore the apostle, with a view to the whole collection of promises, comforts the believing Hebrews by saying, "He is faithful that promiseth^g." And from such premises may we not boldly say? He that engaged his sufficiency for Abraham, for Jacob, and Paul, does by these very promises still encourage us to place our confidence in him. He promises to be our God and that we shall be his people^h: And is it possible for him to confer a greater privilege, or for you to desire a greater consolation? If he is your God, you have all that you can want; and if you are his people, you are exalted, you are honoured indeed.

2. The express *exhortations* of scripture corroborate the same blessed truth, viz. That *our sufficiency is of God*.—How many are the calls to faith, to dependence, to con-

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fidence

^e Gen. xxviii. 15.—^f 2 Cor. xii. 9.—^g Heb. x. 23.—
^h Jer. xxxi. 33.

fidence in God? To trust in him for *all things* and at *all times*, without limitation in either. The uniform language both of the Old and New Testaments, under the article of exhortation, is summarily comprehended in these few words, *lock off from every thing in yourselves in point of dependence, but rest on, and rejoice in the all-sufficiency of God alone.* Here, you will find room to stretch forth all the desires of the soul, and a support that can sustain her full weight. All the exhortations in the Bible, like the rays of the sun, may be reduced into a point, and summed up in the short sentence of the apostle, “Cast all your care upon the Lord, for he careth for you¹.” He regards you and your interest; encourages you to trust in him, and will support you in so doing. Now can we suppose that God would ever mock his creatures, in the repeated calls to trust and confide in him? No; there is that in God which is equal to all these encouragements: they are founded on his veracity, and shall be realized in the comfortable experience of all that follow the directions, and plead the promises of the all-wise, the all-sufficient God.

3. If we take into consideration the solemn *reproofs* of God's word, they also will prove the doctrine that we are now endeavouring to establish. Carefully examine every page of God's word, and you cannot produce *one in-*

¹ 1 Pet. v. 7.

stance

stance of any person's being reprov'd for having too extensive ideas, or placing too strong confidence in the sufficiency of God; but there are not a few to be found which are directed to those, who, through the fear of men, are almost led to forget God. Let one serve as a specimen of the whole. "I, even I am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass? And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth? And hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor^k?" In what pomp of language is the admonition given! It is, as if the all-powerful God would shame us into confidence. How lofty the ethereal dome under which we dwell! How large the dimensions! How magnificently grand the workmanship of yon spangled heavens! Look we down upon the earth, how firm is its foundation, how beautiful its structure, and how rich in its variety of produce! Well, says God, all that wisdom, that majesty, and that power, which appear in the formation and support of these things, are mine. These are my store-houses; all the hosts of heaven shall be engaged, and all the treasures of nature shall be exhausted, before such as place their trust in me shall be confounded. Every reproof of

^k Isa. li. 12, 13.

our distrust in God, is but an argument in a different form, in confirmation of his sufficiency.

4. Let us next touch at some of those scripture *examples*, which are designed to encourage us to rely entirely on God; on his goodness, wisdom, and power. Passing by Abraham and David, Elijah and Paul; fix your attention for a moment on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: These illustrious confessors are reduced to such a dilemma, that they must either fall in with the general custom and dishonour God; or nobly dissent from a whole nation of idolaters, and sacrifice their lives to their profession. On the one hand, they behold the haughty tyrant, the form of whose countenance was changed with fury, and terrible with wrath; on the other, a furnace heated with seven-fold rage, into which they are to be cast immediately if they persist in disobeying the orders of the king. But through this narrow passage, all the glory of the divine sufficiency shines into their souls; they feel all the force of the argument; they are emboldened to speak for God, and enabled to trust both the interest of their souls, and the honour of their faith in his hands; their hearts meet in one centre, and their lips join in one answer, "Our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king¹."

¹ Dan. iii. 17.

Thus

Thus they held fast their confidence, and the rejoicing of their hope firm to the end; and the event proved that it is not a vain thing to serve the Lord, but that such as place their confidence in him, are sure of support.

Thus we see that the intimations, exhortations, admonitions, and examples of scripture, unite their evidence to encourage us to build our hope, and place our dependence in the divine sufficiency: Let us therefore set up our banner and march forth against all opposition, saying with the apostle, *our sufficiency is of God.*

III. We now proceed to shew, that a proper view of this blessed truth will have the most happy and powerful influence on those that believe it. Not to enlarge on the evidence, suffice it to say, it will *support under trials* and *animate to duty.*

i. A believing view of God's sufficiency being engaged for us, will *support* the mind *under the most weighty trials* and in the most discouraging prospects. Does black poverty hang out all her horrors, and seem to approach us with a meagre countenance and formidable aspect? Do we feel the strength of corruption within, opposing both the principle of grace and the authority of God in his word? Are we sensible of our great deficiency in holiness; and want of conformity to the will of God and image of
Jesus

Jesus in innumerable particulars? Are we much harassed with temptations, captivated by Satan's wiles, and at seasons ready to conclude that we cannot persevere to the end? Or are we much exercised with the fear of death, and dread the approach of that terrible enemy? In the text behold a balance to every discouragement: Our sufficiency is of God; and therefore he can, he will, supply our wants,—subdue our iniquities,—perfect our holiness,—conquer our spiritual enemies,—and give us the victory over death itself.—“I am persuaded (saith the christian hero, looking to an all-sufficient God) that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, not height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord^m.”—He that led Israel through the sea, guided them in a wilderness, and supported them by a variety of miracles, is as able to bear us up, and bear us through every difficulty.

2. A view of an all-sufficient God engaged for us, will *animate the soul for the greatest undertakings* in a way of duty. Thus was it with the author of the words we have now been attending to: How large were the services, how unwearied the zeal, how great the ambition, and how heroic the pursuits of the apostle Paul? The history of his travels,

^m Rom. viii. 38, 39.

toils, and indefatigable labours to spread the gospel, are truly surprising. What prejudice had he not to contend against, and what opposition did he not meet with in his master's service? But nothing moved him; he surmounted every obstacle, and through Christ experienced a blessed superiority to all. There he found both encouragement and strength proportioned to the service that was marked out for him. Of himself he could do nothing, but through help received from heaven, nothing was too great, too arduous for him. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Thus while living, he conquered the prejudice of the world, and dying, triumphed over its rage.

On the whole; what an encouraging subject, what a supporting argument have we presented in the text, for our comfort in all trials and in all seasons. Let our situation or circumstances be what they may; if we have an interest in God through Christ, we can lack nothing: We shall have all things. The presence of God shall be our guide,—the power of God our guard,—and the fulness of God our portion. He that multiplied the oil in the widow's cruise, will never stay his hand till every vessel be full. His mercies are new every morning; his wisdom extends to all our necessities, and he

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has

^a Phil. iv. 13.

has engaged to supply our wants, not according to our contracted conceptions, but according to the riches of his glory^o.—O my brethren, if God is your reconciled friend, your covenant father, your all-sufficient fulness; you *shall* be supported,—*shall* be saved,—*shall* be satisfied. *God is a sun*, to enlighten you, *and a shield*, to defend you: *He will give grace* to sanctify nature, *and glory* to perfect grace: *and no good thing will be withhold from them that walk uprightly*^p.

If there is a sufficiency in God, it is our duty to depend upon him. The greatest honour we can give to God at present, is to believe his word, to rely on his wisdom, grace, faithfulness, and power; to go to him for what we want; to look to him as *ours*, and all that he *is* and *has* as engaged for us: And if so, how should we be humbled, that God is no more honoured by us in this way. What perplexing distrust, what sinful staggerings, what provoking ingratitude! The Lord pardon our folly, and give us that wisdom which leads the soul into more intimate union with him, and cordial dependence on him.

To conclude. If saved sinners shall find a sufficiency in God to make them eternally happy; then the finally impenitent will find him all-sufficient; but it will be, to make them everlastingly miserable. There will be a righteous revelation in the day of
God,

^o Phil. iv. 19.—^p Psalm lxxxiv. 11.

God, of all the wrath which hath been treasured up by the ungodly. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power¹." And if this will be the case with some at the last,—tremble, O ye unconverted sinners, lest this should be found your awful condition. You may live at a distance from God, and be unconcerned at present, but think, O think, what will be the condition of those who shall be for ever banished from God, the fountain of bliss, and the source of happiness? Let me summon your attention to a solemn sentence of the greatest Preacher that ever spoke to mankind, and may you dwell upon it in your meditations, till you have reason to conclude that it bears a favourable aspect to you in particular: The words I have a reference to, you will find in Matt. xviii. 3. "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

But I leave you with that all-sufficient God, who is able to grant my desire in the salvation of your souls, by Jesus Christ.

Amen.

M 2 SERMON

¹ Theff. i. 7, 8, 9.

S E R M O N V.

Strength in Christ: Or, the Believer
exulting in an Almighty Saviour.

PHILIP. iv. 13.

*I can do all things through CHRIST which
strengtheneth me.*

THE greatest events have sometimes been brought about by the most unlikely and insignificant instruments; and as this observation is evident in many instances of the divine conduct, so in no one more than in the spread and success of a preached gospel in the world. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise," by their arguments; "the weak things of the the world to confound the mighty," by their patient fortitude in suffering; "the base things of the world, and things which are despised, yea and things that are not;" that is, those things which are accounted vile, despicable, and insignificant by men, "to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his
pre-

presence^a." The whole scheme of the gospel is designed to display the guilt, the folly, and the impotence of man; and magnify the wisdom, the goodness, and the power of God. In his hand the most insignificant instruments prevail, *out of weakness they are made strong*, and through him find a blessed equality to every duty, difficulty, service, or suffering. In his hand the weak shall wax valiant in the contest; the unlearned prevail in argument; and the oppressed triumph gloriously over all opposition. If God be for us, we have infinite Wisdom for our counsellor, infinite Strength for our support, and infinite Fulness for our treasure. If, with the Apostle, we have been led to see All our sufficiency in God, we have all; yea more than all, we abound, and have cause to triumph. Encouraged by this, the magnanimous Paul could, with a holy superiority, look round the world, which, for its opposition to the blessed gospel, was peculiarly at that day a lively picture of hell. Jews and Pagans united in one fixed design to extirpate Christianity, and sweep away the professors of it from the face of the earth. Our great Apostle saw the path of duty lined on either hand with great discouragements: Pride, Prejudice, and Persecution to contend with, and all the rage of men, aided by the counsels and stratagems of hell. He saw the pride of the learned philosophers drawn

^a 1 Cor. i. 27—29,

forth

forth in a long train of specious arguments; and the prejudice of the illiterate multitude wrought up to the highest degree, to abet their endeavours with zeal, tumult, and barbarous cruelty. Poverty and disgrace were before him, and his path lay through all the horrors of a gloomy prison, the raging fire, yea the valley of death itself. "But none of these moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto him, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God^b." His mind was so confirmed in the goodness of the cause he had to plead, his soul so filled with the comforts of the doctrine, and his heart so constrained by the love of Christ, that he was ready to go to prison and to death, whenever the commission came.—The business he pursued in life, was the service and honour of Christ; and his presence and enjoyment was the gain he expected at death. And in the view of this, no duty was too difficult; no undertaking too great; no suffering too severe; seeing he had learned the happy art of doing whatever he did, whether in word or deed, *in* the name, *by* the strength, and *to* the glory of Jesus.

The words now before us contain no pharisaical boast; they indeed evidence strong confidence, but that confidence is founded not upon self, but Christ. *I can do all things*

^b Acts xx. 24.

through

through Christ which strengtheneth me : secure in his hand, I fear no enemy : and shrink back at no discouragement.

In history we read of a prince who ordered these words to be engraved on his tomb, I COULD DO ALL THINGS : But the very subject of information was a contradiction to the assertion ; for it proved that he could neither evade disease, nor conquer death. Such a sentence, if it stands alone, evidently proves the folly and vanity of the mind that dictated it : But when supported by the succeeding words of the apostle, *through Christ which strengtheneth me*, it will remain an eternal truth, and stand superior to all censure. Being strong in the Lord, the true christian finds a support for every undertaking, and even *glories in his infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon him*^c : He experiences an happy equality to his service, and a noble superiority to his sufferings.

In the preceding part of this chapter, having exhorted them to steadfastness, and given some directions, both to particular persons, and to the church at Philippi in general ; the apostle proceeds to take notice of the liberal and seasonable supply they had sent unto him ; speaking at the same time of that happy frame of temper, which by grace he had obtained. Ver. 10, 11, 12. "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again,

wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content. I know both *how* to be abased, and I know *how* to abound: every where, and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." This was truly an high attainment,—an attainment which was not only the experience of some peculiarly happy moment; but accompanied him in all places, and extended to all things. In adverse circumstances his mind was not depressed, nor in prosperous ones elated; he experienced that happy equilibrium of temper, which rendered all conditions both easy and profitable. But lest they should be discouraged by what he had said, or think him presumptuous in his assertion; he immediately adds, *I can do, or I am sufficient for*, all things, in Christ, or through Christ which strengtheneth me.* "Whatever is to be done, "whatever is to be borne, I have vigour "enough for the one; have patience and "fortitude enough for the other;" but in all, it is through Christ which strengtheneth me.—In this discourse we shall

I. Mention some of those things the Apostle found himself sufficient for.

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II. Shew

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II. Shew where he found this sufficiency ; or in other words, how Christ strengthened him for the service and sufferings he was called to.

It is the solemn declaration of Christ the faithful and true witness, that “ without him, or separate from him,” we, as fallen creatures, “ can do nothing^d” that is pleasing to God ; can do nothing but sin ; for, however specious the act, however useful we may be to Society, being destitute of the divine life ourselves, our works are dead works. What some men may call religion, God may pronounce hypocrisy ; and the appearance of piety may be, and frequently is, rather the fruit of pride than of humility. Love to God is the life of all acceptable obedience, but every natural man is an enemy to, and a hater of God ; and therefore till the tree be made good, the fruit cannot but be evil.—We may stand high in the esteem of men for our piety towards God, and charity to the distressed ; but whatever we do, if “ not done as God hath willed and commanded it to be done, it hath the nature of sin in it^e.” From this then we see the distinction between the man that is in Christ, and him that is not : The one can do nothing that is approved or accepted of God ; the other can do all things, through the grace, strength, and spirit of Christ.

I. Let

^d John xv. 5.—^e Articles of Religion, Art. XIII.

I. Let us take a view of some of those great and important things which, through Christ, the Apostle found himself sufficient for.

And under this part of the discourse it may not be improper to consider him both as a *minister* and as a *christian*. As a minister, he could bear up under disappointments,—persevere in discouragements,—and plead the cause of Christ against all opposition. And as a christian, he could resist temptation,—mortify corruption,—sit loose to the world,—maintain intercourse with God,—and realize eternity.

Let us now proceed to consider these things more particularly, and

First, In his ministerial capacity he found himself sufficient for all things. Considered as an apostle, his charge was solemn, and his labours great and interesting;—he had to travel from place to place to spread the tidings of salvation, and seek the conversion of sinners: And the burden of the several churches where his ministry had been successful, was devolved upon him;—but we have remarked already,

1. As a minister, he could bear up under very great disappointments. If any man had ground to promise himself respect and success in his ministerial labours, sure it was the apostle Paul.—His conversion was so remarkable,—his acquaintance amongst

his brethren, the Jews, so extensive,—his former zeal against christianity so notorious,—and his natural and acquired endowments so considerable, that one would almost have thought, the whole Sanhedrim would by one general consent have intreated an audience with him, have listened to his arguments with patience, and, under their energy, felt their prejudices dissolve as snow beneath the beams of the sun.—Or, if the leaders of the people are so strongly entrenched in prejudice against him, and the cause he had newly espoused, sure he might hope that the lower class of people, moved by curiosity, would crowd together under the sound of his voice, and become the captives of his arguments. But, instead of this, they combine together in bloody contracts, and by solemn oaths to take away his life. In almost every city and province, they fly upon him with madness, and hold him in the greatest contempt and aversion. Like so many blood-hounds they pursue his steps with eagerness, bellow forth their rage, and can rest satisfied with nothing short of his life. “In every city, bonds and afflictions await him^f ;”—their tongues are dipped in malice, and their hands armed with stones to discharge against him.

But if he found things so disagreeable amongst his brethren according to the flesh, sure he might naturally expect every en-

^f Acts xx. 23.

couraging

couraging support from those who were brethren in Christ. But it was not so. When he is called to Rome to make his apology both for the faith and practice of the christians, in the presence of the Emperor, how is he attended? On such occasions, the presence either of great numbers or of great personages was supposed to be of singular advantage to the cause; and in that day, the number of christians was neither inconsiderable, nor were there wanting some of that profession, even in Cæsar's household: Ver. 22. But, either through fearfulness or unfaithfulness, he tells us that he was entirely deserted by all, on that occasion. "At my first answer no man stood with me but all men forsook me, I pray God it be not laid to their charge." Was he then wholly deserted? He was not. He had more than human support; the blessed and only Potentate espoused his cause and defended his person. And therefore he immediately adds, "Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the Lion^s." Even Nero, that bloody persecutor of the christians, dismissed him unhurt, untouched. This was a great trial both for nature and grace,—a trial to faith and fortitude,—but through Christ he was found sufficient for it.

From this we see that the Lord will always stand by his people in a time of affliction and trial; he will strengthen them for it,—support them under it,—and make them superior to it. Every Christian has the same in Christ to encourage him that Paul had; and *God is faithful*, faithful to his Covenant,—to his promise,—to his charge, and “he will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it^h.” Thus we see that through Christ, the Apostle could bear up under great disappointments, and

2. As a minister, through Christ, he could persevere in the prospect of very grievous discouragements.—He had strength not only to bear the Cross, but the Yoke also. From heaven he received both his orders and his strength to labour in the vineyard. *That* Jesus who had laid his commands on him, strengthened him for the service which he had to perform, and to contend with the trials and discouragements that were thrown in his way.

The very narrative of his sufferings is sufficient to convince us, that as he needed, so he must have been supported by no less than supernatural strength, in the discharge of his duty. In labours abundant,—In stripes above measure,—In prisons frequent,—In deaths often,—five time scourged,

ed,—thrice beaten with rods,—once stoned and left as dead,—thrice shipwrecked,—a night and a day floating in the sea on a broken part of the ship, *apparently* at the mercy of every wave, but *really* under the care and convoy of the God of salvation. In journeyings often from place to place,—In perils from deep and rapid waters that he had to cross,—In perils of robbers who abounded in those parts,—In perils of his own countrymen,—In perils from the heathens,—In perils in the city, in the wilderness, on the sea, and among false brethren.—What wearisome and painful labours! What toil by day and watchings by night! What distress from hunger, thirst, cold, and nakedness¹!* And yet he endured all as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and persevered through all, by strength received from him.—O my brethren, your God is not like the Egyptian task-masters, for his commandments are not grievous. They called for brick, but gave no straw; but when he calls for work, he gives straw and strength likewise,

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 23—27.

* However affecting and particular this account may seem, it is far from being a full description of what this Apostle suffered in the cause of his blessed Master: For if the second epistle to the Corinthians was written about the year of our Lord 57, as the learned Dr. Doddridge supposes in his general introduction to it; and if Paul suffered towards the end of Nero, about A. D. 67, as Eusebius relates, book 2. cap. 25, it will be no ways improbable to conclude, that this catalogue of his trials was greatly increased in the ten last years of his life.

likewise, *i. e.* not only outward means, but inward supports.—The least duty, the smallest difficulty is too much for your strength, but the greatest shall not overmatch the strength of Christ. And it was through the strength of Christ that Paul was sufficient for all things.

3. As a minister, he could plead the cause of Christ against all opposition.

He preached Christ and him crucified, at the bar and in the synagogue, before kings and priests, Jews and Pagans. It was his desire to know nothing amongst men but Christ. This was his daily study, the theme of his conversation, and the substance of his pulpit labours. He went about the world to publish grace and salvation, and wherever he came, his service was not without success.—If his audience were not converted to his doctrine; his opposers were confounded by his arguments. Before him Felix trembles; Agrippa declares that he was almost persuaded to be a christian; Dionysius, the Areopagite, embraces the tidings of the gospel; and Paulus Sergius, the Proconsul, professes his faith in Christ. Through Christ, the spiritual weapons he employed, became mighty to the pulling down the strong holds of Satan, and the bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christⁱ. Under his ministrations Sinners were converted, and almost in every city,

^k 2 Cor. x. 5.

churches established under his direction, or edified and comforted by his sermons and epistles. In short, it was his aim,—his joy,—his ambition, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ¹, to all where ever he came, and publish the name of that Saviour who had plucked him as a brand from the burning.—His business was to confirm truth, to refute error, to detect hypocrites, and to comfort real believers.

Through Christ he could do all things. And it is the same still; for all the light and liberty, all the acceptable service, and desired success of ministers, are to be ascribed to Christ;—to his spirit,—to his grace,—to his power. All their support and sufficiency is of God;—he gives the door of utterance and the door of entrance; makes the word effectual; and by the foolishness of preaching, saves them that believe. But from considering him as a minister, let us proceed,

Secondly, To view him in his private capacity as a christian. And here, likewise, we shall find, that through Christ he could do, or was sufficient for all things.

1. Through the strength of Christ he could resist temptation.

Paul was a tried saint; but being tried, his faith was found to praise, and honour, and glory.—He met with temptations both

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from wicked men and wicked spirits, as well as from his own heart.—Temptations from men, commonly arise either from a desire to avoid their frown, or to obtain their favour; but, through Christ, the Apostle was enabled to view his fellow-creatures in a true light, and to consider, that as their frowns were not to be feared, so neither was their favour worth courting; when it was to be purchased at the expence of truth.—He was also much exercised with the temptations and buffetings of the Devil, as we learn from the 12th chapter of his second epistle to the Corinthians; but he overcame all through that Christ who said to him, “my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness,” verse 9.—And as to trials from the remains of a depraved nature, he enlarges upon the humbling subject in the 7th chapter of his epistle to the Romans; but we see that as all his comfort, so all his support, were derived from Christ; and he who cries out in one verse, “Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death,” immediately adds, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” In him I have strength for my support and security for a complete victory.

And, my brethren, to imitate our Apostle in the manner of his resisting temptation, is the only sure way to succeed. Satan and
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the world are in confederacy with our lusts against us: And we are exhorted to “resist stedfast in the faithⁿ ;” not only in the general assent to sound doctrine, but on a real dependence upon Christ for strength and success. We must take shelter in Omnipotence, and “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might^o.” It was the want of self-diffidence that was the cause of Peter’s fall; and it was this entire affiance in God, through Christ, that was the ground of Paul’s success.—Therefore, presume not to engage in any duty—to resist any temptation—to subdue any corrupt lust, in your own strength; for this is the certain way to be foiled: But “go forth in the strength of the Lord God,” in order to oppose sin, “making mention of his righteousness, even of his only^p,” in point of justification and final acceptance.

2. In his private capacity as a christian, through Christ, he could mortify corruption.

The most eminent saints, while in the body, are not wholly free from sin. There are sins which more easily beset them;—they feel lusts not only of the flesh but of the mind; and these will certainly prevail against, and have power over us, unless we have strength from Christ to mortify and subdue them. There are pride and passion, covetousness and envy, which would soon

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ⁿ 1 Pet. v. 9.—^o Eph. vi. 10.—^p Psalm lxxi. 16.

gain the throne, did not Christ give wisdom and strength to oppose them. But it is only *through the spirit that we can mortify the deeds of the body.* If they live, we must die; but if they die, ye shall live^p: Live spiritually,—live comfortably,—live eternally. By Christ's strength Paul kept under his body, and made use of every proper method to subdue inordinate affection: But all his hopes of success were founded upon Christ.

And, depend on it, sirs, you will never prevail against your corruptions, till you come to God with such language as this, Lord, iniquities prevail against me, thou knowest that I am but perfect weakness. I can no more prevail against this lust, or overcome that corruption, than a straw can stop the progress of the tide, or a feather resist the force of a whirlwind.—Lord, undertake for me, and enable me with constancy to apply to Christ for grace and strength both to watch and strive against sin. He that promises that he will cleanse you from all your iniquities and uncleannesses, declares, that for this he will be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them^q. The strength is all from Christ, but he will have us sensible of our weakness, and earnest in our application for his grace, before he bestows it upon us. “The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power to his people^r.”

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^p Rom. viii. 13.—^q Ezek. xxxvi. 37.—^r Psalm lxviii. 35.

3. It is the character of a christian to sit loose to the world, and Paul was enabled to do this likewise, through Christ which strengthened him. His affections were set upon things that are above, and he declares that one reason why he gloried in the Cross of Christ was this, that "thereby the world was crucified to him, and he unto the world." It appeared of no more importance to him, and was as insignificant in his view, as a chamber hung with the most curious tapestry, and decorated with the utmost elegance, would be to a dying person, though stretched in the midst of it upon a bed of down. He considered the world as an inhospitable wilderness, and desired no more than a passage through it.—Christ had bound his affections to the cross with the strong cords of love; and there the Apostle discovered such glories, that he accounted all the honours and pleasures of the world but as dross and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ: Yea, he esteemed not even life dear unto him; but was desirous rather to turn his back upon the world, to depart and be with Christ, which, in his esteem, was not only better than all earthly enjoyments, but than all spiritual privileges on this side eternity".—O what a blessing is it, to have the heart, the treasure, the affections above!—To converse in heaven while

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we sojourn below!—To have the desires frequently ascending upwards!—To experience union to God, and friendship with him!—And to find the realizing, though but faint discoveries, of the enjoyments of our elder brethren, who are safely arrived at their Father's house! But ah! how strong and many are the ties that hold us down to the world! How are the affections intertwined amongst the creatures, and the heart often presented in a discomposed, divided state before the Lord! Even David, that eminent saint, confesses that his heart clave to the dust, and that he needed fresh quickening from his God. O my brethren, look to Christ for strength, to keep the world at a proper distance. Too near an embrace is dangerous.—It smiles a Paradise in prospect, but proves a wilderness in enjoyment.

Loose then from earth, the grasp of fond desire,
Weigh anchor, and some happier clime explore.

Remember this is not your rest, it is polluted. It is insufficient both in its nature and duration, to satisfy the craving desires of your hearts; it is under the curse of God, and is doomed to destruction. Let us ever remember that “Christ gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.” Deliver us from being conformed to it, enslaved by it,—or condemned with it.

4. As a christian, supported by Christ, he could maintain intercourse with God. This is the highest honour, privilege, and happiness of a rational being. To have access *to*, and audience *with* God, through Jesus the Mediator; with humble boldness to be admitted to approach the throne of grace, there to present our petitions and praises; and there to receive mercy and grace; how high the favour! How great; the felicity! To argue our cause from his own gracious promises, and fetch the strength of our arguments from the perfections of his nature; or, like Jacob, to prevail with God, by power received from himself: This is an unspeakable privilege indeed! But it is the spirit of Christ, which dwells in all the family of faith, that instructs, assists, and gives fervency and power to the believing soul, in pleading with God. “The Spirit 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 that cannot be uttered*.—” He forms the petitions, and fills them likewise,—he gives strength of argument to plead with God,—strength of faith to lay hold on God,—and strength of patience to wait for God. O what a blessing is it, to be enabled to come before God with the desires in lively exercise, with a heart opened to catch the falling dews of his grace! To

* Rom. viii. 26.

find the mind rising, as the knees bend to the earth, and the language of the heart breaking out in secret fervour, before the lips are opened to express our desires in words!—When the duty begins with a sincere desire to perform it with acceptance to God, and profit to ourselves; when such secret language as this makes its way to heaven, without the noise of words; and like a trusty servant informs our Father that his child is coming. Lord, teach me to pray;—help me to prevail;—shine upon the season of audience;—and fill my mouth with arguments, my soul with confidence, and my heart with comfort. There is no coming to the Father, but by the Son^v; and it is from him the strength is furnished, by which the intercourse with heaven is kept up.

I might take up a considerable part of the time allotted to this discourse, in exemplifying the truth of this particular, in the case of the Apostle; but such of you as are conversant with his epistles, are already furnished with sufficient proof of it. How frequent, how fervent, how full are his petitions for the churches! With what solemnity does he bow the knee before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and with a pathos somewhat divine, plead for their prosperity and salvation! But, leaving the enlargement to your own knowledge of

^v John xiv. 6.

his spirit and writings, I pass on to observe, once more,

5. Through Christ he was enabled to realize eternity;—and it was this which supported him under all his sufferings, and enabled him to view them as light in their nature, and short in their duration. “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but to the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” He saw the fashion of this world passing away, and sought a country where the enjoyments are both spiritual and permanent. Christ strengthened the eyes of his mind to look forward into eternity, and encouraged his heart to endure opposition in the way to the prize which he had in prospect. He knew the grace and strength of Christ to be inexhaustible; and therefore makes use of an unlimited expression, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.* But this calls our attention to the second thing proposed, viz.

II. Where he found his sufficiency; or, in other words, how Christ strengthened him. *I can do all things in or through Christ,*

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i. e. either

i. e. either by union to him, or by help received from him; he was strong, but it was “in the grace of Christ Jesus^a.” In all that we do as creatures, we are so dependent on the power and providence of God, that we are said to live and move in him: so in all we perform as christians, we are so dependent on Christ, that we do it in, or through him.

But here it may be asked, How was the Apostle thus strengthened by Christ? The answer is easy: He strengthened him by animating him *for*,—exciting him *to*,—and supporting him *in* the several services and sufferings he was called to.

1. He strengthened his servant by animating him *in* his work.—The love of Christ was so shed abroad in his heart, that he was under an holy constraint to serve so good, so great a master: holy love and sacred zeal animated him *for*, and accompanied him *in*, his several great and laborious undertakings. He had no higher ambition than to spread the tidings of Christ’s grace in the world, and be some way conducive to advance his glory in the conversion and salvation of sinners.—Endowed as he was with great natural courage, an active spirit, a lively genius, and much solid learning, on the day of his conversion he lays them all at the feet of Christ, and consecrates both them and himself to his service.—He gives up the

^a 2 Tim. ii. 1.

commission which he had received from the Chief Priest, and takes out one of a different nature from Christ himself; his cry is, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do^b?" He obtains mercy that he may be a preacher of faith, and a pattern to all that should afterwards believe unto life everlasting^c. Like Alexander, it was his wish to conquer the world; not with carnal but spiritual weapons; not to impose the yoke of slavery, but to proclaim freedom, and lead miserable captives into the pleasures of gospel-liberty. And has not that which was evident in Paul, been exemplified in the followers of Jesus in every age?—How were Wickliff, Hufs, Zuingle, and Luther, animated and assisted in the important services they were called to engage in! What a noble stand did they make against the inroads of Papal tyranny and superstition; and laid the foundation for that happy day of gospel-liberty, which has been long enjoyed in this favoured nation. I might descend lower, and shew how this is the case with both ministers and private christians in general. It is by Christ's strength that they are stirred up to every service which is accompanied with success. Christ animated Paul for his work, so,

2. He excited him to the undertaking. A remarkable instance of this nature we have in the account of his ministrations at

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Corinth.—

^b Acts ix. 6.—^c 1 Tim. i. 16.

Corinth.—Having faithfully delivered his message in the synagogue, to his brethren according to the flesh, his service is opposed, his doctrine blasphemed, and the doors of their meeting shut against him. On this he shakes the dust of the city from his feet, expressive both of his displeasure against them, and of his resolution to depart: probably the next day was fixed for his remove. But when the curtains of darkness are drawn around a slumbering world, Jesus approaches his bed, and calls upon him to persevere in his work, assuring him both of protection and success. “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city^d.” He obeyed;—was the instrument of proselyting many to the faith;—laboured amongst them for a year and a half; and planted a church in that city, which he afterwards honoured with two of his epistles.

So, he that encouraged Paul, engages to stand by every faithful minister in his work, every humble christian in his trials and temptations: he will comfort them with his presence; support them by his providence; “and never leave them nor forsake them^e.” Fear not, therefore, for he will
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^d Acts xviii. 9, 10.—^e Heb. xiii. 5.

be with you;—be not discouraged, for he is your God.—He will strengthen, help, uphold you with the right hand of his power and righteousness^f.

3. He that encouraged Paul to serve him, supported him *in* his service, strengthened him according to the riches of his glory, with might by his spirit in the inner man. But as this is evident from what has been observed before, we shall conclude with a few inferences from the whole. And,

1. From this subject we may learn the reason why so many promising appearances in the professing world come to nothing. Many seem to run well for a season; they are alarmed at their state, and concerned about their salvation;—they assent to gospel-doctrine, and approve of the ministers that preach it; but by and by they fall off, and walk no more with Jesus. Like Jonah's gourd they flourish for a time, and ministers rejoice in them; but, alas! the malady lies at the root;—they were never brought off from the bottom of Self; nor, with the Apostle, led to engage in religious duties in the strength of Christ. Sirs, let me beseech you to follow this remark with a close examination of yourselves in secret. Prove yourselves. Thousands, I fear, have been mistaken in this; beware lest you should increase the number.

2. From

^f Isaiah xli. 10.

2. From this also we see why those who are christians indeed make so small advances in real holiness:—they live below their privilege;—they do not go to Christ with that constancy and earnestness that they ought, for grace, strength, and holiness. But the life which Paul lived in the flesh was by faith in the Son of God^g:—he received him not only for righteousness but for sanctification also^h;—not only to justify him from the guilt of sin, but to save him from the power of it. O live nearer the fountain of strength. Look to Jesus to work in you all the good pleasure of his will.

3. Such as have received great supports from God, in particular trials and difficulties, should declare what he hath wrought for them: this they should do in order to promote God's glory, and encourage others in their course.

This was Paul's practice, and the good effects of it we learn from the churches in Judea, who, having heard of his great change, and that he now preached the faith, "glorified God in himⁱ."

4. As whatever is done in the natural world, is performed by God the Creator; so all that is, or has been transacted in the church, which I may call the spiritual world, is done by the strength of Christ. "He is head over all things to the church,

^g Gal. ii. 20.—^h 1 Cor. i. 30.—ⁱ Gal. i. 24.

church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all^k;" all faints in all ages and places. "Now to him that is of power to establish you; to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever^l." *Amen.*

SERMON

^k Eph. i. 23.—^l Romans xvi. 25, 27.



S E R M O N VI.

Jehovah's Immutability and Jacob's
Security : Or, A Sinner's Salvation
all of God.

M A L A C H I iii. 6.

*I am the LORD, I change not ; therefore ye
sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

WHEREVER we direct our view, throughout the whole globe, or whatever object we make the subject of meditation, we see, we feel the arguments which prove that there is one supreme, eternal, and immutable Being. That Being which is above all, and presides over all things. "The heavens declare his glory, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work^a;" while every swelling bud, and opening flower, evidence the power, and proclaim the wisdom of the great Creator. The whole universe is the temple of the Deity ; and all the vast variety we observe in this

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created

^a Psalm xix. 1.

created world, but so many steps, by which we ascend to his throne:—*There* to profess our allegiance, to present our petitions and praises, to ask his friendship, and learn his will, that thereby we may engage more cheerfully in his service. “To be spiritually minded is life and peace^b.” A spiritual mind discovers God in every place and providence: It is that key which admits the favourites of heaven, by secret passages, into the presence-chamber of the Deity. To such, the whole creation is but as a thin veil thrown over infinite perfection, whereby the dazzling beams of uncreated glory are softened; but the original object so far discovered, as to engage the heart, and to inspire the soul with a laudable ambition, to have a fuller knowledge and nearer enjoyment of him: “So that, as one observes, to
 “ such there is a transparency in every thing,
 “ through which the artificer shines. To
 “ such the works of God are so many WIN-
 “ DOWS, for letting into the mind the most
 “ captivating beams of the divine perfec-
 “ tions, while the sensual, or the inconfi-
 “ derate sinner, uses them as so many CUR-
 “ TAINS for shutting GOD, and his perfec-
 “ tions, out*.”

What excellencies appear in the different orders of the creatures!—What wisdom in *this*, power in *that*, and beauty in a *third*!

But

^b Rom. viii. 6.—* Mead.

But they are all so many emanations of uncreated excellency:—Of God the father of lights, the original of beauty, and the splendour of every perfection.—His perfections should be the study of his rational creatures; and, as displayed in Christ, they are the delight of angels, and the support of his saints. Come then, my dear fellow sinners, let us take the greatest subject for our present meditation. Leaving the Philosopher to investigate the nature of second causes;—the Astronomer to calculate the bulk and distances of the planets;—the Sensualist, like the spider, to suck poison out of the fairest flowers in the garden of the creation; be it our ambition to converse with God,—to meditate on his perfections, and to fix the mind upon that subject, the complete knowledge of which, fills angels and perfect spirits with an heaven of delight and satisfaction.

In God there is every thing to fill the mind with reverence, delight, and pleasing astonishment. If glory and majesty strike us with reverence,—if goodness and mercy attract our love,—if wisdom and power raise our admiration,—if holiness and justice affect us with awe,—if riches, beauty, or happiness court our esteem,—we find them all in God, in the highest degree, in the most absolute perfection.—He is that “blessed and only Potentate, who is King of kings

and Lord of lords^c :”—His glory is infinite;—his goodness unsearchable; *for he is good, and doth good; he is God alone.*—His mercy is from everlasting, and endureth for ever :—His understanding and knowledge are unsearchable; hence an Apostle cries out, “ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” knowledge in the plan, and wisdom in the prosecution of it, “ how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out^d.”—His power is infinite; nothing is too hard for him.—His holiness is absolute; for he only is holy.—His justice is inflexible; and he can do nothing but what is right.—His riches are unsearchable,—his beauty supreme,—and, to crown all, he is possessed of *that*, which I may stile the glory of every excellency, the quintessence of every perfection, viz. *immutability*. He can say, what none besides can, *I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

The chapter in which the text is found, begins with a prophecy, and a promise :—The prophecy relates to John the Baptist, the harbinger of Christ;—he is described by his office as a messenger, and by his work, which was to prepare the way of the Lord.—The promise respects Christ, who is set forth as the Lord and Messenger of the

^c 1 Tim. vi. 15.—^d Rom. xi. 33.

the covenant; and the desire, delight, and expectation of his people.—His appearance is spoken of both as certain and sudden; and the particular place fixed upon, almost *four hundred* years before he was born. Ver. 1. “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple: even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.”

The design of his coming, is further described by its effects, both with respect to the righteous and the wicked. To the former, he shall come as a refiner, that they may offer a pleasant and acceptable sacrifice to the Lord. Ver. 2—4. “But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's sope. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, an offering in righteousness.” To the wicked he will put on a very different aspect, and appear as a swift witness against them. Ver. 5. “And I will come near to you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the forcerers, and against the adulterers, and
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against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts."

But will not the truly pious, who are more sensible of the evil of sin, and of the desperate wickedness of every departure from the living God,—will not they be ready to fear and say, Who then can stand when God doth this? If he should mark iniquity, we cannot answer him one of a thousand.—As a preservative against such fears, and for the encouragement of such humble souls, the words of the text are introduced, *I am the LORD, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.* In which short, but comfortable passage, the Lord describes himself,

- I. By his name; *I am the LORD.*
- II. By his nature; *I change not.* And
- III. By the effect of this, with respect to his redeemed Israel, *therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

I. The first thing we have to notice, is the *name* of the sacred speaker, *I am the LORD, JEHOVAH.* This name is the common preface both to his own glory, and to his people's comfort; it is expressive, not only of self-existence, but evidences him to be

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be the spring or fountain of all existence to others. He exists *necessarily* and *originally* of himself. This glorious name is derived from a verb, which, in the Hebrew language, signifies *to be*; and the learned Buxtorf observes, that it takes in all the tenses, *past, present, and future*. Jehovah then is that Being, “which is, and which was, and which is to come^c ;”—the fountain of life,—the immutable centre of existence,—the Lord of all.—What authority and majesty is conveyed in the very sound of his name, *I am the LORD*. If the Babylonish monarch, walking on the top of his palace, with that once famous city in view, could exult in such language as this, “Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty^f ? How much more strictly may it be said of this glorious Being who speaks in the text, that he collects into his view ten thousand worlds, with their numerous inhabitants; and renders his proclamation as extensive as is his authority; saying *I am the LORD*:—The Lord of angels, of men, and of every inferior race of creatures.—*I am the LORD*.—Which title, I apprehend, takes in three things;—that he is the *origin*,—the *proprietor*,—and the *end* of all worlds and creatures.

I. When

^c Rev. i. 4.—^f Dan. iv. 30.

1. When he says *I am the LORD*, it proves him to be the *origin* of all worlds and creatures.—“In him we live, and move, and have our being^g.”—“It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves^h.” At his almighty word, innumerable worlds start into existence, and acknowledge, that “for his pleasure they are, and were createdⁱ.”—He is the root of all existence, and all other beings are but as so many branches from him: Some are more exalted as to station, and some more eminent for fruitfulness than others; but the smallest bud is filled with that prolific virtue, which will burst forth to his praise: “For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist^k.” His own hand planted the whole garden of the universe, in which he walks with delight and pleasure. His almighty *fiat* ran through the vast inactive chaos, and heaved into different forms, things both animate and inanimate: His wisdom, power, and goodness united all their influence, to form a regular chain of being from gross matter, up to perfect spirit; the whole of which is arranged in proper subjection

^g Acts xvii. 28.—^h Psalm c. 3.—ⁱ Rev. iv. 11.—
^k Col. i. 16, 17.

tion to himself, and every link in due subordination to each other.—Yes, my brethren, mortifying as the declaration may be to human pride, the loathsome spider, and the celebrated beauty;—the gloomy mole, which resides in the dark caverns of the earth, and the flaming seraph, who flies through the vault of heaven; the stupid ass, and the learned philosopher, have all but one Father; one God hath created them: And whatever present excellency there may be found in one above another, is to be attributed to his sovereign will, not to any superiority in the materials out of which they were produced:—Well, therefore, might the Royal Psalmist cry out, “O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth, the sea,” yea all things, “are full of thy riches¹.”

2. When he says *I am the LORD*, it also evidences him to be the *proprietor* of all worlds and creatures:—Whatever change may have taken place amongst the creatures, however they may endeavour to cast his yoke far from them, or free themselves from his authority and service, yet his claim is not to be disputed, his right in them is not to be set aside; he is Lord of all: And however their nature or course may deviate from their original design, he can so serve himself, by their conduct, that “the wrath of man

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¹ Psalm civ. 24, 25.

shall praise him^m," and even the rage of devils shall exalt him. If the universe is his house, then all the creatures in it must be his servants: They are supported by him, and under law unto him, so that "he says to one, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he comethⁿ." Commissioned by him, flies become the executioners of his vengeance; and frogs march with irregular motion into the very palaces of his enemies. He rolls the stars in their courses,—gives laws unto the moon,—and appoints the sun *when* to rise and *where* to set. He is that great artificer, that has ten thousand instruments always at hand, and can employ them as he pleases; for "the earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof." He can monopolize all things, and yet injure no one.—Is the Lion the king of beasts? The Leviathan lord of the sea? And particular men rulers over different nations? Jehovah is Lord of lords: From him Lions seek their prey,—to him Leviathan is subject,—and by him Kings reign, and Princes decree justice.—If we look into the history of nations, what warm, what cruel, what tedious contests have been carried on by mankind about property; but God, with an almighty arm, can incircle all things, and with propriety say, All is mine,—I *made*
all,

^m Psalm lxxvi. 10.—ⁿ Matt. viii. 9.—^o Psalm xxiv. 1.

all,—and *claim* all,—and *support* all for my own glory.

3. His saying *I am the LORD*, implies further, that he is the *end* of all worlds and creatures.—“All his works praise him^p.” “He hath made all things for himself^q.” “The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works^r.” If we look into the factory of some renowned artist, we see different persons employed in several parts of workmanship, yet all preparing their quota towards one general design: So through the whole of God's dominion, one uniform design prevails: And however opposite the aims of Angels, Men, and Devils may appear at the first view;—however contrary the conduct of saints that serve him, and sinners that despise and rebel against him, all meet in the same end, viz. God's glory.—He shall be glorified, no less in the damnation of the wicked, than in the salvation of the righteous:—Yes, when all the creatures have answered their design, and all the mysteries of providence are brought to a conclusion;—when the world we now inhabit, like a temporary bridge built on purpose by God to conduct his family to the heavenly kingdom, shall be taken down;—when the wheels of nature shall be broken;—the planets drop;—and the sun set in everlasting night;—*then* the glory of the Lord shall arise out of the

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dissolution

^p Psalm cxlv. 10.—^q Prov. xvi. 4.—^r Psalm civ. 31.

dissolution of nature, to be eclipsed no more,—to shine for ever.—Then it shall appear, that there was no superfluity in the whole creation, but all necessary,—all useful,—all advantageously disposed to promote the grand design.—Then all the kings of the earth, and the fulness of the nations, shall bring their glory to the Lord, and lay it at his feet, to be employed to his eternal praise.—Then it shall be seen that “God is all, and in all:” *i. e.* either to be all the perfection, that has appeared in the creation, or that his glory has been the *chief end*, to which all the services of the creatures were directed.—Then it will be known that it was his power, which was put forth in all their motions; and his wisdom, that guided the whole so exactly, to terminate in his eternal honour and everlasting praise.—Thus in the end, “Every creature which is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, shall ascribe blessing, and honour, and glory, and power to him, that, sitting on his throne,” saith, *I am the LORD.*

Thus having considered his *name*, let us pass on,

II. To the description here given us of his *nature*. *I change not*: Which declaration evidences that he is *immutable* in his *perfections*,

^s 1 Cor. xv. 28.—^t Rev. v. 13.

perfections, in his *purposes*, and in his *promises*.

1. He is unchangeable in his *perfections* and attributes. He is “the father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning^u.” “The Lord shall endure for ever^w.” “He is the same, and his years shall have no end^x.” It is impossible, in the nature of things, that he should change; for could he rise higher, or sink lower in any perfection, it would prove him not to be God:—But he is the same;—immutable in *all*, in *each* of his perfections.—Speak we of strength? Behold he is strong, the almighty, omnipotent Jehovah:—And however gloriously his attribute of *POWER* may have been drawn forth, in the works of creation, providence, and redemption, it is the same still without alteration, or weakness, through exertion.—He *has* power to keep his saints,—to support his cause,—to crush his foes,—to raise the dead,—and exalt his throne and name through everlasting ages. If Caleb, at eighty-five years old, could say “I am as strong this day, as I was in the day that Moses sent me to espy out the land: as my strength was then, even so is it now, for war, both to go out and come in^y.” Surely with the greatest propriety it may be said of God, after all the exertions of his power,

^u James i. 17.—^w Psalm ix. 7.—^x Psalm cii. 27.—^y Josh. xiv. 11.

power, he is the *same* he ever was.—With an infinite *understanding* he seeth the end from the beginning :—To him there is no increase of knowledge, or defect of memory,—all things are naked and open to his view ;—all persons, actions, thoughts, contingencies, all are known to him.—He is that Being, whose infinite mind can grasp a whole universe at once, and yet the smallest particle of matter is under his particular notice.—He is infinitely above all, and yet interested in all.—O the infinite immensity !—The glorious excellency of the Deity !—No mortal tongue can speak the glories of his name, nor angelic mind comprehend the infinite grandeur of his nature. Would you see human understanding labouring under so great a subject,—stretching the wings of desire,—and straining every idea, to speak forth *what he is* ;—yet after all, describing him by negatives, take it in the words of a renowned Poet of our age and nation :

The nameless *He*, whose nod is *nature's* birth ;
 And *nature's* shield, the shadow of his hand ;
 Her dissolution, his suspended smile !
 The great *First-Last* ! pavilion'd high he sits
 In darkness, from excessive splendor born,
 By gods unseen, unless thro' lustre lost.
 His glory, to created glory, bright,
 As that to central horrors ; he looks down
 On all that soars ; and *spans immensity* *.

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* Night Thoughts, N^o. 4.

In his *love, grace, and mercy* also he is immutable. His love to his church is fixed, permanent, and everlasting. Hear his own declaration, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD, that hath mercy on thee^z." To the same purpose is the argument of the Prophet, "The LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people^a." "He rests in his love^b;"—in this "there is continuance, and they shall be saved^c;" for "whom he loves, he loves to the end^d;"—and "nothing shall separate them from the love of God^e."—"His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting to them that fear him^f."—He changeth not in his *veracity*:—But of this presently.

2. As he is immutable in his perfections, so he is likewise in his *purposes*. His "counsels of old are faithfulness and truth^g." "He is of one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doth^h." "The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generationsⁱ." When he speaks, it is in the most authoritative

^z Isa. liv. 10.—^a 1 Sam. xii. 22.—^b Zeph. iii. 17.—

^c Isa. lxiv. 5.—^d John xiii. 1.—^e Rom. viii. 35, 37, 38,

39.—^f Psalm ciii. 7.—^g Isa. xxv. 1.—^h Job xxiii. 13.—

ⁱ Psalm iii. 11.

authoritative language, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it^k."—Even the wicked Balaam bears an honourable testimony to the immutability of the divine purposes. "God 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^l?" Yes; my brethren, what God *wills* he *does*, and what he *plans* he *executes* likewise. It would be as easy to him to cease *to be*, as to alter his mind; for immutability is his very nature. Hence we are informed by an inspired writer, that "he worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will^m." All the prophecies and their accomplishments, are but so many evidences and arguments to prove the immutability of the divine decrees. It was his purpose that Israel should be enslaved,—that Egypt should be destroyed,—that Babylon should fall,—that the Saviour should be manifested,—that Jerusalem should be left desolate,—that the Jews should be rejected,—and that the Gentiles should be converted; and we live to see how awfully, or how exactly the events have answered to the predictions.—Even things that are to come, are all present with him; and therefore

^k Isa. xlvi. 10, 11.—^l Numb. xxiii. 19.—^m Eph. i. 11.

fore he speaks of them, with the greatest certainty, as though already past.

3. Founded upon his perfections, and connected with his purposes are his *promises*; and each of these, if the expression may be allowed, is endorsed with his own hand, *I am the LORD, I change not.* “All the promises are in Christ Jesus, yea, and amen, unto the glory of God by usⁿ.”—All revelation is, in some sort, a discovery of himself; “and he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself.” “Faithful is he that hath spoken, who also will do it.” And that the heirs of promise may have strong consolation, hear what he has to say, “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips^p.” When God speaks a promise, he lays himself under obligation to answer the faith of those who trust in him for the accomplishment of it. And hence it becomes a certain truth, that “they that trust in him, shall never be confounded.”—Many are the promises that he hath recorded in his word;—and many the petitions that his people have founded on them, in their access unto him:—But I have this encouragement for every believer, however dark thy views, or weak thy faith in the promises, thy God “will never leave thee, nor forsake thee, until he hath done all that

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ⁿ 2 Cor. i. 20.—^o 2 Tim. ii. 12.—^p Psalm lxxxix. 34.

he hath spoken to thee of^a.”—He will mortify corruption,—heal backslidings,—strengthen grace,—increase comfort,—preserve the divine life,—complete sanctification,—and perfect that which concerneth thee. He has pledged his honour,—his veracity,—his omnipotence, for the accomplishment of his word. “Trust in him therefore at all times; O ye people, pour out your hearts before him^r.” “Trust in the LORD for ever; for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength^s.”—The only thing that remains in the method proposed, is,

III. The blessed effect of the divine immutability, with respect to his favoured people: *Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.* The truth of this assertion will appear with the fullest evidence, if we take a general view of their *conduct* and *confessions*.

1. A slight view of their *conduct* will convince an unprejudiced mind, that the immutability of God is the reason, the only reason, why they are not consumed. How many deviations from the line of truth, and from the path of duty? What unsteadiness in their faith,—in their love,—in their obedience?—In how many instances have they provoked or rebelled against God? What heart-

heart-wanderings,—mental idolatry,—secret backslidings,—creature love,—worldly conformity,—presumptuous sins,—trifling in duty, or omissions of it? In the review of the many dangers, snares, and temptations from which we have been delivered, is not our preservation a wonder to ourselves? Why has he not left us to be burnt up by our own lusts, or consumed by the fierceness of Satan's temptations? O, sirs, here we read the reason,—*He changeth not.*—What is said of Israel of old, is but too just a description of the people of God in every age. “Their heart was not right with God, neither were they stedfast in his covenant. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath, for he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again^t.” O professor, is not thy preservation to this very moment, one continued evidence that thy God is not given to change!—But,

2. Let us take a general view of the *confessions* of the people of God in past ages, and it will confirm the doctrine of the text:—We will begin with *Job*, who is supposed to have lived, either about, or before the time of the patriarch *Jacob*.—He, having acknowledged that sinful man cannot be just with

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God,

^t Psalm lxxviii. 37—39.

God, immediately adds, "if he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand^u." *David* speaks the same sentiment in these words, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities: O LORD, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared^w."—The church, in *Jeremiah's* time, unite in the same confession: "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not^x." *Daniel* gives into the same sentiment, when he says, "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him^y." In short, this has been the general declaration of all the followers of God in every age; and when all the company of the redeemed are convened together, and led up to glory, the song with which they will enter heaven, will be a full confession of their unworthiness, and a free profession of God's unchangeableness. "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us: but to thy name be the praise^z."—Thus we see that Jehovah, the *author, proprietor, and end* of all things, changeth not, either in his *perfections, purposes, or promises*;—and both the *conduct and confession* of the church make it evident, that *this* is the reason they are not consumed.

^u Job ix. 2.—^w Psalm cxxx. 3, 4.—^x Lam. iii. 22.—
^y Dan. ix. 9.—^z Psalm cxv. i.

ed.—An inference or two shall bring us to a conclusion of this discourse.

1. If God is unchangeable, then he is a suitable portion for an immortal soul.—A substantial and immutable good, is only sufficient to answer its vast demands, or yield it everlasting satisfaction.—In every earthly enjoyment the soul finds a void, which nothing can fill but the fulness of God.—In him is rest^a.—“In his presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore^b.”—God, as revealed by Christ, and reconciled in Christ, has every thing to endear him to those that have eyes to see his excellency.—He is infinite beauty,—everlasting fulness,—eternal truth, and absolute perfection.—He is light in all its effulgence, and love in all its fulness: And to enjoy that *beauty*,—take in that *fulness*, live upon that *truth*, and be related to that *perfection*;—to walk in that *light*, and to be delightfully lost in that *love*, is the highest happiness of immortal beings, and should be their prevailing desire and constant pursuit.—O sinners, wherefore such labour for that which satisfieth not!—Such a perpetual race after shadows!—Such uninterrupted disappointment, while in constant expectation!—How often have your feet slipped, when you have seemed almost on the threshold of satisfaction:—The reason is, happiness

^a Psalm cxvi. 7.—^b Psalm xvi. 11.

ness is only to be found in God, in his favour here, in his enjoyment hereafter. And all pursuits after this, all expectations of it any other way than through a reconciled God in Christ, are like the attempts of a drowning mariner to climb up a rock of ice, in order to evade the danger of the sea;—at every such attempt his hand slips, and his foot fails.—May the sacred Spirit convince you of your folly, and give you that wisdom, which consists in the *knowledge, fear, and love* of the Lord.

2. If God is immutable in his perfections, purposes, and promises, then what have saints to fear?—The eternal God is their refuge in every trouble,—their strength in life,—their guide through death,—their portion for ever.—If he be for them, his perfections, purposes, promises for them; then who can harm them? Who shall be against them?—“Blessed are the people that are in such a case; yea, happy the people, whose God is the LORD^c.”

On the other hand, if God is immutable, then sinners shall be consumed.—Consider this ye that hear of salvation, but are not saved.—God is immutable in his *threatnings*, as well as in his promises;—unalterable in his justice, as well as in his love;—and therefore if you die unconverted, it will be found “a fearful thing to fall into the hands

^c Psalm cxliv. 15.

of the living God^d ;”—that God who lives for ever, to take vengeance on those that obey not the gospel.—O, sirs, how awful must that eternity be, in which sinners have to deal with God as an implacable enemy, as an immutable tormentor !—But to draw to a close.

3. From this subject, how easy is it to infer, that a sinner's salvation is all of grace :—Grace begins, advances, and completes the work.—That you are comforted, and not consumed ;—encouraged, and not confounded ;—redeemed, and not ruined ;—saved, and not condemned ; is all to be resolved into this, *the LORD changeth not*. “ Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy. To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. *Amen*.”

SERMON

^d Heb. x. 31.—^e Jude 24, 25.

S E R M O N VII.

God the gracious Remembrancer, and yet the faithful Reprover of his professing People: Or, Present Declensions set in the Light of past Experience.

J E R E M I A H ii. 2.

Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.

THROUGH that depravity of nature, and the power of indwelling sin, which is found even in the truly regenerate, we often hear them complaining of much languor in their frame, and formality in their devotions:—Things are not with them as in time past, when they experienced a happy fervour of soul, and an holy intimacy with God. Through inattention to the serpen-

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tine windings of sin, or being deluded by its false pretences, they are found sufferers in the nobler part:—Their garments are defiled, their souls wounded, and their comforts suspended;—and but for the interposition of grace, there would be cause to fear that they would continue in that state, and at length suffer eternal misery. Their goodness but too justly resembles “the morning cloud, and the early dew which passeth away^a.” And though the habits of grace are not eradicated, its actings are awfully debilitated or suspended: Their zeal abates, their love waxes cold, and their affections, once fixed upon the things that are above, now grovel, are debased, and too, too much set upon shadows, trifles, and vanity. If we look into the christian world, how many do we find who once spread the sails of profession, and made such progress, as to lead us to conclude they would soon reach the desired haven; but, alas! either they are driven back into port, by the dangerous winds of worldly prosperity, or they have run upon the sands of formality, and are in danger of ruin. Declensions in religion are generally more visible from their effects, than in their progress. A stupor creeps on by degrees. Want of watchfulness, remissness in duty,
necessary

^a Hosea vi. 4.

necessary employments in life*, or too great a conformity to the customs or temper of the world, have often paved the way to very awful declensions, and bitter sorrows as the effect of them. Even the true christian, from a conviction of his loss on these accounts, has been led to cry out, "O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me: when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness: as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle^b." Some that are now present may have cause to adopt this language. How hath the world insinuated itself into your affections, and the things which demand the most serious attention, are held off at the greatest distance, and, like strangers, treated with reserve and indifference! Call to remembrance the blessed season, when the thoughts of sin were bitter, and the tidings of salvation precious; when your hearts were much taken up in delightful meditations; when the love of God, the condescension of Jesus, the promises of grace, the wonders of redemption, the glo-

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* The world's infectious; few bring back at eve,
Immaculate, the manners of the morn.
Something we *thought*, is blotted; we *resolv'd*,
Is shaken; we *renounc'd*, returns again.

Night Thoughts, N^o 5.

^b Job xxix. 2, 3, 4.

ries of heaven, and the employments of those happy saints who eternally inhabit it, were subjects of pleasing reflection unto you.— Call to mind “the years of the right hand of the Lord^c,” and those sweet indulgences with which you were then favoured, and say, was it not better with you *then* than it is *now*?

But however painful it may be to reflect on the days that are past, what cause have you to rejoice that a way is opened for your return? Call upon the Lord that he may revive you again, that so you may rejoice and be glad in him^d; go and tell him that you want to be as humble, as holy, as heavenly-minded as you were formerly: Look to him as the great reviver, and never rest satisfied till you can love him supremely, rejoice in him fully, and rely on him only. “Times of refreshing come from his presence^e,” and all our returns are but the effects of his drawing. We can neither mourn for sin, nor rejoice in salvation, till the Lord look upon us, as Christ did upon Peter. Our declensions are entirely of ourselves, our deliverances are only of God. He convinces the conscience, quickens the active powers of the soul, reduces from the ways of sin and error, and “leads in the paths of righteousness for his own name’s sake^f.”

The

^c Psalm lxxvii. 10.—^d Psalm lxxxv. 6.—^e Acts iii. 19.—
^f Psalm xxiii. 3.

The chapter in which the text is found, contains the Lord's message to the seed of Abraham, by Jeremiah the prophet. In it they are reminded of former favours, as an aggravation of those sins which they now stood chargeable with; and in order to shew them their ingratitude, and bring them to a conviction and acknowledgment of their transgressions.

The preface to this message we have in the two first verses. It is probable the summons found *Jeremiah* at *Anathoth*, a city given to the priests, by the tribe of *Benjamin*; it was the place of the prophet's birth, and situated about *three* miles north of *Jerusalem*.

The expressions in the text, may refer either to God's kindness to them, when as a nation he separated them for himself, loaded them with his favours, guided them by his presence, and supported them by a long and wonderful series of miracles: Or it may respect that humility, gratitude, dependence, and obedience which was expressed on their part, when he took them by the hand to lead them out of *Egypt*. This indeed was the case of very few, in comparison of the whole, and even in those few there was a great mixture of imperfection; but a gracious God makes mention of it with strong marks of approbation. They followed him in a *wilderness* where there was no way, and in a *land which was not sown*, thereby evidencing
their

their entire confidence in his wisdom as their *guide*, and in his providence as their *keeper*.

The whole may be applied, without any force upon the text, to the church of God in every age. In the season of conversion, constrained by the influence of Almighty Love, they yield themselves to the Lord, are espoused unto Christ, and submit to his guidance and government; saying, "Thou shalt guide us with thy counsel," supply all our wants, "and finally bring us to glory^s."

How kind is the reproof! How tender the admonition contained in the text!—What bowels of mercy breathe in every word!—What a sweet mixture of authority and love do they present to our view! *Thus saith the Lord*. He, whose authority is acknowledged in earth and heaven; He, whose understanding is incapable of a mistake, whose wisdom invariably dictates the most proper method to be pursued in every cause, and whose power can make it effectual: *I*, with whom a thousand years are but as one day, and in whose view the past, as well as future, is ever present. *I remember thee* with pleasure and delight, *the kindness of thy youth*, when my praises burst from thy lips in songs of thanksgiving; *the love of thine espousals*, when thine heart was given up unto me; even at that season *when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown*.

^s Psalm lxxiii. 24.

What I propose from the words, will be found under these two general observations.

- I. That there are seasons, in which a gracious God sees it needful to refer his people to their past experience. And,
- II. That such a method is wisely calculated to convince the conscience, to stir them up to diligence, and to promote dependence on him that speaketh.

Other useful remarks might be drawn from the words, but those already pointed out will suffice for a single discourse.

I. We observe from these words, that there are seasons in which a gracious God sees it necessary to call the thoughts of his people to their past experience: *Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, &c.*

The people to whom he addresses himself, by the Prophet, in these words, were in a very awful state of backsliding: "They had forgotten their resting-place^h," forsaken the God of their mercies, and were greedily following after the vanities of the nations. Their sin and folly are marked out in very pointed language, and under a very striking similitude in this chapter: "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be ye very desolate, saith the Lord.

^h Jer. 1. 6.

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For my people have committed two evils : they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water¹." Surprising folly ! to leave living water for that which was stagnated ; a fountain for a cistern ; yea, a never-failing fountain for a broken cistern : Sure this was madness, to be equalled only by those who are daily deceived by a desperately wicked heart. O ye *Israelites*, if strangers to ourselves, we should be astonished at your conduct, and censure you more severely, did we not thereby condemn our own conduct.

The method which the Lord takes in re-proving this people, is not less remarkable for its *wisdom* than *tendernefs* ; he evidently seeks rather to win upon their tender feelings, than to awe them with his terrors ;— rather to melt their hearts under a sense of his kindness, than to break them with the rod of correction. His language is to this purpose : O Israel, what have you found at my hands to produce so strange an alteration ? Have I ever proved unfaithful to my engagements, or failed in the expressions of my love ? Did I ever desert you in a time of difficulty and danger, or cross you in any desire when it was for your real good or profit ? Why is it that you act with such reserve towards me, and return contempt for my kindness to you ? This was not always the

¹ Jer. ii. 12, 13.

case:—No; *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals.* I remember the strong expressions of gratitude for favours conferred;—the earnest breathings of your souls after converse and communion with me;—and the tenderness of your conscience with respect to sin and temptation: I remember the yearning of your bowels towards your fellow sinners;—the reproaches, trials, difficulties, and discouragements you had to pass through, for your attachment to my cause and interest; and your readiness to surrender and give up all for my sake: Yes; I remember the diligence you evidenced, and the delight you then experienced, in attending upon the ordinances of my institution, and the clear, frequent, and realising views you had of death, judgment, and eternity. Of these in their order.

1. The Lord remembers your strong expressions of gratitude, for favours conferred upon you in the day of your espousals.—Blessed season! when he appeared clothed with mercy;—commanded your fears and terrors to depart,—pointed you to the conscience-cleansing, peace-speaking, and soul-comforting blood of Jesus; covered your nakedness with the robe of righteousness and garment of salvation,—whispered in your ear, *Thou art mine*, and left the impressions of his love upon your souls. O what astonishment! What a scene was then opened to

your view ! You were unable either to contain the bliss, or suitably to express your grateful sense of it ; all that the lips could utter or imagination conceive, was too contracted to convey to others that sense of obligation which glowed at your heart :—Such broken sentences as these were then frequently uttered by you, Lord, what am I ! A wretch deserving hell, and yet indulged with such a heaven of peace and joy !—And can such a worm attract thy notice ? Is it possible that thou shouldest have thoughts of peace, and designs of love towards my rebellious and leprous soul !—O what a debtor am I to grace ! When I expected no less than to be blotted out of the land of the living, and sent to the regions of eternal darkness and despair, behold thou hast blotted out my transgressions for thy own sake. Lord I am thine.—As my salvation is all of thee, so it is my desire to give up all I *am* and *have* unto thee :—My future life shall be the evidence of my gratitude, and eternity itself shall be filled with thy praises.

Such were the pleasing sensations you felt in your early acquaintance with God, as reconciled in Christ Jesus. And he remembers your solemn vows and serious reflections ;—the praises and petitions that then filled your closets, are bound up in bundles and laid by in his storehouse, as the first-fruits

fruits of that glorious harvest which he expects from you in eternity:—"Then (as he says of Israel in the next verse) you were holiness unto the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase."

2. He remembers likewise the earnest breathings of your souls after uninterrupted converse, and increasing communion with him:—This you know was the happy experience of your souls in the first steps of real christianity.—How fully did you then enter into the spirit of *Ajaph's* language, when he says, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee^k." Your soul then thirsted for God, for the living God; and you longed for the return of that season, which admitted you once more into audience with the Deity^l. How did you then watch every opportunity to steal away from the hurry of the world, and either open your heart to God, or plead that he would open his word to you.—What sweet moments did you find in retirement! And even when engaged in the business of your calling, your hearts have ascended heavenward in holy ejaculation:—Your diligence in business was not interrupted by the fervency of your spirit in the service of the Lord, nor was the service of the Lord thrust into a corner or neglected for a season, to make

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^k Psalm lxxiii. 25.—^l Psalm xlii. 2.

way for the business of the world;—your eye was upon him, who says, “I cause these that love me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures^m ;” and you “sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” fully persuaded that “all other things should be added,” so far as they tended to your real goodⁿ ; you dreaded the least interruption to your enjoyments, and kept a constant watch, lest you should be deprived of the company of your beloved: How were your affections set upon the things that are above, and you experienced that joy and peace which is annexed to such a temper.

Call to remembrance those happy seasons. Remember thy *Hermon* and *Mizar* visits^o ; remember your *Bethel* discoveries and engagements. *Thy God remembers the kinness of thy youth*:—He can tell the time and place, when you have given him the preference to all things;—and though he hath met with many a slight from thee since, yet he hates putting away: His compassions are towards you, and he kindly remembers you still.

3. He remembers also the tenderness of your conscience at that season, with respect to sin and temptation:—Conscience then, like a shrill trumpet, sounded the alarm upon the least approach of danger. The question in that day, was not how far may

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^m Prov. ix. 21.—ⁿ Matt. vi. 33.—^o Psalm xlii. 6.

a person deviate from the path of duty, and yet remain in a state of grace? But how shall I best abstain from every appearance of evil?—How shall I act, so as best to honour the Saviour before others, and enjoy the favour of his grace in my own soul? You have felt the great scrupulosity of conscience, lest in any thing you should contract guilt and offend God. Temptations, soon as presented to the mind, were rejected with the language of surprise, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” You then, it may be, denied yourselves of some things which you have since seen to be lawful, lest you should grieve the Spirit, or cause him to depart: You prayed, watched, and strove against sin in every form, and was desirous in all things, “to keep a conscience void of offence both toward God and man¹.”—There was nothing you saw greater cause to fear than *sin, Satan,* and your *own heart*: And this knowledge of your enemies led you to look to, and depend on God as your only friend. O how often have you pleaded, that as his “servant, he would keep you back from presumptuous sins²”; that he would *hold you up*, in order to your *safety*³; and “work in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure⁴.” These things, O soul, thy God remembers, and

¹ Gen. xxxix. 9.—² Acts xxiv. 16.—³ Psalm xix. 13.—⁴ Psalm cxix. 117.—⁵ Phil. ii. 13.

and he calls on thee now to recollect them, in order to humble you under your declensions, and to animate you to pursue the prize with greater ardour.

4. Nor is thy God unmindful of the yearning of your bowels towards your fellow sinners, in that season when you was admitted into his banqueting house, with the banner of love over you: With what anxiety have you reflected upon their state and danger? With what holy importunity have you pleaded for their conversion and salvation? How have your ears tingled and your hearts ached, when you have heard the name of God blasphemed, or seen his laws violated in their conduct? You could not be silent spectators of their wickedness, or suffer them to rush on to everlasting ruin, without warning them of their danger in the most friendly manner. It may be this has not been always the case, but when you have found your mouth so shut up, that you could not speak as you desired to your near relations, you have made use of the greater importunity for them in the closet, and pleaded that God would be pleased both to shew them their danger, and point them to the only sovereign remedy provided. While you have read the sacred pages to them, or sat with them under the preaching of the gospel, your souls have travelled over them in birth; and the secret language of your heart was this,

this, Lord fasten the arrow of conviction in their souls, and give them eyes to see their danger, and hearts to believe the report.—With the Apostle, you would willingly have submitted to any temporal punishment, however excruciating, yea, to a transient suspension of spiritual and divine sensations, so that they might have been advantaged by it: “You could wish to be made a curse, *after the example of Christ*, for your brethren, your kinsmen, according to the flesh*.” How did you then pity a world lying in wickedness, and pray that your greatest enemies might be brought into a state of friendship with God.

5. The Lord remembers likewise the bitter reproaches, the grievous trials, increasing difficulties, and numerous discouragements which you have had to pass through for your attachment to his cause and interest. “If any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, we are told that he must suffer persecution.” The grand adversary of souls displays much of the enmity of his nature, in the opposition to the young convert;—he stirs up near relations to pity them for their weakness,—intimate friends to sneer at their folly,—the more moralized to contemn them for their singularity,

* This is the sense given to Romans ix. 3, by Dr. Waterland, and followed by Dr. Doddridge. See Waterland's sermons, vol. 1. and Doddridge in loc.

* 2 Tim. iii. 12.

singularity,—and the prophane to blaspheme; on account of their real piety:—A man's foes are often those of his own house,—mother's children are angry with us, and even mothers themselves seem to have cast off all the tender feelings peculiar to that sex and relation, and join in the common opposition against the offspring of their own bowels. Many a contest hath the young disciple to engage in, on his first admittance into the service of his blessed Leader; but, in general, such are furnished with extraordinary zeal, and divine supports to bear them through it. When grace sets them as “solitary in families,” they become a mark for observation; if not for ridicule: And there is scarce any thing of which they are more afraid, than, lest by any unguarded expression, unbridled temper, or unwatchful action, they should dishonour that cause which it is their desire to adorn.

Your God keeps the record of all your labour of love for his name's sake;—he remembers every trial and difficulty you have passed through on his account, and he is pleased to call upon you to recollect them likewise, in order to animate you with greater zeal in his service: “Call to remembrance the former days, in which after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of affliction: Partly while ye were made a gaz-
ing-stock,

ing-stock, both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly while ye became companions of them that were so used *."—But to proceed.

6. He remembers the readiness you then expressed, to part with all for his sake: All was then but “as dross and dung, when compared with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord’.” The mind was so engaged about heavenly things, that you had almost lost the relish for those which were of a perishing nature; or rather you were enabled to use them in a due subordination to your best interest. The love of Christ was so strong and prevalent, that, if called to it, you could have parted with property, parents, yea, life itself.—You felt something of a spirit of martyrdom, and have almost longed for a summons to lay down your life for his sake. O what an empty shell! What a fleeting shadow, doth all the pomp and glory of the world appear at such a season! The mind illumined from heaven can look upon it with contempt, hold it off at a proper distance, and say that is not my portion. Too, too long indeed hath my soul been seeking food amongst yon heap of ashes, but now I have discovered a country, and am in search of an house which is not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.—How the case is with you

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now,

* Heb. x. 32, 33.—^y Phil. iii. 8.

now, we may have opportunity to enquire before we close this discourse; but God remembers the season when the description I have given, was the genuine experience of your souls.—Once more.

7. He remembers the diligence you evidenced, and the delight you then experienced in attending on the ordinances of his house. How amiable were his tabernacles in your view! and your very hearts glowed with gratitude, when any said unto you, “Come and let us go up to the house of the Lord, for he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths².” The return of sabbaths was your delight; and “the word of the Lord was precious in those days³.” How was every petition, put up by the minister, prayed over again from the heart, and every truth delivered from the pulpit, received in love and mixed with faith.—You then heard the word of the great God with attention, sung his praises with understanding, and prayed before his throne in the spirit.—You came to his house with a child-like simplicity to be taught his will, and went home with a desire to improve the instruction received, to your souls comfort and progress in holiness.

O happy days! When God and you were no strangers in the sanctuary, when you came to receive what you found him as willing

² Isa. ii. 3.—³ 1 Sam. iii. 1.

ing to bestow upon you. Blessed seasons! When you could give him an undivided heart, that he might draw his image *on* it, and put his fear *into* it: When his word was more precious to you than gold^b, more delicious to the taste than honey^c, and higher in your esteem than rubies^d. O soul, thy God remembers all the kind visits made to his house, and that love, gratitude, and allegiance which have been expressed in it.—But to close this part of the subject.

8. He remembers those clear, those realizing views which you then had of Death, Judgment, and Eternity;—these were subjects which dwelt much on your thoughts; you considered yourselves as strangers and pilgrims here; as a small particle of dust advanced an inch above the grave, but liable to fall into it every moment. How have you anticipated the solemnities of the last process, and examined your hearts as under the eye of God, the judge of all? You made your confession, and put in your plea, founded upon the blood and obedience of Jesus. Such a reflection as this was then common with you. O my soul, how solemn a thing is it to die! To reach the period of every employment in which I am engaged below, that excepted which can never have an end, the *love* and *service* of Jesus.—To quit this cell, and launch forth into un-

bounded space;—to have new objects set out to view; new ideas drawn upon the understanding; and new sensations of pain or pleasure let in upon the soul *. To see God the impartial judge, and join either with the society of the blessed above, or associate with such as have omnipotence for their eternal enemy! Soon will death untwist the mysterious tie by which body and soul are lashed together, and open the folding doors of eternity †. These are *seasons*, these are *subjects* to which a gracious God would frequently

* In an *eternity*, what scenes shall strike!
 Adventures thicken! novelties surprise!
 What webs of wonder shall unravel *there*!
 What full day pour on all the paths of heaven,
 And light the Almighty's footsteps in the deep!
 How shall the blessed day of our discharge
 Unwind, at once, the labyrinths of fate,
 And straiten its inextricable maze.

Night Thoughts. N^o. 6.

† That sublime poet Dr. Young, not less remarkable for the grandeur of his style, than for the propriety and execution of the metaphors he makes use of: Having stretched his thoughts through all the immensity of space;—having admired the order, variety, magnificence, and rising glory of the works of God in creation, he breaks forth in the following beautiful lines:

What *this* to that illustrious robe *He* wears,
 Who tost this mass of wonders from his hand,
 A specimen, an earnest, of his power?
 'Tis, to *that* glory, whence all glory flows,
 As the mead's meanest flow'ret to the sun,
 Which gave it birth. But what, the sun of heaven?
 This bliss supreme of the supremely blest?
 Death, only death, the question can resolve.

Night 6.

quently refer you. *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth: the love of thine espousals.*

The other observation from the text, to which we shall now proceed, is this,

II. That such a method is wisely calculated to convince the conscience, to stir us up to diligence, and promote dependence on him that speaketh.

1. Nothing can be more wisely adapted to *convince* us of the evil and folly of our departures from the living God.—With what tenderness and authority does such a method of address throw its evidence into the conscience. *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth: “Then Israel was holiness to the Lord.”* But how great the change! How affecting the alteration! How grievous the consequences.

But how are matters with you brethren? Is it with you at present, as in the days that are past? Are you as much concerned about your souls, and as earnest in the duties of religion? If not, may I be permitted to follow the question home to your conscience, by asking whether it was not better with you then, than it is now?—Are you as grateful for favours received,—as desirous of fellowship with Jesus, and of friendship with God through him,—as fearful of the least appearance of sin,—as compas-

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nate towards the souls of your fellow-creatures, and particularly of your relations, friends, and acquaintance,—as stedfast in the cause of God and truth,—as ready to leave all for Christ,—as diligent in your attendance on public worship,—and to close all, as much engaged in thoughts of death and eternity as you were then? Your God remembers how the case once was, and by my voice, he now calls upon you to consider how it stands at present. Have not our “backslidings been multiplied, and as for our iniquities he knows them?”

2. The method here made use of, is wisely calculated to stir us up to greater *diligence* in the concerns of our souls. Remember then from whence ye have fallen, repent and do your first works. Stir up the grace that is in you; hold fast that which ye have received, that you may obtain the crown. Apply to God as the source of all spiritual activity, that he may quicken you in your desires and pursuits,—quicken you according to his word,—quicken you to do his will in all things: Beg of him to make every promise a restorative to your fainting spirits, and that by every ordinance you may be established, strengthened, settled in the truth, in the love, and in the service of the eternal King.—O plead with him to revive you again, to attend to the things that are ready to die, to strengthen faith, attract
your

your desire, increase your joy, confirm your hope, brighten your evidences of his favour, fit you for his will, and prepare you for his kingdom. If convinced that a spiritual languor hath insensibly come upon you, and that you have left your first love, I call you to him who can “take away all iniquity, and will receive you graciously; to him who says, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.” “Awake then thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light^f;”—the light of knowledge, of faith, of comfort.—Does not His pathetic manner of address tend also,

3. To promote *dependence* upon him that speaketh? You may have forgot many of his gracious dealings with you, but he remembers you still, he hates putting away, his heart is made of tenderness, and he rests in his love. His arms are wide extended to receive every returning prodigal, and he that cometh shall in no wise be cast out. O my dear fellow sinners, it is a God of grace that says to you, *I remember the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals.* It is that God who declares, “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins, and their iniquities will I remember no more^g.” O then venture upon his grace, upon his promise, upon his willingness to receive, and

^c Hosea xiv. 2, 4.—^f Ephes. v. 14.—^g Heb. viii. 12.

and ability to save to the uttermost, all that come to him by Jesus Christ. Humbly prostrate yourselves before his “ throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy in your pardon, and find grace to enable you^h” to return to the Lord, and live more to his glory.

But to draw to a close. From this subject how easy is it to infer that God sees, takes notice of, and is highly displeas'd with all declensions and departures in his professing people. But how does he act towards them? Does he marshal his terrors in dread array against them, and brandish his flaming sword in their view? He first makes use of every tender and softening means, and seeks to win them back with affection; it is more pleasure to him to pardon than to punish, to display the bowels of a tender father, than the severity of a just avenger.—What pity! What affection breathes in every word of the passage we are now upon! But are you affected on account of your departures from him?—Sensible of your sin against him, and really desirous to return to the Lord? Then let me refer you to a similar case, in which the compassion of his heart is described by himself; a case in which misery and mercy are exemplified in the most lively colours.—The passage I refer to, you will find in the 31st chapter of this Prophecy,

^h Heb. iv. 16.

phesy, ver. 18, 19, 20. "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." What sorrow, shame, and confusion doth sin, particularly sins of backsliding, bring upon the soul!—But what follows upon *Ephraim's* penitential confession? "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."—O come then with *Ephraim*, acknowledge your folly, and "return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon¹."

But if God *remembers the kindness of youth, the love of espousals*, to the advantage of his people, will he not likewise remember the ingratitude, rebellion, and multiplied offences of his enemies against him?—He will; all the black catalogue lays before him, and as they have treasured up wrath against the day of wrath, he will reveal his

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displeasure

¹ Isa. lv. 7.

displeasure at last in righteous judgment. Consider this ye trifling, giddy souls, before it is too late,—before the door of mercy is for ever closed, and the throne of justice unveiled.—O flee from the wrath to come :—Flee to the appointed, the almighty Saviour ;—his blood cleanseth from all sin ; his arm is able to snatch you from ruin, and raise you to a throne of glory.—May the efficacy of that blood be evidenced, and the omnipotence of that arm displayed in bringing us all to glory for his great name's sake. *Amen.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N VIII.

The Soul revived and God exalted.

P S A L M lxxxv. 6.

*Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people
may rejoice in thee?*

WE have already explained and enforced the kind and parental admonition of a gracious God, to his backsliding and disobedient children; an admonition fraught with tenderness, and expressive of the most unshaken affection; an admonition calculated to discover their folly, and produce in them genuine humility, as well as dispose them to a speedy return to that God from whom they had revolted.—We have seen the greatness of his love, have heard the yearnings of his bowels, and felt the pathos of his language in those moving words, “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals: when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.” If that

subject hath answered the desired effect; if thereby you have been led to call to mind those happy days when Christ was exceeding precious, when your love, and faith, and zeal were manifest;—if convinced that you are now formal, unaffected, and barren, compared with what you were formerly: The words now read, not only hold forth encouragement, but furnish you with language wherewith to return to the embraces of your compassionate Father;—to return to that God who waits to be gracious, who will in no wise cast out, and who is able to exceed both your petitions and desires;—that God who receiveth graciously, loveth freely, and blesteth abundantly for his own name's sake. Having, as *his* servant, delivered his message to you already, permit me now, as *yours*, for Christ's sake, to assist you in returning a suitable answer. In order to this I call upon you to take a view of the largeness of his heart,—to attend to the love that is mixed with the very reproofs he sends to you;—to behold him arrayed with all his glories as the God of salvation;—to reflect upon his gracious dealings, both with yourselves and others in similar circumstances. Consider his interest in you, and unabating affection towards you, and then, under the pressure of so many arguments, and influenced by so many powerful attractives, say, *Wilt thou*

thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?

It is evident, from the first verse of this psalm, that it was composed on account of God's gracious appearances for his ancient people: He had turned their captivity, and restored them in safety to their native land.— As to the author of this sacred ode, we have no right so much as to conjecture who it was, seeing the Spirit of the Lord has been pleased to draw a veil over his name: But without determining who it was, it is evident that he viewed God as the grand director of all wants, as well as the main spring of every deliverance. *Cyrus* was the chief agent under him, and probably the freedom granted to them, was founded upon some secret maxim of government: But “the hearts of kings are in the hand of the Lord; and he turneth them as seemeth good unto him^a.” The inspired poet therefore overlooking every second cause, every created instrument, fixes his eye singly upon God, and gives him all the glory. Ver. 1, “Lord, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of *Jacob*.”

From this general remark he proceeds to investigate the cause of their deliverance. Sin was that chain with which they were bound, when the king of Babylon led them
into

^a Prov. xxi. 1.

into captivity, and no doubt many of them saw their sin in their punishment, and were really humbled for it. But we see that the cause of this great revolution is not to be ascribed to Israel's repentance, but to God's free mercy: Ver. 2. "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin." Pardoning mercy is the preface of every other blessing to sinful men: When God condescends to pardon, he gives his church encouragement to expect and plead for blessings in the greatest variety.—Thus in the instance before us, when God in his providence unveiled their privileges, and once more restored them to the enjoyment of them, what was it but an evidence that he had covered their sin? And where sin is covered, there the glories of the divine character are laid open to view.—His people then behold him as a Being of infinite goodness, as light without darkness, love without any mixture of fury, glorious in holiness, and yet rich in mercy. Ver. 3. "Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger."

But sensible that the seeds of every evil are to be found in the human heart, and which, if not kept down, or eradicated by the hand of grace, would break forth in every abomination, and expose to fresh, perhaps greater maladies; he intreats that God
would

would turn them effectually, and thus prevent all future occasion for a repetition of the stroke: Ver. 4, and 5, “Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger towards us to cease: Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?” Considered as the just judge, there would appear a propriety in his doing so; but how would it comport with his honour as the God of their salvation? It is sweet, it is powerful pleading with the Almighty, when we have clear and consistent views of his nature, and free and intimate access to his throne of grace: Our souls will then be replenished with those comforts which faith has wrested out of his hands.—The omnipotence of prayer will then be proved, and our comforts be founded on, our quickenings be argued from, his glorious character, as the God of our salvation. Our plea will be with the Psalmist, *Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?* The method in which we shall proceed, in discoursing from these words, is,

- I. To consider the peculiarly happy privilege of God’s people as here described, viz. *To rejoice in him.*
- II. That even such may, at seasons, greatly decline, and in consequence of it, be much abridged in their inward

ward comforts or outward privileges.
But,

III. We have a petition admirably suited to such a state and condition: *Wilt thou not revive us again?*

I. We are to shew that it is the peculiarly happy privilege of God's people to rejoice in him. In discussing which, it may be proper to glance at the *privilege* itself,—the *happiness* of it,—and its *peculiarity* as here limited to his own people.—And,

1. As to the *privilege*, it is the highest that a creature is capable of. To joy in God, is that delightful employ in which Angels, Archangels, and all the blessed society above are eternally engaged. “In his presence they experience a fulness of joy; and eternal pleasures are, by his right hand^b,” liberally distributed amongst the favourites of his court: And, in a lower degree, this is the privilege of all his saints, even while passing through this vale of tears.—Hence an inspired writer informs us, that they “joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom they have received the *reconciliation* *.” They have pleasures which

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^b Psalm xvi. 11.

* This is the proper meaning of the word *καταλλαγήν*, translated atonement, Rom. v. 11, and is more agreeable, not only to the subject treated of, but to the preceding context.

no tongue can describe;—pleasures which have God for their origin, support, and perfection;—pleasures which arise from the discovery of his love and wisdom, promises and power.

If we take a view of man as coming into existence; his soul was endowed with the most noble powers and passions, which all adhered to God as the subject, the centre, and perfection of their felicity: Every discovery of glory in the works of omnipotence, rendered their Author infinitely amiable in his esteem; and every interview with his Creator raised his desire to a higher pitch, as well as advanced the delight he already experienced. He enjoyed God in all things, and all things conspired to fix, enlarge, and draw forth his soul in one continued series of joy before him. Happy *Adam!* privileged with the most clear discoveries, and intimate friendship of the Lord of nature. No veil on the subject; no darkness in the intellectual faculty; no adverse principle within, or opposing objects from without, to divide the affections. All was harmony: And hence pure, constant, unabating joy in God, was the happy frame of his soul. The opening dawn called him forth to the discharge of this delightful duty, and the evening shades found him still unwearied in the pursuit of this dear object of his love and worship.

But, since the fall, universal experience is an evidence of the amazing and affecting change. The carnal mind is now become enmity against him. The natural man a stranger to him. Of too *many* it may be said, they contemn him: And of *all*, that so far from having their souls swallowed up in God, and being perpetually delighted in his works, ways, and worship, they remain too much strangers to this inestimable privilege of rejoicing in God.

This privilege is great, but in order to its being attained, it is necessary that we enquire on what it is founded, or wherein it consists. And to rejoice in God, necessarily supposes two things, the KNOWLEDGE of him and INTEREST in him.

That the *knowledge* of God is requisite to this, is a truth which is self-evident. At this he aims in all his works: For what is the express design of the word of revelation, but to give us a discovery of himself? Hereby his nature is described, his attributes discovered, and his aim made manifest. Did we but know God in the manner and extent, in which he has been pleased to reveal himself in the scriptures; or if the small degree of knowledge we have attained, were more operative on the faculties of the soul, it would be impossible for us not to love him supremely, and rejoice in him continually. He is that *perfect* Being, the discovery

covery of whose immaculate, underived, and immutable purity covers the Seraphim with awe; the prospect of whose never-failing fulness, and over-flowing perfection fills all his redeemed with triumph.—And is there not cause to rejoice in such a God as he discovers himself to be?—If we know his name, we shall place all our confidence in him; for he is the gracious, wise, and powerful defender of his people. His *love* is infinite, his *mercy* everlasting, and his *patience* wonderful. O what an amiable, adorable being is God! Overwhelmed with the discovery of his excellencies, the holy *Augustine* describes him as the “one un-
 “compounded, incorporeal, invisible, uncir-
 “^{1 3 1}cumscribed, Being; in whom there is
 “^{5 2 2}nothing higher or lower, greater or less;
 “but perfect and equal all: Great without
 “quantity, Good without quality, Eternal
 “without time; Life without death,
 “Strength without weakness, Truth with-
 “out falshood, Omnipresent without space,
 “filling all things without extension, pas-
 “sing every where without motion, abiding
 “every where without confinement, com-
 “municating to all the creatures, without
 “diminishing his own fulness, governing
 “all things without labour; without be-
 “ginning, yet giving existence to all;
 “making all things mutable yet unchange-
 “able himself: Infinite in greatness, un-

“bounded in power, indefectible in good-
 “ness, incomprehensible in wisdom, won-
 “derful in counsel, and abundant in
 “mercy.” Such was that knowledge of
 God, which that great and good man had
 learned from the scriptures, and this know-
 ledge was productive of holy joy. When be-
 lievers have a view of the infinite perfections,
 the incommunicable attributes of God, as
 revealed in Christ Jesus;—when they are en-
 abled to see the design of his counsel, the
 determination of his wisdom, and the dis-
 play of his love in the gift of his dear son;—
 when they contemplate his character as the
 father of mercies, the fountain of light, and
 the God of all grace, comfort, and peace;—
 when they behold him as reconciled to sin-
 ners,—revealing himself as the God of their
 salvation, and rejoicing over them to do
 them good;—when they can look to the
 throne, and see how “mercy and truth have
 met together, and righteousness and peace
 kissed each other.” How can they do
 otherwise than adore the grace, and rejoice
 in that God who has thus been pleased to dis-
 cover it? Such will rejoice in him as the
 God of their salvation, “who forgiveth the
 iniquity of his people, and covereth all their
 sin^d.” Thus joy is the *fruit* of faith, but
 knowledge is the *root*.—Hence, Peter tells
 us, that “believing we rejoice^e.” But
 Paul

^c Psalm lxxxv. 10.—^d Psalm lxxxv. 2.—^e 1 Pet. i. 8.

Paul assures us that it is impossible to believe in him, of whom we have not heard^f."

A scriptural hope of *interest in God*, is no less necessary to this rejoicing in him, than the knowledge of him; for to know God without some hope of his favour, is but a sure inlet to misery. How can I rejoice in infinite power, wisdom, or faithfulness, if he that possesses these perfections is my enemy? Without interest in God, the clearer views I have of his nature, and the larger my discoveries are of his perfections, the more, in exact proportion, will be my dread and misery. This being the case, I may indeed tremble with devils, but it is impossible that I should rejoice with the inhabitants of *Zion*. Is not this the condition of the apostate spirits? Their knowledge is ever increasing, but does not their misery increase with their knowledge, and their punishment with their crime? They know God in the terror of his majesty, but it is a knowledge which does not issue in the fruits of joy, but in anguish and sorrow.

To rejoice in God then is to have some hope or discovery of his good-will towards us; to lay hold of his promise to help us, and depend on his mercy to save us; to commit ourselves to the conduct of his wisdom, and the guardianship of his power; to converse with him in Christ, through whom
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^f Rom. x. 14.

his anger is turned away, and he appears propitious towards us. It is impossible that we can joy in God, till we see his honour vindicated, his justice satisfied, and his grace revealed in Christ Jesus; till sin be pardoned, the enmity of the heart subdued, and a disposition given which bows to the sceptre of sovereign and saving grace.

The whole tenor of this psalm is calculated to shew us, that it is only a view of God as pardoning iniquity for his own sake, ver. 2;—as turning away his wrath, ver. 3; as converting the soul, ver. 4;—and as reviving his saints from their faint and feeble frames, ver. 6; that can induce them to rejoice in him. And O what a privilege, honour, and advantage is it for a weak, sinful, miserable creature to be permitted to triumph in the God of power, grace, and salvation! But,

2. This is the privilege, the *happy* privilege of all his saints. In such a frame, in such employment consists much of their happiness: Nor is this to be wondered at, seeing the subject of their joy is both *immutable* and *eternal*.

It is immutable:—For with God there is no variableness or shadow of turning. No addition, diminution, or alteration. In him alone is found absolute immutability; that necessary qualification in the object of the soul's felicity,—without which her desires remain

main unsatisfied, and her pursuit unfinished;—without which she starves in the midst of plenty, and finds a void in every enjoyment.—This is a property to be found in nothing short of God. The purest gold will tarnish, the fairest form will alter, the most magnificent edifice decay, and the choicest pleasure-garden vary with the seasons. Solid, permanent good, in all respects adapted to the desire and duration of an immortal spirit, is only to be found in God. He is the Lord, and changeth not^s, therefore the sons of Jacob, instead of being confounded, are enabled to rejoice.

But, if to immutability you add *eternity*, the happy privilege of a christian will appear truly complete. Eternity is inseparable from immutability: The one is an expression of the perfection of his nature, the other of the duration of that perfection. This God, who has that in himself, which is able to satisfy the desires of his saints, be they ever so many;—this God who liveth for ever to fill them all, be they ever so durable; this God is the portion of his people, and therefore the subject of their joy.—“A portion suited to the dignity of a rational soul; large as its faculties, and immortal as its being.” This is the believer’s privilege. A privilege not to be equalled by, or compared with any thing of an earthly nature.

Should

^s Mal. iii. 6.

Should we grant that his knowledge of God, his joy *in* him, and the happiness resulting from *both*, may be increased, and probably will receive new augmentations through eternity; yet the subject of that joy is incapable of change or alteration. Unite *immutability* and *eternity*,—an *unchanging* and *immortal* good,—never-fading excellency, and ever-blooming beauty, and then judge how valuable is the believer's portion! how great beyond all estimation his privilege!—But,

3. To rejoice in God, is not only the privilege, but the *peculiar* privilege of his people. The Sacred Penman draws a line of distinction, which separates the world from the church. *Thy people*, the subjects of thy love and care,—the objects of thy grace and mercy,—the instruments of thy praise and glory.—*Thy people*, to whose advantage thou hast respect, in every dispensation of grace and providence.—This pronoun THY excludes all, and includes none but the church of God, the ransomed of the Lord. Let the miser rejoice in his gold,—the merchant in his success, the statesman in his wisdom, the warrior in his prowess, and the voluptuary in every scene of luxury and dissipation; it is the honourable privilege, the happy experience of the believer, so far as grace is in exercise, to rejoice in God. In his fulness and faithfulness; in his grace, wisdom,

wisdom, and power; in his covenant and conduct. “Let Israel therefore rejoice in him that made him, let the children of Zion be joyful in their King^b.”

Thus we see the privilege itself is founded upon the *knowledge* of God, and *interest* in him.—The happiness appears from the *immutability* and *eternity* of the subject:—And the peculiarity of it, from this distinguishing character, *thy people*.—Proceed we now,

II. To shew that though it is the privilege of God’s people to rejoice in him; yet there are seasons when the lively actings of grace may be much obstructed, and their joy in God be very languid: This, if not fully expressed, is clearly intimated in the text.—When they say, *Wilt thou not revive us?* Does it not prove that they felt themselves languid?—And while joy in God is referred to, as the end of those revivals, what can more fully evidence the frequent need we have of them, in order to our rejoicing in God?

That the church, or particular believers, may be in such a state, is not only evident from the history of past ages, but from the painful experience of particular saints. Are there not seasons when they feel, and mourn over great estrangedness of heart, coldness of

A a affection,

^b Psalm cxlix. 2.

affection, and formality in religious duties? So far from rejoicing in God, they are contracted, benumbed, yea, confounded before him. They are so shut up, that they can neither find freedom of thought in meditation, nor order their speech before him by reason of darkness. Once they could exult in the Lord, and triumph in the God of their salvation; their heart was in tune, and their mountain stood strong; but now they can only sigh out their distress, or enquire whether his mercy is clear gone for ever, or will he be gracious any more?—Much might be said in confirmation of the doctrine advanced, but as this was insisted on in the preceding discourse, we shall omit it at present, and pass on,

III. To the petition in the text, suited to such a state and season. *Wilt thou not revive us again?*

That it is possible for a real believer to be brought into such circumstances, is evident from many scripture examples; but for a person to rest long unconcerned and unaffected in such condition, seems to me to be incompatible with a state of grace. By some fall into temptation, the soul may receive such a shock, as for a season to render it insensible of its condition, and unaffected with its loss. Such, probably, was the case of *David*, before *Nathan* was sent to him

him with his humiliating message. Such, likewise, was the condition of the church, as here described: She was greatly fallen, greatly declined, her joy was abated, and she stood in need of fresh quickening.—Her prayer includes three things.

1. A *confession*, that she needed the quickening influences of God's spirit.—She felt the effects of distance, and desired the return of those happy frames, when love constrained and grace captivated all the powers of the soul.—But is it so with us? Let us view ourselves as in our closets: Are we as constant and diligent, as much engaged and refreshed in religious duties of a private nature as formerly? Do we read and meditate upon the scriptures with that relish and enlargement, examine ourselves with that impartiality, and pray to God with that holy importunity which we found formerly? Do we taste that sweetness, and experience that refreshment from converse with God, which we knew in the first stages of christianity? Or are we become negligent, trifling, and indifferent? It is an old observation, but not less true, that declensions in religion generally begin in the closet: And indeed secret duties are like the movement of a watch, though hid from the eye, yet, if not kept clean and in good order, the hand will point out the defect.—Brethren, let us converse much with our own hearts, and if thereby

we are convinced how irregular they move, how low the power of religion, how carnal our affections, and how worldly our pursuits; let us seek the quickening presence, and reviving influences of our God. Go with your winter frames, your lifeless duties, your barren hearts; go to a throne of grace and there lodge this petition, *Wilt thou not revive us again?*

2. This request takes in likewise an *acknowledgement* of God as the great Restorer, *Wilt not thou revive us?* As much as to say, thou only art able to do it, and if thou wilt not, we can neither do it ourselves, nor can any created power do it for us. When convinced of our declensions, a legal principle will point us to various means, in order to bring about a cure: But all of them are defective;—all of them calculated to keep us off from the only sovereign remedy. This will inform us that we must repent of our past conduct, and in future read with greater attention, pray with more fervency, and attend the word preached with greater constancy and circumspection. Things, though very proper in their place, may at such a season be presented to the mind, to divert it from that business to which we are then more particularly called, viz. a direct application to God, through Jesus Christ, for pardon and restoration. The fore-mentioned duties are very necessary, and highly expedient,

ent, but who must give that repentance? or what *can* produce that diligence, fervency, and attention? These are blessings, not within our compass, but to be ascribed wholly to the free and sovereign spirit of the Lord. The Psalmist refers you to the great Author of all spiritual influences in the text: *Wilt not thou revive us?*—But while they confess their need, and acknowledge God as the author of all spiritual influences, they accompany it,

3. With an *application* to him for a time of refreshment. *Wilt thou not revive us again?* They have no doubt of his ability, and would fain persuade themselves of his willingness. It is powerful pleading before a throne of grace, when we can rest the weight of our petitions upon the will of God. If our fellow mortals will exert themselves to the utmost, when their power or ability is brought in question; sure God will not be inattentive, when you challenge his willingness. There was much faith as well as fear, in that Leper, who said to Jesus, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean:” And the all-gracious Redeemer soon confirmed the *one*, and removed the *other*, saying, “I will, be thou clean¹.” Presume not then to make a contrast between the power and the will of God in this case; for he is able to do what he will, and willing to do what

¹ Matt. viii. 2, 3.

what he is able, for all that apply to him, through Christ.—Is able and willing to pardon, bless, and everlastingly save all that come to him by Jesus: Say not then I know that God can save me, can do great things for me, yea, even greater than I can ask or think: But will he? In order to remove every doubt, and deliver your mind from so painful a suspense, let me advise you to imitate the example, and make use of the language of the church. Go and put the question to himself, saying, **WILT THOU NOT?**

There was much faith in this humble petition, and the more attentively we view the words, the more full we shall find them. They here argue from *past experience*,—from the *nature* of the object addressed,—and from the *honour* that would arise to himself, by granting their request. We have had occasion repeatedly to mention the text already, but I cannot persuade myself to dismiss it, till these observations are confirmed by it.

(1.) The plea is founded on the remembrance of *past experience*, this is evident from the word *again*. *Wilt thou not revive us again?* They had tried him before, and were no strangers to him under this blessed character. Former appearances for them, induce them to apply to him again. They have a grateful sense of the season, when he was pleased to enlarge their hearts;—when he indulged them with his blissful presence; and

and made them joyful in his house of prayer. Here they confess that they needed the same help, and plead that he would set their hearts at liberty, that they might run the way of his commandments.

(2.) This request has respect to the *nature* of the gracious, glorious Being to whom they apply. Wilt not *thou*? *Thou*, who art ready to pardon and able to save: *Thou*, who art immutable in thy purposes, and faithful to thy promises: *Thou*, who art pleased to speak peace to thy saints, ver. 8; whose salvation is nigh unto all that fear thee, ver. 9;—who delightest over sinners to do them good, ver. 12;—yea, *Thou*, who restorest the backslider, and leadest in the way everlasting, ver. 13.—*Wilt thou not revive us again?*

(3.) This petition has a regard also to the *honour* that arises to God, from the vigour and liveliness of his people. Wilt thou not do it, *that thy people may rejoice in thee*? It, perhaps, may be difficult for us to say, whether our happiness or God's honour be most promoted by this. But this we are sure of, that he that offereth praise (which is no other than the expression of joy) glorifieth him. It is his own glory at which he invariably aims in all things, and therefore we conclude that he revives, comforts, yea, saves his people, that he may “be glorified in his saints,

saints, and admired in all them that believe^k.”

Some inferences from the whole shall conclude this subject.

1. If those who are really the people of God, need frequently to be quickened, in order to their rejoicing in him, then surely a great change is necessary in the unregenerate, before they can attain to this. “The carnal mind is enmity against God^l;” and therefore till the enmity is destroyed, and the person renewed in the spirit of the mind, so far from loving God, he must hate him, and instead of making him the object of his joy, will contemn him.—It is the christian’s character, that “he is a new creature, old things are passed away, and all things are become new^m.”—And such as remain strangers to this change, Christ being judge, “cannot enter into the kingdom of Godⁿ :” There being a total unfitness to take in the joys, or engage in the service, either of the kingdom of grace or glory.—Union to Christ, is absolutely necessary to real fruitfulness in God’s service. The scion brings forth no fruit till engrafted into the stock, and vitally united with it. So that such as are strangers to this divine change, may see their state. They are enemies to God and destitute of happiness :—For what is happiness?

^k 2 Thef. i. 10.—^l Rom. viii. 7.—^m 2 Cor. v. 17.—
ⁿ John iii. 3.

ness? Friendship with God is the *door* to it,—joy in God the *life* of it,—and the enjoyment of God the *perfection* of it.—There is no rejoicing in God, but through Jesus Christ, and it is a peculiar privilege, confined to those, who, “through him, have received the reconciliation^o.”

2. From this subject we also learn the awful effects of departures from the living God. They interrupt that cordial friendship, that holy intercourse, those sacred joys which the active christian is privileged with. It is the call of God, and the privilege of his saints to rejoice in the Lord always^p. He is the supreme good, and therefore requires our strict regard to him.—And as often as we lose sight of God, we lose sight of happiness, and may be said to wander from it. So far as Satan can draw our attention from God, by whatever means it is effected, he gains his end, and we lose our comfort. This may be considered as the inlet to all evil, as we see in the case of *Eve*: When the serpent had gained her attention, he improved the advantage, to lead her imperceptibly farther and farther, from God the fountain of light, till he had darkened her understanding, captivated her will, and accomplished his malevolent design. The soul, like the earth, when it turns towards

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^o Rom. v. 11.—^p Philip. iv. 4.

the sun, receiveth light and pleasure; but when it recedes from it, darkness and distress commence.—While we have a single eye to God, as the object of our desire, delight, and expectation, we shall cleave to him with purpose of heart, and rejoice in him as our friend and portion; but in proportion as we attend to inferior objects, we forsake our own mercies^a. Beware then of spiritual declensions; darkness and distress will follow them, as closely as the shadow doth the body. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God’.” It is in his presence that there is fulness of joy; but if deprived of this, sorrow and sighing will succeed.

3. If joy in God be the end of all spiritual revivals, how earnest should we be in pleading with him for them. Certainly this should make up a great part of our petitions before the throne of grace. Are you grown cold and languid in your profession, after so many years standing in the courts of the Lord? Plead with him for a time of refreshing from his presence, that your prospects may brighten, your conversation be more spiritual, your progress more evident, and your lives more useful.—Nor should we only plead for personal revivals, but for
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^a Jonah ii. 8.—^f Heb. iii. 12.

the church of God in general. The prosperity of *Zion* should lay near our hearts, and the peace of *Jerusalem* be the subject of our petitions: That ministers may have more light, and love, and zeal;—that churches may flourish;—professors prosper; and sinners be convinced and converted. For these things we should plead, without presuming to limit the Almighty to our line, or restrain his blessings to any party. “O give him no rest till he establish *Zion*, and make *Jerusalem* a praise in the earth.” Plead with the Prophet of old, for a sinking cause and a sinful nation. “O Lord revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.”

4. What a glorious day will be opened by the resurrection morn; when all the followers of Jesus shall appear perfect in holiness, and be introduced into that world, where uninterrupted joy shall fill their souls, and everlasting gratitude warble forth in their ceaseless songs. God shall be their light, and Christ their glory.—No more distance, darkness, or langour to complain of: Their service will be pure, and their enjoyment perpetual.—They shall be ever with the Lord, see him as he is, and serve him day and night in his holy temple. With

B b 2

that

^a Isa. lxii. 7.—^c Habak. iii. 2.

that noble company may we all join at last, and in that honourable service be employed for ever, God, of his abundant mercy, grant for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

SERMON

S E R M O N IX.

Jacob's Prayer: Or, Scripture Oratory.

GENESIS xxxii. 9, 10, 11, 12.

And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: For I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.

THE words now before us, contain one of the most beautiful pieces of natural oratory, that is, perhaps, to be found

found in any writings, either sacred or profane:—The stile is so pathetic, the expression so simple, the pathos so grand, and the occasion so solemn, that the attentive reader is at once struck with admiration and pleasure.—What a view do they give us of the majesty of that Being which is addressed, and of the undisguised humility of the suppliant!—What a solemnity and suitableness appears in the whole!—The more we review it, the more we shall be convinced that it is neither encumbered with superfluity, nor impoverished by a defect.—There is a beauty of sentiment, and propriety of expression runs through the whole, which indicate the well-informed judgment, and heart-felt fervour of the speaker,

Jacob's situation was now very dangerous, and his feelings remarkably delicate.—What had he not to fear from *Esau*? And what must he feel for the dear connections now in view? How can he bear the thought to see his *Joseph* murdered before his eyes,—his beloved *Rachel* torn from his embraces,—or his other children and servants led away as captives.

All rational means are employed to mitigate the rage of his brother, or, at least, to save a part of the family from ruin: But, after all, however specious the plan, he presumes not to carry any part of it into execution, till he goes to God and begs a blessing upon

upon his endeavour, saying, *Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother.* Prayer is the appointed way to success, and it has seldom been found ineffectual.—The case of *Jacob* is recorded as an evidence of its power: And the conduct of this great man is worthy of being imitated, not only by every head of a family in a time of distress, but by every prince in a season of national danger.

He was now greatly alarmed by the tidings of *Esau's* approach at the head of four hundred men.—His family was large, but their strength feeble; his situation was very much embarrassed; but the advantage he had often experienced of having a friend in God, leads him to make a fresh application to him in the season of distress.—And the spirit of God has been pleased to hand down a copy of his address upon that occasion. *And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, &c.*

The subject is too copious to admit of any regular division: However, in the words we have the *object* to whom he addresses himself, viz. the God of his fathers; together with the *command* he gave, and the *promise* made unto his servant: As also *Jacob's confession, petition, and conclusion* on this occasion. We shall take the words in the order in which they lay in the text.

The FIRST thing we notice in the words, is the *object of worship*, to whom he addresses himself: O God of my father Abraham; and God of my father Isaac. As much as if he had said, O thou who didst honour my grandfather Abraham, calling him from his country and kindred; Thou, who art the fear, and hast been the helper of my father Isaac; Thou, who hast promised also to be the God of their posterity; by every promise thou hast made, by every engagement thou hast entered into, I invoke thy presence and blessing to be with me, as my security and comfort in this season of distress. “By whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small^a,” but by the God of Jacob. “It is the day of thy Jacob’s trouble: O save me out of it^b.”

Had he espoused the Popish doctrine of the intercession of saints or angels, it was impossible to have had a fairer opportunity of discovering it, than at this season.—We are informed in the beginning of the chapter, that an host of Angels had appeared to him in a very friendly manner; and he was nearly related to Abraham, now in glory:—Yet we meet with no application either to the one or the other. Some, with less shadow of success, are heard to cry out, “O, all ye Angels of God, pray for us: O, all ye holy order of Patriarchs, pray for us:” But Jacob goes immediately

^a Amos vii. 5.—^b Jer. xxx. 7.

immediately to God, as a God of grace and mercy, as the God of his father.

From the *object* he applied to, we may draw this obvious remark, that *it is a great privilege to be descended from godly relatives*. Mistake not my meaning, far be it from me to suppose that grace is hereditary, or flows in a regular succession from parents to children; matter of fact proves the contrary; and however graceless children may be advantaged in providential favours, on account of their godly parents, they reap no saving benefit: But if made partakers of that grace which dwelt in their forefathers, it is truly a special privilege to be related to such, when brought into trying dispensations.— Let me instance in two particulars.

1. Such have all the wonderful appearances of God in behalf of their ancestors, to encourage them in such a season: And this is no small privilege. Thus *Jacob*, in the case before us, sends his thoughts through all the history of the lives of *Abraham* and *Isaac*, and makes use of every merciful interposition in their favour, as a step by which he rises to the throne of grace. It is as much as if he had said, “Thou art my God, and I desire to exalt thee, my fathers’ God,” O give me a fresh opportunity to praise thee.—And if you would see what improvement is made of such a privilege, you have it exemplified in *Jacob’s* sons, I mean the church. “We

have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what works thou didst in their days, in the times of old^c." The argument founded upon this encouragement follows, thus, "Thou art my King, O God, command deliverance for *Jacob*." The whole consists in a knowledge of his works, an interest in his favour,—a conviction of his ability,—and an application for his interposition in their behalf.—The report of their fathers, was the foundation of the children's petition.

O ye professing parents, how should this animate and encourage you, frequently to declare to your children what God hath done for you. How should you speak of his mercies and your obligations, when you abide with them in the house, or walk with them by the way. Brethren, make the memory of your children the diary of your mercies, and that monument on which you inscribe the high praises of the Lord.

Why should the wonders he hath wrought,
Be lost in silence, and forgot?

And such of you as are descended from godly relatives, enquire what improvement has been made of your descent from them: Have you ever, with *Jacob* in the text, gone to their God as yours? Are you frequently taking a view of his mercies to
your

^c Psalm xliv. 1.

your fathers, by way of encouragement to your own souls? And in fresh difficulties is this your comfort, that “The Lord changeth not, and therefore the sons of *Jacob* are not consumed^d?”

2. Another advantage of being descended from godly parents, which a good man enjoys in trying times, is interest in their prayers. Thus was it in the case before us; *Abraham* was dead, and *Isaac* at a distance; but *Jacob* on this occasion reaps the benefit of their petitions. O God of my father *Abraham*, and God of my father *Isaac*: As if he had said, Lord, these are names thou art no stranger to:—Thou hast owned them as thy friends and favourites: Thou art well acquainted how frequently they have pleaded thy promise, not only for themselves, but for their posterity. O send help from thy sanctuary and bless me.—Are there no petitions on the file? No mercies ripe for an answer?—Lord, they have sowed the seed of prayer, let me now reap the harvest of deliverance.—And, in this view, several of us may now be enjoying the advantage of the prayers of our deceased relatives.—They followed their petitions to heaven, before God had sent down the answer. They laboured, and we enter into their labours.

From this part of the subject, such of you as are parents, may see how earnest you

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should

^d Mal. iii. 6.

should be, in pleading for your posterity: The hand of death will soon close up your lips in silence, and therefore, while you have the ear of the King of heaven, be sure to speak for them.

And let the children of such remember, that the prayers of parents are of no further advantage, than as succeeded by our own: They, by their petitions, have treasured up grace against the day of salvation; but, by prayer, these blessings are to be fetched down into our own souls.

But I am aware, that all that has been advanced under this observation, may tend to discourage some who ought not to be made sad. You conclude, it may be, that you have no advantage from the grace or prayers of your parents, since you have reason to fear they lived and died strangers to Christ, and salvation by him:—But supposing the worst, have you ground to conclude that sovereign grace has separated you out of an ungodly family?—Then see what is said upon this head: “Let not the son of the stranger that hath joined himself unto the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from his people.” No; if thou hast real grace, thou hast *Abraham*, and *Isaac*, and *Jacob* for thy fathers, and mayest draw encouragement from all the wonders that God hath wrought for them,
from

^c Isa. lvi. 3.

from all the petitions they have presented to him for their posterity. This is one of those special blessings which flows to sinners through the death of Christ; as the Apostle evidences, when he says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of *Abraham* might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ'."—So that it is through Christ, that we are admitted into all the privileges of *Abraham's* family; and have his God for our God, his example for our encouragement, and his experience for our comfort.—"If ye be Christ's, then are ye *Abraham's* seed, and heirs according to the promise^s."

The SECOND thing we have to notice in the words, is the command received from God for the journey in which he was now engaged. *Thou, Lord, saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and kindred.* In obedience to thine order I moved at first, and have followed thy direction to this moment:—My regard to thy command has brought me into danger, and now thine honour is engaged to bring me out of it: I look to *thee* for direction, support, and deliverance.—This was strong arguing indeed.—So, when we can bring God's orders for our conduct,

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^s Gal. iii. 13, 14.—^s Gal. iii. 29.

we may claim all his perfections for our salvation:—In such circumstances, the soul has a good hold-fast in God. *Thou saidst, Return.*

The observation that we would draw from this, is, *That it is a great privilege to have the will of God for the rule of our conduct.* Not that we are to expect any fresh revelation of his will by voice or vision: No; we have his word, “Which is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished for every good word and work^h.” To this we do well to take heedⁱ;—from this we should seek counsel in all we undertake, and he has promised “to instruct us in the way we should go, and guide us with his eye^k.”—The written word is the grand directory, in every doctrine we are to believe, in every duty we are to perform; and if we “acknowledge him in all our ways, we have his promise that he will direct us in all our paths^l.” Be very solicitous then in all you do, to have the word of God for your rule. Stir not, till, with *Moses*, you have the promise of his presence with you^m; and, with *Jacob*, have obtained the blessingⁿ.—Without God for your guide, you will soon be perplexed in the way, or wander out of it; but if he be your leader, however rough the path,

^h 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.—ⁱ 2 Pet. i. 19 —^k Psalm xxxii. 8.—
^l Prov. iii. 6.—^m Exod. xxxiii. 14.—ⁿ Gen. xxxii. 26.

path, the end will be both honourable and happy. O professors, keep close to the Bible; converse much with it;—make it your daily counsellor;—revolve it much in your thoughts by meditation;—treasure it up in your memories,—and transcribe a fair copy of it in your lives. “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace shall be unto them.”

But to go one step further: If it be a great privilege to have the will of God for the rule of our conduct, sure it is not less so, *to have our conduct, in some happy measure, conformed to that rule.* Thus was it with *Jacob.* Thou saidst, What have I done, and though I have not yet finished what thou gavest me to do; Lord, I here stand waiting only for thy permission; I am in the way, and look to thee to remove every obstacle out of it. It is a great blessing to have “the testimony of a good conscience, that not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God we have had our conversation in the world^p.”—When it has been the habitual tendency of the heart to desire to stand approved of God: When his will has not only been approved by us, but diligently pursued.—This being the case, though men oppose, such can appeal to God, that their cause is good, and their carriage righteous.—Thus was it with *David,* “I have done judgment and justice, leave me

* Gal. vi. 16.—^p 2 Cor. i. 12.

me not to my oppressors⁹." And though *Jacob* could not deliberately say so, seeing by subtlety he had obtained the blessing from his father, and the birthright of his brother: Yet, so far as his conduct had been sinful, we have reason to hope that he had repented of it:—And therefore resting wholly on the promise included in this precept, he expected deliverance from every surrounding danger.—God had said, *Return to thy country and kindred*, and this gave sufficient encouragement for him to hope that he should see both in peace.—So much for the command.

The THIRD thing which occurs is the *promise* given to him. *I will deal well with thee.* That is, in other words, "I will be with thee in all places whither thou goest; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of^r." This promise *Jacob* employs as a wall and bulwark for his defence. Hope in this, is the anchor he casts forth in the storm, and this must fail before destruction can approach him. If the promise stand, though *Jacob* fear, he cannot fall; and if God suffer a breach in his promise, it would be a great reflection on his honour.

I will deal well with thee. Here you will observe, that though the promise was very
great,

⁹ Psalm cxix. 121.—^r Gen. xxviii. 15.

great, it did not secure him from trials and temptations.—The tide of providence seemed to run quite contrary to the engagement of the promise:—Faith grew languid and fear strong;—danger was fast approaching, and deliverance was at a distance:—Destruction lay at the door, and yet there was *grace* in all, there was *good* in all, with respect to *Jacob*.—Hence learn not to cast away your confidence in God's grace, or doubt his promise in a season of discouragement.—No; though the fig tree do not blossom, though thy comforts be low, thy discouragements many, and thy corruptions strong, yet wait for the God of salvation. Convinced that it is not in your own power to perfect that which concerneth you, depend upon him who both *can* and *will* do it. And ever remember, though God may sift thy grace, he will save thy soul.

But though God has no where engaged to exempt his people from trials and temptations, he has expressly promised to *do them good*. And what could more strongly exemplify the truth of that promise, than the history now before us.—Who ever had more abundant cause, at the conclusion of such a scene, to say that God had dealt well with him, than *Jacob* had? It was *well* that he had been brought into such a straight,—and *well* that he was tried;—and *well*, that in the season of trial, he was enabled to rely

upon God, for support, direction, and deliverance.—He found, what every faint shall find, sooner or later, “That all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose.”—In every trial and temptation, “his grace shall be sufficient” to support you under it, and “his strength shall be made perfect in weakness’,” by giving you a complete victory over it.

FOURTHLY, after God’s promise comes *Jacob’s* confession, in the *tenth* verse. *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am becoue two bands.* Here he acknowledges that he had been blessed by God, taught of him, and enlarged from him.

1. He confesses that he had been blessed by God: *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies which thou hast shewed unto thy servant.* Goodness and mercy had followed him ever since he left his father’s house.—Mercies had been multiplied,—had been renewed every morning,—had flourished for his comfort in a strange land.—All that he had received was from the hand of mercy. Wives and children, health and strength, servants and cattle, all were mercies to him:

But

° Rom. viii. 28.—° 2 Cor. xii. 9.

But these were mercies of an inferior sort; pardon and peace, the presence of God with him, the smile of God on him, the promises and precepts of God to him, these were mercies of the larger kind. With *David*, he saw the mercy of God reaching to the very heavens, and in the view he cries out, "I am unworthy of the least." What genuine humility! What godly simplicity was this!—How doth it teach us, that the nearer we approach to God, and the more clear views we have of interest in him, the more shall we be humbled before him: Saying with *Paul*, "I am less than the least of all saints"; or with *Jacob*, as in the margin, "I am less than the least of all the mercies which thou hast shewed unto thy servant."—As he had been blessed by God, so,

2. He confesses that he had been *taught of him* likewise. *I am not worthy of the least of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant.* *Jacob* had enjoyed very large discoveries of the truth of God's presence, and power, and promise.—His soul had often been fed with truth, and his covenant, God had granted him many a blessed manifestation of his truth and faithfulness, since he travelled that road before. But, Lord, faith *Jacob*, when I consider how unfruitful I have been I am astonished at thy grace and

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patience,

patience, and constrained to declare, that I am not worthy of the least of these discoveries with which I have been honoured.—Such will be the frame and disposition of all that are taught of God.—Their cry will be, why hast thou made me to differ, and what have I which I have not received?—Such will, with *Jacob*, confess how unworthy they are to be taught of God, even at that very season that they are pleading for further instructions.

3. He confesses that all his enlargement was from God. *With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.* As much as if he had said, When I went out I had no help-mat to comfort me, no servant to minister to me, no guide to go before, or guard to defend me in the way;—no flock or herd to afford me provision: Traveller-like, I had little more than my staff; but now I am become two bands, having wives and children, men servants and maid servants, camels and oxen, and sheep and goats. There was much implied in this expression,—he could scarce believe that God would ripen such a mercy for ruin, or multiply life to such a degree for slaughter. A gracious heart knows, at seasons, what it is to argue with *Manoah's* wife, “If the Lord had intended to slay us, he would not have shewed us such things as these.”

I am not worthy. Here we have no pleading either of personal merit, or of any condition performed.—Although *Jacob* had done what God commanded, yet after all he acknowledges himself an unprofitable servant.—He ascribes all to grace and mercy, and admires how all his needs, both spiritual and temporal, had been supplied according to the glorious riches of the God of *Bethel*.—From this example of the Patriarch, we may see what a difference there is in pleading before *God* and with *Men*.—On this occasion we find him travelling with a vast train of mercies. *Laban* pursues him, and claims all that he had. “These daughters, says he, are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine*.” Poor *Jacob*, should this claim stand, he will have nothing left but his staff to travel back with to his native country. But “we see that by works a man is justified,” before men, “and not by faith only.” Hence *Jacob* boldly avers before *Laban*, that he had merited the whole by his conduct. “This twenty years,” says he, “have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts, I brought not unto thee, I bore the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by
day,

* Gen. xxxi. 43.—^y James ii. 24.

day, or stolen by night. Thus I was, in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thine house: I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father the God of *Abraham*, and the fear of *Isaac*, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty: God hath seen my affliction and the labour of my hands.” But however confidently he speaks to a fellow creature, when he comes to deal with God, what a change do we observe in the language? I am not worthy of the least favour with which I am privileged,—not worthy of the smallest blessing that I am permitted to enjoy.

The FIFTH thing we have to remark, is the petition. Ver. 11. *Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.* All that goes before, is thanksgiving expressed, and petition only implied; but here, like *Jehosephat*, he acknowledges that he had “no might against the great company that came against him, neither knew he

he what to do, but his eyes were upon the Lord^a."—He had no faith in *Eſau's* tenderness, and all his hope was founded upon the promise and power of Jehovah.—The danger was great, but he prays, *Deliver me from the hand of my brother.*—Here we may note,

1. *That a good man may have many fears.* Thus was it with *Jacob*. He knew *Eſau's* disposition: Was informed of his threatenings, and assured of the four hundred armed men that accompanied him at this season;—he knew also how incapable his charge was either to flee or fight.—While he loses sight of the promise, his fear groweth exceedingly: With an anxious heart he looks round on his wives, and children, and servants, and is ready to say, Lord, I have offended my brother, but what have these done? I know the cruelty of his disposition, and dread his power, lest he destroy all this company root and branch.—*Jacob* had many fears.—We observe,

2. *That a gracious God will allow his friends to mention their fears before him.* This is no inconsiderable favour. It is a tender father, a sympathizing friend, who encourages us to come boldly to a throne of grace, when we have no where else to flee for succour.—In his presence you may lay open your whole heart, and tell him of all your wants.

^a 2 Chron. xx. 12.

wants.—Do you fear at seasons that sin will prevail?—That Satan will have the advantage? And that you shall, in the event, fall short of the prize? Carry all your fears to God: He permits you to cast your burden upon him^b, and says, “Fear not, thou worm *Jacob*, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the holy One of Israel^c.”—We remark, once more,

3. *That there is encouragement in God for a believing soul in every time of difficulty.* And it was a view of this, by which faith got the better of fear, in the experience of *Jacob*.—*Deliver me I pray thee.* God can deliver, and he encourages us to apply to him for it. “Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me^d.” And he that makes the promise, “never said to the seed of *Jacob*, seek ye my face in vain^e.”—Mercy and grace, wisdom and strength, pity and patience are to be found in God:—He can “make all grace abound towards us, so that we, always having all-sufficiency for all things, may abound unto every good work^f.”—“God is the refuge and strength of his people, a present help in every time of trouble^g.”—And blessed are they who trust in him^h.

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^b Psalm lv. 22.—^c Isa. xli. 14.—^d Psalm l. 15.—

^e Isa. xlv. 19.—^f 2 Cor. ix. 8.—^g Psalm xlv. 1.—

^h Psalm ii. 12.

The LAST thing we remark in the words, is the *conclusion* in the 12th ver. *And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.* Brethren, it is a successful plea, when we can back our arguments with God's promises, when we can go to him with a *thou hast said*. He loves to see the confidence, to hear the plea that is founded upon his own sayings.—*Thou*, who art faithful to thy promises, hast said, that thou wilt bless both me and mine, and I now apply to thee for the performance. The promise referred to, partly respected *himself* and partly his *family*.

1. It respected *himself*. “Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good:”—Before it was, “I will deal well with thee.” Here he repeats it with a *surely*;—for where it is God's will to do good, he will *surely* find a way to accomplish it.—Or *in doing good I will do thee good*. One act of goodness, is but the preface to a subsequent act of goodness. And what God *has* done for his saints, is but a specimen of what he *will* do for them.—So that we may cry out with the Psalmist, “O what goodness hast thou laid up for them that fear thee, and wrought out for them that trust thee, before the sons of men¹!”—*Jacob* had God's promise that he would do him good, and therefore was led

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to

¹ Psalm. xxxi. 19.

to hope that his brother *Eſau* ſhould do him no harm.—This promiſe was pleaded very reaſonably, *Thou ſaiſt, I will do thee good,* and the preſent was a ſuitable opportunity for God to “make all his goodneſs paſs before him^k.”

2. The other branch of the promiſe relates to his *family*. *I will make thy ſeed as the ſand of the ſea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.* He ſaw that the promiſe was not yet accompliſhed: And therefore that God's promiſe may not fail, *Jacob's* family ſhall be preſerved.—It was for Chriſt's ſake that the Patriarch and his family were delivered: Had *Eſau* gratified his rage in their deſtruction, the purpoſes of God had been fruſtrated, his promiſes broken, and his glory eclipsed. But “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one ſaith, Destroy it not, for a bleſſing is in it: ſo will I do for my ſervants ſakes, that I may not deſtroy them all. I will bring forth a ſeed out of *Jacob*, and out of *Judah* an inheritor of my mountains^l.” Had they been cruſhed, the intereſt of Zion had been ruined for ever.—The ſtar had never aroſe out of *Jacob*, nor the lion of the tribe of *Judah* appeared for the ſalvation of the church.—Bleſſed be God for Jeſus Chriſt; and for all thoſe wonderful ſteps of providence, by which a way was opened for his appearance in the fulneſs of
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^k Exod. xxxiii. 19.—^l Iſa. lxxv. 8, 9.

of time, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

But to draw towards a conclusion.—This subject contains something *instructive* and *encouraging*.—It points out the path of duty in every time of trial.—There is a God that heareth prayer: And to whom shall we seek but unto him.—He is ever ready to hear, and mighty to save.—He has all things at his disposal, and all hearts in his hand.—He can turn the rage of an enemy into friendship, and dispose even the cruel *Esau* to embrace his brother *Jacob*. He can make the overflowing wrath of men to praise him, and shut up the remainder of it when he pleases. Before him, the valley of sorrow is converted into a scene of triumph, and the horrors of destruction into shouts of salvation.—To him then let us look for direction in every undertaking, and for deliverance from every enemy.—“If God be for us, who can be against us^m.” *Jacob* had an interest in God, and this made every thing yield unto him.—God was his counsellor.—God was his keeper. And if you could prevail as he did, then “in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto Godⁿ.”—This is

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your

^m Rom. viii. 31—ⁿ Philip. iv. 6.

your duty, your privilege, and will be your advantage.

Nor does this subject only instruct us in the way of duty, but *encourage* us to persevere therein.—It is not a vain thing to serve the Lord.—And though you may have to wait longer for the deliverance than *Jacob* had; yet you shall not wait in vain.—Rest upon the promise,—plead your relation to him,—invoke his presence,—be strong in his strength,—and in the end, it shall be found, that “Happy is he that hath the God of *Jacob* for his help, and whose hope is in the Lord his God.”

SERMON

• Psalm cxlvi. 5.

S E R M O N X.

God's Name the Sinner's Trust:
Or, A Plea for future Help,
founded on past Experience,

P S A L M xxvii. 9.—Latter Part.

Thou hast been my help, leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

THE penman of this psalm was *David* the king of Israel; a man as remarkably signalized with the tokens of the divine favour, as any that lived either before or after him.—Honoured in the early part of life with the presence, and rescued from danger by the interposing providence of the Almighty;—his conversation was in heaven, and his retirements blest with the sweetest society.—Happy *David*! raised from an obscure station, to vindicate the cause of God, and crush the enemies of Israel!—Exalted from sustaining the shepherd's crook, to sway the sceptre of royalty on the throne of Israel, there to shine no less a prodigy of grace, than the darling of Providence.

Providence.—In the esteem of this no less good, than great man, it was a higher honour to be a servant of God, than to rule over the most distinguished people.—He thought it no disparagement to his wisdom, as a man, or to his character, as a sovereign, to worship God in the sanctuary;—to seek his direction in the cabinet, or to cultivate the fear of him in his palace.—In his devotional engagements, how did his notes rise into all the elevation of sacred harmony; while he proclaimed the greatness and goodness,—the wisdom and power,—the love and mercy of the God of Israel! He views them again and again in the works of nature, providence, and grace! And expresses his love *to*, joy *in*, and submission *to* the God of his salvation.

Praise is a duty which, as intelligent creatures, we owe to God.—The arguments to it are numerous, and the obligation constant; for his mercies and our indigence, are not only new every morning, but are meeting every moment.—Praise is that employment for which the church above are never indisposed, and in which they are never weary.—They praise their God for what he is in himself, and for what he has done for them. They serve him day and night without weariness, abatement, or interruption.—Their hopes are ever in tune, and the subject of
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their song as far from a period, as when they first began.—In short, they move in a perpetual circle of admiration, love, and obedience.

And are there not some happy seasons, even in the present state of imperfection? When the love of God is so shed abroad in the heart; and its *breadth, length, depth, and height* so far discovered to the mind, that the soul is overwhelmed with admiration, and lost in praise?—It labours under the subject, and in the most lofty ideas and expressions comes infinitely short of the exalted theme.—Like the lark, the wings are insufficient to bear them up till the song is ended.

Praise is comely^a.—It is that debt which we owe to the great God; and it is condescension in him to take notice of us in the discharge of it; for he “is exalted above all blessing and praise^b.” Even the songs of Archangels are almost lost in silence, before they reach his throne. If then it is condescension in God to pay any regard to *that*, which may be stiled the most excellent part of the creatures service, O what a stoop of grace must it be, to notice our sighs as well as songs! To listen to our cry, when we are bowed down under the weight of oppression, as well as when exalted in his righteousness! But such is the honour of all his saints: In every trial he permits them to cry to him,
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^a Psalm cxlvii. 1.—^b Nehe. ix. 5, 6.

he commands them to cast their burden on him,—and encourages them to hope in his mercy.—He allows them to form their petitions for present help, upon their past experience of his goodness: And to say with *David, Thou hast been my help, leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.* In which words we have,

- I. The glorious object addressed. *The God of salvation.*
- II. The ingenuous profession made to him. *Thou hast been my help.*
- III. The suitable petitions, founded on the consideration both of the help afforded, and the author affording it. *Leave me not, neither forsake me.*

I. Under the first branch, we shall attend both to the *title* given to God, and the *relation* which the believing soul claims to him under it. Thou art not only the *God of salvation*, but the God of *my* salvation.

I. As to the *title*. Of all characters this is the most honourable. The great Jehovah is stiled the God of power, of wisdom, of glory, of mercy, of grace, &c. but all these are but several branches of that comprehensive name given him in the text.—For wherein is his power most conspicuous,—his wisdom most displayed,—his glory most exalted,—or his mercy and grace most magnified?

nified? Is it not in that great, important, and all-glorious work, the salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ? This is the brightest jewel in his royal diadem, that salvation belongeth to the Lord;—and this is the triumph of the purchased remnant, that their God is the *God of salvation*. They have ample proof of this truth already in what they enjoy, but they wait for brighter manifestations, and larger discoveries in eternity, when the full import of this glorious title shall be unfolded to their view.

O how animating is the thought to a poor sin-convicted, self-condemned sinner, that the God he applies to is the *God of salvation*. Encouraged by this, in the full prospect of his multiplied and aggravated offences, the poor publican cries out, “God be merciful to me a sinner^c.”—He sees that though his sins rendered him unworthy of any thing but hell, yet that they are not too great to be pardoned, by that glorious Being who fills the throne of grace.—He honours God, by an application to him for salvation, and while he confesses his sin, takes comfort from the name of him to whom he makes the confession:—Alternate fear and hope struggle in his labouring breast while he stands before the Lord;—fear of justice, and hope of mercy:—And when he speaks, they unite their influence

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in the same sentence.—Such is the character which God approves. “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy^d.”

In all your applications to a throne of grace, let me intreat you to remember to whom you make known your requests. Are your sins a burden too heavy for you to bear? Do they cover you with shame and confusion, when you would draw near to God? Does a sense of their nature, guilt, and number, lay peculiarly heavy upon your conscience? Remember you have to deal with the God of salvation.—Or have you not only to confess the guilt, but to complain of the power of sin? Does indwelling corruption disturb you,—surprize you into temptation, or molest and interrupt you in sacred duties? Doth it oppose you under some new form, or annoy you under some old appearance? O forget not that your kind father, your best, your constant friend is the *God of salvation*.—Or it may be you are perplexed with this or that dispensation of providence;—you find it very difficult to bear up under a long series of disappointments and crosses;—and you are ready to conclude that you shall be shipwrecked, and overwhelmed in the deep waves of adversity.—Be it so; yet thy God is the *God of salvation*. He sustained his character

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^d Psalm cxlvii. 11.

no lets to *Paul*, while floating on a broken board in the raging ocean, than when the priest of *Jupiter* would have honoured him as a God.—The heaviest trials, the greatest losses which the good old Patriarch sustained, were, no doubt, considered by him as parts of his salvation, when he once more beheld his *Joseph* both in health and honour. Happy the man who by faith takes shelter in the title, and screens himself in the protection of him, who is the *God of salvation*. Happy for us, when we are as nothing in our own esteem; when we see that we deserve nothing from the divine hand but wrath, and when, from the heart, we can leave all to God, all with him, saying, “The will of the Lord be done:”—Happy for us, when we can cordially join in the language of the poet:

Thy will is welcome, let it wear
 It's most tremendous form;
 Roar waves! Rage winds! I know that thou
 Can't save me by a storm.

Humbly wait for God,—patiently follow him:—And though he lead you in a rough path, it will assuredly end in salvation. Indeed I dare not promise the people of God deliverance from particular troubles in this life,—seeing such deliverances might prove their destruction;—but this I dare insure to them, either salvation from their troubles,

or salvation *by* them: For he that is their God, is the *God of salvation*.

But before I dismiss the title, there are *two* comfortable truths involved in it, which we shall insist on a little:—The *first* is, that *no work* is too great for their God to perform: And, *secondly*, that *no season* is unsuitable for him to perform it in.

That no work is too great for him to perform, is evident from his being stiled the *God of salvation*.—What cannot he effect?—Is any thing too hard for him, who can do any thing, yea every thing, but deny himself?—If the publication of his name can receive any additional glory; if his people can reap any real advantage; the rocks shall dissolve at his presence,—the sun stand still at his command, and the very stars in their courses fight against *Sisera*. Be thy case accompanied with as many difficulties, or interwoven with greater improbabilities than that of *Joseph*, this God can make a way through every difficulty for thy deliverance.—His arm is mighty, his word is clothed with omnipotence, his wisdom cannot be counteracted, nor his purpose frustrated. The very sight of his name should dismiss every suspicion of his love, and disarm every doubt of his ability to save to the very utmost.—“They that trust in the Lord shall never be confounded,” for with “the Lord JE-

HOVAH is everlasting strength^c."—He can conquer enemies, support his friends, sanctify nature, preserve and perfect grace, seeing he is the *God of salvation*. As no work is too great for him to perform, so we may add

No season is unsuitable for him to perform it in. We read of many of the heroes of antiquity, who, in particular cases, have been unable to succour their friends, or face their enemies; but can you point out one instance in which God came too late to the aid of his people, when it was his design and honour to save them? Or can you mention one season, when the *God of salvation* was in such disadvantageous circumstances, that he could not effect his pleasure and purpose? Was he too late? Or was it an unsuitable opportunity for him to save, when Israel stood trembling on the banks of the red sea?—Before them a watery grave presents itself to their view, behind them, the insults of the haughty tyrant seem almost to ring in their ears;—on the right hand and on the left they are shut in, as some suppose, by two mountains:—But he that gathers the waters in the hollow of his hand, and marches on the waves for the help of his people, interposed on this occasion. He opens a passage to salvation through the briny waves, bids them rise up for walls of defence

^c Isa. xxvi. 4.

defence on the right hand and on the left, while his people turn their back upon the tyrant, and march forward to liberty ;—then he gives the word of command, and the obedient waves swallow up the haughty foe in ruin. Thus *Israel* saw the work, and sang the praise of the *God of salvation*.—Was the case of the Hebrew youths who were cast into the fiery furnace, too desperate an undertaking for this great Deliverer ? No ; they were saved, and saved with honour. Consider the situation of *Peter* in the prison : See him bound with a chain, surrounded with a guard,—shut in with a gate of iron, condemned to die on the morrow : The Lord sends his Angel and delivers him.—Take a view, likewise, of the widow of *Zarephath*, her all is near spent, and nothing but the horrors of famine and death are in prospect :—All she has to do is to eat her morsel, and sit down and die in the presence of her son ; or to see him expire before her : But even then the miracle begins, the barrel of meal wastes not, neither does the cruise of oil fail ; for her God was the *God of salvation*.—Thus having touched at the title, we proceed,

2. To take a view of that *relation*, which the believing soul claims to God under this character. He addresses him as the *God of his salvation*. As to the rise of this relation, it must

must be resolved into the meer good pleasure of the divine will. He reveals himself in this character to babes and sucklings, while the wise and prudent are left strangers to the saving operations of his grace; and the only reason of such conduct, is because it seemeth good in his sight^f. It is an act of free grace, it is a display of divine sovereignty, when God takes any of the fallen children of *Adam* into this relation to himself. What can we resolve it into short of this, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy^g." Some indeed talk much of preparatives for mercy, and qualifications for grace, but the very sentiment is calculated to destroy every proper notion both of grace and mercy. Mercy knows no other object but misery, and grace is no more grace, if it be not dispensed freely, without money or price. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy^h." The Lord aims at the glory of his grace in the salvation of a sinner; but he will do nothing to nourish the pride of the human heart, or to promote a conceitedness of our sufficiency, to perform any thing that can render us worthy of his favour. No; "The haughtiness of man shall be brought low, and the Lord alone exalted."

^f Matt. xi. 25, 26.—^g Exod. xxxiii. 19.—^h Rom. ix. 16.

altedⁱ.”—It is often, if not generally the case, that he is “found of them that fought him not^k.”—Did the woman of Samaria seek this relation, or was there any thing in her, misery and guilt excepted, to qualify her for the grace she received? Did *Saul* of Tarsus seek this honourable relation, when he was going to Damascus with this express design, to persecute all that called on the name of the Lord Jesus? Yet it was then, even then, that Jesus appeared to him as the *God of his salvation*.—And I might almost venture to affirm, in the name of all those, who, with *David*, are enabled to call God the *God of their salvation*, that they were introduced into this honourable relation in the same way and on the same account. It is by the grace of God that they are what they are.

And where salvation is begun in any heart, the Lord engages to appear for them, and encourages them to trust in him, in all outward difficulties and inward trials: And they that trust in him shall never be confounded, for the *God of salvation* will fill up all the parts of that glorious title, with honour to himself. He “will perfect that which concerneth” them: for “his mercy endureth for ever,” therefore will he not “forsake the work of his own hand^l.”—He that is the author and finisher of their faith, will

ⁱ Isa. ii. 11.—^k Isa. lxxv. 1.—^l Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

liver: in whom we also trust that he will deliver us^t."

Neither forsake me,—for thou ART the God of my salvation: Though clouds gather darkness succeeds, and the deliverance doth not yet appear, yet thou abidest faithful.—Thy character is the same,—thou not only *hast been the God of my salvation*, but thou *art so still*. Thou changeest not, therefore I am not, I shall not be consumed.

And now to conclude.—Having laid before you the character and conduct of this eminent Saint, permit me to ask, how doth it comport with yours? Have the eyes of your understanding been opened to see the divine glory, and take in the sacred consolations contained in this honourable title, *the God of salvation*? Have you been ever humbled from a view of sin, as rendering you unworthy of every blessing, and deserving of every curse? Have you ever, with pleasing astonishment, taken a view of the divine appearances for you? And doth this encourage you to hope and plead, and wait for full salvation?—If this be the case, I congratulate you on your experience.—The Lord preserve you in *David's* frame, till you are admitted to join him above in songs of praise.

But I fear you are not all acquainted with the blessed God in this character.—

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Remember

^t 2 Cor. i. 10.

Remember the very opportunity to cultivate an acquaintance with him, as a *God of salvation* will soon be over with you. At present we have his authority to entreat you to be reconciled to him.—Christ, as his unspeakable gift, and free salvation by him, are held forth to you in the gospel:—But if you reject the *one* and slight the *other*,—let me beg of you to consider what will be the consequence. If you die in a state of ignorance and alienation from the *God of salvation*, you must,—I tremble while I pronounce it,—you must be cast off from his presence for ever! O sinner, to warn you is my duty, and yet, it is impossible to express the pain I feel in doing it; seeing every warning that is not accompanied with success, has a tendency to increase your condemnation.—But I must here pause, and leave you, with what has now been delivered, in the hands of the *God of my salvation*; to whom be ascribed everlasting praise.
Amen.

SERMON

S E R M O N XI.

The spiritual Banquet: Or, Provision made in God's House for needy Sinners.

SONG of SOLOMON ii. 4.

He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love.

COMMUNION with God is that sacred privilege, which gracious souls breathe after at all times; but in a particular manner at the return of those solemn seasons wherein he frequently manifests himself unto them, as he doth not unto the world. To enjoy a nearer approach, a clearer discovery, and a more endearing embrace from their Covenant-Father, is their prevailing ambition and humble supplication. To be captivated with the charms of this eternal beauty, to be bound fast with the cords of his everlasting love, to have the mind employed in the contemplation, and the heart overpowered with the discovery of his excellencies, is that painful pleasure which the soul ardently desires. I call it *painful*, be-

cause through the frailty of our nature, and the infirmities incident to the body, in its present lapsed state, such discoveries have a tendency to overpower, and in some cases, have almost dissolved the tie which unites us to it. There is a joy in believing, which, by a sacred efficacy, penetrates the inmost soul, sweetens the most bitter affliction, and suspends the most excruciating pain. The Apostle Peter styles it "joy unspeakable and full of glory^a." And there are seasons when God deals out the sacred *nectar* with a liberal hand; the quality delights, but the quantity is almost too much for them. Something of this the Apostle Paul experienced, when he could scarce determine whether he was in the body, or separate from it. And have not some of you now present, enjoyed clearer discoveries, both of the happiness and glory of heaven, in some blessed moment of intercourse with God, than from all the sermons you ever heard, or books that you have ever read? You have found that access to God, discoveries of him, and communion with him, were the very soul of happiness. In such a season his tabernacles have been amiable, his ordinances so many wells of salvation, and his word an exhaustless treasure of comfort. Your joy was such as no man could take from you, nor was it in your power to communicate the least discovery of it to your dearest friend.

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^a 1 Peter i. 8.

O happy moment! Desirable season! When God takes his children, as it were, by the hand, to introduce them into the secret chambers of communion. When the designs of sovereign love break out in communicative streams of mercy and grace: When he resolves to visit his own graces in the soul, and is pleased to make himself known as a Covenant-God, to his pleading people: When he owns his work in their hearts, and removes every suspicion concerning the reality of it from the mind: When he confirms his love to the soul, and evidences that it is his fixed, his unalterable purpose to establish, preserve, and perfect that which concerneth it.

That there are ordinances instituted, with express design to promote communion between God and his people, is evident from the sacred scripture; and the history of the church, in all ages, is a sufficient proof, how well the design has been answered. Ordinances are for communion; and in them the believing sinner gives up himself, and all his concerns to God:—Gives up his heart to be purified from sin, and doubts, and fears; to be moulded into the will, to be filled with the presence, and to be prepared for the fullest enjoyment of him. On the other hand, God makes himself over to the believer as a suitable, sufficient, and satisfying portion. Declares his readiness to pardon freely, save completely, and crown
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the whole with everlasting felicity. And the solemnity is ratified with this gracious promise, I will be thy God, and thou shalt be my child.

Are your souls fired with an holy desire after so exalted a privilege? Then be assured that all things are ready for the accomplishment of that desire: And while the word encourages, the ministers of the gospel invite you to give up the heart to God; and if by grace you are enabled to make this surrender, the privilege of the church, recorded in the text, shall be verified in your experience. *You shall be brought into the banqueting-house, and have the banner of his love unfurled on your account.*

As to this Song of Solomon, it is the opinion of the generality of ancient expositors, both Jews and Christians, that it has a respect to the Messiah, and is descriptive of that love and communion, which subsists between him and his church. It is of the same nature with the *forty-fifth* Psalm, and probably composed on the same occasion. All the beauties of the East are collected together. The images are so bold, the language so animating, and the matter so important, that an honest enquirer must at once reap both instruction and delight. Herein the Saviour manifests himself under an embroidered veil, and while his church admires the beauty of the covering, he indulges

dulges her with a discovery of the glory of his countenance.—In the whole, he appears as “the chief of ten thousand, and altogether lovely.”

The words now under consideration, are evidently descriptive of that high honour, that holy privilege with which he favours his church. To her he manifests himself as he doth not unto the world. He admits her into that state of friendship and communion, which is productive of a joy that strangers intermeddle not with.—*He brought me into the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love.* From which words we are naturally led to enquire.

- I. What is meant by the *banqueting-house*.
- II. What is implied in her being *brought* into it by Christ.—And,
- III. The distinguishing honour held forth on this occasion: *His banner over me was love.*

I. A banqueting-house is that place where the choicest wine is set forth in the greatest variety and plenty, to refresh and regale those who are reputed friends. I shall not take up the time in giving the various senses which expositors have put on the words, but fix upon *that*, which, to me, appears the most natural. Gospel ordinances,

ces, I presume, are the banqueting-house here referred to. This sense seems not only to accord with the context, but to receive some additional confirmation from the remarkable prediction the Prophet gives us of gospel times. “In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people, a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things, full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined ^b.”

If we examine the records of antiquity, we shall find that banquets were made on two accounts; either *to display the riches and magnificence of the provider*, or *to commemorate some great event*.

1. Sometimes a banquet was made *to display the riches and magnificence of the provider*. Hence we read of an Eastern Prince, who made such a feast for his Nobles, as lasted for an hundred and fourscore days: And we are further told, that his express design was “to shew the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty ^c.” And with what view were the ordinances of the gospel instituted, but to display the exceeding riches of God’s grace, and the super-abundant treasure of his wisdom, greatness, and power? “He abounds towards us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of his will ^d.” The expence of this feast he hath supported in
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^b Isa. xxv. 6.—^c Esther i. 4.—^d Ephes. i. 8.

will bring forth “the head-stone with shouting grace; grace unto it^m.” From the object addressed, we now pass on,

II. To the ingenuous profession made to him: *Thou hast been my help.* This profession originates in a review of the great love, rich grace, and abundant mercy which God had displayed in his dealings with him.—He had pardoned, comforted, and supported him;—and while he reflects on the repeated interpositions of the divine hand in his behalf, it appears an indubitable fact, that the Lord was both his keeper and helper.

Under this head we might insist on the manner *how*,—the instances *in which*, and the seasons *when* God helps his people.—But, passing these by, we shall rather touch on the nature of this confession:—And we may observe, that it is a *God-honouring* and a *soul-supporting declaration*.

1. It is a profession which *honours* God. He loves to hear his people dwell upon his favours,—exalt his goodness, and make fresh application to his mercy.—And how could the Psalmist more fully honour God, than in the review of all that goodness and mercy with which he had been followed, to say, *Thou hast been my help?*

In this he honoured the *goodness* and *mercy* of his deliverer: Thou hast been *my help*,

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though absolutely unworthy, though undeserving of the least expression of thy favour, yet, O the surprising riches of grace! my help hath been found in the Lord. The generosity of a liberal mind is, in some cases, displayed to great advantage in the object of their liberality: Thus, when a superior succours the necessities of those that are below him, when there is no prospect of any return, it is an evidence of a generous nature, and a compassionate heart.—But if the subject of all this kindness never discover the least sense of gratitude or obligation,—would it not be just in his benefactor to stay his hand and deny all further assistance?—Certainly it would.—But if instead of this, notwithstanding his apparent inattention and ingratitude, these favours should be continued, should be increased, should be aggravated by fresh instances of kindness, how would such a conduct tend to illustrate the character of their author? And is not this really the case between God and us? In how many instances hath he helped us, when our ingratitude for past favours, and doubts with respect to future deliverances, have been sufficient to provoke him to stay his hand, and leave us to confusion. O what unfruitfulness, ingratitude, unworthiness, distrust, opposition, and rebellion against the God of our mercies. The very thought is distressing:—And yet we have this day to lift up our voices,
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and say, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped usⁿ."—It is because his compassions fail not, that we are not consumed.

As this confession honours the goodness and mercy of God, so likewise his *wisdom* and *power*. Thou hast been my *help*, though the case has often been as difficult, as the subject was unworthy.—When hope has been ready to expire,—when all prospect of deliverance hath been taken away, when nothing short of infinite wisdom and almighty power could give birth to the mercy, *thou hast been my help*.—Seasonably thou hast interposed in my behalf, and snatched me as a brand from the burning.—Frequently has thy gracious hand broke the snare, delivered my soul as a bird, and led captivity captive.—*David* had very large experience of God's care over him.—How often is he brought upon the very verge of ruin, that mercy might be magnified, and the power of God displayed in his salvation?—How does his confession place the crown of honour on the head of the Almighty! How doth such a declaration sink the soul in the very dust of humility! while the secret language of the heart is this, "Who is a God like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders^o?" "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name be the glory^p."

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ⁿ 1 Sam. vii. 12.—^o Exod. xv. 11.—^p Psalm cxv. 1.

2. As it is a God-honouring, so it is a *soul-supporting* consideration. It braces up the nerves of expectation, girds up the loins of the mind, and enables the soul to endure, under the greatest discouragements, the most complicated trials, as seeing him that is invisible. The man reasons thus, Hath he helped me in all former difficulties, and will he fail me now? Hath he engaged, by promise, to defend me, and will he alter the thing that hath gone out of his lips?—Has he laid the foundation of a gracious deliverance in my heart already, and shall the building fail for want of his finishing hand? No; I dare not admit so dishonourable a thought of him that is the *God of my salvation*. *Thou hast been my help*, and the remembrance of this gives fresh strength to faith, hope, and expectation.—This is the dawn of new comfort, and a pledge of new deliverance. “I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me^a.”—We have a remarkable instance of this manner of pleading in the case of *Moses*:—The Lord being angry with Israel, threatens to destroy them as transgressors, and raise *Moses* to the greatest honour. “I will smite them,” saith he, “with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a great nation, and mightier than they.”—But, unmoved with the prospect of

^a Psalm lviii. 2.

so great an honour;—far more concerned for God's glory than his own, he pleads with him in the most effectual, I had almost said, in the most irresistible manner. “And *Moses* said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them); and they will tell it to the inhabitants of the land: for they have heard that thou, Lord, art among this people, that thou, Lord, art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day-time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now, if thou kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee, will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt, even until now’.”—You see he rests the whole weight

’ Numb. xiv. 13—19.

of his plea on the honour of God's power,—the truth of his promise,—the plenitude of his grace,—the riches of his mercy, and the immutability of his engagements.—In short, he fetches his argument for future help, from what they had already experienced.

There may arise objections from a real conviction of our misimprovement of former favours, and unworthiness of future help; but the words, now under consideration, furnish a suitable answer to all such objections, I am, saith the humble soul, undeserving of help; but was it not always so? I am unworthy of the least mercy that ever I received, but I can as soon doubt my existence as deny this truth, that *thou hast been my help*.—And seeing this is the case, I will hope in the Lord, and patiently wait for the *God of my salvation*.—He will hear me, he will help me.—But we shall now proceed to the *third* thing proposed, viz.

III. The suitable petitions founded on this two-fold consideration, viz. The help afforded, and the author affording it. These are two, *leave me not, neither forsake me*.

1. *Leave me not*, which signifies much the same as the first words in the verse, “hide not thy face from me:” As if he had said, Cease not to work *in* me, cease not to work *for* me.

Work

Work *in* me that realizing sense of thy presence, that evidence of my relation to thee, that confidence in thy power, and that submission to thy pleasure, which becomes one whose only help is in the Lord. Let me not want the sense of thy favour in my own soul, guide me with thy counsel, direct me by thy unerring wisdom, let thy presence be with me, and grant me peace. If straitened without, let me experience enlargement within; let duty be my delight, and work in me, both to will and to do of thy own good pleasure.

Cease not to work *for* me;—but O perfect that which concerneth me. Forsake not the work of thine own hands, and prove that thy mercy endureth for ever. Remove difficulties, sanctify crosses, enrich me by losses, bear me up in fresh trials, and leave me not, O thou *God of my salvation*.

2. The other petition is, *neither forsake me: Or, Put not away thy servant in displeasure*, as in the former part of the verse. By reason of our diffidence, the Lord might justly hide his face from us, and deprive us of his presence in the use of gospel ordinances; or, for our unfruitfulness, he might remove us from those privileges in displeasure. This petition then is, in effect, a confession, that it would be just in God to forsake us utterly. And the only reason we have to hope, the only ground we have to plead that he

he would not, is his own gracious promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." It is then, as much as if the Royal Suppliant had said, Lord, however thou art pleased to chastise me, yet do not consume me; leave me not either to my own counsels or fears;—forsake not thy charge of me, or care concerning me. If it is good in thy sight to keep me low, or lead me through a variety of difficulties; yet "cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me." In the enjoyment of thy presence, I can bear up in the absence of every outward comfort, but if thou withdraw I shall be miserable under the robe of royalty, miserable at the head of a kingdom. "O forsake me not:" In fresh trials, afford fresh comforts: In new difficulties, step in with new deliverances. And let me never be left to that hell, which consists in being cast out from thy presence.

In fine, how closely are these petitions connected with the consideration of what God had wrought *for* him, and was *to* him. *Leave me not, for thou hast been my help.* A God that we have tried, is a God that we may trust.—Past deliverances, like the setting sun, illumine our horizon, and encourage us to hope for a return. This was the experience of St Paul, "He who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver:

* Heb. xiii. 5.

... book & leaves

the world for more than *seventeen* hundred years, but yet his grace remains inexhausted. From eternity it was his determination to make known “the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Jesus Christ.” Is not this, brethren, the substance of every message, which the ministers of the gospel bring to you from time to time? That God is so rich in grace, so abundant in mercy, that, in Christ, he can pardon the vilest; and so great in power, that he can save the weakest. They proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, and ever desire, though with great imperfection, to display all the fulness of God. O what a banquet are sinners invited to in the gospel! What a tide of mercy is ever flowing upon them! We may bathe in this boundless ocean of grace, and drink those salutary waters, of which whosoever drinketh shall thirst no more. It is the King of kings, who hath opened this banqueting-house, and displayed his royal munificence, by furnishing it at such vast expence. When he gave his Son, his spirit, yea himself, did he not prove that the riches of his treasure were infinite, and the largeness of his heart inconceivable? “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” The banquet is opened, and the

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invitation

invitation runs, "Eat O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved^s." Prove the freeness of my grace, the extent of my mercy, and the largeness of my love. It is not in the nature of my riches to be exhausted by your poverty, nor shall the provision I have made, be found insufficient to answer your wants: I will supply them all, "according to the riches of my glory, by Jesus Christ^h." He is a great King, and will be magnified in his provision, and by his guests.

2. Banquets were sometimes intended, as *commemorations of some great event*. Such probably was that feast mentioned in the book of *Daniel*, which *Belsazzar* made for his lords, and which gave an opportunity to *Cyrus* of taking the city by surprise. Such, likewise, were the *Purim* of the Jews, and the *Saturnalia* of the Romans.

Gospel ordinances are not only expressive of the magnificence of Zion's sovereign, but also commemorative of the most important events. They are intended to bring to the mind the boundless pity, the wonderful sufferings, and gracious designs of the compassionate Saviour. They present to the view those matchless blessings and invaluable privileges which flow to sinners, through the death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession of the great Redeemer. In every
act

act of religious worship we are invited to look back to Jesus, when he so freely undertook our cause, and so faithfully performed every engagement: When, by himself, he fought our battles, vanquished our enemies, and procured our title to the heavenly inheritance: When he brought in an everlasting righteousness, magnified the law, completed the glorious work of redemption, and became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him: When he opened a blessed intercourse between earth and heaven, united angels and men in one family, and furnished his treasury with such a variety and fulness, as shall be found sufficient to supply the whole company of his redeemed. In all your attendance therefore upon God's house, remember Jesus; shew forth his death as the ground of your hope, and glory in his salvation as your highest honour. Whether you pray or praise, hear the word, or attend upon ordinances of special communion; O remember that Jesus by whom these ordinances were instituted, and through whom alone they become profitable to you. It is a great event, that you have to commemorate in the banqueting-house of the great Jehovah.—An event, which secured a sinking world from falling back into a chaos of confusion.—An event, which astonished all the hosts of heaven, and will fill eternity with its glory.—How much depended upon this

great event, is only fully comprehended by the glorious inhabitants of eternity: But if you would learn something of that inexhaustible subject, upon which their ideas are perpetually enlarging, let me give it you in the thoughts of a modern writer. In the cross of Christ, “the glory of
 “the Creator was eminently displayed, all
 “the divine persons were gloriously manifested, the divine attributes magnified,
 “the divine works and ways honoured; the
 “earth was redeemed, hell conquered, heaven opened, the law magnified and established; its commandments fulfilled, its
 “curse suffered, the law was satisfied, the
 “criminal that broke it saved, and his
 “tempter and accuser defeated. The head
 “of the old Serpent was bruised, his works
 “destroyed, and the principalities and
 “powers of darkness spoiled and triumphed
 “over openly. The principalities and
 “powers of heaven received new matter of
 “everlasting Hallelujahs, and new companions joined in them. The fallen angels lost their old subjects, and the blessed
 “angels received new fellow-citizens.”

What a glorious undertaking was it! What important events grow out of it! May we ever glory in the cross of Christ, till glorified in his presence. And in the meantime, while at humble distance, and with imperfect services, we attend his lower courts,

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may this blessed subject fill our souls with joy and wonder.

In royal banquets they were careful *to provide good old generous wine, such as would be agreeable to every taste, and tend to exhilarate the spirits of all their guests.* Let us now see how these remarks may be applied to the subject in hand. And,

(1.) Did they set before their guests such wine as was esteemed *valuable on account of its age and quality?* In like manner, God, in the ordinances of the gospel, displays that love which is everlasting, that grace which was given in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, that eternal covenant which is ordered in all things and sure. This, all this, he sets before his waiting family, to comfort and support them while engaged in his service. That gospel which *we* preach, and *you* profess to believe, is the product of eternal wisdom and everlasting love. It is no human device, no modern contrivance, and not to be confined to age or nation: No; it was preached in Paradise, and is handed down to us in these distant ages in its original purity, but with additional brightness. In gospel ordinances, the designs, undertakings, and engagements of the sacred Three, are set forth to view; and you are invited to drink at the fountain of electing love, and enter into those chambers, in which God has laid up all his treasure.

sure. It is here made manifest, that the first revelation of a Saviour, almost six thousand years ago, contained all that salvation afterward to be more fully revealed to the church. What was the original promise, but the first-born which came forth from the womb of an everlasting purpose. Here the soul finds room to stretch out all her powers, and the mind is led to see that the thoughts of God's heart towards saved sinners, is from everlasting to everlasting. This is that good old generous wine which maketh glad the heart of man.

(2.) Did they, in banquets, provide such *a variety as was suited to the taste of their numerous guests?* So in gospel ordinances, there is not only provision for the whole family of faith, but such provision as is best adapted to the age, strength, and circumstances of each in particular. The sublimest truths are conveyed under the plainest similitudes, and the plainest set forth in the sublimest language. By those means we learn, that our God hath provided the most solid supports for the feeble-minded, and subjects suited to employ the human understanding, when most enlarged and assisted by the spirit of the Lord. In short, he hath collected together all the beauties of nature, and all the blessings of grace, that his saints may be both pleased and profited by the same means, and at the same season. In what a diversity of lights
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is the adorable Saviour presented to our view? As the propitiation, intercessor, and advocate of his people:—As the friend, and brother, and husband of his church: As the refuge, bulwark, and fortress of the oppressed; and as the Saviour, sanctifier, and portion of his redeemed. Under what a variety of offices is the blessed Spirit also described, as uniting in, advancing and perfecting the same great design? It is the Spirit that convinces the guilty, comforts the sorrowful, and confirms the wavering; that mortifies sin in our nature, and implants, preserves, and perfects grace in the soul. It is the Spirit who reveals Christ to the understanding, enables the soul to lay hold on him as the propitiation for sin, and to follow hard after him in the path of holiness, as the complete pattern of obedience. Again, by gospel ordinances, what a collection of promises are set before us? Some suited to those who are oppressed with guilt, fear, or corruption: others adapted to quicken the languid, support the feeble, or encourage those that are dissident;—all, aiming at one thing, and yet tending, by different means, to bring about that glorious event. Never was unity of design, and diversity of means, tending to its accomplishment, so admirably, so wonderfully displayed, as in that revelation with which we are privileged. Here we have pardon for the guilty, salvation for the miserable,

miserable, peace for the rebellious, joy for the sorrowful, an eternal inheritance, and a kingdom of glory for the unworthy. The gospel table is richly furnished, the invitation is unlimited, and the provision freely dispensed without money or price — Once more.

(3.) Was it the design of those that made banquets, *to exhilarate the countenance of their friends?* And for what end is the gospel and its ordinances instituted, but that believing we may rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory; and that our faith and hope may be in God? Fellowship with Christ, is that royal banquet wherein his followers are largely refreshed, greatly satisfied, and abundantly strengthened. They are encouraged against every enemy, comforted under every fear and trial, and their faces made to shine with the brightest expectations. They rejoice in pardoning mercy and saving grace; in the provision made, and the prospects of happiness and honour set before them. — Rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and in the security that the covenant, promises, and perfections of God give them, that they shall attain it. They rejoice in the strength, the wisdom, the faithfulness, the glory of God; and see that *strength* engaged to keep, — that *wisdom* to guide, — that *faithfulness* to perform all to them, and that *glory* to be greatly advanced in all by them. — They rejoice in the promise and prospect of

a complete victory over sin, Satan, the world, and death; as well as in that crown of righteousness, that palm of victory, that garment of salvation, and those mansions of glory which are already in the hands of Christ, for them. In fine, they rejoice as they travel towards Zion, in the prospect of being shortly for ever with the Lord. Thus they hold on their way rejoicing, and wax stronger and stronger, till they appear perfect in love, before the presence of their God in glory.—From the banquet, let us pass on,

II. To enquire what is implied in Christ's bringing the church into his banqueting-house.—In the *general* we may remark, that hereby all the praise and honour is ascribed to him. *He*, the matchless, the gracious *He*, brought me, sinful as I *was*, and unworthy as I *am*; brought me not only into his family as a servant, but as a friend, as a favourite *into his banqueting-house*; where he made all his goodness to pass before me, and displayed his glory and love unto me.—But, in *particular*, it holds forth,

1. That we could never have obtained entrance of ourselves. He leads in a way that we know not. It must indeed be granted, that a person may act a voluntary part, in waiting upon the ordinances of God's house: But though we attend there ourselves,

or bring our near friends or dear relations with us, all is ineffectual till he bring the heart into the service. No spiritual advantage, no saving good is enjoyed, till Christ take sinners under his conduct, and sweetly allure them into fellowship with himself: And where he leads, they shall go in and out and find refreshment. O brethren, it is sweet attending upon ordinances, when we are under the drawings of the Father, the constraints of the Saviour's love, and a kind of holy necessity, from the Spirit, to approach the throne of grace. In such a season, the world vanishes from our view, and we experimentally know what it is, to "have fellowship with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christⁱ." Perhaps some of you, to whom I now address myself, once attended under the gospel, wholly unacquainted with those blessed influences of which we now speak; but you have since enjoyed such discoveries, and experienced such pleasure as you once knew not, nor ever could have known, had not Christ graciously visited you, and taken you under his conduct. While many come and go, without being admitted into the secret chambers, it is your privilege to enter into his banqueting-house and partake of his royal favours. But who made you to differ? Not yourselves, not your friends, not your parents, or ministers; but

ⁱ 1 John i. 3.

but that God, who, of his sovereign pleasure, “hides these things from the wise and prudent, and reveals them to babes^k.” O never forget how deeply you are indebted to that Christ, who made the provision and led you to it.

2. When it is said *he brought me into the banqueting-house*: Is it not also expressive of his amazing condescension, in taking creatures so vile and unworthy into fellowship with himself*? When he found you, were you not in a state of poverty, misery, and ruin? The slaves of sin, the enemies of righteousness, the children both of disobedience and wrath? Was there any thing amiable in you to attract his notice, or excite his regard? Quite the reverse: If impurity could be agreeable to his holiness, or contempt stir up his love, this might have been the case; but you know it was for his own sake, he both pitied and pardoned you. Frequently consider then what a stoop of grace, what an effort of mercy, what a stretch of compassion it was to take you out of a state of condemnation, to bring you *to his banqueting-house*, and honour you in it.

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^k Matt. xi. 25.

* The admitting a person to a banquet of wine, seems to have been a mark of *distinction and preference*: Thus it was esteemed by *Haman*, when admitted by *Queen Esther*, to the banquet she had prepared. See *Esther* v. 9, 10, 11, 12.

How has he snatched you from poverty, and brought you to plenty? How has he changed the deserved curse into unmerited kindness? Truly blessed is the man whom the Lord chooseth and causeth to approach unto him, that he may dwell in his courts; he shall be satisfied with the goodness of his house, even of his holy temple¹. Such may with propriety adapt the poet's song:

'Twas the same love that spread the feast,
That sweetly forc'd us in;
Else we had still refus'd to taste,
And perish'd in our sin.

3. When the church or believer says, *He brought me into the banqueting-house*, it shews further the kindness of Christ, in raising them above every fear and doubt, and filling them with holy joy and heavenly peace*. At seasons they have been ready to sink under a variety of discouragements, or conclude that they had neither part nor lot in the Saviour. The guilt of their past conduct, the corruption of nature, and the dark dispensations of providence, have all contributed to augment their suspicion, that they had no interest

¹ Psalm lxxv. 4.

* The giving a person *drink*, is, among the people of the Levant, an assurance of friendship, and that they may lay aside *suspicion and distrust*: It seems to have been the same anciently among the Jews. See *the out-lines of a new commentary on Solomon's Song*.

intrest in the covenant of grace.—Such, for a time, has been the painful experience of God's dear children; but afterwards they have felt their fears disarmed, their faith confirmed, and their souls delighted. They have found the blood of Christ every way efficacious to purge the conscience, and his grace sufficient to save to the uttermost. They have been supported by him, and enabled to glory in him as their strength and righteousness. These divine supports and consolations are probably intended, by what is said in the *sixth* verse. “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.”—It now only remains that we consider,

III. The honourable manner in which such are introduced into the banqueting-house. *His banner over me was love.* Love, Almighty love was displayed. So that “as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, our God rejoiceth over his church and people^m.” The intent of banners is various.

They are designed to *collect* persons together. And is it not by the preaching, and exhibition of Christ's dying love to lost sinners, that they are converted to him, comforted by him, and collected into several companies to seek and serve him? Hereby the love of God in Christ, is richly, is gloriously

^m Isa. lxii. 5.

riously displayed, in saving the lost, in satisfying the needy. But, sirs, be it your concern to enquire whether this banner has ever been so displayed, as to draw forth your hearts in love to him. Have you lifted under his standard, and surrendered yourselves to his service? Have you ever felt the attracting, constraining, captivating effects of this love upon your souls? How does the consideration of the love of Christ, manifested in leaving his Father's bosom, in assuming our nature, and dying for the salvation of sinners;—How doth it draw out the soul in grateful wonder and chearful obedience!—When the heart is directed into the love of God, you rejoice to go to him, through Christ, as having pitied you,—remembered you,—yea, loved you, when dead in trespasses and sins.

The unfurling of banners is also expressive of *victory*. And where the sinner is conquered by omnipotent love, is it not highly proper that Christ should display his banner! By nature our hearts are so obdurate, as to resist every thing but the power of Christ's grace: But if he condescend to shed abroad his love in the heart, it slays corruption, dispels the darkness of guilt and ignorance, and brings every thought into obedience to Christ. This confirms the graces of the spirit, and establishes confidence. That hope shall never be put to the blush,

blush, which hath the promise of the heavenly inheritance in view, and the earnest of it in possession. For “hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto usⁿ.” So that the banner of love signifies, not only that Christ hath conquered for us, but also that he will conquer in us, and reign supreme in the soul.

Banners are for *distinction*: And this ensign over them, shews that they are the distinguished subjects of sovereign, efficacious, discriminating love.—They are chosen out of the world, and separated from it. The divine affection is fixed upon them, and therefore they shall be received into glory, perfect before him in love. Love is the *cause*, and the manifestation of that love the *end* of all his dealings in his church.—Having loved them, he calls, justifies, sanctifies, and will glorify them. “He will present it to himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish^o.”

On the whole. If such be the privilege of God’s favourites, then how are thoughtless sinners to be pitied? A deceived heart hath turned them aside, they feed upon ashes, and are rushing upon destruction. Christ and his fulness are set before you in
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ⁿ Rom, v. 5.—^o Ephes. v. 27.

the gospel: But do not many remain entire strangers to that joy, peace, and fellowship, which his true followers enjoy through believing?—You hear him described as a Saviour; but what know you of his salvation? As the gift of God; but you have never cordially received him as such:—As the bread of life; yet you never fed upon him:—As the righteousness of his people; but you have never yet put him on.—Let me beseech you to consider both your state and danger. You know no more of christianity than the name, nor of godliness than the form.—You pursue happiness, but are under the conduct of a bad guide. Unless Christ lead you, you will die as you live, strangers to his unsearchable riches;—strangers to the provision of his house;—strangers to that happiness and honour, which are the fruits of believing. May he make you sensible of your need, and willing to follow him for a supply.—Willing to go to him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;—willing to part with all for his sake, and to receive him as the All that you can need.—In short, willing to attend to, and comply with the invitation of him that says, “If any man thirst let him come to me and drink^p.”

Again. Such of you as have been *brought into this banqueting-house*, what cause have you

^p John vii. 37.

you to be thankful for the privilege? What reason to be humbled, on account of the small improvement you have made of it? Frequently remember how the Lord has been pleased to honour you, and as frequently make it your inquiry, “what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?”—And while you feel your hearts glow with increasing gratitude for present enjoyments, endeavour to anticipate the discoveries of that blessed day, when the work of salvation shall be brought to maturity. O what a glorious shout of victory shall be heard! When all the ransomed of the Lord shall be gathered together, and, under the banner of eternal love, be introduced to the banquet in heaven.—When *Abraham*, with all his sons and daughters, shall tune their songs to the common Author of their bliss! When the glories of the Redeemer shall be unveiled,—the counsels of eternity be ripened,—the mysteries of providence unfolded, and the honours of the Lord be exalted!—Glorious season!—When the fulness of God will be the feast, and his glory the ceaseless subject of their meditation!—“But eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what he hath prepared for them that love him.”—Suffice it to say, there God will be

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all in all : There, all his faints will be eternally happy with him.

His throne their centre, and his smile their crown.

That it may be our blessed privilege to enlarge that circle, and partake of that smile, through an endless eternity, may God of his abundant mercy grant, for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

SERMON

S E R M O N XII.

God's Word the best Companion:
Or, The Duty of Parents and
Children with respect to the Scrip-
ture,

P R O V E R B S vi. 22.

*When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou
sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou
awakest, it shall talk with thee.*

AS travellers passing through a dreary wilderness, we need a guide; as strangers in an enemy's country, we require a guard; and as those who may expect to meet with many trials and difficulties, we require both a counsellor and comforter. The words now read, refer us to a subject every way adapted to answer these ends; every way suited to our state and condition. Here we have a wise guide, a strong guard, and a faithful friend recommended to us; one that will lead us into truth, defend us from danger, and succour us in the hour of temptation.

temptation. And in order to claim our attention, we may remark, that this recommendation is given by *Solomon*, one of the greatest of earthly kings, and the wisest of mortals; one who sought his knowledge from above, and was directed by the spirit of wisdom, to pen those sacred morals as a rule for our conduct and conversation. This manner of instructing by proverbs, was much used amongst the ancients. Great truths were couched in few words; that they might be soon repeated, and not easily forgot. *Solomon* is said to have spoke *three thousand* of them; but those handed down to us in this book, contain sufficient rules for every station in life; for sovereigns and subjects, masters and servants, high and low, parents and children, buyer and seller.— And the diligent perusal of those sacred precepts, will conduce more to inform the mind, and improve the life, than the generality of publications, which are but too eagerly sought after by young and old, in this degenerate age.

It is generally supposed that this book was composed by King *Solomon*, for the advantage of his son *Rehoboam*, as a guard to him against sin, and as a guide in the path of duty. And indeed it holds forth sound divinity as well as good morality. The grace of Christ is set forth in the latter part of the *first* chapter, and the glory of Christ,
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in his person and office, in the *eighth* and *ninth* chapters. — Upon this foundation he raises a beautiful superstructure of morality. It is the grace of Christ alone which refines, polishes, and makes us living stones, fit to compose the fair temple of holiness. *Solomon*, like a wise master-builder, lays Christ as the foundation; and if we would have the building to stand, we must imitate his example: Ministers in their preaching, and the people in their practice. If we are strangers to the grace of Christ, as the principle, and the glory of Christ, as the end of our obedience, all our morality will be but like fruit upon a broken branch, which though it hang upon the tree, yet being deprived of sap, is shriveled and good for nothing: It is both displeasing to the eye, and a disgrace to the root which bears it. O my brethren, keep a steady eye upon the Lord Christ, in all you do. View his life, as the example, his death, as the constraining argument to all acceptable obedience*: “And whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus^a,” *i. e.* do it as those that belong to him, depend on him, receive from his fulness, and aim at his glory.

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* ————— O thou bleeding Love!
Thou maker of *new* morals to mankind!
The *grand* morality is love of Thee.

^a Col. iii. 17.

The five first verses of this chapter contain a very necessary caution against entering into *suretyship* with strangers, which, in the event, has often proved a distress to individuals, and the ruin of whole families.—He then proceeds to guard against *indolence*, which is not more prejudicial to bodily health, than it is inconsistent with real religion:—It tends to impair strength, prevent usefulness in society, and to incapacitate the soul for those spiritual services which the Lord requires.—From this, he passes on to describe the vile character, and final confusion of the malicious and wicked man: “Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually, he soweth discord. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken, without remedy. He then enumerates *seven* things which are peculiarly displeasing to the Almighty, a proud heart,—lying lips,—defiled hands,—wicked imaginations,—alacrity in doing mischief,—perjury,—and sowing discord amongst brethren. Pride is placed in the front, as it is the root of all sin, and an ingredient in every sin. Then he calls upon his son *Rehoboam*, and in him, upon all that have been privileged with a religious education, to attend to the counsel of those who endeavoured to bring them up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord^b.”

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^b Ephes. vi. 4.

The text may be considered both as the living and dying charge of the godly parent. *My son keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother. Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.* In this discourse we shall,

- I. Consider the *subject*, to which this promise refers. *When thou goest, IT shall lead thee.*
- II. Open the several branches of the promise, in the order here described.

I. In order to determine the subject to which this promise relates, we must have recourse to the preceding and subsequent context. In the preceding verses it is called the *commandment of our father* and the *law of our mother*; not I apprehend any injunction imposed by them, but that *command*, that *law* which they received from God, as a *rule* both for their conduct, and our instruction. So that it means, that eternal rule of duty, that revelation of grace and mercy which is contained in the sacred scriptures. That the revelation of God is designed by these phrases, is very evident from the reason annexed to the words of the text: "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and
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reproofs of instruction are the ways of life^c." In perfect unison with this, *David*, speaking of the revelation of God to the church, says, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path^d:" Sufficient for all seasons, by night to guide, by day to comfort: Sufficient to lead me through every difficulty, and enrich me with every consolation.—This shall inform the judgment, warm the heart, and both influence and adorn the conduct.—By the law and commandment here mentioned, we are not to confine our view to the moral law; for that would be to contract the subject, more than was designed by the Holy Ghost. It means the whole of that revelation with which the church is furnished, in any age; and with respect to us, it comprehends the whole Bible, consisting of precepts and promises. I might advert to many scripture references, in confirmation of the sense now given to the words; but the context is so very plain, that other proof seems every way unnecessary. I shall therefore, under this head, only address myself to *professing parents*,—and to the *children of such*.

1. To you professors who are intrusted with the charge of children; here see your duty, and take the rule for the 'education, and instruction of your dear posterity. If you would bring them up in the nurture and admonition

^c Prov. vi. 23.—^d Psalm cxix. 105.

admonition of the Lord!—If you would see them holy here, or meet them in happiness hereafter; frequently consult, explain, and endeavour to conduct both yourselves and them, according to the unerring rule of God's word. To the law and to the testimony.—Read it in their ears, familiarize it to their mind, and seek to impress it on their hearts.—Remember they are born for an eternity of existence,—have immortal souls as well as dying bodies; and while nature teaches you to provide for the one, surely grace will powerfully constrain you to be concerned for the other —You that are parents, unite all your influence in this great and important duty. Fathers with all your authority, and mothers, (for think not that you are excepted) with all your tenderness recommend the word and ways of God unto them. *Abraham* commanded his children after him, *Solomon* did the same; and every godly parent will desire to imitate both; but if parents pay no attention to this important charge, no wonder that their children “perish for lack of knowledge.”—Endeavour then to instruct your dear posterity in the great essentials of christianity:—Train them up in a reverential awe of the divine majesty,—of his presence, knowledge, and observation. —Tell them of their fall in *Adam*,—their depravity in consequence of

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* Hosea iv. 6.

it,—the evil nature, the direful consequences, and destructive tendency of sin.—Tell them of the blessed remedy provided, by a gracious God, in the Son of his love;—urge them to consider their danger, to accept the Saviour, and flee from the wrath to come.—Exhort, invite, entreat them with all the tenderness and affection you are possessed of.—Improve all the interest you have in their affections and dutiful regard, to bring them to God and Christ. “Travail over them again in birth, till you see Christ, the hope of glory, formed in their hearts^f.” Begin with them early,—pray with them frequently;—and seek not only to impress their memories with the form of doctrine, but as the understanding opens gradually, let their minds be well instructed in the importance and connection of those blessed truths they have already learned. Thus by training up children in the way they should go, they will not so easily be imposed on by error, or slide into the gross practice of sin when they are advanced in years^g. Speak to them frequently about the things that concern their everlasting peace:—Be faithful, tender, and solemn in your address to them:—Line upon line, and precept upon precept. “Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when

^f Gal. iv. 19.—^g Prov. xxii. 6.

when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up^h." Bear with their dulness, and guard against impatience. The gardener's view in watering his plants is not merely to wet the surface, but that the drops may gradually sink to the root.—The shepherd considers the state of his flock, and drives them gently as they are able to bear it. And the instructor in human sciences, gives precept upon precept, line upon line, and opens his design by little and little.—Prudence and perseverance are necessary, if you wish to succeed in this important undertaking.—In short, we must look to heaven both for direction and success, and if any man experience the need of wisdom to bring up his family in the ways of truth, peace, and holiness, "let him ask of that God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth notⁱ."

But, O! how does all this reprove those families where the word of God is almost, if not altogether neglected. Sirs, children are your present charge, take heed lest your inattention to their souls, at last prove your condemnation. Hold forth the word of God as the rule of your conduct, and as the command you would lay upon your children:—In so doing, when called to die, you may address them in the words of *Solomon*,
My son, keep thy father's commandment, and

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for sake

^h Deut. vi. 7.—ⁱ James i. 5.

forsake not the law of thy mother, bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee, &c,

This also reproves such parents who are at no cost or pains to have their children taught to read the scriptures:—And may, at the same time, point out a path of duty to those that are in affluence, viz. to assist the poor in this respect.—There is scarce a more useful way of shewing a charitable disposition than this, of educating the children of the poor. This is indeed to use the key of knowledge to advantage, by opening to others the door to usefulness and happiness.

2. To you, the children of professing parents, I am next to address myself.—My young friends, your advantages have been greater than many, but what effect have all the prayers and tears, the instructions and admonitions of parents had upon you? When you take the Bible in your hands, do you esteem it a peculiar privilege, that therein you can at once read the will of God, and the command of your dear parents, some of whom are, perhaps, now in their graves?—O consider the blessed Bible as God's word, your *father's command, and your mother's law*:—And remember, that if you are not converted by it,—influenced by it in your faith and conduct, that at last God, and father, and mother, will rise up in
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in judgment against you.—If then you would take heed to your way, your steps must be ordered according to this word. — Study it closely,—pray over it frequently,—and look to God for grace, that you may live upon those truths, be supported by those promises, and influenced by those precepts which were the glory of your dear parents. *Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.* Beware of slighting or speaking irreverently of those doctrines which were the very life, comfort, and support of your parents' faith and confidence.—And be not inattentive to those sacred precepts, which they esteemed more than their necessary food: and an attention to which constituted the brightest ornaments of their lives.—Some of them, though dead, yet speak to you, every time you read the oracles of God.

Thus having proved that the subject, to which this promise relates, is the word of God, I pass on,

II. To consider the promise itself, in the several branches as here laid down. *When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.*—The promise you see consists of three parts.

I. *When thou goest, it shall lead thee* — The path in which we walk, is surrounded with

with many dangers, the journey in which we are engaged is in its consequences of vast, of eternal importance; we are exposed to difficulties both from *error* and *sin*, but this part of the promise contains a sure preservative from both. *It shall lead thee* into the mind of God, by distinguishing truth from error; and into the will of God, by distinguishing duty from sin.

(1.) It shall lead thee into the mind of God, by distinguishing truth from error. This is the design of God in the whole scripture: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness^k."—To the same purpose speaks the Psalmist, "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes^l."—What is the Bible, but the treasure of eternal truth unsealed? The mind of God himself, transcribed with his own hand:—And the inexhaustible riches of mercy, held forth to poor sinners.—One of the ancients might well call it, "the library of the Holy Ghost, the circle of all divine science, the wisdom of the cross, and the cubit of the sanctuary."—O value your Bibles, as that blessed volume which is indited by infinite wisdom, stamped with infinite authority, abounds with discoveries of infinite importance, displays the riches of infinite

^k 2 Tim. iii. 16.—^l Psalm xix. 8.

finite love, and proclaims, and prepares for, the infinite joys of the heavenly state.—What important discoveries does this lay before us! Discoveries of man's misery, of God's mercy, and of free, rich, everlasting salvation by Christ alone:—Discoveries which prophets, the servants, and kings, the representative of the Lord, desired to see, but were not privileged with the prospect:—Discoveries which evidence the depths of the divine sovereignty, and relate to the everlasting salvation of the sons of men:—Discoveries of the rich, free, and superabounding grace of God in Christ:—Discoveries of a free, full, and perpetual pardon:—Discoveries of strength in Christ, and help through him, to support the soul in the way of duty, and encourage it in the spiritual warfare:—Discoveries of prophecies fulfilled, promises confirmed, and the perfections of God engaged, to make us both holy and happy:—Discoveries of an immutable inheritance, an everlasting kingdom, an eternal rest, and all the glorious treasures and enjoyments of the heavenly state. In short, the Bible informs us of the only consistent way in which God can be just and justify the ungodly:—The way in which Satan shall be bruised, and sinners saved.—Every doctrine which relates to God's honour,—to Christ's person and glory,—to man's duty, interest, or salvation, is here laid down, in the most full,

full, plain, and conspicuous manner. Brethren, set an high value upon your Bibles,—read them frequently,—consult them in every difficult case,—receive what they deliver,—submit to what they require,—yield your understandings to be guided by this rule, and build your faith on this foundation.—*Thus when thou goest, it shall lead thee.*

(2.) It shall also lead thee into the will of God, by distinguishing sin from duty.—“It teacheth to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, as well as to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world^m :” And such as consult it with prayer and diligence, shall have direction in all things; shall hear, as it were, a voice behind them, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in itⁿ.”—In this perfect map we find the path of duty to be the way of holiness; and it is marked out with such precision and exactness, that “the way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein^o.”—Here the will of God is fully expressed as to particular duties; and the whole summed up in this one sentence, “Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God, am holy^p.” The Royal Psalmist hid this word in his heart, that he might not sin against God^q. Here we find direction what to do, and what to avoid: “By them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there
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^m Titus ii. 12.—ⁿ Isa. xxx. 21.—^o Isa. xxxv. 8.—
^p Levit. xix. 2.—^q Psalm cxix. 11.

is great reward'." Such have the reward of a good conscience towards God,—the reward of solid and internal peace,—the reward of great and spiritual manifestations,—the reward of intimate communion with Christ.—They that know Christ will love him, and they that love him will serve him, and keep his commandments. "He that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men^s."

2. The SECOND part of the promise is, *When thou sleepest, it shall keep thee.* While we are in this state of imperfection, we need sleep for the refreshment of the animal frame, and during our repose, we are liable to many dangers, yea, to death itself. Our beds may prove our graves, and sleep the anti-chamber to the mansions of the dead.—But such as revere the word of God, and are interested in the promises thereof, shall be kept. "It shall be well with them that fear God, that fear before him^t." *It shall keep thee.* This may have respect either to the *state* of a good man's soul, or the *frame* of his mind.

(1.) May it not refer to the *state of his soul*?—His last work before he retires to his bed, yea, and even while sleep spreads the veil over the organs of sense, is to commit his soul into the hands of God as a faithful Creator; in confidence that he is able to

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keep

^t Psalm xix. 11.—^s Rom. xiv. 18.—^t Eccles. viii. 12.

keep that which he commits to his care. Indeed there is no particular promise which infures the natural life of the righteous, more than the wicked: Fire may consume both him and his habitation, or disease make a sudden separation between him and every earthly connection; but as to his state, whether he sleep or wake, or "live or die, he is the Lord's."—He rests secure under the canopy of this promise, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."^w And should he sleep the sleep of death, even death would be gain to him.—Not so the wicked:—He lies down under the curse of God; sleeps upon the very precipice of damnation; and if he awake no more, is undone for ever.—The one rests upon a bed of promises, and upon the grace and veracity of God to fulfil them:—The other lies exposed to all the miseries of hell, and the displeasure of the Almighty, which will render those miseries perpetual.—Thus the word of God may be said to keep those, who live in friendship with the Deity.

(2.) This phrase, *when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee*, may also refer to *the frame of the mind*. Solomon, speaking of the man who is seriously and diligently engaged in search after saving knowledge, says, "When thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid: yea,

^u Rom. xiv. 8.—^w Isa. xxvi. 3.

yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet*." It will generally be found that the more we converse with the word of God, by serious meditation in our waking-hours, the more we shall be preserved from vain and wicked imaginations in our sleeping moments.—The mind is ever active, and frequently pursues that subject with the greatest ease, which engaged our attention, before fatigue overpowered the body, and sunk it into a state of inactivity and stupor.—How far the agency of separate and immaterial beings may influence the imagination in sleep, I presume not to say: but both scripture and common experience furnish examples of the advantages of daily meditation. If then you would enjoy much of that spiritual mind, which is life and peace, next to a proper dependence on the blessed Spirit, as the author of all good in fallen man, I would exhort you to begin and close every day with meditation upon some portion of scripture. Thus, *while thou wakest, it shall instruct thee; and when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee.*

3. The THIRD and *last* branch of the promise is, *When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.* When the Gospel was first carried amongst the Indians, and they were informed that the Bible was the word of the great God, and that God spake in it to his crea-

tures ; some of them taking the opportunity, placed their ear to it with the greatest attention, as if they expected to hear some oracular sound from it :—This was indeed an evidence of their ignorance : But from it, let us learn this wisdom, every morning and evening to apply the eye, the ear, the heart to God's word ; that so we may hear what God the Lord will say unto us.—“ Search the scriptures, for in them ye have eternal life' :” The revelation of it, the promise of it, the employments of it, and the way to it.—*They testify of Christ*, of his person, grace, sufferings, willingness, and ability to save.—Read the scriptures diligently, reverence the authority, adore the grace, and receive the message of the great God speaking to you therein.—“ See that you refuse not him that speaketh ;”—but take the several parts of it as addressed to yourselves in particular, each prefaced with this solemn sentence, *Thus saith the Lord*.—The scriptures are the will, the voice, the oracles of God :—The trumpet of truth, and the whisper of love : They contain the most curious, useful, and important subjects. The great Dr. Owen observes, “ They contain the whole counsel
 “ of God, concerning his own glory and
 “ worship ; our faith, obedience, and salva-
 “ tion ; every parcel of it hath in it such a
 “ depth of truth, as cannot by us be perfect-
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“ly searched into.—There are wonderful
“things in the word, if God be pleased to
“give us light to see it. It is like a cabinet
“of jewels, that when you pull out one
“box or drawer and search into it, you find
“it full; pull out another, it is full; and
“when you think you have pulled out all,
“yet still there are some secret recesses in the
“cabinet, that if you search further, you
“will find more.”—If then there be such
a blessed fulness in the scriptures, read them
constantly, and every morning admit them
to audience. *When thou awakest, it shall
talk with thee.*—God speaks to us in his
word both with *authority* and *familiarity*:—
Herein he delivers himself,

As a *Sovereign* to his subjects,
As a *Master* to his servants, and
As a *Father* to his children.

(1.) As a *Sovereign* to his subjects.—
The Bible is his book of statutes:—Here he
claims our obedience, and particularizes
wherewith it consists,—the service he requires
of us is reasonable, and closely connected
with our own advantage.—We are under
law unto God, but it is a law of *liberty*, a
law of *love*. A law, which connects happi-
piness with holiness, and the dignity of
man with his duty:—A law, which has his
sovereignty for the ground of it, and our
good for its end.—The only reason for his
orders,

orders, is, I AM THE LORD; and his end therein is, to recommend, enforce, and advance holiness.—Surely that can never be an hard requirement, which consists in being made like himself.—The great Sovereign Lord of all, by his word requires faith in his Son,—and obedience to his orders:—“This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ^z ;” “and this is the will of God, even your sanctification^a .”

(2.) In the word, God speaks to us as a *Master* to his servants, informing us of the business that he requires from us that day, and also relating how he will have it done, viz.—with an eye to his glory, with a regard to the rule, and with a dependence upon himself, for wisdom and grace to perform it.—And therefore as the eyes of a servant are to the hands of his master, so should our eyes be unto the Lord for direction in the way of duty, and assistance for the performance of it.

(3.) In his word, God also speaks to us as a *Father* to his children. With what tenderness and affection does he condescend to invite us to duty, and warn us against sin?—“O do not that thing which my soul hateth.”—Herein he informs us that even chastisements are from love, and that
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^z 1 John iii. 23.—^a 1 Theff. iv. 3.

the most solemn requirements are but so many expressions of his tenderness:—So that while we are called to follow him, it is as “his dear children^b.” In him *authority* and *affection* are united, and almost every page of his word contains a fresh evidence of his love, pity, and care towards his dear children.

On the whole.—Seeing the promise is *When thou goest, it shall lead thee*, brethren, permit me to enquire how your experience corresponds with it.—Have you ever been led by this word?—Led to see sin exceeding sinful,—your situation as transgressors against God’s law, exceeding awful,—and, that without peace with God, your eternal misery must exceed all conception?—Have you been convinced that you can do nothing, either in whole, or in part, in order to peace? That you can only cry for mercy, and plead the grace of God displayed towards sinners in Christ?—Have you been led to see that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin^c,—that he has brought in everlasting righteousness^d,—and is able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him^e?—Have you heard this word speaking, as to you in particular? Speaking conviction, or comfort; and are you led by it to hate every false way, and to follow after righteousness, peace,

^b Ephes. v. 1.—^c 1 John i. 7.—^d Dan. ix. 24.—
^e Heb. vii. 25.

peace, and conformity to the will of God, and image of Jesus?—Examine, Sirs, whether you be in the faith and favour of God. “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be unto them, and mercy, and upon the whole Israel of God^f, even so. *Amen.*”

SERMON

^fGal. vi. 16.

S E R M O N XIII.

The *Object* and *Nature* of Faith.

J O H N ix. 35.

Dost thou believe on the Son of God?

THE chapter from which these words are taken, contains an account of a remarkable cure, wrought upon the man that was born blind. A spectacle truly mournful! Deprived of all that pleasure which arises from an acquaintance with visible objects; unable to engage in such useful labours as might yield him an honourable support; to increase the distress, his parents being in such circumstances as rendered them incapable to supply his necessary wants; he is reduced to the painful expedient of begging his bread, and, by a moving kind of oratory, to excite the pity of those that passed by.

In this situation the Saviour finds him.— Probably many had that day turned a deaf ear to his complaint, and passed on without

either being affected with compassion, or yielding him relief.—But now the happy moment arrives, when he is both heard and regarded.—The windows of the body fly open at the Redeemer's command, and give entrance to the beams of day. All things are become new, and he is sent to obtain the perfection of the cure, and to stand forth as a faithful witness of the power of his gracious deliverer.

The question proposed by the disciples in the *second* verse, as well as the reproach cast upon the man by the Pharisees, in the *thirty-fourth*, have led some to conclude that the Jews maintained the doctrine of *Pythagoras*, concerning the transmigration of souls: But I am rather inclined to think, with Dr. *Lightfoot*, that these expressions refer to some sins, which they supposed to have been committed previous to his birth, either by the infant, or by the parents during the mother's pregnancy. Hence they ascribed all deformities or grievous maladies, in new-born children, to some defect in the observation of the traditions of their elders.—But not to dwell upon this.

The evidence of the cure is visible to all; the tidings of it spread wider and wider: — At last the man is brought before the *Sanhedrim*. He is examined, and cross-examined; intreated, and threatened, in order either

to make him vary in his evidence of the fact, or stagger his confidence in the righteousness of his deliverer. However, he boldly perseveres in a simple narrative, which confounds all the sophistry of his brow-beating judges. The miracle was doubtless an evidence of divine power; but the season in which it was performed, according to their traditions, was a breach of the sabbath. The difficulty resulting from this, was not easily to be surmounted. However, so great was their regard to their own superstitions, that they finally resolve, rather to deny the work of God, than give up the commands of men: And, to conclude all, they pronounce the Saviour a sinner; and the witness, as a poor ignorant fellow, and vile blasphemer, is excommunicated from the Synagogue, and thrust out of their assembly.

The tidings of such arbitrary proceedings soon reach the ears of Jesus: He seeks, and finds him.—On which the question now before us is proposed to him. In Christ's conduct towards this man, we see how ready he is to succour his friends in all their trials; and in the question, how desirous he is to teach them. He well knew how this poor creature was exposed to temptation and reproach, in his present circumstances; but he seeks him, in order to encourage him. He knew also the state and frame of

his soul, yet enquires of him, *whether he believed on the Son of God.*

In this man we see that there may be true grace, where there is much darkness in the understanding; but where there is grace in the principle, it shall be brought out into action. I have no doubt but he was accepted with God at this very season, even before he acts faith in a formal manner: For faith is a living act; but as the cause must be previous to the effect, so the person must be quickened before he believes.—This man's heart was made good by regeneration; and therefore as soon as Christ sows the seed of heavenly doctrine, it takes root downwards, and brings forth fruit in a holy profession and practice.—Jesus said to him, *Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*—In discoursing on these words, it shall be our endeavour,

- I. To lay before you what is included in the question. And,
- II. To mention some marks, or evidences of true faith, whereby you may be helped to judge of your state, and return an answer to this interrogation.

I. The question evidently contains two things which merit our particular attention, viz. the *object* of faith, and the *nature* of it.—The *Object*, is the *Son of God*.—The
Nature

Nature of it, a *believing on him*. These in their order.

1. The *Object* of faith is here set forth as the *Son of God*. This is a title which it becomes us particularly to examine. It is very necessary to understand what is meant by it, seeing our believing or not believing on Christ, as the *Son of God*, is, throughout the whole New Testament, represented as that cardinal point, on which the happiness or misery of all the hearers of the gospel depends. That this is the case, is plain from John iii. 18, and many other places: There it is said, "He that believeth on the SON hath *everlasting life*: and he that believeth not on the SON shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Various reasons are assigned by divines, why he is called the *Son of God*. The most common amongst the orthodox is, that it is descriptive of the Father's communicating the divine nature; or, according to others, divine personality, to him, who afterwards appeared in our world as the Saviour. This mysterious sentiment has commonly been held forth, under the well-known phrase of *the eternal generation of the Son*. Much time and labour has been employed to enquire into, and explain the nature of, this doctrine: And, without prejudice, I may add, that many of their enquires have been as fruitless, as the images
made

made use of to explain the doctrine, have tended to confound the subject. Definitions, distinctions, metaphors, and similies have been made use of: But after all, it is at least very difficult to justify the divine wisdom in fixing upon so abstruse a doctrine, as the turning point of a sinner's salvation: A doctrine which, in this view, seems to have little, if any connection at all with salvation.

The scripture lays it down in the plainest manner, that "there are Three which bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one^a." These *Three* have every mark of distinct personality ascribed to them. They are severally represented as engaged in the grand, and no less gracious, œconomy of man's salvation. But seeing God is infinite, and we can never trace him out to perfection, is it not surprising that any should suppose, that a belief of the *modus* of their personal subsistence (which I apprehend is as much beyond angelic conception as human description;) I say, is it not amazing that any should maintain, that God has made the belief of this the grand article of a sinner's salvation? Can we wonder, that they who deny the proper divinity both of the WORD and SPIRIT, should greatly triumph amidst all this metaphysical jargon, and secretly

^a 1 John v. 7.

cretly attempt to sap the very foundation of the most important doctrines?

As to the doctrine of a plurality of persons in the Godhead, and the proper divinity of the Word and Spirit, I not only believe it to be contained in the scriptures, but rejoice in the persuasion, that it will stand superior to all the assaults of error to the end of time. But with respect to this phrase, *Son of God*, from a frequent perusal of the New Testament, I acknowledge myself rather inclined to understand it of his office-character, as the *Messiah*, or *Mediator*. All those scriptures, in which it occurs, countenance this sense, and unite to confirm it. Amongst a great variety, to which we might advert, let a few serve as a specimen. In Christ's temptation in the wilderness, the Evangelist has represented Satan as accosting him thus, "If thou be the Son of God," *i. e.* if thou be the Christ, as *John* lately testified of thee at *Jordan*, "command that these stones be made bread^b."—When *Nathaniel* appears before him, he says, "Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of *Israel*^c," *i. e.* thou art the Messiah.—*Peter* declares him to be the Son of God, *i. e.* the Christ: And *Jesus* saith, "Upon this rock I do build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."—In like manner it is said of *Paul*, after his conversion, that "he
preached

^b Matt. iv. 3.—^c John i. 49.

preached Christ in the Synagogues, that he is the Son of God :” which is immediately explained by the same historian, of his “proving that he is very Christ^d.” And, writing to the church at Rome, the same Apostle assures them, that he “was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead^e,” *i. e.* was declared to be the expected Messiah. In short, wherever we find him called the *Son*, the *begotten Son*, the *only begotten Son*, &c. such phrases are descriptive of him as the Mediator.

The Evangelist John tells us, that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us, and we beheld his glory, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth^f.” In which words he is described to us, (1.) In his divine Nature, or Personality, *The Word*. And in this sense, he is the eternal, independent, immutable God;—equal in every respect to the Father in perfection and property.—So that if we consider him abstractly as the *Word*, he dwells in that light to which no mortal can approach and live: In this view, therefore, it is impossible for any mortal creature to behold his glory.—But (2.) *He was made flesh*, *i. e.* he assumed our nature into union with himself, so as to qualify him

^d Acts. ix. 20, compared with verse 22.—^e Rom. i. 4.—

^f John i. 14.

him for the discharge of his office, and that he might have something to offer.—And (3.) in this Hypostatical union,—in this his complex person, as God-man, he is stiled “the brightness of his Father’s glory^e,” and his *only begotten Son*.—In this character he has a glory, which is above all created glory:—A glory which is peculiar to himself. Do you ask wherein consists this glory? It is this, that all fulness dwells in him:—All that grace and truth, which God has either revealed to his church, or will confer on it,—it all dwells in Christ. He is *full of grace and truth*. This is that glory which his disciples saw, and by which he still manifests himself to his saints, as he doth not unto the world^h. It is in the church, that the blessed Spirit glorifies him, as the son of God, by taking of his truth and grace, and shewing it unto themⁱ.

But would we make a further enquiry, in what sense God is said to be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whether it be, according to some, as the fountain of the Trinity, or as he is the author of all spiritual and divine blessings to the church: Let St. *Paul* resolve the difficulty. Writing to the church at Corinth, he pleads that “grace might be with them, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This prayer is immediately followed with a

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^e Heb. i. 3.—^h John xiv. 22.—ⁱ John xvi. 14, 15.

sacred doxology, in the following words. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort^k." From which it seems highly probable, that he bears the title of Father, not as he communicates divinity, or personality to our Redeemer; but as he is a Covenant-God, bestowing mercy and comfort upon sinners through Christ the Mediator. Perfectly agreeable to what we find in another place, that "it pleased the Father that in him (viz. as he is the Son) should all fulness dwell." And as to the phrase the *fountain of the Trinity*, though it be used by very good and valuable authors, it appears to me unguarded and unscriptural.

That the Sonship of Christ respects him as Mediator, will appear probable, if we compare *John* x. 30, with *John* xiv. 28. In the former it is said, "I and my Father are one." In the latter, "My Father is greater than I." These declarations, however opposite they may seem, equally respect him as he is the Son. But if his Sonship primarily and properly signify the generation of his divine nature, it will be difficult, if not impossible according to that scheme, to make them harmonize. Considered as a distinct person in the Godhead, without respect to his office, as Mediator, it is impossible

^k 2 Cor. i. 2, 3.

possible that, in the same view, he should be both *equal* and *inferior* to his Father. But difficult as it may seem, this must be maintained, if he be called the Son, only as it respects his divine nature. Again, He expressly tells us himself, that “the Son can do nothing of himself; that the Father sheweth him all things that he doth; and that he giveth him to have life in himself¹.” Which expressions, if applied to him as God, not as Mediator, will reduce us to the disagreeable necessity of subscribing either the creed of *Arius*, and maintain him to be God of an *inferior nature*; or to embrace the doctrine of *Socinus*, who allows him only to be a God by *office*. But if this title belong to him as he is God-man, Mediator, every difficulty is removed, and the truth shines forth with the greatest clearness.

Thus having endeavoured to clear the way, by shewing from scripture, that, as Mediator, Christ is held out as the object of faith, under this character, Son of God: I now come more particularly to lay before you, what I apprehend to be included under this glorious title.—And what we shall say upon this head, may be comprehended in three things. When he is stiled the Son of God, we are called to consider—*The office he sustains* in the church,—*the work* he has performed for her advantage,—and *that*, which

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renders

¹ John v. 19, 20, 26.

renders both the one and the other effectual to their complete salvation, viz. his Deity.

1. The title, Son of God, is expressive of his *office*. He is the head of all influences and of government, and the only Mediator between God and man. He is Son, in a sense superior either to men or Angels, being the brightness of his Father's glory, the express image of his person, and made so much better than the Angels, as he hath by right obtained a more excellent name than they^m. As the Son, he is the great *Prophet*, *Priest*, and *King* of the church. He, only, has a proper and unlimited claim to these honours in the house of God. Others indeed have sustained these titles, performed these services, and wore the honour connected with them: But they were only the instruments, by which Christ discharged these several offices.—It was by his spirit that prophets were moved to declare the glad tidings of salvation;—as his representatives, that *Aaron* with his sons, ministered at the altar; and by him, that kings ruled, and princes decreed judgment. It is as the Son of God, that he hath revealed the will of his Father concerning the salvation of sinners. For “God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken

^m Heb. i. 4.

spoken to us by *his Son*, whom he hath appointed heir of all thingsⁿ.”—It is as Son, that our great high Priest hath entered into the heaven of heavens, having made reconciliation for the people. “Seeing that we have a great high Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the *Son of God*, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin^o.”—Yea, it is as Son, that he fills the throne of royalty in the heavenly kingdom. Hence the same Apostle assures us, that “unto the *Son* he saith, thy throne O God, is for ever and ever, the sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool^p.”

2. Under this title we are also led to take notice of his *work*. The *Old Testament* informs us, that the Messiah was to finish transgression, and to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness^q: And in the *New*, we read, that “for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil^r.” In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his

ⁿ Heb. i. 1, 2.—^o Heb. iv. 14, 15.—^p Heb. i. 8.—
^q Dan. ix. 24.—^r 1 John iii. 8.

his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. The Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world¹." And it is through him, and what he hath performed as the Redeemer, that we receive the adoption of sons². Important, though arduous work! A work, which none in heaven or on earth were equal to, but himself! A work, more wonderful than that of creation; and by which the glory of God will be more completely manifested, more illustriously displayed. Redemption, it is the marvellous production of God's counsel, the basis of his honour, and the most costly jewel of his crown! Redemption is that eternal wonder, which is hymned in heaven, and is proclaimed on earth, for the salvation of fallen sinners. There is redemption in Christ's blood, the forgiveness of sin. But,

3. Under this name, Son of God, we are likewise led to reflect upon *that*, which renders both his office and work effectual to salvation. There is no doubt but the divinity of Christ is included under this name, although it be not the primary idea held forth by it. For if he be not God, as well as man, he was no way suited to heal the breach which sin had made. It is his Deity, which renders his sacrifice acceptable, his intercession prevalent, and his salvation complete.

¹ 1 John iv. 9, 14.—² Gal. iv. 4.

complete. Take away this, and the most glorious production of Omnipotence dwindles into obscurity, and sinks into nothing. It is this which renders his blood precious, and his grace sufficient; seeing it is the blood, it is the grace of him, that is really God.

That we are not to exclude his Deity from this title, is evident from his being worshiped under it, both by Saints and Angels. That the man, to whom this question was proposed, did worship him without any prohibition, is evident from the 38th verse of this chapter.—And that Angels not only worship him, but worship him by divine command, is equally plain from Heb. i. 6, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, and let all Angels of God worship him. But, that you may see divinity and humanity united in the *person, office, and work* of the Son of God, I shall conclude this part of the discourse, by repeating that magnificent description given of him by the Apostle *Paul*. Having spoken of the grace of God, in bringing sinners into the kingdom of his dear Son, he immediately adds, “In whom we have *Redemption* through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Who is the *Image* of the invisible God, the *First-born* of every creature: For *by him were all things created* that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible

visible and invisible, whether they be thrones; or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created *by* him, and *for* him. And *he is before all things*, and *by him all things consist*. And he is the *Head* of his body the church; who is the *Beginning*, the *First-born* from the dead; that *in all things* he might have the pre-eminence "."

The SECOND thing we have to observe in this question, is, *The nature of faith*. It is here described as a believing on the Son of God. The word $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\upsilon\omega$, signifies both *to have knowledge of the object*, and *confidence in it*, *i. e.* a knowledge of Jesus Christ, as he is described in the scripture, and a confidence, that he is able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him.

As to an assurance of personal interest in Christ, and consequently a right to all spiritual blessings through him, this, I apprehend, is not, properly speaking, of the nature of faith. Indeed that a person may arrive at a well-grounded evidence of his being a friend, a child, yea an heir of God, is very evident from the scripture. Hence we are exhorted to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith; and to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure. But how is this knowledge to be attained?

tained? There are but one of these two ways for it: Either it must be expressly revealed to us from God; or, it must be derived from the evidence we have of our being possessed of those marks and characters, which the scripture represents as belonging to the people of God. But the scripture nowhere informs any man, that Christ died for him in particular: It assures us that he died for sinners,—for the chief of sinners;—that he that cometh to him shall in nowise be cast out;—and that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Now, when such scriptures as these are opened to the understanding, or applied to the heart by the spirit of God, they produce in the mind a divine *conviction* of Christ's ability to save, and a *determination* to go to him for salvation, guilty and unworthy as they are. This is what the scripture calls a coming boldly to a throne of grace; a drawing near in full assurance of faith, that we may receive mercy and find grace. The full assurance of faith does not, I apprehend, relate to our personal interest in Christ; but to the revelation that God has given us of Christ in the word.* The evidence that a

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person

* The words *assurance*, *assured*, &c. are found in Acts ii. 36, Acts xvii. 31, Col. ii. 2, 1 Thess. i. 5, 2 Tim. iii. 14, and Heb. x. 22, these are the only places, that I can recollect, in which there can be any reference to *faith*; and in all these places an assurance of the truth of that doctrine, taught in the scripture, is evidently intended.

person hath of his belonging to God, or being interested in Christ, is expressed simply by the word *assure*, or the *full assurance of hope*. And this arises from a consciousness of our having those desires, dispositions, and characteristics which God has given of his children in the word: Such as hungering and thirsting after righteousness; breathing after holiness; esteeming all the commandments of God concerning all things to be right; accounting Christ precious; receiving wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption from him; bringing forth the fruits of repentance and righteousness; and looking, or waiting for the coming of the Saviour: In short, love to the brethren is set down as the grand, as the distinguishing mark of the true Christian. It is that love which is the criterion of all love: If this be wanting, love to God, and Christ, and religion, is an idle pretence. It is a love which glows at the *heart*, is expressed by the *lips*, and, according to a person's ability and opportunity, confirmed by the *hands*. Hear what the beloved Disciple says upon this love. "Whofo hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

HEREBY

HEREBY we *know* that we are of the truth, and shall *assure* our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we *confidence* towards God^w." Sanctification, or obedience, is the *best*, may I not add, the *only* scriptural evidence of real interest in Christ, and consequently of a title to glory: Hence it will follow, that in proportion as this appears evident, or otherwise, so will the assurance of our personal interest in Christ be steadfast or wavering. *David* speaks of the saints in his day, as loving God's law, and enjoying great peace: But what did it flow from? What he says of himself will furnish us with an answer, "Lord, I have *hoped* for thy salvation, and *done* thy commandments^x." And in the book of Revelation we read, that "blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city^y."

Here then it may not be improper to shew what faith is, both in a more extensive, and in a more particular view.—In general, *Faith is an hearty approbation of all that God hath revealed to us in his word, whether it relate to doctrine or duty, precept or promise; the whole is considered as worthy*

Qq 2 of

^w 1 John iii. 17—21.—^x Psalm cxix. 165, 166.—
^y Rev. xxii. 14.

of God to reveal, and of sinful man to embrace. In a more particular view, *faith hath respect to God's method of saving sinners by Christ alone, to the glory of his wisdom and grace, to the honour of his justice, power, and holiness.* To produce an hearty approbation of which, the eyes of the understanding must be opened, and God shine into the heart, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ: The will must be subdued, its enmity destroyed, and disposed in all things to submit to what God reveals, and cheerfully to engage in what he requires: And where this is the case, the affections and passions will, in some degree, be suitably engaged. In short, God will appear to be all in all; Christ will be altogether lovely, and his ways will be accounted ways of pleasantness, and his paths peace.

But should any be disposed secretly to indulge an objection against this description of faith; should they say, is it possible for the mind fully to approve of the glorious scheme of salvation by Christ alone, and yet the person have no interest in, or advantage from it? To this I would answer as follows:

1. It is not a discovery of our personal interest in this salvation, that is the ground of approbation, but the scheme itself; or rather the glory of God displayed in it.

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We are to admire it, not properly because we are advantaged by it, but because God is honoured. The Sun is a glorious creature of God, and we are led to admire it as such, though the next moment we should be led into total darkness, and excluded from every advantage that proceeds from it. But,

2. This hearty approbation is ever accompanied with a strong, prevailing, and permanent desire after interest in this salvation. That which a person admires and approves, he will spare no pains or cost to bring within the compass of his own possession. If then we do, from the heart, approve of salvation by Jesus Christ, we shall never rest satisfied till we rest in him, and have scriptural and rational evidence, that we are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. Thus, by a growing discovery of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and advancing in the knowledge of the excellencies of the Saviour, we shall look to him, and plead with him, to perfect that which concerneth us.—To this I beg leave to add,

3. That all who are brought from the heart to approve of this salvation, shall assuredly partake of it: Yea, I may go on to assert, that the very approbation, is an evidence, that they are actually interested in it, although they have not, as yet, the comforts arising from their interest. Devils
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may *assent* to the doctrine, and hypocrites *seem* to approve of it; but while the former are hearty in their opposition to the progress of the scheme, the latter are no less partial in their approbation of the scheme itself. To approve from the heart, which is the same as believing with the heart, is peculiar to the people of God: For “the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God; they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth, *i. e. discerneth* all things^z.” If therefore you thus approve from the heart, of Christ and salvation by him; approve of being saved from sin, as well as from hell, and of being made holy as well as happy; then you may answer the question as the blind man in this chapter, “Lord, I believe.” But you will observe, that the approbation must be *heartly* and *unlimited*; we must not only approve the grace, but the holiness of this salvation. Such will not find greater pleasure from the tidings of pardon, than from the discovery of that way in which they are to be made pure. They approve of it as a salvation that flows from holiness, tends to it and terminates in it.

We shall not enter upon the second head of discourse at this season, but conclude
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^z 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15.

with a few inferences from what has been said. And,

1. Hence we may learn in what method the ministers of the gospel should deal with sinners. Let them learn of their blessed master. We are no where taught to call upon them, to believe that Christ is theirs, and that he hath died for them in particular. There is no such report as this in all the scripture; and faith is a believing of the report. To know that Christ is mine, and that he gave himself for me, is not the *ground* of faith, but the *fruit*; not the *cause*, but the *effect* of it. The Apostle *Paul* knew that Christ loved him, and gave himself for him: But how did he know this? Was it from the free grant of the gospel? No; it was from this, that he was crucified with Christ, and that the life he lived in the flesh was by the faith of the Son of God^a. The free exhibition of Christ in the word, may encourage a person to come as a *sinner*, but it is only a life of dependence on Christ, and obedience to him, that can prove him to be a *saint*. The report of the gospel is this, that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life:—And this believing
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^a Gal. ii. 20.

you have now heard described. This may also lead us to infer,

2. How necessary is it, impartially to examine ourselves whether we do believe. If we do not, we must perish; if we do, we have eternal life. It is to be feared there are many mistakes in the professing world, and while some suspect they have no faith, because they cannot speak with great confidence; there are many who are very confident, that are entirely destitute of it. There is no correspondence between their language and their conduct; they speak confidently, but walk irregularly. But we may venture to lay it down, as a sure maxim, that a scriptural assurance of our personal interest in Christ, is neither to be *obtained*, nor yet *maintained*, but by an holy conduct and conversation. The Lord knoweth them that are his, and if we would know whether we belong to their number, let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.—To conclude.

3. If a well-grounded evidence of our being in God's favour be so desirable, we see how it is to be sought after.—The scripture abounds with the description of the characteristicks of the people of God.—If we try ourselves by these, our own hearts can testify whether they
belong

belong to us or not,—and though there may be found great defects under every particular; yet if there be no *allowed* guile, the spirit will bear witness with our spirits that we are of the truth, and enable us to assure our hearts before him. And that we may be going on from strength to strength, till we appear perfect in Zion, God grant, for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

R r SERMON

S E R M O N X I V .

The Scripture Evidences of Faith.

J O H N ix. 35.—Last Clause.

Doſt thou believe on the Son of God?

AS the whole world may, with propriety, be arranged under the two denominations of ſaints or finners, ſo all the hearers of the goſpel are either believers or unbelievers; either they heartily receive the record that God hath given of his Son, and thus ſet to their ſeal that God is true; or, by a perverſe rejection of the divine testimony, they do what lies in their power to make him a liar. To theſe ſeparate characters the bleſſings of God's favour, or the curſe of his wrath, belong: An heaven of felicity is provided for the one, an hell of conſummate miſery is reſerved for the other.

Let others think of us what they may, or pretend what we pleaſe, God knows our real ſtate, and ſoon will he pronounce our

fixed character and final doom, before the assembled world. It is therefore no trifling concern to which of these families we belong: An eternity of bliss, or woe, is suspended upon this point. Should we not therefore consider the words now before us, as a question to each of us in particular?

Dost thou believe in the Son of God?

In this short, but solemn sentence, it becomes us to pay a proper regard to *the authority of the sacred Querist*. It is no other than the great Searcher of hearts, the constituted Judge of all men; and that all-wise Being, who is not to be imposed on by any evasive answer. It is that Jesus to whom all things are naked and open,—that Jesus who is the author and finisher, the object and support of faith. He, who will soon determine the propriety or impropriety of our claim as his followers, now proposes this question, *Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*

The *importance of the question* is no less worthy of serious regard, than the authority of him that proposes it: Our All depends upon this subject. What will it avail us, that God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son; that all the blessings of grace and glory are bestowed upon sinners on his account; and that he is become the author of eternal salvation? It is only those that believe that can enjoy the advantage.

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We may hear of justification, adoption, and other special privileges connected with them, but it is only those who believe in Christ, that are justified from all things, and to such alone as receive him, he gives the right or authority to become the sons of God. An unbeliever, whatever speculative knowledge he may have of gospel doctrines, is under the curse. It is with the heart that a man believeth to righteousness, and where this is the case, the enmity is destroyed, and love to God will appear in his conduct. Faith worketh by love; and the fruits of obedience are as necessarily connected with true faith, as light with the sun, or the stream with the fountain. It is true, the fruits of faith may not at all seasons be alike evident, either to the believer or others: But where faith is, even in the lowest degree, there will be both the principle and a propensity to fruitfulness. Like a tree in the orchard, although not enriched with flowers and fruits in the winter months, it possesses the principle of both, in the sap it contains. Holiness is the desire and delight of the real christian. In his darkest seasons, and in the lowest frame, he feels a fixed purpose and determination of heart to bring forth the fruits of obedience. How much then depends upon a proper answer to this question! *Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*

In a former discourse we have considered this question, as it is descriptive both of the *object* and *nature* of faith: Agreeable to the method then proposed, we proceed,

II. To mention such marks, or evidences, of true faith, whereby we may be helped to form some judgment of our state and character, and so return a proper answer to the Saviour's question.

It is certainly a very necessary and important duty, for a man to examine himself whether he be in the faith: This appears not only from the express command of the Apostle, but from our own interest, and the infinite consequences which are connected with the subject. But in order to such an enquiry, two things are requisite: Something may be said both of the *manner* and *matter* of our search.

1. It is necessary that we be not partial and hasty, but honest and deliberate in our enquiry. Some begin to enter upon the work, but break off abruptly; they do not pursue the business, as if they were convinced of its vast importance; or they apprehend the affair so perplexed, that they resolve to refer it to a future season, and run the dreadful venture a little longer.—Others are rash in their conclusions; they make no allowances for the different degrees of faith; they begin the search at an improper season,

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in an hour of temptation and darkness; or they fix upon the high experiences of others as their rule, and thus, concluding that they have not the characters of God's children, they proceed to pronounce sentence against themselves. I would add therefore,

2. That in order to this examination, care must be taken that the marks by which we judge ourselves, be proper, such as have the word of God for their support. To lay down any fixed degree of terror, distress, or consolation, and to suppose that unless a person comes up to this standard in every particular, he is to conclude unfavourably of his state, is, in my opinion, exceeding dangerous, and an error against which there was never more need of caution than the present day. A person may have experienced great terrors of conscience, and these be succeeded by very great comfort and serenity of soul, and yet remain a stranger to the faith of God's elect. On the other hand, another who has been brought to see his state and character, as a sinner against God; his need of the application of the blood of Christ, and of interest in his righteousness, and heartily to approve of being saved in God's gracious method, through Jesus Christ: Although he can give but a very imperfect account how his conviction and conversion was brought about, yet we have all the proof that can reasonably be desired,

to conclude that he is passed from death unto life, and is really accepted before God in the beloved. His profession and practice are such as have the sanction of God's word for their vindication. He is sure, with the man, to whom our Lord speaks in the text, that a very great change and alteration has taken place in him: And whereas once he was blind to his true interest, and the grace and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ; now he sees the necessity of attending to the one, and the excellency and sufficiency of the other. There is very great danger of making the experiences of others the rule of our examination; and it is to be feared, that while many *distress*, others *deceive* themselves by this. The one go on doubting, and the other presuming of their interest in God's favour, to the end of life; and the chief reason is, a want of an impartial examination of themselves by God's word. Were professors but more frequent, diligent, and impartial in their searching the scriptures, and comparing themselves with what they read, there would not be so many doubts and suspicions amongst the truly godly as there are. The question *then*, would not be whether they had experienced the same terrors as this person, or attained to the same elevations of joy as *that*; but whether they are new creatures,—partakers of a divine nature,—led by the spirit of Christ,
and

and such as have the characters, dispositions, and tempers of the people of God. Whether they are meek, humble, poor of spirit, holy, merciful, and compassionate towards all men. These are some of the characters described by Christ in his sermon on the mount.

Having premised these things, I now proceed, according to the method proposed, to lay before you some scriptural evidences of true faith. And may the God of all wisdom help me to clearness in the representation, and you, to an honest impartiality in the enquiry.

1. A believer sees such a glorious excellency and suitableness in the Lord Jesus Christ, as renders him in every view *precious* to his soul. What can be more desirable to the blind than sight; to the necessitous than food; or to the captive than liberty? But Christ is the *light* of the world; the *bread* of life; the great and the only *deliverer*. He is the gain and glory, the treasure and trust, the health and honour of his people. By faith they discover in him all the treasures of wisdom, power, and grace. Such see him to be able to succour them under every difficulty, to sympathize with them in every trial, and to save them from every enemy. His blood cleanseth from all sin, his grace is sufficient for them, and he has pledged his royal word never to leave them,

nor forsake them: None are rejected, and all succoured, that come to him, and depend on him. In short, no language can describe how precious Christ is to a believer. When they consider the glory he relinquished; the state he submitted to; the gracious design he came upon:—When they take a view of the work he performed; the sufferings he endured; and the subjects for whom he did all this:—When they reflect upon the promises he has made; and the engagements entered into to sanctify, and save poor sinners: How can they but account him precious! How can they do otherwise than love his name, his company, appointments, and people? They esteem him as the chief of ten thousand, the pearl of price, fairer than the sons of men, and altogether lovely. Christ is so precious to every true believer, that, with the Apostle *Paul*, they account the knowledge of him the most excellent of all knowledge; and discover their value of him, by giving him the pre-eminence in their affections. That which we greatly value, we either place in the most conspicuous situation, for the entertainment of our friends, or deposit in a place of security, to protect it from our enemies: A believer desires to entertain his friends with a display of Christ, he has no better topic for conversation, and finds a constant subject here for admiration. Love opens the heart to
Christ,

Christ, and desires him to make it his residence; or, to use the Apostles phrase, "Christ dwells in their hearts by faith^a." "To them that believe, he is precious^b." And with the Psalmist, such can say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee^c."

From this scriptural description of faith, let me beg of you to examine, what evidence you have of being possessed of it.—If you have no saving knowledge of Christ, no sincere love to him; yea, if you do not prefer him to all things besides, your pretended faith is but a fancy, and your profession a delusion. If you sincerely believe him to be what the scripture represents, you will love him more than brother or sister, father or mother, husband or wife, house or land, yea, than liberty or life. If you are believers, you have really given up your hearts to Christ; you long to have every thought brought into subjection to him; and it is your grief and burden, that you are not more sincerely and uniformly engaged in meditation on his excellencies. You evidence your cordial esteem for the adorable Jesus, by a steady search after him, in his word, in his ordinances; and at his footstool. Now what says conscience to this enquiry? Do your hearts and actions condemn you, or not?

S f 2

If

^a Ephes. iii. 17.—^b 1 Pet. ii. 7.—^c Psalm lxxiii. 25.

If they do, God is greater than the heart, and knoweth all things.

Thus while *Peter*, the servant, describes the character of true christians, saying, "To you that believe he is precious:" Jesus, the master, proposes this question to each of us, *Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*

2. Another effect, or evidence of true faith; is *Rest*. This the Apostle *Paul* lays down as the necessary consequence of faith. In his epistle to the Hebrews, he says, "We which have believed do enter into rest^d." The same cause will always produce the same effect, and therefore we may be assured, that this rest was by no means a privilege confined to the apostolic age: But as then, so now, all that believe do enter into rest.

But when we describe *rest*, as the inseparable consequence of believing; by rest, we do not mean a cessation either from that labour or warfare which is proper to the christian. It is not a state of sloth and inactivity, arising from a supposition that we have attained *that*, which is sufficient to constitute us christians. Some talk, indeed, as if *seeking*, *striving*, &c. were confined to a person's first concern about religion: Hence they make a distinction between what they term a *Seeker*, and a *Believer*. But where is the scripture authority for such a distinction?

^d Heb. iv. 3.

distinction? *Seeking* as necessarily supposes *believing*, as *worship* does the being of a God: Who would ever seek after that which he has no discovery of, nor the least probability of attaining? Be your attainments then what they may, I venture to affirm, if you are not a seeker, you are not a believer; and on the other hand, if you do in reality seek with your whole heart, although you have not yet attained to a full manifestation of your personal interest in Christ, you have that faith which will never rest satisfied without it. *David* was a seeker, as is evident from his own words, "My soul followeth hard after thee^e." As the heart panteth for the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God^f." *Paul* describes himself as one of this character. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that, for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus^g." Yea, all the family of faith, in former ages, are represented

^e Psalm lxxiii. 8.—^f Psalm xlii. 1, 2.—^g Philp. iii. 12—14.

presented as seekers. “This is the generation of them that seek thee, that seek thy face, O *Jacob* ^h.” And again, “Let all those that seek thee, rejoice and be glad in thee, and let such as love thy salvation, say continually let God be magnified ⁱ.” Where seeking God, and loving his salvation, are exegetical. Nor was this peculiar to the Old Testament dispensation; *Peter* exhorts those, to whom he wrote, “as new-born babes to desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby ^k.” From which it appears, that though they were the children of God, truly regenerated, yet they were to seek, or desire the sincere milk of the word, in order to their growth in holiness and comfort. Seeking and striving are constant duties, in the life of a christian; seeking after greater attainments in knowledge, and striving after further advances in holiness. It is required of us that we *strive* to enter in at the strait gate; and the reason assigned is, because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth to life: But if this be a reason at *first*, it is so *always*; for the way is as narrow after we are in it, as it was when we first entered upon it. And therefore we are commanded to watch, wrestle, be diligent, and follow on to know the Lord.

But

^h Psalm xxiv. 6.—ⁱ Psalm lxx. 4.—^k 1 Peter ii. 2.

But by that rest which we enter upon by believing, is meant a cordial approbation of the *work* and *ways* of Jesus Christ, accompanied with a dependence upon the one, and a very high esteem of the other. This produces *rest*. A rest, from those anxious fears of God's wrath;—a rest, from those alarms of conscience;—a rest, from that trouble of soul;—and a rest, from those forebodings of eternal misery, which generally precede a discovery of the Saviour. Christ says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest¹." And what we enjoy at first, is to be obtained in all future distresses, in the very same way, viz. by believing. Rest as naturally follows believing, as light does the sun. If therefore you habitually depend upon the blood of Christ for pardon,—the righteousness of Christ for acceptance,—the promise of Christ for supply,—the spirit of Christ for sanctification,—the power of Christ for your security,—and the intercession of Christ for your admittance into the kingdom of glory: If this dependence be accompanied with an increasing desire, to walk even as he also walked; to esteem his commandments, and to do his will: Then, I presume, there is good authority to conclude, that you do really believe on the Son of God.

3. Another

¹ Matt. xi. 28.

3. Another thing which follows upon faith, as an evidence of the truth of it, is *Joy*. “We joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the *reconciliation*^m.” “Believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of gloryⁿ.” Hence we read likewise, of the “joy of faith^o.” And the Apostle *Paul* pleads for the Romans, that “the God of hope would fill them with *all joy and peace in believing*^p.” It is a joy which originates in a discovery of the divine wisdom, grace, and holiness, as displayed in the scheme of salvation. To see honour to God, and happiness to man, springing from the same root, and growing up together in beautiful harmony, through a boundless eternity, O what a subject is it for joy! True concern of soul will never be limited to our own advantage; a believer could find no rest or joy from any discovery, unless the glory of God be honourably secured, and displayed advantageously therein. The enquiry of such, is not only, can I be saved, but can God be just in saving me? And in the gospel is found that which fully answers the enquiry, and lays a sure foundation for joy. The true believer rejoices in Christ Jesus: And though in himself he finds perpetual cause for sorrow, yet in the Lord he finds sufficient matter for joy. He rejoices

^m Rom. v. 11.—ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 8.—^o Philip. i. 25.—
^p Rom. xv. 13.

joices in Christ, as of God made to sinners wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption:—Rejoices in the love, the strength, and the glory of the Lord.—Brethren, have you this evidence of faith, that believing you rejoice?

4. Another property and evidence of faith, is a real *love* for every truth contained in the word of God. Truth is to be considered as a part of Christ's fulness; and the believer desires to receive from him not only grace for grace, but likewise truth, in the love of it, truth, as it is *in* Christ Jesus. Believers are not partial in what they receive, they do not receive one doctrine and reject another; but so far as the understanding is enlightened, they receive *all*, and reject *no* truth. There is not one doctrine contained in the Bible, that the church of God could dispense with. They rejoice in the truth, and contend for it as the hungry man would for his bread, as a miser for his treasure, or as a king for his diadem. They buy the truth by much diligence and study, but no price is accounted equal to its value. They are so rooted and grounded in the truth, that it is become more with them than a mere sentiment. They prize it highly, and esteem the doctrines of grace, more than even life itself. They strive together for the faith and honour of the

gospel^a; earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints^r; and hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering^s. Thus was it with the Apostle *Paul*, with what earnestness, constancy, and holy boldness did he stand forth in the support of truth, before friends and foes, against Jews and Gentiles? He kept the faith as a most sacred depositum; and never yielded up the cause while he had life and breath to maintain it.—He felt the importance of the doctrine; the sacred energy of divine truth warmed his heart, while he proclaimed to sinners the unsearchable riches of Christ.—Is it so in any measure with us? Do we feel a holy concern for the honour and success of the glorious gospel? Is faith so mixed with the word, that we derive real pleasure and support from it? Are we grieved on account of the daring aspersions, or horrid reflections which have been cast upon some of the blessed doctrines of the gospel? Do we rejoice that truth is immutable, and that God has engaged that it shall eventually prevail against all error and superstition?

5. Another effect, concomitant, or evidence of true faith, is *inward holiness* accompanied with *outward fruitfulness*. Obedience is the best and most certain mark of true faith: Indeed, this is the most general rule, which God has been pleased to give us
to

to judge ourselves by. “By their fruits ye shall know them’.” “Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” Holiness is inseparable from true faith, as is evident from the uniform language of the word of God. Hence we read of the heart being purified by faith^u: And of being sanctified by faith which is in Christ^v. The Apostle *James*, who held no other doctrine than his brethren in the same office, makes it very plain, that without this evidence, all pretences to faith are but dangerous delusions. He says, “Shew me thy faith by thy works,—faith without works is dead, being alone.—It is by works that faith is made perfect^y;” *i. e.* answers its end, by bringing forth fruit to the praise and glory of God. The Apostle *Paul*, likewise speaking of believers in his day, says, “We all with open face, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord^z.” To understand this beautiful metaphor, it may not be improper to remark, that the mirrors, or, to speak in modern language, the glasses made use of in that day, were plates of gold, silver, or brass, polished in the most exquisite manner. Now a person in a proper direction, taking a view of an object in one

T t 2

of

^t Matt. vii. 20.—^u 1 John ii. 3.—^v Acts xv. 9.—
Acts xxvi. 18.—^y James ii. 18, 20, 22.—^z 2 Cor. iii. 18.

of these mirrors, when the sun shone upon it, the reverberated rays would so fall upon the face of the spectator, as to give it something of a similar lustre: So, in the glass of the word, we behold the face of Jesus; and the more we behold his glory, the more we are conformed to him.—In strict unison with *James* and *Paul*, let us listen to the declaration of the faithful and true witness, “Herein,” says he, “is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples^a.” Not that fruitfulness constitutes a man a disciple; but he cannot be a disciple without it: It is not the *condition* which gives him a title; but the *evidence* which proves his title good.

How does this description of faith agree with our experience? Do we bring forth fruit meet for repentance; fruit unto holiness, fruit unto life everlasting? “Without holiness no man can see the Lord^b.” If you are living in the allowed practice of any known sin, or in the wilfull neglect of positive duty, you want one essential mark of being a new creature. I am far from supposing any thing that is done by us is perfect; in many things we all offend, and in all things come short of the glory of God; But if there is not an hearty and uniform esteem of all God’s commandments, and a fixed desire to press towards the mark of perfect

^a John xv. 8.—^b Heb. xii. 14.

perfect holiness, we have no ground to conclude that we know any thing as yet of true faith, for “he that faith he abideth in Christ, ought himself also to walk even as Christ walked^c.”

6. *Confidence* in the veracity of Christ to perform all his promises, and in his power to keep that which we commit to him, is another evidence of faith. The Apostle *Paul* had no dependence upon his own prudence, watchfulness, or diligence, as the security of his perseverance; these were very necessary in their place; but his hope was founded upon the engagements and ability of his dear master. “I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him^d.” *David* professes the same confidence, when he says, “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me^e.”—If then we do thus depend upon the word and power of Christ; if we see that it is his engagement, his interest, his honour thus to preserve, protect, and perfect his work in the soul; if we apply to him for daily support, and final victory, we have reason to conclude that we do believe on the Son of God.—Once more,

7. An habitual *looking, waiting, and preparing* for the coming of Christ, is another scriptural evidence of faith.—Hence we find

^c 1 John ii. 6.—^d 2 Tim. i. 12.—^e Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

find true christianity described as a “looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ;” “waiting for the coming of the Lord;” and having the heart and treasure above. And as those who look for these things, we are exhorted to be diligent, that we may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless^s.

But is it so with us? Are we looking for the appearance of Christ, to put a period to our trials, temptations, and every thing disagreeable or distressing?—Are we looking for him as our hope, our treasure, and deliverer? Do we wait for his coming, as the season of the glorious manifestation of the sons of God; when their adoption shall be complete, their capacity perfect, and their felicity consummate? Can we look forward to that glorious event, with some degree of composure and comfort, believing that as Christ is our life at present, so when he shall appear we shall be like him; shall see him as he is, and appear with him in glory?—In the last place.

8. An *holy concern* for the promotion and advancement of God’s glory, in the salvation of sinners, is a further evidence of true faith. “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth any thing, but faith which worketh by love^h.” If then we do, in reality, believe what God says in his word,

^f Titus ii. 13.—^s 2 Pet. iii. 14.—^h Gal. v. 6.

word, of the present danger and final misery of the wicked, let love to their precious souls appear, in an endeavour to awaken and snatch them from ruin. And if God be glorified in the salvation of sinners, evidence your love to his name, your zeal for his honour, and seek to promote it in this way. O plead for the prosperity of Zion, and endeavour to further the gracious design, by often speaking a word in season to the ignorant, and them that are out of the way. Be instant in season and out of season, in the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not the hand; ever remembering, “that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins¹.”

On the whole, if this faith be in you and abound, ye will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. You will be careful to add to your faith fortitude, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness and charity; till you are called to receive the inheritance, and appear without spot and blameless before the throne. You will love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, rest in him,—rejoice before him,—esteem his doctrine,—bring forth fruit to his praise, depend upon his veracity and power,—wait
for

¹ James v. 20.

for his coming,—and in the mean-time plead his cause, and endeavour to promote his glory, in the hearts of your fellow-creatures. Thus may you grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, till faith terminate in vision, and your souls are filled with all the fulness of God.—May the God of hope fill you with all joy, and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. And to Father, Word, and Spirit, be all the praise throughout eternity. *Amen.*

SERMON

S E R M O N XV.

Love to God traced to its Origin.

I J O H N iv. 19.

We love him, because he first loved us.

AS love is the sum of all religion, the requirement of the law, and the end of the gospel; there is scarce any question, in which we are so much interested as this: Do we really love God? Love is the fruit of spirit of adoption: It is love, which casts out fear, that inseparable concomitant of the spirit of bondage. It is love, which enables the soul to call God Father, and to esteem him, depend on him, and rejoice in him as such. What the scripture intends by the spirit of adoption, is no other than that holy, loving, obedient disposition, which all that are born of God partake of. How common is it, when we observe children discover the same dispositions, tempers, or inclinations with their parents, to

say they are actuated by their very spirit, be it either good or bad? Now to apply this to the case in hand: The name and character of our heavenly Father is *Love*.—Love is that amiable disposition by which he is actuated, in all that he does. It is love, pure, unabating love to his own honour and glory, that constrains him to every act both of grace and judgment. In like manner, love is the characteristic of our belonging to God. Hereby we know that we are of him: This is the infallible distinction between the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error; by one or other of which the whole human race are influenced. “Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love.” Ver. 6, 7, 8.—To the same purpose, he speaks in the 13th verse of this chapter, “Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his spirit.”

But seeing there are many pretend to love God, who, it is to be feared, are entire strangers to that heavenly temper; seeing from a blind partiality to ourselves, it is possible to presume this is our character, when it is not: The Apostle fixes upon *love to the brethren*, as the certain fruit or evidence of love to God: “If we love one another,
God

God dwelleth in us :” This he stiles *perfect love*, in verses 12 and 17. “ Herein is our love made perfect,” *i. e.* Love to God is enriched and adorned with its fruits and evidences. By this the sincerity of our love appears.—We have the fruits of love ; and as the effect cannot be without the cause, it is evident that we are influenced by the spirit of love. Men do not gather figs of thorns, or grapes from thistles, because it is not their nature to produce such fruits : But seeing we do bring forth that fruit which God requireth, we conclude that we are the vines of his planting, the trees of his watering. This gives us “ boldness in the day of trial : because as he is,” *i. e.* as God is love, “ so are we in this world :” We love the truth, as it is the revelation of his love ; and we love the brethren, for the truth’s sake that is in them.

Faith is founded upon the free proclamation of pardon and salvation in the word ; but *confidence*, respecting our good state, arises from the evidence we have of our love to God. And where love to God is thus accompanied with its proper fruits, it carries its own evidence, and removes doubts, fears, and suspicions concerning its sincerity. Fear will always be proportionably strong, as our evidences are weak. As love increases fear declines. Ver. 18. “ There is no fear in love ;” *i. e.* no servile, distressing fear : Love

is always accompanied with a filial reverence of God's majesty, and a cautious fear of offending him; "but perfect love," *i. e.* love with its evidences as before described, "casteth out fear; because fear hath torment: he that feareth, is not made perfect in love." *i. e.* However it may be, as to his state towards God, he wants these qualifications, which are essential to a well-grounded evidence of his being a child of God. In a word, perfect love implies that sensible union with God, and delight in him, which arise from a discovery of his moral excellencies; accompanied with a sincere affection to the whole truth, and to all the people of God, of every denomination, so far as the truth and image of God appear in them.— And if this be a scriptural representation of the nature of perfect love, perhaps some, who have made great pretensions to the thing, will be found to want two essential evidences of that character, *viz.* love to some of the grand doctrines of the gospel, (and by the way, we cannot love what we do not believe, nor esteem what we revile) and love to many of God's people, who are not exactly of the same sentiment or denomination amongst professors. On the other hand, many who have concluded that they came far short of this perfect love, may see that they have long been partakers of it: They love the whole truth, as it is in
Jesus:

Jesus: They love his followers of every name, for the truth's sake that is in them.

Having insisted so particularly on the nature of love, the Apostle, in the words of the text, proceeds to point out the rise and spring of it. *We love him, because he first loved us.* In this discourse we shall attend to two things, which are held forth in the text.

- I. The proposition laid down by the Apostle, as the sure and indubitable mark of true christianity, viz. *Love to God.*
- II. The cause or spring of this love to God: *We love him, because he first loved us,*

I. The criterion of true christianity, as described in these words, is *love to God. We love him.* The Apostle, you see, speaks of this as a matter of certainty: The primitive christians were confident of their love to God, from the effects it produced in them: Nor was their confidence shaken, by any alterations which they experienced in their frame. Their mind was not always alike serene, nor their affections equally vigorous; they had their dark, listless frames, as well as we; but in their heaviest hour, they were sure that they loved God, because they had the fruits of it to refer to.—If then our confidence

confidence of God's favour be built upon our lively frames and comfortable sensations, it must alter as often as they do; but if it be derived from the habitual bent, desire, and disposition of the soul, to seek and serve God, there is something to encourage us, even in an hour of darkness. Your desire, even in the darkest moment, is still to him, and to the remembrance of his name. Communion with him, and conformity to him, are those desirable privileges you breathe after. It is your greatest burden, that you do not love him more sincerely, and serve him with greater uniformity: But you do love God, you do love holiness, you do love his people: Well, "we know that every one that doth righteousness is born of him^a." And "hereby (viz. by sincere love to the brethren) we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him^b."

In treating of this love to God, it will be proper to consider both its NATURE and EFFECTS, in order to our forming a proper estimate, whether it be our character or not.

As to the NATURE of love to God, it is the motion of the will towards him, as he is apprehended to be that amiable and glorious Being, who is altogether worthy of our esteem: So that love is properly the effect
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^a 1 John ii. 27.—^b 1 John iii. 19.

of illumination. God shines into the heart to give the light of the knowledge of his glory, and this produces that esteem, desire, and complacency of soul, which we call love.—This love has respect to God, as he is the *greatest good* considered in himself, and as the *most suitable good* with respect to us, his creatures.

In himself he is possessed of every natural and moral excellency in the highest degree: And if it be commendable to value and esteem the fortitude of a renowned champion, or the wisdom of some disinterested patriot, who have exerted themselves for the welfare, or in the defence of their country: Sure it is but equitable that we love God, in a degree as much superior, as his excellencies are above all created endowments. Almighty power, unerring wisdom, infinite goodness, unblemished truth, and spotless holiness, are perfections that belong to him. There is none *holy* as the Lord. None *good* but him. He is *light* in all its effulgence, and *love* in all its perfect beauty. Whatever we behold of wisdom, amiableness, power, or goodness, in the whole circle of our observation; all are but so many straight lines, drawn by his own omnipotent hand, from himself as the centre: All are but so many samples of those infinitely amiable perfections which reside in God. He is *great*, he is *holy*; which is to
express

express every perfection that the human mind can conceive of in two words. Wisdom and power constitute his greatness; and righteousness, faithfulness, and goodness are the several branches of his holiness. How then should we admire him, as the infinite and eternal King?—Contemplate his omnipresence with awe, and his sovereignty with a becoming submission of heart? How should we fear to be obnoxious to the power and justice, rejoice in the mercy, and fetch comfort from the immutability of that all-glorious Being, who has condescended to reveal himself to us in his word? Sure it is our duty, as his rational creatures, to contemplate the glorious excellencies of this great God, as they are unfolded to our view in his works and word. How should we love him with the whole heart, and esteem his favour better than life?

Nor is God only the greatest good considered in himself, but also the *most suitable good* to his creatures. In his presence is life, and in his favour an heaven of felicity. He alone is able to fill the desires of the soul, and fix it upon himself, as an unshaken foundation. He is an infinite, immutable, and eternal portion; the light of light, and perfection of all perfection: And deliberately to choose him as our portion, and pursue his glory and enjoyment as our end, is a certain evidence of the reality of our love to him.

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It is from a discovery of what God is, that we are brought to desire his favour, and delight in his perfections. A display of his excellent glory captivates the heart, so as to induce the believer to declare that there is none upon earth he desires in comparison of him; that this God shall guide him with his counsel, govern by his laws, and finally bring him to the kingdom of his glory.—Such is the *Nature* of this love.

The EFFECT of this love, is a sincere respect and regard to every manifestation or revelation which God has been pleased to give of himself; whether it be in his *works*, in his *word*, in his *ordinances*, or in his *people*.

1. True love discovers itself in a very high esteem of God, as manifested in his *works*. His works are great and manifold, sought out by all them that have a delight therein. A discovery of God in his works, particularly of his greatness and goodness, has a tendency to inspire the soul with holy wonder, and real gratitude. We have observed already, that greatness and goodness is the sum of all his perfections: These are displayed in all his works. They shine forth gloriously in the work of *creation*; with still greater glory in the works of *providence*; but greatest of all, in the work of *redemption*. Here almighty greatness and

infinite goodness unite with equal beams, and unfullied glory. O how wonderful are his works! In wisdom hath he made them all. How do they seem to conspire together, to gain a place in our affections, for their glorious Author? Look round the world, and what profuse, what abundant goodness appears, in the vast variety of blessings provided either for our enjoyment or entertainment, as his creatures! While the heavens shine with his glory, the earth is full of his goodness.—Glance at his works of *providence*, and how wise, how holy his conduct! How great, how good his design! With goodness and mercy he follows us continually;—follows us from infancy to manhood, from the cradle to the grave. Yea, the darkest, the most afflictive dispensations with which the true christian is ever exercised, shall, in the event, be found to be no exceptions to the truth of this observation: For “all things work together for good, to them that love him^c.”—But in *redemption*, Almighty love is pleased to lay aside the veil. God commandeth his love towards sinners^d: And in doing this, there is such a display of majesty and mercy, of greatness and goodness, that angels wonder, sinners are captivated, and saints adore through eternity. Such a discovery of the love of God had the Apostle obtained, that he dwells upon it
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^c Rom. viii. 28.—^d Rom. v. 8.

with a pleasing tautology, in several parts of this chapter. Thus, verse 9 and 10, "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." To the same purpose, verse 14, "We have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."

2. Another effect of love to God, is a very high esteem and regard to the revelation he hath given of himself in his *word*. What is the Bible, but that bright mirror in which we behold the glory of the Lord?—In his *law*, how doth he reveal himself as an holy, perfect, and righteous Being;—as requiring not only regularity in the outward conduct, but truth in the inward parts. Herein we view him as perfect beauty, strict rectitude, and glorious in holiness: All his commandments appear as they really are, holy, just, and good: And though considered in ourselves, this law is the ministration of condemnation to us; yet there is a glory discovered in it, which is altogether worthy of God. The sinner, that is convinced by the Holy Spirit, doth not cavil at the law, because it is holy, but condemns himself for want of conformity to it: Approving of God's holiness therein, he mourns over his

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defects:

defects: And in proportion as the law appears glorious to his understanding, he loaths himself because of his sinful deformity. The true convert loves the law, because it is a manifestation of God: Hence *David* esteemed all his commandments^c: And he breaks out in the language of holy transport, “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day^f.” The law was his delight, and he prays that God would open his eyes, that he might behold the wonderful things contained therein^g.—*Job* likewise declares that he esteemed the words of his mouth, more than his necessary food^h.—The Apostle *Paul* also, even at the very season when we find him complaining, and groaning on account of indwelling sin, declares, that he “consented to the law, that it was good,” and “delighted in this law of God after the inward manⁱ.”

As to the other part of God's word, viz. the *gospel*, it is the most bright, the most perfect revelation of his glory and beauty, that he ever did, or ever will give to his church in the present state. It is by this, that he shines into the heart, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ^k. In this, we all with open face, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image

^c Psalm cxix. 128.—^f Psalm cxix. 97.—^g Psalm cxix. 18.—

^h Job xxiii. 12.—ⁱ Rom. vii. 16, 22.—^k 2 Cor. iv. 6.

image from glory to glory¹.—Have you, my brethren, this evidence of love to God? I am sensible that you will find many and great defects in yourselves; but if it be your sincere desire to be more conformed to the will of God, in his law, and more sanctified through the word of the truth of the gospel; it is no bad evidence that your love to him is sincere. It is the property of love both to constrain to obedience, and to humble us, on account of our defects. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous^m.” The sum of obedience, both to the law and gospel, is love.

3. *Ordinances* are another special mean of God’s appointment, for making himself known to his people: And it is the property of true love, highly to esteem and value them. *David* counted one day in God’s house better than a thousand; and chose rather to sustain the meanest office there, than dwell in the tents of wickednessⁿ. It was his delight to appear before God in the sanctuary^o. This was his language, “My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath to thy judgments at all times^p.” True love will always discover itself by a steady regard to the seasons of gospel worship. If we really know what it is to have fellowship
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¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18.—^m 1 John v. 3.—ⁿ Psalm lxxxiv. 10.—
^o Psalm xlii. 2.—^p Psalm cxix. 20.

with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, we shall ever be forward to embrace every opportunity, when the doors of his house stand open, of increasing our acquaintance with him.—But to be careless and indifferent in these things, is a sure evidence, either that love is wholly wanting, or that it is in a very languid state.

4. Love to God will evidence itself by a real esteem and value for his *people*. We shall love them because they are the children of God and the brethren of Jesus Christ. Suppose any of you had an intimate friend or relation, removed into a distant country, who had left his family behind him, and some of them in indigent circumstances: If we loved that friend, should we not often converse with them, and endeavour to relieve their necessities? The case is similar; God has his family below, many of them are in low circumstances: If then we love God we shall love his people, because they bear his image, and for this very reason, because they are related to him. We shall “love them not in word and tongue, but in deed and in truth.” This is an evidence of love to God, much insisted on in this epistle. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment

commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also^r.” “We know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren^s.” We come now,

II. To the cause or spring of this love to God. *We love him, because he first loved us.* Our love to God, I apprehend, is not primarily founded upon a discovery of his pardoning love to us in particular, but from a view of what he is in himself, as he appears in Jesus Christ. We find him to be all that which is able to make us happy; and as such, we desire, above all things, to have interest in him. But it is not a discovery of God's love to this or that man in particular, that begets love to him; for none can have evidence that God loves him in particular, further than he is keeping his commandments, and patiently bearing the cross; according to those words which Christ left for the comfort of his friends, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you^t.” Let a man make ever so sound a profession of the faith, and talk of ever so many impressions and experiences, if he wants to pass these upon us as proofs of his being a child of God, without shewing his faith, in the works of love commanded by Jesus Christ, he is assuredly deceiving his
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^r 1 John iv. 20, 21.—^s 1 John iii. 14.—^t John xv. 14.

own soul. The spirit of holiness does not first assure a man that God loves him, and then works love in his heart to God: No; he first directs his heart into the love of God, and then, in connection with its genuine fruits and effects, bears witness with his spirit that he is a child of God, an object of his special love.

The design of the beloved Disciple in the text, is, I apprehend, to argue from the effect to the cause. He lays this down as a fixed principle, *we do love God*: And such an effect can only flow from his having first loved us. He treats not so much of the manifestation of God's love *to us*, as of the operation of his love *in us*. Love is the only cause why we do love him. The text is exactly parallel with a passage we meet with in the writings of *David*, Psalm cxvi. 1. "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice, and my supplications." God's hearing his voice in a time of trouble, was not the *reason why* he loved God, but the *evidence that* he did love him. He explains himself in the 16th verse, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant, and the Son of thine hand-maid:" But how could he support this declaration? Or what was the ground of his assurance? It was this, *thou hast loosed my bonds*. However, that the words of the text may appear,

pear, if possible, more clear, let us view the argument as drawn forth to this effect.

1. It is neither agreeable to our nature as sinners, or to our practice, while in an unconverted state, to love God. The carnal mind is enmity against him^u; and “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^v.” Love both supposes *union*, and tends to the support of it: But what fellowship hath light with darkness, or love with enmity?—Hence it appears evident,

2. That it is neither possible for a depraved heart to work itself up sincerely to love a pure and holy God: Nor can we suppose this to be the effect of any wicked and diabolical spirit. Is it not essential to all things to act agreeable to their nature? But so far is God, or his service, from being agreeable to sinners in an unconverted state, that they “say unto the Almighty, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways^x.”—And as to the apostate spirits, it is neither their practice to love God; nor is it their interest, supposing it was in their power, to produce it in others.—But,

3. The Apostle asserts that all true christians do love God: And since this is not to be ascribed to themselves, nor to the

Y y

operation

^u Rom. viii. 7.—^v 1 Cor. ii. 14.—^x Job xxi. 14.

operation of wicked spirits : It must proceed either from the holy angels, or from God. But seeing, however desirous the good angels might be to effect this, it is beyond their power ; it follows, that love to God must, of necessity, flow from himself. His love is the cause of our loving him ; and our love to him is the sure evidence of his love to our souls. Here then we trace the effect up to the cause ; and in doing so, we find that it is free, personal, distinguishing, everlasting love. *We love him* ; and the only reason why any do love him, is, *because he first loved them*. Love to God, is the effect and evidence of the life of God in the soul : But whence flows this love, or that life ? but from God's eternal love to sinners. Let us call in the assistance of holy *Paul*, in order to our understanding these words of the beloved *John* : Writing to the church at Ephesus, he says, " God, who is rich in mercy, FOR HIS GREAT LOVE, WHEREWITH HE LOVED US, even when we were dead in sins, hath QUICKENED us together with Christ^y." From which declaration these two things are evident ; that it is owing to his great love that sinners are quickened ;—and they are quickened in order to their loving him. So that the love of God is the blessed spring, the glorious cause of the *renovation*, the *redemption*,

^y Ephes. ii. 4, 5.

redemption, and the *separation* of his people from all eternity.

(1.) This love is evident in their *renovation*. The kindness of God the Saviour appears in this, “that according to his mercy he saves them, through the washing of *regeneration* and the *renewing* of the Holy Ghost^z.”—It is of his own will that they are begotten^a.—It is he that destroys the enmity, and directs the heart into the love of himself^b. So that if we do in reality love God, his word, his ways, his people, we have the best mark that we can desire of our regeneration; and therein a sure evidence of our being the objects of his love: “For love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God^c :”

(2.) If we really love God, we may look beyond our quickening, and behold his love shining forth gloriously, in the great work of *redemption*. The promise which God made to the Saviour was this, He shall see his seed:—Shall see of the travel of his soul, and shall be satisfied^d.” All that *are* quickened, *were* redeemed; and all that *were* redeemed, *shall be* quickened. The *commis-*
ssion of the spirit is of the same extent with the *work* of the Son: All that he redeemed were given to him by the Father^e; and all

Y y 2

that

^z Titus iii. 4, 5.—^a James i. 18.—^b 2 Theff. iii. 5.—
^c 1 John iv. 7.—^d Isa. liii. 10, 11.—^e John vi. 38, 39, and John xvii. 2.

that the Father hath given to him, shall come to him^f.—O ye new-born babes, who desire the sincere milk of the word, in order to your growth in holiness and comfort; let me invite you to behold, admire, and take comfort from the display of God's love, in the glorious work of redemption as here described. "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins^g."—But we have not yet reached the extremity of God's love to his people: For,

(3.) We may trace it up to his self-moving goodness, from all eternity. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son^h." He commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for usⁱ. Now as the disposition to give, is previous to the gift itself; and that which is commended, prior to the commendation of it; so this love is more ancient than the cross of Christ. He loved his church with an everlasting love, and therefore he sent his Son to redeem, his spirit to renew them, and all with this view, that they might be holy, and unblameable before him

^f John vi. 37.—^g 1 John iv. 9, 10.—^h John iii. 16.—
ⁱ Rom. v. 8.

him in love^k. Thus we see, that our love to God, is the evidence of his love to us; and his love to us, is the spring, cause, reason, or, if you please, principle of our love to him. *We love him, because he first loved us.*

From the subject we shall deduce an inference or two, and so conclude this discourse. And,

1. If love to God be the characteristic of true christianity, then let me beseech you to examine what claim you have to it.—If you love God, you will necessarily love what he loves, and avoid what he hates. God will be your delight, your rest, and the object both of your reverence and obedience. You will esteem his favour better than life, receive his truth, depend on his promises, love his ordinances, and observe his commandments: And though in many things you come short, both of the rule of duty, and your desire of conformity; yet love will bear you forward, with encreasing desire to be more holy, more heavenly, and in all things more like to the dear object of your esteem. In short, you will love God with a different kind of love from what you love any thing below, as well as in a different degree: Your love to him will be more pure, more spiritual, more disinterested, than that with which you love the creatures; or
than

^k Col. i. 22.

than that with which the natural man may love God. And as to the degree of this love, it will be superior to a love of all earthly enjoyments whatever.

But, on the other hand; if you are carnal in your pursuits, worldly in your aims, and sensual in your dispositions, think not that you are of those that love God: Quite the reverse, you are of another character, and of another family: Haters of God is your character; the world is your portion; and the Devil your father. Think not, that by excluding you from this character, I rank you with the profane and abominable: No; I will only suppose you guilty of an undue attachment to the world; this, some will magnify as a virtue, and others represent as a very small vice: However, in the view of God, *this* will be found sufficient to exclude every *Demas* from the character of loving of God. “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him¹.”

2. Supposing that many of you have the evidence that you do love God, what cause have you to be humbled on account of the disproportion of your love to him? God is infinitely lovely in himself; and consequently it is both a reasonable and gracious requirement, that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our
foul,

¹: John ii. 15.

foul, and with all our might.—Our failure in this duty, is sin.—The degree of our failure, constitutes the degree of our sin.—And *this* should be accompanied with a proportionable degree of self-abasement before God.*—May the discoveries of His love prompt our humility, fire our devotion, and make us long to be for ever with the God of love. May it be our privilege to dwell *in* him here, and reign *with* him for ever, for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

SERMON

* See this subject set forth in a very striking manner, in that most excellent *Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, wrote by that great and shining light Mr. Edwards, President of the College of New-Jersey.

S E R M O N X V I.

God secret, but certain, in all his Proceedings: Or, The Providence of God, the Counter-part to his Purposes.

I S A I A H xlv. 15.

Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself: O God of Israel the Saviour.

IT is a question which will ever exceed the capacity of the most enlarged understanding, “Canst thou, by searching, find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection^a?” The subject is great and wonderful: It is high as heaven, what can we say? Deep as eternity, what can we do? In every view it is infinite and unsearchable. In his nature, God is inconceivable; and in his providence, wise, wonderful, and incomprehensible: His way is in the sea, his

Z z path

^a Job xi. 7

path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known^b.

There are various ways in which God may be said to hide himself. If we consider his *nature*, he is the omnipresent, yet invisible God. He dwelleth in that light, to which no mortal can approach and live: No man hath heard his voice, or seen his shape. He is a spirit; a pure, perfect, infinite spirit. But how can our finite understanding comprehend the infinite God? or our carnal, low ideas, conceive of his pure and spiritual nature? As soon might we empty the channels of the sea with a cockle-shell, or gather the winds in our fist. To demonstrate the being and perfections of God from his works, is no great difficulty: The heavens declare his glory^c, and the earth is full of the evidences of his goodness. We can say what he is *not*, and faintly describe what he *is*; but who can trace him out to perfection? Let Saints and Angels exert themselves to the utmost, he remains infinitely exalted above all their blessing and praise. Cherubim and Seraphim must veil their faces before his uncreated glory, and every finite capacity sink under the weight of their earnest desires, to increase in the knowledge of him.

As a *sovereign*; God is pleased also at seasons to hide his face from his own people:

He

^b Psalm lxxvii. 19.—^c Psalm xix. 1.

He withdraws the special tokens of his favour, suspends his sacred visits, or withholds those discoveries of his grace, which render his institutions profitable: He delivers them into the hand of their enemies, that they may be chastised for their transgressions: Continues them under the yoke of servitude, or doth not bring the deliverance so soon as they desire or expect.

Considered as the great *director* and *disposer* of all events, there are times and cases in which he hides himself. As the God of providence and salvation, it may be said of him, that his judgments are a great deep, and all his ways wonderful. The wisdom of the plan, the beauty of the connection, and the harmony of the several parts, are all subjects of admiration. What a depth of design! What a propriety of conduct! What a fitness of means, conducive to the end in view, is evident in all that God hath wrought. Ten thousand instruments, perhaps, are engaged at once; the work is continued upon the wheel for several generations; but at last it is wrought off, without either flaw or failure. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out^d."

"The providence of God towards his peo-

Z z 2

" ple,

^d Rom. xi. 33.

“ ple, may, with propriety, be called the
 “ Drama of Mercy; various scenes of dis-
 “ tress, trials, afflictions, enlargements, and
 “ entanglements are exhibited; but when
 “ all the scenes are withdrawn, and the cur-
 “ tain removed, it will plainly appear, that
 “ all things have wrought together for
 “ good, to them that love and fear God.”

He never erred in judgment, or failed in any thing which he undertook: There is no searching of his understanding, and what his soul desireth, even that he doth. One uniform design prevails in all the works, the ways, the dominion of Jehovah: The circle is large; the lines many, but the centre is one. The good of Zion, in connection with his own glory, is the central point, in which all his works of grace and providence terminate. He is that unseen cause, which directs, disposes, and orders all events. It is his spirit which moves in all the wheels of providence; and however contrary their direction may appear to our view, in reality, they all move straight forward. Such is the nature of that hiding, mentioned in the text. *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself: O God of Israel the Saviour.* In treating upon these words, let us consider,

I. The

- I. The honourable title by which God is here addressed. *O God of Israel the Saviour.*
- II. What is said of him under this character. *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.*

I. In the *title* this glorious Being is described, both in his *relation to* his people, and in his wonderful *appearances for* them. He is the GOD and SAVIOUR of his Israel.

1. In *relation to* them, he is stiled *the God of Israel*. By *Israel*, I apprehend, we are to understand the church of God, in every age and country: And when he is stiled their *God*, it evidences him to be the object of their worship, the glory of their land, the original of their comfort. He ever was, is, and ever will be the hope, the strength, and the confidence of his believing family: And whenever his name is mentioned, as the *God of Israel*, we are reminded of that gracious, seasonable, and very remarkable deliverance, which he wrought for his servant *Jacob*. To have interest in this God, through Jesus Christ, is to have that eye engaged to watch over us,—that arm to defend us,—and that treasure to supply us, which so eminently appeared for the Patriarch in his distress. If by Jesus Christ we have entrance into this family, then all the promises, privileges, and encouragements, which pertained

pertained to Israel, belong also to us. Jehovah is our God, and we are his people;—his presence and promise,—his oath and covenant,—his name and nature, are all engaged for us. Truly “happy is that people that is in such a case: yea happy is that people, whose God is the Lord^e.” His wisdom shall guide, his power keep, and his grace supply them: In short, he has engaged that as their day is, so shall their strength be^f; and that he will never leave them, nor forsake them^g.—The name *Israel*, you will remember, was given to *Jacob*, upon his wrestling with the Angel; and therefore, the primary reason why Jehovah was called the God of Israel, was, that of his meer sovereign grace he entered into covenant with him, to be his friend, guide, and eternal portion. It is by Jesus Christ, that we Gentiles have access to all these privileges, and through him, God becomes the friend, the guide, and portion of every believer.

2. As his relation to the people is signified by his being stiled the God of Israel, his wonderful *appearances for them* is expressed by the term *Saviour*. It is he that supports them under trouble, makes their trials profitable, and in his own time, as well as for his own glory, delivers them out of them. There is a peculiar emphasis in the words,
the

^e Psalm cxliv. 15.—^f Deut. xxxiii. 21.—^g Heb. xiii 5.

the Saviour: As much as to say, the *only* Saviour, the *constant* Saviour.

In the review of their deliverances, they find the number *many*, and the seasons when they were effected, very distant from each other: But however different the occasion, distant the time, or various the instruments, the Saviour was *one*. They give to God all the honour, both of providing the means, and of rendering them effectual. All visible Saviours were of his raising up; they came with his commission, and therefore succeeded in his service. All the temporal deliverances wrought for the church of God, previous to the incarnation of our blessed Lord, were but so many earnest of, and preparatives to, that great and glorious salvation, which he brought in himself.

While they pronounce him the only Saviour, do they not also proclaim him the *constant* Saviour? What he was formerly, he is still; *the* Saviour. He that had delivered their fathers, delivered them the children; and they trusted in him, that he would still deliver his church, even to the end. The salvation of God is to be considered as one continued work: It began as soon as sin made its entrance, and will run on till the consummation of all things. God is advancing his gracious designs of salvation, when he removes the gospel from one place
and

and sends it to another: And in times of persecution, as well as in seasons of outward prosperity, he is the Saviour. He will both purge away the dross, and polish the gold that is to adorn his heavenly palace.—The salvation of God then is *one*: This is the end which he never loses sight of; and this the work in which he is continually engaged. There is not a year, a month, yea, a moment passes over our head, but this salvation draws nearer to its maturity and perfection. This remark might be as fully confirmed from a general view of his work, as it is evident in the experience of every believer: And of such the Apostle asserts, “Now is your salvation *nearer* than when ye believed^h. Every sinner that is converted, every saint that is glorified, brings this grand design nearer to a period. This gloriously important work is carried on in so gradual and imperceptible a manner, and oftentimes advanced by means, in our view so unlikely, that we in a great measure lose sight of the all-wise Agent: This, I suppose, is what the church means by his *hiding himself*. We now pass on,

II. To consider what the church observes of this God and Saviour of Israel. *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.*

It

^h Rom. xiii. 11.

It has been observed already, that these words are descriptive of the secret, yet sure and surprising way, in which God carried on his great designs in the salvation of his people. There is so much of mystery, not only in the design itself, but in the prosecution of it, that it is often hid, not only from the world, but from his own people likewise. Yea, the principal agents which are employed by him, have generally no such view in what they perform, as the event discovers. The devices of a man's heart are pursued, but the counsel of the Lord is either advanced or effected therein. The Lord seeth the end from the beginning; and that end is the manifestation of his own glory in the salvation of the church. This he always keeps in view; and the plan which he has laid down, is wisely calculated to bring about this blessed end.—Under this head I shall attempt two things.—1st, To shew that in all God's saving interpositions for his church, He has been pleased to hide himself.—And, 2dly, Assign some reasons why he chuses to act thus.

FIRST. We are to shew that in God's saving interpositions for his church, he hath all along been pleased to hide himself: *i. e.* He doth not discover his design, till his end is accomplished; nor reveal himself as the author, till the work is compleated. That this truth may appear with the fullest evi-

dence, let me beg your attention to the situation of the church in various periods; and in all of them it will appear, that the God and Saviour of Israel was pleased to hide himself. Consider,

1. His gracious appearances for the human race, upon the first entrance of sin. The Tempter presents the bait,—his arguments prevail,—his desire is accomplished,—man, with his posterity, are involved in one general ruin. How may we imagine, all hell would triumph, upon the supposition, that the whole race would now share in the same punishment, with the wretched outcasts of heaven, and the design of God in creation would be frustrated for ever. May it not here be asked; Could not God have placed his creature man out of the reach of temptation? Would it not have been better to have rendered him incapable of falling? Or at least, why was not some swift-winged messenger dismissed to warn him of his danger, before he had tasted of the prohibited fruit? But the hellish plot is laid, the assault is successful, and man is ruined before God appears. Is all this to be ascribed to negligence, or want of power?—No such thing. Sin is suffered to enter, “that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus¹.” He makes even the
rage

¹ Ephes. ii. 7.

rage of devils, and the sin of man to praise him, and opens a way for the introduction of salvation. Had Satan never fallen, man had not been tempted,—being tempted he fell ;—and falling, the riches of love, mercy, grace, wisdom, and power are magnified in his salvation. In all this the God of salvation was pleased to hide himself, till the favourable opportunity came, to baffle the devices of hell, save the captive, and more abundantly to glorify himself in the salvation of the sinner, than in preserving him in a state of innocence.

2. Consider the Lord's delivering his people Israel from under the power of Egypt ; and the same observation is eminently illustrated. Things are so disposed, that Israel are brought into very miserable circumstances. They are oppressed, afflicted, and weighed down with heavy burdens. No dawn of salvation appears,—the cloud grows more lowring, and the oppression more heavy : Till at last the haughty tyrant issues the cruel mandate, for the death of their newborn sons. In this view of things, might it not be asked, what is become of the God of salvation ? Has he forsaken the earth ? Has he cast off his people ? Or, does he pay no attention to their prayers, tears, and distresses ? The event proves that the relation was not dissolved ; and though for a small moment he hid his face from them, yet, in

the issue, with great mercy he gathered them.—All this time he was preparing the salvation for them. Had their condition been otherwise than it was, this salvation had not appeared so great: But under all the darkness of this dispensation, things were working together for their good. There was a strict connection between their sufferings and their triumph. Had not *Pharaoh* ordered the death of their male children, *Moses* would not have been cast upon the waters:—Had he not been cast upon the water, the king's daughter would not have met with him.—If she had not seen and pitied him, in that exposed condition, he would never have come into the king's palace.—Had not this been the case, he would never have had the opportunity to shew his attachment to Israel, and thereby prefer the reproaches of Christ to all the riches of Egypt^k.—But for this, he would never have fled to Midian; never conversed with God in the burning-bush, or been commissioned by him to be the scourge of Egypt, and saviour of Israel.—So, that in the view of the whole, we may say, had it not been for *Pharaoh's* cruelty,—his daughter's tender feelings,—the indignation of *Moses*, against the very appearance of cruelty and oppression,—and God's reasonable interposition in a strange land, Israel would

would have been worn out with oppression, the church would have failed, and the woman's seed would never have been born.— But the Lord, though invisible, saw the afflictions of his people, and he saved them.

3. View them again in the Babylonish captivity, and we see how secretly he carries on the designs of his love. There is a very evident reference to this in the beginning of the chapter. “ Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to *Cyrus*, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him: and I will loose the loins of kings to open before him the two-leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut. I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know, that I the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of *Israel*. For *Jacob* my servant's sake, and *Israel* mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides me, I am the Lord, and

and there is none else¹." And to the same purpose he speaks again, "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: He shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of Hosts^m." *Cyrus* was in the pursuit of glory, and seeking the enlargement of empire. He knew nothing of the Lord, nor had the least discovery, how his designs were connected with the divine purposes: Babylon was well fortified, well peopled, well supplied; they were so secure, as to leave the Persians to gaze upon their walls, while they devoted themselves to their sports and revels. But when God hath work to do, rivers shall change their courses, and gates of brass fly open to give him entrance. Probably, the poor captive Jews had very little hope of deliverance; or, they might think it as well to be in the hand of their present masters, as to become captives to new tyrants; yea, it is not unlikely, that some of them were in arms at this very season, to defend the city: But it was the time in which God had resolved to appear as the God of salvation, and therefore he secretly works the way for their deliverance. Once more.

4. Consider his appearance for sinners by Jesus Christ, and how is the whole design conducted in a very secret manner? The
Jews

¹ Isa. xlv. 1—6.—^m Isa. xlv. 13.

Jews had great expectation of the promised Messiah at this season: But the Saviour they expected was very different from what God designed. The birth, parentage, appearance, doctrine and claims of our Lord, were so opposite to their view of things, that they conclude him to be an impostor. The Jews would never have accused him to *Pilate*, had he but answered their expectations:—*Pilate* would gladly have acquitted him, notwithstanding his accusation, but that he feared the Jews:—And thus, between prejudice on the one hand, and fear on the other, God was secretly accomplishing his designs of salvation. *Judas* betrays him,—*Barrabbas* is preferred to him, and *Pilate* condemns him: But all this was the way for God's counsel to be fulfilled; and in the review of the whole, we may cry out, *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour.*

5. Consider the final rejection of the Jews, and the conversion of the Gentiles, and how secretly did the Lord advance his great design of salvation? In about *forty* years after the death of Christ, God breaks up house with his ancient people. The temple is destroyed, the sacrifice ceases, the city is laid in heaps, and its inhabitants scattered up and down in the earth: But in all this the design of God was drawing nearer to its perfection. The Jews are broken off, that
the

the Gentiles may be grafted in. The gospel must have a more extensive spread, that the elect of God may be gathered out of the different nations of the world: This, I presume, is what we are to understand by the words preceding the text. "Thus saith the Lord, the labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia, and of the Sabeans, men of stature shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine, they shall come after thee, in chains they shall come over: and they shall fall down unto thee, saying, surely God is in thee, and there is none else, there is no God." Upon this, the church breaks out in the language of admiration, *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour*: Exactly agreeing with the Apostle *Paul*, who after a large discourse upon the rejection of the Jews, concludes with these words, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" I come now,

SECONDLY, To assign some reason, why the Lord thus secretes his design in the pursuit of it.

1. One reason is, that the children of men may not be prevented from following their own disposition and inclination. Was the divine plan to be laid open to public view,

^a Rom. xi. 33.

view, in all its connections and tendencies, probably many great and important events which have taken place, might never have happened: And unless they had fallen out as they did, we should yet have been destitute of a Saviour. Let me illustrate this by two very remarkable instances. The first is the case of *Joseph*. This is so strikingly represented by an author, that I shall give it in his own words. “How many casual
 “ events may we remark in the history of
 “ *Joseph*, which had each a necessary in-
 “ fluence in his ensuing promotion! If he
 “ had not dreamed, or if he had not told his
 “ dream;—If the Midianites had passed by
 “ a day sooner, or a day later;—If he had
 “ been sold to any person but *Potiphar*;—If
 “ his mistress had been a better woman;—If
 “ *Pharaoh’s* officers had not displeased their
 “ Lord;—Or, if all or any of these things
 “ had fallen out in any other manner, or
 “ time, than they did, all that followed had
 “ been prevented.—The promises and pur-
 “ poses of God concerning Israel, their bon-
 “ dage, deliverance, polity, and settlement
 “ must have failed:—And as all these things
 “ tended to, and centered in, Christ,—the
 “ promised Saviour; the desire of all nations
 “ would not have appeared,—mankind had
 “ been yet in their sins, and the counsels of
 “ God’s eternal love had been defeated.
 “ Thus we see, there is a connection between

“*Joseph’s* dream, and salvation by Jesus Christ*.”—The other instance I would refer to, is the death of Christ. Upon this, it must be acknowledged, much depended: Had not this taken place, our condition had been truly miserable, and our future prospects awful beyond expression; yet the Apostle assures us; that “had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Life and glory.” Thus by being permitted to follow their own passions and prejudices, they became instruments in advancing God’s work of salvation. Another reason is,

2. That wicked men, however they may be instrumental in promoting the good of the church, might be left inexcusable in their wickedness. Was the purpose of God evident before; they might argue, that they were under a fatal necessity to act as they do: But seeing they act freely without any constraint,—seeing they are no way compelled to act as they do, every sinner’s mouth must be stopped, and all stand guilty before
before

* See an authentic narrative of some remarkable particulars in the life of *****, communicated in a series of letters to the Rev. Mr. Haweis, Rector of Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire. These letters contain the most particular display of the ways of providence, that I ever met with in any human production: I know of no parallel to it, except the history *Moses* has given us of *Joseph*, in the book of *Genesis*, and that beautiful drama of providence, contained in the book of *Esther*.

before him. God being infinite in foreknowledge, could not but see how that such persons, being in such circumstances, and at such a time, would act so and so: And he resolved to glorify himself by them, in bringing good out of evil. But the fulfilling of his purposes is no justification of their crimes: It may, and does, magnify his wisdom, but is no excuse for their impiety. How evident is this, from the cases that have been mentioned already: *Joseph's* brethren, and the murderers of the blessed *Jesus*, were absolutely inexcusable in their conduct, though the one were preparing the way for God's glory, and the other did what "his hand and counsel determined before to be done^p."

3. Another reason why he hides his design, is, that he may try the faith and patience of his own people, and stir them up to greater diligence in religious duties, such as searching the scripture, prayer, and an attentive examination of providence. A remarkable example to this purpose, we have in holy *Daniel*: Having understood from the writings of the prophet *Jeremiah*, the number of the years in which the Lord would accomplish the desolations of Jerusalem, he set his face to seek unto the Lord, by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes^q." God is pleased to keep his

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church

^p Acts iv. 28.—^q Dan. ii. 3.

church in a waiting frame, that they may glorify him by their faith, and in their services.

4. The Lord is also pleased to hide himself, while in the operation, that his wisdom may be displayed and admired in the event. How pleasing, how profitable to ourselves! How honourable to God is such a review! How wise, wonderful, and gracious are all his proceedings! How admirable the contrivance; sure the progress, and wonderful the event! Who could have thought, that things which once appeared so contrary, were so necessary, so useful, so proper! Who is a God like unto Israel's God? Not only glorious in holiness, but wonderful in working^r. Truly wisdom belongeth unto God; and it is weakness in us, ever to censure his proceedings. He is wonderful in counsel, wise in his choice of means, adapted to the end he has in view, and excellent in working. "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein^s."

5. The last reason we shall assign for his conduct, in hiding himself, while thus engaged for the good of Zion, is, that all the honour of salvation may be ascribed to him, by his saints through eternity. Then God will appear to be all in all^t. The work being compleated, will be admired by all the
glorious

^r Exod. xv. 11.—^s Psalm cxi. 2.—^t 1 Cor. xv. 28.

glorious company of Saints and Angels. God will be glorified in his Saints, and admired by all them that have believed^u. That great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, standing before the throne, in robes of spotless white, and palms of victory in their hands, will proclaim with a loud voice, Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. Angels and elders, prostrate before him, will unite in the general chorus, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen^w. All will join in this song, "great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints^x."— Thus having proved the doctrine of the text, and assigned some reasons for God's acting thus, we shall conclude the whole with an inference or two from the subject. And,

1. Hence we learn, that, in particular cases, the providence and purpose of God may wear a very different aspect. The way to salvation may lay upon the verge of ruin; and the door to comfort, be opened in the valley of tribulation. Thy God, O believer, may try thee, in order to see if thou darest trust

^u 2 Theff. i. 10.—^w Rev. vii. 9—12.—^x Rev. xv. 3.

trust him: Judge not therefore of his love to thee by outward dispensations; trials, losses, afflictions, are in the list of the *all things* which shall work together for thy good^y.—Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth^z; and though for a small moment, and in a little wrath, he hide his face from thee, yet he remembers you still, and with great mercy will he gather you^a.

2. From this subject we also infer, that in all the shakings and commotions of nations, God is carrying on his own work. The glory of Egypt shall be brought into disgrace, the empire of Babylon be dissolved, and the arms of *Cesar* prove victorious over the inhabitants of this isle: But the salvation of Israel, the spread of the gospel, or the conversion of sinners, is that which he has principally in view. What will be the end of the present unhappy dispute between Great-Britain and the Colonies in America, I presume not to say; but the God of salvation reigneth; his purposes are going on; and his glory shall shine forth illustriously in the event.—And when all the mysteries of providence are wound up to a period, the volume of the divine purposes will appear to have been fully transcribed, without either blot or mistake:

His

^y Rom. viii. 28.—^z Heb. xii. 6.—^a Isa. liv. 7, 8.

His providence unfolds the book,
And makes his counfels shine:
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfil some deep design.

May we wait for his appearance: Then
his work shall be fully manifested, his
ways approved, and his name honoured
in our everlasting praises. “Now unto
the King eternal, immortal, **INVISIBLE,**
THE ONLY WISE GOD, be honour
and glory, for ever and ever. *Amen*^b.”

SERMON

1 Tim. i. 17.

S E R M O N XVII.

The Faint encouraged, and the Weak supported: Or, Divine Strength perfected in Human Weakness.

I S A I A H xl. 29.

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength.

IF we examine the records of providence, we shall find that in every age God has had a people whom he hath delighted to honour: A people who have been richly distinguished by his royal munificence and sovereign bounty. For their sake he built the world at first; and all his great productions therein, are carried on with a view to their welfare. “He plants the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth, that he may say unto Zion, thou art my people^a.” They are a people who are precious in his

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^a Isa. li. 16.

sight, the objects of his love, the charge of his almighty power, and in whom he will be eternally glorified. He accounts of them as his treasure, and guards them as the apple of his eye^b. He gave the glory of Egypt, to ransom their persons from the human thralldom^c, yea, gave the brightness of his own glory, even the Son of his love, to redeem their souls from spiritual and everlasting misery. The price that was paid for them, will be an eternal evidence of the greatness of his love: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have eternal life^d.” “He commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us^e.” Saints are the jewels of his crown, and the vessels of his glory. He knows them that are his^f; knows their situation, their wants, their weaknesses; knows their difficulties, dangers, and sincere desires to glorify him. With a view to this favoured remnant, he hath given forth exceeding great and precious promises^g:—Promises founded on veracity, big with grace and glory, and made sure to all the seed, by power and holiness: Promises of pardon, of purity, of strength, and victory:—Promises, which reveal his purpose, and are all yea and amen, in Christ Jesus

^b Zech. ii. 8.—^c Isa. xliii. 3.—^d John iii. 16.—
^e Rom. v. 8.—^f 2 Tim. ii. 19.—^g 2 Pet. i. 4.

Jesus the Lord, to the glory of God by us^h. It is a promise-making, a grace-conferring, a soul-supporting God, that has written the arguments of his love, in fair and immortal letters, almost in every page of the Bible. To silence the fears of this people, to strengthen their faith, and to encourage their hope, is the mark at which infinite wisdom aims, in the word of revelation: "By two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, the heirs of promise shall have strong consolation, who flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before themⁱ." It is the eternally faithful, all-gracious, and unchangeable Jehovah, who *giveth power to the faint, and to those that have no might, increaseth strength.*

The chapter from which the text is taken, abounds with a rich collection of the most solid and supporting comforts, for the church of God, that either they can need or he bestow. Herein he displays himself in all the glory of his character, as the God of all grace and comfort: The substance of it is collected in the two first verses, and therein you have a specimen of that divine spirit which breathes through the whole. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God, speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, &c." Christ is the root of all comfort to the fallen race of men; and in this view

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^h 2 Cor. i. 20.—ⁱ Heb. vi. 18.

he is here particularly referred to, both in his office and divine character. In the former, appears the skill, patience, and tenderness of a shepherd: He feeds, supports, and will save the sheep of his pasture. Ver. 11. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Nor is he only meek and merciful as Mediator, but as God; he is infinite in wisdom, power, and glory. He is that glorious Lord of nature, "who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weigheth the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance," ver. 12. "Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; behold, he taketh up isles as a very little thing." ver. 15. "All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity." ver. 17. His providence extends to all the creatures; the more minute are not overlooked by him, and the most feeble enjoy his support. Ver. 26. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power,
not

not one faileth.”—But after all, though he has told us again and again, that his faints are precious in his sight, that he delights over them to do them good, and that whatever is neglected, their interest shall not be overlooked: Yet how ready are they to doubt the whole, or in particular circumstances to infer the very contrary, as in ver. 27. “Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?” In answer to such a disposition, he refers them to the history of the church,—the experience of all good men,—and the records of heaven; all which tend to display his power and wisdom, drawn forth in love. Ver. 28. “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.” He neither sinks under the weight of so extensive a government, nor is weary in loading his faints with his favours. His understanding extends to all persons and things, and therefore he can never be at a loss how to provide for, or plead the cause of his people. He knows their frame and necessities, and “will supply all their need, according to the riches of his glory by Christ Jesus^k.”—As an evidence of this, *He giveth power to the faint,*
and

^k Philip. iv. 19.

and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength.

In discoursing on these words, we may observe, in the general, that the life of a christian is frequently in scripture compared to a *race*, and a *warfare*; and experience teaches such, that they have neither power for the one, nor strength for the other; that their help cometh from the Lord, and that their sufficiency is found in him alone. The text, you see, abounds with consolations in each respect. Does the believer faint in his course, or find that he hath no strength to maintain the contest against sin and Satan? Let him know for his encouragement, that he is related to that God, *who giveth power to the faint, &c.*

Taking the words then in the order in which they lay in the text, we shall first consider the condition referred to, and then the encouragement presented to a soul considered in such circumstances.

He giveth power to the faint, to those that are *fatigued, tired, spent* in a journey, so the word signifies¹; and that the true christian is often ready to faint in his heavenly course, will appear from several considerations, some of which we shall mention.

1. He is sometimes ready to faint in his course, from the experience of his entire weakness, and inability for the undertaking.

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He feels the effects of his fall in *Adam*, and, like *Jacob* of old, travels towards Canaan, with much pain and with many discouragements. If at seasons he is enabled to run the way of God's commandments with an enlarged heart, you soon hear him pleading for quickening grace, to revive a heart that cleaveth to the dust. O what doubts, fears, and staggeringings are to be found in him; the law in the members wars against the law of the mind, and he is heard to groan under the weight of a body of sin and death. It is an experimental truth, which every advanced christian is convinced of, that he can neither pray with that feeling sense of his wants, nor strive against sin with success, nor fetch comfort from any doctrine which he has received, nor engage in any duty with a proper spirit, if God should leave him to himself. There are seasons when he finds himself very faint, very cold, very contracted in the service of his God. He longs to get near to the throne of grace, but finds that the flesh prevents him from doing the things that he would. Such, in their best estate, are but like children, which need the mother's eye to guard them from danger, and her hand to support them in every step.—If the Lord hold you up, you can stand firm, and run vigorously, but without him you can do nothing. “The christian, when fullest of divine communications,

munications, is but as a glass without a foot, he cannot stand, or hold what he hath received, any longer than God holds him in his strong hand*." Without divine supports, and communications, he would soon spill his comforts, and be dashed to pieces. An experimental sense of his weakness and insufficiency, the power of corruption, and the deceitfulness of sin, often leads the favourite of heaven to doubt the reality of a change; and almost to conclude, that either he shall never be able to maintain his profession to the end; or that then it will be found essentially defective. — He is ready to faint because iniquity prevails against him, and he finds that his strength is small.

2. Another cause of this faintness, are the various difficulties he meets with in the way. Many frowning or perplexing providences;—many gloomy dispensations, heavy crosses, and sore temptations;—sneers from enemies, and slights from friends;—the misconduct of professors, and the necessary concerns that attend his occupation in the world;—these frequently cloud his evidences, wound his peace, or retard his progress.—His burdens are heavy, his soul staggers under the weight of them.—He is brought almost to his wit's end, and is
ready

* See a very excellent and useful book written by Mr. Gurnall, entitled *The Christian in compleat Armour*, Vol. 1. p. 16. Edit. 6th.

ready to cast away his confidence. You that know any thing of real christianity, do you not find, that many things conspire to make the heart faint, while you would pursue the heavenly prize? At seasons you are ready to argue yourselves out of your comfort, and God out of his glory; saying with the Psalmist, “Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies^m?” You find so many imperfections, that you doubt your sincerity; see something so peculiarly heinous in your transgressions, as to fear that you are not the Lord’s; so much carnality, lukewarmness, and worldly-mindedness, that you fear there is no grace; old corruptions have acquired new strength, and it is not with you as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon your headⁿ, when sensible comforts ran high, and the joys of salvation were experienced.

The opposition likewise, that is to be expected from the world, on account of your professed attachment to Christ, and his cause, is apt, at some seasons, to discourage the real christian. Against this the Apostle *Paul* guards us, “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and

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^m Psalm lxxvii. 9.—ⁿ Job xxix 3.

is set down at the right hand of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds^o." From which we learn, that they which are after the flesh, will persecute them that are after the spirit^p.—That the more the grace of God shines in the professors of religion, the more they will be opposed on that account: That such opposition has in it a tendency to make the subject of it weary,—and that nothing can preserve such from either turning out of the course, or growing weary in it, but a steady looking to Jesus, both as the life of our faith, and the example of patience, fortitude, and perseverance. It is through faith in the power, promise, and intercession of Jesus, that such are kept to salvation.

3. Another thing, which makes the christian faint in his progress, is the small advance that he has yet made against sin, or towards glory. In the view of our spiritual privileges, and the time that we have enjoyed them, what reason have we to cry out, My leanness, my leanness^q. O how little conformity of heart, of life, or of conversation, to the will of our heavenly Father! What dwarfs in holiness, and how small our growth in grace and knowledge! Weeks, and months, and years slip away, but, snail-like,

^o Heb. xii. 1—3.—^p Gal. iv. 29.—^q Isa. xxiv. 26.

like, how slow our progress! How many sermons have been heard and forgot, before they were improved;—how many ordinances attended, and yet we go lean from day to day! Still faith is weak, corruption strong, and hope languid. Comparing ourselves with what we ought to be, truly we may say, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed.” And if we take a view of the attainments of those, who have neither been so long in the vineyard, nor privileged with the opportunities we have enjoyed; have we not cause to bow our heads like a bulrush, and complain with the Prophet, “Wo is me, for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat: my soul desireth the first ripe fruit.” Such a view of things tends to relax the nerves of activity, and sink the soul into the very dust of humility. But if this is your burden, behold the gracious encouragement in the text.

He giveth power to the faint.—The word, in the original¹, signifies that radical moisture and natural vigour, which is both the effect and evidence of bodily health: It is the same which *Caleb* makes use of, when he says, “I am as strong this day, as I was in the day that *Moses* sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for

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¹ Lam. iii. 22.—² Mich. vii. 1.—³ דב

war both to go out, and to come in^u." And when it is said that God *giveth power to the faint*, it means that he endues them with fresh vigour to press towards the prize, and lay hold on eternal life^v. Giving power then, is expressive of *sovereign kindness, seasonable interposition, and constant liberality*.

1. *Sovereign kindness*.—*He giveth power to the faint*: Grace is a voluntary act of the divine mind, and every favour bestowed by him, is a fresh evidence of the goodness of his nature. He is resolved not only to display his power *to* his saints, but to exert it *in* them, by subduing their corruptions, and sanctifying their natures. As the natural sun is the cause of all beauty and fruitfulness in vegetation, so is God of all light, love, and holiness in the church. His power is the life of grace, and the death of sin. He giveth power for the service he requires, and at last honours the instrument he employs, with a gracious reward. What can be more free than a gift? But when God is said to give power to the faint, how fully does it evidence that he owes them nothing, but is gracious, because he will be gracious^x.—If then we find power over sin, against temptation, or for the performance of this or that duty, let us remember that we are indebted for it, to the free bounty and
condescension

^u Josh. xiv. 11.—^v 1 Tim. iv. 12.—^x Exod. xxxiv. 19.

condescension of God; we have nothing to glory in, because we have nothing but what we have received^y.

2. His giving *power to the faint*, is also expressive of *seasonable interposition* in their behalf.—He permits them to feel their weakness, that they may be sensible of their unspeakable obligations to him for support; and suffers their case to come to extremity, that he may make bare his arm in their salvation^z. He may see it necessary to try your faith to the very uttermost, but will eventually save your souls. *Paul* may pray for deliverance, and repeat the petition again and again; but at last the promise comes forth, “My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness^a.” It is a part of that glory which distinguishes the august character of the divine Majesty, that he revives the spirit of the humble. “Thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones^b.” God is a present help in every trouble: Thousands of his Saints have found it so. He that interposed so seasonably for *Abraham* in the mount, still lives, and is well

^y 1 Cor. iv. 7.—^z Isa. lii. 10.—^a 2 Cor. xii. 9.—
^b Isa. lvii. 15.

well known in Zion, by his name *Jehovah-jireh*^c. The sinner's extremity is the Saviour's opportunity, and while such are faint, he is faithful.

3. This declaration further takes in *constant liberality*. The words refer neither to what is past, nor what is future:—Not he has *given*, or he *will give* power to the faint, (though such an expression would have borne an encouraging aspect) but when it is said he *giveth*, what can more endear him to us, or embolden us to apply to him?—*He giveth power*. With him it is one constant act to feed the strength of feeble saints. Their sufficiency is of God; and his promise is, as their day is, so shall their strength be^d. It is preserving and persevering power that such stand in need of, and this he has engaged to give to them that seek it of him. Ver. 31. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." Their wants shall be supplied, their weakness strengthened, their fears removed, and their desires accomplished. "He that hath begun the good work in them, will perform it to the day of Christ Jesus^e." He will not leave them until he has done all that which he has spoken to them of^f. The
bruised

^c Gen. xxii. 14.—^d Deut. xxxiii. 25.—^e Philip. i. 6.—^f Gen. xxviii. 15.

bruised reed shall be supported, the glimmering lamp of grace shall be supplied: For the Lord *giveth power to the faint*, and hath promised to bring forth judgment unto victory^e.

Let us now proceed to the latter part of the text. *And to them that have no might, he increaseth strength.* As the former phrase respects the believer in his *course*, so this in his *contest*; “For he wrestles not only against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places^h.” In this part then, as in the former, we may take notice both of the condition referred to, and the encouragement proposed to such a condition.

The condition described is, *them that have no might*. Such are the most eminent Saints considered in themselves, and such they have appeared to others, when the Lord has left them but for a little. What was *David*, and *Hezekiah*, and *Peter*, when God suffered Satan to tempt or sift them? And we shall find this to be the case with all succeeding Saints, if we consider either the Lord's *exhortations* to them, or their *confessions* before him.

I. That

^e Matt. xii. 20.—^h Ephes. vi. 12.

1. That such have no might as of themselves, to oppose their spiritual enemies, is evident from God's *exhortations* to them. How many are the invitations to believe, depend, and rejoice? But you find God ever referred to, as the foundation of that faith, confidence, and joy. It is in him that we are called to trust for ever; and the reason assigned is, "for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strengthⁱ." And it is with a view to that spiritual contest, in which the followers of Christ are engaged, that St. Paul exhorts them to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might^k;" which not only shews that they have no might of themselves, but also that the best security against the assaults of the Devil, is divine Omnipotence. All the exhortations we meet with in God's word, to apply to him for wisdom, strength, and victory, are but so many arguments in a different form, to convince us of our impotence, and his all-sufficiency. And till we are convinced of this humbling truth, that we have no strength; all those exhortations which call upon us to trust in God, rest on him, and commit ourselves unto him, will be found unnecessary with respect to us; and we shall remain entire strangers to those happy supports, which are the effect of an hearty compliance with them. It is an ancient maxim that we should never do that
by

ⁱ Isa. xxvi. 4.—^k Ephes. vi. 10.

by another, which we are able to do ourselves, and to this we strictly adhere in the case before us; for a man will never contend against sin and Satan, in God's strength, till he is convinced that without him he can do nothing.

2. The *confessions* which the most eminent Saints have made to God, agree with the exhortations in confirming the same truth. *Jehoshaphat's* conviction, confession, and supplication, has been common amongst the followers of God in all ages. "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are unto thee¹." To the same purpose, we find the great Apostle of the Gentiles declaring, "That when he was weak, then he was strong^m." Weak in himself, but strong in the grace and power of the Lord. He was equal to every contest, and superior to every enemy. And must not every one, that is experienced in the spiritual warfare, join with him in this? How have they found themselves supported, comforted, and encouraged, when the heart has been ready to fail! Their daily confessions before the Lord, evince that they consider themselves, as poor, weak, helpless, and needy creatures.

But what saith the scripture? *To them that have no might, he increaseth, or he*

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will

¹ 2 Chron. xx. 12.—^m 2 Cor. xii. 10.

will increaseⁿ, multiply, or magnify strength. This promise shews, that the *principle* by which Saints oppose Satan, is *from God*.—That he not only gives this principle, but *supports it also*,—and of course, *that all those great atchievements which have been wrought by the people of God, are to be ascribed to him alone*.

1. That *principle* of opposition which is found in the Saints, to sin and Satan, is *from God*. It is he that works in the heart an hatred to sin, and love to holiness. It is he that puts the enmity between them and the Serpent, as he promised to the first parents of mankind*. The work of grace on the human heart is all of God, therein he fixes his standard against all the rage of hell, and power of sin. The empire of sin is gradually diminished. The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh^p. A warfare commences, which shall terminate in the total death of sin, and in the complete victory of grace.—Now what is the cause of all this enmity and rage against the christian, but holiness? It is the divine nature which opposes the interest and reign of sin. And hence, as one remarks, “while a man continues un sanctified, he
“cultivates peace with the Devil, and calmly submits to his dominion: Enmity and
“hostility against the Devil, can only proceed

* גרבה —^o Gen. iii. 15. —^p Gal. v. 17.

“ceed from an infused principle of holiness¹.”—There is a fixed enmity on each side; Satan opposes, because he hates holiness; and the believer, because he hates sin.—It is his desire and delight to do the will of his heavenly Father, to abstain from every appearance of evil²: He depends upon promised grace, to perfect holiness in the fear of God³.

While the strong man keeps the house all is at peace, for there is nothing in the natural heart to resist the will, or oppose the interest of Satan:—So far from it, they are in the strictest alliance, till God put the enmity between them: All holiness is from him; and it is from being made partakers of his holiness, that we feel a desire and disposition to glorify him. That this divine principle, by which God is served, sin opposed, and Satan repulsed, is to be considered as the christian’s strength; appears from the following passage, which you may take as a specimen of many to the same purpose, Zech. x. 12. “I will strengthen them in the Lord.” Observe, their strength is by union to Christ, “and they shall walk up and down in his name,” viz. as champions and conquerors, “saith the Lord.”

2. As God gives the principle, which is the cause of all the opposition, so he supports

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¹ Witfius on the Covenants. Book 4. Chap. i. § 13.—
² Theff. v. 22.—³ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

and preserves it. To them that have no might, he increaseth strength. The leaven of grace spreads through the whole lump^t, and their faith groweth exceedingly^u, so that “the righteous shall hold on their way, and he that hath clean hands,” *i. e.* he that is in a justified state, “shall be stronger and stronger^w.” Their supply and success are alike from God: He will support them while in the field of battle, and in the event make them more than conquerors. “For the Lord will give strength to his people, the Lord will bless his people with peace^x.” The treasure of a believer’s support can never be exhausted, seeing that his God is “able to make all grace abound towards him, that he always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work^y.” What a beautiful climax,—*grace, all grace,—all grace abounding,—abounding at all times,—in all things, and to a blessed all-sufficiency—abounding, so as to break forth in every good work.* With what confidence doth *David* speak upon this subject! With what fervency doth he plead with God concerning it!—“The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever, forsake not the work of thine own hands^z.” The welfare and salvation of his soul, was a matter of great

^t Matt. xiii. 33.—^u 2 Theff. i. 3.—^w Job xvii. 9.—
^x Psalm xxix. 11.—^y 2 Cor. ix. 8.—^z Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

great concern to him:—But while he was sensible of *imperfection*,—desirous after perfection, and convinced that he could not perfect himself, he had not only a view of the Lord's *ability* to perfect him, but in the midst of every discouragement from a corrupt nature, a confidence that he *would* do it.—But on what did he fix his confidence? Upon nothing but this; *thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever*.—It was *mercy*,—therefore *free*: *Thy mercy, therefore great*. The mercy of Jehovah, that Being who could *bestow it in the most sovereign way*.—It is not like the mercy and compassion of creatures which is liable to change, and easily obstructed, but *it endureth*, is the same now as ever it was,—and not only endureth, but endureth *for ever* in all ages, and extendeth to all Saints. This mercy will be the same to the last saved sinner, that it was to the first. Well might such confidence in the power, and discoveries of the mercy of God, lead him to plead, “Forfake not the works of thine own hands.” It is thy work,—it needs thy constant support,—Lord preserve it,—Lord perfect it.—But to return.

3. When it is said, *To them that have no might, he increaseth strength*, does it not evidence that *whatever great, surprising, or supernatural is to be found in the conduct of believers,*

believers, ought to be ascribed to God? Could Abraham lay his beloved Isaac on the altar? Moses turn his back upon the glory of Egypt?—And Shadrach prefer death to disobedience? It was out of weakness that they were made strong^a, and endured under heavy trials, as seeing him that is invisible. And O, my brethren, remember this in every trial that you meet with, that God retains the whole monopoly of strength in his own hand,—his strength shall be made perfect in your weakness^b;—and his command is, “Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness^c.”

The inferences from the subject, you may take as follows:

1. From this we see the ordinary course which God takes, in comforting and encouraging the souls of poor sinners. He makes them sensible of their weakness and insufficiency,—and when they feel that they are without strength, and that without Christ they can do nothing, then he magnifies his grace by giving *power to the faint*.—Examine yourselves by this, my dear hearers: Have you thus been humbled to receive Christ

^a Heb. xi. 34.—^b 2 Cor. xii. 9.—^c Isa. xli. 10.

Christ as your fulness? And do you thus “go forth in the strength of the Lord God, making mention of his righteousness, even of his only^d?”

2. From this subject we may also infer, that it is the duty of such as have obtained help from God, to declare it for the encouragement of others. Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.—Thus *David* acted, “I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord, in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord^e.” Others should be comforted by the comforts, whereby we also have been comforted by him.—Brethren, converse much with your mercies; this will enable you to speak a word in season to the weary, and them that are out of the way.—You need never be ashamed to declare to others, what God hath done for you;—therefore, while he is pleased to give you power, forget not to return him praise.

3. What an encouragement is this to the mind of a believer, in the prospect of fresh and great difficulties:—*He giveth power to the faint*.—He will supply your wants, proportion your strength to your day, and never leave

^d Psalm lxxi. 16.—^e Psalm xxvii. 13, 14.

leave you nor forsake you^f.—In six troubles he will be with you, and in seven will not fail you. The eternal God will be your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.—Thus may we increase in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power unto all patience, and long-suffering with joyfulness^g. *Amen.*

FAREWELL

^f Heb. xiii. 5.—^g Col. i. 11.

FAREWELL to LIFE:

OR, THE

AGED BELIEVER

Going to R E S T.

A

S E R M O N,

Preached on Occasion of the DEATH of

Mr. ROBERT JONES,

Who changed this Life for a better, October 16, 1778,

In the 79th Year of his Age.

His God sustain'd him in his final hour!

His final hour brought glory to his God!

YOUNG!

S E R M O N XVIII.

Farewell to Life: Or, The aged Believer going to Rest. A Sermon preached on Occasion of the Death of Mr. JONES.

THE work upon which I am now entering, is a task the most pleasant, and at the same time the most painful, in which, as a minister, I have to engage. What can be more pleasant than to think and speak of those who have finished their course with joy, who sleep in Jesus, and are now for ever with the Lord? What more painful than to reflect upon the loss we sustain in their prayers, in their counsel, and in their conversation? These different sensations I feel, while I stand forth to address you upon this solemn occasion.—An occasion which should at once remind us that we are mortal, and induce us to attend to *that* which alone can enable us to triumph over death,

F f f 2

death, and exult in the prospects of immortality. Death has once more made an inroad into this congregation, and while he has taken away one who was an ornament to the church militant, (now I doubt not a member of the church triumphant) he has left left us a friendly warning to prepare for death. To die, how solemn the thought! To die, how great the consequences! O death, thou foe to iniquity, thou friend of real holiness, by thee the impenitent sinner is undone for ever, but the sincere follower of Jesus made happy for eternity. Death is that friendly guide, which brings the believer to his God, opens the door to admit him into the celestial mansions, and places the soul beyond the reach of danger or the assault of enemies. Thus they enter into joy; the joy of their Lord; that joy which is too sublime in its nature to be conceived by the mind at present, too great in the degree to enter the soul in this state of imperfection and weakness.

As several of us have lately surrounded the grave of a great and valuable man, an eminent professor, a close-walking christian, and a praying saint: In order to improve the providence, I am now desired to call your attention to a passage of scripture, which frequently employed the thoughts, and
dropped

dropped from the lips of the late Mr. Jones.
It is to be found,

L U K E ii. 29, 30.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.

These are the words of good old *Simeon*. A man, the out-lines of whose character were not less honourable, than the principle of his conduct was acceptable. Hence the sacred historian informs us, that *he was just* with respect to his dealings towards men, *and devout* in his conduct towards God; but both the one and the other were the fruit and effects of his faith in Christ; for “he waited for the consolation of Israel,” ver. 25. Whether this good man was the son of the famous *Hillel*, and the tutor of the renowned *Gamaliel*, (as some suppose) I take not upon me to say. But a character, far more honourable than either of these, is here ascribed to him: For godliness is true greatness; it is that which will be gloriously distinguished, when every inferior excellency will be sunk into oblivion. Then they that fear the Lord, will be set forth as the excellent of the earth, and be collected together as the jewels and treasure of the Lord God Almighty.

The

The grey hairs of *Simeon* were his crown of honour, because he was found in the way of righteousness. He was no stranger at the temple. There God had promised his gracious presence, and there the good man waited for the fulfilment of the promise: "For it was revealed unto him, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lords Christ," ver. 26.

Whatever difficulties stand in the way of the accomplishment of God's promises, he will assuredly remove them. This was exemplified in the case before us. Had *Joseph* put away his wife, as he once proposed;—or had *Simeon* been absent at this season from the temple,—had he been in any different apartment of it, or had he entered at any other than the East gate of the court of Israel*; in any of these cases we may suppose, that his expectation would have been frustrated. But at the very instant, while the holy child Jesus is presented to the Lord, he visits the sacred mansion, and is guided by the Spirit which rested upon him, to embrace and publish the new-born Saviour. Taking the babe in his arms, and with his eyes directed above every earthly object, his lips pronounced the language of thanksgiving and satisfaction. *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according*

*Dr. Lightfoot remarks that the child was to be presented at the gate of *Nicanor*.

ing to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation. From which declaration of holy Simeon, we may observe,

- I. That it is the privilege of a believer to depart or die in peace.
- II. That this peace arises from, and is founded on, a view of God's salvation.

I. It is the privilege of a believer to depart or die in peace. *Lord, said Simeon, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.* Which words are both descriptive of the nature of death, in reference to a believer, and likewise of the state or frame in which he dies, *in peace.*

1. To such death is a *departure*. A departure from every thing painful or distressing. They depart hence, that they may inherit the promises, and be with Christ, which is far better than any thing that they could either conceive, or have enjoyed below. They depart from sin, from Satan, and from temptation, to be holy as God is holy, and for ever happy in his presence and enjoyment.

Life is a state of service, and each of us have some particular work assigned us, by the great Author of our being; and of this we must give up our account to him at last, as judge of all. The glory of God was the
end

end of our creation ; and this we should aim at in the whole of our conduct. Whatever we do in word or deed, whether we eat or drink, all should be done to his glory. And as this is our incumbent duty, as rational creatures, it is much more obligatory upon us as redeemed sinners. Such should “serve the Lord with gladness; seeing it is he that hath made them and not they themselves, they are his people and the sheep of his pasture^a.” They “are not their own, but bought with a price^b ;” which should be a powerful incentive with them to glorify God. Let such frequently think thus with themselves, I am the Lord’s servant, and therefore how can I best exert myself to do his will, to magnify his grace, and promote his glory? How shall I lay myself out to be useful to the souls and bodies of my fellow-creatures, or suitably proclaim the goodness, as well as display the glory of my God unto them? I am not sent into life to be inactive. Teach me to do thy will, O God, and by thy grace enable me to serve thee in my generation ; that having concluded the work, and finished my course, I may inherit the promises.

As life is the season for service, so the extent of that service is parallel with life. A person may live till he apprehends he is become useless, but in this he is mistaken.

Waiting

^a Psalm c. 2, 3.—^b 1 Cor. vi. 20:

Waiting was a part of *Simeon's* service: His Lord reserved the noblest part of his work, till almost the close of life. It was then that he was to bear an honourable testimony to the Saviour, to profess his faith and dependence on him, as well as proclaim him to others. While God privileges his servants with life, they may be assured that he has something either to do *by* them, or to do *in* them. Their rest shall commence when their service is concluded, and their very death is "precious in the sight of the Lord." The setting sun has lighted many a traveller to his home, and the dying christian often encouraged others to quicken their pace in the heavenly journey.

Death puts a period to the service of a believer here below: And in the close of life what are his views of it? Does the prospect yield him *full* satisfaction? Or does he ground his hopes of acceptance on it? Neither of these. He readily acknowledges that it has been attended with many difficulties, accompanied with much imperfection, and performed under many and great *disadvantages*. But in death the Lord permits him to depart with approbation. He can say with *Simeon*, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.* The word *lettest*, in the original, has a copiousness in it, which is answerable to all the

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defects

defects of a believer's service. It signifies to dismiss from service^a,—to absolve from guilt^c,—and to deliver from distress^f.

Does he consider the defects of his service, through the many difficulties he has met with in the discharge of it? Difficulties from a depraved nature, a busy enemy, and a scoffing, ensnaring, bewitching world? In death God sends his dismissal, and releases him from a post of trust and danger. He is released from the body, that he may be for ever with the Lord.

With what extasy of joy, what fervour of love, and purity of devotion may we suppose the disembodied spirit appearing before the throne! Dismissed from a sinful world, she is permitted to enlarge that happy circle of saved sinners, which surround the glorified Redeemer. How do all her noble powers at once rise and swell into heavenly proportion! No longer cramped, or impeded through her connection with the body, she strikes up in that sacred chorus, in which Angels, Elders, and all the Blessed harmoniously unite. How are her views into the grace, the wisdom, and the power of God (displayed in her salvation) enlarged, to furnish matter for the wonder and admiration of an endless day! A clear vision lies before her,

^a This is evident in the case of *Simeon*.—^c Luke vi. 37.—
^f Acts v. 40. Leigh in his *Crit. Sac.* observes that in the Syriac, it is *now thou openest the prison*.

her, and she is privileged with a perfect capacity to take it in. Sorrow is banished, and desire fully satisfied. What pleasure do they find in the perpetual smile of Jesus, and every expression of his satisfaction, fires them with increasing fervency in his service.—But how low are all our conceptions; how flat our most lively descriptions of the felicity of that glorified assembly! Suppose the happiest frame that ever the believer enjoyed below, wrought up to the utmost perfection, and perpetuated through an eternal duration, and then presume to guess at the happiness of that soul, which is dismissed from the difficult service of the present life.

Again: Is the believer in death, led to discover the many *imperfections* which have attended his best services? As was observed already, the word signifies not only to dismiss from service, but also *to absolve from guilt*. His sins, which are many, are forgiven; his services, which were imperfect, are accepted, and both through that Saviour on whom he depends. “There is no condemnation found against him^e,” but he is “accepted in the beloved, to the praise of the glory of grace^h.” Death places the soul in a capacity fully to know “the blessedness of that man, whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sin is coveredⁱ.”

G g g 2

Once

^e Rom. viii. 1.—^h Ephes. i. 6.—ⁱ Psalm xxxii. 1.

Once more: Is the expiring believer, led to view the many and great *disadvantages* with which his service has been performed? In death the Lord not only dismisses him from service, and absolves him from guilt, but likewise *delivers him from distress*. No more weakness or temptations; no more complaints of the law in the members, or of the body of sin and death. The doors of the prison are unlocked, and the soul called forth to perfect light and liberty. What a pleasing prospect, what blessed privileges does the solemn moment of death present to the soul, and enrich it with! To have immediate connection with the overflowing fountain of blessedness, and an eternal interest in the fulness of God; to be admitted into perfect light, and filled with perfect love, is that bliss which hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive. Was it possible for us to travel with the sun, in a region that is never clouded, in that case we should enjoy a day as extensive as our lives: But in heaven their sun never goes down, their summer never ends, the harvest is always ripe, and the vintage ever ready.

Truly well may it be said, that "blessed are the dead that die in the Lord^k," seeing they are pardoned, they are accepted, they are sanctified, they are saved for ever. Thus

much

^k Rev. xiv. 13.

much may suffice for the nature of death to a believer, it is *a departure*.

2. Let us now proceed to consider the state or frame in which he dies, it is *in peace*. It must be acknowledged, that all believers are not alike comfortable in their departing moments, though they are all equally safe. They die in a state of reconciliation with God, though some may not be privileged with the sensible comforts arising from that peace. It may not be improper therefore to consider the words, as applicable to the *state* of all believers, or to the *frame* of some in particular.

If we take the phrase as applicable to all believers, it must be restrained to their *state*. They die in the favour, and as the friends of God. And this is the privilege of the weakest as well as the strongest. Some suppose there is an allusion in the phrase to the form of dismissing servants, or inferiors, amongst the Jews, when it was common to say to them, *Go in peace*. So, in the hour of death, God says to the soul that is reconciled to him in Jesus Christ, *Go in peace, I dismiss thee from a body of sin, and call thee to a service more noble than can possibly be performed in connection with it: In Christ I approve of thee and thy services: I am satisfied, and thou art safe. O blessed, desirable privilege! To die in friendship with God, and in union to Jesus. Though such*
should

should not have the sensible comforts arising from that relation in the time of departure, what a glorious scene must open upon their leaving the body. To see that Jesus who bore their sins in his own body on the tree; that Jesus who was made a curse for their sakes, who so constantly supplied their wants below, and so completely pleaded their cause above; to see him honoured, exalted, yea glorified in their salvation. To behold sin pardoned, the Judge satisfied, the law magnified, and holiness and happiness secured to them for ever. To converse with friends once dear to them below; with Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, whose characters they have frequently admired, or by whose writings they have been often edified and encouraged; and with the numerous assembly of Angels and happy Spirits, who rejoice in their victory and company. O ye happy Dead, while we congratulate you in your honour, we cannot but wish to be partakers of your privilege: "May we also die the death of the righteous, and our latter end be like yours¹."

If the phrase departing in peace, be understood of the *frame* of believers, it must be taken in a limited sense; for I know of no promise in all the scripture, which makes this certain to every individual of the family of the faithful. One may leave the world
 exulting,

¹ Numb. xxiii. 10.

exulting, another dejected, and a third raving through the violence of the disorder: But being in Christ, the last is as safe as the first, and will appear before the throne as completely justified from all things, as fully sanctified in all the faculties of the soul. Our state is no security to our frames, nor, blessed be God, do our frames make any alteration in our state. One soul may enter heaven, like a vessel into port with her sails filled, another with considerable labour and difficulty; but Christ being the pilot, and the glory of God the treasure that is embarked in them, they shall assuredly reach the haven of eternal rest.

To finish our course with joy is very desirable. And for this it is lawful to plead with submission, that, if it be the will, and for the glory of God, our last hours may be enriched with his comforts, and our last breath be employed in bearing testimony to his truth, and in the admiration of his grace. Thus, if we should suppose with some, that *Simeon* expired almost as soon as he had spoke these words, he departed expressing his approbation of Christ, admiring the grace of God to Israel in general, as well as proclaiming his faithfulness to himself in particular. *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.* The promise was fulfilled,—the Messiah was come, and *Simeon* was willing to surrender his

his body to death, and his departing spirit into the hands of that Saviour on whom his eyes were fixed. His soul, full of sacred rapture, dictated this language to his tongue: *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.* Which brings us to consider,

II. The ground or foundation of that blessed peace and tranquillity of mind which he felt. *For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*

This was the peculiar honour which sovereign grace conferred upon this good man. It was a greater honour than had been bestowed upon any of the Prophets. Happy *Simeon!* What they described, thine eyes beheld, and what they predicted, thine arms embraced. And was not the sovereignty of grace displayed in this honour? Certainly it was. While under the double veil of humanity and poverty, the Saviour is hid from the wise and prudent, by the spirit of the Lord he is revealed unto *Simeon*. And at the same time that his bodily eyes gaze upon the new-born Saviour, the eyes of his understanding are opened to see into the nature of his salvation. It is highly probable that at this season *Simeon* had more noble, more suitable, and I will add, more supporting views into the nature of God's salvation, than all the members of the Sanhedrim, yea, than

than all the learned Rabbies of the Jews. *They* expected a deliverance from their surrounding enemies: *He*, a salvation of a more spiritual nature. *They* looked for their Messiah as a great and warlike prince: *He* acknowledges the son of those parents, whose appearance and oblation was an evidence of their poverty. *They* hoped to possess the riches of the world, and to have the inhabitants of the nations reduced into a state of servile subjection under them: *He* looked for an inheritance beyond the grave, and desired entrance into that kingdom, where perfect freedom is the enjoyment of every inhabitant. With a blessed composure and serenity of mind he could bid farewell to life, for he had seen the Lord's salvation.

But although *Simeon* was highly privileged with a view of God manifest in flesh, yet it was a discovery of the work that he came to perform, and the salvation he was to bring, that enabled him to look with composure on the brandished dart of death, and the opening doors of eternity. It was a view of salvation, that made him long to commence an inhabitant of the world of spirits, that he might be put into the full possession of it. *Mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* How significant is every part of the sentence!

SALVATION.—It is that great and important word, which is understood in a very imperfect manner by any in this world, nor,

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perhaps,

perhaps, opened in its full meaning to many even of the saints in light. As this salvation extends to the body as well as the soul, perhaps it is only fully known to *Enoch* and *Elijah*. The rest wait for the full manifestation of their adoption, in the redemption of the body. But to be saved from sin and wrath, from sorrow and imperfection, from death and the grave; to be filled with the fulness, with the love, with the high praises of God; to bask in the beams of uncreated glory; to drink at the fountain of permanent and perpetual delight; to be solaced in the vision of God and of the Lamb; and to be employed in that service which will be constant and uninterrupted, is, what would be as presumptuous in me even to attempt to describe, as, after all description, it would be impossible for you to conceive. But this, all this, and infinitely more than we can at present conceive by all this, is included in the comprehensive word *Salvation*.

Is it therefore to be wondered at, that a Salvation so great and honourable, should be attributed to so high an original? *Simeon*, with his eyes directed to the sovereign Lord of all, says, it is *Thy Salvation*. It is the work of God, and the display of his glory. Salvation, what is it, but the prodigy of his grace, the product of his wisdom, and the effort of his almighty power? It was the subject of his thoughts from eternity, and
has

has been the pursuit of all his operations in time. This Salvation of God is one; and however various the parts, they are so closely connected with, and depend on each other, that all are necessary, and each in particular contributes to the great design. All national or personal deliverances, whether ancient or modern, are but so many branches from it, or lines that meet in the same central point. Salvation is that great, that important work which originates in the counsel of God, is effected by his providence, and will issue in the eternal confusion of Satan, the happiness of his church, and the honour of his name.

This was that salvation of the Lord, which *Simeon saw*. And from what he says of it, we may observe that it is a discovery of this salvation to the mind, which alone can disarm death of its terrors, and make the soul willing to be absent from the body, that it may be present with the Lord. This we have exemplified in the instance before us; and such was the case with our deceased Brother, in the near prospect of death. “I know, said he, my end draws near.— Death is welcome to me, come when it will. I have a blessed refuge to fly to.— I shall go off not as a captive, but as a conqueror.— I am in good hands, and go as an empty vessel to be filled with mercy.” At another time he delivered himself thus, “Well, I am almost at home:—I am going

“ to that inheritance which is freely bestowed :—It is freely bestowed, or I should never have it. O what a mercy is it to have a friend in heaven that careth for me.” Being asked how he found it between God and his soul, he answered, “ I am enabled to rely upon the all-sufficient merits of a crucified Redeemer, and to trust in the all-cleansing virtue of his blood, and to breathe continually after the indwellings of the holy spirit. I have not the joys of sense, but I have the supports of faith.” When it was said to him, Sir, that will bear you through, he replied, with all his collected strength, “ It will, it will.” Thus we see that the experience of *Simeon* and of our departed friend, unite in the confirmation of this important truth, that it is a discovery of this salvation which enables the soul to rejoice in the near prospect of death and eternity.

But to draw towards a close. Whether we consider our departed friend in a civil, ecclesiastic, or domestic capacity, we have reason to mourn for the loss of a very valuable member. His prayers for the nation, his example in the church, and his conversation in the family, are now no more, are enjoyed no longer. He is removed from every evil, while we, for the sins of the land, are left to fear (perhaps to feel) the approach

approach of some dreadful calamity, or desolating judgments.

The best way then to express our sense of the loss, as well as our esteem for the deceased, is to follow his example so far as he followed Christ.

He mourns the dead, who lives as they desire.

I propose him not as a perfect copy, (that you know where to find) but as in many things worthy of imitation.

Imitate him in his entire dependence upon the death, righteousness, and intercession of Jesus. In his last illness he spake much of the need there was of all the faculties of his soul being sanctified, in order to their being glorified. And amongst other expressions he made use of the following: “ To have all
 “ sin done away and destroyed, is such a
 “ wonder, that Satan tells me it is too
 “ great:—And to be perfectly conformed to
 “ God, is wonderful indeed —Satan preaches
 “ dark doctrine; he tells me I shall be
 “ lost, but what he says is false. I deserve
 “ to be lost, but we read of no worthiness in
 “ the register of heaven, but that of the
 “ Lamb that was slain: There I cleave, and
 “ all heaven does the same. Our Lord on
 “ the cross said, Look unto me. That is
 “ all my hope, to look to him, who before
 “ he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost,
 “ said, *It is finished.* And but a few hours
 before he died, he expressed himself thus, to

a friend who was looking on him. "I am going to appear before God, the Judge of all,—and Jesus Christ is my advocate: The curse of the law is taken away, and Satan is conquered." Thus his faith was fixed, trusting in the Lord for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Imitate him in his steady love to the blessed truths of the gospel, and zeal for their honour and success. The faith once delivered to the saints, was *that* which he was enabled to receive in love, and mix with faith: *That* which he professed in the early part of life, by joining himself with a church in London, under the pastoral care of the late Dr. *Ridgley*; and *that* which he never deserted in life, nor lost sight of in death. For his firm attachment to the gospel, the invidious breath of calumny has often endeavoured to blast his reputation before men. And I doubt not but those very things which were designed to render him contemptible here, will appear as some of his brightest ornaments in that day, when characters will appear to be what they are, without disguise on one part, or doubt on the other.

Imitate him in his strict regard to the ordinances of God's house, and in his unwearied attendance on them. Truly it might be said of him, that he loved the very place

place where the honour of his Lord was recorded. Many of you can bear me witness how long, and how constantly he has attended with us, upon the service of the sanctuary, though for a considerable time unable to hear the very sound of the minister's voice. Thus while he was recommending the ways of God to others by his practice, he was often heard to say, that "to see the very faces of his fellow-travellers, revived him in the way."

Imitate him in his frequent attention to, and recollection of the steps of divine providence. This was what he conversed with much, and spoke of often. It was his delightful employ, to think upon the way in which the Lord had been leading him for many years. Some of you can well remember, with what pleasure he has often repeated, and appropriated these words of *Simeon* to himself, saying, "*Mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* - Salvations in grace; salvations in providence; salvations in the church; salvations in the family:" Thus would he run over these, and many other particulars, enlarging upon them in a very pertinent manner.

Finally, for to dwell upon particulars would be almost endless, imitate him in a familiar converse with death and eternity. For some time before his removal, it might be said of him that he died daily. It was familiarized

familiarized to him by frequent meditation, and he was often heard to drop such expressions as these, “ I am waiting the will
 “ of my heavenly Father.—I am waiting
 “ upon the brink of the river.—I am will-
 “ ing, quite willing to go when he is pleas-
 “ ed to call for me.”—And now he is gone ; he has crossed the river of death, and joined the assembly of just men made perfect : But “ the memory of the just is blessed ^m.” And therefore whatever things were excellent, amiable, or praise-worthy in the deceased, let all be ascribed to grace, and think of these things.

A few inferences shall close this discourse. And,

I. How evident is it from this description of death, that the soul is immortal. It is neither impaired in its powers by the disease, nor reduced to annihilation by the dissolution of the body. It lives and acts in the most vigorous manner, even when heart and flesh fail. And while the corporeal part is left in the hands of friends, to be consigned to the grave as a repast for worms, the soul, under the convoy of Angels, departs to receive the decisive sentence, and to be fixed for ever in bliss or woe.—The soul dies not, sleeps not with the body ; but when absent from it, is said to be “ present with the Lord ⁿ,” and active in his service. This
 is

^m Prov. x. 7.—ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 8.

is a doctrine as agreeable to right reason, as it is to express revelation. Hence *Xenophon* represents *Cyrus*, as addressing himself to his children a little before his death, in these words: “ I cannot persuade myself that the
“ soul, by being separated from this body,
“ which is devoid of sense, should thereupon
“ become itself likewise void of sense ; on
“ the contrary, it seems more reasonable to
“ me to believe, that when the mind is
“ separated from the body, it will become
“ most of all sensible and intelligent.”
Even sleep and death are proofs of the soul’s immortality. In the latter, we find the body is incapable of sensation, because the soul is absent ; but in the former, though the body is dormant, the soul is most active, and capable of taking in things in a more quick and connect manner. It is the mind which is the seat of all sensation, and this is no more impaired by the death of the body, than the removal of a veil from the eyes has a tendency to obscure the object which was but imperfectly seen before.

2. If the soul be immortal, how necessary is it to attend to it in a particular manner.—What is there that can support, or satisfy an immortal spirit but salvation?—This salvation is brought nigh unto you in the gospel.—This salvation is held forth by those who dispense it to all that come with-

in the found of their word:—And however men may treat so glorious a proposal with indifference, or give the preference to other things; unless interested in, and made partakers of this salvation, your souls will be miserable for ever.—If you profess to be rational, act rationally; spend not your strength for that which cannot satisfy. For “what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”—Enquire what knowledge you have of this salvation, and whether you have any scriptural evidence to conclude that it is already begun in your souls.—And may God so accompany the enquiry, as to enable you to adopt the language of *Simeon*, and say, *Mine eyes have seen thy salvation*.

3. If death is a departure from sin and the company of imperfect saints, and a translation to a state of holiness and the society of the blessed: How should we think of death with pleasure, as the way which God has appointed to bring us to our best friends? If *Socrates*, with the dim lamp of nature's light, could say in the view of his departure, “O happy day, when I shall go to the blessed assembly of spirits, and depart out of this wicked and miserably confused world:” Much more, assisted by the pure and perfect light of revelation, should we

we reflect with pleasure upon that happy moment, which shall introduce the believer to friends, and brethren, and fathers, departed in the Lord.—There perfect love, and light, and liberty will be enjoyed.— And God, and Christ, and salvation be exalted by all the company of the redeemed, world without end, *Amen.*

T H E E N D.



