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SERMONS.

BY

DR. DODDRIDGE.



# S E R M O N S,

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

BY

✓  
PHILIP DODDRIDGE, D. D.

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IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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## SERMON I.

PRAYER CONSIDERED AS A BRANCH OF  
ACTUAL SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION.

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LAMENTATIONS, iii. 41.

*Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the  
heavens.*

SOME of you may perhaps remember that in SERM.  
I.  
the last discourse which I gave you upon such   
an occasion, I entered upon the subject of  
sacramental preparation. I told you it consisted of two parts, habitual and actual. Habitual preparation is a sincere giving ourselves to God and Christ, and acting suitably to such an engagement. Actual preparation is a course of devotional exercises, which, when we have an opportunity for them, are proper to be used, in order to putting our souls into a fit posture for such a solemn transaction. I propose, by the Divine assistance, in this and some future discourses, to endeavour to assist you in your actual prepa-

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I.

ration. But I must desire you to remember, what I formerly told you, that I would by no means insinuate that such a model of devotion should be always exactly followed; but leave every person to judge for himself how far it may be useful to him. We told you that actual preparation may be considered under four heads; self-examination, prayer, meditation, and self-dedication. We have already dispatched the first of these particulars, and told you that a man ought particularly to examine himself as to the safety of his state in general, and as to the present temper and circumstances of his mind; and, for his assistance in the work before him, he should inquire what sins he has to lament, what mercies to seek, what favours to return thanks for, and what duties to oblige himself to. I now proceed,

II. To consider prayer as another branch of sacramental preparation; which is well expressed in this exhortation of the prophet: *Let us lift up our heart with our hands to God in the heavens.*

It will be the main business of this discourse,

I. To show what may properly be the

matter of a Christian's prayer, when he is preparing for the Lord's table. And then, SERM.  
I.

II. I shall, in a very few words, prove that this contains a proper branch of actual preparation.

I. I am to show you what it is that a Christian may properly pray for when he is preparing himself to attend upon the table of the Lord. And what we have to say under this head will be digested under three principal branches of prayer, confession, petition, and thanksgivings. For self-dedication, which, indeed, is properly a part of prayer, will be the foundation of a distinct discourse.

1. When the Christian is preparing for the table of the Lord, he ought to make an humble confession of his sins, and an earnest application to God for pardon.

We suppose that a Christian has been employing himself in self-examination; and upon a diligent review of his heart and his life he cannot but find a great deal amiss in them; and when he considers the purity of that God he is approaching to, he is filled with shame, and confusion, and terror. It is natural then that he should go and prostrate

SERM.

I.

himself in the Divine presence, to obtain the pardon of his sins by such a turn of thought as David expresses: *As for my transgressions, thou wilt cleanse them away, though iniquity*

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxv. 3. *prevails against me*<sup>1</sup>. The Christian knows that confession is the way to pardon. *I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest me the iniquity of my sin*<sup>2</sup>.

5.

He will, therefore, upon such an occasion, take a review of his original pollution; and will lament all the bitter streams that have proceeded from this corrupted fountain. He will reflect, with anguish of mind, upon all his continued violations of the law of God in thought, in word, and in deed; more especially any notorious acts of guilt that lie heaviest upon the conscience; and those sins that he has committed since the last sacramental engagements; which, by a diligent course of self-examination, we suppose he has particularly discovered. And when he is mentioning these things at the throne of grace, he will not pass over them in a slight and cursory manner; much less will he endeavour to extenuate the guilt of them; but he will confess them in all their circumstances and in all their aggravations. Lord! says the

Christian, I have acted thus insolently, thus  
brutishly, though I have had the clearest  
notices of thy mind and will, and the most  
moving obligations to engage me to holiness.  
I have rebelled against thee, though thou art  
my Creator, my Father, and my Friend!  
though I have all my life been supported by  
thy grace and bounty! nay, though I have  
been redeemed by the blood of thy Son, and  
brought into the bonds of an everlasting  
covenant! I have sinned against thee, though  
I have experienced the pleasures of a quiet  
conscience, and a life of communion with  
God, and have confessed that to be infinitely  
superior to all the gratifications of sense and  
passion; nay, though I have, in the solemn-  
est manner, devoted myself to thy service,  
and against all sin in general; and perhaps  
against those particular sins which I now  
lament, over the solemn memorials of Christ's  
dying love. When a Christian is thus re-  
counting and aggravating his guilt, he will  
acknowledge that it has justly exposed him  
to the Divine wrath and vengeance. Lord!  
will he say, I have broken thy covenant;  
and thou mightest justly cause me to know  
the breach of it, and for ever cut me off from

SERM.

1.

SERM.

I.



all the benefits and blessings which are secured by it. All the mercies that I have received from thy hands, and all the solemn transactions that have passed betwixt God and my soul, might justly be made aggravations of my punishment, in the same proportion as they have aggravated my guilt. Instead of bringing me to thy banqueting house, and spreading over me a banner of love, thou mightest justly cast me out into *outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*. Instead of giving me *the cup of salvation*, the representation of the bleeding love of my Redeemer, thou mightest justly put into my hands *a cup of trembling*, and cause me *to wring out the dregs of it, and drink them*. But when he is just laying himself in the dust before God, he will *not sorrow as one who has no hope*; he will remember that he has declared himself *the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness; and doth forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin*<sup>3</sup>. And he will remember *the blood of Jesus, which cleanses from all sin*; he will therefore apply himself to that, that his *conscience may be sprinkled from dead works*, and his soul be accepted in

<sup>3</sup> Exodus  
xxxiv. 6, 7.

the sight of the holy God. He will plead the blood of Christ by faith, and he will earnestly and particularly beg that the solemn ordinances which he is now going to attend upon may be the seal of his pardon; and will receive the bread and the wine as a token that his sins are forgiven him.


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I.

2. As a Christian, in his preparation for the Lord's Supper, will confess his sins; so he will humbly present his petitions for those favours which he desires to receive; and some of his petitions will more immediately regard others, and some of them himself.

1. A Christian, at such a time, has a great many favours to ask for himself, both of a temporal and a spiritual nature. In general, all the mercies that he needs he will be asking at such a season as this; and as to particulars, he will be determined by the inquiry he has been making into the state of his soul: one branch of which, as peculiarly regarding the head that we are now upon, I will suggest some particulars, that a Christian will be asking for himself upon such occasions as these.

1. He will not be entirely forgetful of temporal blessings. When Jacob entered

SERM. I. into covenant with God, he was humbly bold  
 to stipulate, that he might *have bread to eat,*  
 \* Gen. *and raiment to put on*<sup>4</sup>. So a Christian will  
 xxviii. 20. be begging of God the necessaries, and, if he  
 sees fit, the conveniences of life, as proceeding  
 from his hand. He will further desire a  
 comfortable measure of health and strength,  
 which is indeed one of the most valuable  
 temporal mercies, because without it most of  
 the enjoyments of life are tasteless, and many  
 of the duties of it are impracticable. And  
 besides this, any particular blessings for the  
 present life which he now needs, he will hum-  
 bly ask at such a time. But then he will  
 remember, that all these petitions are to be  
 presented with an entire resignation to the  
 Divine will. Lord! I am a poor, foolish,  
 short-sighted creature; and perhaps I am  
 pursuing that which would but do me hurt,  
 if I should obtain it. And, therefore, how-  
 ever I may desire health and plenty, a fair  
 reputation, and the comfortable enjoyment  
 of my friends; yet, if Thou in thine infinite  
 wisdom seest it fit for me, that I should be  
 exposed to poverty and disgrace, to reproach  
 and persecution, to sickness of body and  
 unkindness of friends, I readily and cheer-

fully submit; and choose that for myself SERM.  
which Thou art pleased to choose for me. 1. 

And thus any particular project that the Christian has upon his mind, which he imagines may tend to promote his temporal advantage, he will with equal submission leave in the hands of God. But,

2. The Christian at such a time as this, as indeed in all his other addresses to God, will be most earnestly desirous of spiritual blessings in heavenly things. He will *come to the throne of grace*, upon such an occasion, that he *may find mercy, and grace to help in every time of need*. Here, in general, he will seek all the graces and the virtues of the Christian life; that he may grow and abound in them, and more completely adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things. Peculiarly will he beg those graces to mortify those corruptions which have hitherto too much prevailed, and to encounter those temptations that he sees are lying before him. But permit me, my friends, for your better assistance in this important duty, to mention some particular spiritual blessings, which Christians have great need to be frequently asking

SERM. I. of God, and which they should particularly insist upon in their approaches to the table of the Lord.

1. We should pray for the increase of our faith. When a Christian has been taking a survey of his mind, though he perceives that, by the grace of God, he has been enabled, in the general, *to walk by faith, and not by sight*; though he may say with that good man, *Lord! I believe*; yet he has abundance of reason, like him, to cry out with tears, *Lord! help my unbelief*. Lord! increase my faith. Give me a more undoubted assurance of the reality of unseen objects; and particularly of that future state of glory and happiness, which Thou hast prepared for them that love Thee; that so it may be like oil to the wheels of my obedience, that it may carry me delightfully through every duty, and cheerfully through every affliction; as nothing that I can do, and nothing that I can suffer, is worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed.

2. The Christian will see reason to pray for a more entire conquest over the world. It is true, as the apostle John observed, that

*every one, who is born of God, does in some comfortable measure, overcome the world*<sup>5</sup>. SERM.  
I.

And if we are Christians, we have not our ultimate happiness, or our supreme affection there. But we converse intimately with it, it takes up a great deal of our time, and, God forgive us, a great deal of our hearts too; and hopes, and fears, and cares about present enjoyments do frequently distract and discompose us; nay, they frequently break in upon us, when we are in the immediate presence of God, and pollute the temple and disturb the sacrifice. And therefore we should pray, at such a time, that God would convince us of the vanity of all creature enjoyments; that he will enable us to *set our affections on things above, and not on things below. Oh! turn away our eyes from beholding vanity*, and from an affectionate regard to those *things that are seen and temporal*; that they may be fixed upon those brighter and nobler objects, *that are unseen and eternal*. And in a peculiar manner, if there be any particular creature that is gaining too much upon our affections, it is very proper to be solemnly renouncing that as our por-

<sup>5</sup> 1 John  
v. 4.

SERM. tion, and begging the assistance of the Divine  
I. grace to mortify our irregular regards to it.

3. We should pray, in our preparatory devotions, that for the time to come, God would enable us to take greater care in the government of our thoughts, and of our words. I am afraid, Christians, when we reflect upon the secret actions of our own minds, we shall find that folly and impertinence have too large a share in them ; and that, especially, when we have no particular business before us, but our thoughts are in a manner left to themselves, we manage them so as to turn to but little account. We should beg, therefore, that God would teach us the happy art of raising our thoughts from earth to heaven, and every thing we see might raise us to him ; that we might be in his fear all the day long ; and might redeem those little intervals of time, which we so prodigally and extravagantly trifle away. The government of the tongue is also a point in which most Christians are shamefully defective ; and yet the apostle lays so much stress upon it as to tell us, that without some good measure of it, it is absolutely vain for us to pretend to

be religious<sup>6</sup>. A Christian will heartily lament that his discourse has been so idle and unprofitable, and perhaps so injurious and uncharitable, hitherto; and will beg, that God will teach him to manage it so as that, for the time to come, the law of prudence and love and holiness may be in his lips, instead of such *foolish talking and jesting as is not convenient*, or unreasonable and uncharitable censures of his neighbour<sup>7</sup>; that his *speech may be always with grace, seasoned with salt*; such as may tend to warm his own heart, and the hearts of his fellow Christians; to confirm their faith, and to animate their devotion.

SERM.

I.

<sup>6</sup> Jam. iii.  
26.<sup>7</sup> Col. iv. 6.

4. A Christian should pray that his heart may be more fitted for communion with God in holy duties. Lord! says the good man, I can remember the time when I could come into thy presence, and make my requests known unto Thee, with the utmost freedom and intention of thought; and when I could hear, as for the life of my soul. But now my petitions frequently die upon my lips, and every trifle diverts me in my most solemn attendance. Oh that Thou wouldst

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I.

enlarge my heart in Thy service ! that Thou wouldst *touch my lips with a coal from Thine altar*, and pour out upon me the Spirit of grace and supplication ; that every duty may be a foretaste of heaven ! that I may be enabled to place myself in Thine immediate presence, and be earnest with Thee for the blessings that I ask ; that I may hear Thy word with attention and understanding, with faith and affection, and that it may be more and more the rejoicing of my soul.

5. A Christian may very allowably pray, that God would give him a clearer assurance of his interest in the Divine favour. Thus many an excellent Christian, who through a consciousness of the deceitfulness of his own heart, and the weakness of his former resolutions, *goes mourning all the day long*, and is in a great deal of doubt and perplexity about the safety of his state. Sure he need not to be reminded, that he is to seek comfort in the way of his duty, to go unto God, to *lift up the light of his countenance upon him*, and say unto his soul, *I am thy salvation* : to enable him, with a filial confidence to cry, *Abba, Father*. Lord ! may the Christian say,

I am a dying creature, and for aught I know I may be in eternity by another sacrament day; and my doubts and fears will make dying a very uncomfortable work. Oh, that Thou wouldst clearly shine in upon my soul. Let me but know, that *when I am dissolved, I shall be with Christ*; and that, *though I walk through the dark valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil*. When Thou callest me away, I will cheerfully answer Thee; and in the mean time, I will wait and long for that happy change, which now I cannot think of without fear and amazement. Only let me remind you, Christians, of what I am afraid you are too apt to forget; that you are not to ask comfort and assurance in too positive a manner, but with an humble submission to the Divine wisdom; which perhaps may see it best, that you should still be kept in suspense.

6. The Christian should earnestly pray, that he may be endued with a warmer zeal, and stronger resolution, for the honour of God, and the public good. Remember, my friends, that all our work is not at home. We owe a great deal to the bodies and souls of our fellow-creatures; and the more we

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have received from God, the more we are obliged to do for *him*. But though the duty is ours, the strength is the Lord's; and therefore we should pray, that God would excite us to his service, and enable us in it. Lord, should each of us be saying, I am under infinite obligations to thee, not only as created by thy power, but as redeemed by the blood of thy Son. I acknowledge, that I am not my own; but am *bought with a price*. May I, therefore; be endeavouring to glorify thee, my rightful possessor. May I not live to myself, but to Jesus, *who died for me, and rose again*. And enable me, in the station in which I am placed, to be carrying on that which was the great design, for which he came into the world. May I animate and encourage my fellow Christians to a holy course, by friendly exhortation, and by a shining example. May I be endeavouring to reclaim sinners from the error of their ways, to awaken the stupid, to comfort the distressed, and to lead convinced sinners to the Lord Jesus Christ, the only foundation of a solid peace. That we may be working for God, and for our fellow-creatures, *whilst it is day, before the night comes wherein no*


*man can work; that so we may give a good* SERM.  
1.  
*account of our stewardship, when we may be*  
*no longer stewards; and hear the Lord Jesus*  
*Christ saying unto us, Well done, good and*  
*faithful servants! you have been faithful in a*  
*few things, I will make you rulers over many*  
*things; enter ye into the joy of the Lord.*

7. Once more, a Christian should earnestly pray that he may have the presence of God with him, in that solemn ordinance for which he is now preparing: That when he comes to the table of the Lord, he may meet with his beloved there; and may not return home from the wells of salvation with his pitcher empty, but that he may be, some way or another, the better for his attendance. Only remember, Christians, that you are not to limit the HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL to any one particular method of operation. When we pray for the presence of God in the sacrament, we generally mean, that we may have the more lively assurances of his love; and that our most affectionate and rapturous desires may be drawn out after him. It is true, such experiences as these are, in their own nature, very desirable: they are here begun upon earth; and every soul, that has ever

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I.

tasted them, will acknowledge that they *are sweeter than honey, and the honeycomb*. But God may be graciously present with us, when he does not discover himself in such communications as these. Thus, when Jacob arose from his dream, he said, *Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not*<sup>8</sup>. And I question not, my friends, but that God is frequently with you when you go away mourning, and trembling, and complain that you have missed of his presence. It is the presence of God that enables you to mourn over your sins, and fills you with horror and remorse at the remembrance of them; and makes them the grief and burthen of your souls. It is the presence of God that sends you away from the sacrament, with a confirmed resolution for God and holiness; that *you will perform unto the Lord your vows*, and continue to look unto him as the God of Israel, the Saviour, though he be *a God who hides himself* from you. And, therefore, Christians, I desire you to remember, that you may conditionally beg the comfortable manifestations of his presence; yet, upon the whole, you are to leave it to God to determine the ways in which he will operate upon

<sup>8</sup> Genesis  
xxviii. 16.

your souls, whether by enlarged affections, SERM.  
triumphant joy, and rapturous love; or by <sup>I.</sup>   
struggling desires, silent mourning, or unutterable straitenings. This it is, that a Christian should pray for with regard to himself. But let me add,

2. That he will not be forgetful of the concerns of others. I am afraid we must charge it on ourselves as a great failure, both in our public, and especially in our secret devotions, that we have too much of a private spirit, and we either leave out those petitions that regard others, or pass them over in a slight and indifferent manner. Each is certainly a fault, and we should endeavour to remedy it; and when we set apart a considerable portion of time for the exercise of devotion, we should see to it that we remedy it then. Upon this occasion, let us pray for the whole state of mankind in general; for unhappy creatures that are strangers to the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; who have no sabbaths, nor sacraments, as we have, but are debasing the noble faculties of the rational nature in stupid idolatry, and unmanly observances. Let us pray, that *the knowledge*

SERM.  
I. *of the Lord may cover the earth; and that, from the rising of the sun to the going down of it, the Lord may be one, and his name one. Let us pray for the whole Catholic church in general; that it may be more entirely reformed from all corrupt mixtures of error and superstition, of bigotry and persecution; that all who profess the sacred name of our Redeemer, may consider the correspondent obligations that lie upon them, to depart from all iniquity, and to walk in the paths of holiness and love. But, let us particularly pray for the persecuted church; our suffering brethren, whom we so frequently forget. They had once their Sabbaths and their sacraments as we have; but now they are deprived of these sacred opportunities. Their teachers are driven into corners, and their souls languish for the solemn assemblies. Let us pray, that the time to favour Zion, yea, the set time, may come: that the rod of the wicked may no longer rest upon the lot of the righteous, but, according to the elegant phrase of the Psalmist, the church which has so long lain among the pots, in a state of slavery and affliction, may come forth beautiful and glorious as a dove, whose wings are*

*covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold*<sup>9</sup>. And, particularly, let us pray, that those designs which are now forming may be made effectual for her redress and deliverance. Let us peculiarly remember our own land and nation; the king as supreme, and all other magistrates as in subordinate authority under him: that they may employ their power and their influence to the noblest purposes, that they may be *terrors to evil doers*, and to such only; but *a praise and an encouragement to them who do well*; that immorality may every where be suppressed, and religion and virtue may be established by this means. Let us remember the ministers of the word and gospel, of whatever denomination or opinion they may be; that if they do sincerely intend the glory of God, and the reformation of the world, the blessing of God may be upon them, and the work of their hands may be established. In a particular manner, my friends, you should remember your own minister upon such an occasion as this. I am heartily desirous of your prayers at all times. I persuade myself that you do not forget me; and I really believe that, both in soul and body, I fare

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<sup>9</sup>Ps. lxxviii.  
13.

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I.

considerably the better for them. But, permit me to remind you, that I have a peculiar claim to your remembrance at such seasons as these; as for your sake I am obliged to absent myself from the table of the Lord, and so am deprived of those comforts and blessings, which, through the grace of God, I might expect there\*. Let me entreat you to endeavour to make up this loss, by being more earnest in prayer to God upon my account. And depend upon it, that in return I will remember you, and earnestly beg that God would meet you and bless you; that every one of you may be the better for that excellent ordinance. Once more, you should remember your family and your friends, and the particular concerns of them, who are to be represented to God. You should not forget the sorrow of the afflicted there, in body or in mind; but consider *that you yourselves are also in the body*, and have the

\* “ In October, 1725, he removed his abode to Market Harborough. He continued his relation to the congregation at Kibworth, and preached to them, except when Mr. David Some, minister at Harborough (who had taken this small society under his pastoral care, together with his own), went to administer the Lord’s Supper to them; and then Mr. Doddridge supplied his place.”—*Orten’s Memoirs of Doddridge*, p. 37.

same human nature, and the same Christian profession with them; and, therefore, should have a fellow-feeling of their miseries and complaints. Such a public spiritedness, in your addresses to the throne of grace, would make you more extensively useful. It would affect those, on whom you cannot have any influence any other way; and it would stir you up to endeavour to do your utmost for those for whom you pray; and it would draw down upon yourselves the return of peace and joy, and the comfortable evidence of the Divine approbation and acceptance. Thus have I endeavoured to direct you what blessings you should seek in your preparation for the sacrament, and have dispatched petition, which is the second branch of prayer. And I have been so large upon this, that I cannot largely insist upon those mercies which you should return thanks for: and as a thankful frame is of very great importance to our worthy attendance upon the Lord's Supper; and there are many useful observations to be offered with respect to it; I shall choose to reserve it for the foundation of another discourse. And in the conclusion of this, I will,

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I.

SERM.

I.

II. Endeavour to prove to you, in a few words, that prayer is a proper exercise, when we are preparing ourselves for the table of the Lord. You will remember, that by actual preparation, we mean some extraordinary exercises of devotion. Now prayer is so considerable a branch of devotion, that it is certain, it cannot be excluded. Besides, prayer is a very powerful thing, and has an immediate tendency to prevail upon God, to send down those influences of his Spirit by which our attendance may be made comfortable and useful to us. If you reflect upon the instances which we mentioned under the former head, you will find that many of them are peculiarly proper to be remembered at such a time, and when we have been thus large and particular in our preparatory prayers, we shall have our wants more ready in our minds when we present ourselves at the table of the Lord. Or, though we should not be able to recollect every particular, yet we may do our business by one general petition; as for instance, Lord! I beseech thee, remember what has passed betwixt us, bestow upon me all the blessings I have been asking; and permit me to receive these sacred elements, as a pledge and assurance,

that thou wilt not deny me my petitions, so far as they are subservient to my truest advantage. It only remains that I conclude the discourse, with exhorting you to the duty which I have now been explaining. Remember, that God has declared himself a God hearing prayer. And as you are the seed of Jacob, there is a peculiar promise that he will not say unto you, *Seek ye my face* in vain. Remember, that by these means you will get your hearts into a good frame for the solemnest acts of Divine worship, and then you may more justly expect to receive those blessings at his table, which you have before been seeking in so regular a way. And once more, that the duty I am recommending is easy and pleasant, as every Christian will confess, who has made the experiment. Only let me further remind you, that in this, and all your addresses to the throne of grace, you are not only to regard the matter of which they consist, but the manner in which they are presented. You must offer them with humility and faith, with ardour and sincerity; and in the language of the text, must *lift up your hearts, with your hands, to God in the heavens.*

SERM.


I.

## SERMON II.

OF RECEIVING THE GRACE OF GOD IN  
VAIN.

2 CORINTHIANS, vi. 1.

*We beseech you, that you receive not the grace of God in vain.*

SERM. II.  IN the conclusion of the former chapter, St. Paul makes a very honourable representation of the ministerial office; which, though it essentially belongs to the apostles, yet may, with a great deal of propriety, be applied to inferior officers in the church of Christ. *They are ambassadors for Christ, and do beseech men in his stead that they would be reconciled to* God<sup>1</sup>. And, to persuade them to this, immediately before the text, he displays the riches of that grace which was revealed in the gospel; and gives a summary account of the method of salvation by a Redeemer. God, says he, *has made*, or constituted, *him*, that is, Christ, his own most beloved Son, *a sin-offering for us; though he knew no sin,*

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 20, 21.

though he never approved, nor loved, nor practised it; yet has God given him up to the punishment of it, *that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*; that is, that we, upon his account, and with a regard to what he has done and suffered, might be accepted by God as righteous persons. Now, says he, when we have thus declared the method of Divine grace, it is our business, and a very excellent business it is, earnestly to entreat you that ye would not reject it. *We, therefore, as workers together with him*, heartily falling in with this great design, and desirous to do our utmost to subserve it, *we beseech you that you receive not the grace of God in vain*. This is my business, says he, as a Christian minister; and I seriously apply myself to it; and do now entreat you, my Corinthian friends, as well as all others to whom this epistle may come, that you would not rest in an historical knowledge of the gospel doctrine, but that you would so heartily consent to its demands, that you may secure an interest in the benefits of it. And this is the great design of a gospel minister in all succeeding ages; and, in particular, I would consider it as my business; for thus

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would I study, and pray, and preach, and *be instant in season and out of season*; that, if it be possible, those to whom Providence calls me to address myself; and in particular you, my friends, you who are committed to my constant care, may not *neglect this great salvation*; may not *receive the grace of God in vain*. And God grant that my endeavours may be effectual. In discoursing on these words, which I have now been reading, I would,

I. Briefly show you what we are to understand by *the grace of God*.

II. Consider what it is to *receive this grace in vain*.

III. Advance some arguments to dissuade you from receiving it thus.

IV. Conclude with a short application.

I. I am briefly to show you what we are to understand by *the grace of God*.

Now here you are to observe that grace, in the Hebrew language, and in the Greek too, properly signifies any favour, or benefit, received from another. Thus, the present, which the churches of Corinth and Macedonia sent to the distressed Christians at Jerusalem, is called *grace*; for he tells them that *Titus*

*was chosen to travel with them, with that grace*<sup>2</sup>; the margin translates it, *with that gift*. Thus the grace of God must signify all those favours which we receive from his bountiful hand; and include those of a temporal nature which regard the present supports and conveniences of life, as well as spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus our Lord. But it is evident that, though the word itself be of so extensive a signification, it is here to be taken in a more limited sense; and I apprehend that in this place it signifies the offers of salvation by Christ, as laid down in the gospel; and all the means which God made use of to induce us heartily to accept of them.

1. By the grace of God we are here to understand the offers of salvation by a Redeemer, as proposed in the gospel. This will plainly appear from considering the context. The apostle had before been telling the Corinthians, that *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*; and that *he had made his Son a sin-offering for our justification and salvation*. Now, says he, *let not this grace, those discoveries and proposals of reconciliation and life, be received in vain by you*. And

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2<sup>d</sup> Cor. viii.  
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there are many other passages of scripture in which the gospel is spoken of in such language as this. It is sometimes called *the word of grace*: *The Lord gave testimony to the word of his grace*<sup>3</sup>, that is, to the gospel as preached by Barnabas and Paul; and *the gospel of the grace of God*. *I count not my life dear to me*, says this excellent man, *that I may finish my course with joy, and testify the gospel of the grace of God*<sup>4</sup>. Nay, at other times, it is expressly called, as here in the text, *grace*, and *the grace of God*. As in this language it is frequently opposed to the Mosaic law, *You are not under the law, but under grace*<sup>5</sup>. *The law came by Moses, but grace by Jesus Christ*<sup>6</sup>; that is, the gospel of grace. So in another place, *The grace of God*, that is, the gospel dispensation, *has appeared unto all men, teaching them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts*<sup>7</sup>. Again, when the apostle is warning the Hebrews against apostacy from the gospel, he expresses it thus, *Take heed, lest any fall from the grace of God*<sup>8</sup>, as the margin of your Bibles renders it. And when he accuses the Galatians, that they had in part forsaken the gospel, he uses the same phrase; *Ye are fallen from grace*<sup>9</sup>. As when he had been

<sup>3</sup> Acts xiv.  
3.

<sup>4</sup> Acts xx.  
24.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. vi.

<sup>14.</sup>

<sup>6</sup> John i.

<sup>17.</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Tit. ii. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Heb. xii.

<sup>15.</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Gal. v. 4.

told, he had been instrumental in converting them to the gospel, he says, he *had called* <sup>SERM. II.</sup> *them into the grace of God*<sup>1</sup>. Once more, <sup>' Gal. i. 6.</sup> when St. Luke tells us, that Paul and Barnabas attempted to confirm their new converts in their adherence to Christianity, he uses the same phrase, *They persuaded them to continue in the grace of God*<sup>2</sup>. Now it is evident <sup>' Acts iii. 43.</sup> that the gospel may very properly be spoken of in this language, as *the grace of God*; as it was God's free goodness and mercy, and not the prospect of any valuable return from us, which induced him to contrive a way for our happiness; and as the method in which this salvation is proposed is exceedingly gracious and indulgent; both which I shall have occasion to illustrate more at large hereafter; and therefore content myself with barely mentioning them at present, and so go on to the second particular.

2. The grace of God may further signify all those means which God is pleased to make use of to induce us to accept of the gospel salvation. I persuade myself, you need not be told that there is a great variety of these. At first, you know, the message was delivered from the mouths of the apostles; and this

SERM. office was called *grace* ; not only as it was a  
II. favour and honour to themselves, but a means  
of conveying salvation to others. By the indulgent care of God for our happiness, those who at first preached the gospel have left upon record excellent histories, which give us a faithful account of the most important facts on which the truth of Christianity depends ; and to these they have added many admirable discourses, which do not only open the nature of the gospel covenant, and describe the duties which it requires from us, but at the same time suggest the most powerful motives to awaken us to the discharge of those duties, and have a quickness and spirit in them which is most naturally adapted to work upon the mind. *The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.* And as he has given us such excellent instructions in our Bible, so he has appointed a succession of ministers in every age of the church, whose business it is to explain and enforce the doctrine of salvation, as laid down in the word of God ; who, for that purpose, are to study the most engaging methods of address, and to search out the most proper opportunities of dealing with

their people on these most important subjects. SERM.  
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And to this the apostle seems immediately to refer in the text, when he says a little above, *We, as ambassadors from heaven, pray you, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God; and as workers together with God, we beseech you that you would not receive the grace of God in vain;* this grace of sending us, as his ambassadors, to plead with you for your everlasting happiness. And I may add, that the serious admonitions of parents and Christian friends, as well as of ministers, are means which God often makes use of to awaken us to a sense of our duty, and to lead us home to himself; and so may be comprehended under these particulars. Again, the operations of Divine Providence are visibly adapted to engage us to accept of the gospel salvation; and so his providence is his grace. The prosperity and pleasure that we enjoy in life are intended as a solid demonstration of God's care over us, and his affection to us; and as a sensible intimation of his readiness to bestow still nobler blessings upon us, if we can be persuaded to accept of them. And all the afflictions he is exercising us with are a rod, by which he is teaching us this heavenly

SERM. wisdom. By these he would make us sen-  
II. sible of the terrors of his wrath, and of our  
own incapacity to endure or resist it. By  
these he would mortify our affections to  
worldly vanities, and awaken us to serious-  
ness and reflection, as the surest way to our  
recovery and salvation. But when I am dis-  
coursing upon this head, I must by no means  
omit to remind you that the operations of  
the Holy Spirit of God upon the heart are  
very illustrious and important means, by  
which he persuades us to accept of the gospel  
salvation. By his own immediate impres-  
sions upon the soul, he awakens us to some  
conviction of the guilt and misery of our  
state by nature, to some solicitous concern  
for an interest in the righteousness of the  
great Mediator, and some purposes and reso-  
lutions of repentance and reformation of life.  
Sometimes these operations are so strong and  
commanding that the soul is conquered to  
a willing obedience, and fixed in a steady  
determination of entire devotedness to God  
through Christ; and, by the continuance of  
these sanctifying influences, is led on from  
grace to grace, till it attains to the perfection  
of glory and felicity, notwithstanding all the

opposition it meets with in its way. But when these impressions are of a less prevalent nature, yet still they are means, and they would be effectual, if the obstinacy and perverseness of the sinner did not resist, or, as scripture expresses it, *quench the Spirit*. These means, which I have now been endeavouring to enumerate, are often expressed in scripture by the phrase used in the text, and called *grace*. I apprehend, all these means may be comprehended, where Christians are spoken of under the character of those who had *believed through grace*<sup>3</sup>; that is, through the preaching of the good word of God, and the cooperation of his Providence and Spirit; but especially the working of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, to form it to a Divine temper, and engage it to an acceptance of the gospel salvation, is called in scripture by the name of *grace*; as it is the most excellent gift of God. Thus God promises *to pour out the spirit of grace and supplication* upon his people, *in the latter days*<sup>4</sup>. And the apostle Paul professes, *By the grace of God I am what I am. I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*<sup>5</sup>; that is, the Spirit of God

<sup>3</sup>Acts xviii.  
27.

<sup>4</sup>Zech. xii.  
10.

<sup>5</sup>1 Cor. xv.  
10.

SERM. II. exciting me to a vigorous discharge of my apostolic duty. And upon this account those Christian virtues, which are elsewhere called *the fruits of the Spirit*, are sometimes spoken *of as grace*. Thus, when St. Peter<sup>6</sup> exhorted the Christians to improve in practical religion, this is his phrase, *But grow in grace*. And the reason of this denomination is much the same with the former; for, as it is free and unmerited goodness in God that inclines him to make such proposals of salvation to fallen man, so he can have no other motive to engage him to use such means to persuade his creatures to accept of them; and the diversity with which these means are distributed, is a very evident argument, that they are given *not of debt, but of grace*.

II. I now come to consider what it is to *receive the grace of God in vain*. And here, to be sure, they *receive the grace of God in vain*, who are not at all affected with it; and so do they too, who though they may be brought under some transient affections, yet do not embrace it with a full consent of heart and obedience of life.

1. Those most evidently receive the grace

of God in vain, who are not at all affected with it. If a man hears the message of salvation by a Redeemer, but is not at all sensible that he stands in any need of this Redeemer; nor solicitous to inquire what is this salvation which he proposes, what is the method in which it is offered, or to examine whether he hath fallen in with that method or no; if he hears of the being and government of God, and his obligations to love and serve him, but will yet *live as without God in the world*, and cast off fear, and restrain prayer before him; if he hears of eternal happiness and misery, which God will *render to every man according to his works*, but utterly disregards the unchangeable world which he is going to, and entertains not any serious thought of the reception which he shall meet with there; but goes on in a negligent, stupid course of sin, earnestly driving on his worldly designs, and allowing himself in carnal employments and entertainments; while God, and Christ, and a happy eternity, are entirely neglected and forgotten; to be sure, such a man has *received the grace of God in vain*. The grace of God was intended to accomplish some end; but it can

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have no end at all with a person who will not take any notice of it; but will overlook it as if it were only a *cunningly devised fable*, or an airy invention, designed to amuse the ear, or furnish an orator with a pathological subject of declamation. You are easily aware, I am not now drawing an imaginary character. This is the condition of the far greater part of those to whom the gospel comes. And I verily believe, it is the condition of some of you to whom I am now speaking. You, to be sure, *receive the grace of God in vain*. But,

2. Those do as really *receive the grace of God in vain*, who, though they may be in some transient manner affected by it, yet do not embrace it with a full consent of heart, and sincere obedience of life. There are a great many such persons in our assemblies, who have heard the great truths of religion very plainly proposed, and cannot be utterly unaffected by them; who are ready to acknowledge that they are naturally in a very miserable state; that Christ is a very suitable Saviour; and it may be, to rejoice in the news of salvation by him; who yet, possibly, rest here; and conceive that knowledge, and con-

viction, and some transient affections, to be SERM. II. sufficient to entitle them to the gospel salvation; though while they profess to know, or to love Christ, they in works deny him. Or, if they are convinced that they are not yet converted, they form some instant purposes and resolutions, that hereafter they will return to God, and break off their sins; though for the present, the violence of temptation prevail upon them, and their worldly affairs be so very urgent, as not to allow them sufficient leisure to attempt a change of so great difficulty and importance. These are the persons whom our Lord speaks of under the character of the *stony ground hearers*; *who when they had heard the word, received it with joy; but had no root in themselves, and so in a time of temptation fell away*<sup>7</sup>. But now it is very 7 Mark iv. 16, 17. evident, that such people *receive the grace of God in vain*; and this will appear, if you do but consider what is the end of the gospel. It is plainly intended to restore fallen man to the favour of God, and so to everlasting happiness in heaven. Now it is evident from the whole tenour of scripture, that those who rest in a transient affection, without sincere, constant, practical obedience, will never be accepted by God, and made happy in hea-

SERM. ven. Christ is the *author of eternal salvation*,  
 II. but it is only *to all those who obey him*<sup>8</sup>. Not

<sup>8</sup> Heb. v. 9. *every one who says, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does*

<sup>9</sup> Matt. vii. 22. *the will of the Father*<sup>9</sup>. And to those who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness;

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ii. 8. *God will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*<sup>1</sup>. When the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God, and

<sup>2</sup> 2 Thess. i. 8. *obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ*<sup>2</sup>. Doubtless, such persons as these, who are thus excluded from everlasting life and salvation, and left exposed to such terrible vengeance, have received the gospel in vain; whatever affection they may have pretended to it; or whatever temporal privileges they may have enjoyed by it.

III. I now proceed to what I principally intended: to propose some arguments to dissuade you from *receiving the grace of God in vain*. And here consider, both the excellency and freedom of it. Consider your own need of an interest in it, and the consequences of finally rejecting it. To allude

<sup>3</sup> Phil. ii. 1. to St. Paul's words<sup>3</sup>, were there any hopes of prevailing in my entreaties, I would study

the most submissive, the most tender language, and should think myself happy, if SERM.  
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by falling on my knees, or throwing myself at your feet, one single soul might be gained over to the cause and interest of the Redeemer. I would conjure you by friendship and compassion to me, if there were any among you in whom I had an interest; and would tell you, as I could with the greatest sincerity, that nothing could be a greater joy to me, than to see you wrought upon by this gospel grace. If this might be the day when, and I the unworthy instrument by whom such a change was produced, I should, from my very heart, bless God for it. It would be an encouragement to me to go on in my work, and make amends for the disappointments of many former days; when, I fear, I must complain, *I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought.* Or, I would conjure you by the much dearer and more honourable name of your own pastor, who watches over you with a sorrowing heart; who mourns over you in his secret devotions; and trembles for you, though he has no reason to fear for himself, when he thinks of that day of account against all who

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have continued impenitent under his awakening and edifying labours. I could insist most copiously upon this topic, if I had any hope that you would be wrought upon by the principles of humanity and compassion to others, even to those who most sincerely love you; and would be ready, if Providence should call them to it, even to lay down their lives for your salvation. But, alas! I fear mere entreaties will turn to but little account. I will now apply myself to propose some plain, but important arguments, to dissuade you from that which I have been beseeching you to be upon your guard against. And herein I imitate the holy apostle in the text, who here, as well as elsewhere, enforces his affectionate petitions with the most powerful reasonings.

1. Consider the riches and excellency of this grace. The inspired penmen to whom it was committed seem to be in raptures when they speak of it. It is *an unspeakable gift, an instance of the great love wherewith*

<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. ix. *he has loved us*<sup>4</sup>. *This redemption is given us*  
<sup>15.</sup>  
<sup>5</sup> Eph. i. *according to the riches of his grace*<sup>5</sup>: *it is the*  
<sup>7. 13.</sup>  
<sup>6</sup> Eph. ii. *riches of the glory of his inheritance*<sup>6</sup>; which,  
<sup>7.</sup> by an usual hebraism, is the *glorious riches*,

the *exceeding riches of his grace*; and in the conclusion, he speaks of *the riches of the glory of this mystery*<sup>7</sup>. And that the grace of God, proposed to mankind in the gospel, is indeed so exceedingly valuable, and deserves to be spoken of in such exalted language, may be argued from a great variety of topics. We may readily conclude it from the pomp and solemnity with which God introduced the declaration of it. He first gave some obscure intimations of some very gracious design he had formed for the happiness of his fallen creatures; and then gradually opened brighter discoveries of it; first in typical representations, and afterwards in more express prophecies. At last, when the world had been kept in expectation four thousand years, *when the fulness of time was come*, an angel was sent from heaven to give notice of his conception, and afterwards a whole host of these blessed *beings* appear, to celebrate this illustrious person, which they speak of as *tidings of great joy*, not only to these immediate auditors, but to all men. John the Baptist prepared the way, and alarmed the whole nation. When Christ appeared for his public work, the *angels* fre-

SERM.  
II.<sup>7</sup> Col. i.  
27.

SERM. II. quently *ministered to him*; and God poured out upon him an abundant effusion of his Holy Spirit, as *a spirit of power and of holiness*, whereby he was enabled *to fulfil all righteousness*, and to perform the most amazing miracles; nay, a voice from heaven declared him to be the Son of God, and required the world to hear and to regard him as such. To show the importance of the salvation he was to offer, this illustrious person purchased it at the most expensive rate, submitted to the agony in the garden, and to the agony of the cross, and laid down his life for the recovery of ours. God afterwards bore witness in a still more signal manner, by raising him from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand. And then, upon his intercession, he poured down the Holy Spirit upon the apostles; whereby they were enabled to preach this doctrine in languages they had never learnt, to heal the sick, to illuminate the blind, to strengthen the lame, and to raise the dead. With such pomp and solemnity did God usher in the declaration of the gospel; and, in the course of the propagation of it, he has so ordered it, that many of the most ex-

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cellent characters both for wisdom and piety, have been employing all the ardour of their souls in it; and have, at length, sealed it with their blood. And can we ever imagine that God would have interposed in so amazing a manner, to add weight to a trifle? and that the proposals published to the world with so much pomp and grandeur, should not be worth our most serious attention, and cheerful compliance? From these considerations, the apostle argues it to be a *great salvation*; because it was at *first preached by the Lord Jesus Christ, and afterwards confirmed by them who heard him, God also bearing them witness by signs, and wonders, and divers miracles*<sup>8</sup>. And to raise your ideas of it, look into the word of God, and see in what exalted language the Holy Ghost speaks of this gospel salvation; and what contempt it pours on every thing in life that is great and illustrious, when once it comes in competition with it. For this, says an inspired apostle, *I have already suffered the loss of all things; and for this I count them but dung*<sup>9</sup>. And is this *grace to be received in vain*? In the last place,

<sup>8</sup> Heb. ii  
3, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Phil. iii.  
7, 8.

5. Consider the nature of this salvation, as

SERM. described in scripture; and then judge of  
II. the excellency of it, and of the manner in  
which it is to be received. Consider, I entreat you, that the grace of God, in the gospel, offers you the pardon of ten thousand aggravated offences, which you have committed against the Majesty of heaven; and for which he may most righteously subject you, not only to some present pain and uneasiness, during your abode in this mortal life, but to everlasting misery and damnation. It plucks you as brands out of the burning, and frees you from a dreadful condemnation, to depart, accursed, from the presence of God to the society of the devil and his angels, and a participation with them in their miserable torments. But further, it does not only deliver you from this abyss of misery, into which you were sinking, but it raises you to the hopes of the most solid and substantial felicity.

The blessings, which are held forth in the gospel, are not the mean entertainments of the animal life; blessings, not out of the corn-floor, or out of the wine-press, but those rational angelic pleasures, which arise from the harmony and regularity of our souls,

from an approbation of the rectitude of our actions, and from a sense of the favour of the great God of heaven and earth. By the gospel we are enabled to lift up our heads to heaven with hope, and with joy; and to behold that God as our unchangeable friend, whom our sins had armed with vengeance against us. By the gospel we are brought to delight ourselves in the Almighty, and to spend our lives in his praise, and his love. But why do I speak of the most agreeable manner of spending a mortal life? It is the least of the happiness which the gospel proposes. It has opened the prospect of a future state, and *brought life and immortality to light*. Let us survey the description of heaven, as contained in the word of God; and then say, is it not rich grace that is proposed to us? To be surrounded with all those scenes of beauty, and of glory, which God has prepared for the riches of his magnificence and his love, and for the reception of his most favourite creatures: To have our faculties brightened and enlarged to the capacities of angels; and then, for ever entertained with the contemplation of the most important truths, and the most surprising mysteries:


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the Divine likeness; the perfection of holiness, without the least interruption of a forbidden thought or irregular desire: To live in the most intimate friendship with the brightest and most glorious creatures: Not only to be restored to our pious kindred and friends, but to meet them upon terms of infinite satisfaction: Nay, to be admitted to converse with the most illustrious saints that ever appeared upon earth; and even with the most exalted angels that attend upon the throne of God in heaven: And to know assuredly, that all this delightful company have so hearty an affection for us, that they will esteem our society a part of their happiness; and rejoice in every opportunity of expressing the sincerity of their friendship, by all the good offices they can perform for us: But above all, to dwell before the throne of our exalted Redeemer, and behold the face of our reconciled Father; to feel the blessed God shine upon our souls with the mildest beams of his grace and love; to be breathing out our souls in devotion to him, and employing all our enlarged capacities in tendering him the most worthy and excellent

service: To be graciously accepted by him, and continually rewarded with new accessions of glory, and new capacities of further service: And to be secure of the enjoyment, and the increase of this happiness, throughout the endless ages of eternity. This, this is the happiness proposed to us in the gospel; this is that glorious riches, and glorious grace, which is given us by Christ Jesus our Lord. Judge, Christians, whether it be not *a great salvation*; and judge, whether it be decent to *receive it in vain*.

2. Consider the freedom, as well as the riches of this grace, as a further argument against receiving it in vain. We are told, that we *are justified freely by his grace*<sup>1</sup>. <sup>1 Rom. iii. 24.</sup> And elsewhere we read of gospel blessings, as things which are freely given to us of God<sup>2</sup>. <sup>2 1 Cor. ii. 12.</sup> I have already told you, this is intimated, when the gospel is called *grace*; and with how much propriety, would easily appear from many considerations, which my time will not allow me to enlarge upon. All the favours that God bestows upon his creatures must be freely bestowed; for *he* is so completely happy, by the necessity of his own nature; and *they* are so mean and in-

SERM. II.  considerable, that they can contribute, and he can receive no accession of glory. The degrees of favour that he bestows on the brightest angels are free, much more those that are imparted to such despicable worms as we; *who live in houses of clay, and whose habitations are in the dust.* What can we render to him for all his favours? It is too little to say, that we shall be for ever employed in admiring and adoring him. This will be *our* happiness, but not *his*; any more than it increaseth the brightness and glory of the sun, that we are charmed by its light and influence.

The freedom of God's grace will further appear, if we consider that as we were mean, so we were sinful creatures. We had reason to expect a messenger of vengeance, when he sent his Son as the messenger of grace. And the argument will be further illustrated, if we consider the methods in which salvation is imparted by this Redeemer. It is too little to say, that it is not proposed upon any impossible terms; for that would have been only mocking our misery, and could never be properly called grace. But I will add, that it is proposed, not only in a possible,

but in a most equitable and delightful way. SERM.  
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 God does not require us to endure, some years and ages, the punishment, which we had deserved to endure for ever. He does not insist upon an observation of a variety of burthensome ceremonies, such as those that were imposed by the law of Moses; nor upon any perfect, unsinning obedience to the moral precepts of the gospel. No, *the yoke of the Redeemer is easy, and his burden is light*<sup>3</sup>. If you consult the whole system of <sup>3 Matt. xi. 30.</sup> the gospel, you will find that nothing is required but what is wholly reasonable, and to a pious soul exceedingly delightful; and nothing forbidden, which is not mean and despicable; and therefore, in its immediate or its remote tendency, pernicious both to ourselves and others. And, in consequence of the infirmities of human nature, here is room for repentance, even after relapses into sin; and we have a promise of a renewed pardon thereupon.

3. Consider the need you have of this grace, as an important argument against receiving it in vain. When Christ speaks of his being sent into the world, as the minister of it, he represents the world as in a wretched

SERM. condition. *God so loved the world, that he*

II. *gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have ever-*

<sup>4</sup> John iii. *lasting life* <sup>4</sup>. And do but consider your own  
16. circumstances, and you will see the propriety of that representation. You are not independent creatures, who are necessarily possessed of some inferior degrees of happiness; though then it would be worth your while to listen to any proposals for the improvement of them. But you are poor, indigent creatures, entirely at the disposal of God; and sink into nothing, if you are left destitute of his grace. Nay, I will add, you are not innocent, but guilty creatures, who are justly obnoxious to his displeasure. You can not but know, that you are subjected to his government, and under an obligation to obey his laws. But consider, I entreat you, how you have behaved yourselves to him; review the records of your conscience, and tell me how your accounts stand. You are now upon your good behaviour, and God will shortly call you into his presence, to stand before his awful tribunal, and be judged according to what you have done. And are you prepared to stand such an inquisition?

Will you then maintain, that you have never offended him ? Oh ! thousands of known, and ten thousands of unknown transgressions, which God has recorded against you, will give the lie to so insolent a pretension. Well then, if you have broken the law of God, and by that breach are exposed to his justice ; can you endure the penalty ? Can you bear to lie down in everlasting burnings, and dwell with devouring flames ? If you cannot, then in the name of God, sinners ! what do you offer in arrest of judgment ? What can you offer, but the satisfaction and atonement of a blessed Redeemer, the grace of God given in the gospel ? By your own confession then you need it ; and are really undone without it. And will you yet receive it in vain ? Shall it be in vain, that pardon was offered to condemned malefactors ; and mercy and everlasting salvation to poor guilty creatures, who are just dying out of this world, and entering, naked and helpless, upon another ; where, without this mercy which is now offered, inflexible justice will seize and destroy them ? God forbid. But,

4. Consider the dreadful consequences of your refusal of this gospel grace. You see

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SERM. the time will come when you will need it.

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But if you will go on to neglect it, know, to your confusion, that you will then be excluded from all benefit by it. Nay, it will serve to aggravate your condemnation and misery. If you go on in your refusal, you can hope for no benefit by it. You have no reason to expect it after so long a trial; but lest you should be so vain as to expect it, God has expressly declared to the contrary.

*There is, says the wise man, no device, nor*

<sup>5</sup> Eccles.

ix. 10.

*knowledge, nor working in the grave<sup>5</sup>; but*

<sup>6</sup> Heb. ix.

27.

*after death comes the judgment<sup>6</sup>. And thus, says the apostle in another place, We shall be judged according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good, or whether it be*

<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor. v.

10.

*evil<sup>7</sup>; not according to what we shall do, in some second state of probation. And it evi-*

*dently appears from other scriptures, that our eternal unchangeable condition is to be fixed by and upon that judgment; on which*

<sup>8</sup> Heb. vi.

2.

*account it is called eternal judgment<sup>8</sup>. So apparent is it, that if you continue to receive the grace of God in vain, you will at last have no benefit by it. And do you consider what this is, to be excluded from all benefit by gospel grace? to sink under the*

guilt of your sins? to be delivered over by God into the hands of tormentors, and to lie in that flame where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched, till you have paid the uttermost farthing? I appeal to your consciences, whether this be not dreadful? Well then, how dreadful will be *your* condition, which is still more intolerable than this? This will be the portion of impenitent heathens; but as for you, who have received the grace of the gospel in vain, your misery will be aggravated by it. So says our Redeemer, *He who knoweth his Master's will, and does it not, shall be beaten with many stripes*<sup>9</sup>. And <sup>9</sup> Luke xii. 47. when he sends forth his messengers to proclaim this grace, he directs them, that if they were not received, *they should shake off the dust of their feet against those who rejected them*. And he adds, *that it shall be more tolerable*<sup>1</sup>, not only for the generality of the heathen world; but *for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah*, those monsters of unnatural wickedness who were consumed by fire and brimstone from heaven; yet it shall be more tolerable for them in the day of judgment, than for the despisers of gospel grace. God will resent the injuries which you

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. x.  
11, 15.

SERM. have done him, and so make your plagues  
II. wonderful; nay, you will become your own  
tormentors, and aggravate your misery by  
the raging reflections of your own mind, of  
the opportunities you once enjoyed, of the  
affectionate manner in which you were once  
even entreated to flee from this vengeance  
which has seized upon you, and to accept of  
that everlasting felicity which you will be-  
hold at an unapproachable distance, and of  
the value of which you will be fully con-  
vinced. But what reflections such circum-  
stances must occasion, I have often already  
represented to you, and my time will not per-  
mit me further to enlarge.

IV. I conclude with two or three words of  
application. And here I would advise,

1. That we every one seriously inquire,  
whether we have received the grace of God  
or not? And, considering the infinite impor-  
tance of the question, we should prosecute it  
with serious, diligent examination. If you  
have been utterly unaffected with the gospel  
hitherto, the answer will be sufficiently plain  
and obvious. But we must remember, that  
we are not to rest in any transient impres-

sions that have been made now upon our minds ; but are to judge of the safety of our state, by the resolution of our hearts for God ; and to judge of the sincerity of that resolution, by the prevalency of it in the general course of our lives.

2. If, upon an inquiry, you find you have *received the grace of God in vain*, consider your guilt and danger, as it has now been represented. Urge the arguments that have been pleaded with you ; and knowing on the one hand *the terrors of the Lord*, and on the other the mercy of our God, be prevailed upon no longer to trifle ; but in the strength of that grace, which God is already communicating to you, seek him for further degrees of it, till you are led on to a saving conversion, and so entitled to everlasting happiness.

3. If we have received the grace of God to saving purposes, let us admire the goodness of God, who has so happily distinguished us from many others, and made that grace salvation to us, which to many others proves but *a savour of death unto death*. Let us be humbled, that though we have not been entirely neglecting the grace of God, it has

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been no better improved by us. And let us be excited in the Divine strength to endeavour to correct what has been amiss, and to supply what has hitherto been defective. Let us labour after greater degrees of holiness, and of usefulness than we have ever attained to. Let us prize the grace of God more highly; and let us use our utmost endeavour with others, to awaken them to a sense of their duty and interest, after the example of the blessed apostle in the text. Having found grace ourselves, let us each in our respective stations, whether as ministers or people, be entreating and beseeching others, that *they receive not the grace of God in vain.*

## SERMON III.

OF THE DIFFICULTY WITH WHICH GOOD  
MEN ARE SAVED.

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1 PETER, iv. 18.

*And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly  
and the sinner appear?*

MY friends! it is a very awful thing for a SERM.  
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minister to rise to his public work, and look  
about upon a numerous congregation, and  
think every human creature that I see before  
me is an immortal creature; and each of the  
living, who assists in making up this assem-  
bly, will in a few years be numbered among  
the dead, and be transported into an eternal  
world. And it much increases the awfulness  
of the thought, to consider it is too probable  
that some of them will sink into everlasting  
burnings. History tells us, that when Xerxes  
reviewed his army, which consisted of a mil-  
lion of men, he wept to think that within  
the space of one hundred years every one of

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them would be dead. Is there not much more reason to weep, when we look about upon a congregation of professing Christians, upon a congregation of our acquaintance and friends, and think it is highly probable, that in a small part of that period many of them will be in hell, *tormented in that flame*. And really it is probable; for the generality of mankind, even in a Christian nation, appear utterly unconcerned about their eternal salvation, and others are but almost persuaded. They seem rather faintly to wish that they *may die the death of the righteous*, than steadily to resolve that they will live his life. And when that is the case, what can be expected, since it is only those who put on a holy violence that shall enter into the kingdom of God? And an inspired apostle has told us, that *the righteous scarcely are saved*; and has drawn this inference from it, *where shall the ungodly and sinner appear*? My brethren! God has made ministers watchmen unto the house of Israel; and they are *to lift up their voice like a trumpet*, to give a plain and faithful warning; and if they neglect to do it, when their hearers perish in their iniquity, their blood will be required at

the watchman's hands. And how dreadful will be the answer to the eternal God, when he comes *to making inquisition for blood*, for the blood of immortal souls, and charging it upon us. *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation !* That I may, if possible, deliver my own soul, I am come, this day, plainly and faithfully to warn you of your danger. I am come with a solemn message to every one of you. I am come to tell the righteous themselves that they *will scarcely be saved* ; and to declare to every impenitent sinner, that the vengeance of God will shortly seize them ; and to ask them, in the name of God, where they will appear when they are surrounded by it ? The awful words, which are the foundation of the present discourse, are introduced by Peter, in that part of his epistle where he is exhorting Christians to endure persecution with a holy fortitude and patience. To stir them up to a more careful attention he tells them, that he was not only instructing them in a speculative point, nor talking to them under an apprehension of a possibility that they might suffer ; but that they ought to consider themselves as more immediately and personally


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concerned, for they themselves would be called out to the trial. Something of this they had already borne, and more of it they must certainly expect. For, says he, I plainly tell you, that *the time is now come, when judgment must begin at the house of God*; with us Christians, whom he has taken into his family, and accounts as his servants and his children: and then he makes a reflection upon that assertion, which may, perhaps, be included in a parenthesis. *And if judgment begin at us, what will be the end of those who obey not the gospel? and if the righteous scarcely be saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?* The sense of which, in short, I take to be this: If good men must pass through so much difficulty in the way to heaven, then by the way we may certainly infer, that the case of wicked men is extremely dangerous and calamitous. Perhaps he might intend this hint as an awful warning to their persecuting enemies, if by chance the epistle should fall into their hands. As if he had said, let them consider what they will do when God rises up, and when he comes to call them to an account for their injurious treatment of us. He might further

design hereby to animate and encourage good men under their trials and persecutions, by leading on their thoughts to that happy time, when God would appear for their rescue and deliverance, and declare himself an enemy to those who troubled them. And he might further intend to warn them against any sinful compliances, in order to avoid persecution; lest if they turned aside into crooked paths, the *Lord should lead them forth among the workers of iniquity, whom he will destroy by the breath of his mouth, and consume by the brightness of his coming.* As the admonition might be useful on such a variety of accounts, you see he inculcated it in two clauses, which are nearly parallel. *If judgment, says he, begins at the house of God, what shall be the end of those who obey not the gospel? and if the righteous scarcely are saved, &c.* the latter of these sentences, which is our text, seems to be a citation of those words of Solomon, *If the righteous be recompensed in the earth, much more the ungodly and the sinner*<sup>1</sup> ? <sup>1</sup> Prov. xi. 31.

Which the Seventy translate just in the same words that are used by the apostle in his epistle. The sense is evidently the same; and the apostle thought it best to use the

SERM. III.  Greek version, though not exact, because it was what was generally received, especially among the Jews of the dispersion, to whom he wrote this epistle. The words do evidently consist of two parts.

1. A principle laid down, and taken for granted: *The righteous scarcely are saved.*

2. A very awful consequence drawn from it, that the wicked are in a very dreadful condition; expressed by this pathetical interrogation, *Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* I shall consider each of them at large; and the former will be the foundation of the present discourse. The principles laid down are taken for granted by the apostle that *the righteous scarcely are saved.* In speaking to which, I shall,

I. Show you whom we are to understand by the righteous here spoken of.

II. Explain what the apostle takes for granted with relation to them, that they *are scarcely saved.*

III. Prove the truth of this principle, as thus explained.

IV. Conclude with some practical reflections.

And may God so animate us in our survey

of the difficulties which surround us in the way to heaven that we may be engaged to great watchfulness and resolution in our encounter with them ; and to a more affectionate dependance upon that grace which alone can bear us victoriously through them.

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I. I am to show you whom we are to understand by the righteous here spoken of. An inquiry which will be dispatched in a few words. I observe,

1. That it cannot mean persons who are perfectly innocent, and free from the stains of any moral defilement ; because it speaks of the righteous among the children of men. Now none of them are entirely innocent. So says the apostle of good men themselves : *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us<sup>2</sup>. In many things we offend all<sup>3</sup>. There is no man living upon earth that does good, and sinneth not ; but all are sinners, and come short of the glory of God<sup>4</sup>.* So that when the apostle speaks of good men, for whom Christ died, he calls them *unjust*. *Christ has also once suffered for us, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God<sup>5</sup>.*

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

<sup>3</sup> James iii.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. iii.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Pet. iii.

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2. It is evident that the apostle here speaks of those who will be accepted by God, as righteous persons, through the merits of our blessed Redeemer. The apostle tells us that by him *he justifies the ungodly; and that he was made sin for us, though he himself knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*<sup>6</sup>. Now those who are thus accepted, and treated by God as righteous, are called *righteous* in scripture; because there is a principle of inherent holiness wrought in them, and they are turned from the love and practice of sin; they are said *to hunger and thirst after righteousness*, and to make it the business of their lives to *live soberly, righteously, and godly, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*<sup>7</sup>. Upon this account we frequently find they are called *righteous*, and distinguished from the wicked, though not entirely free from sin. So particularly in that place, where Christ is giving an account of the proceedings of the great day, *The righteous shall go away into life eternal*<sup>8</sup>. These few words may be sufficient to explain whom we are to understand by the *righteous* here spoken of. Let us proceed,

<sup>6</sup> 2 Cor. v.  
21.

<sup>7</sup> Tit. ii. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew  
xxv. 46.

II. To inquire what it is that the apostle here takes for granted with relation to such persons; they are *scarcely saved*. And the only difficulty here will be to understand what is meant by salvation. And here the question is, whether we are to understand it of a temporal or of an eternal salvation? SERM.  
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1. The generality of commentators seem to take it for a temporal salvation. It is certain, the word *salvation* is often used to express temporal deliverance, particularly by our Lord, when he says, *Except the tribulation of those days*, i. e. of the destruction of Jerusalem, *should be shortened, no flesh living could be saved*<sup>9</sup>. And so they suppose it signifies here a deliverance either from the destruction brought upon Judea by the Romans, or from the persecution of the enemies of Christianity. Some understand it, of a deliverance from the desolations which the Romans brought upon Judea, q. d. God will bring judgment upon the temple, his own house, at Jerusalem; and such a dreadful desolation will come upon the Jewish nation, that the Christians themselves shall hardly escape. But I can by no means give into this interpretation. For it is plain that, by the

<sup>9</sup> Matthew  
xxiv. 22.

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house of God, we are to understand, not the temple of Jerusalem, but sincere Christians, as appears by the end of that verse, *If it begin at us*, i. e. the house of God, *what shall be the end of those who obey not the gospel?* Now it had been exceedingly improper to oppose the Jews at Jerusalem to those who did not obey the gospel; since they themselves were the most inveterate enemies it had. Besides, it is not true that the Christians escaped with very great danger and difficulty from the destruction of Jerusalem; for as soon as ever the Roman army invaded Judea, they took the warning that Christ had given them in that celebrated prophecy in the 24th of Matthew, and retired to Pella, a city of Arabia, where they were safe during the whole siege. So that if the apostle had now been writing to the Jewish Christians dwelling in their own land, we should hardly have admitted of this interpretation, much less when he writes to those of the dispersion in *Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*, who lay at some considerable distance from Judea; and consequently were not exposed to any danger at all from the invasion which the Romans made upon that

country. Others, with greater appearance of justice, interpret this salvation, of a deliverance from the fury of all the enemies of Christianity; q. d. You are called to such difficulties that you will have much ado to escape with your lives. And if we must be so persecuted, what will become of the wicked and ungodly? this was fact, and this seems to be comprehended in the words; but it is only a part of the sense that they contain: for the apostle supposes that the righteous were saved, though scarcely, i. e. with difficulty. Now it is certain that many of them were not saved from the sword of their persecuting enemies, but were suffered to fall by it. And therefore,

2. I conclude that by salvation we are here to understand eternal happiness. And that when the apostle says that the righteous scarcely are saved, he means that good men were forced to pass through a great deal of difficulty in the way to heaven. The Lord knows them who are his; and he will take care that they shall get safe to heaven; however it will be through many trials, partly arising from persecution, and partly from other causes. And this is very agreeable to

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the general sense of the text, as it stands in  
the Proverbs: *The righteous is recompensed*  
<sup>1</sup> Prov. xi. *in the earth*<sup>1</sup>, i. e. meets with a great many  
31. trials and afflictions. I proceed now to show  
in the

IIIrd Place, The truth of this assertion, that *the righteous scarcely are saved*, or that good men must pass through difficulties in the way to heaven: by which it will appear that it was not peculiar to those earliest ages of the church, when Christians were exposed to the power of their persecuting enemies; but that it is applicable to all, even to us, who live in its most peaceful times. And this will appear from the testimony of scripture, which warns us to expect opposition; and from a survey of those particular difficulties with which we are surrounded. It appears, in general, from the testimony of scripture, that good people must pass through a great deal of difficulty and opposition in their way to heaven. There is a text which is often quoted to this purpose, and which comes in here with great propriety: *The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*<sup>2</sup>. Where the persons

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xi.  
12.

that seize the kingdom of heaven are re- SERM.  
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presented by persons who storm a city, ~  
an action of vast difficulty and danger, and  
in which it is necessary to exert the most  
heroic courage and resolution. But I own,  
that our Lord Jesus Christ is not there shew-  
ing what was required of all, but what many  
did since the preaching of John the Baptist.  
And it is a description of that eagerness with  
which the Messiah's kingdom was expected  
upon the proclamation which he had made.  
However, there are other sayings, both of  
Christ and his apostles, which do evidently  
prove, that all Christians must meet with  
difficulties in the way to heaven. So in that  
celebrated place, *Broad is the gate, and wide  
is the way that leads to destruction; and many  
go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and  
narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there  
be who find it*<sup>3</sup>. And still more emphatical, <sup>3</sup>Matt. vii.  
*Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many* <sup>14.</sup>  
*shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able*<sup>1</sup>. <sup>4</sup>Luke xiii.  
The original is very expressive; it signifies <sup>24.</sup>  
to strive, as men do when they are wrestling  
in public games; and it seems to intimate  
opposition of various kinds; as if a man were  
to pass through a strait passage, and that

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passage was beset with enemies, whom he must wrestle with, and overcome, before he could get through. Such was the warning that Christ gave; and the apostles repeated it, when they warned the Christian converts, that *through much tribulation we must enter* <sup>5</sup> *into the kingdom of God*<sup>5</sup>. And it is inti-  
<sup>2.</sup> mated in all those passages of their writings, where they represent our passage to heaven, as a race, and a wrestling, and a warfare: as they do in a variety of places which I have not time to refer to particularly.

2. It will further appear, that *the righteous scarcely are saved*, or that good men are to pass through a great deal of opposition in the way to heaven; if we take a view of their present circumstances. It will appear that they are exposed to many difficulties arising from the nature and extent of the Divine commands, from the devil, from the corruption of their own hearts, from the character of the persons they converse with, and from their different states and conditions in human life.

1. Good men are exposed to a great deal of difficulty, arising from the nature and extent of the Divine commands. The law of

God is holy, just, and good; yet, it cannot be observed without great diligence, for the commandment is *exceeding broad*, as David expressly asserts<sup>6</sup>; and a variety of duties<sup>6</sup> are required of us with regard to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. Each of these general branches of duty may be divided into a multitude of particulars, which it is not in all circumstances easy to understand; much less to recollect and practise as occasion may require. Again, the law of God is of a very sublime nature; and requires not only that we should cultivate such and such virtues, but that we should aim at very eminent attainments in life; we are to *love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and might, and strength*. The obligation of it is constant; we are not to regard it only for some hours and days, but it is to be our continual care, and a care that is to run on to the very end of our lives. Nor shall we see that moment in which we are capable of any rational volition, when we are not obliged to govern ourselves by it. The extent and variety of the Divine law, the sublimity of its precepts, and the constancy and perpetuity of its obligation, render the

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<sup>6</sup> Ps. cxix.

96.

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Christian's work very difficult. But this difficulty will appear still greater, if we consider,

2. The remainder of indwelling sin, and of corrupt, unsanctified nature. The laws of God, extensive and numerous, sublime and perpetual as they are, would be easy and delightful to a regular mind; but, alas! in us, i. e. in our flesh, there dwells no good thing. Far from being born with a bias of nature towards them, we are naturally under the influence of a strong aversion from them, and of a propensity towards the violation of them, and this propensity rules in the hearts of the best of men. Even where the tyranny of sin is conquered by Divine grace, still there is an allay of corruption, and the emotions of it are *frequently* very strong and violent. If, for a while it seems sleeping in the soul, an urgent temptation awakens it again; and it acts with new violence. It is like a mighty man awaking out of sleep, who seems to have gained strength by his inward inactivity; and put us to fight as for our lives. You know how affectinglly the combat is described by St. Paul in the

<sup>7</sup> Rom. vii. seventh of the Romans<sup>7</sup>; when he represents

the good man as crying out, *Oh, wretched man that I am, &c.* q. d. I could be content to lay aside that body, as intimately as it is united to me, if together with it I might lay aside those sinful inclinations which have fixed themselves so deeply in it. The difficulty of conquering those remainders of indwelling sin is represented in a very lively manner by our Lord<sup>8</sup>, when he compares<sup>8</sup> *Matt. v. 29, 30.* it not only to wounding our flesh, but to *cutting off a right hand, or tearing out a right eye*: and by the apostle<sup>9</sup>, when he speaks<sup>9</sup> *Gal. v. 24.* of it as *crucifying our own flesh*. And he, who had made such eminent attainments in religion, does plainly tell us, that he found it hard to practise that lesson himself, which he was so frequently inculcating upon others: *I keep under my body, says he, and bring it into subjection, lest, after I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away<sup>1</sup>.* The<sup>1</sup> *2 Cor. ix. 27.* original word signifies *I beat it down*, by heavy and repeated blows, and even make a slave of it; to signify the violent opposition which the flesh made, and the vast difficulty with which he subdued it.

3. Good men are exposed to a great deal of difficulty from the temptations of Satan.

SERM. III. St. Peter tells us, that *our adversary, the devil, goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*<sup>2</sup>. And St. Paul, that *we wrestle not only with flesh and blood, but principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places*<sup>3</sup>. He is certainly a very formidable enemy, having all the relics of angelic power and wisdom, to make him capable of very great and difficult undertakings; and being urged on to attempt our mischief by the most eager malice. Not to mention his long experience of mankind in general, and the observations he has made, upon a more intimate inspection of us than we are commonly aware. All this must render him a very formidable enemy, when we ourselves are prone to give him so many advantages against us; and when it is so easy for him to find occasion of hurting us, from the circumstances of our abode in this mortal life. Which leads me to add,

4. That many difficulties arise to us in our Christian course, from the characters of the persons with whom we converse. It is too evident, that the generality of them are *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise*. Far

from instructing us in the knowledge of God, or engaging us to the practice of our duty by their advice, or by their example, the generality of them would mislead us into sin; and were we to follow the multitude, it would generally be to do evil. Few have any lively sense of piety; and many make a jest of religion, and do their utmost to discourage all who seem to entertain any thoughts of it. Besides this, there are certain seasons when wicked men get such power in their hands, as to persecute those who are faithful to God and their own consciences. This was the case of the Christians in the apostle's time. For the sake of God they were persecuted all the day long, and accounted *as sheep for the slaughter*; they wandered about under a variety of calamities, and were obliged to submit to the spoiling of their goods, and to the torture of their persons; and *not to count their lives dear unto them*. It is true, this is not always the case with good men. Through the Divine goodness, it is not the case with us. Nevertheless, the evil examples and persuasions of wicked men may do a great deal to corrupt our innocence, if we are not resolutely

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upon our guard. Nor must it be concealed, that there are instances in which religion is wounded in the house of its friends. Persons of sincere piety may sometimes prove a snare to us, whilst our esteem for them gives too frequent a sanction even to the irregularities of their temper and behaviour. But the principal damage that we receive, even from good people, is the loss of our time; and the abatement of a lively sense of piety upon our souls. And this we must own to be too common an evil. There are, comparatively, but few of those who are sincerely religious, who are animated with that lively zeal for God, with that concern for the benefit of others, which would lead them to give such a turn to their discourses, as might render them edifying and refreshing. Or, if they have any inclination to it, idleness or bashfulness too frequently hinder the execution of it. So that, generally speaking, the more we converse with our fellow creatures, the less we converse with God; and there is too much reason for the reflection which Seneca makes upon the characters of men in his time: I never, says he, bring so good a temper out of company, as *I carried* into it.

5. Good people are exposed to further difficulties and dangers from the different states and conditions of human life. St. Paul, speaking of the world, calls it *an evil world*; probably in this view, as it frequently ensnares the souls of men, and draws them into danger or ruin. Prosperity and adversity have their different temptations; but both of them are very dangerous. By prosperity our hearts are too frequently alienated from God; we become too fond of a smiling enemy, and give it a double advantage against us. We foolishly argue ourselves into a confidence in future from the pleasures we at present possess: and we think with aversion of leaving a place where we are surrounded with so many entertainments. By adversity our hearts are often broken and dejected; we are tempted to irregular methods of advice, or to entertain some hard and unworthy thoughts of that God who writes so many bitter things against us, and causes us to possess days of sorrow. And when our affairs are in suspense, we are apt to be exceedingly anxious about the event, as if we were excused from the discharge of present duty till we saw how they would be determined. The

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temptations we often meet in conversing with our fellow creatures I mentioned under the former head ; nor are we entirely secure when we are alone. We often then waste our time in impertinent speculations, and find it a very difficult thing to govern our thoughts, though the government of them would be so delightful and so advantageous. Thus you see how the different states and conditions of human life bring their snares and temptations along with them, and join to increase those other difficulties which the Christian finds in his pilgrimage here. Now lay all these particulars together, and then judge whether his work be not hard ; and whether in this sense of the words it may not be fairly said of the righteous themselves, *that they are scarcely saved.*

IV. I conclude with some reflections on this important truth.

1. Let us bless God that the righteous may be saved at all. I own that I have been insisting upon an awful truth ; but be not discouraged by it. It is true that the *righteous shall scarcely be saved* ; nevertheless they *shall not lose their reward.* Though they pass

to heaven through danger and difficulty, they shall arrive safely at their journey's end. SERM.  
III.  
So will you, my friends, to whom I am now speaking, if it be not your own fault. And is not this matter of joy? Do you grieve and murmur that you must be saved with difficulty? Ungrateful creatures! you had deserved certain damnation. The vengeance of God might have appeared armed for your destruction; and he might long ago have sworn in his wrath that *you should never enter into his rest*. He might have left you nothing but *a certain fearful looking for of vengeance and indignation, to consume the adversary*. And will you complain that God is leading you from hell to paradise, unless he strews your path with roses? Oh, consider what this salvation is; and then mourn at the methods in which it is proposed, if your conscience will give you leave! Think what hell is, that you are delivered from; and then judge whether it be not worth your while, at any rate, to be free *from the wrath to come*. Those who feel it would certainly think that it was. The unhappy creatures, who are now *tormented in that flame*, would rejoice to think that they might be saved, though it were

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with great difficulty. Far from being unwilling to submit to all the hardships which God requires of you, they would willingly pass through a furnace seven times hotter than their own, could they hope that it would at length lead them, I will not say, to pleasure, but to ease. But God offers you not only an exemption from misery, but the possession of everlasting glory; and, methinks, *those afflictions*, that lie in the way, *are but light, when compared with that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. So St. Paul thought. *I count*, says he, *that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed*<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. viii.  
18.

And can you imagine that it was a mistaken thought? Can you imagine that any of the inhabitants of that world of glory are lamenting that they were willing to endure so much difficulty in the way, and think the salvation which they enjoy was not worth all that they endured for it? With what indignation would they bear to be suspected of such a thought? Surely if you could go and consult them upon this head, they would all declare that if a sentiment of regret could enter into that region of serenity and joy, it would be this,

that they were so cold in the prosecution of that exalted happiness, and that in so many instances they suffered themselves to be overborne by the hardships and opposition that lay in their way to it. SERM.  
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2. Let what we have now been hearing of the difficulties that lie in our way to heaven be an engagement to us to depend upon the Divine strength. It is of the utmost importance to us to be sensible of our dependance upon God. There is a most beautiful energy in that text, *When I am weak, then am I strong*<sup>5</sup>; q. d. When I see my own weakness, then God communicates to me the aid of his grace; and I shall proceed with cheerfulness and success. Now pray think if what we have been hearing this day may be sufficient to discourage our confidence in ourselves. Alas! if God should leave us to one of these difficulties alone, it would be too hard for us. The extent and sublimity of duty alone would confound us; the corruptions of our own hearts alone would poison us; the temptations of Satan alone would circumvent us; the characters of those about us would pervert us; and the snares of every circumstance of life ruin us. How much less could we

<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor.  
xii. 10.

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oppose all those difficulties when they come to be fatally united against us? My brethren, let us rejoice that there is a better strength than our own offered to us; let us rejoice that we are invited to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and grace to help in every time of need. Every time is a time of need with us, who are surrounded with so many dangers. Let us then make daily application to God through Christ, that his grace may be sufficient for us; that the Lord would stand by us, and strengthen us.

3. Let us, in this strength, renew our resolutions for God, and set ourselves to a most vigorous opposition of all the dangers we may meet with in the way. Remember, my friends, I have fairly warned you that the *righteous are scarcely saved*; that if you ever think to get safe to heaven, it must be a serious business; it must be a prevailing care. Imagine not that it is sufficient that you bestow a few thoughts upon it on the sabbath, or in the moments of stated devotion on your own days. No; your work will not bear such an intermission of care and attention; it is not in religion as in the business of husbandry, in which so many are

engaged. You sow your seed ; and, though you go away and forget it, yet, while you are asleep, or, while you are employed about something else, the corn is growing ; and when you come to it after a considerable interval, you find it very much advanced. But your case is rather like that of soldiers, who keep the guard in a besieged city. If you desert your post, if you lay down your arms, if you indulge to slumber, your enemies are upon you, and take the advantage of your negligence and folly. Remember, therefore, that you are in constant danger ; that every circumstance and every relation, every day and hour of your lives, brings its temptations and duties ever along with it ; and therefore be constantly upon your guard ; *put on the whole armour of God, that you may stand in the evil day*<sup>6</sup>. *Be strong, and quit yourselves like men ; gird up the loins of your minds*<sup>7</sup> ; exert all the force of your souls, and fight as for your lives ; for the *righteous are scarcely saved*. This day let us humble ourselves for former negligences ; and this day let us renew our resolutions for greater watchfulness and vigour during all the remainder of life. The warning and exhortation is

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<sup>6</sup> Eph. vi.  
11.<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xvi.  
13.

SERM. awful and solemn; but be not discouraged:

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say not, the admonition is terrifying, and the exhortation is impracticable, since you have the strength of God to encourage you to the attempt. When the spies had represented to the children of Israel the difficulties which they must meet with in their entrance upon the land of promise, we are told that all the congregation lifted up their voices, and cried; and the people wept that night<sup>s</sup>; their soul was discouraged because of the way, and they spake of throwing up the design, and making a captain to return back into Egypt. But Joshua and Caleb ran in amongst them, and said, *The land that we passed through is an exceeding good land. And they added, The people of the land shall be as bread for us, for the Lord is with us; fear them not.* Thus have I been telling you, that if you would possess yourselves of the heavenly Canaan, high walls are to be scaled, and potent powers are to be resisted, sons of Anak, to whom we seem but as grasshoppers. Nevertheless, quit not the glorious enterprise, *for the land is an exceeding good land, and the Lord our God is with us;* and methinks there is comfort in this thought sufficient to coun-

<sup>s</sup> Numb.  
xiv. 1, &c.

terbalance all our fears. Observe in what SERM. III. emphatical terms God speaks to Zerubbabel of the Israelites' victory over all that potent opposition which lay in his way, when he was undertaking the restoration of the Jewish commonwealth, *not by might, or by power, but by the word of the Lord*; he immediately adds, *And now, oh thou great mountain, before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain*<sup>9</sup>. So, if Zeck. iv. 6, 7. the word of the Lord be with us, all those mountains that rise in our way to obstruct our passage shall become plain before us; and our progress through them shall not only be possible, but easy and delightful. Wherefore, my dearly beloved brethren, to conclude all in the words of the apostle, *be ye steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*<sup>1</sup>. Amen. ' 1 Cor. xv. 58.


## SERMON IV.

THE DANGER AND MISERY OF THE WICKED,  
INFERRED FROM THE DIFFICULTY WITH  
WHICH THE RIGHTEOUS ARE SAVED.

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1 PETER, iv. 18.

*And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly  
and the sinner appear?*

SERM. IV.  AMONG all the awful passages of the Old Testament history, there are few which are more awakening and affecting than that of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the deliverance of righteous Lot. That good man, whilst he lived among them, had vexed his righteous soul with their scandalous behaviour; and a righteous God would not involve him in that vengeance which he brought upon his incorrigible neighbours. Therefore he gave a peculiar charge to the angels, whom he sent to destroy Sodom, that they should be sure to bring him out in safety, before they proceeded to do any

thing against the city. The good man believed the denunciation of that Divine vengeance, which he had so long seen reason to expect; and no doubt he was very thankful for that gracious warning with which he was favoured. But yet we do not find that he made so much haste out of this cursed place, as it might reasonably have been expected that he should. Such was his affection to some relatives there; or such his concern for those worldly possessions which he was to leave behind him, that he lingered in Sodom till, as the sacred historian tells us, *the angel laid hold on him; and the Lord, being merciful to him, brought him out of the city*<sup>1</sup>. He was charged to escape for his life, and to fly to the mountain, without indulging in so short a delay as might be occasioned by looking back upon the habitation he had left. And the good man himself was impressed with such a powerful sense of his danger, that he cried out to his deliverer, that if he attempted to fly to the mountain, *evil would overtake him, and he should die*, and therefore he begged that Zoar might be spared from the general destruction, that he might be allowed to take refuge there. Such

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<sup>1</sup> Gen.  
xix. 16.

SERM. is the broken language of his fear: *Behold*  
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*now this city is near to flee to, and it is a little one. Oh, let me escape thither: Is it not a*

<sup>2</sup> Gen. *little one? And my soul shall live*<sup>2</sup>. His re-  
 xix. 20.

quest was granted, he fled thither with a trembling eagerness, and he gained the retreat with safety. But one of his little company, and perhaps the dearest, perished by the way. His wife was so curious as to look

back; and the consequence was, she became  
<sup>3</sup> Gen. a pillar of salt<sup>3</sup>: she was struck dead in the  
 xix. 26. place, and left in an erect posture, where perhaps some part of the shower of sulphur overtook her and encrusted her; or she was, as it were, salted with fire, and set up to the terror of future ages, a dreadful monument of the Divine indignation. With such difficulty did Lot escape, drawn out of the city by a merciful violence, flying over the plain, trembling and panting; and perhaps imagining in every moment of his flight, that the fire of the Lord was flaming against him, and that there was but a hand's breadth betwixt him and destruction: a terror that would be increased by the prohibition of looking back, which might have satisfied him that this part of his fear was groundless.

And when he came to Zoar, with the re- SERM.  
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 mains of his broken and solitary family, he did not think himself there safe ; but, as the historian expressly informs us, *he went out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain ; because he feared to dwell in Zoar*<sup>4</sup>. But how much <sup>4</sup> Gen.  
xix. 30.  
 more dreadful was the condition of those abominable wretches whom he left behind him ? The light of the rising sun was obscured by an impenetrable cloud, that brought upon them everlasting darkness. It quickly discharged its fatal birth, and burst upon their heads in a torrent of fire. Who can describe the consternation and amazement of those unhappy criminals, when they saw the tempest gather round them ; when they heard the report of unusual thunders ; when they saw the glare of the most dreadful lightening, and perhaps felt the earth trembling under their feet, while it was preparing to discharge a magazine of combustible materials from its bowels ? How dreadful to see ! how much more horrible to feel ! In what wild disorder did they fly, when God began to scatter his artillery upon them ; and when they felt the first drops of the scalding shower,

SERM. how eagerly did they seek the nearest retreat:

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and how soon did they perceive, that every retreat was vain, when they saw the hail sweeping away the *refuge of lies*, and the torrent of fire sweeping away their *hiding places*<sup>5</sup>. Some of them might perhaps cry out to the idols of Sodom; but, alas! they were impotent to save, for their temples were flaming in this general conflagration. Others might, in the transport of their fears, call upon the God of Lot; but if they did, there was none to save them. If they called upon the Lord, he answered them not; and then perhaps, in a few moments more, they were cursing his inexorable severity; and like the wretches, who are mentioned in the Revelations<sup>6</sup>, being tormented with great heat, they blasphemed the name of God, who had power over those plagues. How did they twine and writhe themselves, when they felt the scalding sulphur eating into their very bowels! How did they pierce the air with their shrieks and their howlings, when the aged and the young, the honourable and the obscure, the rich and the poor, the male and the female, were *tormented in that flame!*

<sup>5</sup> Isa.  
xxviii. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. xvi.  
9.

till at length they breathed out their polluted souls, and went down to that lake that burns for ever with fire and brimstone; where they felt, and are still feeling, that the first strokes of Divine vengeance, painful as they were, were the least severe. My brethren, methinks in this history before us, we have a most lively representation of that difficulty with which the righteous escape; and of the terror and confusion which the wicked are in, when they feel themselves in the hands of an incensed God, and he is pouring out upon them all the furnace of his wrath. It is an awful comment upon the words of the text. St. Peter tells us, that when *God turned into ashes the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and condemned them with so terrible an overthrow*, he made them *an example to those who should hereafter live ungodly*<sup>7</sup>. <sup>2 Pet. ii. 6.</sup> And St. Jude, that *they are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*<sup>8</sup>. And a fearful example it is; such a one as might make our ears tingle, while we are taking a survey of it; and may melt our hearts into the tenderest compassion for those unhappy creatures, who stand exposed to a like

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Pet. ii.  
6.

<sup>8</sup> Jude,  
ver. 7.

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condemnation. Did I say, to a like condemnation; nay, to a sentence that is still more severe. For thus has our blessed Redeemer said of those who perish under the gospel. *And thou Capernaum, that art exalted to heaven, shalt be cast down to hell. For if the mighty works, that have been done in thee had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah, they would have remained until this day. Therefore, verily, verily I say unto thee, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for thee*<sup>9</sup>. And so he says elsewhere of all those who reject the offers of his grace, as well as of those who enjoyed his personal ministration. For the sake of such unhappy creatures as these, it is that I now prosecute the subject which I entered upon the last Lord's Day. And as I have considered the principles upon which the apostle argues, that *the righteous scarcely are saved*; or, that good men meet with a great deal of difficulty in their way to heaven; I now proceed to consider the conclusion that he draws from it, that wicked men are in a very dangerous and calamitous condition indeed; which he expresses in those

<sup>9</sup> Matt. xi.  
23, 24.

remarkable words, *Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* In speaking to them SERM.  
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I will,


I. Show you, in a few words, whom we are to understand by the ungodly and sinner.

II. Explain the meaning of that pathetic interrogation, *Where shall they appear?* as expressive of their great danger and misery.

III. Show you how this conclusion follows from the principle it is built upon; the difficulty with which the righteous are saved. And then,

IV. Conclude with some practical improvement.

May God affect my mind with a most affectionate sense of the truth and importance of what I am to say, that I may endeavour to *persuade men, as knowing the terrors of the Lord!* And may his Spirit impress the hearts of sinners in so powerful a manner, as to add efficacy to this awful truth; that these unhappy creatures may be like brands plucked out of the burning, and may be encouraged rather to encounter all the difficulties which they may meet with in the way to salvation, than to run upon that

SERM. extreme danger and misery to which every  
 IV.  impenitent sinner will be exposed.

I. I am to show you whom we are to understand by the *ungodly* and the *sinner*. It is plain there is a sense, in which all may be said to be *ungodly* and *sinner*s ; as we have all been once *foolish and disobedient, have all sinned and come short of the glory of God*. But persons, who are here called *ungodly* and *sinner*s, stand opposed to the *righteous* in the beginning of the verse ; that is, to good men, who are righteous in the evangelical sense of the word ; being justified by the righteousness of Christ, and having a principle of holiness wrought in their hearts by the influence of the blessed Spirit. From this distinction it is plain, that the phrase *ungodly* and *sinner* must comprehend all that were not comprehended in the number of the righteous. It is true, that persons whose lives have been scandalously wicked are called *sinner*s by a peculiar emphasis. This man was a *sinner*, says the pharisee, meaning a person of a very lewd life. And, perhaps, the word may here peculiarly refer to

such; and particularly to the persecutors of the Christian faith: q. d. If God suffer his own children and people to be exercised with so much tribulation and affliction, let not our proud enemies triumph: for the time will come when God will *make inquisition for blood*, and bring them to a punishment answerable to their crimes. And it is plain, that the degree of any person's danger and misery is proportionable to that of his wickedness<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, the character is not entirely to be confined to persecutors, or other most notorious and scandalous offenders; but must comprehend all those who are strangers to a saving conversion, and to a Divine life. So in scripture, those who are not righteous are frequently called wicked<sup>2</sup>. And the general threatenings of the book of God are levelled against all such. And I mention this, not as having any considerable difficulty in itself, but only that every unconverted sinner may see himself concerned in those awful things which are now to be spoken, and may not shift off the conviction, because he is free from any scandalous crime. I now proceed,

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. ii.  
6.<sup>2</sup> 1 Thess.  
i. 8.

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II. To explain the meaning of that pathetic interrogation in the text, *Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* Now, in this question the apostle seems either to imply, or express these three particulars: That a Divine vengeance will search after sinful creatures; that they shall not be able to conceal themselves from its discoveries; and that when it shall actually seize them, it shall be insupportable to them.

1. This inquiry of the apostle supposes that the Divine vengeance will search after sinful creatures. Wicked men now commit crimes, and God does not seem to take any notice of them; the thunder does not strike them; the earth does not open to swallow them; the sky does not pour forth a tempest of fire upon their habitations; but their affairs go on with serenity and prosperity. *These things they do, and he keeps silence; and therefore they are ready to conclude that he is altogether such a one as themselves.* But the apostle here does in effect assure them, on the contrary, that the time will come when *judgment shall return to righteousness*<sup>3</sup>, and God will make an inquiry after his offending creatures;

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xciv.  
14.

that he may bring them to justice for their crimes. This is the plain foundation of this question, *Where shall they appear?* It implies that such danger will surround them, that some evil will be intended against them. SERM.  
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2. It further supposes that wicked men will not be able to elude that search which God makes for them, nor to conceal themselves from the Divine discoveries. *Where shall the wicked appear?* or, as the original might be rendered, *Where shall he show his face?* It seems to represent him in the greatest consternation, seeking out the obscurest retreat. As if it had been said, Let him fly where he will, yet still as soon as he shows his head in a new place, the eye of God will discover him, will discern him as plainly as in the place he has left; so that he may say as David, *Whither shall I go from thy presence*<sup>4</sup>?

<sup>4</sup> Psalm  
cxxxix. 7.

3. The interrogation may further imply, that when sinners are seized by the Divine vengeance, they shall not be able either to resist or endure it; but shall be utterly confounded and destroyed by it.

*Where will they appear?* There seems to be something peculiarly emphatical in these

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words. As if he had said, Poor wretches! methinks I am concerned for them, though they are enemies to God, and enemies to his church, and though they are seeking to take away our lives; yet when I think what their end will be, I feel the sentiments of human compassion stir in my heart (where will they appear? I know they will be searched after, I know they will be seized by the Divine vengeance), and look about to see whether I can discover any comfort for them; but, alas! I give them up as utterly disconsolate and helpless. *Where will they appear?* or, in the words of Job, *what will they do when God rises up; and when he judges, how will they answer*<sup>5</sup>? All this the words certainly imply, that they will be searched after, and found by an angry God; that when he proceeds against them, they will not be able to withstand his displeasure. And so you see it takes in the whole process of Divine vengeance against them, both in this world and in another; though it particularly points at that awful time which is spoken of in scripture as a *day of wrath, and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. I do not enlarge in the illustration of these particulars,

<sup>5</sup> Job xxxi.

14.

because some of them will come under the improvement. Nor do I dwell upon the proof of each, because it is so plain from the whole course of scripture ; every threatening in the word of God is a proof of this, when taken in comparison with the perfections of the Divine nature. God has said, he will punish sinners ; therefore his truth will engage him to search them out, that he may bring them to justice ; his omniscience will discover them wherever they are ; and his almighty power is such that, when it comes to be employed for their destruction, it is certain that nothing can either resist or endure it. The most insolent man upon earth, the most stubborn devil in hell, must bow and sink under his weighty vengeance. Thus much for the sense of the question, *Where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?*

III. I come now to examine the force of the conclusion from the former part of the verse, or how it appears that, because the righteous are saved with difficulty, therefore wicked men are in a very dangerous condition indeed. There are some other scriptures which seem to look this way. Such is that

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proverbial expression, *If these things are done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry*<sup>6</sup>? Behold, I bring evil upon the city that is called by my name; and shall ye be utterly unpunished<sup>7</sup>? Behold those whose judgment was not to have drunk of the cup have assuredly drunk of it; i. e. who were most ready to promise themselves an exemption, and shall ye go unpunished<sup>8</sup>? I do not mention these scriptures as entirely parallel to this in the text; but it is very obvious that there is a considerable resemblance. The principles on which this argument is built are obvious from the light of nature, but much illustrated by Divine revelation.

<sup>6</sup> Luke  
xxiii. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Jer. xxv.  
29.

<sup>8</sup> Jer. xlix.  
12.

1. We may argue the justice of the conclusion from our natural apprehensions of the Divine Being. Reason will convince us that God is a Being of entire rectitude and perfection of nature; and consequently holiness is amiable, as sin is hateful, in his eyes. He loves himself with a supreme affection, and he must approve and love others in the degree wherein they resemble him, and disapprove and abhor them in proportion to the degree in which they are unlike to him. Now good men are in some considerable degree

transformed into the image of his holiness ; SERM. IV.  
 while wicked men bear the resemblance of  
 the devil, his great enemy, whose character  
 is the very reverse of his own ; by conse-  
 quence he must love good men, and hate the  
 wicked : according to that natural argument  
 of the Psalmist, *The righteous Lord loveth  
 righteousness, and his countenance beholdeth  
 the upright ; but upon the wicked he will rain  
 snares*<sup>9</sup>. Now if he will cause those whom  
 the light of nature tells us he loves to pass  
 through so many trials, the wicked must ex-  
 pect something a great deal worse. <sup>9</sup> Psalm xi.  
5, 7.

2. This argument is much illustrated and  
 confirmed by the revelation of his word, be-  
 cause there he has declared his love to the  
 righteous, and his hatred of the wicked, in  
 the most emphatical terms. It is not only  
 there said, as in the forementioned place,  
 that *the Lord loves the righteous*, but that *he  
 takes pleasure in his saints*<sup>1</sup>. He speaks of  
 them as *his jewels, and his children*. *They*  
*shall be mine, says the Lord, in the day that I*  
*make up my jewels ; and I will spare them as*  
*a man spares his son who serves him*<sup>2</sup>. *I will*  
*be a father to you, and ye shall be my sons and*  
*my daughters, says the Lord of hosts*<sup>3</sup>. And,  
<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxlvii. 11 ;  
cxlix. 4.  
<sup>2</sup> Mal. iii. 7.  
<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 18.

SERM. which is still more tender and endearing, *the*  
 IV. *Lord will rejoice over his people; he will joy*

*over them with singing, as a bridegroom re-*  
<sup>4</sup>Isa. lxii. 5. *joices over his bride*<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand,

God tells us in scripture, *that he is angry*  
*with the wicked every day, and that his soul*

<sup>5</sup>Ps. vii. 11. *hates them*<sup>5</sup>. To express his utter detestation  
 xi. 5.

of sin, he represents it as a heavy burden ;  
 and describes himself as pressed by it, *as a*

<sup>6</sup>Amos ii. *cart is pressed that is full of sheaves*<sup>6</sup>, over-  
 13.

loaded, and ready to be broken in pieces.  
 Now consider God as declaring his love to  
 the righteous, and his hatred to the wicked  
 in such terms as these ; and then judge  
 whether he will suffer the wicked to escape  
 unpunished, when he exercises his own  
 people with so many afflictions, and com-  
 mands them to go through so thorny a path.

IV. I proceed to the practical improvement  
 of this important and awful truth.

1. Let us be engaged seriously to examine  
 ourselves whether we be in the number of  
 the wicked and ungodly, or not. The ex-  
 amination will not be equally difficult to all.  
 There are some who, upon a very transient  
 survey, must acknowledge that they are so ;

that they are sinners in the most notorious sense of the word ; being conscious to themselves of scandalous crimes, which are utterly inconsistent with the appearance of religion. But let not all others conclude themselves in a safe state ; for, believe me, sirs, you are as certainly in the number of the ungodly, if you live as without God in the world, if you have never seen your need of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor been brought to repose your souls upon him ; if you are not willing to bring forth every dearest corruption, and offer it up as a sacrifice to God ; if you are not willing to renounce your worldly interests, and deny yourselves, and follow Christ, at any rate. The greatest difficulty in this examination will lie upon those that have been under some serious convictions, and have been brought to some good resolutions, but have contradicted these resolutions in a great many instances. To such I will fairly say, that you must not expect to determine the matter at one survey ; you will often repeat the inquiry. And in the mean time give diligence to mortify corruption, and improve in grace more and more ; and then you will find the evidence of grace rising in proportion

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SERM. to the degree in which *that* prevails. I will  
IV. further add, for your assistance here, that  
upon the whole it is most safe to judge too severely than too favourably. If you conclude that hitherto you have been wicked and ungodly; if you now act faithfully on our blessed Redeemer's holy gospel, and give up your souls to God in his covenant, you will be safe; nor will the renewal of these acts hurt you, though you may already have done it in the sincerity of your souls. But on the other hand, it may be of the most fatal consequence to imagine that you are in a state of grace, when you are not; and such an unhappy conclusion may end in your everlasting destruction.

2. What foundation of terror is here to all unconverted sinners. Give me leave now seriously to address myself to those of you who are of this number; to those of you who are convicted by your own consciences. How will you appear before God when he comes to execute his judgments upon you? Suppose it were in this world, how would you appear? But, above all, how will you appear at that great and terrible day of the Lord? It is so awful a scene that is now before us, that you

must pardon me if I dwell a while upon it. SERM.  
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 Let me earnestly entreat you, therefore, that you would look forward to it; represent to your imagination that awful solemnity; imagine that you heard the sound of the trumpet exceeding loud, shaking the very centre of the earth; tearing open the tombs, and awaking the dead: imagine yourselves rising out of your graves, and lifting up your eyes to heaven in amazement; that you beheld the Lord Jesus Christ descending in a cloud, with legions of attending angels, and placed on a throne of awful judgment. *What will you do in this dreadful day?* Permit me to ask you, will you refuse to appear before his tribunal? will you vindicate your actions there? have you any thing to offer in arrest of judgment? or can you endure the execution of the sentence?

1. Will you refuse to obey the summons, and to appear before this awful tribunal? When he says, Come forth and appear at my bar, that thou mayst take thy trial for an eternal world; is it for thee to say, I will not come? Wouldest thou dispute it with him, who could send a legion of devils to drag thee before him in feeble consternation? Thou

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canst not hope forcibly to resist his will, nor would it be more rational to think of escaping his regards. In vain wouldest thou seek for the most obscure retreat. He might address thee in the words of Amos, *He that fleeth shall not flee away; and he that escapes shall not be delivered. Though thou diggest into hell, thence shall mine hand take thee; though thou climbest up to the heavens, thence will I bring thee down; though thou hide thyself in the top of Carmel, I will stand, and take thee from thence; though thou be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command*

<sup>7</sup> Amos ix.  
1—3.

*the serpent, and that shall bite thee*<sup>7</sup>. So evidently dost thou see that his eye will discover thee, his hand will reach thee, wherever thou mayest attempt to conceal thyself from him. It is evident then that thou must obey the citation, and appear before his awful tribunal. Let me,

2. Ask, Will you vindicate your own actions there? Will you maintain the innocence of your behaviour? Alas! sinners, in vain would you attempt to defend it before your fellow-creatures. There is not one of those who have intimately known and conversed with you, but could witness against you some

crime, which, though it might not fall under the cognizance of human laws, would justly expose you to Divine condemnation. How then will you stand before God, when the book shall be opened<sup>8</sup>, the book of his omniscience and of your own conscience; when *he shall reprove thee, and set thy sins in order before thee*<sup>9</sup>? Guilt will silence and confound thee; and as to any plea of innocence, thou must stand speechless.


3. What will you offer in arrest of judgment? Will you plead that you are his creatures? He will justly reply, that you have rendered yourselves unworthy of his favour; and brought yourselves into such circumstances that it is just that he that made you should not have mercy upon you; and he that formed you should show you no favour<sup>1</sup>; 'Isa. xxvii. 11.

You will plead the mercy of the gospel covenant? You will plead that in vain. The gospel did indeed bring the message of salvation; but it promised life only to the penitent and believer: and as you will be proved to be

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<sup>8</sup> Rev. xx.  
12.<sup>9</sup> Ps. l. 21.

SERM. IV.  impenitent and an unbeliever, all those offers of grace will aggravate your condemnation, and sink you under a dreadful punishment, proportionable to the riches of that grace which you have despised. You will then so plainly see the vanity of all these pleas, that you will not have the confidence so much as to offer them, while that sentence you must be arraigned by convicts, silences, and condemns you.

4. Can you bear the execution of your sentence? In order to determine this, I entreat you to consider what that sentence is. You are no strangers to it; you have heard it again and again; but you hear and read it with indifference. *Then shall the King say to them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*<sup>2</sup>. You read it coldly and negligently; and so pass on to the remainder of the chapter. But, alas! my friends, it will be quite another thing when this prophecy comes to be accomplished. And when you shall hear the King saying this, when you shall see that royal majesty in which he appears, and hear him pronouncing those dreadful words, you will then know what it

<sup>2</sup> Matthew  
xxv. 41.

is to depart from him ; from him, whose presence is the joy and the glory, the light and the transport of the celestial regions. You will know what it is to be fixed upon as the object of his curse ; the flames of hell will appear infinitely dreadful, when you see them flashing around you, and the pit opening its mouth to devour you ; and an abode with devils will appear horrible indeed, when you see them with your eyes, and experimentally know their malice and cruelty ; the subtilty with which they invent torments, and the rage with which they inflict them. In these circumstances it will pierce to the bottom of your souls to hear the King saying unto you, *Depart from me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* Accordingly St. John represents the sentence of this day as so dreadful that it shakes the souls of the most obstinate sinners, and throws them not only into amazement, but destruction. *The rich men of the earth, and the great men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bond-man, and every freed-man, hid themselves in the dens, and the rocks, and the mountains, and said unto the rocks and unto the mountains, Fall on us, and*

SERM. *cover us from the face of Him who sitteth on*  
 IV. *the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;*  
*for the great day of his wrath is come, and who*

<sup>3</sup> Rev. vi. *shall be able to stand*<sup>3</sup>? How emphatical is  
 15—17. this description! it represents the unhappy  
 criminals so exceedingly terrified with the  
 fear of so dreadful a calamity, that they  
 would prefer the crushing of a mountain  
 before it; and as in such utter despair of  
 obtaining any mercy from their Judge, that  
 they think it more possible to move inani-  
 mate nature, and to persuade the mountains  
 and rocks to pity them. *Consider this, ye*  
*that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and*  
*there be none to deliver you. For if the righ-*  
*teous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly*  
*and the sinner appear?*

3. What reason have you to compassionate  
 the case of poor unconverted sinners. I have  
 been endeavouring faithfully to represent it;  
 and I doubt not but many sincere Christians  
 in this assembly have heard it with attention  
 and with horror, though, perhaps, some of  
 those that were most concerned in it have  
 not been at all affected by it. Well, my  
 Christian friends, let me assure you that  
 these things are not unworthy your consi-

deration; review the thought; look about SERM.  
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upon poor unconverted sinners; on those whom you have reason to fear to be such; and think, Must they appear before God? must they be arraigned, convicted, and condemned by him? must they appear in all this consternation and amazement? Unhappy creatures, what can be done for them? Oh that I could but be instrumental in opening their eyes, and delivering them from so dreadful a destruction! But, perhaps, you will say, I know not how it is. Well, but endeavour to keep these sentiments alive in your hearts; and love and pity will find out means that, without such tender impressions, would not have entered into our thoughts, or would have been refused as impracticable. At least, go into the presence of God, and affectionately represent their case before him; and earnestly beg that he would direct you what you should do for their recovery, and that he would give you prudence and courage to attempt it. And I must add, that the more we know of the terror of appearing before God, and the more we ourselves are affected with it, the greater is our guilt in neglecting to do our utmost for the rescue and

SERM. assistance of those who are in such extreme  
 IV. danger.

4. What reason have we to be thankful, if there be any room to hope that God has delivered us from so dreadful a condition? My friends, we must all appear before God, and have our part in the solemnity of that awful day which we have now been surveying. We might all have been thinking of this day with terror; for we have all contracted so much guilt, as might arm our conscience with stings, and arm the hand of God with vengeance against us. We are not casting about our despairing eyes, and crying out in the agony of our souls, Where shall we appear? We are thinking of this day with patience and comfort; nay, more, we may think of it with hope. Christians are described, in the word of God, as persons *who love the appearance of Christ*<sup>4</sup>; *who look for it, who hasten to it*<sup>5</sup>. And certainly there is a great deal of reason that they should love it; for he will appear without sin, to their complete salvation. He will come openly to confess them as his brethren and his friends; to fix a crown of glory upon their heads, and say unto them, *Come, ye*

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 8.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 12.

*blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Matt.

xxv. 34.

Let us adore the Divine grace that has brought to light such glorious prospects, and has interested us in the joy and consolation of them. And to conclude, in the words of the apostle, *my dearly beloved brethren, seeing we have such promises, let us make it our governing care to purify ourselves from all pollution, both of the flesh and of the spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God*<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor.  
vii. 1.


Amen.

## SERMON V.

OF CHRISTIAN WATCHFULNESS.

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 MARK, xiii. 37.
*And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch !*

SERM. <sup>V.</sup>  THERE is something in the very sound of these words, which must command the most serious regard of all who have any sense of the dignity or the love of that sacred Person by whom they were spoken. Our Lord, in the former part of this chapter, had been giving a very remarkable and circumstantial prediction of his coming for the destruction of Jerusalem ; and as many particulars in that description were suited to his most solemn appearance for the final judgment of the world, he takes occasion seriously to charge it upon his disciples to make it their constant business to maintain such a temper, as that they might be always ready for it. And lest any should imagine this admoni-

tion did only regard the apostles, to whom he had allotted stations of the most honourable and important service in his church, he here tells them that the cautions which he had just been giving were matter of universal concern. *These things*, says he, *which I say unto you*, concerning the uncertainty of the time of your Lord's appearing, and the necessity of a constant preparation, *I say unto all, Watch*. I say it to all your Christian brethren, as well as to you; to all that shall hereafter appear under the profession of my religion, as well as to all who have already embraced it. So that you behold Christ our Lord addressing himself to *us*, and as it were bespeaking our most attentive regard. Let us not neglect the admonition, which he has so signally marked out as our particular concern. It is certain that, memorable as it is, the greater part of mankind neglect it; even the greater part of those who call themselves Christians. Immersed in the cares and pleasures of this mortal state, they are as regardless of the coming of Christ, as if there was not the least room to expect it; or they had not even the least concern in it. And the gene-

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rality of those whom we have reason to believe sincere in the Christian profession, yet are not under the constant influence of this important expectation; they are not always in a posture of watchfulness; but the wise, as well as the foolish virgins, do often slumber and sleep; and they exert little zeal and little constancy in the service of their great Master. A sad charge! in which we must all allow ourselves to be deeply involved, if we make any reflection on our own temper and conduct. I know not, therefore, what subject I could have pitched upon more useful and necessary to myself and to you. In the discussion of it I will,

I. Endeavour to open the nature of that duty, which our Lord recommends to all his followers, Watch.

II. Will propose some arguments, to engage you to a diligent and careful discharge of it. And,

III. Will offer some plain advices, which may be assistant to you in this attempt.

And may God so awaken and animate our hearts, that these things may be spoken and heard with a seriousness answerable to their importance; that from this day we may

make some remarkable improvement in that holy watchfulness, in which, necessary as it is, we have been so shamefully deficient!

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I. I am to endeavour to explain that duty, which our blessed Redeemer does so earnestly recommend to all his followers: *What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.* You will easily apprehend, in the general, that watching is opposed to sleeping; and you evidently see it by looking back to the preceding words: *Take heed, lest your Lord coming, find you sleeping; and those things which I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch:* which is the repetition of the former charge, that they should not be found sleeping. It plainly signifies a wakeful lively temper, and the exertion of vigorous endeavours to shake off drowsiness and indolence; which might otherwise be ready to oppress the mind. It further appears by the context, that the watching here spoken of is referred to the coming of Christ, that is, his coming to judgment and to death, which will fix us for the eternal world, and consign us to judgment without any alteration in our state, whether of believers or impenitent sinners. And the

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preceding discourse, when compared with the passages in the other evangelists which are parallel to it, directs us to consider this watchfulness or vivacity of temper, recommended as a proper preparative for the coming of our Lord, under two distinct views; as regarding the dangers we are surrounded with, and respecting the business committed to our care; and so it will appear to consist in caution and in diligence. Christ represents his disciples under the notion of servants, who are left in the house when their Lord is abroad on a journey, having fixed no certain time for his return. Now in this interval it is their business to keep themselves in a posture of defence, that the house may not be broken in upon by thieves; and to follow their other business, which their Lord has assigned them to be dispatched in his absence. So you expressly read, *The Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, giving authority to some of his head servants, and appointing to every man his work, and commanding the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore, lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch.* You see, that though in the

parable he represents watching as the peculiar province of the porter, who was to wait at the door, and guard the house, and working as appointed to other servants; yet he afterwards comprehends both under the general title of *watching*. And it is undeniable, that this ought to be the concern of every Christian. I will therefore suggest a few thoughts with regard to each of these particulars.

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1. The watchfulness, which is here mentioned, must certainly include a caution with regard to the dangers that surround us. So in another part of a discourse, we find that guarding against the invasion of enemies is directly mentioned as explaining the general exhortation to watching. *If the good man of the house had known at what hour the thief would have come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken up*<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Matt.  
xxiv. 43.

Now if we take it in this sense, our watchfulness supposes a general apprehension of danger. And it further supposes, that we are so far impressed with this apprehension, as to enter into a particular review of our circumstances; that we may observe from what quarter the principal dangers arise, and

SERM. V. to what attacks we are peculiarly exposed, according to the various conditions of life in which Providence has placed us. And it further includes a most solicitous care to avoid those dangers, when it is possible to do it; and a vigorous resolution to oppose them, in those instances where they cannot be declined. And this last is of the utmost importance; for reflecting on our general and particular dangers is but trifling without it. As if a man was appointed to stand sentinel in a castle; it would signify but very little for him to know that the place was besieged by a numerous army, and that it was particularly liable to a very dangerous attack in such a part or avenue, if he took no care to provide accordingly; but spent the night in luxury, or in sleep. All the world would agree that, in such a case, his knowledge of danger would be a very high aggravation, rather than an excuse of his negligence.

2. Watchfulness does further include diligence and activity in the despatch of our proper business. I before observed, that our Lord here represents the Master, who was on a journey, as having assigned to his servants

<sup>2</sup> Luke iii. 35. their proper work<sup>2</sup>; and then follows an ex-

hortation to *watching*, that is, to be diligent in the performance of it. *Watching*, in this sense of the charge, supposes that we consider ourselves in the general as the servants of God, and acknowledge his authority as our great Master; that, upon this acknowledgment, we set ourselves seriously to consider the nature of that service he demands; that we take a general survey of the Christian duty, as described and enjoined in the word of God; and that we enter into an attentive review of our own particular circumstances, in comparison with it; that we may know what we are to do, in every instance, as the particular emergency requires. It further includes a concern to act according to our knowledge, to do our duty in its full extent; and every part of it in its proper place, which will much contribute to its beauty and expedition. It supposes a concern, that we may persevere in the discharge of our duty; or in the language of the apostle, *that we may watch unto the end*. And once more, this idea of watchfulness carries in it a concern to despatch our work with a becoming degree of vigour and alacrity; that we shake off that heaviness and idleness of temper, which

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 would clog the soul in its most vigorous operations, and to do the work of God as if we did it not; and that we endeavour to be, as St. Paul expresses it, *fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*<sup>3</sup>. It includes a concern to look at the temper of the mind, as well as the external form of the action; that we may perform every duty as unto the Lord; with a reverent regard to his authority, with an earnest desire of his approbation; enter into the spirit of this thought: I act before God; I act in the view of the eternal world, which, perhaps, may be even now opening upon me; and, therefore, *whatever my hands find to do, I will do it with all my might*. I do very readily acknowledge, that such a godly frame is not always attainable by us. Some tempers are naturally abundantly cooler and more phlegmatic than others; and persons whose constitution does most incline them to be brisk and lively, may find their spirits deadened at particular times, by excessive labour, or by bodily indisposition, so that it may be impossible for them to exert their usual vigour. Yet, generally speaking, if it be not our own fault, I am fully persuaded that we may command some-

<sup>3</sup> Rom. xii.  
 11.

thing of liveliness: otherwise I see not what foundation there could be for that exhortation which I mentioned as parallel to the text, *not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit*. Having thus endeavoured to open to you the nature of the comprehensive duty recommended in the text, which does, indeed, take in the whole of our Christian care, I proceed,

II. To urge you to the discharge of it by some serious and important considerations; and I shall range these under two heads, answerable to the two branches which I before observed to be comprehended in the general exhortation as regarding the dangers we are to oppose, or the business we are to despatch.

1. I would propose some arguments to engage you to watchfulness and caution, with regard to the dangers which surround you. And here I entreat you to consider that you are encompassed with a variety of enemies; that, with regard to many of them, their character and their design render them exceedingly formidable: and that, on the other hand, you are subject to an insensibility of

SERM. V. temper, which would betray you into their hands ; and, therefore, needs the more vigorous resistance.

1. Consider that you are surrounded with a variety of enemies. We are not, perhaps, readily aware of these, because many of our enemies are of an invisible nature, and we are ready to confine our regards to those things which strike upon the senses ; but the truth of the assertion is as certain as the express declaration of scripture can make it. Thus the human, and especially the Christian life, is frequently represented under the notion of a warfare, which plainly supposes that we have an army of foes to encounter ; and, therefore, the apostle does exhort us again and again, *to put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand in the* <sup>4</sup> *evil day, and having done all, may stand* <sup>4</sup> : and insists upon it not only that we have some weapons of defence, but that we be completely armed. And he intimates, that we are to think ourselves very happy if, after all our preparation and all our watchfulness, we be able to stand our ground, and be not borne down by the enemy. The whole world is represented, in scripture, as

<sup>4</sup> Eph. vi.  
11.

an enemy; and we are expressly told, that *every one that is born of God*, i. e. every sincere Christian, must not only oppose it, but *overcome it*<sup>5</sup>. The things of the world, and the men of the world, are our enemies: some indeed intend and profess enmity, and others may do us a great deal of mischief without designing it. They may seduce our hearts from God and our duty, by their perverse and irregular example; and thus the dearest of our friends may act an hostile part. Nay, it is certain that, in the most intimate sense, our foes are those of our own household. There are corrupt and dangerous dispositions in our hearts, which, if they be not vigorously resisted, will be exceedingly pernicious: and, therefore, we are expressly required *to mortify our members which are upon earth*<sup>6</sup>. And when the apostle describes the struggle, he chose to make use of military phrases: *I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and leading me into captivity*<sup>7</sup>. And besides all this, the prince of devils is in combination against us, and draws together his infernal legions. As the apostle reminds us, *we wrestle not only with flesh and blood*, not

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<sup>5</sup> 1 John v.  
4.

<sup>6</sup> Col. iii.  
5.

<sup>7</sup> Rom. vii.  
23.

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only with the inhabitants of this world, or the corruption of flesh, *but with principalities and powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, with spiritual wickedness in high places*<sup>8</sup>; so various and so numerous are the forces of our enemies.

<sup>8</sup> Eph. vi.  
12.

2. With regard to a considerable part of these enemies, their character and their design are exceedingly formidable. Whatever our temper or our circumstances may be, there is always something in the world which is a suitable temptation, and so accommodated to that turn of mind, or that condition of life, as to be peculiarly dangerous. The degeneracy of our own hearts is formidable, as it pursues us wherever we go, as it hides itself under the most artful disguises, and as it has a power of assaulting and conquering us when we have no warning of it, and are not at all provided for an opposition. And with regard to the devil and his angels, we know their genius was originally great and large, capable of the highest designs, and the most artificial contrivances; and their natural capacities have been improved by long experience and observation. Their spiritual and invisible nature gives them an opportu-

nity of attacking us in our most secret retire-  
ments, and our most unguarded moments. SERM.  
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And their number is so great, that one or  
another of them may be continually hover-  
ing near us, and watching for occasion of mis-  
chief against us; their restless and implaca-  
ble malice join to complete the terror of their  
character. We may be injured by ourselves,  
or the world about us, without any deliberate  
mischief. But as for the devil, he has the  
name of *Satan* from his avowed enmity, and  
aims not merely at our disturbance and  
uneasiness, but at our ruin. Animated by  
hatred to God, and envy to man, he would,  
if possible, spread a universal desolation,  
would disconcert the measures, and disap-  
point the designs which God has formed for  
the recovery and happiness of fallen man,  
and would drag down the whole race of  
Adam into his own region of darkness and  
despair. And do we not feel a secret horror  
at the thought, or can we allow ourselves to  
be careless and negligent when these murder-  
ous creatures are continually surrounding us,  
and lying in wait for our blood? Did we  
know that a man like ourselves had formed  
a design against our lives, caution would

SERM. V. attend us in all our steps, and we should endeavour to keep ourselves on our guard. How much more is it necessary in the present case! and therefore it is from this consideration that St. Peter does most earnestly recommend this watchfulness: *Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*<sup>9</sup>, and swallow up.

8.

<sup>9</sup> Judges  
xviii. 7.

3. There is a natural indolence in our temper, which, if it be not vigorously opposed, will certainly betray us into ruin. Numerous and formidable as our enemies are, we are naturally insensible of our danger. We lose ourselves in soft and luxurious dreams, when we should be standing to our arms, and fighting as for our lives. Like the men of *Laish*<sup>1</sup>, we dwell careless, quiet, and secure, and thus we invite the attack of those who seek our destruction. In how many instances have we already been vanquished by them! And if we have at any time been, for the present, alarmed by the defeat, how soon have we relapsed into our former negligence: a negligence which, perhaps, continues even until this day! Now, surely, if we are naturally inclined to such a foolish and indolent temper, it is highly

necessary to do violence to ourselves, that we may be upon our guard against such a variety of dangers. SERM.  
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2. I would now excite you to that other branch of watchfulness, which consists in a diligent discharge of that work which is assigned to us in life: and here I would recommend the following reflections.

1. Consider how great and how difficult our work is. It is a very large extent of duty which is assigned to us. The commandments of God are *exceeding broad*<sup>2</sup>, <sup>2</sup> Ps. cxix. 96. and God requires the most universal obedience. We are to *purify ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God*<sup>3</sup>. And if we <sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 1. should pretend to except against any signal branches of our duty, or to reserve the liberty of indulging in the most darling corruptions, God would reject our services with disdain; and *offending in one point, we should be guilty of all*<sup>4</sup>. The gospel *teaches us to deny all un-*<sup>4</sup> James ii. 10. *godliness, and every worldly lust, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world*<sup>5</sup>. And how much is comprehend- <sup>5</sup> Tit. ii. 11. ed in each of these expressions! How many are the duties which relate to God and our

SERM. V. fellow creatures! How many those which concern ourselves, and the management of our own appetites and passions! Yet each of these is to be attended to. So that whatever place or circumstances of life we are in, in which we are capable of any rational action at all, there is a proper business assigned to us. We are to aim at a holy temper, complete in its branches and exalted in its degrees. For we are to love our God *with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind*<sup>6</sup>; and in this we are required to persevere to the very end of our lives, and *to be faithful unto death*<sup>7</sup>, if we desire to receive the crown of life. Judge then whether such a work as this will not require all the vivacity of our spirits, and whether it be not absolutely necessary that, in order to perform it, we awake out of sleep, and resolutely oppose that dilatoriness of soul which is ready to creep upon us by insensible degrees.

<sup>6</sup> Matt.  
xxii. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Rev. vii.  
18.

2. Consider those hinderances, which lie in the way of our performance of these duties, as a further engagement to watchfulness and activity. Our worldly circumstances are often a snare to us in this respect, while our minds are broken with sorrow, distracted

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with care, or intoxicated with pleasure ; and, therefore, our Lord does particularly caution us to take heed that our *hearts be not overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, or the cares of this life*<sup>8</sup>. Of those we converse with in life, some may, perhaps, be so notoriously bad, as to endeavour, with a fixed and deliberate design, to pervert us from the ways of God, and hinder us in the discharge of our duty. And it is certain, that how little soever others may design it, it is what they very commonly do. Their conversation and their example fill our minds with thoughts and cares entirely foreign to the great concerns of life ; and even sincere Christians themselves are so far from a becoming solicitude to *provoke one another to love and to good works*, that very often the conversation of the best of them is an impediment rather than an assistance to us in the discharge of our duty. And in the midst of all this external opposition, it falls out most unhappily that our own hearts are averse from the work of God. Sometimes the spirit of sloth and idleness prevails, and we are indisposed for all manner of business that requires application and vivacity ; and at

<sup>8</sup> Luke  
xxi. 34.

SERM. other times our sprightliness is entirely mis-  
 V. placed, while irregular desires and sinful pas-  
 sions hurry us away into a contrary course :  
 so that upon the whole, if we indulge our  
 own natural propensities, the consequence  
 will be either that the work of God will be  
 entirely neglected, and we employed in the  
 direct service of the devil, or else the proper  
 business of life will be but coldly pursued,  
 with many interruptions and with little des-  
 patch.

3. As a further engagement to diligence,  
 let us consider that our Master's eye is con-  
 tinually upon us. There is something so  
 awakening in this thought that the apostle  
 takes it for granted that it would influence  
 those who were otherwise but very bad ser-  
 vants. And therefore he charges them to  
 attend to their business, not merely *with eye-*  
*service, but with singleness of heart, as fearing*

<sup>9</sup> Eph. vi.  
 6. Col. iii.  
 22.

*God*<sup>9</sup>. But it would be happy for us if we  
 would come to this, and persuade ourselves  
 to be diligent while our Master is looking on,  
 for then we should never be idle, since *the*  
*eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding*  
*the evil and the good*<sup>1</sup>. *He has searched us*  
<sup>3.</sup> *and known us. He knows our down-sitting*

<sup>1</sup> PROV. XV.

*and uprising, and is acquainted with our thoughts afar off*<sup>2</sup>. Wherever we are, we are surrounded with his presence, and his eye is as attentively fixed upon us as if we were the only creatures that were under his inspection. And surely there is something very awakening in this thought. If we have any thing of generosity in our hearts, we shall desire to behave worthy the regards of such a Being, that he may behold us with an eye of approbation; and surely if we have any regard to our own interest, we shall not dare to affront him by trifling in his service. Especially, if we add,

4. That we are shortly to be brought to an account for our conduct, and that the consequences of this account will be infinitely awful. That we are all to be brought to an account is so evident from scripture that it is by no means necessary to enlarge upon the proof of it. Nothing can be more express to that purpose than those words of the apostle, *For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that we may receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or whether it be evil*<sup>3</sup>. Our Master is now invisible, but we shall then see him revealed in

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V.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm  
CXXXIX. 1,  
2, 3.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. v.  
10.

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the most splendid and majestic form, and appearing to reckon with us for our actions. He will say to each of us, “Such capacities and opportunities I gave you; so long I continued you in life, and fixed you in such and such circumstances; and now give an account of your management. Have you done any thing for my service, or have you acted in proportion to your opportunities and obligations?” And upon this every circumstance of life will be reviewed, and, as the wise man assures us, *God will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*<sup>4</sup>. How awful a thought! especially when we add, that the consequences of the account will be infinitely important; everlasting praise or everlasting shame, eternal life or eternal death. To those who are faithful and laborious our Lord will say, *Well done, good and faithful servants, ye have been faithful over a few things, I will make you rulers over many things; enter ye into the joy of your Lord*<sup>5</sup>. But on the contrary, *the unprofitable servant shall be cast out in outer darkness*<sup>6</sup>. *If the servant who is commanded to watch shall say in his heart, My Lord delays his coming*<sup>7</sup>, and shall thereupon

<sup>4</sup> Eccles.  
xii. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew  
xxv. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew  
xxv. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew  
xxiv. 48.

fall into riot and debauchery, or cruelty and oppression, it is expressly said, *the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he thinks not, and in an hour when he is not aware, and shall scourge him so severely that he shall even cut him in sunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites*, with false, treacherous creatures, who enter themselves into engagements that they will not answer, and undertake charges which they will not faithfully perform. This is the representation of our Master himself. We may, therefore, depend upon the exactness of it; and shall we be tardy at the expense of losing so rich a glory, and suffering so much shame and misery?

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V.

5. Consider that the time when we are to be brought to this account is entirely uncertain. And this is an argument against allowing ourselves in present sloth and irregularity from the prospect of recollecting our spirits, and putting our affairs in a better posture, before we are called to our last reckoning. Alas! setting aside all the other arguments which are commonly and justly urged upon this occasion, the futurity we reckon upon is in its own nature entirely uncertain. We

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promise ourselves future years, but it is more than possible that *this night our souls may be required of us*. And this is an argument which our Lord urges again and again to enforce this exhortation to watchfulness, in the words that precede the text, *Watch ye, therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house comes, whether at the evening, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning*<sup>8</sup>. And elsewhere, *Watch, for ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh*<sup>9</sup>. Nay, it is observable that our Lord particularly threatens careless people that he will come at such a time as shall be most surprising to them. *If thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee*<sup>1</sup>. Now think what a dreadful thing it would be for Christ to surprise us in an unprepared posture, and in what terrible confusion will our souls be if we be called to give up our account when we are loitering in our Master's business, and have almost forgotten that we are his servants. I would hope these arguments have made some impression upon you, and will incline you to hearken with

<sup>8</sup> Mark  
xiii. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew  
xxv. 13.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. iii.  
3.

attention to what I have to lay before you under the third general, where I am,

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III. To propose some directions for your assistance in maintaining such a constant watchfulness as appears so important and so necessary.

1. Let us humble ourselves deeply in the presence of God on account of our former negligence. Let us consider in how many instances we have afforded matter of triumph to our spiritual enemies, notwithstanding all the warning and all the experience which we have had of their formidable nature, and their fatal attempts; how shamefully we have fallen into those snares which had entangled us in former instances, and repeated the sins and the follies which we had most deeply repented of, and most solemnly renounced in the Divine presence. And with regard to the business of life, let us consider what we might have done in those circumstances in which Providence has placed us; and let us compare it with what we have actually dispatched, and think how many days and years of this short life have already been trifled away.

SERM. V. Let us enter seriously into all the aggravations of so foolish and so wicked a behaviour; for the deeper our repentance is for former neglects, the fairer will be the prospect of superior diligence for the time to come.

2. Let us earnestly pray that God would awaken us to a more watchful temper. Our Lord exhorts his disciples to join prayer to their vigilance: *watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation*<sup>2</sup>. And the apostle exhorts us in one place *to watch unto prayer*<sup>3</sup>, and in another *to watch in it*<sup>4</sup>. Let us remember that our strength is in God; and not dare to trust entirely to the force of those rational convictions which we must have felt if we have attended to this discourse with any seriousness. Though they are obvious to the capacity of a child, they may be forgotten by us, or we may remember them only to act in direct contradiction to them, by relapsing again into negligence and sin; and we shall shortly do it if we are left to ourselves. Let us therefore beg that the Lord would be our keeper, that he would lighten our eyes, that we may not fall into a fatal and deadly sleep, nor into any slumber which

<sup>2</sup> Matthew  
xxvi. 41.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. iv.

<sup>4</sup> Col. iv. 2.

may give an advantage to our spiritual ene- <sup>SERM.</sup>  
mies, and consume that time which should <sup>V.</sup>  
be spent in services honourable to God, and  
useful to the world.

3. If we would maintain continual watchfulness, let us often be reflecting upon our actions, and examine ourselves with regard to them. Such a survey of our mistakes in former instances would make us more careful and diligent for the time to come; at least, it would prevent our sleeping any considerable time. And for this reason I think it is very plain, that the more frequently these seasons of recollection return, the more probability there is of their being useful. Some time should certainly be taken every evening to reflect upon the actions of the day; and it would be convenient to enter into the examination more frequently than every evening. It might, perhaps, turn to very good account to divide every day into several short periods, as suppose, the morning, the forenoon, the afternoon, and the evening; and to take a few moments at the close of each of these periods to reflect upon our conduct in it. It would be easy to review so short a period,

SERM. and to enter into those particular circum-  
V. stances to which it is highly necessary to  
attend. A few moments of respite from business or conversation might be sufficient for this purpose; and, no doubt, if we were to accustom ourselves to it, we might be engaged to shake off the first symptoms of an indolent temper; and, when we had thrown away one part of the day, might be led to greater diligence in the other. And, besides all other advantages, such frequent recollection would furnish us with matter for more large and stated examination at the conclusion of any longer period of time, as suppose, of every month or of every year.

4. Let us often be discoursing with our own hearts, and with one another. Consider the great engagements to Christian watchfulness. Let us preach over to ourselves those plain but important thoughts, which were laid before us under the former heads; and solemnly charge them upon our consciences as in the sight of God. "Think, oh my soul!" let us every one say, "Think, oh my soul! thou art in a state of danger. Innumerable dangers compass thee about; and they aim

at thy everlasting destruction. Thou must fight thy way through whole armies of them if thou wouldst ever enter upon the promised inheritance; and this indolence of temper, into which thou art now ready to sink, will betray thee as a helpless captive to their power. Remember, oh my soul, that thou hast a various and most important work; and that in every circumstance of life thou art surrounded with a variety of impediments. Thy great Master looks on, and beholds thy conduct; and it is but a little time, and he will call thee to an account for it. Shortly, oh my soul! must thou appear before his tribunal, and receive honour or disgrace, life or death, according to thy fidelity or thy negligence in his work. I know not how soon this account may be demanded: perhaps God has marked this out for the last of my mortal days; and if I trifle it away, death may surprise me in my idleness and my sin, and make me for ever serious." Such discourses should we address to our own souls, and upon these topics should we entertain one another. Such is the caution of the apostle, *exhorting one another daily, whilst it*

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SERM. *is called to-day, lest any be hardened through*  
 V. *the deceitfulness of sin*<sup>5</sup>. Thus should we  
<sup>5</sup> Heb. iii. watch over those that are in danger of falling,  
 13. not with a severe and ill natured, but with a  
 kind and charitable intention of awakening  
 them out of dangerous security, and animat-  
 ing them in the battles and in the labours of  
 the Lord. And God grant that these motives  
 and these directions may be so enforced by  
 the Divine power that there may be a revival  
 of his work in the midst of the years, and  
 that the next week in particular may be spent  
 in more resolute watchfulness than that to  
 which we have ever yet been accustomed.

## SERMON VI.

SINNERS PRISONERS OF HOPE.

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ZECHARIAH, ix. 12.

*Turn ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope.*

THOUGH I am sensible that some understand these words as relating to those prisoners of the children of Israel who were yet detained in Babylon, and concerning whose recovery the prophet had intimated some hopes, yet I confess it appears much more probable to me that they do, in their original sense, relate to the time of the gospel. The prophecy in the 9th verse is expressly said to have been fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, when he entered in an humble triumph into Jerusalem, riding on an ass: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem : behold, thy king cometh unto thee : he is just, and having salvation ; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.* God determined that this salvation should

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SERM. VI. not be accomplished by any might and power of their own; they should see themselves disappointed in their creature confidence. *I will cut off the chariots of Ephraim, and the horses of Jerusalem.* Agreeable to this it is added, that the kingdom of this great prince should not be established by force of arms, and yet that it should be extensive. *I will cut off the chariots from Ephraim, and the horses from Jerusalem;* and yet, notwithstanding that, *he shall speak peace to the heathen, and extend his dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the end of the earth.* The eleventh verse shows the manner in which this salvation was to be accomplished. It was to be by *the blood of his covenant*, by the blood by which the new covenant was established, and by which it was sealed. *As for thee, oh thou appointed prince, by the blood of thy covenant, or, as it might be rendered, whose covenant is by blood, I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit, wherein is no water, i. e.* For thy sake I have delivered and released these poor creatures, who had brought themselves into a very miserable condition, and seemed to be like prisoners in distress; in some deep pit, from

whence they cannot get out. It is called a *pit in which there was no water*, because it was such a kind of pit in which prisoners were frequently confined. Thus, Gen. xxxvii. 24, it is said that Joseph's brethren *cast him into a deep pit, which was empty, and had no water in it*. And it is mentioned as a peculiar circumstance of cruelty in the confinement of Jeremiah, that *there was no water in the pit* in which he was thrown. Yet there was mire in it, in which the prophet sunk. *In the dungeon there was no water, but mire, and Jeremiah sunk in the mire*<sup>1</sup>. Thus you see here is a promise to the Messiah for the deliverance of his people from that state of condemnation, danger, and misery in which they originally were. And here in the text God addresses himself to them to urge them to lay hold on this hope that was set before them, and to flee for refuge to it. *Turn ye to the strong hold, oh ye prisoners of hope! for even to-day do I declare unto thee that I will render unto thee double*, i. e. I will make you victorious over your enemies, and render your glory and your happiness greater than your disgrace and your misery have ever been. I hope, therefore, I shall do no vio-

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<sup>1</sup>Jeremiah  
xxxviii. 6.

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VI. lence to these words in deducing the following observations from them.

I. That while sinners are in their natural condition they are prisoners.

II. That when the gospel comes to them they are prisoners of hope.

III. That a strong hold is prepared, in which they may be happy and secure.

IV. That it is their duty, if they desire deliverance, to turn unto this strong hold.

I shall consider each of these important observations, and add a reflection or two upon each as I go along. Oh that the voice of the Divine Spirit might so address itself that *the prisoners of hope* might hear the encouraging proclamation, and may so *turn to the strong hold* as to be translated to the gospel liberty of the children of God. Then it will be a happy day indeed to the redeemed prisoners. They will have a peculiar joy; God himself will rejoice over them, and the church, both in heaven and on earth, will have its share in the joy.

I. I would observe that sinners may be considered under the notion of prisoners. And for the explication of this, I would ob-

serve that they are as malefactors under the sentence of a righteous God, as captives under the power and tyranny of Satan, and bound in such chains of corruption and sin as to be utterly incapable of delivering themselves. SERM.  
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1. In our natural state we are *prisoners*, as condemned malefactors under the sentence of a righteous God<sup>2</sup>. That we are malefactors is too plain with regard to the best of us. Who amongst us can say, *I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?* Is there a soul in this assembly so proudly confident in itself that it will arise, and maintain its innocence in the presence of God, and of his people. Surely those who intimately know you and converse with you might convict you of a great deal of guilt, but your own conscience will charge you with a great deal more. What then would you do if the records of God's omniscience were unfolded, and all those transgressions which he has seen and recorded were laid open before you in their full number and their various aggravations? Surely these would fill you with shame and amazement; and you must own that, should *God be strict to mark all you have done amiss, you could not answer him for* <sup>2</sup> Gal. iii.  
23.

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*one of ten thousand.* Now this is a very awful thing. God is our rightful sovereign; he has the justest title to our obedience, and the violation of his law, even in the smallest instances, carries a great deal of guilt along with it, and exposes the transgressor to a most awful curse. So says the apostle, Gal. iii. 10, *As many as are under the works of the law are under a curse: as it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.* Now this curse extends itself a great way; it takes hold of the body and the soul, it reaches to the interests of time and eternity. The sentence is gone forth; and, as peaceful as our circumstances may seem, we continue under it whilst we are in our natural state. So says the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who was the messenger of pardon and of peace. <sup>3</sup> *John iii. He that believes not is condemned already*<sup>3</sup>; and, verse 36, *the wrath of God abideth on him.* And whilst the sinner is thus under a sentence of condemnation, and the object of the Divine displeasure, he is evidently a prisoner of God, though a prisoner at large. For wherever he is, he is under the observation of his eye, and within the reach of his

<sup>3</sup> John iii. 18.

hand. Be his situation ever so obscure, or ever so well fortified, this is the case<sup>4</sup>. A rebel is not half so much the prisoner of his sovereign, when sunk in a dungeon and loaded with iron, as the sinner, in the midst of all his apparent freedom, is the prisoner of God. Let but that injured Sovereign speak the word, and in one hour, in one moment, the poor creature shall be seized by the messengers of vengeance, crushed into the grave, and sunk into hell. In this respect may it properly be said he is a prisoner.

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<sup>4</sup> Amos  
ix. 1—3.

2. Sinners are *prisoners*, as they are the captives of Satan. In this view you know they are represented in the word of God. When he speaks of them as *in the snare of the devil, and as taken captive by him, as seized alive by him*, as the word properly signifies. *That they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will*<sup>5</sup>. And therefore it is intimated that the saints themselves were in the power of Satan, till brought into the kingdom of the Redeemer, *who has delivered us from the power of Satan, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*<sup>6</sup>. On which

<sup>5</sup> 2 Tim. ii.  
26.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Col. i.  
13.

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account Satan is called, in Eph. ii. 1, *the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience*. He is the great head of apostate angels and apostate men. He drew our first parents into a league with himself against the great God of heaven and earth; and we being naturally under the power of sin, are his slaves. Though we do not see him, yet we are influenced by him, and much more fatally under his power than those whose bodies are only possessed by him. And the sinner may too surely perceive that he is naturally under the power of Satan, by those vigorous efforts which that spirit makes to recover him, when he finds that he is struggling for his liberty, and entertains serious thoughts of returning to his allegiance to God through a Mediator.

3. We are naturally *prisoners*, as we are bound with the fetters of corruption and sin, and incapable of delivering ourselves. Thus those to whom deliverance is sent by the Messiah, are represented not only as in *prison*, but as *bound*. Thus, Isaiah, lxiii. 2, *the Lord has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them*

*who are bound.* We are not only subdued by a superior power, but as it were bound hand and foot. Our intellectual powers are darkened and degenerated. In us, that is in our flesh, there dwells *no good thing*. Our condition is like that described in Eph. iv. 18, *We have our understandings darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our hearts.* So that even when we consent to the law as holy, just, and good, we see *another law in our members warring against the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin, which is in our members.* And in consequence of this, in the unconverted, *sin reigns unto death.* And so prisoners as to be slaves; *whoever commits sin are servants of sin*<sup>7</sup>. I shall make a reflection or two upon this melancholy truth.

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7 John,  
viii. 34.

1. How much reason we have to lament it, that we are thus universally in a state of bondage and captivity. There is something melancholy in the sight of one condemned prisoner in bonds, of one condemned malefactor under the sentence of death. How melancholy then must it be to reflect that it is naturally the case of all! That of the

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whole race of mankind there is not *one* who is exempted from this calamity, from this condemnation! How melancholy to look about on a congregation, on a town, and, in thought, on a kingdom, or even on the whole race of mankind; on all who are now living, and who ever have appeared, or ever shall appear in our world; and to think of so many hundreds, of so many thousands, of so many millions, not a man, descended from Adam by ordinary generation, which is not involved in this guilt and ruin, with all their boast of liberty, with all their insolence in prosperity, with all their eager pursuit of pleasure and happiness; yet all prisoners, all condemned by the sentence of God, all conquered by the power of Satan, all bound in the fetters of corruption, till a Divine power shall restore them to liberty, and raise them to heaven. Blessed are we if that Divine power be exerted on us, and our souls are made free by it.

2. How stupid are the generality of sinners, who are thus utterly insensible of their bondage and misery. Were we to take a particular survey of all those who are, in this different view, the prisoners of God, the pri-

soners of Satan, the prisoners of their own corruptions, how few should we find who are at all aware of their circumstances, and have any deep and abiding concern about it ! The Jews were fond of the notion of their own freedom ; and thought themselves exceedingly affronted when our Lord represents their true condition under the notion of a bondage. *We were never in bondage to any man*<sup>8</sup>. And such is the true state of the case, with regard to the generality of sinners. Their fetters sit easy upon them ; nay, sometimes they are so fond as to imagine them ornamental, and are rather proud than ashamed of them. They are under the sentence of a broken law, but they think not of the awful hour of destruction which is approaching ; but are, perhaps, many of them lost in debauchery, and in an eager and violent gratification of their lusts. Like malefactors under the sentence of human laws, they spend the little remainder of life in riot and drunkenness, and so drown their fear of approaching death. At best, they sleep in their chains, and amuse themselves with idle dreams of worldly pleasure and entertainment ; and their case is so far like that of

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<sup>8</sup> John,  
viii. 32, 33.

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Peter, that they will never be delivered till a messenger of God smite them, that they may be awakened, and a Divine power cause their chains to fall off, as well as point out to them an open door. This is, indeed, a very melancholy circumstance; it is this that renders their case so dangerous; it is this that makes all the glad tidings of liberty and salvation by a Redeemer so tasteless and insipid to them; therefore it was necessary to represent their case at large. Oh, that God may impress it on the heart of every unconverted sinner, that the voice of God may say to each of them, *Thou art the man*; thou art condemned by the sentence of the Divine law; thou art enslaved by the power of Satan; thou art bound in the chains of sin. Will sinners be prepared to hear with pleasure what is to be laid before them under the Second Observation, where I am to show that they are prisoners of hope? *Turn ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope.* Here I would show you on what this hope is founded, and then consider how far it extends.

1. The perfections of the Divine nature afford some considerable intimation of hope. It is the language of *reason* and *experience*

as well as of scripture, that *God is good to all, and that his tender mercies are over all his works*; conscious as we are of numberless offences, we do not immediately fall victims of the Divine vengeance. So far from that, we daily experience the Divine goodness to us. Though we behave too much like his enemies, yet in many instances he shows himself a friend and a father to us. When we are hungry he feeds us; when we are thirsty he gives us drink. Now it is natural to consider this as a token for good. Some intimation of hope seems natural; and we find that in the case of the Ninevites, they prevailed so far, though they were oppressed by an absolute threatening, that they said, *Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not*<sup>9</sup>? Yet I own this arguing is far from being entirely conclusive: there may, in the midst of all, be some fears, some melancholy forebodings. I therefore further add,

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<sup>9</sup> Jonah  
iii. 9.

2. That the gospel gives us a sure and solid foundation for hope. Well may it be called the *gospel*; i. e. as the word properly signifies, a good and comfortable message. It is *glad tidings of great joy*, and contains such

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discoveries of Divine grace as are perfectly adapted to our helpless and miserable circumstances. It shows us too the justice of God atoned, the dominion of Satan destroyed, and the power of corruption subdued; and consequently, in all these respects, it represents us as *prisoners of hope*.

1. The gospel shows us the justice of God atoned, and the honour of his law secured. I observed that we were under the condemning sentence of it; and it might seem necessary, in order to testify the justice and purity of God, and repair the injury of his broken law, that sentence should be executed in all its terrors; but now the gospel represents our Lord Jesus Christ as making an atonement: so we read, Romans, iii. 24, 25, *Justified freely by his grace, through Jesus Christ, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.* And so the apostle declares, *He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be*  
<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 21. *made the righteousness of God in him*<sup>1</sup>. The plain sense of which is, that he has so amply testified his purity, and consulted the honour

of his law, in the penalties executed upon his dear Son, when he undertook to make an atonement for sin; that it will now be no reflection on his attributes, or his government, to receive penitent and believing sinners, and embrace them in the arms of his mercy. And we read, Romans, iii. 26, *That he might be just, and the justifier of him who believes in Christ Jesus.* Nay, it represents God as so far reconciled to those who were before the prisoners of his justice, that he takes them into a state of peculiar favour. *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God*<sup>2</sup>. <sup>2</sup> Rom. v. 1. And to as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on his name<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> John i. 12.

2. The gospel represents Satan as subdued, and consequently his captives as prisoners of hope. It is with regard to this our Lord Jesus Christ says of the strong man, that when *armed, and keeping his house, his goods are in peace; but if a stronger than he come, and bind him, he will spoil his goods*<sup>4</sup>. <sup>4</sup> Luke xi. 21, 22. Whence our Lord proves himself stronger than Satan. He has appeared against him, to raise the ruins of human nature which

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he had destroyed, and has gained a complete conquest over him, insomuch that the prince of darkness is even said to be *destroyed* or *abolished* by him. *He took part of flesh and blood, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that*  
<sup>5</sup> Heb. ii. *is, the devil*<sup>5</sup>. In order to understand this it  
<sup>14.</sup> must be observed, that the power of Satan over the children of men was not merely that of superior strength, but by permission from God, for the just punishment of his apostate creatures. Upon the restoration of these apostates to the Divine favour, that permission to the enemy immediately ceased, and God exerting his power in their behalf, Satan would soon appear unable to resist. And thus the original promise is fulfilled, *the seed of the woman has broken the serpent's*  
<sup>6</sup> Gen. iii. *head*<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>15.</sup>

3. The gospel reveals a sufficiency of Divine grace to enable us to conquer the corruptions of our nature, and constantly represents us as *prisoners of hope*. God is *the father of lights*, and the author of *every good and every perfect gift*. And it is certain that human nature is never sunk into so deep a degeneracy, that he is unable to recover it.

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Now the gospel brings along with it the more abundant communications of the Spirit, on which account it is called *the law of the Spirit of life*. And in that view the apostle declares, that he was freed by it from that broken law that gave him such sad occasion of complaint. *The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh*<sup>7</sup>. <sup>7 Rom. viii.</sup>

2, 3.


Now as the Spirit is said to be the purchase of Christ, so *Christ has delivered us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit*<sup>8</sup>. <sup>8 Gal. iii.</sup>

13, 14.

And it is promised by Christ in the most gracious manner: *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him*<sup>9</sup>? Now <sup>9 Luke, xi.</sup>

13.

certainly this is a most reviving consideration. He that raises us from the dead can awaken us from that dead sleep into which sin has thrown us. He that shakes the earth, and overthrows the foundation of the mountains, can break our bands of sin in

SERM. VI.  sunder ; and he that by his power supporteth universal nature, can strengthen us under all our weakness, and enable us, as scripture expresseth it, to recover ourselves out of Satan's snares.

1. With what gratitude and joy should these intimations of hope be received by those who are naturally in so miserable a condition. It is a celebrated story, that when Titus Flaminus\*, at the public games, proclaimed the liberty of Greece, after it had been conquered by the Romans, the auditors were at first lost in a silent amazement, and then burst out into one continued shout for two hours together, *Liberty! Liberty!* Methinks such joy, and greater than this, should appear amongst miserable sinners when these proclamations for liberty are made. And are they not now made? Have I not been now telling you from the word of God, that though you were condemned under the righteous sentence of the law, through a Redeemer, that sentence may be reversed, your souls may be restored to life and happiness? Have I not been proving that though Satan held you in a dark capti-

\* Plutarch's Life of Titus Quint. Flaminus.

vity, yet by the law of the great Redeemer you may be rescued from his hands and made more than conquerors over him? Have I not told you that notwithstanding the painful and the fruitless struggle which you have hitherto had with the feebleness and corruption of a depraved nature, you may still receive those communications of the Spirit, which will purify and strengthen you, and enable you to *purify yourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God*? And are these really little matters? What if you had infallibly been told, on the contrary, that you must lie for ever under this dreadful sentence, and feel the execution in all its terrors: that Satan must for ever tyrannise over you, and that all this corruption of nature should continue upon you, and should be for ever increasing rather than amending; had it not been a very sad case? How joyful and thankful should you then be, that by Divine grace you hear the very reverse of all this? And what stupid creatures are you if you hear it, but *like a tale that is told*.

2. How unreasonable is it that any should imagine themselves excluded from hope?

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Prisoners of hope, will you despair? Has not Christ merit, and power, and grace enough to rescue and save you? Will you take it merely on the word of Satan that he has not? I speak this, but I know that God must speak to your souls; and, as I pity you, it is my prayer that he would.

III. Our Lord Jesus Christ is a strong hold, where those *prisoners of hope* may find their security and protection. He is able not only to grant them an immediate rescue, by breaking open the prison doors, and to set them at liberty, but to secure them in that happy state: if they will take security from him, they will be as safe from sin as in a castle, which no power of the enemy can overthrow. For the proof of this I would only observe, that the Divine power of Christ renders him capable of defending his people against all opposition; and that his eternal duration, and unchangeable glory, renders him still more capable of doing it.

1. The Divine power of Christ renders him capable of defending his people against all the assaults which may be made upon them. When the soul has once taken security in

Christ, it is certain God will not reject it, SERM.  
VI. because, as we have already seen, it was by God that Christ was appointed for a refuge, and God cannot deny himself, and abrogate the covenant that he has contrived and established. And as for the power of Satan, and corrupt nature, what is it when opposed to the Almighty power of the blessed Redeemer? In vain might earth and hell unite its opposition against him, still he would appear more than a conqueror. At his command Satan should be subdued, and chained down under the closest confinement. At his word all the corruptions of nature should not only be weakened, but entirely rooted out. If he pleases, the weakest and most polluted sinner shall be raised to all the purity and strength of an angelic mind. For our Lord is not merely man, nor merely an exalted creature, but really and truly *God*, by an incommunicable and inconceivable union with the eternal Father: in consideration of which the power of the Father is his power, and shall be employed by him in the affairs of his people. So he himself argues: *The Father, who gave them me, is greater than all; I and my Father are one* <sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> John x.  
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2. As our Lord Jesus Christ has such a Divine power, he has also an unchangeable nature, and that will be an everlasting security to his people. He cannot only afford them a *present* defence, but can carry that defence to all the future ages of eternity. The strongest castles are at length ruined: rocks fall to dust, and mountains crumble away; but Christ is *the rock of ages*. *He is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever*<sup>2</sup>: able to relieve and defend his people continually: as able to do it now as he at first was; and will be as able to do it a thousand years hence as he is now. On this account you see it may be well said that he is the *strong hold*.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xiii.

8.

How easy and cheerful then may they be, who have reason to hope that they have taken security in this strong hold? Christians! permit me to address myself to you, and expostulate with you upon this head. Permit me particularly to address myself to those who have fled to the feet of a Redeemer, who have in the humblest manner prostrated themselves there, and poured out their souls before him. Wherefore is it then that you are so full of trouble, and discourag-

ing thoughts? Why have you such grievous apprehensions? What do you suspect? Can the powers of sin and of hell wrest you out of the arms of this blessed Redeemer? or can you imagine that, after all the gracious and encouraging things which he has said, after all the pains he has taken, after all the blood he has shed for your sakes, he will voluntarily give you up a prey to destruction? Alas! my friends, you suspect him of a temper with which even *we*, base and worthless as we are in comparison of him, would not be chargeable. Had any distressed creature committed itself to our protection, though it were ever so weak, though it were ever so needy, yet if we had once undertaken its security, we should make its interest our own, and should be ready to exert ourselves to the utmost in its defence; and shall we fear that Christ will do it? Remark, I entreat you, that triumphant song of the apostle, Romans, viii. ult. Methinks we should learn to imitate this triumph. Shout, Oh my soul! for thou art in the hands of Christ, thou art lodged in that strongest hold, and, therefore, I am safe. *The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom should I fear? The Lord is*

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm  
xxvii. 1.

*the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid<sup>3</sup>? I will not fear thee, O arrow of the Lord; I will not fear thee, O thou flaming sword of Divine vengeance, that once wert threatening to drink up my blood! for thy terrors are not levelled against the humble soul that betakes itself to this sanctuary. The flames are quenched in this stream of blood; and that Almighty arm, instead of being lifted up to wound me, is now open to embrace me. I will not fear thee, O thou prince of darkness! powerful, subtle, and malicious as thou art: for thou art a conquered enemy. That Jesus, to whom I fled for protection, has triumphed over thee! and far from being able to destroy me, thou shalt not be able to shelter thyself from that aggravated destruction to which his awful judgments will shortly doom thee! I will not fear you, O ye corruptions of nature! though you give me such painful exercise, for *his grace is sufficient for me!* I hope all the efforts that you make are but dying struggles; and that he who has already given you a mortal wound by his sacred Spirit, will shortly put an end to your very being, and will raise me to a state of perfec-*

tion. Blessed Jesus, I rejoice in thee as my hope, and the louder the storm rages around me, the more violently the enemies of my soul are invading me, the closer will I adhere to thee, and the more will I rejoice in thy care.

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IV. If sinners desire to be interested in this strong hold, it is absolutely necessary that they should turn unto it. This might in the nature of things easily be apprehended. Who could suppose that a refuge should be offered to those who will not set any value upon it, or direct their pursuits to it? And if you consult the messages of peace in the gospel, you will find that the promise of salvation is made to them, and only to them, *who believe in the name of the Son of God*. Now this believing in him is the very same thing with turning to the strong hold. And since we are so expressly exhorted to it, I will a little more particularly show to you what I apprehend to be intended in it.

1. It supposes an apprehension that we are really in danger: a desire of Christ as a strong hold; a desire of coming out of the prison, in which we naturally are, and of

SERM. VI. taking the directest way to the appointed  
refuge.

1. It supposes an apprehension that we are really in danger: that we do not rest in a general acknowledgment of the degeneracy and misery of man's natural condition, but that we apply all these to ourselves: "I am thus condemned by the Divine justice; I am thus enslaved to the power of Satan; I am thus bound in the fetters of corruption."

2. It further supposes that we are deeply affected with this danger, and earnestly desirous of being delivered from it. It supposes that we are taught by Divine grace to say, "I now see this is not a light and inconsiderable matter, the sentence of God is now dreadful; the slavery of Satan is base and painful; and these bands of sin, light and agreeable as they once seemed, are not only infamous, but would be fatal. If thou continuest a prisoner thou art undone: *Lord, bring my soul out of prison.*"

3. It supposes some cheerful apprehension of the provision made for our deliverance. It supposes that by the eye of faith we see the strong hold, that we know the purposes for which it was erected, that we consider it

as built for sinners, and be persuaded that if we apply ourselves to it we shall find our security in it. SERM.  
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4. Turning to the strong hold does further suppose that, consequently upon all this conviction, we take the way to this appointed refuge; that we do not only turn to it, but that, as the apostle expresses it, *we flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope that is set before us*<sup>4</sup>; that we actually quit our sins, that by the strength of God we throw off our fetters, that we leave the territories and kingdom of Satan, and press forward to lay hold on Christ, with an eagerness becoming creatures who see that it is their only hope, as those that are pursued by the sword of Divine justice, and must fall by it, if they are not sheltered in him. This is *turning to the strong hold*. <sup>4</sup> Heb. vi.  
18.

For the improvement of this head, let me press every one of you seriously to examine yourselves, that you may see whether you have *turned to the strong hold* or not. You see it is a matter of infinite importance. Your freedom and your life depend upon it. Let me then entreat you to go over the hints which I have now laid down, and examine

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yourself upon this head with a becoming seriousness, as those who desire to know the worst of themselves, and dread, above all things, to be mistaken in a matter of such great weight. Have you seen yourselves *prisoners*? Are you more earnestly desirous of liberty? Have you been directed to Christ as the refuge, and have you eagerly fled to him as such? On what conviction? in what place? with what solemnity? Did you ever enter into this strong hold, that you might submit your souls to him? Surely some of you must own you have hitherto been unconcerned about it? I would hope others are now desirous of doing it; and that many more are saying, by Divine grace they have already done it. I shall conclude the discourse with a particular application to each of these.

1. To obstinate sinners, who are insensible of their danger, and have never yet betaken themselves to the strong hold; to you I would address the exhortation. And though I am sensible that you are not of yourselves able to act upon it, yet you see, by the word of God, that it is reasonable to do it. You are in the text exhorted to *flee to the strong hold*; and

<sup>s</sup> Eph. v. by the apostle to *awake from the dead*<sup>5</sup>. Such

is the will of God, that his messengers should exhort you, as he commands the prophet in the valley of vision to prophesy to the dry bones, and say, *Ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord unto you.* Then would I say, turn to the strong hold, you who yet, through Divine grace, are prisoners of hope. I would say it, but by what arguments shall I engage you to it? Alas! I want not arguments. I know the insufficiency of all the most weighty considerations to move your souls till God shall awaken them; but in hopes that he may do it, I would address you with the following considerations.

1. Look about on the horrors of your prison. See how gloomy and melancholy it is. Perhaps you will say, Are not we at liberty to go where we will? Are we not blessed with the cheerful light of the sun? Do we not breathe a pleasant air? How is it gloomy then? Alas! you are fond of the notion of liberty; and, because you are in a world where you have many entertaining objects to strike your senses, you are pleased, and proud, perhaps, of your present circumstances. But look into your souls; see the darkness that prevails there; see how you are, as it were, shut up from converse with

SERM. VI. God; now see how you are captivated by Satan at his pleasure. Alas! when you come to look upon yourselves in the light of scripture, are you not in prison? and is not that prison a very uncomfortable place? Sinners in their natural state are said to be in darkness? *I send thee to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.* And are you not in darkness? Where there is true knowledge of divine things, there is that cheerful sense of the Divine favour; there is the true light of the soul. Alas! poor creatures, so thick is the darkness which surrounds you that you hardly know there is such a thing as light. And is not your prison *strong* too? Is it not fortified by the hand of God, and guarded by the legions of heaven? Are not your fetters weighty? Surely you must have had some experience of it. Can you not remember the time when you struggled with them, and made some feeble efforts to throw them off; but have ye only locked them on so much the faster? Oh! that you would consider this, then you would soon see yourselves in a very deplorable case.

2. Think of the dreadful execution day. You are now condemned malefactors; but,

alas! in a little time the sentence will be executed. So you read, *But those mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring them forth, and slay them before mine eyes.* And can you bear that, think you? Imagine yourselves standing before the bar of God; imagine the Lord Jesus Christ addressing himself to you: “Sinner, I charge thee, as a rebel to me and to my heavenly Father. I charge upon thee all the violation of my law, and all the contempt which thou hast cast upon my gospel. Answer for thyself; if thou hast one word to offer in arrest of judgment, do it immediately, before the irrevocable sentence passes, otherwise thy *damnation lingers not.*” What will you say? Will you plead your innocence? will you excuse your guilt? These pretences will be overruled, and you will soon stand speechless and amazed. And what is the sentence, *Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* Is there not, indeed, something very terrifying in it? What will you do when you hear it pronounced upon yourselves? Will you resist the execution of it? Will you oppose your feeble strength to his executioners of vengeance, when they shall seize you; or to the

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arm of God which will be lifted up against you? or will you betake yourselves to flight, and search for some obscurity that an omnipresent Being and an all-seeing eye is not able to discover? or will you strengthen your hearts with obstinate resolution to bear the Divine vengeance without shrinking under it? All your stupidity has not yet taught you to think so absurdly, or to reason so falsely. You must see yourselves poor, captivated, helpless creatures, and feebler when opposed to that awful Power than the feeblest worm when opposed to you.

3. Think of the riches of Divine grace in providing a strong hold. Is there nothing insinuating; is there nothing melting in such a thought as this? That God looked with compassion on our fallen state, that he erected a strong place of refuge, that he drew this plain way to it; that he sent his messengers to you again and again freely to offer to you an entrance into it? Is there no charm in such condescension and goodness; nothing that should incline you *not to receive the grace of God in vain?*

4. Think in how little a time you may cease to be *prisoners of hope*. Multitudes who were once so are now prisoners of de-

spair. Thousands and ten thousands, who SERM.  
VI. once attended on these messages of grace, and perhaps many, who have joined with us in attending upon them, are gone down to destruction. They trifled with the only season of grace, and now there is no hope; the gates of the city of refuge are shut, and it is in vain that they cry for admittance. Another prison has received them, and, like the fallen angels, with whom they partook in their crimes, they are *reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day*. And are you not liable to this most dreadful fate? God may swear in his wrath that, with regard to you, the time shall come when hope shall be no more. And can you see then all your hope hanging upon so slender a thread, and see it with a stupid unconcernedness? Surely if your hearts are not harder than the nether millstone, such considerations as these must work upon them. I would hope that they do in part work.

2. To awaken sinners, I would only say, Flee to the strong hold with speed and resolution, and in an humble use of all those assistances which God is offering to you in his word.

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1. Flee with speed: as the angels said to Lot, I may say to you, *Arise, flee for your life, look not behind you.* If you delay it for a week or a day, the prison doors may, perhaps, be shut upon you, and all your schemes and your hopes be for ever disappointed. Multitudes have perished with good purposes which God never suffered them to live to execute.

2. Flee with resolution. I must deal very plainly and faithfully with you; you must expect a great deal of opposition. Satan will oppose you to the utmost, and, above all, your own corruptions will sit so fast upon you that they cannot be thrown off without vigorous efforts. It will be like cutting off a right hand or plucking out a right eye, but it must be done.

3. Do it in an humble use of the appointed assistance. Take your directions from the word of God. Thankfully accept what help your minister can give to you, but do not entirely trust to an arm of flesh. Remember that it is the Spirit of might and of power that must set you at freedom. *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, in this sense as well as in another, there is liberty.* Therefore maintain an humble dependence upon that Spirit,

and earnestly pray that it may be communicated to you.

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3. To those who have already fled to the strong hold, I would only say,

1. Adore the grace that led you into it, else it had been erected in vain; your eyes had been blinded, so that you would not have perceived it at all, or you would have seen it only to despise it.

2. Let it be your care to continue in it. The man who fled to the city of refuge was safe no longer than he continued there. And such is the case with you. Let it therefore be your concern to place a continued confidence in Christ, to keep close to him, and to endeavour to be more and more intimately united with him. Then you will be *prisoners of hope* in a very different sense from that which we have been considering. Though prisoners in the body, which fetters your souls in their noblest operations, ye shall shortly be released, and rise pure and immortal into the presence of God. And though prisoners in the grave, even those doors shall be opened, and your sleeping dust shall be called out to a state of immortal liberty and glory. Amen.

## SERMON VII.

ESAU'S SALE OF HIS BIRTHRIGHT.

HEBREWS, xii. 16, 17.

*Lest there be any profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, and he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

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Such a caution the apostle thought proper to advance when addressing Christians who made an early and eminent profession, when addressing societies in which there were many who had stood far greater trials than any of us have done ; for he tells us, they had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods, as those who knew *they had in heaven a better and more enduring substance* ; yet, in the very breath in which he says this, he cautions them that they should not cast away their confidence, which, if they retained, it had *great recompense of reward*, implying that the security of their reward depended on

holding fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end. And here he advances a very solemn admonition to them, that they should watch over themselves, and watch over one another in the Christian society to which they belonged, and look diligently *lest any should fail of the grace of God*; or, as it really is in the original, lest he should fall from it, i. e. apostatize from the gospel, lest *any root of bitterness should spring up*, and trouble them, whereby many might be defiled. There is an evident allusion to that passage in Deuteronomy, in which Moses cautions them, *lest there be any root bearing gall and wormwood, that should bless himself in his own heart*<sup>1</sup>, &c. and imagine that he might find some way or another to separate sin and the punishment which God had denounced against it. In allusion to this the apostle intimates that, as there was great danger lest any idolatry tolerated in Israel should be the means of bringing a curse on the whole people, so one profane sensual sinner springing up in the church might pollute, and, in the consequences, destroy many. And, therefore, every one to whom this epistle comes is cautioned for himself, and is excited, as it were,

<sup>1</sup> Deut.  
xxix. 18.

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to look about him, that, if there were any appearances of this kind, they might be taken due notice of, and proper remedies applied to prevent the infection from spreading yet further. And if, which is certainly the case, every member of a Christian society is to be cautioned upon this head, much more should the ministers of the church be solicitous about it. And, as we are to employ our private inspection and personal admonition as occasion may require, so it is our duty to admonish you publicly from time to time on this head. And now that I am returned to you after so long an absence, with so great a desire of seeing your faces again, and with so sincere a concern to be as serviceable as possible to you, this subject has presented itself first to my thoughts as of so great importance that I could not forbear making choice of it for the subject of my present discourse, and urging you to be solicitous for yourselves, for one another, for this society in particular; *lest there should be any profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.* The instance here pointed out appears to me very affecting. It is a grandson of Abraham who is here spoken of, a son of Isaac and

Rebecca, the eldest son, humanly speaking, the heir of the family, who became a sinner, and is pointed out as an object of precaution. Take heed lest you sin like him, and perish like him. We will set ourselves a while more particularly to view this matter ; and here,

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I. We will consider what the crime of Esau was.

II. We will consider the wretched consequences of this crime.

III. We will consider how much care we should take to avoid the like.

IV. I will suggest some advices for our security on this head.

And, oh! that Divine grace may direct those most immediately concerned to apply this admonition aright, that they who are in the greatest danger of losing their spiritual birth-right may be secured, and that others may keep from every approach to it.

I. We will consider what the crime of Esau was ; and it will be the more necessary to do it because there is really some difficulty attending it. You have the story in the concluding part of the 25th of Genesis from the 29th verse ; and the substance of the

SERM. account is, that as Jacob was making a kind  
 VII. of soup, probably with a mixture of savoury  
 ingredients, Esau came hungry out of the  
 field, and asked his brother for some of it ;  
*and Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birth-*

<sup>2</sup>Gen. xxv. *right*<sup>2</sup>. How it came into Jacob's mind to  
 31. make so strange a demand I confess that I  
 have often wondered : but so it was, that he  
 demanded from Esau, for the boon which he  
 solicited, a surrender of his privileges as the  
 first-born. This I suppose must have been  
 founded upon his having heard his elder  
 brother speak of these privileges formerly in  
 a contemptuous manner, as if he thought  
 them not worth a meal's meat ; and to some  
 such foolish and very unjustifiable speech I  
 think it most probable that Esau might now  
 refer. He strangely caught, as it were, at  
 the bargain ; and, foolish and infamous as it  
 was, seems to make an apology for it by a  
 profane jest, that he was just dying for hun-  
 ger, and his birthright could do him no good  
 when he was dead. This shows the violence  
 of his ungoverned temper (for none can ima-  
 gine it possible that in Isaac's house his eldest  
 son, and now a man grown, should want food  
 to support his life) ; it is impossible that this

should really have been his case. And one SERM.  
VII. cannot think it was seriously spoken. But it is a natural picture of those rash men who press on to the gratifying of the present reigning appetite, as if they could not live under any disappointment or delay. And though it is hard to defend Jacob's conduct in making a purchase of this kind, yet the providence of God, in suffering Esau thus to be snared in the licentious words of his mouth, is to be remarked and acknowledged, and if he secretly proposed to have availed himself of his superior force in recovering the birthright, or thought, as he once certainly did, of murdering his brother, and of thus silencing his claim for ever, his guilt was proportionably greater, and his loss the less pitiable. You see that from this account of the matter there were three things that constituted and aggravated his crime.

1. He sold his birthright and the privileges which attended it. And if you ask what they were, there is hardly any passage that I know of in the whole scripture which is more likely to afford a satisfactory answer than that in Chronicles, where we read of Reuben's for-<sup>3</sup> 1 Chron.  
v. 1, 2. feiting his birthright. What was most emi-

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nently called the birthright was the double portion which it is said was given to the son of Joseph, but the chief rulers came of Judah, whereas Levi was ordained to the priesthood. Now these three seem to have been the prerogatives of birthright, to receive a double share in the portion of the patrimonial goods which was afterwards settled expressly in the Mosaic law, in case of two wives, one of which was hated in comparison of the other. If the first be the son of the hated, *the father shall acknowledge him for the first-born, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength, and the right of the first-born is his*<sup>4</sup>. There was undoubtedly in the eldest some degree of authority over the rest, though not that absolute power which some have weakly pretended, and on which, by a train of consequences as precarious as is the foundation itself, they have endeavoured to build such arrogant and pernicious claims. Yet you see Judah's being made ruler instead of Reuben is mentioned as the effect of Reuben's having forfeited his birthright, and God said, as early as the days of Cain, in regard to his younger brother, *To thee shall be his desire, and thou*


<sup>4</sup> Deut.  
xvi. 15, 17.

*shalt rule over him*<sup>5</sup>. As if he would lay in an early caution against the vain pretension : of foolish enthusiasts or ambitious hypocrites, that dominion is founded in grace. Again, though in domestic sacrifices every father of a family was undoubtedly the priest of it in the earliest days of the world, as might be proved from a variety of passages, yet it was natural, and in many instances it might be necessary that he should often devolve the active part of the service on some other person ; and who so fit as the eldest son ? Accordingly we find, in the Sinai covenant, that young men of the children of Israel offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen to the Lord ; and that these young men were the first-born is evident from what is afterwards said, that God had taken the Levites, to whom this office was committed, instead of the first-born ; because, says God, in the 13th verse, *all the first-born of Israel are mine*<sup>6</sup>. And in acknowledgment of that peculiar right of God to take them, and employ them in sacred services, a particular price was to be paid, and it is called the price of their redemption. And it seems that in the patriarchal families, in consequence of

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<sup>5</sup> Gen. iv.  
7.

<sup>6</sup> Numb.  
iii. 13.

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VII.  this, there was some peculiar blessing pronounced on the first-born, in which his right to these peculiar privileges was recognised by the father of the family, and his interests recommended to the blessing of God, particularly in the view of having the chief authority among the other children of the family: *Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's son bow down unto thee, &c.* And this was solemnly done in the name of the Lord. Thus it was, we know, in the blessing pronounced by Isaac, which both he and Esau seem to have taken for granted was a blessing to be pronounced upon the eldest son. These were the rights of primogeniture, so far as we can trace them from the oldest records, which are those of scripture. And you will easily see that there was something in them referring to God and religion, a right of administering solemn services to God, and expecting some peculiar blessing from him, and to be pronounced in his name. And as Esau sold this, it is upon this account that he was called a profane person, and he might have been called profane and foolish too, if he had sold it at a very considerable price, for herds of kine, and flocks of sheep, or heaps of silver

and of gold. But we are to observe further, SERM.  
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as an aggravation of this guilt and folly,

2. That Esau sold it at a very low and sordid price. It was for one morsel of meat, so we render it, but I think not with the strictest propriety, a morsel generally signifying one mouthful of solid food; whereas *βρωσεως*, the word here used, rather signifies a meal. And it is further to be observed that the word which we render sold, *απεδοτο*, also signifies to give away, and might very well have been used if the thing had been parted with, without any price at all. I should, therefore, translate the whole clause, for one meal he gave away his birthright. He came in hungry from hunting: he met with a savoury dish of soup, and flew upon it, if one may be allowed the expression, with the eagerness of one of his hounds; and, when resigning the birthright, of which he probably used to make a jest, he parted with it as readily as if it had been some little bird or beast which he had taken. Now for a man, a grown man of at least forty years of age, to be so eagerly set upon a thing which is presently to be swallowed down his throat, upon a favourite dish of meat, as to give any thing for

SERM. VII.  it of considerable value, though far inferior to his birthright, is a most shameful thing. And accordingly it is mentioned as one of the meanest characters which can be imagined, that a man should be ready to do a wrong and an evil thing for such a consideration as that. When speaking of a partial man, who has respect of persons, for a piece of bread that man will transgress ; for a mess of lentil pottage this Esau sold his birthright, and then,

3. He attended the sale with a profane jest. Behold *I am just dying with hunger, and what good shall my birthright do me.* It is a thing not to be imagined, that any man belonging to Isaac's family should be in danger of starving, and especially his eldest son ; or that a man, who had vigour enough to carry him through a chase, should be in danger of perishing for hunger before he could get a few steps further. I take this, therefore, to be nothing but a foolish and ill timed joke ; that *jesting* which I am sure is *not convenient* when it turns upon matters wherein religion is concerned. It here looks as if Esau could not have been contented with slighting his birthright unless he had

insulted it too. Insulted it not only by the mean and scandalous price at which he set it, but by the air of mirth and spirit with which he made it over to his brother. It is gone, and let it go, a hungry man would not starve for that. And therefore it is immediately added, thus Esau despised his birthright: and what was the consequence? what made him serious too late? His mirth and laughter were like those of fools, which *are as the crackling of thorns under a pot*, the blazing soon went out, and left him in darkness and sorrow. Which we are to consider,

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II. And survey the wretched consequences of this crime. Afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, and *he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears*: which you see expresses two things. He was rejected when he would have inherited the blessing, and his tears could not prevail to reverse what had been pronounced.

1. He was rejected when he would have inherited the blessing. This was another affair. It does not by any means appear

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that Esau apprehended the blessing to go along with the birthright, though he might easily have seen it if he had reflected. For it would be absurd to suppose a part of the blessing pronounced, where it was known that the birthright was not, unless we suppose the birthright intentionally transferred, particularly that which related to some dominion or preeminence over the brethren of the family. But Esau, being reminded of it by his father, was desirous of receiving the blessing, without scrupulously considering whether, after what had past, it were or were not his right. Isaac, that he might in the decline of life pronounce it with greater spirit, ordered his son to prepare him a little treat of venison, which he might eat before the solemnity passed. And Esau went out to catch it, and get it ready (for in those hot countries meat, and especially hunted meat, is eaten as soon as possible after it is killed), and Rebecca, in the mean time, put Jacob on a scheme of obtaining the blessing, which succeeded by a strange concurrence of circumstances, and as it seems not without some peculiar interposition of Providence. I can by no means vindicate the conduct either of

Jacob or his mother. But God suffered a SERM.  
VII. lie and a dishonourable stratagem to succeed on poor Isaac, whose faculties were so much decayed, that he might punish the profaneness of Esau; and, though he had taken Jacob for him while the blessing was pronouncing, yet when Esau undeceived him and solicited a blessing, either the same blessing, or at least another which might be equivalent to it, the suit was rejected; and the suppliant found his father strangely peremptory, under, as it should seem, some more than ordinary Divine influence. We are to add, that,

2. Neither the entreaties nor the tears of Esau could prevail for a reversal of what had been done. He found no place for repentance, or as I would rather render it, he found no room *for repentance though he sought it*, i. e. not repentance itself, but rational room for it, *with tears*. You will easily imagine that room for repentance signifies an opportunity of getting some sentence, which has been passed, reversed, when a person appears sensible of a foolish bargain or a wrong conduct, and accordingly solicits it as a favour that some-

SERM. VII. thing past may be forgotten. It is the same phrase with that used, *I gave her space to repent: but she repented not of her fornication*<sup>7</sup>. Now it is said, that Esau found not this room for repentance, *though he sought it carefully with tears*: sought it with great anxiety, with great earnestness, yea, with a flood of tears, as we expressly read in the story; and truly one cannot read it without some emotion and concern, though so bad a man is in question. When Esau heard the words of his father, i. e. *I have blessed him, and he shall be blessed*, words which he spoke *trembling very exceedingly*, he cried with a *great and exceeding bitter cry*, and said to his father, *Bless me, even me also, oh my father!* And when Isaac pleaded the impossibility of undoing what had been done, it is said again, and *Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, oh my father!* And *Esau lifted up his voice and wept*. Whatever the reason was, whether he really valued the blessing, or whether the pride of his heart made him impatient to think that he had been supplanted again, and such an advantage taken

<sup>7</sup> Rev. ii.  
21.

against him as might naturally draw after it some hazardous consequences, yet so it was that he was quite in earnest and exceedingly solicitous about the matter. Yet it was in vain, he was rejected as to his great petition: his father would not change his mind; and though he did indeed declare his good wishes for him, and did promise him an inheritance, yet it was not the peculiar blessing. This mortifying circumstance is mingled with it, *thou shalt serve thy brother*; and not one word is said of that great Abrahamic blessing, which was afterwards intentionally pronounced upon Jacob when setting out for Padan-aram, *in thee, even in thy seed, shall all nations of the earth be blessed*. And instead of being thus blessed Esau was in a manner cursed, for his father had said to Jacob, *cursed is every one that curseth thee*; and it is highly probable, such was the violence of his temper, that Esau cursed him often; and we may be sure that he did not scruple, profane as he was, to curse him, when we find that he deliberately contrived to murder him; and comforted himself with the thought of doing it, i. e. with the thought of

SERM. VII. the fratricide which he intended to perpetrate in cold blood. It is true, indeed, that we afterwards read that Esau was reconciled, and that after that reconciliation we hear no more of him, but that he assisted with his brother at his father's funeral; and then settled in Mount Seir; where we know that idolatry quickly began to prevail; but whether in his days or not we are not certain. Not one word is ever said of his repentance towards God for the wickedness of his conduct and of his heart, though the malice of it seems to have been retained for above twenty years. And almost all that the Spirit of God hath seen fit to say further of him is, that he was a profane person, and that, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, which, when considered in connexion with what we have said, I confess seems to me a sad intimation, that he lived and died in an impenitent state. And though I do not think that what is said of him in the ixth chapter of the Romans, signifies an absolute reprobation with regard to his eternal state, yet I much question whether a person, who had died in a state of acceptance and favour with God, would have been chosen out as an in-

stance of one that was comparatively hated of God; and, as it seems he is in the 16th ver. to whom, though he willed and runned, God did not think fit to show mercy. For if this argument be not absolutely conclusive, which I apprehend most will think it, there is certainly enough in it to awaken our caution; and accordingly let me consider,

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III. How solicitous we should be, that we may not imitate the sin, and share the wretchedness of Esau. *Watch diligently*, says the apostle, *lest there be among you*, &c. We should all of us watch over one another, ministers and people should be solicitous that, if possible, there may not be one such person in a Christian church or assembly: but, above all, we should watch over ourselves, and this is what I intended in choosing this subject; not to state what is critical and curious in it, but to edify you by so affecting an example in the family of Isaac, when it was yet very small, by the example of the eldest and best beloved son of that holy patriarch. Now, that you may be properly warned under this head, let me beseech

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you to consider the greater value of your spiritual birthright, the clearer and more engaging manner in which the tenders of it are made to you, the solicitations which you will meet with to barter away the blessings of it, and the sad instances, which you see about you, in which these solicitations are successful.

1. Consider the superior value of your spiritual birthright. When I speak of any spiritual privileges as our birthright, I would not be understood to intimate that mere birth in any circumstances can entitle any man in the world to the favour of God, and the blessings of a happy immortality. The sons of God, in this sense, are not born of blood, yet certainly there is a sense in which God has called us to glory and virtue. There is such a thing as *the prize of our high calling*. We are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; and, if we are true believers, we are heirs to the blessings of Abraham, as it is expressly said, *they that are of the faith are blessed with faithful Abraham*. If we are Christians, then *are we Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*. Heirs of

what? of a pleasant country, of some external dignity and privileges, of such rights as elder brethren had? O how inconsiderable are these, if ever so highly magnified, when compared with what the gospel teaches every one of us to expect, even we who are now taught to consider ourselves *as a kind of first fruits of God's creatures! We are made kings and priests to God, even the Father.* Appointed not only to an inheritance, but a kingdom, even there where his servants shall serve him, and where they shall see his face. Come not to a temporal crown, *but to the general assembly and church of the first born* that is written in heaven, as the apostle argues in the following verses, and that plainly in this connexion. Had Esau continued in the privileges of the first born they would have lasted but a little time; and then Eliphaz, and Teman, and Omar, and Zepho would in their turns have worn them and lost them, till at last the succession itself had grown uncertain and vanished away. But the inheritance you are taught to expect is *an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, in the celestial Canaan, in the new Jerusalem, where you shall reign in life, where you

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shall minister before the Lord with unwearied, with everlasting vigour, and be pronounced by Christ *the blessed of his Father, inheriting the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.* And will you, on any terms, part with this hope? Consider,

2. The clear and engaging manner in which the tenders of it are made to you. The people of the Jews, when formed by the ministry of Moses into a commonwealth, had certainly advantages far superior to those which Esau ever enjoyed. Though we hope that he must have had a religious education under Isaac and Rebekah, yet he saw not such awful manifestations of God's voice and presence, of his holiness and goodness as Israel did when redeemed from Egypt and the Red Sea, and when brought to sit down at God's feet at Mount Sinai. But the manner in which Christians are urged by the apostle, in the very next words to my text, is far exceeding this. *Ye are not come to that natural and tangible mountain that burns with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, but have God speaking to you in milder accents by his gospel; and how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?* If

we suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by the contemptible trifles of mortal life, when God has done so much to raise our minds to such a superior height, and has for this purpose so graciously spoken unto us by his Son.

3. Consider the many solicitations which you must expect to engage you to part with your spiritual birthright. You are surrounded with tempting objects, that have a natural tendency to draw aside the mind from God, and from Divine things. Blandishments suitable to all the senses, accommodated to all conditions, to all circumstances in life. You may be overtaken by surfeiting and drunkenness, gross snares indeed to be laid for Christians, and yet such as Christ thought fit to caution his disciples against, and would to God that all the disciples of Christ had been superior to them. But, if you have too much of the man to be led about like brute beasts by the offers of these, there are other snares that suit other passions and other appetites too. There are the prospects of gain to suit the worldly minded, and the views of honour and preferment to catch the ambitious, and

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applause, often very ill bestowed, to seize a vain genius, and to lead it perhaps to what is truly infamous though much commended. And your children and friends have interests which may be a snare to you sometimes, yet more than those which seem more directly and immediately your own. And you have infernal enemies who will study your tempers and your circumstances, and will endeavour to employ the most tempting baits in the most proper time, and so will ensnare you if possible; and, would to God there were not reason to add, that sometimes, as in Esau's case, even brethren are supplanting, though they are not likely to improve their birthright by it; yet so it is, that bad maxims and principles sometimes prevail among even those whom one would hope to be good men, and, in some instances, *the light that is in them is darkness*; they imbibe wrong notions of religion themselves, and in the simplicity of their hearts endeavour to propagate them; and sometimes the name of Christ, and sometimes the name of virtue shall be employed, with a success which no other name could have had, to draw men

from the one and from the other; and, probably, if from either, then in reality from both. These are sad truths; and duty requires me to warn you of them, lest peradventure *any root of bitterness spring up*, and many be defiled. And to illustrate and enforce the caution, consider,

4. In how many sad instances are these solicitations successful. Have we not heard of them in all ages? Were there not such, even in the apostles' time, as sold their birthright, forsook the assembling of themselves together, were *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience*: some of them *having loved this evil world*, some *going after strange delusions*, some *loving to have the preeminence*, some *going in the way of Cain*, and *running greedily after the error of Balaam for reward*, and *perishing in the gainsaying of Corah*? All these, you know, are scripture phrases expressive of what passed in those early ages; and have we not heard of later instances, and seen many of them in our own day? Have we not seen many who once made a great profession, but who have lost it? They

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VII. seem to have sold their spiritual privileges and hopes,—for what? why some of them for a morsel of meat literally, or a cup of wine or of meaner liquor, and some for a harlot, and some for a place, and some for a name, and some for the smile of a fellow mortal, and some literally for a song or a jest, for the amusement of vain company, among whom hardly a word of reason, and much less of religion, was to be heard. Oh! how many young persons, who once set out well, have perished by these things: have been seduced into early and visible destruction as to this world; and as for another, God alone can tell! Some of them have sought place for repentance with tears, some of them have died in remorse, have died entreating the prayers of their friends; with what success God knows. I limit not his mercy: but I would not run their risk; nor would I advise any of you to be the men who should try what a few deathbed tears, and the name of Christ invoked, just when life is expiring, will do towards a man's safety, when his life has been spent in a course of sin and of folly. But there have been others, many

others, who, after having sold their birthright, with Esau, have not, with Esau, so much as lifted up their voice and wept, but have died hardened. Having spent the last years of their life apparently making light of religion, and deriding the persons and things for which they professed the most solemn regard; and some of them having lived jovially and merrily, folly and madness have been in their hearts while they lived; and after that, as Solomon says, they have gone down to the dead; and then they have known the value of the inheritance which they have lost, and of the blessings which they have despised and forfeited. And if any of you think that, imitating the character of Esau, you shall fare better, I will leave God to answer you in his own words, and I think that they are in the number of the most awful to be any where found: *The Lord shall separate that man to evil, &c.*<sup>8</sup> And now let the profanest sinner go away and deride them, and see whose words shall stand, God's or his. Methinks I hear you say, God forbid; and I say so too, God forbid that it should come upon any of you;

<sup>8</sup> Deut.  
xxix.  
18—21.

SERM. VII. and that it may not, I intended to have given you a few words of advice under the fourth head, but I can only intimate what I would have said, and cannot say it at large.

Let us often reflect upon the greatness of the privileges to which we are called, and I pray God to grant you eyes of understanding, enlightened, *that you may know the hope of your calling, &c.* Let us guard against what would betray us, and particularly practise a command over ourselves, and study to govern the powers of appetite, and imagination, and passion, and take heed lest they hurry us away as they did this unhappy man. Keep a strait rein over them, for their sallies are sometimes sudden, and that suddenness is the circumstance which gives the fall. Be often thinking of the utter despair of those who are entirely rejected of God, and find no place for repentance. Our Lord describes the place of their abode, as the very habitation of sorrow and distress: *There, says he, shall be weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*; and remember that our Lord applies the caution particularly to those, *there shall be weeping and wailing, &c. when*

*you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God and yourselves shut out.* SERM.  
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Oh! it will be an exceeding bitter cry indeed! We shall hear it. I pray God that none of us may join in it; and that we may not I have but one word more to add, that we should remember that all our hopes of attaining the birthright and the blessing are founded on the mercy of God, and the grace and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is so weighty an admonition, that I would go further out of the way to mention it. By the broken law of God we have brought ourselves under a curse; if we ever obtain the blessing it must be in a better name than our own; and there is a way, a presumptuous way of seeking it, which will itself be sufficient to forfeit it. This Israel after the flesh took, and they are as far from God as the descendents of Esau themselves. As the apostle expressly tells us, *that Israel, which follows after the law of righteousness, has not attained to it<sup>9</sup>, and wherefore? be-* Rom. ix.  
31.

*cause they sought it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law, for they stumbled at that stone; and, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and, going about to*

SERM. VII. *establish their own righteousness, submitted not to the righteousness of God*<sup>1</sup>. Let us, there-  
<sup>1</sup> Rom. x. fore, look unto Christ, who is the end of  
 3. the law for righteousness to every one who believes, so that we are made accepted in the beloved ; and instead of crying for a blessing in vain, shall receive the accomplishment of that promise which I leave with you, and which I heartily pray that God may seal and fulfil to each of us. *Thou shalt call and the Lord shall answer, thou shalt cry and he shall say, here I am ; and the Lord shall command a blessing upon thee from Zion, even life for evermore. Amen.*

## SERMON VIII.

OF THE REMAINING IMPERFECTIONS  
WHICH ATTEND THE CHARACTERS OF  
GOOD MEN.

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JAMES, iii. 2.

*For in many things we offend all.*

IT is a celebrated saying of the son of Sirach, SERM.  
VIII. that *pride was not made for man*; and the propriety of it will abundantly appear, whether we consider the meanness of our original, the weakness of our constancy, or the irregularity of our moral behaviour: but as it was the first sin that insinuated itself into the human soul, so it has taken a very deep rooting, and nothing is more difficult than completely to extirpate it. It is so subtle an enemy that it presses our graces themselves into its service, and often makes use even of apprehended humility to puff us up with vain glory and self-conceit. I imagined, therefore, that it might be of some considerable service to lay

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VIII. before you those defects which are to be found in the characters of the very best of men, and from which we cannot, any of us, pretend to be entirely exempted, without such a degree of insolence as is seldom to be found, even in the proudest heart, and much less in those where a work of grace is already begun, though still struggling with the remainders of corruption: *in many things we offend all.*

This epistle was written by St. James to the Jewish converts, and, as it is his concern to form them to those exalted degrees of piety, whereby they might most illustriously adorn the doctrine of God, so he especially cautions them against those errors and crimes which the Jews were most apt to fall into, and endeavours to fortify their minds against many pernicious principles, which they might have learned from their rabbies in their unconverted state. It is well known that the established teachers among the Jews affected the name of masters, and pretended in a most magisterial and tyrannical manner to prescribe to the consciences of men, demanding of their hearers an implicit subjection to what they

said, no less than if it were an oracle of God. SERM.  
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 This they carried to such an extravagant height, that Dr. Lightfoot tells us it was a saying among them, that the words of the scribes were more amiable and witty than those of the prophets, and equal to those of the law ; and Gamaliel advises the laity to get a rabbi, that they might no longer be doubtful of any thing. And this was peculiarly the humour of the pharisaical sect, as the testimony of Josephus informs us. Now, our Redeemer thought it necessary to caution his disciples, that they should not submit to this tyranny in others, nor affect it themselves. *Call no man father upon earth, neither be ye called masters*<sup>1</sup>. And the words of St. James, in the first verse of this third chapter, are exactly parallel to those of his Lord. *My brethren*, says he, *be not many masters* ; and the words of the text are brought in as an argument to enforce that caution. For, says he, *in many things we offend all*. There are a great many imperfections in our own characters, and therefore we must not pretend to dictate to others with an air of infallibility ; for such conduct must ren-

<sup>1</sup> Matt.  
xxiii. 9, 10.

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der our own faults so much the more criminal, and we must expect to meet with severer condemnation for them in proportion to such insolence, since hereby we make it appear, that, besides a great many other faults which might cover us with confusion, we have so much vanity and pride as to forget that we have any faults at all. The word *πταίομεν*, which we translate offend, does properly signify to slip or stumble, and may very exactly be rendered, We all make a great many false steps. Dr. Barrow illustrates the force of this metaphor better than any other writer I have met with. He observes, that, in scripture, life is called a way: a continued course of the same kind of action is called walking in the way, and each of those particular actions is a step taken in it. To observe those directions and commands which God has given to us for the conduct of our lives is walking uprightly; it is going on with decency, and with success: and a vigorous and active discharge of our duty is sometimes called a running in that way: whereas, on the contrary, lighter instances of disobedience are represented by stumbling; gross

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crimes by falling in that way, and apostacy by turning out of it \*. It is observable, that the apostle does not content himself with saying, Brethren, remember that you all offend in a great many instances, though this had been abundantly sufficient to support the force of his caution, *be not ye many masters*; but he changes the form of his speech so as to include himself in the number of offenders, *in many things we offend*, thereby acknowledging that he was still but of an imperfect character. Now certainly when we consider from whom it is that such an assertion and such an acknowledgment come, from an apostle, from so great an apostle, who made so considerable a figure in the sacred college, far beyond most of his other brethren, we could entertain no doubt of the universal truth and reasonableness of it, though we could find no one scripture that was parallel to it, and though we knew a great many people in the world in whose characters there were no visible defects. But this is not the case; for scripture and observation do so abundantly concur to evince the justice of this observation

\* Barrow, vol. i. p. 109.

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VIII. that we must necessarily have yielded to it, though these had been only the words of Seneca, or Epictetus, or some other heathen moralist.

It appears that good men, under the Old Testament, were well aware of their own imperfections. It is true that we do sometimes meet with some passages which, to an inattentive reader, might appear unwarrantably bold. They often appeal to God, that they had *walked before him in a perfect way*; and desire that he would *judge them according to their righteousness*. But, to be sure, they only intended to maintain that they have in the main course of their lives endeavoured to serve him in the sincerity of their hearts, and that their consciences did entirely acquit them of some particular instances of notorious guilt, which the malice of their enemies charged upon them. For if you look into the history of these very men, you will find that they offended in many instances; and if you look into the writings of some of them, and particularly of David, you will find the most penitent acknowledgments of their imperfections. But I will not refer you to such places as those, where the most eminent saints in the

Old Testament acknowledge their own personal imperfections; but will rather confine SERM.  
VIII. myself to other texts, where the assertion is more universal. When Solomon was praying, at the dedication of the temple, for the pardon of those sins which the Israelites might confess in that place, he acknowledges, as he goes along, *that there is no man upon earth that does good and sins not*<sup>2</sup>; and, still more emphatically, *there is not a just man upon earth, that does good and sins not*<sup>3</sup>, i. e. None are so perfectly good as to be got above the remainders of sinful imperfections; and, in another place, he puts it to the conscience of every particular person to judge whether he could maintain such a perfection: *Who can say, I have made my heart clean; I am pure from every sin*<sup>4</sup>? Nay, David in effect declares 4 Prov. xx.  
9. that we have not only some faults, but more than we can enumerate, or even discern. *Who, says he, can understand his errors*<sup>5</sup>? and 5 Psa. xix.  
12. elsewhere, *If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord! who can stand? Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified*<sup>6</sup>. And though 6 Psalm  
cxliii. 2;  
cxxx. 3. the gospel be a much more excellent dispensation than the law, though it makes a much

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clearer revelation of our duty, and communicates much stronger motives and more abundant supplies of grace, yet even this gospel itself does not so far exalt its professors as entirely to free them from all remainders of imperfection. Consult the writings of those apostles who well understand it, and were employed to settle it in the world, and you will find them, as James, confessing that *in many things we offend all*<sup>7</sup>. So St. John declares, that *if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*<sup>8</sup>. And Paul, that *the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh*<sup>9</sup>. So that he himself was not free from the struggle, though employed in so honourable a work, and endowed with so peculiar a proportion of Divine grace, but in the very same epistle where he exhorts the Corinthians and Philippians to be followers of him, he humbly confesses that *he had not as yet attained, neither was he already perfect*<sup>1</sup>; but, on the contrary, was under an unhappy necessity *to keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, lest, after he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway*<sup>2</sup>. And if we reflect on our own experience and observation, we shall find that it

<sup>7</sup> James. iii.

<sup>2.</sup>

<sup>8</sup> 1 John

i. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Gal. v. 17.

<sup>1</sup> Phil. iii.

<sup>12.</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. ix.

<sup>23.</sup>

will echo back the truth of such scriptures as these. If we look about us in the world, as we shall see by far the greater part of mankind living in a state of utter estrangedness from God, and serving divers lusts and pleasures, so we shall find some irregularities and defects in Christians themselves, in Christians of the most amiable and complete characters ; and to be sure, if we survey our own lives, we shall find a great many mistakes in them ; and that we are every day, in some instances or other, neglecting our duty, and transgressing the rules of the Divine commands, and shall discover still greater cause of humiliation and confession, when we enter into a strict examination of our hearts, and review those secret abominations which are there visible. All these may be sufficient to convince the vanity and the insolence of those who pretend that they have already attained to perfection, or at least assert that, though they may be imperfect themselves, others have attained to it, not only in the apostolic times, but in the successive ages of Christianity. Whoever considers what I have now been offering will see reason to be entirely of the contrary opinion, and to acknowledge

SERM. the truth of this general assertion, *In many*  
 VIII. *things we offend all.* But, after all, it was  
 not the explication of the text, or the proof  
 of a speculative doctrine, which was the thing  
 proposed in the choice of these words. The  
 design was here, as in all my other discourses,  
 entirely of a practical nature; and accord-  
 ingly it will be my business,

I. To enumerate some of those particular  
 instances in which good men are most apt to  
 offend.

II. To consider what practical improve-  
 ment is to be made of these imperfections of  
 character in ourselves and in others.

I. I would consider some obvious and im-  
 portant instances in which all good men are  
 ready to offend. I would enter into the  
 enumeration of them for my own admonition  
 and for yours, and I heartily beg the assist-  
 ance of the Divine grace to fix the conviction  
 upon each of our hearts; and to form us to  
 a more diligent care to outgrow those imper-  
 fections which we cannot deny; and, as near  
 as the frailty of our nature will permit it, *to*  
*perfect holiness in the fear of God.*

1. We all offend in the formality of our

devotion. We have a great deal of important business with God : we are frequently admonished of it, and exhorted to apply ourselves to it ; and, as for those of us who are sincere Christians, it is certain that we dare not live in the habitual and constant neglect of it. We do not only assemble for God's public worship, but we sometimes pray to him in our secret retirements ; and, as I would hope, every one of us in our families too : but must we not acknowledge that we often manage our devotions so as to make them no more than a form ; and so in the sight of God no better than an omission. How often do we contract our prayers into a few hasty moments, while we are eagerly pursuing the business of life, or can lavish whole hours in recreation and amusement ? and, which is still worse, how often do we seem entirely to have forgotten the spirituality of the Divine nature, while, like those hypocrites whom Isaiah mentions and condemns, we *draw near to him with our mouths, and worship him with our lips, but our heart is far from him*<sup>3</sup> ? <sup>3</sup> Isa. xxix, 13.

How often do we throw ourselves into a posture of prayer, without seriously recollecting the perfections and majesty of that God be-

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fore whom we are appearing, or the importance of that business on which we are entering? or, if we have taken any care in the preparation of our heart, and have begun our addresses with any serious sense of God upon our spirits, how quickly is our attention interrupted, and how many of our prayers are little more than one continued struggle between a sense of the Divine majesty on the one hand, and of the importunity of worldly vanity on the other? Nay, I fear that there are seasons when we have not the resolution to maintain the struggle for God and our own souls, but feebly yield ourselves to that vain importunity, and are so regardless of that sacred Person to whom we pretend to be speaking, that for some minutes together we hardly know what we are saying; and at other times, when our minds are more attentive, they are often so cold and unaffected that it looks as if we came to mention such and such blessings before God, only to tell him that we did not value them, and had no hearty desire after them. It is true, my friends, that this formality of devotion is only known to God and the worshippers, for they seldom fall into those external indecencies

which may disclose it to the eyes of their fellow-creatures. But when I consider how often I have heard the most lively Christians complain of it, and how often I have heard it lamented even by those whose business it is to lead the devotions of others, and, by consequence, have very considerable advantages of exciting their own, I cannot but apprehend that it is a very common case. I must not here aggravate the guilt of it at large, and I would hope that it is the less necessary because I once gave you a particular discourse upon it. Thus much, however, I would observe, that as formality in devotion is very foolish and criminal in every rational creature, so is it peculiarly unaccountable in those who have experimentally known the pleasure of converse with God, and who have been deliberately and powerfully convinced of the importance of pardon, and grace, and eternal salvation, which they are seeking in their daily prayers; and have studied many of the endearing circumstances of those mercies which they acknowledge in their daily praises.

2. We all offend in our forgetfulness of God in the intervals of solemn devotion. I

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have lately been representing our obligation to have our eyes ever towards the Lord ; and have been giving a variety of instances in which we are peculiarly obliged to have such regards. But must we not own that we have failed in each of them ? that we have neglected them even since they were so largely and so solemnly recommended ? We often go on in our worldly business, only with a desire that it may be successfully dispatched, without regarding God in it, or maintaining a dependence upon his blessing ; we spend, it may be, whole hours in recreation, without one serious reflection, without considering whether those recreations be, all things considered, the most proper we can engage in ; or, perhaps, without reflecting whether we have need of any recreation at all at that time, and in those circumstances ; and it plainly appears that we think ourselves excused from any thoughts of God, while prosecuting them. We meet with temptations, and encounter them in vain, depending upon ourselves, and so fall by them. We entertain a variety of solicitous cares about future events, while we neglect to *cast them upon that God who cares for us*. We give ourselves

up to all the aggravating circumstances of an affliction, without remembering that it came from God, and is sent with a most merciful design. We receive particular mercies from God with as little sense of our obligations as if he had no hand in them; but as if they were the inseparable attendants of our being: and we pass through an uninterrupted succession of them, without the intermixture of one thought of affectionate gratitude and ardent love, it may be, for several waking hours together. When our thoughts are at leisure, how seldom do we choose God for the subject of them, and how often do we give the preference to those objects which are at best but trifling and inconsiderable, and, perhaps, vexatious and tormenting to us? Nay, I fear, we do frequently forget God, even while he is speaking to us, while we are attending upon public instruction, or reading the scripture in our closets or our families; how often are our thoughts fixed upon something else, and how often are they so engrossed by curiosity and criticism, that we forget the devotional and practical improvement? Now, when we recollect what was said in the former discourse, to prove that such regards are equitable and

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honourable, delightful and advantageous, I hope that we shall be abundantly convinced of the guilt and folly of such neglects.

3. We all offend in being so ready to disregard the Lord Jesus Christ. When we view him as represented in scripture, it is beyond dispute that he is the *chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely*; and when we consider the admirable manifestations of his love to us, we must humbly acknowledge that it exceeds our description, or even our imagination. And I have had occasion formerly to show you at large, that there is hardly any circumstance in life, in which it does not become us to regard Christ in one view or another; either as our teacher or our governor, our atonement or our intercessor, our example or our strength, our guardian or our forerunner; and yet, after all, how often is it that we spend the morning, and afternoon, and evening, a whole day, without any serious and lively thoughts of Jesus Christ? We read his instructions, his commands, and his example, without seriously remembering how highly we are obliged to faith, obedience, and imitation. We fly to his atonement, as our only hope under the

immediate guilt of any aggravated offences, but we seldom retain upon our spirits a lasting sense of the value of it. And, when we have gone on regularly for a considerable time, we insensibly forget former guilt, and our need of an interest in his reconciling blood. When we are addressing ourselves to God, it is sometimes very evident that we mention the intercession of Christ merely as a form of compliment, without any deep and affectionate sense that we must owe all our acceptance to it. Were it not so, why should we so frequently see a family or congregation changing their posture of worship as soon as ever we come to those words where we mention the name of Christ, and declare our dependence on his mediation in our favour: that people generally begin to rise, as if the concluding words of prayer were so far from being any important part of it, that they were only a form of giving notice that the duty was already concluded, and so they might betake themselves to some other employment. Again, how seldom is it that we have an affectionate recollection of the Redeemer, or that the comforts of life have a sweeter relish with a regard to this thought, that they come

SERM. by the direction and interposition of Christ ;  
 VIII. and how seldom do we feel it in our souls,  
 that *without him we can do nothing*? How often do we read, and think, and speak of what Christ was upon earth, and what he did here, of what he is now in heaven, and what he is doing there, without any becoming impressions of mind, as if it were no more than an idle tale, or a story that we had not the least interest in? Now this is so much rebellion against the Divine commands, so much brutal stupidity, so much more than brutal ingratitude in such forgetfulness of Christ, that a very little reflection may abundantly convince us that it is an offence of a very important nature.

4. We all offend in the mispenditure of our time. God has commanded us that we should *redeem it*<sup>4</sup>; and that whatever our *hands find to do, we should do it with all our might*<sup>5</sup>; and he has given to us the brightest example of diligence and zeal in the life of our blessed Redeemer; and has promised such an exceeding and abundant reward as might be sufficient to awaken the most stupid soul, and to inspire the coldest heart with Divine fervency and zeal. But under all

<sup>4</sup> Eph. v.  
16.

<sup>5</sup> Eccles.  
ix. 10.

these engagements and encouragements, how little do we do for God and for the world?

It is certainly some degree of sin to attend to less duties with the neglect of others which are of greater importance: but how often do we profusely throw away our precious moments in mere sloth and inactivity? But why do I say our moments? our hours, our days, and, perhaps, I may add, our weeks too are often spent in such a manner as to turn to very little rational account. How often do we lie dozing upon our bed, when duty would require us, and health would allow us to be up and dispatching the business of life! How much time do we trifle away in unnecessary amusements and recreations, in visits that turn to no manner of account, in intervals between one business and another! And how much time do we daily lose by doing business in a droning and indolent way, so that we are as long again about it as we need, and after all we do not do it half so well as we otherwise might! Lord, forgive my sins of omission, said a most useful Christian upon his dying bed. And I am confident that there is not one among us but has daily reason to offer the same request. I

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would only observe, that this neglect is much aggravated, as to most of us, by that uninterrupted health which we, through the Divine mercy, enjoy. One day of health, and vigour, and sprightliness is, to all the most important purposes of life, worth a week or a month when nature is languishing and decaying; but how profusely do we trifle away our healthy days, and even the most vigorous and sprightly moments of them.

5. We all offend in pride, or an immoderate conceit of our own merit and excellency. Though we are not so foolish as to think that we deserve any thing from God, yet it is certain that, with regard to him, we have not that constant humble veneration and religious dread, which would become such mean and guilty creatures when treating with so exalted and so holy a Being. And in our behaviour to our fellow-creatures we very frequently discover an air of self-esteem, far superior to what our characters will warrant. Sometimes we cannot forbear from openly commending ourselves, or, at least, from insinuating our own ideas of our importance in so intelligible a manner that a child might know what we meant; and yet

this is, by the common consent of mankind, a very great indecency: and an inspired writer has said, *let another man praise thee and not thy own mouth, a stranger and not thy own lips.* Our pride does also discover itself in our impatience of contradiction. If others think differently from ourselves, we are ready to grow warm upon it, and hardly have patience to hear their reasons. But especially does our pride swell and toss, when our friends take the liberty to tell us of any thing which they think amiss in our conduct and behaviour. If the reproof be not given in so 'courtly a manner as that it can hardly be distinguished from a compliment, we think ourselves highly affronted, and snarl as a tiger would do against one who should attempt to draw a thorn out of his foot. Nay, I believe we are all of us sometimes so perverse as to contradict our own convictions, and undertake to vindicate what another blames, when we know in our own consciences that we deserve the censure. Our pride does further discover itself in being ambitious of the praise of men, and taking so much pleasure in their applause; and, on the other hand, in having too tender

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a sense of their disapprobation, and especially of their contempt, so that we are often more sensibly touched with an irregularity in our behaviour, because it has made us ridiculous in the eyes of men, than because it renders us criminal in the sight of the great God himself. Now, if we look into our Bibles, we shall find that the Divine wisdom is represented as saying, *Pride and arrogancy do I hate*<sup>6</sup>. *Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: he beholds the proud afar off, and sets himself to resist them; whilst he gives grace to the humble, and delights to dwell with them*<sup>7</sup>. And surely, if we consider such passages as these, we must rationally allow that there is a great deal of deformity and guilt in such a temper; and shall not be ready to talk of pride as if it were an honourable, or at least an innocent thing; and as if it were a credit to our character to justify them from many little weaknesses by attributing them to pride.

6. We all offend in a propensity to rash and excessive anger. There are, indeed, some limitations within which it is possible for us to *be angry, and not to sin*; but it is seldom that we are so happy as to know those degrees

and to keep to them. We are apt to take fire upon every little provocation: nay, to create to ourselves imaginary provocation, and then to be, in good earnest, very angry at that. At other times, when we have indeed received an injury, though we do not retain a malicious design of returning it, yet we cannot heartily forgive it till we have eased our spleen by some passionate expostulations with the person who committed it. And upon this head I cannot but mention, that fretfulness of temper in which a great many good people too habitually indulge themselves, who yet would think it very scandalous and very criminal to break out into violent transports. But surely, if we recollect that Solomon has told us that *anger dwells in the bosom of fools*<sup>8</sup>, and Paul has cautioned us<sup>9</sup> against it as *giving place to the devil*<sup>9</sup>, and that our blessed Redeemer has told us<sup>1</sup> that it will subject us to the judgment of God, we cannot look upon it as a small offence.

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<sup>8</sup> Eccl. vii.  
<sup>9</sup> Eph. iv.  
<sup>1</sup> Matt. v.  
22.

7. We all offend in the impatience of our spirits under afflictive dispensations. We dare not indeed maintain with Jonas, that *we do well to be angry* with God himself, and

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are seldom so lost to all sense of decency as not to acknowledge that it is our duty to be resigned to his will; but it is much easier to acknowledge the reasonableness of submission than actually to practise it: when the afflicting hand of God is upon us, we are then apt to entertain hard thoughts of God; and praying to him, and not receiving an immediate answer, we are ready to say, *Has God forgotten to be gracious? are his mercies clean gone for ever?* And, under such an affliction, we are ready to apprehend that we have a toleration to be fretful and peevish towards those about us, because we are in the bitterness of our soul, without considering that though humanity will require them to excuse it, yet certainly grace ought to teach us to avoid it.

8. We all offend in the deficiency of our charity to our fellow creatures. We are often too severe in our censures of others. Sometimes in censuring whole bodies of men, who are of an opinion different from our own, as if there were no knowledge nor fear of God under another form of worship and church government. We are apt to maintain too

rigorous an opinion of particular persons, for want of that candid Divine temper which *thinks no evil, and rejoices not in iniquity*, but believes and hopes all things for the best. We must all complain that we have too little generosity of soul, and are not affected as we ought to be with the troubles and the calamities of our fellow creatures. We are, it may be, too backward to *deal our bread to the hungry*, and to contribute liberally to the supply of those whom Providence has placed in necessitous circumstances: far from *devising liberal things*, and searching out occasions and opportunities of doing good, we can hardly be wrought upon by the importunate exhortation of others. And when we see our brethren under other afflictions, we do not feel their calamities as our own; we do not give them such an affectionate and tender remembrance in our prayers as we should desire from them in the like circumstances. We must further acknowledge that we are all defective in our charity to the souls of men, and our concerns for their eternal salvation. How little are we troubled to think that there are many heathen nations that know not God, and are going down to

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everlasting destruction without any open warning of their danger ; and when we are praying for the propagation of the Christian and the Protestant religion, how formal are those addresses ; and, which is yet more inexcusable, we are too little concerned for the souls of persons whom we know and converse with, of persons who, it may be, are most intimately related to us. We can actually see them in the way to everlasting burning, without that bleeding compassion, and that internal anxiety of spirit which would become us on so mournful a prospect. We are not so affectionately concerned in pleading with God for them, or so ready to address our admonitions to them, or so much concerned to search out the most proper methods for application, as the cogency of the case would require. Now, when we consider that this is that new command by which we were to be known to be the disciples of our heavenly Master<sup>2</sup>, and that Paul has told us that *it is fulfilling the law*<sup>3</sup>, we must own that a defect in charity is a defect of very considerable importance.

<sup>2</sup> John xiii.

34, 35.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. xiii.

10.

9. We all offend in the criminal indulgence of sensual appetites. Those who are

Christians have in the main *crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts*<sup>4</sup>; but though we hope through grace that, with relation to ourselves, it is fastened to the cross, yet how slowly does it die! And how many vigorous efforts does it make to recover its liberty and its authority again? We have already seen St. Paul confessing that he was forced to *keep under his body and bring it into subjection*<sup>5</sup>, to beat it down with heavy and repeated blows, and even to make a slave of it, lest after all the singular advantages which he enjoyed as a preacher and an apostle he should be a castaway. And we must all of us, no doubt, confess that though by Divine grace we escape the gross pollutions which are in the world through lust, yet in instances less shameful and scandalous we are too ready to *make provision for the flesh*, and to place more of our happiness in the comforts and entertainments of it than is becoming to rational creatures, and especially to Christians.

10. We all offend in the management of our tongue. I mention this because it is so particularly taken notice of by the apostle in the words which immediately follow my text,

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<sup>4</sup> Gal. v.  
24.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. ix.  
27.

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VIII. *If any man offend not in word, that man is a perfect man.* And the son of Sirach, who, though he be not an inspired writer, yet plainly appears to be a man of admirably good sense, and to have made very judicious reflections upon human nature, has a passage nearly parallel to this: *Who is there that offends not with his tongue?* And in another place, *Blessed is the man that has not slept with his mouth.* The offences of the tongue are of a very comprehensive nature, and take in many of those which we mentioned under the former head. It is by unprofitable discourse that we mispend a great deal of our time; by perverting speech that we manifest the peevishness, the pride, the uncharitableness of our hearts; and, in one word, most of the positive sins of good men are sins of the tongue, the tongue is the instrument of most of the positive evils with which sincere Christians are chargeable.

11. We all offend in an immoderate fondness for worldly enjoyments, and are forgetful of our everlasting rest. God has set before us *an exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, and has required us to *set our affections on things above*; and, if we be Christians in-

deed, we have deliberately renounced earth for our portion, and chosen our happiness in heaven. But, alas! how apt are we to be seeking our rest here, to be eagerly solicitous about securing the enjoyments of some creature comfort; and when we taste the sweetness of it, how apt are we to say, this is that which shall comfort us in days and in years to come, and how unwillingly do we think of parting with it, even though it be to go to dwell with God? How often do we read the promises and descriptions of future glory, those faithful promises, those lively descriptions, and find in our hearts little ardency of desire after it, little joy in the expectation of it; and when the calamities of life fall upon us, how ready are we to sink under them, and how little stress do we lay upon those glorious hopes which God, in his gospel, has set before us? Indeed, my friends, these are shameful instances of stupidity and ingratitude, and we have reason to charge it upon ourselves as despising the pleasant land, and to wonder that God is not provoked by it, to swear that we shall never enter into it.

I should now proceed to the practical improvement of this survey of the imperfections

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VIII. of the most excellent character. There are  
a variety of reflections to be made upon it,  
which I would not omit, nor dismiss with a  
bare mention, therefore I shall reserve them  
to be the foundation of another discourse. In  
the mean time, your own judgment will easily  
teach you that if we offend in so many in-  
stances, we ought to be humbled and peni-  
tent, to be candid in our censures of others,  
and to maintain a continual dependence on  
Christ, in whom alone we have righteousness  
to justify us from the guilt of these offences,  
and strength to enable us to oppose and con-  
quer our natural propensity towards them.

## SERMON IX.

OF THE PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT WHICH  
MAY BE MADE OF THE SURVEY OF OUR  
OWN IMPERFECTIONS AND OF THOSE  
OF OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS.

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JAMES, iii. 2.

*For in many things we offend all.*

It was the business of the last discourse to SERM.  
IX. illustrate the truth of this assertion by an enumeration of those imperfections which are to be found in almost all those who, as there is reason to believe, are sincerely religious, and from which none can, without great insolence and pride, challenge an entire freedom. We all offend in the formality of our devotions; in our forgetfulness of God; in our disregards to our blessed Redeemer, and in our negligence about the improvement of our time: we offend in pride, and in sinful anger; in murmuring and repining under afflictive dis-

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pensions ; in the defect of our charity to our fellow-creatures ; in the irregular indulgence of our carnal appetites ; in the neglect of a due government of our tongue ; and, once more, in our excessive affection to worldly vanity, and a shameful forgetfulness of our everlasting rest.

II. It now remains that I direct your thoughts into the practical improvement which we are to make of such a survey. And let me entreat your serious attention to what I am now to offer ; and then I shall hope that, though some imperfections will still remain while we ourselves remain on this side heaven, many future offences may be prevented by the survey which we have been taking of those that are past, and by our religious improvement of it.

1. Do we all offend in so many instances ? Then certainly we have little reason to be proud of our attainments in religion, and much to abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes. I observed in the beginning of the former discourse, how deeply pride is rooted in human nature, and with what cunning address it insinuates itself into our hearts.

I added, that it frequently draws even our virtues into a confederacy with itself; and attempts to puff us up with conceit on account of our pretended humility. Solomon tells us that *there is a generation who are clean in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness*<sup>1</sup>. Shall we, my friends, be such a generation? We are not entirely washed from our filthiness; for who can say, I am pure from my sin? And shall we be clean in our own eyes? Shall we *trust in ourselves that we are righteous, and despise others, when in many things we offend all*? Shall we be proud of the attainments which we have made in religion, we who are so far from being got above sin, that every day of our lives is stained with it? Surely, my friends, when we feel that complacency which is apt to arise in the mind from a consciousness of having discharged our duty, and especially of having behaved ourselves regularly for a considerable period, we should be upon our guard lest that complacency should at length swell into pride; and we should immediately check ourselves with such reflections as these which this subject would naturally suggest. “O my soul! it is indeed delightful to make

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs  
xxx. 12.

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this reflection, delightful to have the approbation of my own conscience, and a comfortable hope that my God approves me. But I charge thee to remember that it is but a part of thy behaviour which thou art now surveying, and that there is another part which is more gloomy and afflictive than this is bright and entertaining to the review. Thou hast, since thou wast first produced into being, committed a variety of aggravated transgressions against the God of thy life, and the Father of all thy mercies, and there is no need of going back a great way to recollect particulars. Thou canst not reflect upon the last week; no, nor on the last day of thy life, but thou wilt see that *in many things thou hast offended*. Think, O my soul! how thou hast trifled in the most solemn exercises of devotion: think how frequently thou hast forgotten thy God in the midst of the most endearing obligations to remember him! Think with what stupid ingratitude thou hast overlooked thy blessed Redeemer, though he died to purchase thy pardon and salvation: remember how often thou hast felt, and how often thou still feelest, the swellings of pride and the transports of anger, the emotions of

irregular desire and inordinate affection ! SERM.  
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 Think with how much prodigality thou art throwing away thy precious time on the improvement of which thine eternity depends : think how little zeal for God, how little charity to man, how little affectionate longings after thine everlasting rest have been found in thee, and how little are still to be found ! And then, with these reflections, judge whether it is fit for thee to entertain a very high idea of thine own attainments in religion. Rather let me lie down in the very dust, and admire the riches of the Divine patience and forgiveness, that I am not brought down to *the dust of death*, and to the flames of hell !” And, hereupon, we should consider all those particular aggravations which attend our sins, and do, it may be, render those offences of ours which seem smaller in the eyes of our fellow-creatures, far more provoking in the eyes of God than many of the grossest infirmities committed by the heathen or by the unconverted world. For all these let *us lie down in our shame, and let our confusion cover us*<sup>2</sup>. And when we thus feel our shame and our sorrow, we shall become more proper ob-  
<sup>2</sup> Jer. iii.  
25.

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IX. } proud and the haughty, but most freely communicates to the humble soul.

2. If we all offend in so many aggravated instances, then let us learn to renounce all dependence on our own righteousness, and most thankfully embrace that of a Redeemer. From the survey of the imperfections of our character, one would imagine that nothing were more easy than this; but such is the natural pride of our hearts that nothing is more difficult. We are not indeed so distracted as to maintain that our own righteousness is perfect and complete, or that it can in strict justice merit any thing from the hands of God. Nor do we at all scruple to acknowledge in words that we must fix all our dependence upon Christ, and that it is only by him that we can obtain pardon and salvation. Yet we are, alas! too ready to forget these thoughts, and we do not behave as those who are verily persuaded of them. It is possible that a sense of this may be pretty lively upon the mind after the immediate guilt of some aggravated sin: yet at other times, and especially when we go on smoothly in the way of our duty, it is apt insensibly to wear off, so that the great doctrine of our dependence upon the atone-

ment and righteousness of Christ, though it SERM.  
IX. be never denied, is very frequently neglected by us, and neglected to a very shameful degree. Let us then, my friends! improve what we have lately been hearing. Let it convince us more affectionately of our need of a Saviour, and engage us more thankfully to embrace the offers of pardon and happiness by him. Let us, upon the survey which we have now been taking, but seriously think what our own righteousness is, and we cannot avoid acknowledging that it is *but as filthy rags*<sup>3</sup>; and that it is so far from meriting <sup>3</sup> Isa. lxiv.  
6. any favour from God that even the best of our duties deserve punishment, as the best of them are attended with a mixture of guilt. In a penitent sense of this, let us join with St. Paul, who had much more legal righteousness than we, and say that it is our most ardent desire and *our most diligent endeavour that we may win Christ, and be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*<sup>4</sup>. <sup>4</sup> Phil. iii.  
9. And let a sense of our daily guilt add a reverence to the name of that sacred Person by whom we hope to receive, not only for-

SERM. IX.  givenness, but life. And let us endeavour to feel the burthen of sin, that we may the more cheerfully apply ourselves to him who has invited us to come, that we may *find rest to our souls*.

3. Do we all offend in so many things? Then what reason have we to receive all the mercies of our lives with a grateful surprise! We know that they all proceed from the hand of God. Now God is a Being *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and he cannot look upon iniquity*. How surprising then is that care which he takes of us who are such sinful creatures, and, upon that account, are not entitled to the very least of his mercies<sup>5</sup>. Our Lord mentions it as a remarkable instance of the Divine goodness that *God causes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain*

<sup>5</sup> Gen. xxxii. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. v. 45. *on the just and on the unjust*<sup>6</sup>. But surely, when each of us, who, in comparison of the rest of mankind, are righteous and good, when even we come to survey our own characters, we must own that it is a surprising thing that God should bestow so many favours upon us, and it is still more surprising when we consider that God in his great goodness, through Jesus Christ, is remitting the

eternal vengeance which is due to our sins. Surely we might be ready to apprehend that, if at length he would forgive our iniquities, yet he would in the mean time take vengeance on our delinquencies. We might expect that some dreadful temporal calamities should visit us, at least that the bounties of his providence should be interrupted and diminished. But behold he renews them upon us day after day; and, after all the provocations of yesterday, *this day is as the last*, and, perhaps, in some respects, *is yet more abundant*. We are apt to receive these daily favours with an air of indifference and unconcern, as if we possessed them by a necessity of nature, and so they were our inalienable property, or as if we had deserved them by the decency and regularity of our behaviour. But let us learn, from what we have now been hearing, to correct this stupid and ungrateful temper; and to receive them as remembering that our peace and our plenty, our health and our friends, and all the entertainments and accommodations of life do not only come from the hand of a God who is infinitely above us, but from the hand of a God whom we are continually offending, and from whom therefore we might

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justly expect misery and damnation; and in this view let us consider them, not only with thankfulness but with amazement.

4. If we have all offended in so many aggravated instances, then certainly we have a great deal of reason quietly to bear whatever afflictions God may inflict upon us. Though we were perfectly innocent, our apprehensions of the Divine majesty, and wisdom, and goodness; our remembrance of the many favours which we have already received from God, might engage us to submit patiently to those dispensations which were for the present very grievous and painful to us. Nature would then teach us to argue as Job does: *Shall I receive good from the hand of the* <sup>7 Job ii. 10.</sup> *Lord, and shall I not receive evil?* But the force of this thought is plainly very much improved when we consider that by the guilt of our rebellion against God we have deserved all this, nay, that we have deserved a great deal more: so that, upon the whole, as much as our present calamities are more tolerable than everlasting burnings, so much reason have we to acknowledge that he has punished us less than our iniquities have deserved. This reflection ought to engage every offend-

ing creature to an humble submission ; and we, who are sincere Christians, should be peculiarly affected with it, because our sins have lain under such most heinous aggravations as cannot attend the offences of those who know not God, and believe not the gospel of Jesus Christ. And therefore, though we *should be chastened every morning*, and scourged all the day long, we ought to resolve, with Micah, that *we will bear the indignation of the Lord, because we have sinned against him*<sup>8</sup>. And we might be sufficiently silenced by those words of the prophet, *Let not a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin*<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Micah v.  
7.

<sup>9</sup> Lam. iii.  
39.

5. Do we all offend in so many things? Then do not let us admire others to an extravagant degree, nor speak of them as if they were perfectly faultless. It is certainly our duty to observe the characters of others, and to judge of them with humanity and candour. And when we discover any thing that is truly valuable in them, we should admire it, and love it, and rejoice in it; and we should always make it our care to treat people with a respect proportionable to the value of their characters. Only we should

SERM. take care that we do not carry this to such  
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an extravagant excess, as to have *men's persons in undue admiration*<sup>1</sup>. We should take care that we do not extol people too highly, lest others, who know them better than we, should censure the weakness of our judgment, and should be induced to despise the perfection of their characters in consequence of such extravagant commendations. And we should, likewise, be very cautious that we do not promise ourselves too much from those of whom, in the main, we have a good opinion. We ought not to imagine that they will behave in every circumstance of life just as they ought; that we shall meet with nothing but pleasure and entertainment, and no uneasiness or mortification from them. And this is a caution which is peculiarly proper when we are entering into strict and intimate friendship, and especially into relations which are to continue for life. We must in such cases remember, as Mr. Bolton very solidly advises, that it is not two angels that are forming an alliance, but two of the children of fallen Adam, who have the infirmities of a degenerate nature about them, and who have a great deal to exercise the

<sup>1</sup> Jude,  
ver. 16.

candour and the patience of each other. And, to add no more upon this head, since *in many things we offend all*, we may learn not to make the examples of others, even of the best of men, a rule to ourselves in all particulars, so as to follow them blindly without caution or suspicion, since if we do we see that it is highly possible that we may follow them into sin. And therefore when the apostle St. Paul proposes his own example to the imitation of his Corinthian friends, though he had attained as nearly to perfection as any mere man appears ever to have done; yet he thinks it necessary to add this limitation, *Be ye followers of me as I am of Christ*, so far and no further you may venture to imitate me<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. ii.  
1.

6. Do we all offend in so many instances? Then surely we should not be very forward in our censure of others. When we find a perverse inclination to be severe upon the faults of the world about us, let us seriously consider, can we ourselves stand such a severity? Have we not need of the candour and good humour of our friends to excuse a great many weaknesses and imperfections of ourselves? And, if we have, how can we expect

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that men should be so indulgent to us when we are so cruelly exact upon others? At least, we must all of us acknowledge, that how unexceptionable soever our behaviour to our fellow creatures may be, we can none of us stand the severity of the Divine judgment. *If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand<sup>3</sup>?* Well then, let us see that we do not invite it, and in effect challenge it by our own rigour and uncharitableness, for it is challenging such severity after what our Lord has said: *Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgment soever ye judge ye shall be judged: and he shall have judgment without mercy that shows<sup>4</sup> no mercy<sup>4</sup>.* If we then are unmercifully severe upon the characters of others, what is it but saying that I will stand thy examination, give me judgment without mercy? Perhaps when we are condemning others, and speaking evil of them, we know in our own conscience that we are guilty of the very same faults with them. And *thou art inexcusable, O man, whoever thou art that thus judgest; for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself, in that thou doest these<sup>5</sup> things<sup>5</sup>.* Or perhaps, if we are clear of those

<sup>3</sup> Psalm  
cxxx. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Mat. vii.  
1, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. ii.  
1.

faults, we are chargeable with others much greater, and then that reproof of Christ falls upon us with the directest force: *Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and canst not see the beam that is in thine own* <sup>6</sup>? However, if it be otherwise, if, upon <sup>6</sup> Mat. vii. 4. the strictest examination, we can make our own consciences acquit us of the same faults, or any other that are equal to them; yet, since we have the remainders of corrupt nature about us, and are always falling into some guilt, it becomes us to remember that it is possible that we may fall just in the same manner as others have done, and that the more severe we are upon others the more reason we have to bear it with regard to ourselves. And as this should teach us not to revile others in their absence, so likewise the same thought should make us very gentle and very tender when we undertake to tell others of their faults. And in both these views it seems to be present to the apostle, *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you that are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted* <sup>7</sup>.

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

7. Do we all offend in so many instances?

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Then, to be sure, we ought readily to forgive those who offend us. We are under a necessity of applying daily to the throne of grace for the pardon of repeated offences, and does it become a creature, who must live only upon the mercy of God, to be unmerciful to his fellow creatures? Observe how Christ has represented this in that most affectionate parable of the unmerciful servant, and remember how this parable concludes, *So your heavenly Father also will do unto you, if you do not from your heart forgive every man, his brother*<sup>8</sup>. So shall he do to you, that is, he shall deliver you to torment, and *cast you into prison, till you have paid the uttermost farthing*. And is your debt so small that you can easily discharge it? Think of the text: remember in how many things you offend all, and then judge whether you have not a great deal of need of God's forgiveness; and judge whether you ought to neglect that, without which God has said he will never forgive. And I would further add, that, in order to remind us of our obligation to forgive injuries, the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, when we pray, to make our forgiveness of others the measure

<sup>8</sup> Matt.  
xviii. 35.

according to which we are to ask forgiveness of God. *And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them who trespass against us*<sup>9</sup>; <sup>9</sup> *Lord, if I forgive my offending brother, I desire thy pardon; but if not, I submit to thy severest vengeance. One would think it were hardly possible to recommend forgiveness in more emphatical terms than by prescribing this prayer; and yet our Lord, to make it more forcible, selects this petition from the rest to make a comment upon it, and repeats the same assertion twice, figuratively and affirmatively. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you*<sup>1</sup>. And when it is thus that forgiveness is urged in scripture, judge whether such offending creatures, who daily need it, ought to refuse it to those who have injured them.

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Mat. xvi.

12.

'Mat. vi.

14, 15.

8. Do we all offend in so many instances? Then certainly it is very decent that we should take reproof with patience and with thankfulness. Sensible of our present defects, it ought to be the constant business of our lives to outgrow them, and to come as near to per-

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fection as we possibly can ; and therefore we ought to rejoice in every thing which may be an assistant to us in discovering our faults, and an engagement to us to correct them. And it is certain that the reproof of our friends may be very serviceable to this purpose. We ought, therefore, to take it very kindly and thankfully, that they will give themselves the trouble to watch over us, and to admonish us of what they think to be amiss. But you will, perhaps, say, they mistake my character, and charge me with faults from which I know myself to be free. It is possible they may ; but then consider with what intent do they reprove. If they be people who have any sense of religion themselves, they dare not tell you that they think that you have such and such faults, when at the same time you are free from them ; and therefore you may reasonably conclude that they speak their true sentiments ; and that they speak out of kindness, and, probably, from a sense of duty. And will you be angry with them for this ? It was, at worst, but a mistake ; the mistake of honesty, and probably of love ; and surely you that offend in so many things yourself should not be ex-

ceedingly enraged at this. But, after all, let us be persuaded to think again, are we sure that our friend is mistaken in those faults of which he admonishes us? We see that all the world about us are partial to themselves, and we know that we have a great deal of pride in our own hearts. Is it not possible then that this partiality and pride may be active in this particular instance? Let us bring the matter to a serious examination; and then if we find the foundation of the reproof was just, let us candidly acknowledge it to our friends: let us thank them for their kindness to us in this particular instance, and desire the continuance of it on future occasions. And if, after all, we find that it was groundless, do not let us be so ungrateful as to make a quarrel of it, but let us at least handsomely acknowledge the favour, and promise that we will endeavour to be upon our guard against those little mistakes which may have led our friend into a wrong judgment. I do really apprehend that we are obliged in conscience to take a reproof in such a manner as this: but if we are not, a sense of honour, and a prudent regard to our own character might alone be sufficient

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SERM. IX. to engage us to it. For such meekness and thankfulness under a discipline, which cannot be but something disagreeable and painful, throws a glory upon the person who has so much command over himself. It does not only give a very comfortable hope of amendment, but it argues such a present degree of wisdom and goodness as makes the reprovcr almost forget that he ever saw any thing to blame in the person where he now sees so much to admire. But, on the contrary, if we receive the admonition with indignation and fretfulness, it will never convince our friends, nor convince the world that it was undeserved, but will rather be looked upon as an additional proof that there was a great deal of occasion for it; and then it will discover a new failure in our character, which, perhaps, is much more considerable than any we were reprovcd for; and that is, that we are so ignorant of our own imperfections as not to be able to bear any admonition for them, which will appear highly inexcusable on the consideration which I have before been offering. All these reasons will come with a great deal more weight upon the mind, when we consider how frequently

God speaks with indignation and abhorrence of those who cannot bear to be told of their faults. *He who refuseth reproof erreth<sup>2</sup>: he who hates reproof is brutish, and he shall die<sup>3</sup>.* SERM.  
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<sup>2</sup> Prov.  
x. 17.  
<sup>3</sup> Prov. xii.  
1.  
xv. 10.

9. Do we all offend in so many instances? Then what reason have you to suspect the firmness of our future resolutions, and to fix an entire dependence upon the Divine grace. Surely, when our hearts have so often deceived us already, we must be stupid fools if we trust them again<sup>4</sup>. As to those particular offences which our consciences charge upon us, have we not again and again been convinced of the guilt and the folly of them; and have we not with a great deal of solemnity engaged ourselves to avoid them? and yet have we not fallen again and again after this engagement? Let us not then imagine, that because these convictions and these resolutions are now again renewed, that therefore they will never be contradicted any more: but let us go to the throne of Divine grace, and humbly renouncing all confidence in ourselves, let us beg the communications of that sacred Spirit which can give might to the feeble, and to those who have no power can renew strength; let us be earnestly

<sup>4</sup> Prov.  
xxviii. 26.

SERM. IX.  praying for those assistances of supernatural grace, whenever we appear before God in our stated devotions ; and let us endeavour to maintain a sense of this dependence all the day long : and, if we do so, then shall we find, according to his condescending promise to St. Paul, *his grace shall be sufficient for us, and his strength shall be made manifest* <sup>5</sup> 2 Cor. xii. *in our weakness* <sup>5</sup>.

9, 10.

10. Are we all apt to offend ? Then let us learn for the time to come to be cautious of future temptations, and to maintain continual watchfulness of spirit. We have already met with some errors ; and, since our corrupt and degenerate nature is the same now as it formerly was, we should not rashly throw ourselves into the midst of these enemies. The smart of our former wounds should surely teach us to be upon our guard against them : and as our Redeemer has taught us to pray, *lead us not into temptation*, so we should also maintain a continual watchfulness that we may not enter into it. We should be prudent in foreseeing and cautious of approaching temptation, that we may, if conveniently we can, remove out of the way of it ; but, if Providence oblige us to meet and encounter it, we

should encounter it with something of fear and horror, with our best resolution, lest by any means we should be borne away by it. SERM.  
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11. Let us be glad of every opportunity of laying ourselves under more solemn engagements to God, since we are so prone to offend against him. I hope through grace that we are already, many of us, devoted to God in the bonds of his covenant. Let us be willing to renew our obligations, and to renew them with such circumstances as may have the most powerful tendency to affect the soul. Therefore if any of us have lived in omission of the Lord's Supper, let what we have now been hearing be considered as an obligation upon us to attend upon it, since it is an ordinance which has so excellent a tendency to quicken and strengthen the soul; and, if we have already joined ourselves to God and his people by it, let us rejoice in every opportunity of renewing the holy engagements, and let us be as frequent in our attendance at the table of our Lord as opportunity will admit. I apprehend that immediately after we have been at the Lord's table we are, for a few days at least, under some peculiar care to behave ourselves well,

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IX. and to guard against those offences which we are most ready to fall into. Now, though it is a pity that those impressions should not always last, yet it is well that they are ever made; and we should endeavour to prevent their wearing entirely off by renewing them as often as we can.

12. A sense of the imperfections of ourselves, and of our fellow Christians, should engage us to breathe after that happy world, where we and they shall be *made perfect in holiness*. The pride, the passion, the worldly mindedness, and censoriousness, which are to be met with in many whom one would hope to be sincere Christians, make earth a much less desirable place than it would otherwise be; but our own corruptions are still more burthensome to us than those of our brethren, or at least they ought to be so, and they will compel us frequently to cry out with the apostle, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of sin?*

## SERMON X.

OF KEEPING THE HEART.

PROVERBS, iv. 23.

*Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.*

I AM well persuaded that every sincere Chris- SERM.  
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 tian will most readily acknowledge, with the blessed apostle St. Paul, that *he has not yet attained, neither is he already perfect*. I am persuaded that the greater progress any of us have made towards spiritual perfection, the more sensible we are of our distance from it. I would hope, therefore, that you will be ready with pleasure to attend these important admonitions, which I have this day to lay before you for your further assistance in this great pursuit. Our Lord Jesus Christ has said, *make the tree good, and the fruit will also be good*<sup>1</sup>. So, Christians! if you

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xii.  
33.

desire a great regularity in your lives, give

SERM. X. me leave to urge upon you a care over your hearts. I know that it is the work of Divine grace, in the highest sense, to *make the tree good*. Nevertheless, where that is implanted in the soul there is still need of watchful care, in order to its flourishing and growing there. To such a care we are very solemnly exhorted in those pathetic words of the text, *Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life*. It was the design of these sacred lessons, as the royal Author expresses it, *to give understanding to the simple, and to the young man wisdom and discretion*. But the advices which he gives are of such a nature, that the most aged are not above the need of them; and the neglect of them will be prejudicial, and even destructive to all. He renews the exhortation, verse 20, *to attend to his words, and give ear to his sayings*; and he assures us that they *are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh*, i. e. that they have the noblest tendency upon our present and future happiness. Now, in the front of these admonitions to which he demands so serious an attention, we find that, in the words of the text, as a very proper introduction to all the

rest, and itself a lesson of the highest importance, *keep thy heart with all keeping*. In SERM.  
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opening it to you I will endeavour,

I. In the general, to show you what we are to understand by keeping the heart.

II. To illustrate the peculiar charge of doing it *with all keeping*.

III. I will lay before you a variety of weighty considerations to excite you to this care.

IV. And then will conclude with some suitable advices which, by the Divine blessing, may assist you in it.

And as I have chosen this subject with a sincere and affectionate view to your spiritual improvement and edification, so I earnestly beg your most serious attention; and I heartily pray that he, who has all hearts in his hands, would enable you so to guard your hearts, whilst I am recommending to you this important case, as that you may understand and retain what is now to be laid before you; and may be quickened by it to this most necessary duty.

I. I would briefly show you what we are, in the general, to understand by *keeping the*

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*heart with all keeping*: and here we may more particularly consider the object of this care, the care itself, and the degree in which it is recommended.

1. We may consider the object of this care: it is the heart. Now by the heart, as I before told you, we are to understand the soul, or the spiritual and intellectual part of our nature. I need not labour at large to show you that the word, in scripture, does generally admit that sense, and is put for the mind or the soul, of which it was thought amongst the ancients to be the seat. Thus, when it is said, 1 Sam. x. 9, that *the Lord gave Saul another heart*: the meaning is, that his mind was wrought up to sublimer views, and to a nobler temper than before. So, 2 Chr. xvii. 5, it is, *his heart* that *was lifted up in the ways of God*; that is, his mind was resolutely and zealously set upon them. And as the heart is sometimes put for the soul itself, so at other times it is used for the principal faculties of it, the understanding, the conscience, the affections, and the will. Thus the heart of the disciples is said to have been hardened, when their understanding was so stupid that they did not

comprehend the meaning of what our Lord expresses in no very mysterious language, Mark, viii. 17. Prov. xvi. 9, it is said, *a man's heart deviseth his way*; that is, his thoughts form a variety of schemes. It is put for the affections when David says, Psa. xxxix. 3, *my heart was hot within me*, that is, my passions were raised to great fervency. And, Joel ii. 13, a flow of holy penitent affections is represented *by rending the heart*; and again, Matt. vi. 21, *where your treasure is, there will your hearts be*, that is, your affections will also be. At other times it is put for the will, so particularly Eccles. viii. 11, *because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men, that is, their resolutions, are fully set in them to do evil*. So Barnabas and Paul exhorted their new converts, *that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord*, that is, with a determined resolution of mind, Acts xi. 23. And, to add no more, it is sometimes expressive of the workings of conscience in reflecting upon criminal actions. Thus it is said, 1 Samuel, xxiv. 5, *David's heart smote him because he had cut off Saul's skirt*. It is the resolution of Job,

SERM. chap. xxvii. 16, *My heart shall not reproach*  
 X. *me as long as I live.* The agonies of conscience are expressed, Acts v. 33, by being *cut to the heart*: and the accusations of it, 1 John, iii. 20, *by our hearts condemning us.* It would have been very easy to have thrown together a great variety of other scriptures under each of these heads; but these may be sufficient to show that the word heart is sometimes put for the rational soul, and sometimes for the most considerable of its faculties, for understanding and thought, for passion, and will, and conscience. I proceed,

2. To consider the care itself here represented, and that is represented *by keeping*. And for the better understanding of this, it may be observed that the word used in the original is a military phrase, and may probably mean setting a guard upon a thing, as upon a treasure that we would not lose, or upon a person whom we apprehend to be likely to betray us; and, consequently, it will determine us to take the word heart in such a sense as is most suited to this idea. I do not, therefore, apprehend that it so immediately relates either to the understanding

or to the will, but reacheth to what is a kind of medium between both the thoughts and the passions. And I suppose it is intended to recommend it to us that we set a guard upon each of them, that we should not indulge to every wild and roving imagination, or to every transport of thought, but that love and hatred, desire and aversion, hope and fear, anger and shame, and all the other retinue of the superior powers should be maintained in a due subordination, that we should consider them as natural subjects, and take care so to guard them that they may not prove dangerous rebels. And it is principally in this view that I shall insist upon the passage as expressive of our obligations to govern our thoughts and to control our passions. And I am the more determined to consider it in this view, because they are considered as distinct things from those *issues of life*, or those actions which are the proper productions of the will.

3. We may consider the degree of the care that is here represented; and it is expressed by *keeping them with all diligence*, or, as the original word imports, *with all keeping*, or above all keeping. And this may properly

SERM. X. express both the seriousness and the constancy of this care.

1. It may be intended to intimate to us that we ought to make it our serious care. There is in the generality of mankind a greater propensity to neglect it, because what passes in our hearts is concealed from every eye but that of God, whom we are too ready to forget; though that eye upon us be infinitely more than the united regards of the whole world of our fellow-creatures. Yet, because our reputation and circumstances are not so evidently affected by the workings of the mind as the external actions, we are generally too negligent about this. But the wise man seems to advise us that we should in a very diligent manner set about this, and determine to make it our study and our care that we form proper schemes for it, and that we put them into a strenuous and vigorous execution, regarding it, indeed, as the *one thing needful*, as what we cannot neglect without the most apparent guilt and the most apparent danger: and then,

2. It may further relate to the constancy of that care. It is not merely giving our hearts one grave admonition or solemn charge, but

it supposes a continued inspection; that, SERM.  
X. wherever we go and whatever we do, in our various tempers, in our various circumstances, we still should maintain this universal duty, as a man guarding a treasure, or keeping a prisoner, may, by the negligence of a few moments, lose what he has been watching for months and years, so, sometimes, our hearts are ready to escape us, and, by a few days of trifling and indifference, we shall lose more ground in religion than, it may be, we have gained in weeks and months. Let this, therefore, be a serious and constant care. But I would not rest in leaving the matter thus generally explained. In order to render an advice of so great importance properly beneficial to us, I will,

II. Descend to an illustration of it by the mention of some particular circumstances in which it should be our peculiar care *to keep our hearts*, and that *with all keeping*. Suffer, my brethren! *the word of exhortation*, and let me entreat you that, as you always maintain such a care, so you *abound in it more and more*, when you draw near to God in the solemn duties of his worship, when you find

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yourselves surrounded with a fulness of worldly bliss, when Providence exercises you with afflictive dispensations, when you meet with provocations from your fellow-creatures, when you are in the hurry of worldly business, when you are engaged in amusements and recreations, and when you fall into intervals of solitude and retirement ; and, lastly, when you find the heart attacked in a dangerous manner by any passion, irregular in its nature or degree. It is my business to urge these things upon your consciences ; it is the work of God to add efficacy to them. I would, with all seriousness and tenderness, entreat your attention to them. May the Divine grace make them refreshing and useful to you !

1. *Keep your heart with all your keeping*, when you draw near to God in the solemn exercises of his worship. You have then to do with a God *who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins of the children of men*. His penetrating eye in a moment sees through the most artful veil that hypocrisy can draw over an inattentive and unaffected mind. You know that he saw it in the people of Israel, and charges it upon them as a most provoking

crime: *This people draw near to me with their mouths, and with their lips do they honour me, but their hearts are far from me*<sup>2</sup>. *They come before me as my people come, and sit before me as my people sit, and their hearts go out after their covetousness*<sup>3</sup>. I believe, my friends, that you know by your own experience how exceedingly backward our hearts are to communion with God; how apt they are to *start back from him like a deceitful bow*. I believe that there is not a regenerate soul in this assembly, that does not know what it is to cry out, *When, in this respect, I would do good, evil is present with me*. Or if the whole tenor of our thoughts in the course of any act of worship were to be laid open before the eyes of our fellow-creatures, how wild, how capricious, and even how monstrous would they appear! Now and then there is a faint desire after thee, O God! a weak motion of the soul towards thee, and then by unaccountable sallies of thought, issuing we know not whence, we are drawn from thee; and, the heart roving with the fool's eye even to the very ends of the earth, we feel a want of pleasure in the Divine service; and are sadly sensible of the failure and the bar-

SERM.  
X.<sup>2</sup> Isa. xxix.  
13.<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel  
xxxiii. 31.

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renness of our devotions. Hence it is that, whilst planted in the house of the Lord, under the droppings of his sanctuary, our souls are like the dying shrub of a thirsty wilderness. Hence the weakness of our faith in Christ, of our love to God, of our charity to men, and of all those holy fruits which might be expected to grow up in those who have sat so long under such cultivation. Well! let this excite us to keep our hearts in the Divine service. Let us solemnly charge them, when entering upon it, to all holy devotion and seriousness of spirit. O my soul! thou art approaching to the most venerable and the most amiable Being; awaken, and wrestle with him, and thou wilt prevail for a blessing from the Lord, even *righteousness and peace from the God of our salvation*. But if all be a mere empty form, how wilt thou escape the curse of the deceiver, *who has a male in his flock, and vows and sacrifices unto the Lord a corrupt thing*<sup>4</sup>? A few moments thus spent in holy recollection, before we come to our duty, might be of admirable advantage throughout the whole course of it; and then, when actually engaged, *keep your hearts with all keeping*; endeavour

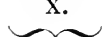
<sup>4</sup> Mal. i.  
14.

to keep them attentive to what passes. Be SERM.  
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upon your guard against those vain excursions of soul that eat all the life and spirit of our devotion; and endeavour to keep them warm and lively. Oh, labour to feel the deepest conviction of your guilt and misery, your most urgent need of mercy and grace, and the most grateful and thankful impressions for all the Divine favour, and especially the riches of redeeming love. And when you feel your hearts cold and unaffected, lift up a long sigh towards heaven, and say, Awake, thou north wind, and come, thou south! O thou sacred quickening Spirit, breathe upon my dead soul, it cleaves to the dust, *quicken* Ps. cxix,  
25, *it, O Lord, according to thy word*<sup>5</sup>. If God enable you thus to keep your heart in duty, surely *it will be a token for good*, and a mean of both exciting you to and assisting you in the other duty I am now to recommend.

2. *Keep your heart with all keeping*, when surrounded with an abundance of worldly enjoyments. It is the observation of an inspired writer that *new wine takes away the* Hosea iv,  
11. *heart*<sup>6</sup>. There is something in prosperity which tends to intoxicate the mind; be therefore upon your guard against it, and

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in these circumstances look well to it. It is surely a most ungrateful thing that our hearts should be alienated from God by the very gifts of his bounty to us. Be therefore cautiously upon your guard against it. Endeavour to keep your hearts from a forgetfulness of God, according to the advice of Moses: *When thou hast eaten, and art full, take care that thou forget not the Lord thy God*<sup>7</sup>. Keep your heart from the secret workings of pride, as if all these agreeable circumstances in life were the reward of your own superior wisdom or goodness. Take heed of sacrificing to your own net, and burning incense to your own drag; and endeavour to keep your heart from an excessive confidence in those things. Take heed lest, with David, you *say in your prosperity, you shall never be moved*<sup>8</sup>; for if you do, you may reasonably expect that *God will hide his face, and then you will be troubled*. And I will further add, keep your heart not only from being entangled with the snares of prosperity, but, likewise, endeavour to preserve a lively sense of the Divine goodness in all. This will add a relish to every enjoyment, a dignity and a pleasure to it, to think of it as coming from such a hand; and

<sup>7</sup> Deut. vi.  
11, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Psa. xxx.  
6.

it will likewise tend to promote your zeal for SERM.  
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 God, and your care to increase all your spiri-  
 tual possessions. Be then often repeating it to  
 your own souls, “ All things are of God: *every  
 good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh  
 down from the Father of lights, with whom  
 there is no variableness nor shadow of turning*<sup>9</sup>. 9 Jam. i. 7.

This peaceful night, this cheerful day, this  
 plentiful refreshment, this agreeable converse,  
 this successful inquiry, this gainful return,  
 all this is from him. *Bless the Lord, O my  
 soul, and forget not all his benefits.* Let me  
 love him, let me serve him for all this, nor  
 let all the mercies of my life bear witness  
 against me, lest at last they draw down upon  
 me judgments proportionable to the weight  
 and number of them. They come from God;  
 let them be returned to him, as all the fragrant  
 odour, which he gave to the sacred incense,  
 was breathed out to him on his own altar.

3. *Keep your heart with all keeping* when  
 God's afflicting rod is upon you. It is the  
 peculiar advice of Solomon that *in the day of  
 adversity we should consider*: for consideration  
 and a guard upon the heart is then needful.  
 Christians! give me leave to appeal to your  
 own souls on this occasion; do you not find

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that it is so? You that have been trained up in the school of affliction, have you found no rebellious opposition to the discipline of your Father's rod? did you never feel your hearts either rising against it or sinking under it? I fear you have. Well, be greatly upon your guard here. Therefore charge your souls with all possible seriousness. O my soul! remember that *afflictions do not arise out of the dust*; but there is the hand of God in them. Remember that they come from a Being infinitely holy and infinitely powerful, who cannot be condemned, cannot be resisted. They come from a Being infinitely wise and infinitely good, who cannot reasonably be complained of by any of his creatures. And if you feel your corrupt nature taking fire, if you feel a discontented and impatient spirit begin to prevail, immediately oppose it: plead the perfections of God's nature, plead the designs of his love, plead the experience which you have already had of his mercy, plead the gracious promise which relates to what is yet to come. Ungrateful creature that I am, *shall I receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall I not receive evil* 'Job ii 14. *also*<sup>1</sup>? Foolish wretch that I am, shall I turn

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my physic into poison by imprudent behaviour, whilst under the operation of it? O my heart! I charge thee, in the name of the King of heaven, *Peace! be still!* Nor should we be concerned merely to suppress the tumultuous and irregular workings of it under affliction, but likewise to fall in with the design of Divine Providence in such dispensations; we should be looking upward for the teachings of God's Holy Spirit, to show us wherefore he contends with us, and looking inward to examine our souls, and to see in what instances those afflictions which, *for the present, are not joyous but grievous, may afterwards yield to us the peaceable fruits of righteousness*<sup>2</sup>.

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

11.

4. *Keep your heart with all keeping* under provocation from your fellow-creatures. These are very trying times; and the spirit that dwelleth in us very often lusteth more evidently to resentment than it does to envy; so that I am sure that he who trusteth his own heart in such circumstances acts a very foolish part. Pride will then rise to aggravate the affront by absurd notions of our own wisdom and goodness; and will be heightening every negligence into an injury, and

SERM. every fault into a heavy crime ; and we know  
X. not whether these may not tend to passionate  
speeches or to uncharitable censures. It may  
be that some hateful and malicious action may  
be the cursed effect of it : therefore *keep your  
heart with all keeping* ; do not be too sensible  
of injuries ; consider where you are, in a  
world of perverse and sinful creatures, where  
the very best are sanctified but in part, and  
have a great remainder of folly and corrup-  
tion in their souls. Expect not that all their  
conduct will be perfectly wise and good.  
You will have a great deal to pardon in the  
very best and kindest of your friends ; and  
if they behave amiss, consider them therein  
as the objects of pity rather than of severe  
indignation. Consider how you have be-  
haved to your heavenly Father ; in how many  
ten thousand more aggravated instances you  
have neglected, offended, and provoked him ;  
and yet he is patient, he is forgiving. O my  
soul ! *let me put on, as the elect of God, holy  
and beloved before him, bowels of long-suffering  
and meekness, of gentleness and goodness : these  
are the fruits of the Spirit.* This was a tem-  
per which Christ my Lord manifested in his  
sufferings ; and which he recommended to

others. Oh, let me cultivate it more and more! Perhaps what I am ready to resent might be mere thoughtless negligence, and there might be no design of injury in it: but if there was, let me herein show something of *that wisdom which is from above*; and if they meant it for injury, let me turn it into good, as I shall certainly do if I make it the occasion of exercising and improving grace in my soul. Lord! this rising resentment I sacrifice to thee. Let all my indignation be against my soul and against sin: but as for my offended brother, do thou forgive him, and bless him, and help me to love him more and more for thy sake; at least, if he will repent, give me leave to do it for his own.

5. *Keep your heart with all keeping* when your hands are full of worldly business. Christians! we walk in the midst of snares; and though it is our duty to attend to the business of our worldly calling, it is no easy matter to keep our souls disengaged from these things, and to live above the world whilst we are in it. It is the excellent advice of our Lord himself, *Take heed lest your heart be overcharged with the cares of this life*<sup>3</sup>. <sup>3</sup>Luke xvi.  
34.  
Take heed that you do not contract too great

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a fondness of *those things which are seen, which are temporal*, to the forgetfulness of *those which are unseen, and are eternal*. Take heed that a regard to worldly advantages may never turn you out of the way of the strictest duty to God and integrity to your fellow-creatures. Be often saying to yourselves, O my soul! remember this is not thy rest. There is a great care of *what I shall eat, and what I shall drink, and wherewithal I shall be clothed*. There is the kingdom of heaven to be sought out. May I be taught by Divine grace to seek it in the first place! There is the Lord Jesus Christ to be gained, who *is the pearl of great price*. Oh that I may be so wise a merchant as *to purchase this, though with the loss of all that I have!* Be often urging your souls with the advice of the apostle, 1 Cor. vii. 29, *Time is short, &c.* O my heart! dote not upon a transitory thing, and love nothing with an unbounded affection that is not immortal as thyself, and immutable as thy God. Thou art not the proprietor of these things; regard them not as thine own. Consider them as a trust reposed in thine hands by God; and as thou art a steward, let it be thy concern that thou *be found faithful*. Devoting all to

God, and improving all for him, may *holiness* SERM.  
X.  
*to the Lord* be written upon my soul and upon all my actions, upon my merchandise and my gain, upon my labour and my increase.

6. *Keep your heart with all keeping* when you are engaged in diversions and recreations. Our kind and compassionate Father, who knows the weakness and frailty of our nature, indulges us in the liberty of relaxing our spirits with proper amusements at convenient times; and does not require that they should always be on the stretch: but the generality of mankind are exceedingly fond of these things; and do, as a serious writer justly, though plainly, expresses it, make their food of that which ought to be regarded only as their sauce. Now we should be very solicitous that we may not spend too much of our time in recreations; that we may not seek them merely for themselves, but in subserviency to the duties of life; that we may not choose such as are of evil repute, such as may give offence to others, and prove a snare to our own souls; and that, whatever they be, we may not indulge to such a dissipation of spirits in them as to grow quite forgetful

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X. of God, and contract a disrelish for the thoughts of serious piety. This is a caution important to all, but especially to young people. My dear brethren and friends! be solicitous *with all keeping to keep your hearts* in these circumstances. Be often saying, O my soul! let me stand at the remotest distance from the character of those *who live without God in the world, and are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*. Oh! let me remember that those who are Christ's *have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof*; and that if any will follow him, *he must learn to deny himself, and take up his cross*. Thou art sent into the world, not merely to amuse thyself with the pleasures of it, but to discharge a work, to fight a combat, to run a race. Awaken all my noblest and most active powers. Let me *be steadfast and immovable*, and whatever relaxations this frail state of nature renders necessary to me, let them be so contracted and so regulated as that they may be but like the time the reaper spends in whetting his sickle, which, though it occasion a little present interruption, yet tends, upon the whole, to his greater dispatch. Think, O my soul! that the great

and blessed God sees thee *in thy lying down* SERM.  
*and in thy rising up, and is acquainted with all* X.  
*thy thoughts*<sup>4</sup>. Let no business, let no amuse- 4 Psalm  
 ment lead thee into a forgetfulness of him. cxxxix. 4.

7. *Keep your heart with all keeping* in seasons of solitude and retirement, whether they be more stated or occasional. When you retire for the worship of God, I have already been cautioning you to be upon your guard; and when you retire for reading or meditation, or to converse with your own souls, the thoughts are so exceedingly volatile that it is one of the most difficult things in the world to fix them: but labour at it. Seriously think how much pleasure, how much advantage you may find in such seasons, if they be regularly improved; and how surely your communion with your own souls may subserve the blessed purposes of communion with God; and let it be your concern that it may do so. And even in those intervals of solitude which occasionally arise in the course of life, let not your time be lost. Remember that a wise and a good man always carries a treasure along with him in his memory and in his heart. Let it be your concern that you may bring out of it *things*

SERM. *new and old.* As God has endowed you with  
X. the powers of reason, thought, and reflection,  
do not satisfy yourselves with waking dreams when alone in a journey, or when alone at your business ; but endeavour to manage a conference with yourselves in an agreeable and useful manner. The precept of my text is one of those of which Solomon says that, if diligently observed, *when thou walkest, it will lead thee, when thou sleepest, it will keep thee, and when thou awakest, it will talk with thee.*

8. *Keep your heart with all keeping* when you find any tumultuous passions are excited, and are ready to bear you away with violence. Before, I cautioned you with regard to those circumstances which might prove temptations, and particular circumstances of provocation among the rest. But now I add that, if you have been at any time surprised, and any irregular passion has been kindled, you must endeavour to extinguish it. Oh! think what combustible matter you carry in your bosoms. Neglect your heart but a little in such circumstances, and all will be in flames. It is like riding a furious courser ; a steady rein must always be kept over him. But if we are alarmed at any thing, of his preparing to

run away, then we must exert all our strength and all our art too, either to stop him short in the career, or with some happy address to divert him from it; or we may be borne down a precipice before we are aware, and never see our danger till it is too late. I speak not merely of the hostile passions, but likewise of those that are sometimes accounted most friendly; which yet, by the excess and abuse of them, may be attended with fatal consequences. Keep your hearts from an excessive fondness for any creature comfort. What if you do not love the world too much, if you are not fond of money or fond of fame, you may love a friend with an excess of tenderness which may throw your whole soul into a sad disorder: when once you begin to find any creature grow, as it were, necessary to your happiness, then remember that it is high time to double your guard, lest you be found to provoke the Almighty to jealousy. Then repeat the admonition to your own heart with the greatest solemnity: O my soul! now, now is the time to combat. If, by any feeble indulgence, thy enemy have got the advantage against thee, exert thyself as for thy life in the strength of God. Remember,

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SERM. X. remember thine everlasting rest : remember the crown of glory, and remember for whom it is reserved. Oh ! let me always labour to preserve a temper becoming one who has chosen his happiness in God, one who hopes that he is going to his heavenly presence. I am very sensible that the difficulty and labour are great, but the reward will be ample in the serenity of our own souls, the sense of the Divine approbation, and the hope of an eternal reward. But it will be, if God permit, the employment of another sabbath, to urge those important motives which may awaken you thus to keep your heart, and to propose the directions which may assist you in doing it.

## SERMON XI.

OF ENGAGEMENTS TO AND DIRECTIONS  
IN KEEPING THE HEART.

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PROVERBS, iv. 23.

*Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.*

WHEN our Lord had addressed himself to his disciples with such excellent practical advices as that, with regard to them, it might justly be said, *that never man spake as he spake*: he concludes with this serious and awful admonition, *If you know these things, happy are ye if you do them*<sup>1</sup>. Those of you, who attended with seriousness to what I was saying from these words on the last Lord's day, cannot be entirely ignorant of the nature of the duty recommended by them, which I then endeavoured to explain at large. I showed you what we are to understand by the heart; and told you that it signifies the mind in general, and sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> John xiii.  
17.

SERM. its particular faculties ; and that here we are

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particularly to understand it of the thoughts and the passions. In this sense the heart is to be kept as under a guard, as the word signifies ; intimating thereby that it is an important kind of a fortress, which, if it be not well manned and secured for us, may be seized by the enemy and turned against us, to our great danger, and, perhaps, in after consequences, to our ruin. And when it is said, that it is to be *kept with all diligence*, it may intimate that it ought to be guarded with a serious, with a religious, with an universal, and a constant care. I then proceeded to illustrate the exhortation by the mention of some circumstances in which it is of peculiar importance ; and I endeavoured, with all due solemnity, to charge it upon your consciences and my own, that we endeavour to keep the heart in the worship of God, in a prosperous condition ; under the afflicting hand of God ; under provocations from our fellow-creatures ; in the crowd of worldly business ; at seasons of recreation ; in intervals of solitude ; and, lastly, when our minds are ruffled by any of the occurrences of life, and we perceive that we are begin-

ning to lose the command of ourselves. I would hope, upon the whole, that you know these things: the Lord grant that you may be so happy as to do them. I am very well persuaded that none of you, who think at all, can think this an indifferent affair: yet I fear that it is so little attended to, and I know that there is so strong a reluctance in our corrupt nature to every thing which is spiritually good, and especially to the religion of the heart, that I think it absolutely necessary,

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III. To urge some plain and awakening arguments to engage you to such a care.

The Lord grant that I may be enabled to do it effectually: the Lord grant that, by what I am now to say, my own spirit and yours may be so impressed that our conviction may not witness to our condemnation, whilst we neglect those duties which we cannot but approve. Now the arguments which I shall, at this time, urge upon you, shall be ranked under two heads: some of them taken from the necessity, and others of them from the difficulty of the duties recommended: the one of them may engage us to see to it that it be not entirely neglected, the other

SERM. may stir us up to a zealous and a diligent  
 XI. discharge of it, or, in the language of the text,  
 may teach us *to keep it with all keeping*.

1. Consider how exceedingly important it is that we keep the heart. I am well aware that this is generally apprehended: nevertheless there are two considerations from which it may further appear. It falls directly under the cognizance of God; and it has a very apparent influence upon our conduct in life. Now, in both these respects it will appear to be very important.

1. Consider that the heart falls directly under the inspection of God, and therefore, that it must be of great importance to keep it. It is in this respect that the eye of God exceeds the penetration of the most sagacious person upon earth, and, as it seems, of every other created being. As for man, we know that he can judge only by what is external; and, on that ground, can form but an imperfect conjecture of what passes. But it is the voice of nature, as well as of scripture, that God has not *eyes of flesh, neither sees he as man seeth*<sup>2</sup>. *The Lord searcheth all hearts, and tries the imagination of the thoughts*; or, as the phrase properly signifies, he accurately

<sup>2</sup> 1 Sam.  
xvi. 7.

knows the very forming of the thought, the first origin, and all the continued progress of it. He, therefore, speaks of it as his peculiar prerogative: *I, the Lord, search the heart, and try the reins of the children of men.* And, in this respect, the Lord Jesus Christ asserts himself to be the image of his Father, and so infinitely superior to every creature: *I am he that searcheth hearts*<sup>3</sup>; <sup>3 Jer. xvii.</sup> and this, says he, is what all the churches <sup>10.</sup> shall know. And surely all the churches that bear the name of a Redeemer, and that assemble to the worship of God through him, should pay their humble regards to him in this view; and this should engage, throughout all the churches, a diligent attention to this important duty. Consider, I entreat you, the weight of the argument, and what follows from it. How it evidently follows that he must require the religion of the heart: even we abhor heartless service when known. To be sure, where there is an entire neglect of this care of the heart, there is no real regard to God, not the least grain of true vital religion: so far as a neglect of it prevails it shows a deficiency in it. But, on the other hand, where there is this care to


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govern the thoughts, and to govern the passions, it is, as it were, an homage paid to the omniscience of God; and it is one of the most genuine evidences of sincere piety: the question is not so much what a man's behaviour is as what is his heart. It is very true that there can be no real godliness, where the life is tainted with habitual immoralities: that the religion of the immoral man is undoubtedly vain; and that the habitually wicked, who buoys himself on any thing, only plunges himself into additional guilt and aggravated ruin. But it is as true that all apparent regularity, and even sanctity in the conversation, if it proceed from nothing but a respect to human applause, or to worldly advantages, is mere painted hypocrisy, and is wholly without value in the Divine estimation: and be the man's actions ever so regular, if his *heart be not right with God*, he will, when weighed in the balance, be found wanting: for, as David expresses it, *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts*. And now, Christians! I appeal to your own consciences, whether this be not an argument of the utmost importance. God sees the heart, and absolutely insists upon the care of it;

and, consequently, if you entirely neglect that care, you have no interest in God, nor can you have any well grounded expectations from him. Pull down the vain Babel of your airy hopes: rase it, rase it even to the foundation. But why do I say to the foundation? alas! it has no foundation, but in your own vain imaginations. It would be as rational to bring a well dressed corpse into the court of a prince, and place it before him at his table, or make it his chief minister of state, as to expect that God should favour a man whose heart is not in any form of service which he performs. And as an entire neglect of this care of the heart is ruinous to all our everlasting hopes, so the partial neglect of it, even in one who, on the whole, is devoted to God, is attended with very melancholy considerations. I am sure that it must eclipse a man's evidences for heaven: for the brightness of these is generally proportionable to the strength of grace which is, above all, apparent from the growth of it; and there is nothing by which that growth more evidently appears than by the care which I now recommend. In this view also it appears of the utmost importance to our en-

SERM. XI.  tertaining communion with God, which must subsist in the heart, and which can never be maintained where the heart is neglected. I put the whole issue of the affair upon this fact: let any experienced Christian testify whether he has not a thousand times more lively communion with God, the clearest views of his special favour, the brightest hopes of eternal glory, when he is most careful in looking to the heart; and all this naturally follows from the first particular which I mentioned, God's knowledge of the heart. I add,

2. That the importance of this care will further appear, if we consider what an apparent influence the heart has upon our conduct in life. This is the argument which Solomon urges in the text, *from thence are the issues of life*; that is, as it might, I think, as well be rendered, the outgoings, or the ways of the life. A man who is unconcerned about his heart will probably fall into a great many irregularities in life; whilst he that, on the other hand, is concerned about making the tree good will probably make the fruit so: or, the original words may by some, with peculiar propriety, be

rendered streams, and so there may be a tacit reference to a fountain, and the issue of water from thence. Nor is this altogether inconsistent with what I before said of its being a military phrase: for as in war<sup>4</sup> peculiar care would be taken that the enemy should not seize a place where he would not only be possessed of a fortress, but likewise would make himself master of some fountain, on which, perhaps, the supply of a city depended, so that by poisoning or diverting that stream, he might destroy the inhabitants; such care should be taken of the heart, and upon the same principles. This is a thought which our Lord suggested: *From the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, &c.* . And, on the other hand, from the heart, a good heart, stream forth that wisdom and piety which add an ornament and a glory to the man's discourses and actions. Such is the beautiful observation of Solomon: *The heart of a wise man teacheth his mouth*<sup>5</sup>; that is, it furnishes him with ample matter of profitable discourse; of discourse of a far more beneficial nature than that of the man who has merely filled his head with speculations, while his heart continues unaffected. A

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<sup>4</sup> Mat. xv.  
19.

<sup>5</sup> Prov. xvi.  
23.

SERM. *parable in the mouth of such a fool is like a*  
 XI. *thorn that goeth up into the hand of a drun-*  
 6 Prov. *kard*<sup>6</sup>, which, whilst he thinks to sport him-  
 xxvi. 9. *self with, only pierces and wounds him. A*  
*good man out of the good treasure of his heart*  
*brings forth good things, and that not merely*  
*in his discourses, but in his actions too, which*  
*render him ready not only to every good*  
*word but to every good work also. So that*  
*you see by this that, in all probability, as*  
*your hearts are, such will your lives be,*  
*decent and honourable, comfortable to your-*  
*selves, and useful to those about you. But,*  
*on the other hand, if there be no guard upon*  
*the thoughts and the passions, it is a thou-*  
*sand to one that you will be hurried away*  
*into some extravagances of life; and, in*  
*consequence of this, into the anxiety, shame,*  
*and fear, which are inseparably attached to*  
*a consciousness of guilt, and to those painful*  
*wounds which are given by it to the soul: not*  
*to mention all that numberless train of tem-*  
*poral evils which are generally the result of*  
*neglecting such a government of ourselves.*  
*Let but a wild imagination, a clamorous*  
*appetite, a tumultuous passion get the ascen-*  
*dent in the soul, and whither may a man be*


driven? or, rather, whither may he not be driven? The driver, whose horses have forced the reins from his hands, and are running on at full stretch down a deep precipice, does not seem to be in so dangerous a condition. It is a thousand to one that neither the voice of reason nor conscience can be heard in that storm: no regard to reputation or usefulness in life, to interest in our friends, to present prospects, or future hopes, will at all influence him who has neglected to keep his heart. Whereas, on the other hand, where there is a becoming care to keep the heart, methinks the Christian appears like a wise and cautious pilot, who sits in the stern of his vessel, guiding the rudder with a steady hand, and opening or furling, or varying the sails in such a manner as to keep clear of every danger, and to gain even from those, which seem the most contrary, to carry him on his voyage to glory. You see the influence which the heart has upon the conduct of life; and this is a considerable argument for a care in keeping it. But it may, perhaps, be objected that though this connexion be indeed probable, yet it may possibly be broken, and a man by vigorous resolutions may change

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XI. and rectify what might otherwise have followed upon his negligent behaviour. Give me leave to add,

3. That a becoming care in keeping the heart is not only highly advantageous in its consequences, but is greatly to be regarded for itself. I appeal to you, is there nothing honourable, is there nothing pleasant in the thoughts of being masters at home, of being possessors of our own spirits? And, on the other hand, whether the idle excursions of thought, and the wild sallies of passion, be not mean vexations, and in themselves evil, and pernicious, separate from all views to their future consequences? Is it nothing that the peace of the kingdom is broken, even though the constitution of it be not overthrown? Would it not be a thousand times better that soldiers in a garrison, by managing their swords, should prevent the attacks of the enemy, than at last, after a long dispute, that they should drive them back? Think, I entreat you, of the serenity and the dignity of that soul, where the duties, which I have been recommending, are in a regular manner pursued! How peaceful, how rich, how noble is it! The external accidents of life are not

able to discompose him : the storms of calamity are but, as Dr. Scott beautifully expresses it, like the rattling of hail upon the tiles of a music room, which cannot disturb the harmony within. Such a man is like the wise centurion, who kept his soldiers in such actual subjection, that when he said to one man, *Go, and he went ; and to another, come, and he came*<sup>7</sup>. The rich talent<sup>7</sup> Mat. viii. 9. of a rational nature is not given to him in vain, nor are the treasures of grace in vain lodged in his heart. He proves himself a good steward of the manifold grace of God ; and *with the five talents gains other five also*. And if his enemies assail him, *though an host should encamp against him, his heart is not afraid*, having this pleasing consciousness, that it has devoted itself to God ; and that this has been its governing care, to maintain its integrity before him. But the man that neglects to keep his heart, or, as scripture expresses it, *has no rule over his own spirit*, is a poor contemptible, miserable creature, with reference as well to the present scene of things as to future prospects. His soul is all full of anarchy and confusion ; and, with regard to internal disorders, it resembles a mutinous

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XI.  army, where, it may be, the meanest and basest are the loftiest of all : and, with regard to outward accidents, he is, as Solomon expresses it, *like a city which is broken down, and has no walls*, so that it may seem to lie at the mercy of every invader. The Lord deliver us from such irregular and disorderly scenes, which must certainly end in the dishonour of God, in the reproach of religion, the calamity of those about us, and, at length, in the great damage, if not the utter ruin of our own souls. I hope I need not say more concerning the importance of keeping the heart. Give me leave to enforce what I have already said, by adding a few words of the difficulty of it.

2. Give me leave then to urge this as an argument to engage us in our care of *keeping our heart with all diligence*, from considering the difficulty of the thing. In low and ordinary cases it will be sufficient, and will abundantly appear if, on the one hand, we consider our own weakness and treachery ; and, on the other, the various temptations and dangers to which we are exposed.

1. Consider the weakness and treachery of the heart of man, and it will evidently

appear that it is a difficult work which is here recommended. Solomon observes, that *he that trusts it is a fool*<sup>8</sup>: and I believe that if you reflect upon your own experience, it will be the best comment upon the observation. The heart, as it originally came out of the hands of its Creator, was indeed noble and excellent. A temple, though built of clay, yet in some measure fit for the habitation of the Deity that raised it. The understanding was quick and extensive, the judgment wise and penetrative, the affections calm and moderate, yet lively and active on proper objects and in a proper degree; and the conscience sat, like the viceroy of God, upon a peaceful throne, surveying all that passed with pleasure, and testifying, by its applause, the approbation of that glorious being whose representative it was. But now *how is the gold waxed dim, and the fine gold changed!* The soul, that has felt the power of renewing grace, is most of all sensible of the weakness of nature. He complains, in the most lively accents, that he is *unstable as water, and therefore excels not*: that his thoughts are wild and roving, so that to govern them seems like laying fetters on the wind: that

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'xxviii. 26.

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his passions are boisterous and rebellious; that his resolutions are faint and feeble, so that his treacherous heart too often *turns back from God, like a deceitful bow*; and *when to will his present with him, how to perform that which is good he finds not*. When he reads in scripture, that *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately* <sup>9 Jer. xvii.</sup> *wicked*<sup>9</sup>, he readily acknowledges that, in <sup>9.</sup> whatsoever sense it was at first intended, it is applicable to himself. He finds not only deceit, but a desperate wickedness within, which lays him low in the divine presence, abhorring the remainders of a corrupt nature, and the suspicion of its prevalency. And though it must be acknowledged, that all have not these apprehensions, yet I will venture to say, that where we most evidently see that they are not, there we have generally the most flagrant proofs that they ought to be. The man that trusts his own heart most is he that most evidently appears to be deceived by it; just as the man that boasts most of his learning and his wisdom, most plainly shows his folly and his ignorance. In short, with regard to the spiritual war, a man has dangerous enemies of his

own household. And we may say, concerning a corrupt heart, as Solomon does of an abandoned woman, *It has cast down many mighty, and many strong men have been slain by it.* Vainly confident of their strength, they have rushed into dangers, immediately to sink under them. Like the thoughtless mariner, who, trusting to a gentle breeze and the calm sea, spreads his sails, whilst he leaves his compass behind him, and neglects the helm till the inconstant element changes, and storms and shipwreck convince him of his folly. But the mention of storms and shipwrecks leads me further to add,

2. That as the heart itself is weak and treacherous, so is it exposed to a variety of dangers, and on that account the keeping of it must be very difficult. We live in the midst of an alluring world, and our vain and degenerate hearts are ready to take fire at a thousand worthless objects, or to wander after, and to dote upon them. We live in the midst of sinners: they compass our path, and our lying down; and surround us in all our ways: and let Satan but have your heart, he will leave your knees, your mouth, and even your hands for God. He knows at once its

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weakness and its importance; and in the most artful manner forms his attacks upon it. He considers you, my friends, when you do not consider yourselves. He studies your temper whilst you yourselves neglect it; and knows every avenue to this fortress by which it may most easily be approached; every feeble place by which it may most successfully be assaulted. It becomes us, therefore, undoubtedly to look to ourselves, and to double our guard when the place is so weak, and the enemy at once so powerful and so subtle. The children of God are not exempted from his assaults; and he desires to have them, *that he may sift them as wheat*<sup>1</sup>, even when he knows that their Redeemer has prayed for them that they may not finally faint. Full of restless and detestable malice, he finds a cursed kind of joy in battering this fort, which he knows that he shall not be able to demolish, and in distressing the soul which God will not suffer him finally to destroy. Sleep not, therefore, whilst these enemies are awake, but permit me to address you in the words of the apostle, *Take the whole armour of God*<sup>2</sup>, &c. I would hope that you are now so far con-

<sup>1</sup> Luke  
xxii. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. vi.

vinced of the importance of this care, as to be prepared to listen, with pleasure, to those directions for it, which I am to lay before you under the fourth general.


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#### IV. Directions for keeping the heart.

1. If you desire to keep your heart, endeavour by all means to know it. The apostle speaks of it as great matter of complaint, and even of reproach, in his epistle to the Corinthians: *Know you not your own-selves*<sup>3</sup>, *you who boast of your knowledge in other things with which you are enriched?* You that, indeed, are puffed up with it, *Know you not your own-selves?* Are you strangers at home? Yet it is the case of many like the apostles, whom, on that account, our Lord rebukes: *Ye know not*, says he, *of what manner of spirit ye are*<sup>4</sup>. Endeavour to know human nature in general, its weakness and its corruption: it is a great lesson, and ignorance in it is the foundation of a thousand errors, in doctrine and in practice. And, above all, endeavour to know your own hearts. Study their character, study their state. Endeavour, in particular, to know your peculiar weakness, for that is

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor.  
xiii. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Luke ix.  
56.

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2. If you would keep your own heart, endeavour to impress your conscience with a sense of the importance of it; and let me entreat you that, for this purpose, you would recollect what I have now been laying before you, and preach it over to yourselves.

3. If you desire to keep your own heart, solemnly sit as in the Divine presence. Accustom yourselves often to think of God, as *searching the heart, and trying the reins of the children of men*; and seriously consider that he is with you wherever you are and whatever you do. Remember those important words of the Psalmist, *Thou hast beset me behind and before*<sup>5</sup>. I might be large in showing you, had I time, how to do it; how

<sup>5</sup> Psalm  
cxxxix. 5,  
&c.

this thought might influence you with regard to every particular circumstance in which I have now been warning you. O, my soul! wilt thou trifle in his worship when he can discern thy hypocrisy? Wilt thou offer to him merely the outward show of service when he can see through the thin deceit, even he whose *eyes are like a flame of fire*? Wilt thou in his presence repine under corrective dispensations, or in his presence forget him while receiving and enjoying the fruits of his bounty? Wilt thou swell into severe and burning resentments against thine offending brother in the presence of thy heavenly Father; thou, who hast so often offended him, and by him hast so often been forgiven, though he be armed with infinite power to punish every transgression with everlasting destruction? Wilt thou lose thyself in the businesses of this world, or in the pleasures of it, without regard to him, without whom thy labour cannot be successful, without whom thy recreation cannot be refreshing to thee? What though I am alone with respect to my fellow creatures, *I am not alone, because my Father is with me*; and his pre-

SERM. sence is more than the most ample theatre;  
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his eye more than that of angels and men. Now, O my soul! let me pay, as it were, an homage to the Divine omniscience by my care in these circumstances of my behaviour. And, to conclude all, when combating with irregular passions, when once awakened, let us excite our souls to consider God as the spectator of the battle. Fight, O my soul! as under the eye of that General by whom on another day the crown shall surely be set upon thy head. Oh! my friends, this thought of the presence of God, carried along with us through all the circumstances of life, would, through the cooperation of his grace, be the death of our corruptions, and the life of our graces.

4. If you would keep your hearts, be often calling them to an account. I hope that we do not live without self-examination: I wish that we practised it more. What I am now to recommend is that, in the review which we take of our conduct, we take our thoughts and hearts into the account; not only what time I have spent in reading, in hearing, in prayer, in discourse, but what temper have I

maintained in these exercises: not only what business have I gone through, but what was the frame of my soul in this business. Was I entirely swallowed up with worldly cares, as if these had been my all, or were my eyes *lifted up to the everlasting hills*, and was *the one thing needful* regarded? In this respect, let me entreat you *that you commune with your own hearts*, if you desire to keep them.

5. If you desire that your heart be well kept, see to it that it be well furnished. Lay in a stock of useful knowledge from the word of God, from observations of Providence, from converse with your fellow-creatures: these will furnish you with matter for conversing with your own heart, which is of so great importance to the keeping of it. These will likewise suggest such motives, as by the Divine blessing may be eminently useful. Endeavour especially to tincture your heart with the knowledge of Christ. Drink deep at the fountain of gospel grace. Pardon me, my friends! if, in this case, I speak from my own experience, it may seem a digression to mention it here. But, for my part, I must say, that all the moral and philosophical

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considerations which I have ever met with, have been as nothing to me when compared with the advantages to be found from evangelical views of the grace of God in a Redeemer. These fix the thoughts, these give a regular turn to the passions, when *the love of God in Christ is shed abroad upon our souls*; when the love of a Redeemer constrains us.

6. If you would keep your own heart, be often looking up to Him who made it. I have been exhorting you to your duty, because the word of God says, *Exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*; and that you might see that I did not put it merely upon my importunity, I have been laying before you, as reasonable creatures, the necessity, the advantage, and the importance of it: but, separate from the influence of the Divine grace, and the communication of God's good Spirit, I have no expectation from all this. I know there is not a Christian in the world who is not deficient here; and therefore let me entreat you to fly to Him, who is strong, for strength. Go to God, morning by morning, and pour out

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your souls before him. Lord! I see it, I am a weak, inconstant, treacherous creature. A deceiving heart has turned me aside again and again: I have broke my resolutions, and violated my most solemn engagements: I have contradicted my most serious and most determinate schemes. Lord, help me! Lord! hold thou me up, and I shall be safe; and I see no other way of being so. *Set thou a guard not only on my lips*, but upon my heart, O God! I entreat thee. To find our hearts taken off from a dependence upon ourselves and fixed upon God is a token for good in every part of our Christian course; and particularly in this which is now before us. May that sacred Spirit attend these plain hints with his efficacious operation, and neither I nor you shall repent that this subject has lain so long before us.

How frequently is the good Christian compelled to cry out with the apostle, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death*<sup>6</sup>? O my God! how long will it be that I shall lie at such a distance from thee, that my best regards to thee shall be so cold, and those cold regards

<sup>6</sup> Rom. vii.  
24.

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so frequently interrupted? How long shall I go this melancholy round of bewailing the infirmities of my life, and of repeating them and bewailing them again? How long shall this uneasy struggle continue, in which I am always exercised, and frequently vanquished? Why, take courage, Christian! the struggle will not be perpetual; nay, I may add, it will not be long. That God, who has already made sin burthensome to you, will in a little while ease you of that burthen. He that has now formed you to a sense of holiness, will shortly raise you to the perfection of it. Yes, Christian! thou shalt *behold his face in righteousness, and shalt be satisfied when thou awakest in his likeness*<sup>7</sup>. And canst thou wish for a greater happiness than this, to be perfect with God? or canst thou hear of it and not wish for it? Methinks that the uneasiness which thou findest now in the want of a more complete resemblance should awaken thy most ardent desire after death and that state of glory to which thou hopest that death will transmit thee. Nor ought we to forget that, when we come to heaven, our company will be glorious and holy as our-

<sup>7</sup> Psa. xvii.  
15.

selves. We shall no longer behold insolent transgressors, and be grieved. We shall not be grieved with the faults and infirmities of those whom we regard as our Christian brethren; but shall be surrounded with *the spirits of just men made perfect*. We shall see nothing to disapprove, nothing to blame; but, on the contrary, we shall have continual reason to rejoice and triumph in the beauties of their characters, as well as in the glory of their external circumstances. For such a society may the Divine mercy now prepare us, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

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## SERMON XII.

## OUR APPEARANCE BEFORE CHRIST'S TRIBUNAL, AND FINAL ACCOUNT THERE.

[Preached, March 22, 1746, before the Assizes.]

ROMANS, xiv. 10—12.

*We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

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THE doctrine of the day of judgment, may some of you be ready to say within yourselves, who does not know it? What child is there who cannot tell that there will be such a day, and that Christ will then appear in glory and majesty; and will call all the world to an account for what they have done? Who does not know it? nay, my brethren! permit me rather to say, who does know it as he ought to know it? As a good man justly observed, We are so unhappy that we know not what we know; we have learned the art of being ignorant of those things with which we are most familiarly acquainted. You say that

you know the day of judgment: when did you SERM.  
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<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter i.  
16.

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Spirit, that we may not merely know, but feel this great truth, which the apostle here declares to us; declares, indeed, with a particular view, but in very general and universal terms. If the Christian world had not been very unteachable, and the hearts of men quite overrun with pride and with self-love, and with that bigotry, censoriousness, and severity which are the sad results of this hell-born principle, it had learnt the most amiable candour and sweetness of temper from this very chapter, though there had not been a word more to this purpose in the whole New Testament, which yet is full of it: and it is enforced with a variety of considerations, of which two most powerful ones are just before us; the one in the preceding verse, and the other in the text itself: *We are Christ's, who to this end died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord of the dead and the living.* And therefore it is charitably to be supposed that, even in different observances, we are, to the best of our judgment, influenced by a regard to him; and that circumstance should unite our hearts. Loving him, and living to him, we should not hate, and censure, and persecute each other; and knowing, also, that,

which is the consideration in the text, we are going before his tribunal, as fast as time can carry us away. The force of the argument, in this connexion, we may perhaps touch upon by and by. At present we will consider the things which are evidently comprehended in this remarkable and extensive scripture ; and then we will attempt the practical improvement of them. I pray God to open your ears to discipline, and to seal the instruction upon your hearts ; that you may be more fit for the day of which I am speaking, and that the discourse which I am to deliver about it may not make to any of you a sad article of your account.

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I. I am to consider the general contents of the words. Now you will observe in them these three things. The apostle asserts a general appearance before the tribunal of Christ ; he illustrates the assertion by a remarkable passage, borrowed from the Old Testament ; and he particularly leads us to reflect on that account which we must each of us give in that awful day. These particulars are so obvious that I think, that if you remember the text, you cannot possibly forget them.

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1. He asserts generally the appearance of all before the tribunal of Christ. *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.* He has elsewhere several expressions parallel to this; particularly in his discourse to the Athenians, when he tells them, that *he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has*<sup>1</sup> *ordained*<sup>2</sup>: and the very same words with these occur in his two epistles to the Corinthians: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive according to the things that were done in the body, whether it be good or whether it be*<sup>3</sup>. You see the doctrine of the future judgment makes a part of the Christian religion, as it did of natural religion itself, if rightly understood and explained. The heathens accordingly had their notions of it, and some of them say very just and awful things concerning it. They pretend, indeed, that three very upright men, who had once been princes upon earth, should preside in that judgment, Minos, Æacus, and Rhadamanthus; the strictness of whose inquiry and penetration none should be able to deceive or elude. But the oracles of eternal truth point out a much more venerable judge, even

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii.

31.

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

10.

Jesus the Son of God. He did not reign SERM. XII. upon earth, but was trampled upon by the pride of haughty princes; and therefore he is called in the prophecies *the man whom the nations abhorred, and who was the servant of rulers*<sup>4</sup>: yea, he was treated like a slave by <sup>4</sup> Isa. xlix. 7. them; for what can be imagined more servile than crucifixion, which it was esteemed the highest of injuries to inflict upon free men? But the following words shall, then, be most eminently fulfilled: *Kings shall see and arise before him; princes also shall worship him*; for he shall be their judge: as he tells them, when they were actually condemning him, *Ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power; and coming in the clouds of heaven*<sup>5</sup>. He shall have a <sup>5</sup> Matthew xxvi. 64. tribunal then, when all the thrones of the children of men are overthrown; their crowns, even the jewels of them, melted down; their capital cities all in one universal blaze; then shall the throne of Jesus appear in its greatest lustre. The throne of his judgment, oh! what a tribunal will that be! With what pomp and majesty shall it be pitched! with what solemnity shall he come to ascend it! He shall *ride upon a cherub and shall fly*; and

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*fly swiftly upon the wings of the wind!* To that day shall those words be literally applied, which David spoke only figuratively concerning God's appearance against his enemies: *The earth shook and trembled; the channels of the water were seen, and the foundations of the earth were discovered: there went a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured*<sup>6</sup>. How lively a description! Methinks I see the blazing of the lightning! methinks I hear that shrill clangor of the trumpet of the archangel, which will awake the dead; hear the crash of dissolving worlds, the shouts of his saints, and the cries of his enemies. His brightness is as the light, and rays streaming from around him; *He stands and measures the earth, he beholds and drives asunder the nations; the everlasting mountains are scattered; the perpetual hills do bow; the mountains behold him and tremble; the overflowing waters pass by; the troubled deep utters his tumultuous voice, and holds up his hands on high in astonishment: yea, the sun and the moon stand still in their habitation; at the light of his arrows they vanish, and at the shining of his glittering spear*<sup>7</sup>. Oh! how should the thought affect us! methinks to

<sup>6</sup> Ps. xviii.  
7—15.

<sup>7</sup> Hab. iii.  
4, &c.

such a degree that we should be almost able to say with the prophet, when describing in these sublime terms a far less awful scene, *When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled within myself*<sup>8</sup>. Oh! should each of us say, oh! that I may rest in that day of trouble! Oh! that I may stand in that hour of general dismay, when the heroes of the earth shall fly, and when royal voices shall mingle with those of their meanest slaves, in saying *to the mountains, fall upon us; and to the hills, cover us!*

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<sup>8</sup> Hab. iii.  
12. 16.

2. The apostle illustrates this assertion by a remarkable passage borrowed from the Old Testament. The passage, without doubt, is in the 45th of Isaiah: *I have sworn by myself; the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness; unto me shall every knee bow, every tongue shall swear.* These words the apostle, in a great measure, transcribes; and with greater propriety applies to the present occasion: *As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.* The latter clause here, though not the same in words, is similar in sense; for when the tongue swears, it confesses to God, if it swears

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in a solemn manner, which is here to be supposed, in making confession of his deity and perfections, and particularly of his omniscience, power, and justice. And the propriety of the application in general will easily appear from considering the context, in which God declares himself to be the only Saviour, and as it seems, in the person of his Son, invites the ends of the earth to look unto him and be saved. Never, to be sure, was this prophecy so fully accomplished in any event as in the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ; and in the messages of grace and salvation by him, sent to the ends of the earth; from whence all, and, blessed be God! we among the rest, are invited to look to Jesus, that we may obtain complete salvation. *For as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so is the Son of man lifted up, that he may be seen from afar; and to this salutary purpose, that whoever believed in him should not perish, but have eternal* <sup>9</sup> *life*: and then it follows, *As I have sworn by myself*, which the apostle renders, *As I live, saith the Lord, unto me every knee shall bow*. Now how natural it is to suppose this to be spoken ultimately in the forementioned connexion of this great day: I will send my

<sup>9</sup> John iii.  
14, 15.

Son to be my salvation to the ends of the earth, as he is expressly called a little after : SERM.  
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 but if sinners will not be subjected to him by love, they shall be subdued by force ; and the time shall come when *every knee shall bow* before his high tribunal, *and every tongue confess*, i. e. as Paul paraphrases it in the epistle to the Philippians, *every tongue shall confess that Jesus is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father*<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Phil. ii.  
11.

Having seen the propriety with which this is applied, let me a little further observe, how solemn and affecting the representation is, according to the *mind* in which our apostle quotes these words. You see the declaration is introduced with a Divine oath : *By myself I have sworn*, says Isaiah ; *As I live, saith the Lord*, according to Paul's quotation. God was willing in this instance to give, on the one hand, strong consolation to those *who should fly for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them ; who should look unto Christ from the ends of the earth*<sup>2</sup>, that they might be saved : and, on the other, strong conviction to those who should presume to reject him ; *and therefore, when he could swear by no greater, he swears by himself. As I lift up*

<sup>2</sup> Heb. vi.  
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<sup>3</sup> Deut.  
xxxii. 40.

It is, This thing shall certainly be, *if I live*: if death does not seize my immutable life, and the source of all things be not brought to nothing, than which nothing can be imagined more absolutely impossible, this great event shall happen: I will see to it that the throne of my Son be erected, and that the world be convened before it.

*To me every knee shall bow.* There will be those who shall then pay a willing homage, and bow their knees with pleasure. They are now doing it, not in a vain, false, hypocritical form, when there are many eyes upon them to *behold their zeal for the Lord of hosts and his worship*; but in their secret retirements bowing the knee, having first bowed the heart; rejoicing above all other joys for this, that *the Lord reigns, and that they shall reign for ever*. But there are others that will not submit: their knees are stubborn like their necks, which are called *an iron sinew*, and said to be attended with *a brow of brass*<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. xlviii.

4.

They hear their great King proclaimed, but they will not do him homage, nor will they offer to him any services. Their pride and the haughtiness of their heart have despised

him and his judgments. But it imports not ; none ever hardened himself against God, and prospered. They will then be in chains, and brought out, whether they will or not ; even *those, that would not he should reign over them, will be brought forth and slain.* For the tribunal is the Lord's ; and, when he judges, he will come. Yea, the devils, with all their insolence and their rage, shall bow too. As the apostle in the passage quoted before, *To him every knee shall bow, of things under the earth as well as of things upon it.* What a specimen had you of this in that fierce demoniac, by whom *chains had been plucked asunder, and fetters plucked in pieces ;* but who, *when he saw Jesus afar off, ran, and worshipped, and said, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God, I adjure thee by God that thou torment me not*<sup>5</sup>. Strange language ! <sup>5 Mark v. 7.</sup> For God's sake spare me. For you well know that it was the devil in this wretched man who uttered these words ; which are some of the most remarkable any where to be met with, and intimate that there was some sense of horrible anguish and torment inflicted upon the proud spirits of hell, when they were cast out of the persons whom they possessed ; in which view the words are very memorable.

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We may in some measure judge by them of that homage which they, of whom here was a legion together, speaking as with one voice, shall be compelled to do at the tribunal of Christ; for this was only the triumph of his humble state, when he was *found in fashion like a man*, a common man, and appeared as one of the lower ranks of men, a carpenter and a companion of fishermen. See, O ye proud, thoughtless sinners, see the abasement and humiliation of him who is King over all the children of pride; and judge whether ye shall stand!

But it is added, *Every tongue shall confess to him*. It may in general signify that they shall own his authority; as it is elsewhere expressed, *shall confess he is Lord*. The homage of the tongue shall be added to that of the knee, which makes it more expressive. But it may, as quoted by Paul himself, be intended to express that all men shall confess themselves sinners; at least we are sure that they shall do so. Paul had proved it in this very epistle; *we have proved that Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, that every mouth may be stopped, and that all the world may become*

<sup>e</sup> Rom. iii. *guilty before God*<sup>6</sup>. Now surely the conviction.  
2. 19.


tion of guilt will then become much more sensible, when the majesty of God shall be displayed in so affecting a manner; even of that God, against whom every act of wilful sin has been high treason, has been insolent rebellion. Then, when the book shall be opened, when the law of God shall be laid open in all its extent, and shall be showed to be exceeding broad and exceeding pure; so that by the works of it *shall no flesh living be justified*; since the breach of it, even in thought, is enough to bring on eternal condemnation; then, when the records of conscience shall be laid open too, and every transgression, with every circumstance of aggravation which has inflamed it, shall be represented in the most striking view. Methinks, while I speak of this, my heart fails; and, oh! what shall I do *when God rises up; and when he judges, how shall I answer him?* Alas! I could not answer him at all, had I not the blood of my Saviour and his all-perfect righteousness to plead. But, under a sense of this, I will confess guilt before God with all deep humility and contrition of soul; and then, *if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse*

SERM. XII. *us from all unrighteousness, through the blood of Jesus Christ his Son*<sup>7</sup>, which has such an amazing efficacy. But as for those that now justify themselves, God will in that day condemn them, and will make them to condemn themselves too; will stop their mouths, so that they shall not open them to deny the charge; but to confess that they are sinners, and that he is just, just even when he condemns them to final, to everlasting misery. Great is the force of truth, and it shall prevail: great is the force of conscience, and God shall make it prevail too. Oh! that sinners would think seriously of it, and would confess to God while there is hope, and fly to Christ that their sins may be taken away. You see, then, with what propriety this scripture is applied, and how many useful and important thoughts it suggests. But I observe further,

<sup>7</sup> 1 John i.  
9.


3. That the apostle leads each of us to reflect on that strict account which we must give in that awful day. *So then*, says he, *each of us must give an account of himself to God*. Some may be ready to say, What need of that repetition? Was it not included when he had said before, *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*? To be sure

it was. But it was wise and kind of the apostle to draw out the thought into particular view, and press it by such a personal application. You know that, in human judicatories, there are many present, not as parties, but as spectators ; and it is fit that they should. If justice were not to be administered openly, there might be a foundation laid for corrupting it. And there shall be multitudes of spectators in this great judgment too ; as it is said in that lively parable, in which there are so many references to it, *He shall call to heaven from above, and to the earth, when he shall judge his people*<sup>8</sup>. All the <sup>8</sup> Psa. l. 4. shining inhabitants of heaven shall be witnesses ; for when Christ shall come in the glory of his Father, he shall have all his holy angels with him. But all the children of Adam shall be parties in that judgment. Every one of us must be there, and we must be there to give an account of ourselves to God. Every one of us ! The apostle would have every man know that should read or hear this epistle, as long as it shall be extant, and that will be till the conflagration begins, whatever his rank, circumstances, or character shall be, that he shall be concerned in

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XII.  this judgment, and that he must give an account of himself. The greatest of men, even kings, of whom their greatest flatterers only presume to say, and I think indeed that it is gross flattery to say it, that they are accountable only to God, receive this admonition with their incense. And a great account they will have to give: and so will all the great, in proportion to their dignity, their authority, and their distinguished opportunities of doing good. While we hear it, let us pray for them, that they may be made to remember it, even *kings and all that are in authority*. And there shall be every mean man too; even those who might be ready, on such an occasion, to think that, like rebels of least eminence, they might be overlooked in a crowd, while their chiefs are indeed animadverted upon. No; there must be every one of us, whether in a public or in a private character of life. There will be Paul: and, oh! how glorious and happy a day will it be for him! that day on which his heart was so much set; how happy will he find it, even above all his conception and hope, above all that he felt when, on the verge of life, he wrote to Timothy *of the crown*

*of life, which, says he, the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day; and, he* SERM.  
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*added, not to me only, but to all them that love his appearance*<sup>9</sup>. Oh that my soul may be <sup>1 Tim. iv. 8.</sup> with him! Oh! that I may learn not only his doctrine, but his temper; may trace his steps at an humble distance, and follow that Spirit and that grace by which he was what he was. There shall be his hearers, those of them who believed, and shall *be his joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord*<sup>1</sup>; <sup>1 Thess. ii. ult.</sup> those who rejected him in one place and another, the very men who opposed themselves and blasphemed, among whom he shook his garments, and said, *Your blood be upon your own head, I am clean*<sup>2</sup>. <sup>2 Acts xviii. 6.</sup> It will then be upon their heads; and I pray God, that there be not those of you who shall be in the same condemnation, and against whom I shall have the like witness to bear. It is what I most assuredly expect. We must every one give an account of himself to God. Your lives shall be reviewed, in the whole history of them, from the day of your birth to that of your death. Your sins shall be reviewed, those which you have forgotten, those which you have never observed, those which you

SERM. thought God had passed over without notice.

XII.  Alas! you will find this a vain and presumptuous thought, according to that expression in the psalm before cited, *These things thou didst, and I kept silence*; and so *thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine*

<sup>3</sup> Ps. l. 21. *eyes*<sup>3</sup>. Thou thoughtest it was the silence of fondness, but thou shalt know the contrary: it was the silence of wisdom and of justice. Thou shalt be compelled to say, as Israel, *Thou settest our iniquities before thee, our*

<sup>4</sup> Ps. xc. 8. *secret sins in the light of thy countenance*<sup>4</sup>. And, O! what a scene will that be. Thou hypocrite! that, because thou hast art enough to conceal thy wickedness from man, thinkest not of the eye of God, what shame and consternation, and horror will overwhelm thee in that day when we must all be *made manifest*, as some read that word which we translate *appear*. All our labours must then be reviewed; our works tried then, which we who are ministers have built upon this foundation: as it is expressly said, *The fire shall try every man's work, of what kind it is*. All our talents shall then be reviewed too; and it will be charged to our account that we

received such and such advantages, of genius, of education, of honour, of worldly possessions, of power and authority ; and God will inquire not only what we have done for him, but what we have done in proportion to this receiving. *Give an account of thy stewardship*, will he then say to me, and in some measure to you. I hope we shall, some of us, be then able to say, *I have not been quite unfaithful ; my talent has gained*, if not five, *yet two* : but it has not gained the half, or the tenth part of what it might have done, had I been so diligent as thou mightest well have expected. Therefore I disclaim every pretence of merit. Lord ! pardon what has been done amiss ; and accept of my poor attempts, the effects of thy grace through Christ. But, O sirs ! what will you do who have buried your talent, who have squandered it away ? Bethink yourselves in time, and fall down at the feet of your injured Master, before he arise to bring you into judgment. But I will not enlarge further on these things. I will conclude with a few hints by way of application, which is what I proposed as the second general head.

Now the following inferences may natu-

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rally be drawn, and the following exhortations grounded on what I have said. We may infer,

1. That opposition to Christ and his kingdom must be a very vain, and indeed a very fatal thing. You see that it is established by the word, by the oath of God. He has sworn, even as he lives, *that to him every knee shall bow*; and will you dare to imagine that it shall not be so: will you presume to risk your souls upon the event? Hear now, ye rebels! as Moses said to the Israelites, and judge what you are like to get by your rebellion. Has he not engaged that he will rule his enemies *with a rod of iron, and dash*


<sup>5</sup> Psa. ii. 9. *them in pieces like a potter's vessel*<sup>5</sup>? Where will all your mad opposition end? Shall it not be here, at his bar, in standing, shall I say, or rather in falling, before his tribunal? You have seen many wretched men ruining themselves by a vain opposition to that excellent prince whom the good providence of God has set over us: you see them all share in the condemnation and in the desert and execution of their followers. But, oh! how much more foolish, how much more fatal is the opposition which the greatest of men may

make against this greater Sovereign. It is a thought which we may, perhaps, ere long, resume at large; and therefore we dismiss it for the present. SERM.  
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2. That it must be of great importance to gain the friendship of Christ. Not only to avoid, as much as possible, a controversy with him, an opposition to him; that is by no means enough: we need his patronage and protection: he is to be our judge; and who would but wish that a judge should be his friend? It is true, indeed, that he will not pervert justice out of regard to friendship; but he has received a commission from God his Father to declare all his friends pardoned and blessed. I admonish you therefore solemnly of this. Seek his friendship in time. What can you do without it? What will you have to fear if you are so happy as to secure it? And may it not be secured? Yes, blessed be God! it may; for he waits to be gracious, sits long waiting upon the throne of his grace before he ascends the tribunal of his vengeance, and says, *Come unto me*, &c. But this naturally leads me to add,

3. How highly reasonable it is, that each of us should reflect how this account is like

SERM. to stand with us. It is certainly coming: it  
XII. is in effect near, for you must each of you in  
a very little while pass your own, in such a  
manner as that it will be fixed. How many,  
who were, a few years ago, amongst us, have  
passed it already, so that their doom is de-  
termined for heaven or hell. And you know,  
as surely as you know that you are alive,  
that yours may be past too; and that before  
those of the prisoners, who are to be tried  
at the assizes which are opening among us.  
Consider with yourselves then seriously, what  
will you do? Will you plead your innocence?  
I am sure, if you are not most pitiably igno-  
rant of God and of yourselves, you will not  
think of doing it. You have broken God's  
law, and you cannot atone for the breach of it:  
your future behaviour will be imperfect; and  
if it were perfect, it could make no amends  
for former offences. And therefore there is  
but one plea, which I apply to myself, and  
which I recommend to you, to fall down upon  
your knees before God on this day, and say,  
Lord, I confess all that thy justice can lay to  
my charge: Lord, I am a wretched sinner: I  
have committed a thousand crimes: I have  
abused a thousand talents: my best days,

and hours, and duties are overrun with sin. SERM.  
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 I am guilty, and I might be cast into hell.   
 But there is a great act of grace passed, and  
 I plead that. Thy Son has died for sinners,  
 for all who believe in him ; and I believe in  
 him. I commit myself to him : I desire to  
 be saved by him, from sin as well as from  
 hell ; and to spend all the little remainder of  
 my days, be it more or less, in thy fear and  
 service. And I desire that the love of Christ  
 may so reign in my heart, that I may con-  
 tinually honour his authority, and trust his  
 grace, and so be made accepted in him as  
 the beloved. This is the sinner's prepara-  
 tion for judgment, and I pray God to work it  
 in your hearts. But we may further infer,

4. That it must be our great wisdom to  
 live daily mindful of this account, in the  
 future conduct of our lives. Is every one of  
 us to give an account of himself to God ?  
 Then surely we should take great care that  
 we do not live at large, and as if we had no  
 such solemnity before us. Let it particularly  
 be our concern, that we do not live to our-  
 selves in any known act of disobedience :  
 that we do not usurp the throne of God by  
 judging our brethren ; and that we do not

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neglect the service of God, and the improvement of the talents with which we are entrusted. In consequence of what we have heard, let us take heed, that we do not live to ourselves in any known act of disobedience. Remember, you must account for it; God will not, he cannot forget it. Say with yourselves, therefore, when tempted, *How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!* Would I commit such a sin, if I knew I were to be called to judgment for it within a week, or within a day? Alas! it will bear the same weight before the judgment-seat, as if that judgment were to be to-morrow. Endeavour, therefore, to make the thoughts of this great judgment familiar to your mind, and call them up as it were in your imagination, when you enter into any circumstances of peculiar temptation. Let it be, also, our concern, that we do not usurp the throne of Christ by judging our brethren. *Who art thou*, says the apostle, *that thou judgest another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.* My brother is Christ's servant: what have I to do to judge him, any further than according to Christ's appointment. It is true, indeed, that there are

some men *whose sins*, as the apostle expresses SERM.  
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it, *are open, going before them to judgment*; and it is not usurping the throne of Christ at all to cast out of his church wicked members. It is, indeed, executing his own commission, and obeying his own commands. For he will have the memory of the last judgment kept up in the world, not only by regular judicial processes against those who offend against the civil law, but also by regular church censures against those who there behave unworthy of a Christian profession. And in token of his casting all impenitent sinners out of his kingdom at last, he requires us now to *put away from ourselves such wicked persons*. They are his own words, by the apostle Paul<sup>6</sup>. But by <sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. v. ult.  
judging a person in this manner, we do not absolutely judge of his state. We pretend not to say, how far even a good man may fall into some particular acts of wickedness: but we judge that if he does fall into them, he is not fit to be retained in Christian communion, till his repentance and reformation be apparent. Much less do we judge, that because a person may be now graceless, he

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will necessarily continue so. God may, possibly, make this ordinance the means of converting a sinner who is still in an unregenerate state. And if we are not, in this absolute manner, to judge even those, whom we are authorized and commanded by Christ at present to animadvert upon and to separate from his communion, much less should we be ready hastily to judge and condemn those, who perhaps behave, in the main, in a very regular manner; because they do not interpret some particular scriptures as we do; because they cannot express their faith in such or such human forms, or because they do not judge as we do, as to this or that external rite of Divine worship. It is pragmatical to do it: it is meddling out of our own sphere. And it is dangerous too; for our great Master and Judge has expressly forbidden it, and threatens the practice:—*Judge not, says he, that ye be not judged; for with what judgment soever ye judge, ye shall be judged*<sup>7</sup>, &c. Let us, therefore, judge ourselves: let us reflect upon our own many faults; upon our weakness to resist temptation, upon our vain, unprofitable, irresolute

<sup>7</sup> Mat. vii.  
1, 2.

lives ; how little good we do day by day ; how little we have the command of our appetites, and our tongues, and our thoughts ; how our hearts wander from God in prayer, and how much formal hypocrisy is ready to mingle itself with our worship, on every sabbath and on every day. And let us think how these things may be reformed, and how our hearts may be set more upon Christ, and upon heaven ; and then we shall be less at leisure for judging our brethren : and our Master and our Judge will think us much better employed. And let us be concerned to improve the talents with which we are entrusted, since we have so strict an account to give for them. Let us examine our stock ; let us reflect what they are, not that we may be proud of them, but that we may be humbled for former negligence, and that we may endeavour to improve them better for the time to come. And let us be asking ourselves every day, What have I this day done for God ? how have I filled up my time ? how will my account for this day stand in the book of God, where it is already registered, and where the register will be found

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undecayed, if it should not be opened for several hundred years? Think how you have profited by sermons and ordinances. I speak to you as plainly and as faithfully as I can. Often consider, what am I the better for the sermon which I heard on the last sabbath day? Have I, for instance, during the last week, been more ready to appear for God than I was before; if not, to what purpose did I hear the preacher? Think of your expenses in this view, and think of your time, and your fulness in the world; for all these things, as I have already told you, must then be charged to your account. Pardon the importunity of my friendly solicitude: *it is my heart's desire and prayer to God for you*, that you may every one of you then hear, *Well done, good and faithful servant*, &c. I add once more,

5. We may hence infer, that it will be our wisdom to take occasion from any circumstances which may arise, to assist our meditations of this great and solemn day. I appeal to every one of your consciences, whether it be not an important subject of thought: I appeal also to your consciences, whether you be not every one of you too apt

to neglect it. Sometimes the business of the world puts it out of your head, and sometimes the pleasures of the world; and such very vanity too, in many instances, that one would wonder a rational creature could take any notice of it: yet that very vanity is pursued, while the great day of accounts is forgotten. Well, I beseech you, should you not now consider it as a time of public business, and of public judgment? As it is a time of public business, you should now recollect it, lest your hearts be too much taken up with the world, and lest the temptations of it should draw you out of the way of your duty. Remember that caution of the apostle, which is a very awful and severe one, *Let no man go beyond, nor defraud his brother in any matter, for the Lord is the avenger of all such.* I remember good Dr. Leighton says, the VIIIth Commandment is that which is much more frequently broken than any of the rest. Be cautious, therefore, as you desire that God should bless you, and as you would give a good account of your merchandise and gain, to this *righteous Lord who loveth righteousness.* And nothing will be a

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greater security, than to think of this account: pause upon it this evening, that you may be prepared for the business of the week; and charge your hearts every morning with some serious reflections upon it, and solemnly mention it before God in prayer. You must all see how suitable these meditations are to a time of public judgment. Yet a few hours, and you will many of you hear the trumpet sound; you will see the Judge enter, you will behold his guards around him, you will perhaps see him go up to the judgment seat, and open his commission; you will see the prisoners brought to be tried for their lives, past crimes brought to review, the hidden things of darkness brought to the light. This is but an image, a little image of that great assize at which I am to appear. Thy Judge has Divine perfections, so that every one shall give an account, not to a mere man but to God. *His eyes are as a flame of fire*: his guards shall be angels, and shining cherubims: his trumpet shall wake the dead: before his tribunal a whole world shall be assembled: not a single sinner shall be able to decline appearance, shall be able

to pervert or elude justice, shall be able to survive the sentence. It will be on all the impenitent a sentence of eternal death ; but the smiling face of mercy, amidst all the sorrows of that day, shall shine upon the believers, shall shine upon my soul if I am in that happy number. And, oh ! that it may be so : the Lord grant to every one of you, and to your household too, that you and they *may find mercy of the Lord in that day*. Mercy must be the plea of the most eminent saint ; and if it be sought in time, it may be the refuge even of the chief of sinners.

SERM.

XII.

## SERMON XIII.

A HEAVENLY CONVERSATION DESCRIBED  
AND RECOMMENDED.

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PHILIPPIANS, iii. 20.

*For our conversation is in heaven.*

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XIII.

THE apostle speaks of it as the character of the holy patriarchs, that they *confessed that* <sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. *they were strangers upon earth*<sup>1</sup>; and thereby  
10. 13, 14. declared that they sought *another country*, that is, *a heavenly*: that *they looked for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*. To them that city was discovered in a much more imperfect manner: but now, by the glorious gospel, life and immortality are brought to light; and the object is so illustrious, and the discovery of it is so clear, that one would imagine that every eye should see it, and that every heart should be warmed with it. Did one not know, by observation and experience, the degeneracy and folly of

human nature, one would hope that wherever the trumpet of the gospel sounded, the vanity and folly of the world should be laid down, and a crowd of holy pilgrims should begin their journey towards the New Jerusalem, and should proceed on with a steady pace through all the wilderness, till Jordan were passed, and that heavenly shore were gained. But, alas! it is much otherwise. It was so in the apostle's days as it is in ours, as he observes in the preceding words: *There are many walk, says he, of whom I have often told you, and now tell you even weeping, who are enemies to the cross of Christ, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.* They fix their eyes and their hearts upon sensual things, even more constantly than the brute creatures fix their regard upon earth, as if they were not made capable of lifting up an eye heavenward, or forming a thought, a prospect, or a wish beyond the mean boundaries of time and sense. This is the character of many, and it is to be ascribed only to the Divine grace that it is not the character of all. But, blessed be God! there are those who, with the apostle, can say, *We look not at the things that are seen,*

SERM. *but at those that are unseen*<sup>2</sup>. *Our conversa-*  
 XIII. *tion is in heaven.* From which words it will  
<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. iv. be my business,  
 18.

I. To describe, and then,

II. To enforce that heavenly conversation which is spoken of in the text. After which,

III. I shall conclude with a few reflections.

May what I have to say awaken you, my friends! may it teach you to look upward beyond these little inconsiderable things which take up so much of our hearts, and thereby make us as vain as themselves.

1. I am to describe this heavenly conversation, which the apostle speaks of as his own character, and recommends to the imitation of others. Now here some of you very well know that the original word, πολιτευμα, is of a particular import, and carries much greater force along with it than the word *conversation*, by which it is rendered. It refers to the freedom of a city, or corporation, which a person might have, and to which he might act with a considerable and constant regard while he was absent from the place. Some, therefore, have rendered

it, *our citizenship is in heaven*. And, in this sense, the words may comprehend these two particulars. We have an interest in heaven, and a relation to it as our city; and we conduct ourselves agreeably to such an interest and relation. SERM.  
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1. The words comprehend an interest in heaven, or a relation to it as our city. It is well known that a man might have the *jus civitatis*, the privileges of a citizen of Rome, who had never been there. *I*, said the apostle, *was free-born*<sup>3</sup>. These privileges were some-<sup>3 ACTS XXII. 28.</sup> times purchased, and were sometimes hereditary; as the captain told Paul it was *with a great sum he obtained that freedom*. But, indeed, it is not in either of these senses that any of the sinful sons of Adam can pretend to be citizens of heaven. They are not *free-born*, because they are descended from transgressors, who have forfeited their own right, and the right of their children to this heavenly citizenship. Nor have they any sum in this impoverished state, by which they can pretend to make so important a purchase. Nevertheless, there are some who, poor and miserable as they naturally are, may now say, through grace, that they are *heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*. They are, in this respect,

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*beloved, who were not once beloved, and are entitled to this heavenly city, though they were originally aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, &c.* Now as this is so important an article, give me leave a little to describe various particulars in such characters as these, as the foundation of this their interest in the heavenly city. They are brought firmly to believe the reality of its existence; highly to esteem it; diligently to inquire after the way of obtaining it; and cordially to comply with the terms which are prescribed for its acquisition.

1. The citizens of heaven do firmly believe the existence of that blessed world. This must be the foundation of all their regard to it, and the motive of all their pursuits after it. He that comes to it must believe that it is, must be fully assured that it is not, as some have profanely thought, merely the gay dream of an enthusiastical imagination, that it is not an Utopian region, known only in description and in fancy; but that the existence of earth itself is not more certain than that of heaven. *We know, says the apostle, that we have a building with God.* I may add,

2. The citizens of heaven are also con-

vinced of the excellency of it. Else they would never be engaged to pursue it with so much labour, and, as it often happens, to secure it at so great an expense. The prejudices of all men in favour of those things which are seen, and are temporal, are indeed very great. But every good man is brought to say with the apostle, *We reckon*, we find upon computation, *that neither the sufferings of this present world*, on the one hand, nor the glories of it, on the other, *are*, by any means, *worthy of being compared with the glory which shall be revealed*<sup>4</sup>. And this is <sup>4Rom.viii.</sup> not merely a speculative notion, but it is his <sup>18.</sup> practical judgment; in consequence of which,

3. The citizen of heaven inquires after the method of becoming a member of that blessed city. He makes it his serious inquiry how he may make this happiness his own; that he may *behold it for himself, and not for another*. And here the gospel comes in with that light, and, I may add, that life too, which nothing but the gospel can give, and shows him plainly that he must be an adopted son of God, in order to his being a sharer in this blessed inheritance; and that, in order to that adoption, he must be in Christ; and that, in

SERM.  
XIII.

SERM.  
XIII.

consequence of that adoption, he must be made like to his heavenly Father, and be brought to a blessed conformity to the temper and manner of this blissful state. And, agreeably to this,

4. A citizen of heaven gladly conforms to this proposed method. He not only submits to it, but he cordially acquiesces in it. He sees that it is exceedingly regular and fit that it should be thus, as by the gospel constitution it is. He is, therefore, willing to accept of Christ, to receive him, that so he may have this privilege of becoming a child of God. He desires that he may be formed and fashioned to a temper of mind agreeable to this hope of a heavenly kindom, and gives diligence that he may be *made meet to be partaker of an inheritance among the saints in light*.

2. *To have our conversation in heaven* does also further imply that we conduct ourselves in a manner suitable to our relation to it, as *our city*, and *our interest* in it as such. So the words nearly akin to these signify. When the apostle says, *Only let your conversation be*

<sup>s</sup> Phil. i. *as becomes the gospel*<sup>5</sup>, i. e. Let your behaviour and conduct in life be agreeable to it. So

here do not content yourselves with professing to belong to the heavenly society and community, but show it by your lives; not merely by this or that *particular* action, but by the main tenor of them. Give me leave to mention several particulars evidently comprehended in this branch of the exhortation, which is indeed the chief thing expressed, the other being only supposed as the foundation of it. And here,

1. A conversation in heaven will imply that the heavenly world be the frequent subject of our meditation and of our discourse. It will imply that we think much of heaven. Can we forget our home? if we are at any time, by the providence of God, called to a distance from it, how often do we recollect the idea! Nay, I will add, if we were going to live in a place in which some ample estate and great privileges were to be conferred upon us, how would it fill our thoughts, and how desirous should we be to inform ourselves more particularly about it! how should it be the subject of our discourse as well as of our thoughts! When heavenly pilgrims get together in friendly and familiar converse, methinks, that blessed hope to which they are

SERM. going should often be mentioned ; and there  
 XIII. should be a concern to make their mutual  
 friendship happily subservient to their growing  
 preparation for it : which leads me to add,

2. A heavenly conversation also implies that we be upon our guard against too great a fondness for earth and its enjoyments. A man cannot serve two masters : he cannot pursue two supreme ends. He that is indeed a citizen of heaven will, in consequence of this, be a stranger on earth. Such a one is, by Divine grace, taught to consider that *time is short* ; and therefore he endeavours to moderate his affections towards the most pleasing, and towards the most affecting objects here. According to the exhortation that follows it, remembering that *those who have*  
 ‘ 1 Cor. vii. *wives be as though they had none*<sup>6</sup>, &c. “ I am,”  
 29. says he, “ going home ; these are transient scenes ; it matters but little whether so short a road be fair or foul, pleasant or disagreeable : let it be but a straight road ; let it be but a sure and a near way to my home, and I am content.”

3. A heavenly conversation will further import a concern to keep up a correspondence with the city to which we belong. Who

would drop all correspondence with his own country, while he is abroad? Merchants, or other residents in foreign countries, are writing letters, and consigning over their effects thither: so should we in effect do whilst here upon earth. We should every day be keeping up our correspondence with heaven by faith and prayer, and ordering all our affairs in such a manner as may most advance our interest there. And here let it be particularly observed that our Lord has represented all acts of true Christian charity in this view, *as providing bags that wax not old; a treasure in heaven that fades not away; as the way to make ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it fails, we may be received into everlasting habitations.* And the apostle Paul represents Christians *as ready to distribute, willing to communicate; as laying up in store a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*<sup>7</sup>. <sup>7</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.

And surely we cannot imagine any nobler incentive to abide in every good work.

4. To have our conversation in heaven must imply a great care to do nothing to forfeit our right to the privileges of that blessed community; nothing to bring it so

SERM. much as into suspicion. *Let us fear*, says the  
 XIII. apostle, *lest, a promise being left us of entering  
 into his rest, we should*, by any means, so much

<sup>s</sup> Heb. iv. as *seem to come short of it*<sup>8</sup>. The good man  
 1. lives upon the believing hope of heavenly  
 happiness: he makes it his portion, he counts  
 it his all; and he would think himself undone  
 by any thing whereby it might be finally en-  
 dangered. He, therefore, walks circumspectly,  
 as in the midst of snares; and resists, with a  
 firm resolution, the dangers inseparable from  
 the circumstances of his present abode.

5. A conversation in heaven will imply a  
 zeal for the interests of that heavenly commu-  
 nity to which we have the honour to be thus  
 related. The citizen of Rome might reason-  
 ably be expected to be concerned for the  
 honour and interest of Rome: much more  
 may the citizens of heaven be supposed to  
 have such a concern for their blessed city.  
 The good man, therefore, will be concerned  
 to do nothing that may dishonour it, nothing  
 that may bring a reproach upon the society  
 of which he is a member. He will also be  
 desirous to increase the number of those who  
 belong to it, and naturally lay hold on any  
 opportunity of procuring more subjects to

God, and forming more heirs for heaven: and he will show a peculiar regard for those, who belong to this society, as well as for himself. He will love them, and seek their good; and, whilst *he does good to all as he has opportunity*, he will be particularly ready to do it *to them who are of the household of faith*<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Gal. vi.  
10.

6. To have our conversation in heaven implies a concern that our souls may be conformed to the customs and manners of that blessed world. This, as we before observed, is a very necessary branch of our preparation for it; and it has a very natural connexion with the circumstance supposed. A man who belonged to Rome, and who thought of living there, would, no doubt, be glad to learn the language, and to be acquainted with the customs of the Romans, that he might not appear as a barbarian among them. So the Christian would learn the language of Canaan: he would accustom himself in some measure to live as he must live in heaven; and he knows that is to live a life of devotion and a life of love. This blessed principle, therefore, he is cherishing, desirous to *love the Lord his God with all his heart*, and *his neighbour as himself*: and to moderate his fondness for

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those things which are intended only as accommodations in this pilgrimage; but which must be left behind him, as it were, at the gate of heaven, as of no further service and use.

7. To have our conversation in heaven also implies an habitual readiness to remove our habitation thither, whenever God shall appoint such a remove. He is the great Lord of both worlds; and therefore his discharge from the one, and his summons to the other, are to be attended. But surely it very ill becomes the citizens of heaven to be unwilling to leave this earth, when to leave it is so much to their advantage. We are told that there were some of the Israelites, who, when Cyrus permitted their return to Canaan, chose rather to continue in Babylon, because they had formed alliances, and had fixed their habitations, and purchased estates there. But we think it an unworthy answer when the city of God, to which they were then called, lay in ruins, and was to be rebuilt at vast expense, and with great danger. But the new Jerusalem is in its perfect state and beauty: judge then how advantageous it is that the citizens of it should be willing to leave this wilderness, that they

may go and fix their abode in their everlasting home, with the nearest of their relations, with the best of their friends. An habitual willingness to our passage thither, whatever our circumstances here may be, however comfortable or however promising, is a very considerable branch of this excellent temper, recommended to us by the example of the apostle in the text; and that it is well worthy of our imitation will appear from the second general; to which accordingly I now proceed, SERM.  
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II. To recommend such a heavenly consideration as I have now described. And here I shall urge both the branches of it; that you may secure an interest in heaven as your city, and may live with becoming regards to it.

1. Let me urge it upon your consciences and my own, that we seek an interest in heaven as our city. And here I shall mention only two considerations. Its excellency is worthy of our choice, and the precarious circumstances of our abode here may drive us to it as our only refuge.

1. The excellency of the heavenly city renders it well worthy of our choice. *Glorious things indeed are spoken of thee, O thou city*

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm  
lxxxvii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. ii  
9.

<sup>3</sup> Psa. xli.  
5.

*of God*<sup>1</sup>! But all the most glorious things that can be spoken of it are poor and mean, when compared with its real glories; *for eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God has prepared for those who love him*<sup>2</sup>. Whatever can recommend a city to our choice is here surely to be found—the safety and ornament of the place, and the character of its inhabitants. The safety of the place is worthy of some degree of consideration. What was said concerning the Zion of old may, with much greater propriety, be applied to this. *God is in the midst of her, and therefore she cannot be moved*<sup>3</sup>. Though the kings were to gather themselves together, none of them could approach, to cast a stone or to shoot an arrow into it. Its adamantine walls are secure from all danger of invasion, even by all the powers of hell itself. The almighty arm of God surrounds it: his wakeful eye continually watches over it. Its ornaments are such as nothing on earth can equal. They so far exceed our imagination that they are described by *streets of gold, and gates of pearl, and walls of the most precious stones*; figurative expressions, which at least signify this,

that it is as much more glorious than any earthly city, as such a building would be. And for the pleasure of its situation we are assured that *there is a river whose streams make glad the city of our God* in the habitation of the Most High ; even the river of life proceeding from his own throne, and adorned on each side with the trees of life. There all suitable provision is made for the entertainment of a glorified and an immortal body, as well as for the delight of the sanctified and perfected spirit, in a free converse with the blessed God, with whom, indeed, is the fountain of life, and *in whose light we shall see the divinest light*. This is the great glory and happiness of this heavenly Jerusalem, that *the Lord shall be its everlasting light, and all the days of mourning shall be for ever ended, and a crown of glory there worn, which shall never fade away*. And are the characters of its inhabitants to be forgotten upon this occasion ? It is added, they shall all be holy. It is not, to be sure, the beauty of situation, nor any external circumstances of place that can give entertainment to a rational and friendly mind like the pleasure of agreeable conversation. How happy do we sometimes

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think ourselves in a few select, wise, and good friends; in whom we can entirely confide; with whom we can use a secure and easy freedom, improving them, and being improved by them, in knowledge and in religion? Blessed, yet faint emblem of the heavenly society! where all will be wise, all good, all friendly, and all happy. Their circumstances free from every distress, their persons from every blemish, their character from every imperfection; and, to crown all, our own will be so too; and consequently there will be every thing which is necessary to form us to a relish for their friendship, and to entitle us to a share in it. And never let it be forgotten that, in the midst of all his saints, high upon a throne of exalted glory, the Son of God dwells, and reigns there; even Jesus, *whom, having not seen, we love, in whom, though now we see him not, yet, believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.* All these pleasing ideas are united by the apostle: *Ye are come to mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable*

<sup>4</sup> Heb. xii. *company of angels*<sup>4</sup>, &c. Consider the circumstances of your abode on earth, and the

society with which, even in the most agree-  
 able situation of it, you are surrounded, and  
 judge whether there be any room to make a  
 comparison; judge whether an interest in  
 heaven, and a right to the privileges of that  
 blessed world, would not be desirable and  
 eligible, even though you might have it in  
 your choice to spend an eternity on earth, if  
 you should so think fit. But, alas! you  
 know that this is far from being the case. I  
 therefore add,

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2. You should be persuaded to seek an  
 interest in heaven, because you have so pre-  
 carious an abode here; and, ere long, it  
 must be your only refuge. I may say, *Arise,*  
*depart, this is not your rest*<sup>5</sup>. It cannot be so. <sup>5</sup> Micah ii.  
 You have, as the apostle argues, *you have* <sup>10.</sup>  
*here no continuing city*; surely therefore you  
 should *seek one that is to come*<sup>6</sup>. And is not <sup>6</sup> Heb. xiii.  
 this a true representation of your case? Think <sup>14.</sup>  
 of all the former generations of the children  
 of men. Our fathers, where are they? and  
 their fathers? and theirs? They were once  
 on earth, many of them dwelling in the same  
 country, the same town; it may be, some of  
 them in the same house: but they have re-  
 signed, they have taken their turn, and are

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passed off: and you know it, sirs, you assuredly know it, that in a little time there will be a writ of ejectment executed, and you also must be turned out. *This earthly house will be dissolved*; and when you have done with the body, you have done with all the possessions, delights, and accommodations which were referred to it. And is it not necessary that an immortal creature should have something more and better than a mere mortal happiness? If you are not citizens of heaven, if you have no home and possessions there, what will become of you? what can you expect better than to wander hopeless and forlorn, and in the want of all things? But why do I speak of this forlorn wandering? No, you cannot expect any thing even so tolerable as this. It is the immutable constitution of the world of spirits that when you come into it, you must be the citizens of heaven or the prisoners of hell: you must have your part among the wicked that *go away into everlasting punishment*, if you have it not among the righteous that *go away into life eternal*. And think of the dreadful description given of that *Tophet, the pile of which is large and high, and which is kindled by the breath of the*

*Lord, like a stream of brimstone*<sup>7</sup>; and then say whether it be not your wisdom to seek and secure a share in the treasure, and those privileges of heaven, rather than to continue exposed to all those dangers and horrors? But let me now proceed to what one would think should be the easier branch of our exhortation: viz.

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<sup>7</sup> Isa. xxx.  
33.

2. To urge to a behaviour becoming this relation and hope. What that behaviour is, I have already showed in a great variety of instances: the obligations to it are much more various than I must now recount.

1. Consider that without such a temper and conduct you have no security of your interest in heaven. You can neither have a covenant title nor a real fitness for it. Without such a temper you have no covenant title to it. *Holiness* is a word that comprehends all that I have been saying, and much more; for it is said that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*<sup>8</sup>: that *nothing which defiles shall enter into the new Jerusalem*. And you can never expect that the constitution of the heavenly world should be repealed for you; and without such a temper and conduct you can have no real fitness for it. There is such

<sup>8</sup> Heb. xii.  
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a thing (I wish it were more considered) as being *made meet for the inheritance among the saints in light*. Now I appeal to your consciences whether there can be that meetness without the temper now described in the several branches of it? If a man will neither think nor speak of heaven; if his heart be set upon this world; if he keeps no correspondence with heaven; if he allows himself daily in what will forfeit his interest there; if he has no zeal for it, no concern to learn and imitate the manners of its inhabitants, and at last be taken away, is dragged unwillingly from earth, and only thinks of heaven as a city of refuge from hell, can it be congruous that such a person should have his eternal abode there? Whereas when this temper is prevailing in your souls, which I have now been recommending, then you may regard it as the work of God's Spirit, whereby you are assured that the privileges of this blessed world are yours; and in consequence of that you may easily believe,

2. That the more you have your conversation in heaven the more delightful will earth be. Such a temper will moderate a great many difficulties and pains, and it will

open a great many peculiar pleasures, and those of the most favourable kind. Many of the trials and afflictions of life will be sweetened and softened by such a temper. “Earth is a thorny wilderness; but, blessed be God, I am passing through it. Nothing shall grieve me much that will not grieve me long,” may the christian say. “These things cannot prevent, they cannot diminish my portion and my hope in heaven; nay, they will rather both hasten and increase them.” Thus the apostle argues: *for this cause we faint not*, says he; *though the outer man perishes, the inner man is renewed day by day; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at those that are unseen. For we know that, while we do so, these light afflictions, that are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*<sup>9</sup>. And such a temper will lay a foundation for many peculiar and most valuable pleasures. Pleasure, for instance, in retirement, in which we can leave a vain world, take the glass of faith, look through it, and view the heavenly Canaan *in the length thereof, and in the breadth thereof*. Pleasure also in society; for when holy souls consider one another as

<sup>9</sup> 2 Cor. iv.  
16—18.

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travellers thither, and think how near they are to the end of their journey, and how long a friendship lies before them there, a friendship which death shall not dissolve, but only for a while interrupt, and upon the whole incomparably improve. It moreover lays a foundation for pleasure in ordinances. Sabbath days and seasons of religious worship are the most delightful seasons of life to that man whose *conversation is in heaven*; because it is then that he hears of heaven; it is then that he breathes most ardently after it; it is then that he feels his fitness for it most remarkably growing, and often receives the blessed *Spirit of God, to witness with his spirit that he is a child of God*, and by consequence an heir of all those unutterable and unknown glories.

3. To have our conversation thus in heaven will take out the sting of death. It will reconcile you to the thoughts of it at a distance, and probably be a mean of moderating the conflict when it naturally comes. If death were to be viewed as the last of things, as an enemy that would certainly conquer and destroy us, though it were only by an extinction of our being, we might well think of it with horror. Much more if we saw hell fol-

lowing it. But when abstracting it from this world, we have fixed the heart upon heaven, death changes its property, and its aspect. It then appears a messenger to fetch us home, an officer appointed by God to open the gate of glory. It takes us indeed from earthly things; but, if we have had our conversation in heaven, as we have allowed earthly things but a small share of our affections, it is a transition to another and better state, of which we have lived upon the believing views. “I will not then say, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* I will rather embrace it, and say, Thou art welcome, O my friend! Farewell, thou earth that hast been an ensnaring wilderness to me. Farewell, faith, my best friend here, but now no longer useful. Welcome, the ends of my pilgrimage, the close of my sorrow. *Be ye lifted up, ye gates! be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors!* ye have admitted the king of glory, and I have his order to pass into his presence.” Such may justly be, such often are the sentiments and language of a dying saint, whose conversation has been much in heaven. I am to conclude with hinting at the improvement, which I shall not have time to enlarge upon.

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1. Let us bless God that this heavenly city is revealed, and that we are favoured to partake of its privileges. Adored be divine grace that there does remain *a rest for the people of God*, that we are not left to perish in the wilderness, to go down as we deserve from earth to hell; but that *immortality is brought to light*, that we have not only the hopes, but the *promise* of eternal life, and such particular, such delightful descriptions of this world of glory; that we, whose country was once the seat of gentile idolatry, are favoured with the light of this glorious gospel, and so *begotten to this lively hope*. Let us bless God, if we have been brought to choose our portion in heaven, to *have our conversation* there. We may indeed say *He that wrought us to this selfsame thing is God*. How many are despising this pleasant land, and thinking themselves perhaps wise in that self-condemning and self-destroying contempt which they cast upon it! Blessed be God that we have been to see it; that we have been awakened to pursue it; that we have been at length called, I hope through grace, to enjoy the beginnings of it; that we are in the way shortly to arrive there, and in the meantime have

such present privileges, such present entertainment, in consequence of this relation.

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2. How unlike is the temper of the generality of professors to that of the apostle and of every real christian! How few are there that hear of heaven who can say, *Our conversation* is there. Would to God that their lives did not say the contrary, and proclaim them to be *enemies to the cross of Christ*. They hear of heaven; but prefer earth to it, and set heaven as it were to a deliberate sale for every trifle. They *judge themselves unworthy of eternal life*. It is matter of melancholy reflection. And are there none of you, my friends, who act in like manner? I beseech you, look into your own souls: I entreat you, examine yourselves as to the spirituality of your converse; and remember that a day is coming when God will disown all those who have practically disowned him and his ways. Perhaps you do not believe this; but I should think that the character of saint and of sinner might convince you that there will be a difference in their end.

3. Let me conclude with exhorting you all to cultivate a heavenly conversation. You have heard of it. You must in your own

SERM. judgment and conscience approve of it. See  
XIII. that you pursue it, else your knowledge, and  
your approbation of it, what will they be but  
your condemnation? endeavour by Divine  
grace to attain this blessed temper. Seek  
God in prayer, that he may work it in your  
souls; that your thoughts and discourse may  
be more heavenly, that your affections may  
be moderated to earth and its enjoyments,  
the *manners* of heaven more practised, your  
*correspondence* with heaven better main-  
tained, and the *interests* of heaven more  
resolutely pursued. Give me leave parti-  
cularly to apply by exhortation to you who  
are *solemnly entered into a christian profes-*  
*sion*, to you who assemble from time to time  
at the table of the Lord, before *whose eyes*  
*Christ is evidently set forth as crucified among*  
*you*. Remember that you are redeemed  
from this present world by the blood which  
you there commemorate, and see that your  
*conversation be in heaven*. In that world,  
which he purchased by the precious blood  
of his covenant, dwells that blessed Redeemer  
whom you so solemnly own, and after whom  
you profess to long and breathe. You that  
are the *children of pious parents*; it may

be (as I know some of you are) descended from those who have been most eminent for religion in their day and generation, and who are now with God. You are peculiarly the *children* of the kingdom: may you be the *heirs* of it! Think of that world where your pious ancestors are, and where they are, as it were, waiting for your arrival to improve their own joy. You, *aged saints*, who have dispatched most of your pilgrimage in life, let your *conversation be in heaven*. You have almost done with earth. Methinks that you should peculiarly imagine that every sabbath may be your last. Will you not think much of that world of which you are upon the very borders? Let not earth engross your hearts, when you are so quickly to leave it. I will add, Let it not much affect you, but think of heaven yourselves, and labour to lead to it the thoughts and the discourses of others. Of this *days should speak*, and this heavenly wisdom *the multitude of years should* especially teach; since your tongues are so soon to be silent in the dust, and your souls so soon to be employed in the service and songs of heaven. Once more, let me conclude with addressing

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the exhortation to you who are employed in or are designed for the solemn service of the sanctuary. You who are, or may be, ministers of the God of heaven, let *your conversation be in heaven*. Ministers are called the angels of the church\*, and, as Dr. Bates well observes, “like angels should desire to divide their time between beholding the face of their father in heaven, and ministering to the heirs of salvation on earth.” Nothing can conduce more, through the divine blessing, to the honour and to the success of your ministry. It will be greatly for the honour of your ministry to appear to converse much in heaven, as on the contrary it will be a sad reproach to see ministers the slaves of this world, as if they exhorted others to despise it, only that they themselves might engross it all. Sad indeed will it be, if all the distinguished advantages which our office gives us have not some correspondent influence on our hearts. And I will add, this will probably tend much through the divine concurrence to the success of our labours. Who so likely to speak of heaven to advantage as those who daily converse

\* Bate's Works, p. 318.

there. When we can say with the apostle, *what we have seen with our eyes, and what our hands have handled of the word of life,* what we have tasted, and what we have lived upon, *declare we unto you*<sup>1</sup>! Let it be <sup>SERM. XIII.</sup> <sup>1 John i. 1. 3.</sup> remembered that heavenly ministers are the most likely to make heavenly hearers; and I do verily believe that if God has mercy in store for us, as a nation and a people, it will appear in the effusion of this heavenly spirit on those who serve at his altar. Let us, my christian brethren, entreat you as you love us, as you tender your own edification, and the success of the gospel, that you *strive together in your prayers to God for us*, that our experience of divine things may be more abundant, and our intercourse with heaven more constant; *that so the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us, and we in him, according to the grace of God our Father, and of the Lord Jesus Christ.* In his righteousness our hopes of glory are founded, by his spirit they are wrought and cherished. To him, therefore, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be everlasting praises. Amen.


## SERMON XIV.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT ASSERTED  
AND EXAMINED.

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ROM. viii. 16.

*For the spirit witnesseth with our spirit that we are the  
children of God.*

SERM.  
XIV.  GLORIOUS things are indeed spoken of the city of God, and of that *inheritance of the saints in light*, which has lately been the subject of our discourse to you. To be the *children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ*, must be allowed to be a privilege of so great importance that all the little distinctions, whereby the children of this world are dignified, are as nothing when compared with it. Our great concern should be to insure it, that it may be our own: and never can this persuasion be so satisfactory and comfortable, never can it be built on so good a

foundation, never can it produce such noble effects, as when the *spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.* SERM.  
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It is plain that the apostle speaks of this as *his own* privilege, and as the privilege of many other believers in his days; and I well know that it is what the good man earnestly desires, though, perhaps, many are complaining that they are far from having, as they could have desired, been able to attain unto it. I therefore propose this day, by the assistance of that blessed Spirit, of whose operation I am to speak, to make it the foundation of my discourse to you. Oh that we may find him breaking in upon our poor benighted souls, as the sun from a cloud, and making himself known by his own sacred light, while *he bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God!* It will be my business from these words,

I. To consider what is imported in this expression of *the spirit's bearing witness*:

II. To show how desirable a thing this testimony is:

III. To consider how it may be known and distinguished from any vain and presumptuous persuasion:

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IV. To propose some advices for obtaining this great privilege :

V. And to conclude with some particular application.

I. I shall consider what we are to understand by this witness of the spirit with our spirit; and here I shall first attempt to fix the general meaning, and then consider the more particular import.

1. I am to fix the more general meaning of the word. And here I shall content myself with two remarks: the words are to be considered as referring, not merely to the miraculous gifts of the spirit, but to his gracious operations on the soul; and these operations are not to be considered as peculiar to the apostle himself, nor to the primitive christians.

1. This witness of the spirit relates not merely to his *miraculous* gifts, but to his gracious operations upon the soul. There was indeed a very convincing *witness*, which the spirit bore to the admission of the gentiles into the christian church, which was especially evident in the instance of Cornelius's family. While Peter preached to

them, the Holy Ghost fell upon them like a sacred unction<sup>1</sup>, from whence the apostle very reasonably concludes that it was the will of God that they should be admitted to baptism, and introduced to all the privileges of other christians: in allusion to which it is said, *that it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to admit believing gentiles without circumcision.* But I think that this cannot properly be called *bearing witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.* For that was a testimony borne to others rather than to a man's self, and it could not prove him a child of God, since many *who prophesied in his name, and in his name cast out devils*, would another day be rejected by him, as persons whom he never knew, and on whom he would bestow no favourable regards. It could not, therefore, prove them to be so *children* as to be *heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.* The text then must relate to some inward operation of God's spirit upon their mind, assuring them that they were christians indeed, and so were entitled to the blessings of the Christian covenant, exercising the acts of grace in so lively a manner, that there could be

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Acts x.  
44.

SERM.  
XIV.

no reasonable doubt of the sincerity of it; and so presiding over their minds as that they should not be harassed with any needless scruples. So that I take it to be the same thing as that to which the apostle refers, when he prays that the *God of hope would fill them with all joy, and peace, in believing, that they might abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost*<sup>2</sup>. And this being a prayer for those who were remarkable for their attainment in spiritual gifts, as the christians of Rome evidently appear to have been then, as well as the natural import of the expressions themselves, it may abundantly convince us that the expression here in the text relates to *gracious*, and *sanctifying*, rather than merely to *miraculous* operations.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xv.  
13.

2. There is no reason to confine it to the apostles, or to the christians of that age, but much to consider it as extending to others, even to the whole body of believers. You will observe that I do not affirm that it is actually the privilege of every believer, nor, perhaps, of any at all times, for that would be such a confident faith and assurance as I think has no rational foundation in God's word, and would only tend to terrify and to per-

plex. But I say that there is no reason SERM.  
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to confine such a scripture as this, which relates to the testimony of God's spirit, merely to the apostolic age; for it is plain that christians in after ages would have the same, and in some respects, greater need of support. I say *greater need* of it, in proportion to the degree in which they were removed to a remoter distance from the period in which the great fact, on which redemption depends, was accomplished; and fell into the dregs of time when iniquity abounded, and the love of many waxed cold. You know that all christians are said in general to have *received the first fruits, and the earnest of the spirit*<sup>3</sup>: and the apostle <sup>2 Cor. i. 22.</sup> speaks of it as the common privilege of every believer, when *he has sealed with his holy spirit. Grieve not the spirit, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption*<sup>4</sup>. *He who* <sup>4 Eph. i. 13. iv. 30.</sup> *has wrought us to the selfsame thing is God, who also has given us the earnest of his spirit*<sup>5</sup>. <sup>5 2 Cor. v. 5.</sup> And this spirit being intended to produce the fruits of holiness, and to quicken us to a divine life, why should we conclude that christians in any age should be excluded

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from their part in his operations. I may also add that the apostle in the very context reasons on this very principle. He declares that if any man *have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his*: that all those *who are led by the spirit*, they and they only *are the children of God*. Surely we cannot imagine it less necessary to have and be conducted by the spirit of Christ now, in our temper and conduct, than it was at the time when the apostle wrote. And if we are now to have the spirit as a *sanctifier*, and a *guide*, what can be more natural than to suppose that he should also be a *comforter* and *bear witness with our spirits*, as he did with those of the former christians, that we are indeed *the children of God*. Having given you this general view of the subject, let me proceed a little more particularly to consider what is imported in the *witness of the Spirit with our spirit, that we are the children of God*. Now I would observe, that it implies the answer of a good conscience towards God in the person to whom the testimony is borne; a serious and accurate inquiry on his part; and, lastly, that the words are to be taken

taken in such an extent, as to allow a great variety in the cases of different Christians, and of the same Christian at different times. SERM.  
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1. The witness of the Spirit will imply the testimony of a good conscience in the person to whom it is borne. We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth; and it would be most absurd to imagine that in this instance it should be founded on falsehood. To witness to any person's adoption must suppose a witness to their regeneration, i. e. to a real change of heart, which must necessarily produce a change of life. This is further intimated in the words of the text, when it is said that *the Spirit bears witness with our spirit*, which implies that we have the testimony of our *own* spirit. And the apostle John insists upon it with a plainness and warmth becoming its importance. *Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, we have confidence towards God*<sup>6</sup>. This, says the apostle, *is our rejoicing, even the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world*<sup>7</sup>: and *the baptism that saves is the answer of a good conscience towards God*<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> 1 John  
iii. 21.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor. i.  
12.  
<sup>8</sup> 1 Pet. iii.  
21.

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From whence, by the way, we may reasonably infer (and it is an inference of very great weight) that all those who desire to obtain the witness of the Spirit *should herein*, with that blessed apostle, *exercise themselves daily to maintain a conscience void of offence, both*  
<sup>9</sup>Acts xxiv. *towards God and towards man*<sup>9</sup>. And (as we  
 16. shall have occasion afterwards to observe) the more of a filial temper prevails in our hearts, the greater reason shall we have to expect that Divine witness to the truth of it.

2. It further implies a serious care to know the state of the soul. It is not to be imagined that he bears his testimony unasked; nor, indeed, can there be any room to bear testimony to any person as a child of God who has no value for the privileges of the family. The witness is borne with *our spirit*; our spirit must then be searched, and those powers of self-reflection, which God has given to us, exercised; for we are told that *the spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord* (i. e. a candle which God has, as it were, lighted up in his heart), *that searcheth the secret parts of*  
<sup>1</sup>Prov. xx. *the belly*<sup>1</sup>, discovers the inmost recesses of the  
 27. mind. Nor is whatever extraordinary assistance God has granted to us intended to

supersede, but, on the contrary, to animate and assist in such an inquiry.

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3. It is plainly implied that, besides the exercise of the rational powers, there is some peculiar operation of God upon the good man's heart, to confirm his hope, and to animate his joy. The witness of the Spirit cannot be merely laying down those rules whereby the Christian character may be known; for this is the witness that he bears, not merely to the children of God, but to all others. It surely implies something more than an assistance of the rational faculties in their inquiries. He might then be said to *enlighten*, but I cannot see how he could *testify*. Nor is it merely his working in us those graces which, upon a review, appear; though that be an important operation; but it is something by which he acts under the character of a *Comforter*: it is the voice of God, inwardly speaking to the soul, to confirm its hopes and to awaken its joys, saying, *Son! Daughter! be of good courage; thy sins are forgiven thee. Fear not, for I am with thee. I will never fail thee nor forsake thee. I will surely do thee good; thy life shall be given thee for a prey.* In what particular

SERM. manner the Spirit acts, in producing these  
 XIV. operations upon the soul, we know not; and  
 who can wonder at our ignorance in this respect, since we know not how God acts in the natural world, or how our own souls act in their operations upon the body? But the effect is not the less real because the particular mode of it is inexplicable. And I hope that I am speaking to many who have experienced it to their great delight. But I must add,

4. That this communication and witness are not equally imparted to all believers, nor to the same person at all times. It is certain that there are many who do indeed fear the Lord, and obey the voice of his servants, who yet walk in darkness, and see little or no light. Nay, perhaps, there are some of God's dear children<sup>2</sup>, who, while they suffer his terrors, are almost distracted because he hides his face from them; because he holds them, or, at least, treats them like enemies; and they are ready to say, *Has the Lord forgotten to be gracious*<sup>3</sup>? *has he in perpetual anger shut up all his bowels and tender mercies?* This is, indeed, their infirmity; but it is an infirmity to which some are left, and that, perhaps, for

<sup>2</sup> Job.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. lxxvii.

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a considerable part of their lives: so that, SERM.  
XIV. while others are saying, *We know that if our earthly tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building with God*, they, through all their lifetime, are subject to bondage<sup>4</sup>. Nor is it equal with <sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. v. 1. respect to the *same* person at different times, either as to evidence or comfort. There are those who had once a very satisfactory persuasion of the truth of their graces, who have fallen into great doubts again, and are saying, *Oh that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my tabernacle*<sup>5</sup>! They are recollecting their former <sup>5</sup> Job xxix. 2, 4. times of joy and delight, their secret prayers, their solemn assemblies, their approaches to the table of the Lord, when all their passions have been love, and all their powers have been praise: and they are saying, “*But it is not so with me now; being far, far from that, I go forward, and he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him*”<sup>6</sup>. I prostrate <sup>6</sup> Job xxiii. 8. myself upon my knees before him, but my lips are sealed up in silence. I come to his house, but he speaks not to me; I come to his table, but this hard heart of mine can hardly afford one sigh, or wring forth one tear, to shed over a dying Redeemer, or over

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XIV. my own dying and languishing graces." This is the case of many a gracious soul; and sometimes their distress of this kind is just when their deliverance is nearest. It is *the hour and the power of darkness*.

And I add that, even while some well grounded hope continues, there is, in the state of the Christian, a great variety with regard to *comfort*, to sensible incomings of holy joy and affection. The weakness of the body, the deadness of the animal spirits, may do much in this respect: yet, no doubt, the blessed Spirit could, if he pleased, overcome this; but, for wise and gracious reasons, He who never intended that earth should be heaven, does often suspend those extraordinary communications with which he has sometimes favoured the believer: and, indeed, if he did not often withhold them, afflictions would signify but very little to the person that bore them, for they would hardly be felt, being swallowed up with such Divine joy. Let it be remembered that it is a very great truth that a Christian may firmly believe that he is a child of God, and yet, at the same time, may have but little sensible joy in that persuasion; because that joy, in a

great measure, depends on the lively view SERM.  
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 which he has of the privileges connected with the relation; and it is one thing to value them, and another to rejoice in them. Consider how it is with regard to the relation in human life. We find a constant esteem, no doubt, for many of our dear friends, and reckon our interest in them a great happiness. We habitually prefer them to any of the rest of our worldly possessions, yet sometimes our hearts are full of a much stronger melting of affection towards them than at others. Thus it is with the believing soul: and I mention the case thus particularly to prevent that uneasiness which may sometimes arise, when those transports of holy affection which are not, indeed, in our own power, are withheld. And I judge it the more necessary to expatiate upon the thought, because the devil sometimes takes an advantage to bring all into doubt; and to raise a storm in the soul merely on account of the cessation of those extraordinary experiences, which were never intended as our daily food, but only as rich dainties, with which our Heavenly Father thinks fit now and then to delight the souls of his children, and to make, as it were, a

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feast for them. The more important any hopes and prospects are, the more should we be concerned that the foundation be good. It is certain that many deceive themselves in matters of the highest importance. *There is a way that seems right to a man, and the end thereof is as the way of death*<sup>7</sup>. Satan can turn himself into *an angel of light*; nay, which is much more, as he can borrow the word of God to be an engine of temptation, so he can also assume something of the inward testimony of the Spirit, and be a lying spirit in the hearts of his own sons, to assure them that they *are the children of God, and are passed from death to life*. Perhaps some of you may fear lest it should be thus with you; and it may, indeed, be the case with those who least fear it. I shall, therefore,

<sup>7</sup> Prov. xiv.  
12.

II. Consider how we may distinguish this testimony of the Spirit from flattering hopes and groundless persuasions. And I answer that it may be distinguished by the manner in which it comes into the mind, and the effects which it produces there.

1. By the manner in which it is obtained, and in which it is given: concerning which it

is important to observe that the testimony of the Spirit is generally obtained by prayer and diligent inquiry; and supported by the word of God. SERM.  
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1. It is generally obtained by frequent prayer. You well know that the influences of the Spirit are generally promised by Christ in this view. *Your Heavenly Father will give his Spirit to those who ask him*<sup>8</sup>. And, indeed,<sup>8</sup> Luke xi. 13. I think that all the scriptures, which speak of him as *a God hearing prayer*, encourage us to believe that the comfort which comes in this way is safe comfort, and of a heavenly original. Can we imagine that, when we have been entreating that *God would search us, and know our reins and our hearts*, he will suffer us to be imposed upon by presumptuous and ill grounded hopes? Nay, I will further add, that as it is the same Spirit who is the Spirit of prayer and of consolation, his operation under one of these characters is an encouragement to us to hope that it is he who operates under the other.

2. It is generally the result of diligent inquiry. Sometimes, indeed, it may arise on the sudden in the soul, and surprise it with the unexpected blessing. But, generally

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speaking, in this instance as well as in others, *the hand of the diligent makes rich*, both in grace and in comfort. It is a treasure which a man may seek as silver, and *search for as for hid treasure*; and his case may be that of a miner, where even a rock is to be hewn through, and many a stream diverted; till, at length, the precious ore appears, and richly repays all the workman's expense and fatigue.

3. It commonly comes in by the scriptures, and always in a manner agreeable to them.

We may assure ourselves that, forasmuch as the scriptures are of Divine inspiration, *and holy men of old spoke in them as they were*

<sup>9</sup> 2 Pet. i.  
21.

*moved*, or borne on, *by the Holy Ghost*<sup>9</sup>, there is nothing in them which his immediate operation can contradict. Let me, therefore, refer to this sure rule of trial; *to the law, and*

<sup>1</sup> Isa. viii.  
20.

*to the written testimony*<sup>1</sup>. If your inward suggestions, whatever they are, speak not according to these, depend upon it, there is no truth in them. The Spirit of God cannot acquit you while the word of God condemns you; nor can the one witness that you are the children of God, while the other declares that you are of your father, the devil, as you


must undoubtedly be, if the works of him, as SERM.  
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your father, ye do. I further add, that the Spirit often bears its testimony in the *words* of scripture, or makes some particular scripture peculiarly useful to take off the burthen of the mind, of which we have numberless instances. But I dare not by any means lay down this as a sure character, that whenever a scripture is impressed upon the mind, it comes from God ; because, as I said before, Satan attacked our Lord by abused scripture, and I am very much afraid that he has often succeeded by the same method with others, which, with respect to him, proved so insufficient.

2. I would observe that we may yet more certainly judge of these impressions by the effects to which they lead. I may, with great propriety, apply to this occasion those words of our Lord upon another, *By their fruits you shall know them*<sup>2</sup>. If it be the Spirit <sup>2 Matt. vii.  
20.</sup> of God that witnesses with your spirit, those comfortable things, which you may, perhaps, now be feeling, will produce a deep sense of your unworthiness ; grateful emotions of Divine love ; suitable regards to the Lord Jesus Christ ; an habitual care in heart and

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life to avoid whatever is displeasing to him; an ardent zeal for the Divine glory; a cordial submission to his disposals; and a fervent and resigned desire of that inheritance which is consequent on this adoption. You easily perceive that these are the workings of a filial temper; and if the Spirit witnesses that you have these, he will cherish and promote them.

1. The Spirit's witnessing with your spirit will produce a deep sense of your own unworthiness. God universally *resists the proud*,  
<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. v. *but he giveth grace to the humble*<sup>3</sup>. And I  
<sup>5.</sup> am sure that the privilege revealed will appear such to a soul under the influence of this blessed Spirit, as will fill it with an amazement proportionable to its joy. *Seems it a light thing to you*, says David, *to be the king's son-in-law*<sup>4</sup>? Is it a little thing, will the be-  
<sup>4</sup> 1 Samuel xviii. 23. liever say, that I, a poor sinful creature; that I, a condemned malefactor, should be not only pardoned, but adopted and called a child? How have I deserved it? how can I repay it? Oh! I must fall down at the feet of my Heavenly Father, and say, with the poor returning prodigal, *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no*

*more worthy to be called thy son.* Lord! it SERM. XIV. had not, on the whole, been so wonderful if  from stones thou hadst taken those who should have been made children of Abraham. Is thy grace given to me to make me a child, when many who never provoked thee so much are perished as enemies; are actually already in hell? Is thy Spirit given to bear witness that I am thy child, when so many, better than I, are walking in darkness, and bowed down to the very dust? Oh! *what shall I render unto thee? Lord! not unto me, but unto thy name be the praise.*

2. This Spirit will produce a relish for all the exercises of holy communion with God. The Spirit of adoption will be crying, *Abba, Father!* It will form the soul to a proper taste for the pleasures of devotion; it will render ordinances dear, and the house of God delightful. “My Heavenly Father,” will the Christian say, “will he allow me to come to him; and shall I be shy of that converse? Oh that I could forget every thing else, to remember thee! Oh that from morning till evening, and, if it were possible, in all my waking thoughts from evening to

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morning, mine eyes may be ever unto thee!

Oh that, wherever I am, I might hear thy voice, and see thy face! Welcome the blessed season of making stated visits to my God! Welcome the moments of stated devotion! Welcome sabbaths, the most honoured of days, and sacrament days, the most honoured of sabbaths? *Lord, it is good to be here.* To sit with a prince were very little honour when compared with that which I enjoy when I sit as a child about thy board. *Thus will I bless thee whilst I live, and lift up my hands in thy name,* and in whatever season it is that I enjoy thee, *my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and with joyful lips shall I praise thy name*<sup>5</sup>."

<sup>5</sup> Ps. lxxiii.  
4, 5.

3. This Spirit will produce proper affection and regard to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit of Christ, and he will honour Christ, and *take of Christ and show him to us.* And there is here a very natural connection, as through him we have received the adoption and reconciliation *predestinated to the adoption of children, through Jesus Christ, unto himself*<sup>6</sup>. It will engage us to honour the Lord Jesus Christ, as our dear

<sup>6</sup> Eph. i. 5.

elder brother nearer to the Father, the heir of all things, and through whom the inheritance is bestowed, as the purchase of his blood, and the effect of his grace. “Blessed Jesus, will the Christian in these circumstances say, “how much do I owe to thee! how dear should thy cause and thy very *name* be to my soul! Where had all this hope and joy been if thou hadst not looked upon me? if thy eye had not pitied me? if thine arm had not saved me? alas, I had now been flying from God with terror; his dread would have fallen upon me, and his excellency would have made me afraid. Nay, perhaps, hell had before this time opened its mouth and devoured me. Jesus *delivers from the wrath to come*. To him let me address my eternal songs of gratitude and joy.” Let it be remembered as a remark of great importance, that the comfort which comes from God, as an absolute God, without any regard to a mediator, is far from being evangelical comfort, and cannot really be considered as the work of the evangelical Spirit.

4. This Spirit will produce a tender care,

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to avoid every thing whereby our Heavenly Father may be dishonoured, and displeased. He is the *Holy Spirit*, and (as I elsewhere more largely proved to you) he forms the soul to universal piety and holiness. But what I would particularly lead you to remark is, that this very testimony which he gives will do its part towards producing this happy effect. “Am I a child of God,” will the believer say; “and has that great, almighty, all-gracious Father, given to me both the honour and comfort of such a relation, and shall I do any thing to displease him? What should I have said of the prodigal if, after his father had taken him home to his house in that gracious manner, he had renewed his extravagancies and his follies? Shall I act so abominable a part? Shall a child of God stoop so low as to the mean gratifications of sense in any prohibited instances, and sell his Father’s honour, and the sense of his favour, and in some instances, perhaps, the very credit of the family to which he is related, for the sordid tumultuous pleasure of a few guilty hours, or moments? Shall the child of God as

eagerly pursue this vain world as if all his inheritance was here? and shall this Holy Spirit, by whose welcome and long sought influences I am now *sealed to the day of redemption*, be driven away from this temple, in which he is pleased to dwell, and as it were, be *forced* to retire from me with grief, and to leave me again to all the anguish from which he has so lately delivered me? Better, far better would it be that not only all the guilty, but all the *innocent* pleasures of life were resigned, all its other comforts buried as in one grave, than that my iniquities should any more hide his face from me, and separate between God and my soul.

5. The witness of the Spirit will, on the same principles, excite us to a greater zeal for the divine honour and service. He is called the *Spirit of power*, from his mighty operations, which are therefore represented by a *strong rushing wind*<sup>6</sup>, that shook the place in which the apostles were, when he visibly descended: and the token of his presence was *fire*, to express the activity of that sacred flame which he kindles in the breast of believers, in allusion to which they are charged not to *quench the spirit*<sup>7</sup>. And

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<sup>6</sup> Acts. ii.  
2.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Thess.  
v. 19.

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the Christian under the influence of it will be ready to say, "God forbid that I should rest merely in this thought, that I am not a reproach to the family. Let me rather see that I be an ornament to it. My Father, great and gracious as he is, condescends to keep up an interest here upon earth, which he peculiarly calls his own; and it is the interest of mankind, and the establishment of a Redeemer's kingdom among them. Let motives of devotion, and filial gratitude, then, be added to those of common humanity and benevolence, to engage me to attempt its propagation. Oh! that every day, and every hour, might be thus employed, according to my station of public or of private life. Let me put away the little childish follies, in which many rational creatures are wasting their precious time, and by which they are debasing the nobler powers which God has given to them. And let me be applying myself with vigour and resolution to this; for this is my work; this is my interest in life. Oh that my eyes might always be turned away from beholding vanity, and that I might be quickened, more and more, to consider myself *not as*

*my own, but as bought with a price, that I* SERM.  
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*may glorify God with my body, which is his!*  
Oh, let me follow every motion of this good Spirit, who witnesses that I am indeed the Lord's!"

6. This blessed influence and witness will form us to a quiet acquiescence in the Divine will. "God is my Father, and he manages my affairs. My soul, be content with them. Thou meetest with afflictions; but they are paternal chastisements. Thou art abridged in some of thy desires, but it is thy Father that bounds them. Here is a bitter cup held out to thee, but it is the cup which my Father puts into my hands. Shall I not then drink it? I may assure myself that it is a *medicine*, and not a poison. Whatever I am called upon to bear, or to resign, Lord, it is enough that my time, my condition, my enjoyments, are all in thy hands. I am so rich, in this relation to God, that I cannot be poor. I am so happy that I cannot be miserable. I have such a Father that I cannot be friendless." With these sentiments, and on these impressions, the good man looks back on former trials, and though he ruminates on the

SERM. wormwood, and the gall, which his soul  
 XIV. has still in remembrance, he does not mur-  
 mur at them, but rather says, "Good is the  
 word of the Lord that he has spoken. Lord,  
 did a hasty word drop from me under my  
 heaviest affliction, or a murmuring thought  
 arise? I would *unsay* it, and, if possible,  
*unthink* it. Again, Lord, I subscribe to thy  
 wisdom: it was well done." And thus does  
 the good man look about, and look forward:  
 and, though he cannot but see that greater  
 difficulties may lie before him, that every  
 surviving comfort may be made as a sword  
 in his bowels, or a thorn in his eyes, yet he  
 still says, "*Father, thy will be done*: it  
 matters very little what I bear, so that God  
 may but be glorified by it."

7. This witnessing of the Spirit will fur-  
 ther discover itself in earnest, yet resigned  
 desires of entering upon the heavenly in-  
 heritance. You know the connexion in  
 which this thought stands. *The Spirit*  
*bears witness, &c. And if children, then*  
*heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with*  
*Christ.* "Am I an heir of heaven? does  
 the Christian say, why then I am only *a*  
*stranger, and pilgrim upon earth?* and,

Lord, permit me to say, Oh, that if it were the will of God, that my pilgrimage was over! If it be so pleasant to me now and then, to cast a longing look towards my Father's house, and to read, as it were, this letter which his goodness sends to me, and to receive in the wilderness the tokens of his care, what will it be to come and dwell with him, and with all my brethren in the Lord? O earth! all thy charms are not worth a moment's stay. It would be better, much better for me to be dissolved. How would my heart leap to see his chariot appearing! How welcome would the messenger be by which he should call me to his house, and to his bosom!" And this is the Christian's temper, not merely when he is pressed down with such a load of calamity, that nature itself might, as it were, beckon to us for a release, but in seasons of the greatest prosperity and pleasure. Still would he desire *to depart, and to be with Christ, which is better, far better.* Yet ardent as these desires are, they are still tempered with holy resignation to his heavenly Father. "I would not urge my return. I would not prescribe to thee *how*

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SERM. or *when* it shall be. If thou hast any thing  
XIV. further to be done here upon earth, then is  
earth better to me than heaven itself, O much  
better, though my glory should be delayed,  
my labour prolonged, and my sorrows re-  
newed, than that any part of thy business  
should be neglected. If thou require me  
to drag away a declining body, to wear out  
even old age in some feeble attempts of  
service, or to honour thee even by a present  
waiting for thy salvation, when my active  
powers are exhausted. Lord, I am willing  
to wait, even all the days of my appointed  
time. Still thou art my Father; still from  
this distance I may look up to thee. I may  
look forward and read the memorials of my  
interest in thee, wrought on my heart by  
thine Holy Spirit: and while this is the  
case I have so much cause for thankfulness,  
that I can never have any reason for com-  
plaint. *Lord, I believe, and therefore I will  
make haste.*" Let me beseech you, my bre-  
thren, that you would examine your hope  
and your joy by such a standard. I fear that  
they would bring down many from an airy  
height, and presumptuous confidence, and  
lay them in the dust; and I trust that they

would raise some humble souls to comfort and to hope. Consider what I have said, and consider how soon God will weigh you in an equal balance. I conclude, for the present, with my most affectionate prayer that he would awaken the secure, that he would convince the presumptuous, and that he would raise the dejected into the arms of his love, and by one gracious smile dissipate all its sorrows, and all its fears. May his blessed Spirit shine on his own work; and may they leave their burthens before the Lord, and return with a cheerfuller countenance than they came. I hope God is my witness that this was my design in the composure of this discourse, and I am not without *some* cheerful expectation, that, through the Divine blessing, these may be the effects of it.

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END OF VOL. II.





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