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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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SERMON I.

THE SPIRIT'S WITNESS TO OUR ADOPTION
DESIRABLE AND ATTAINABLE.

ROM. viii. 16.

*For the Spirit witnesseth with our spirit that we are the
children of God.*

If a bare external attendance upon ordinances would make men wise and good by a mechanical necessity, your profiting would soon appear unto all men. But it is a certain truth, that we may as reasonably expect to be cured by the sight of a medicine, as to be edified merely by the sound of the gospel. It is serious reflection and heart application that render ordinances useful. God and your own consciences only know how far this has been bestowed on what was lately offered to you from these words ; in which I have, in the general, shown you what we are to understand by the witness of the Spirit, and how it may be distinguished from vain and

SERM.
I.

SERM.
I.

delusive hopes. One would think that you should seriously have examined yourselves: one would imagine that such important truths might have deserved and commanded a repeated review. But if any of you have not bestowed such a review upon them, permit me to say that ye do greatly err, as, I hope, you will see when, with me, you have considered,

III. The happiness of those who have the *Spirit thus witnessing with their spirit, that they are the children of God*. Which will evidently appear, if we consider the tendency which such an evidence has to make duty easy, and temptation contemptible; affliction light, and death itself desirable. We will a little more particularly consider each of these.

1. What a tendency this witnessing of the Spirit has to make duty easy. Every thing has so which tends to quicken and enlarge the soul, by the exercise of hope and love, when wisely directed and fixed. *I will run, says David, in the ways of thy commands when thou shalt enlarge my heart*¹. And what can have a greater tendency to promote this blessed effect than the Spirit's

¹ Ps cix.
32.

testimony that we are the children of God? SERM.
since that testimony naturally leads us to I.
regard the whole rule of our duty as the
command of a *Father*; and to expect cheer-
fully his assistance, acceptance, and reward,
notwithstanding all our imperfections. It
tends to endear our duty to us while we
consider it as performing our Father's com-
mands. What can be more reasonable, and,
to a well disposed child, what can be more
delightful? "God is my father," does a
Christian say, "and then I can assure myself
that as all his commands are wise, they are
kind too. He abridges me of nothing which
would on the whole be proper for me. He
lays upon me no unnecessary burthen. What
he commands is for my sake and not for his
own. My soul, be satisfied in that it is thy
Father's will: the will of a Father who loves
thee, and whom thou hast all imaginable rea-
sons to love. My soul, canst thou imagine any
stronger engagement? Behold what manner
of love he has bestowed upon me! to spare
me whilst an enemy! and not only so, but
to make me a son! to give to me all these
privileges and these hopes! to visit me daily
with the tokens of his friendly care! to lead

SERM. I. and guide me by his counsel! and at length to take me, as he quickly will, to dwell with him. Why, these are favours that would be but poorly acknowledged, if every remaining moment of my being were to be employed in praising and in serving him. Blessed God! why can I do no more for thee? Oh that I had the faculties of an angel to engage in this blessed cause! Oh that here I could lay aside these mortal infirmities, that I might never be weary though I should never rest. To think that I am serving *thee*, is its own reward. It brings along with it a reward which nothing else can give." And I may add, that as many of the duties of life consist in those that relate immediately to converse with God, the tendency of this witness of the Spirit to endear them is most apparent. For who would not love to converse with such a Father? and as for acts of humanity and benevolence, besides that the very thought of having received such vast treasures, may incline us freely to give, according to our ability, the remembrance of our common relation to each other as members of the same body, children of the same family, and



heirs of the same hope, will be a further spring of a sublimer charity, than human considerations alone could produce. Again: This testimony will render duty easy, as it will assure us of our Father's assistance. "*If I am a child of God*, how much has he already done to make and to keep me so? Consider it, O my soul, as an encouragement to hope for the rest. Go to him with a holy freedom. Seek to the throne of his grace for the more abundant effusion of his quickening sanctifying spirit. It is already thine, it already works in some degree as a Spirit of adoption. The remaining work shall be done in its time. God will carry it on till *the day of the Lord*:" and I may add, that it encourages our hope of being graciously accepted and rewarded. "Numberless imperfections do, indeed, visit me on every side: but a father is pleased with the feeblest efforts which his children make to serve him, if done in the integrity of their hearts. With respect to them, it is evident where there is a willing mind it is accepted *according to what they have, and not according to what they have not*. So will *God be gracious*, and excuse all my many infirmities; *for*

SERM.
I. *he knows our frame, and as a father pities his children, so he pities them who fear him.* He will accept my poor attempts, and he will reward them, though they deserve nothing at his hands. Though *I am an unprofitable servant*, he will treat me as a dear son, and condescend so far as by promise to make himself my debtor, and say he will *not be unrighteous to forget my work of faith, and labour of love.* Be thou *steadfast and immovable, O my soul! always abounding in the work of the Lord.* There is a glorious inheritance for thee, in comparison of which all thy labours, and all thy sorrows, are as a feather weighed against talents of gold." Thus does the witness of the Spirit make duty easy.

2. It renders temptations much less forcible than they would otherwise be. And this in various respects, as it forms the soul for communion with God, and fills it with high hopes of a sublime and exalted happiness. Whatever Satan can offer as the price of our innocence will appear mean and contemptible. The soul will be formed to a higher relish, and therefore the bait will not take. What! shall I, a *child of God, an heir of*

glory, debase myself, and dishonour my family by stooping so low? What! did God call me to these honours and privileges that I might pollute them in the dust? Let me with a generous disdain abhor the thought. Shall I act so ungrateful a part? Is this my love? Is this my duty to my heavenly Father? O my soul, dost thou thus thank him? How justly may he repay it by withdrawing his spirit, by hiding his face, by treating me as an enemy! and how sad will that be! how will the distress of those doleful hours be aggravated by all the light, and pleasure, and happiness, which I now enjoy! by those delightful sealings of his gracious spirit! get *thee behind me, Satan*, if thou wouldest draw me into this, thou enemy of my honour, my peace, and my safety! Rather, O my soul! much rather, may every enjoyment be given up, and every hardship endured with this delightful view and assurance, than any thing done upon any consideration whatsoever, to hazard and endanger them.

3. This witness of the Spirit will have a tendency to make our afflictions light; for it will show us that all our afflictions are chosen

SERM. I. by our Heavenly Father's wisdom, softened by his presence, sanctified by his grace, and shall finally subserve the purposes of his love in the improvement of our final happiness. It will show us that our afflictions are chosen by our Father's wisdom and love. "These seem, indeed," will the Christian say, "to be evil; but God sees them in another light, or he would not surely send them upon me his child. He has forgiven my sins, he has received my soul; and surely he does not now smite me in anger. It is, *if need be*, that I am in heaviness. My stroke is painful, but it is what he makes it. The thing which I feared is come upon me; but my Father brought it on, knowing it fit to work a nobler and better effect than could have been produced in any other way. Let me be satisfied in this, if I know not the reason why this is sent, my Father knows it, and that is enough." Again, this will show us that our afflictions are attempered and moderated by his presence. "He sits by as the refiner, and sees how the furnace performs its operations, and moderates it as he sees fit. *He stays his rough wind in the day of his east wind.* And he every now and then breathes a fresher

gale upon my soul, and speaks to me in the language of peace and love; so that *whilst my afflictions abound, my consolations in Christ abound much more.* And welcome the affliction, when so attended! It further shows that he will sanctify them by his grace; and this makes them lighter. “If *I am a child of God, I am chastened for my profit, that I may be partaker of his holiness.* He is doing my soul good by bringing me nearer to himself, fitting me for further communications of his favour here and hereafter: and in this view, far, far be it from me to complain! Especially since this testimony of the Spirit shows that all afflictions will end in the improvement of our eternal happiness. And this is a thought of great consolation. *These light afflictions work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* True, they are painful now, but hereby the seed is sown which will spring up in a harvest of joy. *I go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, but shall doubtless come again rejoicing.* When my Father has brought me up, as he quickly will, and has shown me all the various progress of the way, I shall find that all was completely right; and shall see those things

SERM.

I.

SERM. ^{I.} to be matter of praise, of which I am now under temptation to complain. My tears will quickly be wiped away; and, therefore, in the mean time, I will *weep, as though I wept not.*" And, indeed, the soul will be so taken up with admiration, and love, and praise, that it will have little leisure and little inclination to complain and grieve: whatever afflictions it may meet with in this house of its pilgrimage.

4. This sealing of the Spirit will have a great tendency to make death comfortable; for it will assure the Christian of the Divine presence in his dying moments, and of eternal glory to succeed a short trial. "Shall I be afraid to die," will the Christian say, "when my Father will be with me? Earthly friends must, indeed, be separated. I must pass through the dark *valley of the shadow of death* alone: but why should I be terrified at that, whilst God speaks to me in these words: *Fear not, for I am with thee, &c:* and surely if he be with me, I need not fear. Let the wicked fear to die, who die as by the sword of Divine vengeance: but surely I can say, Death, thou mayest kill me, but thou canst not hurt me." Will not death, may the Chris-

tian say, convey me to a world of glory? Thou a child of God, and afraid of thine inheritance? Why, it is the thing which thou hast chosen: it is what thou hast been waiting for so many years: it is that, the expectation of which has borne thee through so many troubles, or thou hadst sunk." And when the soul knows that it is going to that blessed world, doubts and fears in a dying hour are terrible indeed. But when the light of God's countenance is lifted up, it is better, far better than the day and hour of birth; and so will it appear to us if God will not then fail us with his aid, and will continue to us the witness of his Spirit. I hope that all this will engage you earnestly to desire *the witness of the Spirit that you are the children of God*. All that remains in the prosecution of the subject is,

SERM.

I.

IV. To direct you as to the attainment of it; and the directions which I shall give are these.

1. Have high thoughts of the Spirit and his operations. Methinks, Christians should not need to be exhorted to this, when so great a stress is laid upon it in the word of

SERM.
1.

God: and yet, how often is he slighted! and, because some madmen have made wild and extravagant pretences to him, how frequently are all his operations represented as if all pretences to him were enthusiasm. I am sorry to say, that it is a prevailing evil of the present day, and I believe it to be a great source of many more. We have sinned against God, and vexed his Holy Spirit; and therefore he gives us up to many sins. Labour, therefore, to see the need which you have of God's Spirit: and, for that purpose, consult scripture without prejudice; and consult your own hearts. Think what you were without him: think what you are still, when deserted by him: think what blessed lives they spend who are under his constant influences; and you will find that those who thus *honour him, he will honour*. Besides, that this esteem for him will animate you to all the other methods of obtaining him.

2. Seek him as the Spirit of Christ. You well know that it is his business to glorify Christ; and you must be disposed to glorify him before you can expect such a signal favour. In Christ you have received the adoption: through him you must receive the

tokens of it. Consider Christ, therefore, as purchasing these blessings, and labour to see his love in the *value* of them, and the *manner* in which they were procured. Consider him likewise as distributing them, and seek them as through his hands. Oh! may Christ be exalted in your soul, and then will your consolations probably abound. Whilst a scheme of religion, which leaves him out, is so destitute of these comforts that it is generally forced to seek its refuge in despising them as little things, most contrary to reason, most contrary to the whole tenor of scripture.

3. Avoid whatever would grieve the Spirit. Let me urge that exhortation: *and grieve not the Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed to the day of redemption*². It is true that he acts as a sovereign agent; so does God in many works of nature and providence. But mock him not so far as to presume upon it that he will therefore make no difference between the humble and watchful soul, and the careless and profane. Consider it: *Know you not that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost?* Take care that you do not in any way defile them. *Be ye holy, as your Father in*

SERM.
I.

² Eph. iv.
30.

SERM. *heaven is holy.* Be ye kind and good as he is.
 1. Delight in all the exercises of mutual love, and
 forbearance, and forgiveness. Endeavour to
 abstract your hearts from this vain world, and
 to set them more and more upon a better.
 These, my friends! these are the fruits of the
 Spirit. To cultivate these is the way to ob-
 tain him. I only add one thing more on this
 head: i. e. Take care, when you feel good
 inclinations working in your mind, that you
 do not overbear them. Sometimes indulge
 to extraordinary retirement and devotion in
 consequence of these: and *whatever your
 hands find to do, at such a season especially,
 do it with all your might.* It is the way to
 make great dispatch in religion, and to ad-
 vance apace in a fitness for heaven.

4. Grudge not repeated applications to the
 throne of grace in order to obtain it. It is
 not to be expected that so great a blessing
 will be given in answer to a few faint prayers.
*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye
 shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto
 you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and
 he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knock-
 eth, it shall be opened*³. Christ spake a parable

³ Luke xi.
9, 10.

on purpose to teach men this, *that they ought always to pray, and not to faint*⁴. Plead hard, therefore, at the throne of grace. Lay hold on God by faith, and say, “Lord, I will not *let thee go till thou bless me* : I will not let thee go till thou take off the burthen from my mind ; till thou take me in the arms of thy love, and say, Son, *daughter, be of good comfort.*” Should you lie low before God day after day, and month after month, on this occasion, and at length obtain it, the success would be a rich equivalent.

SERM.

I.

⁴ Luke
xviii. 1.

5. Cheerfully depend on every present hope, though it may be attempered with a mixture of fear. It is a good thing to *have good hope through grace*, even when we have not full assurance. And, indeed, I believe it is in every respect the best way to obtain further favour, to be thankful for what we have already received. And, to excite you to it, do not only compare yourselves with those whose comforts are greater ; but also with those whose attainments are lower than yours. Pray remember how many poor Christians are now going in the bitterness of their hearts, mourning, and bowed down

SERM. I. greatly, and weeping all the day long, just on the borders of despair, and fearing every moment that they shall drop into it: afraid even of God himself, afraid of prayer, and thinking, every time they go to the throne of grace, that they go for the last time, and never shall have the heart or power to go again. Think how many are left to apostatize from God, and to wound their consciences, and, by vain, foolish, worldly pursuits, to *pierce themselves through with many sorrows*. Praise God for his *preserving* and for his *supporting* presence; that you have his comforting Spirit to so great a degree: and then consider what you have. Does he not sometimes draw out your souls in secret devotion, and in public worship? Does he not sometimes give you great encouragement on sabbath days, and on sacrament occasions? Be comforted with this, and look upon it as some token for good, that at length he will complete his own work. In the mean time, bless him that he has begun it.

6. Seriously consider what are the chief occasions of your remaining doubts. For this purpose be often *searching and trying your-*

selves, and noting down, if you have leisure and opportunity, the result of your inquiry. SERM.
I.

At such and such a time I had greater comfort, and at another greater fear and suspicion. And whence did that arise? I will endeavour to suggest some more particular thoughts here, in the form of queries, which I beg that you would put seriously to yourselves.

1. Do not doubts arise from the want of regularity and fervour in your devotions? Perhaps there are some of you who live in the frequent neglect of secret prayer: and if you do, how can you expect that the spirit should be given which is to be obtained by prayer, and is most likely to be obtained by that sort of prayer in which your wants and your complaints can be most particularly opened before God? Perhaps the word of God is seldom seriously read by you: and do you expect that you should know yourselves, if you do not try yourselves by that standard? Perhaps you find wandering thoughts prevailing in duty, and you do not guard against them. You do not, perhaps, take a moment's retirement just before you are coming to God's house to lift up your

SERM. ^{I.} heart to God. You come, perhaps, so late that you are all in a hurry; or if you are in the little, very little number of those who are here before the minister; perhaps you are talking with each other, and seem to make it your choice to come into the house of God after his worship is begun, thereby to be sure losing some advantage for composing your mind into a proper temper. You do not, perhaps, take time to reflect upon what has past, to try yourselves by what you have heard, to consider how you have behaved; and, if so, can you wonder that you improve but little in comfort, the natural consequence of improving but little in grace.

2. It may be, carnal indulgences, and the love of pleasure may keep your comfort low, and hinder the witness of the Spirit in your heart. *Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts.* They can deny themselves, on all proper occasions, for Christ. And if you have not learned this, how can you expect to know that you are his? It may be that you are, on the contrary, *making provision for the flesh*, and never think yourselves happy but when you are in one form or another indulging it. Perhaps

you have a relish for all the vain pleasures, and vain converse of the world: and sometimes approach to the utmost of what is lawful in meats, and drink, and dress, and mirth; and sometimes, perhaps, you go beyond it. And is this the way to invite the spirit of holiness and piety? *Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh*⁵. Was it any thing peculiar to Paul, that he alone should keep down the flesh and bring it into subjection, lest he should be cast away? I am sorry that any should dream of different ways to heaven. There is but one strait gate, there is but one narrow way, and they, who cannot be content to walk in it, are so far from having any reason to wonder that they do not know themselves to be the children of God, that, on the contrary, they may rather know that they are not.

3. Irregular passions, whether of resentment or desire, will greatly obstruct the witness of the Spirit. To have our hearts violently agitated with any thing relating merely to this world is a temper not becoming the Christian, not agreeable to the tendency of that heavenly spirit. *To love the world, and the things that are in the world*, to be too solicitous

SERM.

I.

Gal. v.
16.

SERM. I. to possess or to retain them is a temper which we should guard against. But especially should it be remembered, that the spirit of wrath and resentment is most unbecoming those who expect the influences of the Spirit of love. When the little clashings of temporal interest interfere with the love that there ought to be among Christians, and they can allow themselves to treat each other like strangers, and like enemies, it is no wonder if the effects be very uncomfortable; or, if you examine yourselves at such a time, that you should see little to comfort you.

4. Do not your doubts arise from excessive care? You plunge yourselves, perhaps, in greater business than you can well attend to. Your whole life is one continued hurry, from Monday morning to Saturday night, which perhaps sometimes enters on Sabbath-days, and leaves you so weary that you cannot attend to the business of that holy day. And why all this fatigue to provide for your families? Nay, but do not you know in your consciences that you might provide for them without this excessive application? Not so plentifully, perhaps you will say; and I must add, it is not necessary that they should be

so plentifully provided for. It is better that they should want some things in the elegance of their table, and their dress, than that these things, which perhaps may be a snare rather than advantage to them, should be purchased at the expense of your improvement in religion. Remember that the mind of man is of a very limited nature. Remember that *you cannot serve God and Mammon*: and remember further (for it is a thought of importance, though a digression from the present subject) that as it is in vain for you to rise up early, and sit up late, without the Divine blessing, so that it is most probably to be secured by honouring him, and labouring above all things to secure your salvation and the evidences of it.

5. Do not your doubts arise from a censorious temper? It is impossible that the Spirit of God should delight to dwell where love does not dwell. And is it consistent with love to be always thinking the worst that we can imagine, and speaking the worst that we can think. Perhaps you are ready, not indeed to invent, but to take up a reproach against your neighbour. One of the first to hear, one of the first to report a

SERM.
I.

spiteful unkind story. It is a great reproach to your character and profession, for it must soil and discompose your spirits, as well as divert your thoughts from far more important things. If some Christians would spend half that time in judging themselves which they spend in arraigning the faith, the worship, the practice of others, they would be as much the glory of religion as they are now its reproach. This humour must be corrected, if you expect the witness of the Spirit.

6. Do not your apprehensions arise from an indolent neglect of the proper duties of life? Religion requires an entire dedication of ourselves to the service of God, and a constant intention of serving and glorifying him. Idleness quenqueth the Spirit. When the sluggard *turns upon his bed, as a door upon the hinges*; when time is profusely thrown away for a variety of trifles without any steady care to attend to the business of life, and perhaps too (which is often connected with the former) to very little purpose of pleasure or entertainment; religious comfort must be much impaired, and a secret fear of the doom of the unprofitable servant

will take possession of the mind. The Spirit of Christ is a spirit of zeal; and where there is no zeal for his service, there is a great deal of reason to question whether there be any spiritual life. On the whole, let these particulars be reviewed; and if you have reason to apprehend that any of these have been the occasion of your former doubts, be upon your guard against them for the time to come.

SERM.

I.

V. I shall conclude with a very few words by way of application :

1. To those who are unconcerned about this testimony of the Spirit. Perhaps there are such among you; perhaps some who secretly despise what I have now said as vanity and enthusiasm. If there are, indeed, any such among you, may God extend his infinite compassions to you; for you are on the borders of ruin. This I think may be laid down as a certain rule: they who are not concerned about the testimony of the Spirit have little sense of the importance of the inheritance; and they who have little value for that cannot be the children of God: and if you are not the children of God, whose

SERM.
I.

children are you? Oh! that you would seriously consider it. You are the children of Satan, the heirs of everlasting destruction. I profess to you, as in the presence of God, that I know not a more dreadful sight on this side hell than a sinner who hears of these gospel privileges from day to day, and perpetually despises them.

2. To those who desire this testimony: I have addressed myself to you with many directions already. I can only add that I would not have you imagine that by merely *wishing* for it you will obtain it. The desire of the slothful only kills and torments him, because his hand refuses to labour: and if you do, indeed, desire so great a blessing, you must be up, and doing, and labouring in good earnest for it. You must seek it by prayer. Oh! seek it *as silver, and search for it as for hidden treasure*. If you do not think it worth a serious pursuit, it is to be feared that you have but little true value for it.

3. I conclude with one word to the happy souls who have already received it. My friends! I congratulate you on this singular happiness. Acknowledge the goodness of God to you. He might have left you with

the doubting Christian; he might have left you with the damned sinner! Let your hearts be enlarged in gratitude and love. *Walk worthy of the Lord to all well pleasing.* Value this inestimable privilege, and take heed that you do not lose it: on the contrary, study to improve in it more and more: labour to improve in it more and more. Labour to promote the spiritual joy of others: and whilst in that respect you *water them, you will be watered yourselves also.* May that God, who is able to make all grace to abound, refresh your souls with the continued influences of this good Spirit! May he bear witness with your spirits that you are his children; and may you, like the sons of God, be *blameless and without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining amongst them as lights in the world,* and holding forth the word of light, that they, seeing your good works, may, with you, glorify your Heavenly Father. Amen.

SERM.

I.

SERMON II.

OF KNOWING THE HOPE OF OUR CALLING.

EPHESIANS, i. 18.

The eyes of our understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

SERM. II. WHEN our Lord is cautioning his disciples against an immoderate solicitude about the things of this world, he urges this consideration among others, *After all these things do* ¹ *the Gentiles seek*: and it is no wonder that they should seek after them, who had no hopes of a better state, and *were without God in the world*. But it is matter of very melancholy reflection that Christians should, in so many instances, forget their high birth, and their heavenly hope, and grovel on this polluted earth, as if they were not only *natives* of it, but had *their portion only in this life*. To raise you, if possible, to sublimer sentiments, and to

¹ Matt. vi.
37.

a more worthy and generous temper, was the design of my discourse last Lord's Day, when I laid before you the perfection of the heavenly state, as opposed to the imperfections with which we are here continually surrounded. And yet, Christians, must we not acknowledge, to our shame and condemnation, that we have been too ready to pursue the vain trifles of life to the forgetfulness of that completely perfect state. Where have our thoughts, our affections, our expectations been? Alas! too much, undoubtedly, here below, though I hope, through grace, not entirely here. Let me then take up the words of the apostle, and turn them into a prayer for myself and you, *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation; and may so enlighten the eyes of your understanding, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints*². St. Paul is here telling his friends at Ephesus what those blessings were which he, with the greatest importunity, asked of God for them in prayer, and when you come to survey them with attention, you will find that they were not blessings out of the corn floor or

² Ephes. i.
17, 18.

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the wine press, but those that related to their establishment in the Christian faith, and their growing meetness for eternal glory. He prayed *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, might give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of him.* I might, with great ease and propriety, raise many very useful observations or remarks from these words, as that heaven is a rich and glorious Divine inheritance of the saints, and that this is the great hope of the Christian; that many who are partakers thereof do not sufficiently know this hope; that, in order to know it, it is necessary that *the eyes of our understanding should be enlightened by Divine influences*: and that eyes enlightened are so great a blessing that we should pray for them, both with respect to ourselves and to our Christian friends. These observations I might particularly insist upon; but what is most natural in them will come in under the following plan.

I. We may consider the view of heaven which is here given: *the hope of our calling, and the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints.*

II. We may inquire whence it comes to

pass that it is so much unknown, even by those who are favoured with the Christian revelation, and have upon the whole cordially embraced it. SERM.
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III. I will show you how desirable it is, *that the eyes of our understanding may be so opened*, as that we may understand more of it.

IV. I will consider in what method we may comfortably expect that this should be effected.

V. Conclude with a brief application.

I. Let us a little more particularly consider the view of future happiness which is here given to us by the apostle. There is a noble and most instructive variety in the representation made of it in the word of God, and in this which is here presented. I think I may truly say, without any strained or affected criticism, that there is an admirable force in every word which the apostle uses. He either intimates or declares that it is to be considered under the notion of an inheritance; of a Divine inheritance, rich and glorious; an inheritance of, or among saints; and the great hope of the Christian

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calling. May God assist our devout meditations upon it in each of these views.

1. It is an inheritance. So the scripture very frequently speaks of it; and so it is called twice in the preceding part of this epistle, *in whom we have obtained an inheritance*³:

³ Eph. 1.
11, 11.

and thus the spirit, as the earnest of heaven, is called *the earnest of our inheritance*. In allusion to this is that promise which so often occurs of *inheriting eternal life*. And even in the last sentence on the righteous, our Lord represents himself as mentioning heaven in this view: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom*⁴.

⁴ Matt.
xxv. 34.

Now when a thing is called an inheritance, it may intimate, that it is for a while waited for, and that when received it is to be possessed for perpetuity; and, in both these respects, the representation here is very suitable. Here is an inheritance which we are for a while to wait for. You know that it is thus with respect to estates which people are to inherit on earth, while they are in a state of minority. They do not immediately enter upon them. They are, perhaps, under tutors and governors, kept on short allowance, and servants have more under their command than

they. Thus may it be with Christians now. Thus, upon the whole, it is even with all of them; yet they are, as the apostle expresses it, *heirs according to the promise*; and the thought may reconcile us even to the straitest and most inconvenient circumstances, which our heavenly Father may at present allot. We shall, ere long, come to age, and then the inheritance will be received. In the meantime, perhaps, if we had more at our command, we should but waste it, and our Father might be dishonoured, and we ourselves might be injured by it. On this account, to allude to the words of the apostle relating to affliction, *if we had fathers of our flesh that abridged us, and we' gave them reverence, let us much more be subject to the Father of our spirits*⁵. And then it is an inheritance, as it is to be possessed for a perpetuity. An inheritance, you know, is generally an estate, which is settled and entailed upon a man, not for a term of years, but for life; and, if he has not such a title to it, the phrase is seldom used. And, indeed, whenever it is used concerning any thing which we possess in this world, it is used in a very low sense, because, being with respect

⁵ Heb. xii.
15.

SERM. II. to our bodies but tenants at will to the great Lord of all, we are liable, whenever he pleases, to be turned out of every thing we have, and leave house and land to others: *for we brought nothing into the world with us, and it is as certain that we can carry nothing away.* But apply the word to the heavenly state, and it has a glorious propriety. That is an inheritance, indeed, which, if we once gain, we shall possess for ever, having no enemy to invade us, and there being liable to no mortality to deprive us of it. Therefore it is (as you already have heard) called an *inheritance of eternal life*; and the promise of it is called the promise of an *eternal inheritance*, of which the apostle Peter expresses a most affectionate sense when he is so thankful that God has *begotten us again to a lively hope, of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*⁶. Oh! that you all would be so wise as to pursue it, and that I might congratulate you as those who were rich and great for ever; and, when you had nothing left of your worldly all, but your coffin and your shroud, your rejoicing spirit would look down upon the poor, stript, mouldering clay, and would

⁶ 1 Pet. i.
4.

regard all which it had lost as nothing in comparison of what it had gained and should possess for ever. Well, this is one part of the view, heaven is an *inheritance*. SERM.
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2. It is a *Divine inheritance*. So it is called *his inheritance in the saints*. And it may well be called so, because it is prepared and bestowed by God, and will consist in the resemblance and enjoyment of him. It is prepared and bestowed by God. His infinite wisdom formed the plan of our happiness, in a manner suitable to *our* nature and to his own; and it is a most enhancing and endearing thought suggested in Matt. xxv. 34, (where Christ says to the righteous, *Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*), that God should have been employing himself in propagating the scheme, in laying the plan of this glorious abode even before we had a being; or, as it is said concerning wisdom, that even *before man was formed, she delighted herself in the habitable parts of the earth, and her delights were with the children of men*⁷. That ⁷Prov. viii, 30, 31, is, it was delightful to think of them as creatures who should enjoy so many delights.

SERM. II. Thus does God, as it were, enjoy the pleasures of his own prescience, in this view, with peculiar relish. *I know the thoughts that I think to you*⁸: and at length it will be received from the hands of God, through Christ, as the gift of his love and free grace. It is, indeed, called the *reward of the inheritance*⁹; but it is a *reward not of debt, but of grace*; therefore the apostle so expressly declared that whereas *the wages of sin is death, eternal life is the gift of God*¹. And indeed, when we seriously consider it, we shall see ourselves most unworthy of it, and could hardly be able to believe it were ever intended for us, were we not also told that we are *predestinated to the adoption of children, through Jesus Christ, to himself*². And then it may be further called *his inheritance*, because it will consist in the resemblance and enjoyment of him. It is most evident that the glory, and beauty, and happiness of the rational nature must consist in the resemblance of that God who is the great standard of perfection: and accordingly it is thus that the good regards it, as the great object of his hope,

⁸ Jer. xxix.
11.

⁹ Col. iii.
24.

¹ Rom. vi.
23.

² Eph. i.
11.

unknown as it is in some of its particulars. SERM.
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We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. As for me, I shall behold his face in righteousness, &c³: and this must be at-³ 1 John iii.
2.
 tended with the enjoyment of God. *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance must behold the upright⁴.* With what 4 Psal. xvii.
15.
 mild beams of complacency and delight will he then behold us, when all our iniquities are purged away, and we stand forth in his complete resemblance, like a fair unsullied mirror, reflecting according to the degree which our weak nature can bear to it, the image of our heavenly Father. How rich shall we feel ourselves in the sense of an everlasting covenant with him. Therefore we are said to be *heirs of God⁵* himself. 5 Rom. viii.
17.
 For then we may say, in a nobler sense than any saint upon earth could ever do, “*The Lord is the portion of my inheritance, therefore, indeed, the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places⁶.* *This God is our God,⁶* 6 Ps. xvi.
5, 6.
he will be our guide here, unto the death. No, he has been so, he has guided us beyond it, and death is no more. *Heart and flesh have failed;* but they shall fail no more, *for God is the strength of my heart,*

SERM. *and known and felt as my portion for ever.*
 II. My God! give me these durable riches, and scatter gold and jewels, and divide lands and tenements on earth to whom thou wilt. In thee I have enough, I have all." This leads me to add,

3. It is a rich and glorious inheritance. This is strongly expressed by that phrase. *That ye may know what is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints*, or what is his *rich and glorious inheritance*. This is a very common hebraism, and it is used often in this epistle. Thus it is said, *he has predestinated us to the praise of the glory of his grace*⁷; i. e. *of his glorious grace*; and in the next verse we have the *forgiveness of sin according to the riches of his grace*, i. e. *his rich grace*. And ver. 19, the working of his mighty power is in the original, *the energy of the might of his power*. It is *rich*, because there is content and magnificence. It is *glorious*, because there is a united lustre both of the body and of the mind.

⁷ Eph. i.
6, 7,

1. It is rich, because there is content and magnificence. Riches admit of a variety of degrees; but, I think that the first notion of them is, that a man is *really rich* who has

as much as he wants: and upon this account the contented man is always *rich*, even in this world: and on this account Saint Paul, who could say, he had learned that blessed lesson, *in whatever state he was therewith to be content*⁸, does sometimes speak of himself⁹ as if he were one of the richest creatures upon earth: *we are*, says he, *as poor, yet making many rich, as having nothing, and yet as possessing all things*⁹. And had we more of this blessed temper, it would turn cottages into palaces, or something better. But in heaven we shall have it completely. There, all those disorderly passions which are now ready to work in the mind, there the spirit too ready to lust, to envy, and to indulge in vain desires will be entirely subdued. The happy soul will look down on the gilded trifles of earth, and say, “what a world of things are there which I do not want.” There will indeed be a variety in the degree of glory, but every one will be so perfectly persuaded of the wisdom and goodness by which these degrees are adjusted, and will feel such an entire friendship for every superior spirit, will receive indeed so many favours from him, and will feel such a gradual rise even towards that happi-

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Phil. iv.

11.

2 Cor. vi.

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ness which *he* possesseth, that there will be entire content and satisfaction, which there was not even in Adam's paradise itself: nor is that all, for there will be great *magnificence* as well as content. Such as *eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive*. On which account you well know that it is represented by the saints being made *kings to God*, by their appearing in *bright robes*, and with *crowns of gold*. And the poor afflicted church, *while tossed with tempests, and not comforted*, is taught to expect that blessed day, when *its foundations shall be laid with sapphires, and all its borders with polished stones, and its windows shall be agate, and its gates carbuncles*<sup>1</sup>, such glorious things are spoken of thee, O thou city of God! We add, therefore,

<sup>1</sup> Is. liv.  
11, 12.

2. It is *glorious*, because there is the united lustre both of body and mind. Glory, properly speaking, signifies something *resplendent*, something that shines forth brightly. Therefore that shining phenomenon, which was the token of the Divine presence in the cloud, is called *the glory of the Lord*, and often spoken of as distinct from the cloud in which it appeared: and, in allusion to the

reflections of those rays from the face of SERM.  
 Moses, it is said to the church, in reference II.  
 to the gospel privileges, and especially its  
 heavenly hope, *Arise and shine, for thy light  
 is come, for the glory of the Lord is arisen  
 upon thee*<sup>2</sup>. And with how much propriety <sup>1</sup> Is. lxi. 1.  
 this may be applied to the heavenly state,  
 you will yourselves easily imagine, though  
 in an imperfect degree. The body will have  
 its lustre, undoubtedly it will, when it is  
 said of it that *the righteous shall shine forth  
 as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father*<sup>3</sup>. <sup>3</sup> Mat. xiii.  
 Nay, more than that is said even of the 43.  
 glorified body in heaven. For it is affirmed  
 that *he shall change their vile bodies, that  
 they may be made like unto his own glorious  
 body*. Now, when he was here upon earth,  
 in the mountain of transfiguration<sup>4</sup>, and when <sup>4</sup> Mat. xvii.  
 he appeared to John, *his countenance was as* 2.  
*the sun shining in his strength*<sup>5</sup>. Yet surely <sup>5</sup> Rev. i. 16.  
 those happy apostles who were favoured  
 with this vision could not have borne to  
 behold it in that splendour which it wears  
 in the presence of his Father above; but as  
 was said of Moses, when he spoke with the  
 people, there was still something of a veil on  
 his face. And we should think, in a manner

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most unworthy the Divine wisdom and love, if we imagine that all this lustre and glory of the body was appointed, like the ornaments of some heathen temple, to enshrine any mean polluted inhabitant. No; undoubtedly the glories of the mind will be as superior to those of the body, as the nature of spirit is superior to matter in its brightest form and most exalted state. But in what I might have said here, I am in part prevented by what I have already said, of the holy soul bearing the resemblance of God, and of the blessed Redeemer. What is glorious in the human mind? is it the love of God ever overflowing the soul, like a pure and sweet river, to water every plant of virtue and grace? is it an entire acquiescence in all his will? an unwearied zeal for his glory and service? is it unmingled disinterested benevolence to all his fellow-creatures, and readiness in every imaginable instance to subserve and rejoice in their felicity? is it a perpetual superiority of the power of the rational and intellectual nature over those of the sensitive soul, and a most exact subordination of appetites and passions to the great guiding and governing faculty?



There will be all this devotion and zeal, all this benevolence and purity, all this order and harmony of soul for ever: these, and a thousand times more virtues and graces, perhaps the very name and nature of which are yet unknown. For as the blessed God may have many perfections of which we have no idea, so may the blessed spirits ever resemble him in those perfections, and inherit joys and glories, of which we have no more notion than a blind man could have of all the glories, all those mingled beauties of nature and art which in the finest landscape and the brightest day, pour in upon the clear and strong eye.

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4. The text further teaches us to conceive of heaven, as the *inheritance of the saints*; in *the saints*, or *among the saints*. This is an expression that very frequently occurs in scripture. *Give thanks*, says the apostle, *to the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of an inheritance of the saints in light*<sup>6</sup>. <sup>6</sup>Col. i. 12. So when our Lord calls Paul, and gives him that memorable commission, it is, that they who were converted by his labours *might receive the forgiveness of their sins, and an*

SERM. *inheritance among them who are sanctified*<sup>7</sup>.

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And when the apostle took his leave of the  
<sup>7</sup>Acts xxvi. Ephesian Elders, he recommended them to  
 18. *the word of his grace*<sup>8</sup>, &c. We may reasonably  
<sup>8</sup> Acts xx. conclude that an expression which so often  
 32. occurs has a very important meaning, and  
 that it naturally suggests these two grand  
 thoughts. That the heavenly state will be  
 peculiar to saints, that it will be common to  
 all such, and a state in which they shall, in  
 a most delightful manner, enjoy the society  
 of each other. We will a little more par-  
 ticularly touch on each of these.

1. Heaven is an inheritance which will be  
*peculiar to the saints*. This is so important  
 a thought, that the word of God is very  
 frequently insisting upon it. We might in-  
 deed argue from the nature of this happiness,  
 consisting so much in sanctity of soul, that  
 nothing which defiles should enter into the  
 new Jerusalem. We might argue, that *with-  
 out holiness no one could with comfort see  
 the Lord, nor inherit his kingdom unless he  
 were born again*. But lest we should fail in  
 making the inference, or lest the subtilty of  
 human wit should evade the conclusion (as

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I think there is hardly any that it cannot (one way or another evade), God has declared it in express terms. *Be not deceived*, says the apostle, *God is not mocked: neither whoremongers, nor adulterers, &c. shall inherit the kingdom of God*<sup>9</sup>. On the contrary, *the wicked shall as surely go away into everlasting punishment, as the righteous into life eternal*<sup>1</sup>. *The expectation of the wicked is death*. And it is not only the foreboding of his own guilty mind, but built on the word of God itself, which declares (hear it and tremble, O ye heirs of hell, whatever your profession, or employment, or hopes be) *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, shall be the portion of every man who does evil*<sup>2</sup>. *Nor can any thing remain for such obstinate sinners, but a certain as well as fearful looking for of wrath, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus*<sup>3</sup>, &c. And therefore let this be written upon the tables of each of our hearts, that the happiness of which you have been hearing this day is intended only for *saints*. However the world may deride the name, God will honour it on another day, and

<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. vi.  
9, 10.<sup>1</sup> Mat. xxv.  
ult.<sup>2</sup> Rom. ii.  
6, 7.<sup>3</sup> 2 Thes. i.  
8, 9.

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those, and only those, who have here worn the image of his Holiness. So you must see to the truth of that blessed principle in your souls, as ever you hope to have a part and lot in that matter; and if you do not, I testify to you, this day, that you will surely perish, and *I call God to record upon my soul that I am clear of the blood of all*: and sooner shall heaven itself pass away than its golden gates be opened to admit any but a holy soul.

2. It further intimates that it will be common to all such: that every saint of God shall have his final portion and inheritance there. It is a great and important truth, that there are *degrees* of glory, correspondent to different improvements in religion; but it is a necessary consequence of this, that every one, who has indeed the root of the matter in him, will be entitled, through Divine grace, to his share. The young child in the family is a child still, and he shall have the portion of a child. Every one who receives of the water which Christ gives him, shall find it, as we are told, *a well of water, springing up to eternal life*<sup>4</sup>; and therefore it is said by the apostle that the crown was

<sup>4</sup> John iv.  
14.

reserved *not only for him, but all who love the appearance of Christ*<sup>5</sup>. How different soever the ways may have been which they have taken, so far as diversities are consistent with their being the ways of holiness, they will all meet in one blessed end. And therefore it is with the most literal propriety called *an inheritance among them who are sanctified*<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Tim. iv.  
8.

<sup>6</sup> Acts xx.  
34.

3. The expression may further intimate that it is a state in which they shall enjoy the delightful society of each other. This is a great and important truth; and the apostle lays a very great stress upon it when he speaks of it as the happiness of Christians that they *are come to the general assembly*<sup>7</sup>, &c. and he also declares it to be the design of God to *gather together in one all things in Christ*<sup>8</sup>. The same is intimated in the words of the text; and how glorious a scheme! that our lot should be cast with such good neighbours, and fall among the saints; among the *saints dwelling in light and glory*. It is a very agreeable circumstance to be so situated here as to have an opportunity of frequently enjoying good company, especially the company of wise and good men, which is, after

<sup>7</sup> Heb. xii.  
24.

<sup>8</sup> Eph. i. 10.

SERM. all, the best company. *The saints of the*  
 II. *earth*, says David, those excellent ones of the  
 9Ps. xvi. 2. earth, *are those in whom is all my delight*<sup>9</sup>.

And it is most desirable that our nearest and dearest companions in life may especially be such; which, by the way, should engage young people to be very careful in their settlement; to regard that which is so generally disregarded, to the wonder of many, and, I fear, to the ruin of some. But, be our settlement ever so agreeable here, there will be some thorn in our side, and, it may be, in our eyes too; but there will be no rending briars nor wounding thorns with everlasting delightful friendship. How dear is the memory of the saints of God to us! We should, I doubt not, have found something of a particular pleasure, had the providence of God cast our lot near any of those places where the ancient patriarchs and holy apostles lived. To have traced their steps, and to have thought on those mountains where they built an altar to the Lord; and here stood the house of such a one; and here rest the bones of the other. How much more delightful then to dwell with the persons themselves! to dwell with them in such an im-

proved and elevated state, so far superior to what earth knew them ; with all the saints, known and unknown ; those with whom we have worshiped God together on earth ; those who had done with earth long before we were born, and perhaps some too whom we hardly expected to have met there. And let us not fear being lost in such a crowd. It is true that here friends seem sometimes to stand in the way of each other ; and when we have many of them together, except in some direct acts of worship, we can do little more than see them. But there, undoubtedly, our methods of converse will be increased in proportion to the degree in which our acquaintance is growing ; and so entire will be our mutual love that even, when we are not directly conversing with each other, the very sight of such an assembly of lovers and friends will cause our hearts to overflow with sacred pleasure. *O thou new Jerusalem ! for my brethren and companions' sake, will I now say, Peace be within thee*<sup>1</sup> : and I rejoice in that eternal peace that resides, and reigns, and triumphs there.

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxxii.  
8.

5. Heaven is represented as the *great hope of the Christian's calling* : *May know the hope*

SERM. *of your calling.* So elsewhere it is called *the*  
 II. *prize of the high calling of God*<sup>2</sup> our Saviour,  
<sup>2</sup> Phil. iii. i. e. the great and glorious prize for which,  
 14. in the gospel, we are called to contend. So  
<sup>3</sup> Eph. iv. *ye are called in one hope of your*  
 4. *calling*<sup>3</sup>; which implies that nothing but the  
 gospel could give this hope, and that it is the  
 great design of the gospel to fix men's hearts  
 and pursuits upon it.

1. It implies that nothing but the gospel  
 could give this hope. There are many other  
 passages to the same purpose, where it is  
<sup>4</sup> Eph. ii. said of the heathens, they are *without hope*<sup>4</sup>;  
 12. and it is their repeated character; *Sorrow not*  
<sup>5</sup> 1 Thess. *as those who have no hope*<sup>5</sup>; and <sup>6</sup> on the other  
 iv. 13. hand it is said that *Christ is our hope*<sup>6</sup>; that  
<sup>6</sup> 1 Tim. i. *Christ in us is the hope of glory*<sup>7</sup>; that *we are*  
<sup>7</sup> Col. i. 27. *begotten again to this lively hope of an inheri-*  
*tance by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from*  
<sup>8</sup> 1 Pet. i. *the dead*<sup>8</sup>: and texts might be multiplied to  
 3. this purpose. Now this representation is rea-  
 sonable: for, without the gospel, we could  
 have had no assurance of any future happi-  
 ness at all, and not the least degree of reason  
 to expect so great and so lasting a happiness.  
 It is an important truth that without the  
 gospel we could have had no assurance of



any future happiness at all: for, in order to such an assurance merely by the light of nature, we must certainly have known that God would have pardoned sin. But I confess that I see not how we could have had any assurance of this, or any thing more than a precarious, trembling, and very suspicious hope. Many have thought otherwise, and pleaded that wherever there was true repentance, sin must be pardoned, because there the end of punishment was answered in the amendment of the offender. But not to say how little probability there would be of men being brought to true repentance without the gospel, nor to insist upon the unaccountable want of every expression of it in the writings even of the best of the heathens, it is sufficient to reply that this goes entirely upon a mistake, that the amendment of any particular person is the only end of punishment: the vindication of the injured honour of God's justice and laws, and the admonition of others, who, from the pardon of a penitent offender, might have encouraged themselves to sin with hopes of impunity; and greater and far superior ends, which, for any thing that any of us could certainly have known, might have required

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our lasting punishment, were we ever so penitent; especially in cases of long continued and repeated guilt, aggravated by relapses after former professions of repentance. It is certain that human lawgivers see it necessary to inflict the penalty in some cases where there is reason to believe the man's hearty repentance of what he has done; and the wisest man upon earth could not have said that the Divine Sovereign might not have seen matters in the same view: and, indeed, when I consider the scheme of pardon established in the gospel by the incarnation and death of the Son of God, as the consideration on which even the sincerest penitent and believer are received by God, I cannot but think that these apprehensions would have been just. But I further add that, without the gospel, there could not have been the lowest degree of reason to expect so great and so lasting a happiness. That *God will render unto all men according to their works* is, indeed, a most necessary consequence even of our natural apprehensions of the Divine justice; but whether that should imply any thing more than different degrees of punishment, according to the degrees of guilt

which even the best of us have contracted (as I have already observed), we could not certainly tell. Yet, were we to allow it probable that there was prepared for the children of men a state of future happiness, yet, without the gospel, our notions of that state would have been very imperfect. I confess that I see no reason why we should imagine that we should have reasoned better without a revelation than the Greeks and Romans did, or than the Brachmans of India, or the Mandarins of China now do: and it is certain that their notions of a future state are very obscure, and most of their hopes have always been very low. The eternal happiness of soul and body, in the image and enjoyment of God, is what I never read of in any of the writings of the ancients, nor heard of as the expectation of any of the modern Pagans; and I wonder not at it. That they should imagine there were pleasant gardens, and refreshing fountains and shades, prepared for those who had been wise and good, where they continue in friendship with each other, and were amused with various recreations and converse, I do not so much wonder at. But that there should be

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SERM. II. an *everlasting* period of all sorrow, and that the *whole man* should be completely happy in the presence and enjoyment of God, I see not how they could have had any reason to expect; and therefore it is no surprise to me, that they appear not to expect it. A temporary paradise, and a transmigration of souls, seem the highest hope of unassisted reason. It is *Christ who has brought life and immortality to light*, and the light in which he has placed it is such, that I freely declare that it would seem hardly *credible*, were it not proposed as the purchase of his own righteousness and blood, and the gift of God's free grace by him.

2. We further add, that it is the great design of the gospel to fix men's views and pursuits on this happiness. This is by way of eminence, *the hope of his calling*, the great hope which the gospel gives, as the apostle expresses it, *in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, has promised*<sup>9</sup>. Accordingly we read this as the great declaration of the Lord, *I give to my sheep eternal life*<sup>1</sup>, &c. And this is said to be a reason for which almighty power is given to him, *that he may give eternal life*<sup>2</sup>. And he sent his apostles that men

<sup>9</sup> Tit i. 2.

<sup>1</sup> John x.  
23.

<sup>2</sup> John xvii.  
2.

might be turned from darkness to light, &c. that they might receive this inheritance. And we are said *to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*<sup>3</sup>. And this is so essential a part of the scheme, that the whole dispensation takes its name with respect to it, and is called *the kingdom of heaven*, because it is intended to lead thither. It is true that there are great and excellent privileges to which we are entitled in the present state, immediately upon our believing: for as St. John expresses it, *to those who believe, to them gave he the privilege of becoming sons of God*<sup>4</sup>. Yet still they terminate in this, and the value of our present privileges is chiefly to be estimated by their reference to their future hopes. Now that this is the great point in view, we may argue from Christ himself having removed to the heavenly world. God *showed him the path of life*<sup>5</sup>, &c. that he might attract our hearts thither, as it is most congruous that where he is, there should also his servants be. And therefore the apostle argues, *if ye are risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God*<sup>6</sup>. And to this the providence of God bears testimony

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<sup>3</sup> 2Thes. ii.  
14.

<sup>4</sup> John i. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Ps. xiv.  
10, &c.

<sup>6</sup> Col. iii.  
1.

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together with his word; for were not this the great end of the Christian calling, there would be a more sensible distinction between sincere Christians and others, than there at present is. Now, as this is an obvious truth so I cannot but observe, that it is the peculiar glory of the Christian dispensation, and a most excellent proof of its Divine original; since it tends so powerfully to raise the mind *above these things which are seen*, and set it *on those which are unseen and eternal*; and thereby lays a solid basis for the exercise of virtue and grace, in circumstances of the greatest extremity, and in such trials as must overbear every thing but the hope thus directed and animated. And since it is thus, suffer, my brethren, the word of exhortation, and permit me to call upon you all *to gird up the loins of your minds, to be sober, and hope even to the end* for this glory, to make it the great object of your pursuit, as ever you would approve yourselves to be Christians indeed, and that *you have not received the grace of God in vain*. Turn away your eyes from beholding vanities; moderate your affections towards them; deaden and *mortify your members that are*

*upon the earth.* I conclude with my hearty prayer to God for you, that you may be content, with St. Paul, to look about on all the charms of life on the one hand, and all its terrors on the other; and resolutely to say, *None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to me, that I may finish my course with joy*<sup>7</sup>. And that this temper<sup>7</sup> may be ever kept alive on your hearts, *may the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you the spirit of wisdom, and enlighten the eyes of your understanding, &c.* But what need there is of such a prayer, with what zeal it is to be offered, and with what method to be accomplished, I shall, if God permit, hereafter show to you, but here I must conclude the present discourse. Nor shall we have lost our time in the house of God on this day, if we carry away with us such views of his house above, as this copious scripture has so naturally suggested to us.

## SERMON III.

OF KNOWING THE HOPE OF OUR CALLING.

## PART II.

EPHESIANS, I. 18.

*The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.*

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WHEN the queen of Sheba heard the wisdom of Solomon, she made this very judicious reflection upon the discovery of it, *because the Lord thy God loved Israel, therefore he has made thee king over it*<sup>1</sup>. And I cannot forbear thinking that a reflection of this kind may sometimes become us, when we read the writings of this holy author before us. It was because God loved his church that he made Paul an apostle in it. Paul, whose heart was so possessed with the love of Jesus, and who was begotten again to so lively a hope of the *inheritance uncorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*. Who can peruse his sacred writings without

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings  
x. 9, and  
2 Chron.  
ix. 8.



feeling something of the flame that animates his breast? I hope we have in part already felt it. I hope we shall feel it more and more while we pursue our meditations on this important passage, which contains his prayer for his friends at Ephesus, a prayer which well became such eminent wisdom, such lively piety and friendship: that God would give them eyes so enlightened, that *they might know the hope of their calling, &c.* In handling which words, you know,

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I. I proposed to consider the view given us of the heavenly world.

II. Whence it comes to pass that it is so much unknown even to good men.

III. To consider what illumination may be expected by the Divine operation on our minds.

IV. How desirable such illuminations are.

V. What methods we are to take that we may gain such an increasing knowledge: and,

VI. Then to conclude with the application.

I. I have already considered the instructive and edifying view that is here given to us of the heavenly world. It is an inheritance, a Divine inheritance, rich and glorious; an

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inheritance among the saints; and it is the hope of the gospel; nothing but the gospel could give it; and it was the great design of the gospel to raise our souls to a becoming regard to it, and to engage us to make it the great object of our pursuit. I am in the next place to consider,

II. Whence it comes to pass that it is so much unknown even to those who have cordially embraced the gospel. I say *to them*, for it is evident that of them the scripture speaks in the words here before us. They were *the joy of the apostle*, and *he had confidence in them as his crown; he had heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and of their love to all the saints; and for this cause he ceased not to give thanks for them.* And yet he prays that *God would enlighten their eyes, and grant them the spirit of wisdom and revelation.* And he asks it for himself as well as for them. For now, says he, *we all know but in part, and therefore can prophecy but in part.* The blessedness is too great for our conceptions; too distant to regard it in proportion to its real worth; too spiritual to be completely relished by creatures of

so imperfect characters; and we are surrounded with so many things which divert our attention from it, that we are much less acquainted with it than we might otherwise have been. SERM.  
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I. The exceeding greatness of this inheritance must necessarily hinder it from being completely known. Like the love of Christ, on which it is founded, *it passes knowledge*<sup>2</sup>. <sup>1</sup> Eph. iii.  
19. The heavenly conqueror, when he enters upon it, has a *new name given him*, which none can know but He who receives it<sup>3</sup>: *for* <sup>3</sup> Rev. ii.  
17. *eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God has prepared for them who love him*<sup>4</sup>. <sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. ii.  
9. On this account, even so great and so holy a person as St. John says, *it does not yet appear what we shall be*<sup>5</sup>. A person, who <sup>5</sup> John iii.  
2. had always been educated in a cottage, could have no just idea of the splendours of a magnificent court; and much less can we, from any thing which we view, or any thing which we enjoy on earth, have an adequate conception of that *fulness of joy* which is in the presence of God, and those *rivers of pleasure* which flow from his right hand. It seems to be with a reference to this, that, when

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Paul had been caught up into the third heaven, he says, that *he there heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful, or possible, for a man to utter*<sup>6</sup>: new ideas for which we have no names, and therefore which no language of ours can possibly express. But we further add,

<sup>6</sup> 2 Cor. xii.  
4.

2. That its distance hinders us from forming a just idea of it. You know how it is with the eye of the body, when an object is removed, it lessens proportionably; as we particularly see in the luminaries of heaven, some of which are so vastly large, according to the best calculations, that the earth itself is but a small spot in comparison with them: and yet they appear to our eyes but of a small magnitude: and even our own hands, or any of the fruits of the earth when held near the eye, fill all the prospect, and cover even sun, and moon, and stars from our sight: and this is too just an image of what befalls us with regard to the future world. It is true that the distance is often imaginary rather than real. But we are exceedingly apt to put the day of death far from us, whereby we sometimes make it an evil day; and, for-

getting that what is now future will at length be present, and what is now present will be past, we suffer ourselves to be sadly imposed upon, and are too soon brought into a forgetfulness even of that *far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, with which nothing seen and temporal is by any means worthy to be compared.

3. Its spirituality renders it less fit to be known by such minds in which there is such a mixture of carnality, and which are so much under the power of remaining corruption. The apostle tells us that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither can corruption inherit incorruption*<sup>7</sup>. <sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 50. The pleasures of the heavenly state are pure and refined. They consist in beholding the face of God in righteousness, and in being satisfied with his complete likeness. The consequence of this is, that the generality of mankind are not at all struck by them, any more than a brute would be by the offer of some philosophical entertainment. *The natural man*, says the apostle, *relishes not the things of the spirit, nor can it know them because they are spiritually discerned*<sup>8</sup>. Now, it is a great and <sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 14.

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certain truth, that these things are in some measure recommended to every believer by the Spirit of God, and his regenerating influences on the heart, forming and fashioning it to a meetness for them. But alas! *we are sanctified but in part, and there is still a law in the members, warring against the law of the mind.* These sink our souls into flesh and sense, and spoil our relish for those sublime pleasures which are in the presence of God: and, on this account, the good man himself may find that, in proportion to the degree in which corruption prevails in his heart, the eye of the soul is darkened, and a veil seems as it were to be drawn over it, so that it hardly knows how to shoot a glance towards that happiness which it has, in its deliberate judgment, chosen for its final portion.

4. The objects, with which we are here continually surrounded, draw off our attention, from what we might otherwise, notwithstanding all our disadvantages, know concerning the future. You know the mind of man is of a very limited nature. Now, the consequence of this is, that objects, which daily demand our attention and care,

must proportionably divert our regard from those which are in themselves of a more excellent kind. *We are now cumbered about many things*, and that, alas! leads us to forget *the one thing needful*<sup>9</sup>. *The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things*, prevent us from forming such an acquaintance, as we otherwise might, with that which is within the veil. May I not, Christians, appeal to you upon this head. You have, perhaps, on a sabbath day, been engaged in Divine contemplation, and before you have been aware, have found your souls *like the chariots of Aminadab*; but then when you have returned to your worldly business, and cares, and pleasures again, you have found your minds swallowed up with them, and the mist has risen, and mean as its materials might seem to be, and small as are its particles in themselves, yet has it grown so thick as to intercept the prospect of the firmament itself, and all the glory that adorns it. And, indeed, this is so frequently the case, that, I fear, were not sabbaths and sacraments often to return, and were we not upon this head to have *line upon line, and precept upon precept*,

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<sup>9</sup> Luke x.  
42.

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we should be lost in the crowd, and delivered over from one vanity to another, till vanity were our *final* recompense, as a just punishment for our having been deceived by it, and for our trusting in it. These causes concur to prevent the good man himself from having that knowledge of the heavenly world which he might otherwise have obtained. We have viewed the disease, let us now consider the remedy, and inquire,

III. What it is to have *the eyes of our understanding enlightened by the spirit of knowledge and revelation*, which is the blessing the apostle prays for in behalf of his friends at Ephesus: and here I must,

1. Observe that it does not signify the revelation of any truth before entirely unknown. This is true, even with respect to the operation of the Spirit in regeneration. It does not discover to us any doctrine which we had not learned before, as it does not give any new faculties, or open any other source of ideas than such as we had before been acquainted with. A man, by a careful study of the scriptures, and frequent attendance on the means of grace,



may learn to conceive rationally of future happiness, as well as to prove it, by most cogent arguments, both from reason and scripture: and much more reasonably may we conclude, that a soul already regenerated has a notional acquaintance with all those truths relating to its future happiness, which it must expect to know whilst it dwells here in the flesh; but

2. The Spirit of God enlightens the understanding by representing the truths, already known, in a more beautiful view. You know that there is a great deal of difference between viewing a curious piece of painting in different degrees of light. You may, perhaps, see all the traces in a dark and cloudy day; but yet, when the sun appears in its full lustre, the colours glow in a far more lively manner, and the figure appears as it were new dressed. Thus does the Spirit of God sometimes give such vivid and penetrating perceptions and sensations of future blessedness, that it seems as if it were a new object, and the good man is almost ready to say that he had before *heard of it, only by the hearing of the ear, but now his eye sees it*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Job. xlii.  
5.

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3. The blessed Spirit sometimes represents these things in a more appropriating view. Much depends upon the conformity of the object known to our own inward state and relishes; and, in contemplating happiness, to apprehend it as *our own* vastly increases the delight of it. Humanly speaking, we may conclude, that if there had been two Israelites brought to the mountain passage, and one of them had been to have died at the foot of the mountain, and the other to have gone over to possess Canaan, the latter would have viewed that goodly mountain and Lebanon with far greater delight than the other could have done. So, when *the Spirit witnesseth with our spirit, that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ*, it is no wonder if the soul finds a peculiar delight in viewing its own inheritance, and in surveying that crown of glory which itself expects ere long to wear. *Property* puts a peculiar sweetness into it, especially when those graces are cherished in the heart by the influences of the blessed Spirit, which are indeed an earnest and foretaste of this expected blessedness. When

these things are attentively considered, they may assist us in judging of this illumination of the eyes of our understanding. Let me now represent, SERM.  
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IV. How desirable a thing it is that we may share in such illuminations as these, and may have some practical and heart-affecting knowledge of the hope of our calling. And here we may observe,

1. That it will cherish the love of God in our souls, which is indeed the great fountain of every other grace. A sense of the general benevolence of the Divine being will occasion some affectionate thoughts of him. But it is chiefly a sense of *personal* obligations that impresses the heart; and what personal obligation so great as this, that *he has chosen us to this through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth:* that he has prepared such an inheritance for us who are conscious to ourselves how unworthy we are of sharing even in the bounties of his common providence. What is, or can be more natural than to reflect, “I hope and expect to live for ever with my Father and my God, to behold his

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face in all the glories of the heavenly world. He is intending to do me good even as long as he himself exists; to bestow favours as long as the treasures of his omnipotence and beneficence can furnish them out. He has called me to this blessed hope, whilst thousands are left ignorant of it; and, being ignorant, are permitted to despise it. O, *what shall I render to the Lord for all that he hath done unto me!* Aid me, ye saints who already possess this glory, to express my grateful sentiments to that heavenly Father who is intending me for it, and conducting me to it. Well might the apostle, when he had been saying, *we rejoice in hope of the glory of God*, proceed to say, *and the love of God is shed abroad upon our hearts*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. v.  
4, 5.

2. It tends also greatly to promote our humility. Humility is so important a part of the Christian character, that our Lord particularly calls us to learn it of him. And what tends to promote it more than the riches of the Divine favour to us, in comparison with our own worthiness? "*Who am I, O Lord,*" does the Christian say, "*that I am brought hither? brought to thine house? brought to thy table?* But, Lord, dost thou intend to bring me so much

further? To set me at thy table not only on earth but in heaven? As if all which thou hast already bestowed were too little, dost thou speak of thy servant for a great while yet to come? *Who am I that thou shouldst look on such a dead dog as I? I am not worthy to wash the feet of the servants of my lord: and shall I dwell with them? Shall I not only have sweet communion with saints upon earth, but have my lot among them, and that for ever? Even I who am less than the least of all saints, and am not worthy to be called one?"*

To know the hope of our calling will greatly strengthen our religious resolutions, under all difficulties and opposition. We shall need a very heroic resolution in the cause of our heavenly master, and must quit ourselves like men, or we shall fall under all that opposition which on every side awaits us. And what can inspire us with this courage more than such obligations and such hopes? Am I called to "this blessed prize, and shall I desert my calling? Shall I behave in such a cowardly and unseemly manner, that my great leader shall be ashamed of me? Is he holding out such a crown,

SERM. III. and shall I not secure it? Is it not worth my while, as he intimates, to *be faithful even unto death*, that I may receive *that crown of life*? What are all the gilded vanities of the present life? When they are compared with these blessings, they are less than nothing. *I find by computation*, says the apostle, (and that gave him that steadiness) *that the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall then be revealed*<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. viii.  
18.

4. It tends to inspire us with a noble ambition of excelling in religion, in proportion to this hope. "Does God intend all this for me? What can I then do in return for it? What can I do to bear any proportion to it? O, my soul, thou art the heir of a kingdom, of a kingdom of eternal glory; there ought therefore to be not only integrity and purity of spirit, but a serenity, dignity, and greatness of mind answerable to these prospects. Thy employment in life, thy conversation ought to be agreeable to it." So Timothy is stirred up even to martyrdom by this thought, *that he has called us with*  
<sup>4</sup> 2 Tim. i. 9. *a holy calling*<sup>4</sup>: and the apostle urges them to *hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of*

*their hope firm to the end, as being partakers of the heavenly calling*<sup>5</sup>. Having these promises, perfect holiness, &c.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. vii.  
1.

5. To know the hope of our calling will cheer our hearts under those burthens that would otherwise overwhelm us. When we do not only in general believe a future state, but feel our souls impressed with the views of its excellency, this hope will be, as the apostle beautifully expresses it, *an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, entering into that which is within the veil*<sup>6</sup>. It will keep our minds steady when the wind blows, and the waves beat. It will be like a reviving cordial to keep our heart from sinking under its fears. You see how it wrought with the apostle when he speaks with such joy of all his afflictions, as knowing that *these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*<sup>7</sup>. “O my soul,” may the Christian justly say, “thy present losses affect not thine inheritance! thou mayst be the richer for thy poverty here. Thy present pains affect not the ease and pleasure of thy celestial abode, any otherwise than as they may increase the relish

<sup>6</sup> Heb. vi.  
19.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor. iv.  
17.

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of it, and make thine everlasting rest so much the more peaceful and refreshing. I lose a friend for a few years, but it is to receive him again for ever. He is gone to his inheritance, and I am going to mine. There is new light risen upon him, and I shall stand in that light. I shall receive it for an everlasting possession.”

6. To *know the hope of our calling* will enable us to conquer both the fear and the pain of dying. Why are the generality of men so unwilling to leave earth? I am persuaded that it is because their views of heaven are not more lively. I hope that I am speaking to some who know what it is to cry out, as good old Simeon did, when they have Christ in the arms of their faith, *Lord, now sufferest thou thy servant to depart in peace, for mine*

<sup>8</sup> Luke ii. 29. *eyes have seen thy salvation*<sup>8</sup>. Paul had a violent death in view, and yet he could say,

*I am ready to be offered, &c. as I know there is laid up for me a crown of righteous-*

<sup>9</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 8. *ness*<sup>9</sup>. And elsewhere, *I have a desire to depart, and to be dissolved, and be with Christ;*

<sup>1</sup> Phil. i. 23. *which is far better*<sup>1</sup>. “I am going home,” may the Christian say, “to my Father’s house. I have lived but meanly in this



state of minority. I have been subject sometimes to very painful discipline: but now for a journey to my inheritance. Why are the chariot wheels so slow? with pleasure do I hear their sound. Welcome these decays of nature, which are the forebodings of the dissolution of it. I shall *be absent from the body, and present with the Lord*. Now the blessed object of my hope is near, *the hope of my calling*. Now is God about to do that which above all things I have desired: that for which I entered into covenant with him: that which I had in my eye and in my heart, when I became a Christian indeed. Lord, I adore thy faithfulness and thy love. *Come Lord, come quickly.*”

Now, sirs, I appeal to you, whether each of these be not powerful arguments to engage you to desire that you also *may know the hope of your calling*. Would you feel this love of God, this humility, this vigorous resolution, this heaven-born ambition, this serenity of soul under the afflictions of life, this fortitude and joy in the views of death. “O Lord! nothing on this side glory is so desirable as these sentiments of soul,

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awakened and invigorated by the expectation of it. Rather had I feel the hope of this inheritance than possess the most noble and glorious inheritance ever known amongst the children of men.”

V. Let me briefly suggest some hints of advice as to the methods by which we may attain a temper so fruitful in comforts, in graces, and in blessings. You desire to *know the hope of your calling*. Let me advise

1. That you study the scriptures with all possible care and diligence. There you see the evidence, the description of that hope; and you see how other good men have been affected under the views of it. The evidence of it is there proposed in the most convincing manner. It rests upon the testimony of God, and you there learn how that testimony was confirmed by Christ himself, and his immediate followers, *God bearing witness to it with signs and wonders, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost*<sup>2</sup>. There you see it described; and there you are taught to form the most bright and noble ideas of it, as you perceive by the former

<sup>2</sup> Heb. ii.

4.

discourse. There you read how the saints of God of old were impressed with it, how they longed for their heavenly country, and *confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers upon earth*<sup>3</sup>. In a word, there is hardly a chapter, especially of the New Testament, but, if read with attentive regard, will teach you something of heaven, and leave you fitter for it. Send forth only thy light and truth, O Lord! to illustrate and confirm our faith in scripture, and it shall lead and guide us to thy heavenly kingdom.

2. Be much in meditation on *the hope of your calling*, if you desire more distinctly to know it. It is not enough that you hear and read of it. It is not enough that your heads form ideas of it, be they ever so bright, the main thing is to bring it to your hearts; and in order to this you must bring your hearts to it. You must sometimes abstract yourselves from other things, on purpose to seek and intermeddle with Divine wisdom. Particularly on the evening of the Lord's Day, cause yourselves to think of your eternal sabbath. When you meet with sorrows and disappointments in the world, then

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<sup>3</sup> Heb. xi.  
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think of your inheritance above. When you lose your friends, your children here, think of your Father's house, and your hope of recovering them there. And for the further illustration of it,

3. Be frequently discoursing with each other upon it. It is, methinks, a most pleasant subject of discourse, and a most natural one. We are fellow-pilgrims, should we not therefore think of the end of our journey? Should we not therefore confirm the faith, excite the joy, and encourage the hope of each other? It is affecting to observe how the Jews in Babylon remembered Sion, and sat down together to weep in the thoughts of it, and could say, *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cun-*

<sup>4</sup> Psalm  
cxxxvii. 5.

*ning* <sup>4</sup>. And shall we forget that Jerusalem which is above, where no enemy invades; that temple which ever stands in its own magnificence, and where we hope to be fixed as pillars for ever. *Let us exhort each other; and quicken each other, I hope that I may add, as many of you also do,*

4. By frequent application to the throne of grace. Convinced of the natural ten-

dency of our minds towards the objects of time and sense, let us humble ourselves before God, and acknowledge that our souls do naturally cleave unto the dust, earnestly entreating that according to his word he would quicken them, and give to us that celestial touch which would rouse and refine them. When the apostle speaks of himself and his brethren, as breathing after the glories of the heavenly state, he adds, *He who has wrought us to the selfsame thing is God*<sup>5</sup>. Let us earnestly pray that God would work us up to it: that he would pour light on our understandings, tenderness on our hearts; and would form us to a growing meetness to be made partakers of this inheritance among the saints in light and glory,

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<sup>2</sup> Cor. v.  
5.

5. By the cultivation of those graces which are suitable to this state, and the blessings of it. On this head, suffer the word of exhortation. Keep yourselves in the love of God. Endeavour to converse with him daily by prayer. Be not easy unless you have found him in your closets, in your families, in the house of God. Labour to

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live in continual converse with him, and you will have the livelier notion of what heaven is. Study the knowledge of Christ, for through him you may know heaven. Lift up your believing eyes to him, renew your covenant of grace with him, and the actings of faith upon him, as your Lord and your Saviour, every day. Study to improve in all the branches of a holy fear; and to improve in love to all the saints. You will then be fit for a portion among them; and your converse with them will assist you in conceiving of the pleasures of that perfect converse that there awaits you. In a word, grace in the heart is in its degree heaven upon earth, and the more the one is cultivated the more is the other enjoyed.

VI. I have left myself but little time for the application of these things, which will divide itself into two branches.

1. I am to apply myself to those who are still in darkness, and without hope. But am I speaking to any such? You have all your light, and you have all your hope: but, alas! with regard to some, the light arises

from sparks which yourselves have kindled. It is the hope of the hypocrite that will fail when God takes away his soul. I appeal to your consciences this day. Are there not such among you who are almost entirely unconcerned about another world, about this rich and glorious inheritance, who hardly feel a desire after it, or if any, only such a one as condemns you: for you are condemned by this desire, since it does not stir you up to a suitable pursuit. It is the inheritance of the saints. And are you saints? Have you a temper and conduct that would bear any thing like that denomination? You God's holy ones? You know the contrary. You know the power of sin and Satan over your hearts. You know, therefore, that *you have no part and lot in this matter*. No part in the kingdom of Christ and of God, as the apostle himself declares<sup>6</sup>. Let me ask you seriously but these two questions: Is it not a sad state which you are now in? and will you not shortly be in one which is much worse? Is not your present darkness deplorable? You would think it a sad thing if the sight of your eyes were lost: and it would be so.

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. vi.  
9, 10.

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And if others saw a beautiful prospect, or a magnificent building, and seemed delighted with the view, whilst you, though with them, were in a midnight gloom, it would grieve you no doubt, and it justly might. But you are in the midst of the people of God who see the beauty of Christ, who see by faith the glory of heaven, and yet you feel nothing of this. Miserable creatures! though you had those gay vanities, which now surround you, to gaze upon for ever. But will that be the case? Are you not in the way to eternal darkness? The saints of God are to enter upon an inheritance. But what must you expect? You who have lived *without God in the world*, you who have wasted your Lord's goods? *Take that unprofitable servant, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*<sup>7</sup>. Yet there the eyes of your understanding, though in a dreadful sense, will be enlightened. Then you will see something of the *hope of the Christian calling*; that hope to which you were once externally called. But, good God! with what horror and despair you will see the

<sup>7</sup> Matt. xiii.  
42. 50.



rich glories of the inheritance of the saints, to make you more sensible of your own wretchedness for ever. This, therefore, is spoken of as the occasion of the grief and horror of the damned. *Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, and yourselves shut out*<sup>8</sup>. Remember it, ye children of religious parents, who despise this heavenly inheritance. *You shall be shut out.* I testify to you this day, I speak it with horror, that I believe this will be the lot of several among you. You have sat so long unconverted, unimpressed under the means of grace, that I cannot but fear that you will perish for ever. I have very little hopes from any thing which I can say to you. I pray that God may open your blind eyes, and that he may not only show you hell to awaken you, but heaven to enliven you, and Christ to lead you thither, and to form you for it.

2. I would address myself to those who have received this Divine illumination. Be thankful for the light which you have already received, and humbly wait and long for more. I would exhort you to be thankful

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<sup>8</sup>Luke xiii.

28.

SERM. for that light which you have already received.

III.

Consider, I beseech you, how many there are who remain in utter uncertainty as to a future state; or, who build their notions and their expectations on false teachers, and wild enthusiastic dreams, as, you know, to be particularly the case of the Mahometans, and many of the Indians. And how many even in Christian countries have very little thought and concern about an interest in this happiness. You may then *bless the Lord who has given you light, and has caused it to shine upon your hearts.* Let your souls, on this account, magnify the Lord. *Once you were yourselves darkness, be very thankful you are now light in him;* and earnestly pray that the light may be more strong. Consider what I have been saying on this day, as an engagement to you to make it now your frequent errand to the throne of grace. But especially long for the fuller discoveries of the future state. *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart;* and the blessed harvest will at length come. Let us rejoice in the hope; and, whilst we are waiting for God's salvation,

make it your humble care to do his commands. Whilst that salvation is delayed, let us be looking for that blessed hope; and let us employ all opportunities of improving our acquaintance with it, and of preparing ourselves for it. Such an opportunity is now offering. Let us then approach the Lord's table at this time, as those who apprehend themselves to be the children of God through faith in Christ, and who come to receive their Father's bread now, in token that they hope, at length, to be admitted to the full inheritance of his children.

SERM.  
III.

## SERMON IV.

## THE REFUGE OF GOD'S CHILDREN.

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 PROVERBS, xiv. 26.

*In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, and his children have a place of refuge.*

SERM. IV. **SUBLIME** indeed is that triumph of the Psalmist, *God is our refuge and strength,* &c.<sup>1</sup>, but not more sublime than rational. Elevated as the transport is, *the words are those of truth and soberness:* and they express so noble and so happy a temper, that I would fain, by the Divine blessing, be the means of establishing it in your souls. In this precarious world, while we sail on this stormy ocean, I would fain establish your hearts in an humble and well-grounded confidence in that God *whom the winds and waves obey.* I have, therefore, chosen these words of Solomon, in which, if I understand them rightly, he speaks of good men as the chil-

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xlvii.  
1—5.

dren of God, and of their happiness under that relation. I say he speaks of good men as the children of God. I know some have interpreted the words, as if the meaning were, *the children of those that fear God, have a place of refuge*, as if intended to express that the Divine goodness extended itself even to the children of godly parents. It does so in some measure, but not always, and without exception. David knew the contrary, and solemnly forewarned Solomon of it, in words which one would hope that he could never forget. *If thou seek him, he will be found of thee: but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever*<sup>2</sup>. If, indeed, the words were to be interpreted so, they would establish my main purpose: for if the children of pious parents have a place of refuge in God, much more evidently have the pious parents themselves. But I think it most reasonable to believe that the words of the text refer to good men as the children of God. *His children*, i. e. those that fear him: for such is the infinite condescension of God to those under this relation. Very clearly indeed is it spoken of in the New Testa-

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

SERM.

IV.

ment, especially in those ever memorable words, *I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*<sup>3</sup>. And this is the most grammatical sense of the words, *his children*, i. e. the children of the Lord. And let it not be wondered that Solomon expresses himself in such language, since it was typically said of him, though with an ultimate reference to him who is the new born among his brethren, *I will be his Father, and he shall be my son*<sup>4</sup>. This then is the plain doctrine which the words exhibit, and not merely a consequence, how properly soever drawn from them. It is the delightful inscription which they wear upon their front, and, oh! that we might wear it upon our hearts, *the children of God shall have a place of refuge*. And should this need to be proved? Can any thing in the world be more evident, even at the first hearing, than that if there are any so happy as to be the children of God, they are in a very secure and blessed state? Is it not evident enough, that *if God be for us, none can be against us?* What can there possibly be to fear if the eternal *God*

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. vi.  
18.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Sam.  
vii. 14.

*be our refuge, and underneath us be the everlasting arms,* which the relation of a Father plainly encourages us to hope? But how little need soever there is of proving it to the understanding, still there may be need of proving it to the heart; and that is what I shall now attempt to do. The children of God have not always that confidence and that joy in him which they ought to have. Their faith often fails them. They think and act beneath their character. I would, therefore, for their consolation, and for the instruction of others too, who may not be sufficiently sensible of it, a little illustrate this point. And I pray God to enable me to do it with a becoming spirit, and to give you to receive these great truths with suitable regard, that you may all belong to the blessed number of God's children, and may all be excited to seek him, through whom we *receive the adoption*. I will then endeavour,

I. To show you how certain it is that they, who are so happy as to be *the children of God*, shall have *a place of refuge in him*.

II. To apply the thought to several particular exigencies and distresses to which they

SERM. may be obnoxious, and in which it will be  
 IV. particularly comfortable and suitable for them  
 to recollect it.

III. To draw some inferences, which will naturally arise from this survey, and may, by the Divine blessing, be subservient to your edification.

I. To show you that they who are so happy as to be *the children of God*, shall have a *place of refuge* in him; and this universally, in all the difficulties that can possibly be supposed to arise. I might prove it from a multitude of scriptures, which speak of it in the strongest terms. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it* (i. e. upon every emergency) *and are safe*<sup>5</sup>. *He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall be safe under the shadow of the Almighty*<sup>6</sup>. *They shall be as Mount Zion that cannot be removed, but abideth for ever,* &c.<sup>7</sup>. But if you consider what and who the blessed God is, you may draw a certain consequence from a survey of his infinite perfections, which will demonstrate the justice of this assertion; and might thus lead us into the same reflections, even if we had

<sup>5</sup> Prov. xviii. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. xci.

1.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. cxxv.

1.



never met with them in our bibles: though it would have been strange indeed, if we had not met with them there. Let me then apply to your own consciences, for to those I labour to bring the proof, whether his eye cannot discern them; his hand help them; and his mercy pity them?

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1. Is there a circumstance of difficulty and distress in which the eye of God cannot discern his children? There are circumstances, indeed, in which the eye of the most watchful earthly parent cannot reach his child. Absence often divides them; land and seas sometimes separate them; so that the affectionate parent, instead of knowing every danger that threatens his child, knows not certainly whether he has a child or not. And even when your children are nearest to you; when in their helpless infancy, you lodge them in the very same apartment with yourselves, yet there are moments in which you must give your *eyelids to sleep*, moments in which *a mother must forget her sucking child*, how tender soever be her compassion to the son of her womb. But as *he that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps*, can his eye be sealed up? Can he forget, I will

SERM. not say any of his *children*, but any of his  
 IV. *creatures*? We cannot think so meanly of  
 his universal providence. We cannot sup-  
 pose one of them is forgotten: no, the *eyes*  
 of the Lord are upon the righteous<sup>8</sup>; ever  
 fixed upon them, never turned away for a  
 single moment. But I would add,

<sup>8</sup> Ps. XXXIV.  
 15.

2. Is there an exigency in which his hand cannot help them? Alas! the eye of an earthly parent is no preservative at all to his children. They may perish in his sight; yea, were he a prince the sad circumstance might happen, in which he might be a helpless spectator of the destruction of his beloved offspring. You read it of Zedekiah, and methinks it pierces one's heart to read it. *They took the king and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah: And they gave judgment upon him, and they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and they put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon*<sup>9</sup>. O miserable calamity! O savage cruelty! that the last object the eyes of a father should behold, should be the slaughter of his children: and then to seal the idea, as it were, upon the mind

<sup>9</sup> 2 Kings  
 XXV. 6, 7.

for ever, that the sight of no new object might divert it, his eyes should be put out, and the needless inhuman load of fetters added to him whom blindness had made a prisoner, and bound with inextricable chains. But can the children of an Almighty God be slain before his eyes, and he want power to rescue and deliver them? Observe, I beseech you, with what a sublime consciousness of that omnipotence the blessed God speaks to that haughty prince Pharaoh! *Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my first-born. Let my son go, or I will slay thy son, even thy first-born*<sup>1</sup>. He speaks, and it is done. He can command, if such were his pleasure, *more than twelve legions of angels. Yea, his own right hand, and Almighty arm shall get him the victory.* Is any thing too hard for the Lord? No; but the question may seem to lie another way: Shall Omnipotence be exerted for a worm? for a sinful worm? Instead of being secured, it deserves to be crushed. But here let me ask once more,

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<sup>1</sup> Exod. iv.  
22, 23.

3. If they are his children, shall not his mercy pity them and secure them? Does not the name of Father speak compassion?

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IV.

It is in reference to this compassion that the name is taken; and the bowels of human parents are referred to, to express that gracious willingness to help which there is in him.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. ciii. *As a father pities his children*<sup>2</sup>. To all that infirmity of compassion which we feel, that pains us, that sometimes confounds us, that sometimes indeed strengthens, and sometimes disarms the power of nature, he is a stranger: but there is in him as real a disposition to help, as if all that, and more than that were literally felt. Therefore it is

<sup>3</sup> Isa. lxiii. said, *in all their afflictions he was afflicted*<sup>3</sup>; and *he that touches you, touches the apple of*

<sup>4</sup> Zech. ii. *mine eye*<sup>4</sup>. Oh, sirs! can it indeed be imagined that this was not intended in this condescension which taught him to assume such a name? Yea, so it is that, with a stoop of mercy never to be sufficiently admired, God is pleased to represent his affection to his people by the tenderness of birds to their helpless brood. *As an eagle hovers over her young, and bears it on her wings,*

<sup>5</sup> Deut. xxxii. *&c*<sup>5</sup>. And once more, *He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust*<sup>6</sup>. We will then labour this point

<sup>6</sup> Ps. xci. no further. It is enough; it is more than

enough. It is proved to our understanding; it is proved to our heart: there is no exigency and extremity in which the eye of God cannot discern his children; in which his hand cannot help them; in which his heart will not pity them. SERM.  
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II. Let us apply the thought to several particular exigencies and distresses, to which the children of God may be obnoxious, and in which it will be peculiarly comfortable and suitable for them to recollect this truth. *His children shall have a place of refuge*, when friends forsake them, when enemies insult them, when necessity presses them, when bodily disorders attack them, and when death seems most entirely to triumph over them.

1. *His children have a place of refuge* when friends forsake them. The possession of our friends too often makes us forget God; and happy is it when the loss of them, however we may lose them, leads us to the remembrance of him. I would not myself entertain, nor would I suggest to others ungenerous suspicions with respect to those friends who have hitherto approved their fidelity;

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nor even with regard to those who have not disapproved it, how weak soever the proofs may thus far have been: nor would I have you in your own minds fix upon particular persons: but a very supposable thing it is, in general, that friends may prove inconstant. Some of them perhaps, though they may not know it, are but loving themselves while they profess to love us, and find those conveniencies in a commerce with us, which if they did not, the commerce would soon be broken. And some, though a brother be born for adversity, will quit us as soon as any extraordinary affliction comes upon us: like those brethren of Job, *that dealt so deceitfully with him, like a brook, and passed away as the streams of the brook; which when it waxes warm vanish, and when it is hot, are consumed out of their place*<sup>7</sup>. *The broken reed* not only fails, but *goes into the hand, and pierces it*, in proportion to the stress that was laid upon it. But if we are so happy as to find those who shall be, what so many inconsiderately perhaps, if not treacherously profess a purpose of being, faithful until the death, *there* the bond must be broken. And how desirous soever they might be to live, or

<sup>7</sup> Job vi.  
15, &c.

to make our lives more comfortable, and not only to enjoy but to serve us, death will dissolve the union, and that quickly. My dearest friends, you are mortal comforts, and if I live a few years longer I must stand before many of your dying beds, I must convey you to the tomb; and all the benefit I received from your love, from your counsel, from your prayers will be gone. The thought cuts to the heart; but *God's children have a place of refuge*. To him they may look when friends are unkind and unfaithful. *My friends*, says Job, *scorn me, but mine eye pours out tears to God*<sup>8</sup>. And<sup>8</sup> Job xvi. 20. sometimes in such a circumstance they are tears of joy. *You shall*, says our Lord, *be scattered and leave me alone; but I am not alone, my Father is with me*<sup>9</sup>. *When father*<sup>9</sup> John xvi. 32. and mother, says David, *forsake me, then the Lord will take me up*<sup>1</sup>: will manifest his<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxvii. 10. kindness to me. O my God, thy paternal love is the balm of my heart, which will heal all those painful wounds! Separated from the dearest of thy creatures, I will, by thy grace, attach myself more closely to thee. I will think of thee more; I will pour out my soul before thee with greater freedom

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and enlargement; and instead of saying, *Where shall I find other reeds to support me?* I will rest *on the Rock of ages*. Thy counsels shall guide me; thy love shall entertain me; the light of thy countenance shall cheer me. Thou art an immortal, thou art an inseparable friend. My dear friends, I feel your loss, but none of you all could be in the place of my Father; and he lives, and will be my rock; and let *the God of my salvation* be exalted.

2. *God's children shall have a place of refuge* when their enemies insult them. There is not a case to which the thought is more frequently applied in scripture. For *the Israel of God* in all ages, even every one of his faithful servants, have had their enemies. But what says David as a specimen of the rest, *The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my soul, of whom shall I be afraid?*<sup>2</sup> Be they ever so many, ever so mighty, what can they do? Can they revile me? *It is God that justifies: Who is he that condemns me?* No unworthy aspersions, no base insinuations can hurt me with him. In due time *he shall bring forth my righteousness as*

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xxxvii.  
1.



*the light: in the meantime thou shalt hide thy children in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly, as in a pavilion, from the strife of tongues*<sup>3</sup>.

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Do they assail by fury? Be it ever so extreme, the wrath of man, O Lord! shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath thou shalt restrain<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xxxi.  
20.

Be the wrath more than human; let the spirits of darkness arise as they will, and make their attack upon God's children, he will deliver his darlings from the power of the dog, of the roaring lion, of the hissing serpent. *The God of peace shall bruise Satan under their feet.* The malice and subtilty of the fallen angels shall not be able to destroy that feeble man whom God is pleased to number among his children, let their legions be ever so numerous: more is that one God *that is with us, than all those that are against us.*

<sup>4</sup> Ps. lxxvi.  
10.

3. His children have a place of refuge when poverty and necessity press them. It may very probably happen: for so it is that *God has chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith*; and when they are richest in faith, their poverty in this world continues. Through all ages Christ is *hungry, and*

SERM. *thirsty, and naked, and a stranger, and sick,*  
 IV. *and in prison.* Some of them are originally poor, and never know any thing but a laborious and necessitous life: others of them are made poor by Providence, that strips them of their plentiful subsistence in more advanced life, when they have other burthens enough, and more than enough. Yet here is their place of refuge. Though sometimes (and that is a very shameful thing) their brethren may neglect them, and while they drink their wine in bowls, and stretch themselves on couches of ease and of luxury, may forget the affliction of Joseph, the God of Israel, their heavenly Father, will not forget them; and he can never be at a loss for methods of supply. They may go to him, and boldly and cheerfully ask from him their daily bread. *All the beasts of the forest are his; the earth and the fulness thereof.* And they may go and say, Lord, hast not thou said, that though *the young lions lack and suffer hunger,* they that fear thee shall not want any good thing? I ask not great and delicate things; but I ask the necessary supports of life, for myself and those whom thou hast given

to me, from thee *who feedest the young ravens when they cry*; from thee to whom the young lions roar and seek their meat. Exert thine arm, O Lord, and having brought me to the wilderness, do thou here furnish out a table for me. Let faith say it, and Providence will do it, and do it in a manner that shall appear marvellous, and, in proportion to the degree in which it is so, delightful: a suitableness of supply, arising the Christian knows hardly from whence, but perhaps from a quarter from whence he had least expectation; the earth opening, as it were, not to swallow up but to help him. Believe the Lord, and you shall be established; believe his prophet, and you shall prosper. It is one word (let faith receive and apply it). *Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed*<sup>5</sup>. *If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him*<sup>6</sup>?

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<sup>5</sup>Ps. xxxvii.  
3.

<sup>6</sup>Matt. vii.  
11.

4. *God's children have a place of refuge* when pain and disease seize them. Methinks that there is a sense in which a man's enemies are, in the most terrible sense, those of

SERM. his own house. When he is attacked with  
 IV. distempers, which not only make a short  
 incursion upon him, but come, as it were,  
 and fix their garrison within; distempers  
 of such a nature that, humanly speaking,  
 they admit no cure but death, and phy-  
 sicians are, in respect to them, of no value.  
 Even here the consolation shall take place  
 if they seek to the Lord. He can cure  
 if he pleases. *Speak thou the word, and thy  
 servant shall be healed.* He can abate the  
 violence of the evil: he can, even while it  
 continues, support under it. How powerful  
 and how sweet are those words! and I  
 hope you will remember that they contain a  
 promise made to charitable and compas-  
 sionate persons. *The Lord shall strengthen*  
<sup>7</sup> Ps. xli. 3. *him on a bed of languishing<sup>7</sup>: thou shalt make*  
*all his bed in his sickness.* Child of God!  
 have you not found that place of refuge?  
 Have you not felt your soul calm about  
 you in the midst of all your agonies, when  
 you have thought, “Well, but this is the  
 hand of my Father, and his correction is  
 wise and gracious correction; *for whom the*  
*Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every*  
<sup>8</sup> Heb. xii. *son whom he receives<sup>8</sup>.* And have you not

known by experience the blessedness of that man whom, while he chastens, he teaches out of his law, and feeds, as it were, with his promise? Have you never known the time when you might not be allowed to speak to a friend for fear of increasing your disorder? and the windows have been shut, and the curtains have been drawn around you, to keep out, as it were, every beam of light? And to you *there has arisen light in that darkness*, and God has made you to hear his voice, to hear joy and gladness. Heavenly Father! we bless thee in the remembrance of thy goodness: we have found shelter in it, and if we prefer health to a sickness thus supported, it is chiefly on account of the opportunities it may give us of paying our vows to thee, and exerting the vigour of nature in thy pleasant services.

5. *God's children have a place of refuge* when death seems most entirely to triumph over them. *When I am weak*, says the apostle, *then am I strong*<sup>9</sup>. When weakest <sup>9 2 Cor. xii.</sup> is the believer strongest of all. <sup>10.</sup> Whatever supports God's children may have under the disorders of nature, they seem at least to sink amidst them all. Death hunts, as

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it were, for the precious life: it pursues it from one retreat to another, till at length it drives it out from the last. The labouring heart ceases its struggling motion, and the soul flies out in a dying groan. But will you say that this child of God who lies expiring, who lies breathless before you, has no place of refuge? How grievously would you then *offend against the generation of God's people*, and against their great Father? Have you then never heard of any of them that said, *My flesh and my heart fails, &c. though I walk through the dark valley. O death, where is thy sting? &c.* And when did they say this? Did they say it only when they were in full health and ease, and death seemed so far that he appeared like a puny enemy, hardly to be discerned? Have you never heard of those who said it in the last hours of life and on their dying bed? If you have not heard of it, I have seen it, and to many of you I have declared it with joy. When the victory of death and the grave have seemed to have been complete over our dear brethren and sisters that sleep in Jesus, they found a refuge when they were dying, and rejoiced

in it with a magnanimity which would have made us envy them their death, if we could have envied them any thing. And does this refuge fail them now they are dead? What say you, sirs, what think you of *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob? is he the God of the dead?* a God that has suffered them for ever to perish, and blanked with final and everlasting disappointment the heart that in its last labouring moments was full of confidence in him, and launched boldly and joyfully into an unknown eternity, as trusting in his omnipotent arm? Has that arm deserted him? Is this grave, in which their bodies are mouldering down to undistinguished dust, their only place of refuge? Is that a question for a Christian? Witness the contrary, ye angels of God! that have waited, as it were, with a kind impatience the last languor of slow dissolving nature, that you might bear them upward on your friendly pinions. Witness, thou heavenly Jerusalem! thou city of our God above! thou palace of our heavenly Father! in which there are so many mansions replenished with millions. Testify thou that his

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IV.

children, his deceased children have found *a place of refuge*. May not the phrase, expressive as it is, seem injurious? a place of joy, a place of triumph. Where the *Lord God appointed salvation itself for walls and for bulwarks*; that quiet habitation where *the glorious Lord himself is with his people*<sup>1</sup>; a place of broad rivers and streams; not only to guard against every invasion, but to deluge their souls with everlasting delight: and where from the day of their entrance, through all the endless ages of eternity, they will be witness only to one scene of terror; and, amidst all that is in itself dreadful in it, shall lift up their heads with joy on the completion of their redemption: even that day when he will lead forth all his children in one triumph, that is well clothed with new robes, to grace the final triumph of him *who is the first-born among many brethren*, and through whom he gives them the victory over the last of enemies that shall then be destroyed.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xxiii.  
21.

III. In the improvement of these things let us,

1. Learn with all grateful humility to



adore the grace of him who condescends to set us among his children. For, blessed be his name, such privileges are ours if we are truly believers, as it is expressly said *we are all the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus*. Let us never forget that it is by him we *have received the adoption*; that by him we are admitted to this place of refuge. As the apostle, who thought so justly on this head cries out, *we joy in God through Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>; by whom also<sup>2</sup>* Rom. iv. 11.

Never otherwise had we been reconciled to God, and oh! if we had not been reconciled, where had been our *place of refuge*? God indeed can shelter us from every enemy and danger: but what on earth or in heaven could have screened us from an unreconciled God?

2. Let me solemnly call on you all this day to seek this *place of refuge*. Have you all sought it? Do your consciences bear witness for you that you have, and that you are indeed entered into it? It is well if it be so; but if not, O! consider what need you will have of it. Ye feeble children of men!

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hearken to the invitation of coming to put your trust under *the shadow of God's wings*. Seek, I beseech you, his paternal love. O think of the terrible storm which is rising. Whither, whither will you fly? To have your hearts sink under the loss of friends, under the severity of enemies, under worldly troubles and disappointments, under broken constitutions, under pained limbs; all these things are comparatively little, and I now call them to your mind only to say that they are so. But the dying hour, that pressing assault of the last of enemies, what will you do if you have then no place of refuge? Methinks I see your wild astonishment and affright. And what shall I say? I fear lest then that you should have no comforter. Alas! I fear even your comforters themselves. I fear lest the desire of giving you some immediate relief should lead surviving friends to an ill judged compassion, to speak a peace which God does not speak. I fear lest you should then take it for granted, though in express contradiction to his word, that it is impossible you should *call and he should not answer, that you should seek him and not*

*find him.* I fear lest you should die with an ill grounded hope, and wake in an everlasting despair. But, oh! remember that *they called, and there was none to save, even to the Lord, and he answered them not.* In that day when God will spare his people as a man spares his son that serves him, *there will be wrath that shall burn like an oven: and all the proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble: the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord, and shall leave them neither root nor branch*<sup>3</sup>.

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

3. Let me entreat the children of God that they would trust in this refuge, and not shame it by dishonourable fears and suspicions. *The Lord, says Isaiah, is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid*<sup>4</sup>. Enlarge your faith: guard against those unbelieving fears which the enemy may suggest; and, oh! weigh those remarkable words, *I, the Lord thy God, will hold thy right hand*<sup>5</sup>, &c. Oh! may you so know God's name as to put your trust in him, for he has not forsaken, and he will not forsake them that seek him.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. xii.  
2.<sup>5</sup> Isa. xli.  
13.

4. Let this engage religious parents to take the greatest care to secure the Divine protection to their children as well as to themselves.

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Nature teaches us to be solicitous for them, and I have known some parents who have been hardly able to support their solicitude, under the ignorance of what their children would do when *they* were dead. It has sometimes been felt, when God has appointed that the children should go first, and so proved the vanity of their care. But in one connexion it is to be commended. Now common prudence will teach us to wish to secure the friendship of persons who, when we are dead, may show kindness to those whom we leave behind us. How much more is it our wisdom to endeavour to secure to our children this place of refuge, in the knowledge of the Lord God of their fathers! Hear, therefore, ye parents! hear and consider. Amidst all your cares to feed and clothe your children, and to lay up something for their future subsistence, oh! bring them to God: instruct them in the knowledge of him; endeavour to convince them of their concern in him: urge them to seek his favour: and present them daily before him for his blessing. Communicate freely to them your own experience: tell them where you have found rest for your souls amidst all the tossing of

this frail vessel in which you are embarked. SERM.  
 Testify to them the goodness of God to you ; IV.  
 express your cheerful confidence in him ; and  
 let them see that the tenderest wish of your  
 love for them is that they may be the objects  
 of his. To conclude, be often addressing  
 them, as I now desire to address all the young  
 ones who hear me this day, in the words of  
 David : *Come, ye children, hearken unto me,*  
*and I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who*  
*is there of you that desires life, &c. The eyes*  
*of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his*  
*ears are open to their cry ; but the face of the*  
*Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the*  
*remembrance of them from the earth*<sup>6</sup> : and,<sup>6 Ps. xxxiv.</sup>  
 therefore, *the fear of the Lord is the beginning*<sup>11—17.</sup>  
*of wisdom ; and a good understanding have*  
*they, and only they, who keep his command-*  
*ments*<sup>7</sup>, and through Christ seek his salvation.<sup>7 Psa. cxi.</sup>  
 Amen. 10.

## SERMON V.

OF THE FOLLY OF LAYING UP EARTHLY  
TREASURE IN THE NEGLECT OF GOD.

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LUKE, xii. 21.

*So is he who layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich  
towards God.*

SERM. <sup>V.</sup> THE Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven to earth, to raise us from earth to heaven; and it is the first part of that salvation to raise our souls thither, while our bodies dwell here below: to engage us to *set our affections on things above, and not on those which are here* <sup>1</sup> *on earth*; and to that purpose our Lord gives a great many very admirable lessons, several of which I shall have occasion to quote in the progress of my discourse. The period of which my text is a part contains a remarkable instance to this purpose. The blessed Jesus was called upon to decide a controversy which arose betwixt two brothers, on the division of their paternal estate (for it was then, as it too

frequently now is, that the dearest relations were ready to quarrel with each other when their secular interests seemed opposite); the Lord prudently avoids interposing in the affair: but he would not omit so fair an opportunity of cautioning them against that excessive love to the present world, which was the occasion of those quarrels betwixt brethren. He *said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness*: and he gives this very solid reason for it, *Because a man's life* (i. e. the comfort and happiness of it) *does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesseth.* He further enforces the caution by a remarkable parable of a rich man, whose ground brought forth after the most abundant manner, so that he was in great care how to bestow his substance, and firmly concluded that he had a stock enough for his support all the remainder of life, and had nothing to do but to consult his own ease and pleasure, and give himself up to sensual indulgence: but God surprised him in an awful manner, by calling him out of the world a few moments after, and in effect said, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.* Now such (i. e. such a fool as I have been now describing) is every man that lays up to himself treasure on

SERM. *earth, and is not rich towards God.* For the  
 V. full explication and improvement of the  
 words, I will endeavour to show,

I. What it is to be rich towards God.

II. What is the opposite character of laying up treasures for ourselves when we are not rich towards him; and,

III. I will endeavour to display the shameful folly of such a conduct, and to show how well it deserves so severe a censure. After which,

IV. I will conclude with some serious application.

And as I hope I can truly say, that God is my witness, I choose this subject with the most real compassion for those who forget God in the midst of their worldly cares, and with a hearty desire to do my utmost to recover them out of the snare of the devil, so I would humbly look up to God for his assistance and blessing, that I may find my way to your hearts. and that what I am now to say may be *as a nail fixed in a sure place.*

I. I am to show you very briefly what it is to be rich towards God. Now I apprehend that it takes in these four particulars.

1. To be rich towards God may signify



being rich in his account or esteem, i. e. when he looks upon us as indeed so. We are sure that his judgment is according to truth: but it is often extremely different from that of men; and indeed for that very reason it is so, because the minds of men are often transported with vain appearances, while the all-penetrating eye of God always sees things as they really are. In this respect, what *things are highly esteemed amongst men are an abomination to the eyes of the Lord*<sup>2</sup>; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord knows the heart<sup>3</sup>. On this account, as he judges many *foolish*, whom the world think extremely *wise*, he judges some *poor*, who seem to themselves and others to be *rich*. So says the Incarnate Wisdom of God to the church of Laodicea, *Thou sayest I am rich, and knowest not thou art poor and miserable*<sup>4</sup>, &c.: and, on the other hand, to the angel of the church of Smyrna he says, *I know thy poverty* (i. e. thy humility, thy sufferings, thy abasement), *yet thou art rich*<sup>5</sup> (i. e. spiritually and therefore truly so), rich in my eye, and esteem, how poor soever thou mayest seem to thyself, and to others about thee. Now he may properly be said to be rich towards

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<sup>2</sup> Luke xvi.  
15.<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel  
xvi. 7.<sup>4</sup> Rev. iii.  
17.<sup>5</sup> Rev. ii. 9.

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 God, whom God esteems and looks upon as a rich and a happy creature; and of such a one we may add,

2. To be rich towards God may signify being rich in an interest in the Divine favour. Critics observe that the particle *εις* sometimes signifies the same with *εν*, so to be *rich towards God* may be the same as to be rich *in him*; and this, undoubtedly, must be the highest and noblest riches: those whom he blesses are blessed indeed. Nor can we imagine any thing greater and nobler than to be, as it were, possessed of Him who is *the Most High*

<sup>6</sup> Gen. xiv. *God, and the Creator of heaven and earth*<sup>6</sup>.  
 22.

And, indeed, every soul that is made thus happy is, by Divine grace, brought to a sense of this, that the Divine favour is infinitely desirable. It is the very language of his soul which the Psalmist uses: *There be many who say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon*

<sup>7</sup> Ps. iv. 6. *us*<sup>7</sup>. *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth whom I desire besides*

<sup>8</sup> Ps. lxxiii. *thee*<sup>8</sup>. He seeks the face and favour of God with the greatest earnestness: he attends with the most dutiful regards to those instructions

by which he may be brought to an acquaint-

ance with him; and he can truly say, with SERM. V. David, *The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver*<sup>9</sup>: and it is 9 Psal. cxix. 72. of the highest importance to observe that he seeks God's favour after his own appointed way. When the gospel tells him that *Christ is the way, the truth, and the life*, and that *no man comes to the father but by him*<sup>1</sup>, he con- 1 John xiv. 6. sidered him in this view: he looks upon Christ as *the pearl of great price*; and, like a wise merchant, would be willing to sell all that he has to buy it. He comes to God by him; comes as a poor, weak, indigent, guilty creature, not to *purchase*, but to *beg* the most valuable favours: and when he is brought, by Divine grace, to such a temper, there is an everlasting covenant betwixt God and his soul; and the tenour of it is, *I will be unto thee a God, and thou shalt be unto me for one of my people*. Such a person may be said to be *rich towards God*, or *rich in him*.

3. To be rich towards God must include to be rich in faith, and in all the fruits of holiness. You know that each of these are scripture phrases: *God has chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith*<sup>2</sup>: and those in more 2 James ii. 5. plentiful circumstances are advised and

SERM. V. charged that they *be rich in good works*<sup>3</sup>; for faith and good works are indeed an invaluable treasure. Nor can any man be rich in the sight of God, and rich in his favour, when he continues destitute of them: for, as the apostle expressly assures us, *without faith* (i. e. a faith which works by love) *it is impossible to please God*<sup>4</sup>. On this account faith is spoken of as more precious than gold, as better than rubies. The man who in this respect *is rich towards God* has, as the scripture elsewhere expresses it, *a good treasure within*. *A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth good things*<sup>5</sup>, not only good words, but good actions; and this he does with a kind of actual freedom and delight. He would be *steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*<sup>6</sup>. I cannot forbear observing on this occasion, that a readiness to acts of mercy and charity is no inconsiderable part of the temper before us. God is said to be *rich in mercy*; and the good man, according to his capacity, desires to imitate him: *to be merciful, as his Father in heaven is merciful*<sup>7</sup>: to forgive those who have injured him: to supply those who are in want: to comfort and

<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. xi. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xii. 35.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 58.

<sup>7</sup> Luke vi. 36.

animate those who are in sorrow. These are *sacrifices with which God is well pleased*; and of the soul that is solicitous with a holy freedom and liberality to abide in these, it may be added, SERM.  
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4. That he is rich in the glories of the heavenly world, which are prepared for him; and on this account he may be said to be *rich towards God*. It is most certain that there is no merit and excellency in works which we do for the sake of them: in themselves considered, they are not worthy of a reward: whatever is bestowed is *not of debt, but of grace*. Nevertheless, we need not be backward to use that manner of speaking which we often find in scripture on this head, where the sacred writer represents the heavenly world as a state and place in which treasures are laid up for the children and people of God, in proportion to their diligence and zeal in his pursuit of God's service on earth; so that Timothy is urged to charge the rich *to lay up for themselves in store a good foundation for the time to come*<sup>8</sup>; and others, by Christ, *to lay up treasures in heaven*<sup>9</sup>; to *provide for themselves bags that wax not old*; or, as it is elsewhere expressed by

<sup>8</sup> 1 Tim. vi.  
19.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. vi.  
20.

SERM. V. being *a treasure in heaven that fades not away*<sup>1</sup>. Now a person entitled to this may be said to be *rich towards God*, i. e. to have riches laid up with God in Christ; as we read, *Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God*<sup>2</sup>. And the Christian has this in view: he prefers these riches to all others; refers all actions in life to them: he considers himself as an immortal creature; he is concerned to secure immortal happiness; nay, he is concerned to increase it day by day, and to be continually doing something which may, through grace, augment this stock. Thus it is to *be rich towards God*. Will you seriously examine your own souls, to judge whether this be the case with you or not. By the explication which I have given of this, you will easily see what it is,

II. To lay up riches for ourselves, in the neglect of these. And here I must premise that the two clauses of the text are to be taken in conjunction; and that the thing here forbidden carries in it a neglect of the former; otherwise laying up for our own use, and laying up for the subsistence of a family, is far from being a sin. If it be done in a

prudent, just, and moderate manner, it is rather a necessary duty. We owe it to ourselves; we owe it to others; we owe it to society; we owe it to God: and we tempt Providence if there be no concern about it. *The parents*, says the apostle, *ought to lay up for their children*<sup>3</sup>: and he elsewhere observes, *that if any man provide not for his own, especially those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*<sup>4</sup>: he brings a greater dishonour upon Christianity, and so he does more injury to it, than he could have done, had he continued by profession a heathen. Keeping this thought in view, it will be obvious to see what we are to understand by *laying up treasure for ourselves*. It may signify our referring our possessions entirely to ourselves, and making worldly enjoyments our great and governing care. These two do always concur; though they are such that each of them deserves our notice.

1. They *lay up treasures to themselves*, who refer their worldly possessions entirely to themselves; persons of a narrow and selfish spirit, who have no higher end than their own advantage, and their own satisfaction, in what they do in the several relations and

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. x.  
30.<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. xii.  
14.

SERM. V. offices of life. I have observed how diffusively good the Christian is; *how ready to distribute, how willing to communicate*<sup>5</sup>: and it is a sign of a very degenerate, and indeed a wicked mind, to be only concerned about *self*; and very provoking to God when we look on those things as so *ours*, as if they ought to be used without any regard to others. Most justly is this reprov'd by the prophet Hosea: *Israel is an empty vine; he brings forth fruits to himself*<sup>6</sup>: and therefore, whatever their fruits are, they are hereby tainted and spoiled. It is much the same if there be nothing but a regard to their *families*, their children being a part of themselves. If there be such a care to make them rich and great as renders us insensible of the calamities and afflictions of our neighbours, and unwilling to relieve them: if it swallows up our regard to God (whose glory we ought ultimately to seek even in all those views and schemes which immediately relate to ourselves), undoubtedly such fall under the censure of the text, in its most plain and direct form.

2. They *lay up treasures to themselves*, who make it their main care to secure worldly



enjoyments. The Christian is indeed careful about these things; but, so far as he acts according to his own principles, he keeps them in their place. He *seeks first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*<sup>7</sup>, as of the greatest importance; and is solicitous to look to the things unseen and eternal, rather than to those which are seen; so that, upon the whole, his treasure is in heaven, and his heart is there also. But the worldly man is one of those whose *portion is in this life*, and who, in the language of the apostle, *minds earthly things*<sup>8</sup>. He relishes and pursues these above any thing else; and this character is drawn in the preceding words, where the rich man had been described as rejoicing in his worldly possessions, and employing all his thoughts about them, and using them in sensual gratifications. So that you see, upon the whole, that many fall under the censure of the text who are not by any means persons of infamous character in life. It is not only the rich, who *will go beyond and defraud his brother*, or the merchant, who has *the balance of deceit* in his hands; it is not only the tradesman who will commend his commodities by known and deliberate lies, in

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<sup>7</sup> Matt. vi.  
33.

<sup>8</sup> Phil. iii.  
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order to rob his chapman within the protection of the law; it is not only the man who grinds and oppresses the poor, and borrows what he knows he cannot repay, or *will not*, when he has it in the power of his hands; but the fair tradesman, the good neighbour, that man who lives in the neglect of God and the Lord Jesus Christ; who sets his affections merely on present enjoyments, who is unconcerned about usefulness in this life, and happiness in the next: he is the man who *lays up treasure to himself*, and who is not *rich towards God*. I now proceed,

III. To consider the great folly of persons of such a character: and here I consider it in comparison with the character of those who are rich towards God, even though we should put them in the poorest circumstances of life; and it will evidently appear that they are much wiser, and much happier than the most artful and sagacious of the children of this world. The folly of the man who lays up treasures to himself alone, in the manner which I have now described, will appear, if we consider that he cannot have entire satisfaction in them while he possesses

them. He is surrounded with accidents, which may take them away; he will surely and speedily be removed from them; and he will have nothing in the other world but treasures of wrath. Would to God that you would seriously consider these things while I dwell upon each for a few moments in my discourse.

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1. If you lay up treasures only to yourselves, you can have no entire satisfaction in them while you possess them. Solomon asserts it in the most express words: *He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver, and he who loves abundance, with increase*<sup>9</sup>. And <sup>9</sup>Eccles. v. let me apply to your own experience, whether that does not confirm it. If you are satisfied, why are you so eager and solicitous to increase your store? The rich man in the text, indeed, seems to expect a great deal: *Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry*. Why, it is true that he might do all this. But will eating, and drinking, and mirth, and laughter satisfy a rational and immortal spirit? Are you, any of you, so sunk in flesh and blood as to think of nothing higher than these things? and if you do think of any thing that is higher, can you think that riches

SERM. V. will obtain it? Justly does Job say of the wicked man, *In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits*<sup>1</sup>: and it is indeed so.

<sup>1</sup> Job xx.  
22.

There is such an unsuitableness betwixt the nature of a rational and immortal soul, and the enjoyments of the present life, that a man might as well satisfy his appetite with the picture of food or the sound of music, as fill his soul with such enjoyments as these. But a Christian, who is rich towards God, finds a delightful acquiescence of soul in him, and says, in that beautiful manner which David does, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul! for the Lord has dealt bountifully with thee*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxvi.  
7.

Having an interest in God, he knows that he may *open his mouth wide, and God will fill it*; that he may *enlarge the desires of his soul to the utmost*<sup>3</sup>, and find more than enough in

<sup>3</sup> Ps. lxxxii.  
10.

God to satisfy them all. His rock is not as your rock, we may venture to say, even now, yourselves being to judge. But we will give up this; we will suppose your taste so much degenerated, the nobler appetites and faculties of the soul so laid asleep, that you could take up with these things. Consider,

2. If you only lay up treasures for yourselves, you are surrounded with ten thousand

accidents that may take them away. You know this better in many of its circumstances than I can particularly inform you. All of you who are arrived to years of understanding have lived long enough to see the justice of Solomon's remark, *that riches make themselves wings and fly away, as an eagle towards heaven*<sup>4</sup>. And do you not then see the justice of his expostulation? *Why do you set your eyes upon that which is not*; upon that which has so precarious an existence that it hardly deserves to be called a being? Our Lord observes, that *moth and rust corrupt these treasures, and that thieves break through and steal them*<sup>5</sup>. You know that a robber, a few bad debts, a storm at sea, unseasonable weather, and especially a raging fire, may in a very few days reduce the rich man so low as to leave him hardly the necessary supports of life. Most justly, therefore, are they by the apostle called *uncertain riches*<sup>6</sup>, and by our Lord the *deceitful mammon*<sup>7</sup>: but the Christian is possessed of *true riches*; as his peace, so his wealth no man takes away. He is as liable as others are to be stripped of all his external possessions; but God his chief treasure dwells in his soul, and he must be sepa-

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<sup>4</sup> Prov.  
xxiii. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. vi.  
19.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Tim. vi.  
17.  
<sup>7</sup> Luke xvi.  
9.

SERM. V. rated from himself before he can be separated from his God. Were he to be reduced to the circumstances of those glorious confessors who *endured the spoiling of their goods*, he might be full of joy in this thought, that he had in heaven a *better and a more enduring substance*<sup>8</sup>. Were he with them to *wander in sheepskins and goatskins, in dens and caves of the earth*, though he *had nothing*, he would be *possessing all things*; while he could add, as the apostle there does, *what shall separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus?* But once more, suppose any new method should ever be found out of ensuring estates and possessions, so that they should entirely be out of danger, can life be ensured too? Which leads me to observe,

3. That if these things should still be continued to you, you must surely and speedily be removed from them by death. *What man is there who liveth and shall not see it?* And the Psalmist particularly observes, that those who place the greatest confidence in these riches *cannot deliver their brethren*<sup>9</sup>, and consequently they cannot deliver themselves from the grave: *the ransom of the life is precious and for ever ceases*. Those who gain

<sup>8</sup> Heb. x.  
34.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. xlix.  
73.

riches by unrighteous courses have peculiar reason to expect and fear that God should cut them off by a speedy stroke, even in the midst of their days; as the prophet intimates, *He who gets riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days*<sup>1</sup>; and then, to be sure, at his end he will appear a fool. But if a man has gained them ever so honestly, as the rich man in the gospel did, it is certain that he cannot hold them with any security. If life in general be precarious, if it be a *vapour that appears for a little while and then vanishes away*, surely there cannot be any security in those things which are peculiar to it. Now it is most evident that these worldly possessions must be left behind us. *We brought nothing into the world with us, and we can carry nothing away*<sup>2</sup>. And when our soul is required, then, as the Jewish writer expresses it, *the life which was only lent shall be demanded*<sup>3</sup>. What are these things then? What can they do for their possessor in his dying hour, but render his separation from life so much the more painful? When with life all these things are to be taken away, when his *pomp is to be brought to the grave, and the sound of his viol, &c.* To erect a splendid tomb

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<sup>1</sup> Jer. xvii.

11.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. vi.

7.

<sup>3</sup> Wisd. xv.

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<sup>4</sup> Job  
xxvii. 8.

is only to perpetuate the memory of the vanity of riches, and to tell the people, as long as brick and marble can bear the impression, that they left their helpless owner rotting near such a place; and that, notwithstanding all his distinguished circumstances, he *was brought down to desolation as in a moment*<sup>4</sup>. Now, is there no conviction in this? It is not so with him who *is rich towards God*, as his treasures lie in the soul, and are deposited in the invisible world. It is not in the power of that stroke which robs him of the body, and strips him of his external enjoyments, to deprive him of this interior and intrinsic wealth. But this will further be illustrated, by adding,

4. If you *lay up treasures only on earth*, nothing is to be expected in the other world but treasures of wrath. You will be stripped, as I observed under the former head, of your worldly enjoyments, and so will the Christian: but *when these fail, he will be received into everlasting habitations. If this tabernacle be dissolved, he has a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* But what have you! alas! you will then be left naked and desolate: and justly may I



say, what will you do in the day of visitation, &c.? How melancholy for a soul to have outlived all its happiness! But how much more melancholy to be thrown into a state of perpetual misery! For this is what you must expect. God will make you know another day, though you might lay up treasures for yourselves, that they were not your own. He will call you to account for your stewardship; and oh! what account will you give? Then it will be found that all, with which you are entrusted, you have abused; and that for all that you have abused God will visit your souls; and when you are condemned by him for your sins, you will find your future sufferings aggravated by past plenty. Oh! that thought will cut you to the soul. Sinner! *remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst good things*<sup>5</sup>; and in that respect the *rust of your silver and your gold will eat your flesh with fire*; and it shall be found that you have *nourished yourselves only to a day of slaughter*<sup>6</sup>. <sup>5</sup>Luke xvi. 25. <sup>6</sup>James v. 5.

Will you not then call with envy and rage on the poorest and meanest Christian who shall enter on his everlasting inheritance, and be found possessed of an eternal kingdom; *a treasure in the heavens that fadeth not away,*

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SERM. but will last as long as an immortal soul?  
 V. Give me leave to conclude with a few words  
 by way of reflection.

#### IV. For the application of these things.

1. How wretched is the condition of many who think themselves the happiest in the world. You see that the incarnate wisdom of the world calls them fools. Judge of the reason, *judge not according to outward appearance, but judge righteous judgment.* If they are *set in such slippery places*, see, if there be reason to envy them; see, if there be reason to murmur and repine, because we want their abundance. How would the Christian start back from the thoughts of an exchange with them.

2. How earnestly should sinners plead with God for an interest in these better blessings. May not some of you, upon a short recollection, see that you are in the number of these unhappy creatures. Let me apply myself to you. Oh that you would attend upon what I say! You have seen the fate of the wretched creature in my text. Let me ask, what if it should be your own? What if God should this night take away your soul? Who would transact your business, who would share your

possessions to-morrow? That's a little question—where would your souls be? *When the spirit returns to God who gave it*, when God comes to call back that noble treasure which he lodged in your breasts, and which you so basely abused! *Go to thy gods*, says Jehovah to Israel, and let *them save you*. Go to your riches, to your darling possessions, may God say then, and let them save you. How could you reach them? How could they help you? Oh, sinner, rather go to God! consider your need of his favour: seek it through Christ. You have other business: but let me tell you, this is of all the most needful. That may be neglected without ruin, this cannot. May God give you grace to attend to it. Go and plead with him as Jabez, *Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed!*

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Chr.  
iv. 10.

3. How thankful should the Christian be for those better riches. You see in some measure how valuable they are. And to what do you owe it? To your own superior wisdom? Surely you may see some destitute of them, who for this world are, at least, as wise as yourselves. If we cannot get wealth even in temporal things, as Moses expressly asserts, how much less here? What reason

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then is there to bless God who has given you counsel! You who are poor how thankful should you be if you are rich in faith, seeing that you *are heirs of the kingdom*, that God has promised a little while and the scene will change. Want and hardship will be turned into everlasting pleasure and joy, and this poor cottage into a shining throne. Are you rich? What an instance of distinguishing grace is it that you should be so for both worlds! Our Lord has said, that *it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*; but he adds, *it is not impossible with God*<sup>8</sup>. Blessed be his name that you are, in this instance, miracles of his grace. Take heed and beware of suffering those worldly possessions to engross too much of your thoughts and care, so as that you should forget your celestial, your eternal birth.

<sup>8</sup> Matt.  
xix. 24.  
Mark x.  
25.  
Luke xviii.  
25.

4. How solicitous should we all be to increase this better treasure, to lay up more and more in heaven? Have we not all reason for lamenting here? If we are the children of light, must we not own that many of the children of this world are in their generation wiser than we<sup>9</sup>? Let us humble ourselves

<sup>9</sup> Luke xvi.  
8.

before God; let us endeavour to quicken our pace. Permit me particularly to address the exhortation to you whom God has favoured with abundance: make *to yourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness*: use your worldly possessions so as that they may in some measure promote your everlasting inheritance. Timothy is in a peculiar manner required to charge this on the consciences of such persons; and permit me to do it in his words, *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy*<sup>1</sup>. May God, by the influences of his grace and Spirit, make us all *wise to salvation*. May God teach us to live above the world while we are in it, and then, when we are to leave it, it will be no unwelcome remove; but if *this night our souls should be required* at our hands, we may joyfully say, Welcome, death, welcome, glory! Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim.  
vi. 17.

## SERMON VI.

OF THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN FAITH AND  
UNBELIEF IN THE GRACIOUS SOUL.

— —  
MARK, ix. 24.

*Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*

SERM. VI. THE words are part of a very moving story, which I doubt not that you well know. A poor affectionate father brought to the disciples of Christ a child possessed with a devil exceedingly fierce. The disciples had been used to work cures of this kind: but to humble them, to exercise the faith of the parent, and to display the superior power of Christ, God permitted this evil spirit to oppose them, and to maintain its ground against them; a dreadful stroke, no doubt, to the poor father to see, that when others were cured, his dear child was still under the power of the enemy, who, perhaps, raged more fiercely for this ineffectual opposition: till, at length, Christ ap-

pears, and finds the child in actual convulsions, tearing and foaming, the father weeping and trembling. He represented the sad case of his son, who had even from his very infancy been thus tormented; and then he adds, *If thou canst do any thing, have compassion upon us and help us*; if this be not a case beyond thy power, oh! employ thy power here. He probably conceived of Christ only as a great prophet, and did not know but that there might be some case which exceeded even this extraordinary power which God had communicated to him. Our Lord answers, *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth*: if thy son be not cured, the reason will not be any incapacity in me, but some remainder of unbelief in thee. This struck the parent to the heart to think it was possible that his own fault might prevent the cure of his child: notwithstanding this, the text tells us that the father of the child cried out with tears in his eyes and great earnestness in his countenance, *Lord, my soul is in a strange hurry and confusion while I think who thou art, and what thou hast done in former instances, and what thou*

SERM. VI. now tellest me, I do believe; and yet I can hardly tell thee so, before a cloud comes over my mind: again I look upon this poor spectacle of horror and misery, and I begin to doubt again. “*Help thou, therefore, my unbelief, either by controlling the evil spirit, or by thy secret and powerful operation on my heart to strengthen this little spark of faith, which may else be put out by these floods of sorrow, and suspicion, and temptation.*”

Christians! I cannot but think that this is a natural representation of what is sometimes our case when we would be acting faith upon the promises of the gospel, and casting our brethren upon the Lord. I will, therefore, in discoursing upon this subject,

I. Endeavour to enumerate some cases when the Christian may particularly find reason to cry out for help against unbelief.

II. I will show you what encouragement he has to apply to Christ for this purpose:

III. Show you in what ways we may humbly hope to have our prayers answered and our unbelief helped: may this be one of those ways, our diligent attendance to what



shall now be spoken, that we may every one of us find our faith confirmed, and the remainder of our unbelief subdued.

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I. I am to enumerate some cases in which the Christian may particularly find reason to cry out for the remainder of his unbelief. I need not now explain faith in the sense in which we use it at present. It is a firm persuasion of the truth of the divine promises: it is a resting upon them and embracing them. It is such a conviction that the promises are the word of God, and shall be performed, as puts a reality into them, and encourages and strengthens the soul in the midst of danger, and fears, and sorrows. But it is too plain that there may be an apprehension of the divine authority in the promises, and a general sense of the divine veracity too, and yet no lively acts of faith. There is a strange inconsistency in the human mind; it is one thing to believe with the understanding, and another to believe with the heart. Faith is sometimes in the soul, as Christ in the ship, asleep; and then the storm rages, and the soul expects to be swallowed up; and sometimes it rises, as it

SERM. VI. were, with an air of divine majesty, and rebukes the wind and the sea, and then there is a great calm. I am to mention only a few instances in which the Christian often finds his faith ready to fail him. I shall take them from experience and observation on others, and on my own heart. To the most they may be such as these. When the Christian views the number, and guilt, and aggravation of his sins, he may find it difficult to believe the promises of pardon; when he sees the prospect of approaching calamity, he may find it difficult to believe the promises of support and deliverance; when he feels the pressure of outward or inward distress, or perhaps of both, he may find it difficult to believe such dispensations consistent with God's covenant love, or capable of being improved for his greater advantage; and when he surveys the glories of the heavenly world, as described in the word of God, he may find it very difficult to believe that such a promise will ever be fulfilled to him.

1. When the Christian views the number, guilt, and aggravation of his sins, he may find it difficult to believe the promises of

pardon. This is the great promise of his covenant, that *he will be merciful to our unrighteousness, and our sins and our iniquities he will remember no more*<sup>1</sup>. He has, therefore, <sup>SERM. VI.</sup> spoken it in the strongest terms, and declared that *though our sins be as scarlet, he will make them as white as snow, and though they be as red as crimson, he will make them like as wool*<sup>2</sup>. <sup>1Heb. viii. 10. 2Isa. i. 18.</sup>

And sometimes, perhaps, the soul is ready to say, “ Lord, I can believe that thou wilt forgive any sins but mine, but surely I am the chief of sinners. I have relapsed into sin so often, I have sinned against so many mercies, against so many vows, that surely the honour of thy law will require thee to punish me. Surely did I belong to thy people, had I received thy pardon and thy sanctifying grace, there would not remain so much pollution in my nature, so many irregularities in my life. Lord, I do believe that there is mercy enough in thy nature, and merit enough in the blood of Christ, to pardon even these; but my fears return, and I must cry out in this respect, *Lord, help mine unbelief.*”

2. In the prospect of approaching calamity the Christian finds it difficult to believe the

SERM. VI. promises of support and deliverance. They are great. *He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and thy buckler, and thou shalt not be afraid of the arrow that*  
<sup>3</sup> Psa. xci. *flieth in darkness, &c*<sup>3</sup>. *When thou walkest*  
<sup>4, 5.</sup>  
<sup>4</sup> Isa. xliiii. *through the fire I will be with thee*<sup>4</sup>. *Trust in*  
<sup>2.</sup> *the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in*  
<sup>5</sup> Isaiah *the land, and verily thou shalt be fed*<sup>5</sup>. *Thy*  
xxxiii. 16. *place shall be the munition of rocks; bread*  
*also shall be given thee, and thy water shall be*  
<sup>6</sup> Dent. *sure*<sup>6</sup>; and, on the whole, whatever thy ex-  
xxxiii. 9. *ercises are, as thy day is, so shall thy strength*  
*bè. These are precious declarations, one*  
*would think that they would make the fearful*  
*soul as bold as a lion: but when the cloud*  
*gathers, and the storm rises, how many are*  
*the fears and distresses of the Christian's*  
*mind! "I shall not have patience to bear*  
*this affliction: I shall not have resignation*  
*and submission of mind to give up these*  
*dear enjoyments: when God takes away this*  
*dear amiable friend, I shall mourn and*  
*droop: and shall hardly know how to enjoy*  
*God, or myself, or to pursue the duties of life*  
*with any vigour and cheerfulness: if God*  
*calls me to such a fiery trial, I shall make*

*shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience*; and if he calls me out to such a laborious duty, I shall not have the courage to undertake it, or the resolution to go through it." Thus does the Christian often disquiet himself, and feel more distress in the distant prospect of a trial than he does when actually called out to encounter it.

3. The Christian, under the pressure of temporal and spiritual distress, finds it difficult to believe that it *shall work for his good*. It is a known promise of the covenant of grace, than which none is more frequently mentioned, *that all things shall work together for good, &c.*: and, "Lord," does the Christian say, "I can believe it in the general. I can in the general believe that *chastisements, which are not for the present joyous but grievous, shall yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised therewith*; and that *light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory*. But, Lord, when I come to particular instances, *Lord, help thou my own unbelief*. Can it be a token of thy love to me, and can it be good for me, that I should be disappointed in such an

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affair; on which, perhaps, the substance of my family so much depends? that I should be emptied from one vessel to another, and tossed from one place and from one employment to another? Can it be for my good that I should meet with unkindness, it may be, from those relatives who ought to be my refuge from all the unkindness of others; or lose those pious friends that were my daily joy, that quickened me in thy way, *with whom I have taken the sweetest counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company?* Can it be for my good that my gourd should wither, even when the sun is beating hottest upon my aching head, or that my staff should be wrested out of my hands before half my journey is dispatched? Can it be good for me that I should be cut off from the privileges of thine house, and from the services of my own, and, it may be, confined for weeks or months together to my chamber or to a bed, a useless encumbrance on a family where I have, perhaps, been a blessing?" And, "oh," will the Christian say, "oh that this were all! Yes, *Lord, with the light of thy countenance*, with the sense of thy love, I could bear this, and more. But can it be

good for my soul that *thou* shouldst *hide thy face from me*, and hold me for thine enemy? that I should go backward and forward from one ordinance and opportunity to another, seeking thee in vain? that I should go to secret duty, and there be dumb and straitened in my spirit before thee, and that I rise from my knees more discomposed and more troubled than when I attempted to pray? Can it be good for me that I should come up to the congregation of thy saints, as it seems to me, only to profane thine ordinances, that I should hear and read thy word only to furnish out matter for accusation, and complaint, and terror; and should sit down to thy table sometimes with a secret apprehension that I am a Judas at thy board, and am making myself *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*; whilst eating of his bread, *I lift up my heels against him*. Can these gloomy apprehensions be for my advantage? Canst thou be the God of Israel, and Saviour to me, when thou art thus hiding thyself from me, or writing bitter things against me? Are these the corrections of a father? Are they not rather the strokes of an enemy? *Lord, help mine unbelief!*"

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4. The Christian may find it difficult to believe the promises of future glory as his own, when he considers the excellency of it, and his own utter unworthiness. Christ speaks very graciously to his people, as if it were on purpose to obviate this suspicion. *Fear not*, says he, *little flock*, weak as you are, unworthy as you take yourselves to be, *it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*<sup>7</sup>. “True,” will the Christian say, “it was thy good pleasure to give it to thine apostles and thy servants in those days; and thou hast thousands in our own whom I can call, and say, Yes, these are intended for a kingdom, they look like the heirs of it; but, Lord, dost thou intend it for me? Were it merely a promise of being laid in the grave during God's indignation, I could perhaps believe that, were it merely the enjoyment of such a world as this, or the temporary enjoyment of heaven itself, it might seem less incredible: but to be completely and eternally happy, to have the crown publicly set on my head, and this not to be worn for one triumphant day, but to be worn for ever. Surely this is not for me; with what face can I expect it, that such a sinful worm as I

<sup>7</sup> Luke xiii.  
32.



am should be taken to be a companion with angels in the joy and glory of thy heavenly presence, and to sit down with Christ on his throne? Nay, *thou man of God,*” am I sometimes ready to say to ministers and saints, when they tell me of these things, “*do not lie unto thy servant*”<sup>8</sup>: do not raise a vain and flattering hope to sink me so much the deeper in disappointment and sorrow. *Lord, what shall I say*<sup>9</sup>? It is thou who hast raised these hopes; and dost thou delude me? Far be that impious suspicion from my soul. When I look on thy word, when I look on the merits and righteousness of thy Son, I think that there is room for the expectation: but, Lord, when I look on myself, it seems almost incredible. The promise appears too great and too good to be true: on the whole, I cry out with tears, *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!*”

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Kings  
iv. 16.<sup>9</sup> 1 Sam. iv.  
16.

II. Let me now show what encouragements the Christian has to address to Christ in this manner to help his unbelief. Now I shall mention only these two; that the Lord Jesus Christ is able to do it, and that he is under strong engagements to do it.

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1. The Lord Jesus Christ is able to do it; as able to cure the infirmities of the mind as he was to heal the disorders of the body. It is he who first works faith in us by his free Spirit, and the residue of the Spirit is with him, *and of his fulness do we all receive even grace for grace.* We may, therefore, go to him, and say, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst do this.* If thou wilt, mountains of oppositions and discouragements and difficulties shall spread themselves, as it were, into a plain before the meanest of thy servants.

2. Christ is under strong engagements to do it. He is engaged by the tenderness of his own nature. He can have compassion on the ignorant and on the weak: having himself suffered, being tempted, he knows our frame; he knows the force of sensible objects to impress, and sometimes to discourage the spirits. You know how he cared for Peter, and prayed for him: *I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.* He is likewise engaged by his office as the Shepherd of his people; as the Saviour of his body; and he is in some measure engaged by his honour too, as he has *begun this good work of faith in the soul, not to forsake the work of his own hands:* and

the more our faith is strengthened and increased, the more he will be glorified by us. SERM.  
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These are all considerations which might bear a much larger discourse; but I hasten to the conclusion.

III. Let me briefly show you how we may humbly hope to have these prayers heard, and our unbelief helped and removed. And here I would offer to you such advices as these. Converse much with the promises of Christ, and his invariable grace and fidelity. Reflect on the accomplishment of them as illustrated by your own experience, and that of others: pray earnestly for the strengthening and quickening Spirit, and attend those ordinances which he has appointed for this purpose.

1. If you desire that your unbelief may be helped, converse much with the promises. The New Testament abounds with them; and, through the Divine goodness to the ancient church, many a bright and sparkling ray breaks through the shades of the Old. Adore God for these promises, and study them with care. Labour to understand them: consider

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which are essential and absolute ; which are only conditional, and, as it were, circumstantial. That you may not be expecting too much, and, being disappointed, bring a doubt upon your souls with regard to others which are not liable to such uncertainty, remember that the degree of temporal enjoyments and of present comforts is not expressly determined. Remember that a very great degree of darkness and of present distress is very consistent with all that God engaged in his word ; but that the promises of pardon and peace, of strength and salvation, of a glorious resurrection, and a blessed immortality, are the glad tidings of the gospel ; and remember that there is proper provision made for a variety of cases and emergencies in life. Read the promises, therefore, with an attentive eye ; collect them ; meditate upon them ; endeavour to see what strength and spirit there is in them ; plead them with your own unbelieving heart, and plead them with God in prayer. *Why art thou cast down, O my*<sup>1</sup> *soul*? What exceeding rich and precious promises are here ! Has God spoken, and shall he not do it ? Couldst thou trust a frail,

<sup>1</sup>Ps..xlii.5.

deceitful, mortal worm, and wilt thou not trust God? Wilt thou not trust the Lord Jesus Christ? Canst thou think so meanly of him as to imagine that he will delude thee, and intended to raise thy hopes in vain? O my soul! it is not, it cannot be so. His grace moved him to make these promises, and his fidelity will engage him to make them good. *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his words shall never pass away*<sup>2</sup>. Which <sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 19. leads me to add,

2. Think much of the invariable grace and fidelity of Christ. Remember that they are made and established in him: *In him all the promises of God are yea, and in him they are Amen*<sup>3</sup>. And is not *He the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*? Could I have trusted Christ upon earth, if he had given me a promise? Lord! I could, no doubt, have trusted thee; I could have ventured over lands and seas upon thy word, and have gone helpless and friendless to the ends of the earth, on the security of thy promise that I should be safe and prosperous: and shall I not trust thee now? Art thou less able, less faithful? Is the Lord whom I serve so forgetful as sometimes

SERM.  
VI.<sup>2</sup> Matt. v.  
19.<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. i.  
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to overlook his promise, or so busy as not to be able to attend to the particular exigences of his people, so that one might say of him, as Elijah did of Baal, *Perhaps he is on a journey, or he talketh with others, or, perhaps, he sleeps, and must be awakened.* Dishonourable, impious thoughts! Wouldst thou, O my unbelieving heart, suggest them? and if not, what wouldst thou suggest? When Christ has called himself the *good Shepherd*, and declared that *he will give to his sheep eternal life*, and that nothing shall separate them from his love, dost thou suspect that he will not make his word good?

3. If you desire that Christ may confirm your faith, then be frequently thinking of your own experiences and of those of your fellow Christians. My friends! the dealings of God's providence and his grace are a beautiful comment upon the promises of his word. Think what you have been, and what you have felt. *Remember the years of the right hand of the Most High*<sup>4</sup>. Remember all his wonders of old: must you not own that you had fainted unless you had believed? Has not God pardoned many of

<sup>4</sup> Psalm  
lxxvii. 10.

your former sins, and given you a delightful sense of pardon? Has he not supplied you in your wants, and comforted you in your sorrows, and supported you in difficulties under which you would have imagined that you must necessarily have fallen? Indeed, Christians! it becomes you to consider the promises sealed by this experience: and it must argue great ingratitude if you forget your tried and constant friend. And pray, think likewise on the experience of others: think how God has sometimes appeared, even for the most despised of his people, in so eminent and remarkable a manner, that those who knew all the circumstances must say, this is the finger of God. When you consider how he has delivered, and does deliver, you will trust in him that he will still deliver.

4. If you expect that Christ should help your unbelief, you must pray earnestly for the Spirit. It is the work and office of the Spirit to produce faith in the soul, and to purchase it; and the Christian vanquishes his spiritual enemies on his knees. How often do we find David's faith apparently strengthened while he has been penning a

SERM. VI. psalm, so that he begins with the bitterest complaints, and ends with praise! and how often have we found the comforting Saviour in this duty ourselves! Cry, therefore, to him with great earnestness and importunity, and cry out with tears, *Lord, help mine unbelief.*

5. You have reason to hope that Christ will help your unbelief in attending ordinances. The preaching of the word brings the promises together, and I do not doubt but you have, many of you, found that in this respect *faith comes by hearing*<sup>5</sup>. In the Lord's Supper the covenant comprehends all these promises as sealed, and there very frequently God lets in a word of comfort and a ray of light upon the humble expecting soul. Attend then, therefore, my brethren, with a cheerful expectation that God will meet you, and bless you in them; and if there be a struggle raised within or without, to prevent your attendance on such ordinances, turn the difficulties and objections into an argument, and assure yourselves that your spiritual enemies oppose them, because they fear that the consequences of them should be too happy to your souls.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. x.  
17.



I conclude all with my hearty prayer to God for you, that this good work of his grace upon your soul may be carried on in a more successful manner daily: that you may find the house of David growing stronger and stronger, and that of Saul weaker and weaker in your heart; that faith may get ground on unbelievers, as the rising morning does on the darkness of the night, till at length every intermingled shade is dispersed, and the whole face of heaven and of earth is beautified and cheered by the victorious *sun shining in his strength*.

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## SERMON VII.

## CHRIST'S COMING IN THE CLOUDS.

## REVELATIONS, i. 7.

*Behold, he comes with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him; and all the kindreds of the earth shall mourn because of him. Even so, Amen.*

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BEFORE I enter on the particular discussion of these words, I must observe that they are introduced in a remarkable manner indeed, as a kind of note to this prophetic, mysterious, but most instructive book; concerning which, dark as many parts of it are, there was reason to say, *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, provided they observe and keep those things that are written therein*<sup>1</sup>.

The apostle salutes the seven churches of Asia, to each of whom he had a distinct message; and, therefore, inscribes the book to them all; and he salutes them in a very extraordinary manner: *Grace be to you, and*

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

*peace from him which is, and which was, and which is to come*, i. e. from the eternal and ever blessed God, the immutable and all glorious Jehovah: *and*, he adds, *from the seven spirits that are before the throne*, which some interpret as a wish of grace and peace from the Holy Spirit. Supposing that the variety of its gifts and graces were represented by seven lamps of fire<sup>2</sup>, which seemed in this prophetic vision to shine before the throne of God, as the seven lamps of the sacred candlestick did in the tabernacle, to which there is here a continual allusion<sup>3</sup>: <sup>3 Rev. v. 6.</sup> though others understand them of seven angels of distinguished dignity, whom they suppose elsewhere to be represented by the seven horns and eyes of the lamb, who are said to be *the seven spirits of God, sent out into all the earth*, i. e. the instruments which he makes use of in his providential government, who from time to time bring their report to him; and receive his commission to exert the power, which he gave them, to such purposes as his wisdom shall see best. In further allusion to those words in which we read of *the seven eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro throughout the earth*<sup>4</sup>, as a little <sup>4 Zech. iv.</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. iv.  
5.

10.

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 which go forth from standing before the Lord  
 of all the earth<sup>5</sup>. But I must beg leave here  
<sup>5.</sup> to observe, by the way, that if we do suppose  
 the spirits of God here in this context to signify  
 the same with the spirits of the heavens  
 in Zechariah, (i. e. great and celestial) it will  
 not follow that there are just seven of them,  
 since we see, in another place, that they are  
 four. The number seven in the one seems  
 only to signify that they are many, as four,  
 answering to the four quarters of the earth,  
 that they are everywhere employed; north  
 and south, east and west, being representa-  
 tions of a hieroglyphical and figurative, rather  
 than of a literal and historical kind. I shall  
 only add here, that if the seven spirits before  
 the throne do indeed signify angels (concern-  
 ing which I can assert nothing absolutely) all  
 that we can infer from it is, that John wished  
 that these celestial spirits might be made the  
 instruments of God's gracious providence in  
 the protection and happiness of these seven  
 churches. He then wishes that *grace and*  
*peace* from a person, on this interpretation,  
 infinitely greater than those mentioned be-  
 fore (of whom, having so much to say, he

mentions him in the last place), and from *Jesus, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth*; who, therefore, can overrule all the affairs of all kingdoms and nations as he pleases, and give such prosperity to his gospel, and deal such destruction to the enemies of it as he, in his infinite wisdom, shall see fit. Waked, as it were, into a rapture with this sacred and beloved name, he breaks out into a sublime doxology, in which he anticipates those songs of heaven, which, before he wrote this, he had learned from the multitude that surround the throne. And, oh! let us join in it with all the powers of our souls: *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and to him who has made us kings and priests to God, even his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

When the apostle had thus ascribed glory and dominion to him, he takes up, as it were, his own words again, and declares the assured persuasion that he had of the universal dominion which his great Lord possessed, and of the final display which he would make of it. Touched with so glorious a view, he speaks

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as if he saw the ensigns of his final triumph already displayed before his eyes. *Behold!* says this holy and sublime secretary of the prince of heaven, this distinguished favourite of the Lord of glory, *behold! he comes in the clouds.* Lift up your eyes, and observe the splendid pomp, the bright procession: hearken to the trumpet of the archangel, that proclaims the approach of this more than imperial judge. *Every eye shall see him.* Whoever you are that hear and read the words of this prophecy, *and they also that pierced him, even all the kindreds of the earth,* who have been his enemies, *shall wail because of him.* They whose hearts have been hardened against him, and who would not hearken to the calls of his grace and the solicitations of his gospel, they shall begin their loud lamentations, which shall never end. *Even so, Amen.* Which words may be considered either as a confirmation of the certain truth of what has been said, or as a cordial assent to it: “Blessed Jesus, thou knowest the loyalty of my heart to thee, and the inward persuasion that I have of my interest in thy favour; and therefore I can cordially subscribe to this: and, animated by love to thee, as well as out

of regard to my own happiness, I can say, *Amen*, so let it be." There are several remarks which will naturally arise from these words, which I shall but briefly touch upon, as they so frequently occur, yet I judge it proper to remind you of them at this time.

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I. That the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to a universal judgment is a most certain thing.

II. That it is nearly approaching.

III. That it shall be exceedingly pompous and majestic.

IV. That it is a matter of universal concern, as every one shall behold him, and appear before him.

V. That it will be a most mournful and dreadful day to all who have continued his enemies.

VI. That the true Christian may cheerfully welcome it, and think of it with courage and delight, *even so, Amen*.

I chiefly intend a few devout reflections under these heads. May the spirit of God guide my heart and yours while we pursue them. To waken our attention I beg of you to take some notice of the introductory word, *behold*, which you know is a word of excita-

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tion, and mark of admiration in the person speaking. Let me, therefore, invite your most solemn regard to this great subject, and call off your thoughts from every thing else. Let the busy man turn aside his thoughts from his farm or his merchandise, to think of that great and awful day when the trades and professions most necessary to human life shall all come to an end; when the very soil which has been cultivated shall be consumed, and the earth itself shall be no more. Let the gay sensualist dismiss the views of his flattering pleasures, which must then be so severely accounted for, and so dreadfully repaid, on all who have been *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*. Let the man of science and study cease to speculate upon those nice amusements of a vain curiosity, which take up so much of his time; that he may employ all his thoughts on this great care, how he shall stand this last trial, and secure a place among the philosophers of heaven, who shall see light in the light of God, and draw truth from its eternal fountain. Turn away your eyes from the weightiest cares of human life, and turn them from the dearest and most pleasing, as



well as most painful and mournful objects, to fix them upon Jesus, the descending Saviour, whom you shall see; before whom you shall appear; with whom you shall transact business of infinite importance; for *behold he comes in the clouds, and every eye shall see him, &c.*

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I. We observe that the coming of Christ to judgment is a most certain thing. I apply these words to the universal judgment, and make that application the subject of my discourse; though I am sensible some of the phrases of them have been used in another sense. For when our Lord Jesus Christ is speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, borrowing images from that last great day, he says, *They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory*<sup>6</sup>. You shall then see an appearance which will be a lively type and image of my second coming to universal judgment. But the coming here spoken of is represented as what shall strike *every eye*, and shall afflict with mourning *all the kingdoms* of the earth that have pierced Christ; and it is imme-

<sup>6</sup> Matt,  
xxiv. 3.

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diately addressed, not to the churches of Judea, but to those of Asia; and, which I think puts the matter out of all doubt, the words themselves were written subsequently to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans; or, as it is generally thought, about the year 96, twenty-six years after the capital of Judea had ceased to exist. As to the certainty of Christ's glorious advent we need not insist upon the evidence which the light of nature affords, that there shall be a state of future retribution, or a judgment of particular persons at least, because we have a much more convincing evidence of what implies a great deal more. I mean the appearance of the Son of God, as the great judge of all mankind. Of this we are as sure as we are that he has appeared already. For we have a large discourse of his upon the subject, in which he describes the process and the sentence, *when the Son of man shall come in his glory, &c.*; his apostles, therefore, had a commission to declare it, as they everywhere do, not only that God had *appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness*; but that he will do it *by that man whom he*

*has appointed, whereof he has given assurance unto all men, &c<sup>7</sup>. O let it be seriously considered, not merely as what is possible, or what is probable, but as what is certain! Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass away. A thousand contingencies may prevent the most probable future events which the children of men are considering here; for their breath is in their nostrils. Earthly judges have been sometimes prevented from going their circuits by death; prisoners have sometimes escaped from their confinement before their day of trial came; or death has removed them beyond the reach of human justice. But this judge lives for ever; no contingencies can prevent or retard his appearance for a moment; and death shall give up all its captives to hear the sound of his trumpet, and to answer the summons to his bar.*

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Acts xvii.  
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II. This awful assize is nearly approaching. John, therefore, almost seventeen hundred years ago, spoke of it as if it were already come. *Behold!* says he, *he comes in the clouds*, i. e. he is now coming; as the proper import of that word is: as it is elsewhere

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said, *the judge is near, even at the door. Behold!* says he, *I come quickly.* So it becomes him to speak who has all eternity in view; and who knows all the scenes which will arise through its unmeasurable ages. To him *a thousand years are but as one day*, as Peter with great propriety expresses it, when he speaks of the scoffer as saying, *where is the promise of his coming*<sup>8</sup>? And as it became Christ to speak thus, it becomes us also to think that the remainder of life, and the remaining duration of this earth, is but a little while to eternity. We must live, how many thousands of years shall we say? Ten thousand, one hundred thousand, a duration to which one thousand shall be but as one to ten millions; if that were all it would justify this expression. But how far is it from being all? So far that when these ten millions, not of years only, but of ages, are come and gone a ten millions of times, the reign of Christ, and his saints in glory, will seem as it were but begun; and the vengeance which he executed upon his enemies will be but begun too. O boundless unfathomable gulf! O tremendous thought! Who does not feel his head, as it were, turning

<sup>8</sup> 1 P. t. iii.  
3.

round when he looks up or down into it? Who is not swallowed up in its height, and length, and depth? The little period between now and judgment is annihilating. He is coming! He is come! Behold the heavens open and disclose him! You and I, and all the world, are standing in his presence! Time has, if I may so speak, laid down its hoary head and expired, is, as it were, already extinct and dead. Only eternity lives, and we are, as at this moment, going to live in it. But as this coming of Christ is so nearly approaching, so,

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III. It shall be exceedingly pompous and majestic. *Behold! he comes in the clouds:* the expression is often used to denote the majesty of the divine appearance. It is said, that *he came out of Sinai, with clouds and thick darkness*<sup>9</sup>. And when he appeared for David's deliverance he had about him *thick clouds of the skies*<sup>1</sup>, as elsewhere *his strength is in the clouds*<sup>2</sup>. And I doubt not that, in all those passages of the New Testament, like those in the text, there is an allusion to that passage in Daniel, *I saw one like the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven*<sup>3</sup>; which words are used

<sup>9</sup> Deut. iv.

11.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Sam.

xxii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Psal.

lxviii. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Dan. vii.

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four times concerning our Lord in the evangelists: and when we consider the awful form of some clouds, and the bright ornaments and beautiful variety of others, we may assure ourselves that it is a very conceivable thing that God should constitute, in a literal sense, of clouds, a throne of glory suitable to the pomp of that day. And I doubt not but it will be so; for as a cloud received Christ out of the sight of his apostles at the ascension, so it is expressly said, *he should come again, as they had seen him go*<sup>4</sup> *into heaven*<sup>4</sup>. And besides all these ornaments, we well know that there are many other illustrious circumstances, which shall add splendour and grandeur to this appearance. *The Son of man shall come, it is said, in his glory, and all his holy angels with him*<sup>5</sup>. Who can tell how many? For the chariots of God are one thousand times ten thousand. Who can imagine in what bright and illustrious forms? They appeared in white robes to the messengers to proclaim his resurrection, and to speak to his apostles at his ascension. But surely this robe shall be brighter on this grand triumphant day, and all the most splendid cavalcade attending the coronation

<sup>4</sup> Acts i. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Matt.  
xxv. 31.

of earthly monarchs shall be infinitely inferior to this. The sublime sound of the trumpet of the archangel shall fill the whole arch of heaven; the dead shall immediately awake; and the glorious robes which shall then be given to all the faithful, when they shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, shall add a further lustre, which will still be conspicuous amidst all that flood of brightness which was before poured out on every side. For when *Christ shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory*. In a word, the pomp shall be worthy of the majesty of God and of his Son. It shall itself be the *means* as well as the time of accomplishing that divine oracle; *As I live, says the Lord, unto me shall every knee bow, and every tongue confess*. Accordingly,

IV. We are further to observe that this appearance shall be matter of universal concern. *Every eye shall see him*. Every eye; the eye of every living man, whoever he is. None will be able to prevent it. The voice of the trumpet, the brightness of the flame, shall direct all eyes to it, shall fix all eyes upon it. Be it ever so busy an eye, or ever

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so vain a one; whatever employment, whatever amusement it had the moment before, will then no longer be able to employ it or to amuse. The eye will be lifted up to Christ, and will no more look down upon money, upon books, upon land, upon houses, upon gardens. Alas, these things will then all pass away in a moment! And not the eyes of the living alone, but also all the eyes that have ever beheld the sun, though but for a moment: the eyes of all the sleeping dead will be awakened and opened. The eyes of saints and sinners of former generations. The eyes of Job, according to those rapturous words of his, which had so deep and so sublime a sense, *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he shall stand in the last day on the earth: in my flesh I shall see God, whom my eyes shall behold and not another's.* The eyes of Balaam, of which he seems to have had an awful foreknowledge when he said, *I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh*<sup>6</sup>. Your eyes and mine. O awful thought! Blessed Jesus! May we not then see thee as through tears; may we not then tremble at the sight. It shall be the case of many; for we observe,

<sup>6</sup> Numb.  
xxiv. 17.



V. That it will be a mournful and dreadful day to those who have continued his enemies. All who have pierced him, even of *all nations of the earth shall mourn because of him*. It is an awful thing to reflect upon that Christ was *pierced*; pierced by his cruel murderers, when he was nailed to the cross, and when he hung upon it. Oh how did *the iron enter into his soul!* Blessed Jesus, are we sometimes ready to say, how could we have borne the sight! *A pointed dart*, said Simeon to Mary, *shall pierce through thine own soul*; and surely it was so to the blessed virgin. She mourned; and methinks her sorrow in that hour is a kind of emblem of what every soul that truly loves his Redeemer feels amidst those insults which are daily offered to him. For it is most certain, that though Christ be now on his throne, there are those who are piercing him: many who are insulting and blaspheming his name, who are throwing the most open and avowed contempt upon his religion and his cause. And this is, so far as in them lies, *to crucify the Son of God afresh, and to put him to an open shame*. It is justifying the Jews in piercing him: for if any person had appeared among them,

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who falsely pretended even to be a common prophet, they had a divine commission for putting him to death; much more then would he have been worthy of death, whatever the outward regularity of his life had been, who should falsely have professed himself the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. Others are piercing Christ by injuring his members. *Saul, Saul*, did he cry from the clouds of heaven, in which he appeared to that chosen vessel, *why persecutest thou me*<sup>7</sup>? *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethen, ye did it unto me*<sup>8</sup>. Now we know that there are vast tracts of land, in which for any one to *become* a Christian is certain and inevitable death. Not to mention the many Christian countries in which it is so to profess the faith of Jesus in its original purity, and to bear testimony against those superstitions and idolatries which are most antichristian, here among ourselves, among protestants of all denominations, Christ is *pierced*, not only when anything is spoken to the dishonour of his person and offices, but when by those who pretend most to honour him he is practically disobeyed. The

<sup>7</sup> Acts ix. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Matt.  
xxv. 40.

drunkenness of one; the lewdness of another; the dishonesty of a third; the covetousness of a fourth; the idleness and uselessness of a fifth; the uncharitableness of a sixth; and the practical unbelief of all, is a thorn, a nail, a spear, to pierce this gracious Saviour. O blessed Lord, how often then art thou wounded in the house of those who call themselves thy friends; but how vain is that name when this is their character! Now it is here said with relation to such, that *they shall mourn because of him*: even all that have pierced him, of all nations of the earth. The true penitent mourns now, the impenitent shall mourn then, even the proudest sinner. To this day our Lord refers his most insolent enemies, when they solemnly condemned him for blasphemy, for avowing that which it had been blasphemy to have denied, that he was *the Son and Christ of God*; and when with hypocritic grimace, as if they had been the most conscientious of mankind, they rent their clothes: he said, *Hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven*<sup>9</sup>. “I appeal to that day to wipe off the infamy of this. Look to it, how you

<sup>9</sup> Matt.  
xxvi. 64.

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will answer at my bar the injurious treatment which I this day receive at yours. Nor shall Caiaphas and Annas, Pilate and Herod, mourn alone in that day. For he shall say of all his enemies that would not he should reign over them, and of all in this place who are practically renouncing him among the rest, *As for those mine enemies, bring them forth, and slay them before me:* and well may they mourn that are to be slain; especially when it is considered what this destruction is to be. Not a sudden stroke which sometimes prevents a cry before it can be uttered by putting an end to life before it is even felt. No, but a long, an eternal death, to which the enemies of Christ shall be doomed; *depart accursed*. For if his sentence shall be pronounced on those that have not fed Christ when he was hungry, and on those that have not given him drink when thirsty, &c. what shall be inflicted upon those who have pierced him? O dreadful day! O deep and incurable wound! O vengeance justly, yet in vain, shunned, though at the expense of being crushed by a mountain, of being overwhelmed by a rock! It shall be mourning and crying indeed, to

which those words of the prophet may with much more propriety than terror to their original *barely* be applied. *Alas for the day, for it comes!* a day of trouble and of *treading down*, a day of perplexity before *the Lord God of hosts*, a day of crying to the mountains. Yet amidst all the terror let us remember,

VI. That the faithful disciples of our Lord may cheerfully welcome it, and think of it at a distance, with courage and delight, *even so, Amen.*

I observed before, as these words may express the certainty of it, so likewise John's cordial consent to it. And I rather prefer this last interpretation, as it is so very agreeable to the concluding words of this book, *Behold I come quickly; Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus*<sup>1</sup>. I will not now enter into the detail of those reasons at large why a believer may welcome it, on which I have insisted elsewhere. Let that reason stand for all which is given by St. Paul, *that he shall come to be admired in his saints, and glorified in all them that believe*<sup>2</sup>. In what view would not the Christian desire to

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxii.  
20.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Thess.  
i. 10.

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see Jesus? To view him by faith is the greatest comfort which he has in all this dark and distant world. He loves to view him in his ordinances, loves to contemplate even his death, though sorrow mingles itself with that delight: loves to eat this passover, how bitter soever those herbs are with which it is eaten. He longs to go into the intermediate state, and to enjoy such views of Jesus as that may afford. Views how much better than we here enjoy! Let us in thought congratulate those of our dear departed friends that enjoy them, and long for the hour that shall join us to that better society. But when we are so joined, we and they shall still be looking *for that blessed hope, the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* Oh, who can express the joy of that bright morning, when those mysterious but emphatical words shall be fulfilled, *thy dead men shall live, my dead bodies* (i. e. the bodies of my dear deceased ones) *shall arise: awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs,* a still dew with vivifying influences is fallen upon you, *and the earth shall cast out*

<sup>3</sup> Isa. xxvi. *the dead*<sup>s</sup>. O yes, my brethren, we shall

awake, and sing such a song as heaven itself had not before taught us. A song of welcome and victory to our divine Master; a song of congratulation to each other; a song of everlasting praise to God. Having been by divine grace taught now to look upon him, whom we likewise had pierced, with tears of penitential sorrow, *God shall then wipe away all tears from our eyes: sorrow and sighing shall flee away*, and nothing shall remain but joy, everlasting joy. *Thanks be to God that gives us this victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is our God, and we will wait for him; we will wait for him, and he will save us: and we will not only on that day, but throughout eternal ages, ascribe our salvation to him, who not only delivers us from those insupportable terrors, with which a guilty and unbelieving world shall then be overwhelmed, but will raise us to behold and share the glory of him who has loved us, and has washed us from our sins in that blood which those sins had shed, and which are so wonderfully and graciously washed away by it.*

## SERMON VIII.

OF HABITUAL AND OF ACTUAL PREPARATION FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER, AND MORE PARTICULARLY OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

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1 CORINTHIANS, xi. 28.

*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of this bread, and drink of this cup.*

SERM. VIII. It is the design of the apostle St. Paul, in the latter part of this epistle from whence the text is taken, to reform some irregularities and abuses which had crept into the Corinthian church. In the 18th verse of this chapter he begins with those relating to the Lord's Supper: and having condemned that rapacious and disorderly manner in which they used to celebrate that sacred ordinance, and the feasts of charity which were joined with it, that he may correct those enormities, he has recourse to the original institution. He shows them, in the



23d and 24th verses, that Jesus Christ intended this ordinance to remind his disciples of his death and sufferings, and that, accordingly, the bread represented his body, and the wine his blood; so that, consequently, when they eat the bread or drank the wine in so irreverent and profane a manner, they *were guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*, i. e. of profaning and abusing those sacred elements which were the symbols of his body and blood, as well as of the indecency of disturbing a feast which was intended for a pledge of mutual friendship. It is apparent that this must be a horrid crime; and therefore, says this venerable apostle, you would not incur so great a guilt, and expose yourselves to a punishment consequent upon it. *Let a man first seriously examine himself*: i. e. let him consider the design of the ordinance, and then look into the frame and temper of his own mind, and see how far that is conformable to it; *and then*, if the matter be brought to a good issue, *let him eat of that bread, and drink of that wine*; for then he may hope to do it with acceptance, and to receive from it considerable advantages. From these words of the

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text I propose by the Divine assistance to discourse at large of sacramental preparation. It is of very great importance that we should observe that there are two distinct kinds of sacramental preparation, habitual and actual. I will explain the nature and the necessity of each.

I. There is an habitual preparation necessarily required in all those that would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper. This consists in two things ; in giving up ourselves in covenant to God through Christ, and in walking suitably to such an engagement.

1. We are all naturally at a distance from God. There is a mutual enmity betwixt us and God ; and, as the consequence of this, we are exposed to all the dreadful effects of his everlasting displeasure and indignation. So the apostle tells the converted Ephesians that *they were by nature children of wrath, even as others* : but God, who is rich and infinite in mercy, has in the gospel published the offers of peace, and pardon, and eternal salvation to apostate creatures ; and he is, in and through a Redeemer, *reconciling the world unto himself*, and not *imputing their trespasses unto them*<sup>1</sup>. Now all that is required of us is

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v.  
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that we should repent of our sins, and with all our hearts believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, hoping for acceptance and salvation through him; and resolving, with the assistance of the grace of God, to abandon every known sin, and to persevere in the practice of every branch of our duty as discovered to us by the dictates of a natural conscience or the revelation of sacred scripture. When a man is once brought to such an unfeigned and prevailing resolution, he receives Christ upon the terms proposed in the gospel, and by this mean he has a right to all those ordinances which Christ has appointed for the edification and comfort of his own people; and particularly to this of the Lord's Supper.

But that no one, who is destitute of these qualifications can worthily partake of the Lord's Supper, is undeniably plain from the very nature of the ordinance, inasmuch as it is represented in scripture as the seal of the covenant of grace. In this view Christ himself has put it: *This is the blood of the new testament*, or, as it might be rendered, of the new covenant, *which is shed for many for the remission of sins*<sup>2</sup>: i. e. this is the representation of my blood, by which the new covenant

<sup>2</sup> Matthew  
xxvi. 28.

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is established, and which I give to you as the pledge and token for the remission of your sins, or a seal of your interest in it. *The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?* i. e. does it not signify our receiving the Lord Jesus Christ, and the benefits which he has purchased upon the terms which he has so plainly proposed? Is it not a mutual seal of the new covenant? Now if a man does not design to enter into this new covenant, and to give up himself to God through Christ, which is the first branch of this habitual preparation, it must be a very profane and presumptuous thing thus to set his seal to it; for by this mean he must be guilty of an abuse of the sacred elements; and so, as the apostle expresses it, *must eat and drink judgment to himself*: i. e. not indeed certainly seal his own damnation, for that is extremely contrary to the whole tenour of scripture, but expose himself to the Divine displeasure; and thus, unless repentance should prevent such a dreadful result, subject himself to eternal damnation, as well as in all probability to some present temporary punishment. Thus you see that entering into the covenant of grace, and giving up ourselves to

God through a Redeemer, is absolutely necessary in order to our approach to this ordinance in a worthy and in an acceptable manner. And this is the first branch of habitual preparation.

2. Habitual preparation further consists in walking suitably to such a resolution and engagement. Every good man is by the grace of God enabled in the main to stand to the terms of this covenant: but yet, even the best of us are too ready at particular times to revolt from it; to yield to the force of temptation, forsake God, and pollute our consciences: and when this happens, a sincere Christian is for that time unfit for the Lord's table. We should, therefore, be upon our guard against every temptation; and, if at any time we are seized and overpowered by it, we should immediately humble ourselves, as in dust and ashes, before God; and never give ourselves any rest till we obtain some comfortable hope of a pardon. We should be very careful to practise the whole extent of our duty, to promote the interest of God in the world to the very utmost of our ability, and to be cheerfully laying out our talents and opportunities of service

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for the carrying on of this important end. We should make it our business to maintain a life of continual communion with God, and of an uninterrupted regard to the unseen and eternal world. *Laying aside all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God*<sup>3</sup>. Now, though we are all too defective in many of these respects, yet some degree of these two branches of habitual preparation is absolutely necessary in order to our worthy attendance on the table of the Lord: and, as an evidence of the sincerity of our giving up ourselves to God, St. James tells us, with all the reason in the world, chap. ii. 18—26, that we must *show our faith by our works, and that without works our faith is dead*. If, therefore, we are negligent of this practical holiness, it is undeniably plain that we are not in a state of grace and salvation. The resolutions which we formerly took up, and which, perhaps, we call our conversion, were plainly the effects of some transient impressions, and dreadfully short of a saving change; and, consequently, having never yet entered into covenant with God, we can have no right to the seals of it, as we observed in the former argument. And again,

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. vii.  
1.

the habitual preparation of a spiritual and a Divine life has a most happy tendency to fit us to receive the visits of the Divine grace and the communications of his love; for the Psalmist tells us *that with the merciful man God will show himself merciful, and with the upright he will show himself upright; with the pure he will show himself pure, but with the froward he will show himself froward*<sup>4</sup>: and <sup>4</sup> Ps. xviii. 25, 26. in another place we are told that *to the wicked God says, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth*<sup>5</sup>? This is what I thought proper <sup>5</sup> Ps. l. 16. to offer to your consideration relating to the nature and the necessity of habitual preparation. I now proceed,

II. To consider wherein actual preparation consists, and to show the expediency of the several branches of it, I mean spending some time in the secret exercises of devotion in order to beget our hearts into a proper frame for that awful solemnity, and to get ready for the business which we are then to transact. Now before I come to particulars, I shall beg leave to premise two things:

1. That actual preparation is not always

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necessary for the worthy communicating of the Lord's Supper. The providence of God may sometimes bring a man into a congregation where the Lord's Supper is to be administered, and which he was not aware of before, and in such a case, if he be at peace with God, and do not lie under the guilt of any unrepented sin, I know not why he should defraud his soul of that comfort and advantage which he might reap from the present attendance. And, indeed, if we were more careful in our habitual preparation, there never would be so much occasion for actual ; (though in some degree it would then be very proper), particularly the most disagreeable part of it would thus be happily superseded. We should not have so much need to wash our garments, when we make it our constant care to keep them clean and undefiled : the lively actings of repentance, and faith, and humility, and love, and joy, and self-dedication would be more easily excited when we did not suffer these graces to sleep in our breast, but were always endeavouring to exercise them as a proper occasion was presented. However, that this caution may not be abused, I must further observe that, generally speaking,



considering the inconstancy of our obedience, the coldness of our affections, and the irregularity of our lives, it is very proper that we should practise this actual preparation as the providence of God indulges us with an opportunity; and this is more than ordinarily needful when we cannot attend the Lord's Supper so often as we could wish.

2. That when the providence of God gives to you an opportunity of being pretty large in your actual preparation, I cannot say that it is absolutely necessary that you should adhere to the model which I shall lay down, provided that you could remember all the particulars of it. For as our cases, tempers, and circumstances vary, it would not be proper always to confine ourselves to one method of proceeding. I shall offer nothing but what I think may be useful in the general; but I submit it to the examination and the discretion of each particular person to judge how far it may be convenient for him. *I speak as unto wise men; judge you what I say.* Having premised these two observations, I now proceed to the several branches of actual preparation, or briefly, how a Christian may profitably employ himself in his retirement

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before he attends upon the table of the Lord. Now I think that it may be very proper for him to spend his time in some or in all of these four devotional exercises; prayer, self-examination, meditation, and self-dedication, or solemnly renewing his covenant with God. I design to discourse pretty largely of each of these; and all that I can expect to do at present is to dispatch the first of them, namely,

1. Self-examination is a very useful part of actual preparation for the Lord's Supper. You see that the apostle most expressly recommends it in the words of the text: *Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.* This self-examination may properly be considered in two branches; either an examination into our state in general, as it respects our right to this ordinance; or a review of our present circumstances with reference to the immediate business which we have to transact at it.

1. Self-examination may regard the right which we have to this ordinance, founded upon the safety of our state in general: and here the grand question is that which it is well worth our while to inquire into, whether we be sincere Christians or no. Now it is abso-

lutely necessary that we should put this question to ourselves before our first coming to the sacrament, that so we may be satisfied in our own minds that we are no intruders, that the Master of the feast has invited us thither, and that we shall not *be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*: and, supposing that we have brought the matter to a fair examination, and, upon the whole, to a very comfortable issue at our first partaking of the holy communion, yet it will be very proper to be often repeating this exercise, because the strong persuasion which we at first had of the sincerity of our grace and the safety of our state will gradually wear off if the impressions be not frequently renewed; and consequently doubt and fear will break in upon us, and deprive us of that comfort and satisfaction which we might otherwise expect in this ordinance. Now as this branch of self-examination relates to a matter of the utmost importance, and, as a mistake on either side might be very pernicious, we should take care to choose the most proper seasons to enter upon it at a time when we are not hurried with the cares of the world, solicitous about an important event that is

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depending, or discomposed by indisposition of body, especially by a melancholy temper of mind. Let us engage in this work as fully convinced of the awful importance of it, and of the absolute necessity of bringing it to an issue; and, I add, heartily willing to know the very worst of our case, because, blessed be God! it is not too late to remedy it. And, with an humble sense of the darkness of our own minds, and the deceitfulness of our own hearts, let us sincerely apply to God, and beg, as David does, that he would lead us into a knowledge of ourselves: *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any evil way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Psalm  
cxxxix. 23,  
24.

Being thus prepared when we enter upon the work itself, it may not be improper to make use of the assistance of pious and judicious human writers. But let us take care to make scripture our main rule, that so we may not be misled by any fallacious and unwritten marks: and it might be very convenient if in our daily reading of the scriptures or hearing the word preached, we took notice of such texts as might be of use upon this occasion, and some way or other marked them down,

that so we might not have this kind of directions to seek when we should have them to use. Let me remind you in the general, that the question is not at what particular time the work of conversion was begun, or by what remarkable steps it was carried on in your hearts, or how strongly your passions are engaged, or to what degrees you are transported in devotional exercises. Here the plain question is, whether our wills are prevailingly fixed on God and holiness; and whether we have chosen God through Christ for our portion and happiness: and let me add that when we use scripture marks (which are of all others the most certain, and, generally speaking, to a sincere Christian the most comfortable) we should carefully distinguish between those which are laid down as the very essentials of religion, without which no man can possibly be in a state of salvation, and those which are only the signs and characters of more eminent attainments in piety; which, though every good man ought to labour after, yet are not absolutely necessary in order to give him a right to come to the table of the Lord.

2. Self-examination may be considered as

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a review of our present circumstances, particularly of the sins which we are to confess, the mercies which we are to acknowledge, the further petitions which we are to offer, and the resolutions which we are solemnly to confirm at the holy table.

1. Before we come to the table of the Lord, it is very proper that we should examine ourselves with relation to the sins of which we have been guilty. In this ordinance we commemorate the sufferings of a dying Redeemer; and, as the apostle expresses it, *show forth the Lord's death until he come*<sup>7</sup>. Now it is highly proper that we should come in a penitent frame, with an humble, sorrowful sense of the share which we had in his death and sufferings; that so, in the words of the prophet, *we may look upon him whom we have pierced*<sup>8</sup>, and mourn over him as one that mourns for an only son, and be in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for a first-born. Now this godly sorrow is most likely to be promoted, when we cannot only say in the general, Lord, I have been a very sinful creature: but in such an instance I have violated thy law, and broken my vows, and stained my conscience; and that, per-

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xi.  
26.

<sup>8</sup> Zech. xiii.  
10.

haps, since the very last sacramental engagement. Besides we here come to receive a confirmed pardon for all our sins; and upon that account it is proper that our repentance should be deep and serious; and, for that end, as particular as may be; and certainly it will be a very great confirmation of our faith and comfort to apply the blood of Christ to that particular sin which lies heaviest upon our consciences; and, if our consciences charge us with any gross offences of a considerable standing either in our unregenerate state, or since our conversion, it may not be improper to humble ourselves before God on the account of them, and to renew our application to the blood of Jesus: but this examination should particularly regard the sins of which we have been guilty since our last attendance at the Lord's Supper. And here we may particularly inquire, Has not the blessed God been in a great measure forgotten when creatures have been thought of with fondness and complacency? Have not my thoughts been swallowed up with my worldly affairs, *what I should eat, and what I should drink, wherewithal I should be clothed, and how I might lay up to myself treasures on*

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*earth*, when the greater and more important interests of the eternal world have been neglected and despised? Have I considered my thoughts as under the inspection of an omniscient God; or have I been acting over scenes of guilt in my secret imagination which I would not have brought upon the stage of the world? If so, I have been contracting great pollution. Oh that such a thought of my heart may be forgiven me! Again, my Redeemer has told me that *by my words I shall be judged, and*  
<sup>9</sup>Matt. xii. *by my words I shall be condemned*<sup>9</sup>. Let  
 37. me inquire whether my speech has been always *with grace seasoned with salt*; or whether I have not been saying *that my tongue is my own, and there is no Lord over it*? Have not my discourses frequently been vain and impertinent? nay, have they not often been dangerous and mischievous? Have they not sometimes offended against truth or modesty, religion or charity? Have I not sometimes been saying spiteful, ill natured things to provoke my brother when present, or to injure his reputation in his absence? or, at least, have I not neglected to improve that noble faculty of speech so much as I might have done to the glory of God and



the advantage of my fellow-creatures? And as to my affections, I know that the great and the blessed God ought to have been the supreme object of my love and of my desire. But let me inquire whether, on the contrary, they have not been fondly placed upon some darling creature that may afflict and torment me, but can never make me happy? Have I not tormented myself with foolish fears of some future evil that might possibly befall me, without considering that I was in the hands of a powerful and a gracious God, and trusting in him with composure and cheerfulness? I know that God has given to me my corn, and my wine, and my oil; have I not rejoiced too much at the receipt of them, and fixed too much of my confidence upon them without considering how easily they might be taken away, and that it is only *the name of the Lord that is a strong tower*<sup>1</sup>, which can protect us against every calamity? When the providence of God has visited me with affliction, have I not been ready to sorrow *like those that have no hope*, to repine under the chastening of my Heavenly Father, or to rage against those who were the instruments of my calamity? Has not my anger sometimes broken

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs  
xviii. 10.

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out to an immoderate degree upon trifling and inconsiderable provocations? and have I not sometimes been so foolish as to suffer it to rest in my bosom till it has produced sentiments of malice and revenge? Have I not been too ready to envy others their worldly prosperity without acquiescing, as I ought to have done, in God my supreme portion and happiness, and in such a share of temporal enjoyments as his wisdom and his goodness have seen fit to allot to me? And lastly, as to my actions, have I not neglected some opportunity either of doing or of receiving good? Have I not trifled away the time of health, and strength, and the capacities of service, which God intrusted into my hands for a better purpose, and for which he will certainly bring me to an account? Have I *not withheld good from him to whom it was due, when it was in the power of my hands to give it?* Have I not been an easy prey to temptation, especially to *the sin that does most easily beset me?* Have I not offended against the rules of righteousness, of sobriety, or of godliness, and acted contrary to my duty, not only in my personal, but in my relative capacities? Now if, upon inquiry, we find ourselves guilty in any of

those particulars, as which of us shall not, then let us take notice of it and humble ourselves before God upon that especial account, earnestly begging the pardon of it. And though it be an offence which we have already confessed, and which we hope that God has already pardoned, let us pray that he will graciously confirm the pardon in that solemn ordinance for which we are now preparing.

2. We ought particularly to inquire into the mercies which we have received, that we may then return thanks for them. When the children of Israel came before the Lord in their solemn assemblies, he commanded them *to rejoice in the Lord their God*: and again, *thou shalt rejoice in thy feasts*<sup>2</sup>. And this is so plainly a feast of joy, that in the primitive church it was called Eucharist, i. e. the rejoicing or thanksgiving; and, in order to excite this holy joy, we should reflect upon the mercies of God to us. Temporal mercies should not be forgotten. That he has given to us our being, that he has bestowed upon us so many of his good creatures, that he has given to us food to eat, and raiment

<sup>2</sup> Deut xvi.  
11 -- 14.

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to put on; and, perhaps, not barely the necessaries, but the conveniencies and the ornaments of life: that he has preserved our life and our health; or, at least, has so far restored and raised us up, that we are capable of attending upon the solemn assemblies. We should bless God for the success which he has given to us in business; for any remarkable deliverance which he has wrought out for us; for the mercies which we enjoy in our families and in our friends, that their lives are preserved and made comfortable to them and to us; for the mercies which we receive as a people; for the benefits of civil government, the possession of our religion and liberties; for healthful, and peaceful and perhaps fruitful seasons: but especially we should be enlarged in our thanksgivings for spiritual mercies, for sending a Redeemer into an apostate and miserable world; that the glad tidings of the gospel have reached, and the victorious influences of his grace have inclined our hearts to accept of him; that he continues to us the opportunity of attending upon gospel ordinances, and particularly of coming again to the holy communion, thus to offer our sacrifice

of praise and thanksgiving. These things lie very open to our observation, and we need not bestow much thought in searching them out: but we should be more diligent in inquiring what particular temptations we have been enabled to resist, what duties we have performed, what opportunities God has given to us of doing or receiving good, and what improvements we have been making in holiness since the last sacramental attendance. And here the particulars which I mentioned under the former head may be of considerable use. For if we have not fallen into the commission of any wilful sins to make work for confession, then that preservation is new matter of thanksgiving to him who has upheld us by the influence of his grace, and by communicating those supplies of strength by which we continue unto this day.

3. We are further to examine what mercies we want, and which we should seek at the table of the Lord. In general, we should pray, if it be the will of God, for the continuance of all those mercies for which we come to return thanks, whether for our bodies, our souls, our friends, or the public. Now it is plain that

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this is a proper part of sacramental preparation: because when we are brought to the sacred banquet to partake of his love, and to devote ourselves to his service, we may offer our petitions with peculiar advantage; and, therefore, it is necessary, that, by such previous inquiry, we may know what we are to ask when the king holds forth his golden sceptre.

4. We are further to examine what resolutions we are to make in this ordinance. We do in general bind ourselves with an oath to a course of universal holiness; and, perhaps, it may sometimes be proper to enter into some particular engagements. But let us remember the advice of the wise man with relation to vows. *Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter*

<sup>3</sup> Eccles. v. *any thing before God*<sup>3</sup>. It is prudent to avoid all unnecessary obligations, to which the warmth of our zeal might sometimes transport us, and seriously to consider what it is we shall promise before God. Thus, my friends, let us employ ourselves in preparation for the ordinance which is now before us, in inquiring into the present state and con-

dition of our souls, what sins we are to lament, what mercies we are to acknowledge, what favours we are to receive, and what vows we are to record ; and let all this be done with a suitable affection. Do not let us think that it is enough to entertain a few transient thoughts upon these subjects ; but let us endeavour to impress them upon our minds. Let us think of our sins in all their aggravating circumstances, against whom they have been committed, the great and blessed God, infinitely the most venerable and the most amiable of beings : and before whom, before our Creator, before our benefactor, before his redeemed servants and devoted people ; and then let us reflect what the consequences might be : the eternal loss of all our abused enjoyments, the severest calamities of a mortal life, and the insupportable strokes of everlasting vengeance ; and, upon such reflections as these, let us with our whole souls abhor our sins and mourn over them, and throw ourselves at the feet of a compassionate Redeemer, entreating him in the most earnest and importunate manner, by the compassion of his heart, and

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by the blood of his cross, that he would take away our transgressions, and wash our hearts from wickedness, that we may be saved. Let us consider the number, and the variety, and the value of those mercies which we have received, and what infinite condescension it is in the great and blessed God to bestow them upon such unworthy, such provoking creatures; and then let our hearts be inflamed with love and gratitude, and let *all that is within us bless his holy name*. Let us reflect upon the importance of the blessings which we ask, and the goodness of that God at whose hands we seek them; and then let us draw near with strong desires and with raised expectations, that so far as those things are for our real advantage, our *hope shall not make us ashamed*, and God will not send us away from his presence disappointed and abashed. And lastly, let us willingly bind ourselves to the Lord with an oath. Do not let us start at the solemnity of the obligation, but let us heartily rejoice if any method can be found out that may retain these fickle inconstant hearts which are so ready to *forsake the guide of their youth*,



*and to forget the covenant of their God.* But in all let us remember that we are not to depend upon the depth of our repentance for the pardon of our sins, nor upon the sincerity of our prayers, nor the ardour of our praises for their acceptance with the Father, but upon the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, which must sprinkle both our persons and our services; and that it is not the strength of our own resolutions, but the communications of the divine grace which can enable us to conquer all opposition to persevere in a course of holiness, and can bring us safely to everlasting glory.

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## SERMON IX.

JUDAH REJOICING IN ITS COVENANT ENGAGEMENTS TO GOD.

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2 CHIRON. XV. 15.

*And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the Lord gave them rest round about.*

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To hear of a whole people joining to seek the Lord with *their whole desire*, and to enter into covenant with him with their whole heart, is surely as happy a piece of news as the history of most ages can furnish out. We may truly say of whomsoever it is spoken, *happy are the people that are in such a case, yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord*. Oh that it might be the happiness of our own country and of our own age! *then would our peace soon be as a river, and our salvation as the waves of the sea*. This remarkable occurrence, to which the words of the text refer<sup>1</sup>, happened in the reign of Asa, who, in the beginning and at the meridian of his reign,

<sup>1</sup>2 Chiron. xiv. 1—5.

was one of the bravest and most religious, as well as most successful princes which ever sat upon the throne of David, and succeeded him in the government of Judah. As God blessed him with ten years of peace in the beginning of his reign, he employed them in reforming the many abuses which had crept into Judah, and into Jerusalem itself, during the reign of the preceding princes; the sad consequence of that revolt of Solomon, which his intermediate successors, Rehoboam, the grandfather of Asa, and Abijah his father, wanted spirit and resolution to suppress and controul. After this, God suffered them to fall into an extreme danger, for Zerah the Ethiopian invaded them with a million of foot, besides a considerable force of chariots and horsemen. But God exerted his almighty power in the defence of his suffering people; and it is very observable that the sacred historian tells us that the Ethiopians were destroyed before the Lord: after which the army of Judah fell upon the Philistines, who seem to have assisted the invader; and as God struck them with a panic expressed by the remarkable phrase *of the fear of the Lord falling upon them*, so

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that those hostile cities became an easy spoil, it is natural to suppose that their hearts were deeply impressed with so sudden a transition from that extremity of danger, in which they acknowledged before the Lord that they had no power, but rested entirely upon his almighty arm. To this joy of complete victory, with which they were then crowned, was added exceeding much spoil, with which they were then returning to Jerusalem. Upon that it is said, *Zariah, the son of Oded, went out to meet them* under the inspiration of the Divine Spirit; and solemnly remonstrated with them on the necessity of a further reformation, not only in Judah and Jerusalem, but in those cities of the ten tribes which had lately fallen away to Asa, and where it might seem of greater importance to indulge their new subjects in their own ways, if carnal politics had been consulted on such an occasion. The remonstrance had its success: they solemnly assembled in the house of the Lord, and offered of the spoil seven hundred bullocks and seventy sheep; (which, whether they were all sacrificed on one day, or on succeeding days, we cannot certainly determine) and they added another sacrifice far

more valuable in the divine sight; for they were prevailed upon by the mercies of God, SERM.  
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*to present their bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, as their most reasonable service*<sup>2</sup>. For it is said, that *they entered into a covenant to seek Jehovah, the God of their fathers, with all their heart, and with all their soul, and swore unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouts, and with trumpets, and with cornets.* After which follow the words of my text, which in this connexion you will hear with increasing regard. *And all Judah rejoiced at the oath which they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire, and he was found of them: and the Lord gave them rest round about.* I might touch upon a great variety of particulars suggested in these words, which might afford matter of ample discourse if I had time to pursue them all. I might show you particularly,

<sup>2</sup> Rom.  
xii. 1.

1. How they had been awakened by the prophet to seek the Lord with humble and earnest prayer; to supplicate and entreat his favour *with all their desire* (i. e. with the greatest importunity), as those who plainly saw that it was the most desirable object in

SERM. IX. the whole compass of nature; as those that deeply felt it upon their hearts, that in *his favour is life, and that his lovingkindness is better than life*. And, indeed, this is the source of all true religion, *seeking the Lord*, not in that cold and indifferent manner in which men frequently pretend to it, but *with all our desire*. O may such desires after the Lord, after God in Christ, as our covenant God and Father, be excited in the breast of every one who hears me this day! *Then will he be found of you*, as he was of Israel. For still does he say, *If ye seek after me, ye shall find me, if ye seek me with all your heart*. I might also consider,

2. That circumstance in the story, that *they had found God*, which may probably refer to that great victory they had obtained, evidently by a divine interposition, when they had so solemnly cried unto the Lord, and said, *Lord, it is nothing to thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God! For we rest upon thee, and in thy name we go out against this great multitude! O Lord our God, let not man, mortal man, prevail against*

<sup>1</sup> 2 Chron. *thee*<sup>3</sup>! or, perhaps, this refers to the temper  
xiv. 11.

of mind which they had experienced in the solemn transaction which had just been recounted, and may signify how acceptable their prayers were to God. And blessed be his name that such prayers, through the intercession of the great Redeemer, will ever be so. Yes, my brethren, you may seek other things in vain; but if you seek God with all your desire, you shall not be disappointed, till his Son has lost all his interest with him, or forgotten that he ever said, *Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

3. Their solemn oath, by which they had bound their souls to the Lord, would also suggest matter of very profitable discourse; which might lead me to consider how proper it is that such treacherous and inconstant hearts as ours should sometimes be bound with peculiar solemnity to the divine service; and consider it likewise as the transaction of the nation and people. I might consider how far public associations may sometimes be added to private engagements in the services of religion: but this would lead me farther from what I now peculiarly intend,

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But the greater part of what I have further to say will turn,

4. Upon the circumstances of their reflecting upon this solemn engagement. Far from repenting, they rejoiced at the oath. They entered into it with circumstances of high festivity: they *swore with a loud voice; and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets.* When their pious sovereign proposed it, they did not only bow down their heads in token of approbation, or lift up their hands to the Lord, which yet they probably did: but they broke out into peals of shouting; and probably made it their request to those who had the direction of the temple music (to which it is more than possible the military might also be joined on this occasion) that there should be some extraordinary symphony played to add new gladness to their hearts, new vigour and spirit to their resolution; and to speak their joyful assent so loudly, that not only all the mountains about Jerusalem, but even the heavens themselves should ring, and the angelic army should, as it were, be invited to join in



bearing their part in this mighty chorus; rejoicing *over* Judah, and rejoicing *with* them: and then follows, SERM.  
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5. That agreeable circumstance with which my text concludes, *that the Lord gave them rest round about*. He defended them from the vexations of future invasion: neither the Ethiopians, nor the Philistines, nor any of the neighbouring nations, who might have taken umbrage at their late success, gave them any molestation; for God secretly influenced their hearts, either on principles of friendship or of fear, to lie still and be quiet. And thus Judah had leisure to perform its vow, and to accomplish the reformation which it had undertaken; and it enjoyed the happy consequences of its right conduct, *sitting every one under his own vine and fig-tree*, having none to make them afraid; and, at the return of their solemn feasts, going up to the house of the Lord, there to renew their vows and their joy. And, oh! that there ever had been such a heart in them *to fear the Lord, and to serve him, and to keep his covenant*. Then had we never heard the sad story of the Assyrian, the Chaldean, and the Roman triumphs. All, who had confederated them-

SERM. IX. selves together, had been broken to pieces, *for God had still been with them*<sup>4</sup>: and when *the Lord, whom they sought, had come into his temple, even the messenger of that better covenant, he had been owned and received.* The gracious Lord had ever been unto them as *a place of broad rivers and streams*; nor would the most distant generations have heard of the overspreading of abominations to make the destruction of the city and the sanctuary, and *the end thereof with a flood.* But, blessed be God! though the scene be so sadly changed, though this covenant was broken, and God made them to know the breach of it; though the flames kindled by Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city and the temple, now the scene of so holy and joyful a solemnity; though Judah was carried captive to Babylon; and, when restored again, sinned more grievously than before, till wrath came upon them to the uttermost, when they had rejected and cut off their own Messiah; yet he *confirmed the covenant with many*, not only of the Jews, but of the Gentile nations. For God *gave him to be a covenant to the people, a leader and commander to the people*; and this covenant is still proclaimed among

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah  
xxiii. 21.

us; and to this day we hear him saying, *Incline your ears and come unto me, &c.*; nor have we all heard it in vain. There are those who have joined in it; and whose cause of rejoicing is, as I might easily show you by running the parallel, not inferior to that of Judah here spoken of; yea, rather infinitely superior to it: and this is the agreeable part of the subject which is to employ the remainder of my discourse. And they who *have sought the Lord with all their heart, and have found him*, have reason to rejoice in the oath, with which they have bound their souls to him; have reason to reflect upon former engagements with pleasure, and to renew them with delight. A proposition, indeed, so obvious that, were nothing needed but the conviction of the understanding, it might almost be left to speak for itself, as a self-evident truth: for what can be more evident to all those who know what we mean by that important word *God*, and by the *covenant* to which we here refer; the covenant which so many of us this day came up to the house of the Lord to seal? But that I may, if possible, invite others to join with us in such engagements; and that I may tune your hearts and

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my own, under the influence of Divine grace, to that sacred joy which becomes us on so happy an occasion, give me leave a little more particularly to illustrate this matter, and to show you what cause of joy those have who *have sworn to the Lord with all their heart*. And now I would observe that they are freed from the misery of those who neglect religion, and the perplexity of those who are undetermined about it. They may look back upon it with pleasure as the gracious interposition of God: they may be encouraged to hope that they shall be kept in a faithful adherence to him, notwithstanding all the opposition which may lie in their way. They may comfort themselves with the thoughts of a friend and a helper in every future circumstance of life; and they may extend their prospect wide into eternity, and find nothing to fear, but every thing to hope. And really, if such considerations be not matter of joy, no thought is so which can enter into the human heart.

1. It is matter of joy that we are freed from the misery of those who neglect religion, and from the perplexity of those who are undetermined about it. *They that are far from*

*God shall perish* ; and those who continue at a distance from him can, I believe, seldom avoid some agony of heart in the demonstration of his being, which everywhere surrounds them ; and in the sad forebodings of his displeasure, which the gospel so audibly proclaims. And while the soul is, as the scripture expresses it, *halting between two opinions*, irresolute in its determination for God or idols, it is painfully dragged, as it were, different ways at the same time ; and can neither enjoy the pleasures of religion, to which it has not cordially consented, nor the delights of sense, to which it dares not wholly surrender itself. It may be that the impressions of one sabbath wear off before the middle of the week ; and gay company, and a variety of fleeting trifles, bear away the mind into a flattering delirium : but the sabbath returns, and the alarm is renewed, and the voice of God and of conscience will be heard, and will make the soul tremble again : and in this divided state it fears either to reject or to obey the call. But when this struggle is over, and the choice is determined, there is a secret peace, a calm and a serenity that diffuses itself over the soul, only to be known by ex-

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perience. “ Lord ! I yield : thou hast overcome me ; overcome me not by thy power alone, but by thy love. I will, by thy grace, be entirely thine. I will give to thee all my heart : too little, indeed, and too mean to receive such a guest ; but thou wilt condescend to enter into it, and I hope that thou wilt make it fitter for thyself. At least, on this I am determined ; I will continue to pursue thee with my humble entreaties that thou wilt take up thy residence in my soul, and wilt confirm my resolution of being entirely and eternally thine.”

2. The soul, having bound itself with this oath to the Lord, may look back with pleasure on God’s gracious interposition, as David did : *The Lord is my portion ; I will bless the Lord, who has given me counsel.* “ Lord ! I do now feel this happy resolution springing up in my mind. I feel the efficacy of that persuasion, which I have, concerning thine infinite perfections and excellences, determining my soul to prefer thee to every thing else. And why is this but because thou the God of glory hast appeared to me ? Thou hast turned away my eyes from beholding vanity : thou hast called, and I have

obeyed. Thou hast caused me to feel and to confess the energy of thine own Divine voice, else the most eloquent of thy servants had pleaded in vain. And, oh! how happy is it, how delightful to reflect, that God should make, as it were, a business of it; should project a scheme; should take a long series of gracious and condescending steps to subdue this heart of mine; to call me off from vanity, and sin, and ruin, to himself. My soul! who, and what art thou, that thou shouldst thus be the care of heaven; and that God should follow me with one gracious call and expostulation after another, and when my folly and perverseness rose so high, should never rest till he had carried the cause, almost as it were, in spite of myself? Rejoice, O my soul! in this condescending goodness, while thou art grieved and humbled in the dust that thou hast exercised it so long, that thou hast abused it so much. I will not insist on the pleasure which the pious soul, in these circumstances, may have in looking inward upon particular interpositions of Providence which have been subservient to such blessed purposes: the place in which we were born, the friends among whom we were fixed, the

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ordinances which we have attended ; perhaps the violent afflictions which we have borne, by which our hearts were indeed cut and torn, yet thereby opened, as the furrows of the field, to admit the seeds of immortal life and joy.

3. The soul, when thus binding itself to the Lord, may reflect with pleasure on its encouragement to hope that it shall be kept in a faithful adherence to him, notwithstanding all the obstruction which may lie in its way. *Being confident*, says the apostle, *of this very thing, that he that has begun a good work in us will carry it on until the day of the*

<sup>s</sup> Phil. i. 6. *Lord*<sup>5</sup>. “O my God!” will the Christian sometimes say, in such a circumstance as this, “were I to confine all my views to my difficulties and my enemies, in comparison with my own weakness, I should presently despair. I should wish that I had never known this bond, pleasant as the engagement has been, as it would surely be better never to have known the way of truth than, having known it, to turn aside from the holy commandment. But thy grace is sufficient for me. Thou hast not surely, O my God! thou hast not brought me thus far to leave



me finally to perish. Nor wouldest thou have shown me such things, hadst thou been determined to destroy me. O my God! thou hast brought me near by the blood of thy Son, even me who was once so far off. And wilt thou lose the purchase of that blood? Hast thou not pointed out him *as the Shepherd of my soul*, and given it in charge to him to say, and he has said it, *I will give unto my sheep eternal life, &c.* Blessed Jesus! which way should I be in thine hand if not in that which I have taken? Thou knowest that I have solemnly consigned over my soul to thee: I have done it again and again: I am doing it daily. My Lord! thou knowest that it is in my heart to *die rather than deny thee*; to pour out my blood rather than let go my hold on thee. Thou knowest that thy love, thy word, is sacred to my soul, and that I long to bear thine image. Thou knowest that there is not a blessing in thy covenant which I would not embrace, not a bond of it into which I would not joyfully enter my soul: yea, I have done it. Thou hast then surely taken the care of me, and in that care I am secure. Thy grace will keep my soul fixed on thee as its centre, so that I shall not

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rove to my destruction ; shall not so wander from thee, as to lose sight of thee entirely, and to overtake thee no more : and, oh ! that I might never wander from thee ! Thy grace will perform what it has begun ; thou wilt strengthen me for duties and difficulties ; and, if any temptations arise which seem beyond human strength, thou *wilt make a way for my escape*, that I may be able to bear them : yea, may I not presume to hope that thou wilt send forth more and more of thy light and of thy truth ? May I not presume to hope that thou wilt make my path *like the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day ?*”

4. The soul may rejoice as comforting itself in the thoughts of a friend and a helper in every imaginable circumstance of life. The bonds of human friendship are very uncertain. Absence may loosen them : distastes, sometimes unaccountably taken, may quite untie them ; or the stroke of death may cut them asunder at once ; and growing years may teach what unexperienced youth is so unwilling to believe, with regard to the vanity of those dearest enjoyments of earth, and of all our other sublunary expectations. “ What

a pleasure then to think that though *father and mother may forsake me, lovers and friends* may be put far from me, and my acquaintance may be thrown into darkness; or *may stand afar off*, by an unkindness, perhaps, worse than *their* death, or than my own; but thou, my God, wilt never be afar off. In every unknown contingency of life thy counsel shall guide me, thy smiles shall cheer me, thy hand shall support me. In trouble thou wilt be near: in worldly disappointments thy liberal hand shall provide me with all necessary good. In sickness thou shalt hold my fainting head, and whisper sweet peace and consolation to my soul; thou shalt cheer me even by the death of my dearest friends, while thou lettest more of thy own sweetness into my heart through the wound made in it by rooting them out. Oh! how do I rejoice that nothing can separate me from thee! In all my removes from place to place, in all my uncertainties; in hours of solitude, and in hours of distress, varied as that distress may be, what canst thou do, yea, what canst thou not do, for my soul? To thee none can misrepresent me; from thee none can divide me. Thou wilt visit my soul; thou wilt say

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unto it, *I am thy salvation*. Were all the world set upon stripping me, how little could they take away! Were all the world set upon afflicting, and tormenting me, how impotent would the attempt be! how little a while could its effects last! Yea, amidst all its seeming triumph, how little could it do if thou, O my Father and my God! wert determined to support me, determined to delight me.

5. Those that have *sworn to the Lord with all their heart* may extend their prospect widely into eternity, and find nothing to fear, but every thing to hope. This is the great comfort of comforts: *With thee, O Lord, is the fountain of life; in thy light we shall see light*. The soul, seeing the hour of dissolution near at hand, yet conscious to itself of immortal duration, does often, as it were, cry out, Give me a support in death; give me a happiness adequate to my nature, a happiness that will run through millions of ages unimpaired, and will, like my own existence, seem to be but begun. My soul! it is here. Shall I say that thou hast it safely lodged in thine arm? No, thou art thyself lodged, safely lodged, in his *everlasting arms*, and underneath thee is the eternal God for thy refuge. Dost thou

not know that word, *I will be a God unto them, and they shall be my people?* This is the covenant which thou hast sealed: the latter is a language of thine own, and the former the counterpart of it, *I will be thy God*, i. e. I will be thy eternal portion; else, as the apostle argues, *he would be ashamed to be called thy God; for he is not the God of the dead, but of the living*: not the God of any who shall be left to die and perish at last. He is thy God. Let death come, and take away every thing else, it cannot take away thy God: he will not then be afar off. Know then that thou dost argue his immediate presence with thee, and his agency upon thee, as much as that thou livest. It is an act by which he bears thee away from this vain world, and takes thee to himself. As if his love could no longer endure that thou shouldst, as it were, seem to thyself ever to be at a distance from him. Can he fail of any angelic guide through the unknown regions of the invisible world, who has the Lord of angels for his God and Father? Be not anxious about it, O my soul! He shall show me in his own method; shall show me the path of life, and conduct me to his pre-

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*sence, where there is fulness of joy; and to his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.* There is a judgment day approaching, and it will be a day of unutterable terror; a day of calling to the mountains, of crying to the hills; but it shall not terrify me: for he will say, *Gather my saints unto me, even they that have made a covenant with me* by sacrifice. Then will he remember that solemn engagement which I this day seal with the great, the worthy, the eternal Judge; will remember how I have this day fled to his cross; how I have this day put myself under the protection of his blood, and entered myself into the bonds of his covenant. Welcome then, ye dear pledges of this everlasting covenant, of this covenant engagement! O Lord! I have sought thee with my whole desire, and thou art found of me; and I rejoice that I can swear unto thee with all my heart. And now for the improvement of all. Will not what I have already been saying be sufficient to induce us to seek the Lord, and to enter into his covenant? *Consider this, you who forget God.* Behold the secret workings of the sanctified heart, as I have this day been laying them open; and let

your consciences witness whether they must not be attended with Divine pleasure. Oh! how much better to have this *anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast*, than to be tossed amidst so many vanities as those which agitate you from day to day. What shall I say? Let the word of God, Oh! may the Spirit of God, speak it in one word, *Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near*. Oh! that, as all Judah entered into the oath, every soul that hears me this day might be engaged to humble obedience. And, to conclude, let me invite all those of you, who seek the Lord, to enter into his covenant solemnly, and to lay a foundation for the joy which I have been describing, by submitting to him with all your heart. I wish every soul in this assembly to know by experience the satisfaction which I have described; to know more of it than I can describe; yea, more of it than I have ever felt, though I hope that I have spoken from the inward experience of my heart. I wish you to know it on such days as these, to know it on every day of your lives, and to know it on your dying bed; to know the sweet

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support which a soul, upon the borders of eternity, has in reflecting, “Well, I shall go to the table of the Lord no more; but I have been there; I have been there in earnest; my vows are recorded in heaven, and they have been written on my heart. And now, O my God! thou wilt remember thy covenant, wilt remember the soul which has been so solemnly lodged with thee, as the purchase of the blood of Jesus.” In the mean time let us go to the table; and may we be prepared there by songs for our joy. God only knows whether I may ever have an opportunity of renewing the occasion to some who hear me on this day: but, however that may be, I affectionately entreat you, and I solemnly charge you, as you desire to know what true joy and happiness are, that you make your choice of God as determinate as possible, and that you take the first opportunity which his providence gives to you of sealing your vows and oath at his table, when you can once feel in your own heart that you seek God with all your desire, and that you are willing to swear allegiance to him with all your heart. And, to conclude all, let as



many of us as are going this day to the table of the Lord endeavour to make our approach with that hearty gratitude which becomes such a solemnity ; and, as a hymn attended the first institution of the ordinance, as was suited to so high and sacred a festival, let us now sing unto the Lord, let us sing praise. Let us endeavour to shake off every gloomy and uncomfortable thought ; every solicitous painful care. While we rest our souls, let us praise God ; and, while we pour them forth before him in the language of the most cheerful thanksgivings, Oh ! may he inspire our hearts with devout affections, that he may rejoice over us while our souls are thus rejoicing in him.

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## SERMON X.

GOD'S JUST RESENTMENTS OF THE SLIGHTS  
PUT UPON HIM BY A PROFESSING  
PEOPLE.

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ZECH. xi. 12, 13.

*And I said unto them, if ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver: and the Lord said unto me, cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.*

SERM. X. As the sense of this context is very difficult, and very important; and as the propriety of that improvement, which I shall make of the verses which I have been reading, will depend upon fixing their meaning aright, I hope that you will excuse me, if I am something larger than ordinary in opening it to you, and in endeavouring to illustrate it perspicuously to your minds. You will observe therefore, that as the prophet Zechariah, who wrote after the children of Israel were returned from the Babylonish captivity, was one of the last in-

spired penmen of the Old Testament, the blessed God was pleased to exhibit to him some visionary representation of the then present state of Israel, and of the manner in which he intended to deal with his people, whether in the way of mercy, or of judgment: and I apprehend that the portion of the prophecy, before us, is an account, not of a real fact, but merely of a phantasm presented to the prophet's mental eye. Such, as I might show you at large, were several other sections of the prophetic books; and particularly, that where Jeremiah hid his girdle beside the Euphrates; and that, in which Isaiah<sup>1</sup> walked naked for several days; and that, in which Hosea took to himself a wife of whoredom, and had children by her. It is generally allowed a very good rule of interpretation, that where we read of any thing done by the prophet, which seems in the nature of things morally impracticable, we should suppose that it passed in vision only, and not in reality; and I believe, that when you have looked over this paragraph, you will see that it is most easy and natural, though it may not be absolutely necessary, to interpret it

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah  
xx. 2.

SERM. X. thus. In the fourth verse God commanded Zechariah that he should feed *the flock of the slaughter*; that is, a flock which should represent a people that had suffered great slaughters and desolation already, and that was to expect yet more and greater; a flock concerning which God declares, that as they had *been sold and slain by their owner*, which may either refer to what they had suffered by their own prince before the captivity, whose wickedness had been so great a snare and plague to the people; or, as the past is often used in scripture to express the future, may refer to the destructive wars which were afterwards excited by the ambition of some of their princes; and particularly those of the Asmonean family, who so evidently aimed at enriching and aggrandizing themselves, though at the expense of the public; which suffered exceedingly in their civil broils, as they introduced among them the Roman power, into whose hands the whole country was afterwards delivered; as it is expressed in those remarkable words, verses 5, 6: Yet for the sake of a little remnant among them of a better temper and character,

called here *the poor of the flock*, God declared his purpose of continuing to take a pastoral care of them. Verse 7, *And I feed*, or as I would rather render it, nevertheless I will feed *the flock of the slaughter*, &c. Accordingly, says the prophet, *I took unto me two staves*, i. e. two shepherd staves or crooks; for you well know that the staff was a pastoral instrument: as in that beautiful pastoral, Ps. xxiii. David says, *thy rod and thy staff comfort me*: and such, by the way, the rod of Moses seems to have been; a sort of a long pole, which he carried in his hand when feeding his sheep. And perhaps in allusion to this, and to express their office as shepherds of the people, sceptres or staves of the same form, were borne by the heads of tribes and other magistrates. Of these staves he called one *beauty*, and the other *bands*, to signify that beautiful order, and that firm union; and consequently, that strength, in which they would be kept, if they submitted themselves to the divine government, and behaved as became the sheep of God's pasture. Thus the servant, and in this respect the representative of the blessed God, seemed to feed the flock for awhile; and in a little

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space, i. e. the term of one month, he discarded three under shepherds, which signifies the change that should happen in their government during the period while God continued their God; i. e. between the present time and that of Christ's appearance, in which, as it is well known, their civil policy was much changed, and many strange revolutions happened in their state. But the consequence of all was a mutual alienation of affection between them and their shepherd: *My soul loathed them, and their soul abhorred me*; we grew weary of one another. They were uneasy under my government when I presided over them; and I am growing weary of the care and administration of so ungrateful a people. And upon that, says the prophet, *I broke one of my rods or staves, even beauty*; as a token that God would withdraw his care in a great measure from them, and leave their beauty and their glory to be very much impaired. It was broken in that day; *and the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the Lord*: i. e. the remnant of good men, observing the providence that thus disjointed and weakened them, they took notice of the hand of

God in it, and of its correspondence to prophetic declarations: and then come in the words of the text: *And I said unto them, i. e. to the people, if you think good, give me my price, and if not, forbear.* I seemed to myself in this prophetic vision, to ask of the people, i. e. probably their governors and representatives, what they thought I deserved for this good office which I did them as their shepherd; and they weighed out, i. e. they paid (for when money among the Jews was paid, it was usual to weigh it), they weighed out, or delivered to me for my price, thirty pieces of silver. Now you know that this was but a very small price. Supposing the pieces to be, as probably they were, shekels, and each shekel to be about two shillings and sixpence, they amounted to but three pounds fifteen shillings of our money, which was just the price which was to be paid as a fine, if a slave had been killed by an ox that had been used to gore<sup>2</sup>; and this was the price which they seemed in vision to set on the worth of the prophet's pastoral care. And these pieces of silver seemed to have been paid in the house of the Lord, where their senate met, consisting partly of the leading priests,

<sup>2</sup> Exod.  
xxi. 32.

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and partly of the most considerable of their nobles of other families. This God is represented as very justly resenting as an affront to himself; that his servant, who, as we shall afterwards observe, was there in a remarkable type of his son and of himself, should be estimated at the price of a poor slave; and therefore he says, *cast it to the potter*, throw it to the first poor working man whom you find, the potter at work at the temple gate; a fitter reward for him than for me, this *goodly price that I was prized at of them*; this worthy return which they make to my servant, my under shepherd: and accordingly, says the prophet, *I took my other staff, even bands, and cut them asunder, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel*; i. e. I then destroyed all their mutual union, and gave them up to quarrels and dissensions; which, as you know, at last, proved their utter ruin by the Romans, when they fell under the administration of those who were infatuated by God to their destruction; and to represent whom the prophet was directed to take the instruments of a foolish shepherd, i. e. instruments ill made, unfit for use, and such as none but an idiot



would think of taking. And the chapter ends with a *demonstration* of divine judgments against these shepherds and their flock; judgments which were accordingly executed in the utter destruction of their princes, priests, and people, by the Romans; when their city was taken, their government utterly broken in pieces, their temple burnt, and several of the priests, who survived it, put to the sword by the express command of Titus, though one of the most merciful princes in the world. This, surely, was a most sensible accomplishment of the concluding words; *Woe to the idol shepherd*, the wretch that is no more than the image of a shepherd; while he pretends to bear the office, *he deserts the flock, and throws off the care of them. The sword shall be upon his right arm and his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his eyes shall be utter darkness.* God shall smite the arm which had been folded, while it should have been stretched out in guiding the flock; and the eye, which has been sealed in sleep, or roving, when it should have been watching over them; or rather which has been upon the flock for evil, as had been represented in the preceding verses.

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This seems to be the general sense of this remarkable context; that God would for awhile continue to be the shepherd of Israel; but that, for the repeated affronts and contempt which he saw that they would cast upon him, he would in righteous displeasure, at length, give them up to the conduct of wicked men, both in church and state, till governors and governed should be destroyed. With this general interpretation of it, you will see how remarkably this prediction was fulfilled, in the base treatment which our Lord Jesus Christ experienced from them; to which these words of Zechariah (though our copy reads Jeremiah) are applied by the evangelist Matthew: *And they took, or as I would rather render ἐλαβον, I took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of one who was sold; of one whom the children of Israel sold, as it is well known the word τιμάω also signifies; and they were given for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.* I have elsewhere endeavoured to account for the little variation occurring in the manner of quoting them, which is according to the general sense, rather than exactly according to the words, either of the Hebrew, or of the LXX. But the general reason

of the application of them was very evident. SERM.  
When the Lord Jesus Christ, the great X.  
shepherd of Israel, was bought at the price of a common slave, even for this very price of thirty pieces of silver, there was the most literal accomplishment of this prophecy that could be imagined. Any attempt put upon Christ in this view would have been some degree of accomplishment of it, had the price they paid for his head been three hundred or three thousand shekels, but much more remarkable when it was exactly thirty: and it was further a circumstance worth remarking, that as the prophet had by divine direction thrown this money to the potter's gate, so that very money, being returned by the traitor who had received it, should be given to purchase that which was called the potter's field; probably because it used to be the place where that potter worked, to whom Zechariah thought in vision that he gave this money; or possibly, because it might have been the property of a potter. Having thus endeavoured to illustrate the true meaning of this text, and to show you with how much justice it is applied by the evangelist to that great event in which it was most ex-

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pressly accomplished, I shall now come to consider it in that practical view in which it first occurred to my thoughts. You see, that the blessed God here represents the slights which should be put upon him by his professing people, and then speaks of it with a just indignation, as that which highly provoked him, and on account of which he would withdraw his protection from them, and give them up to dissension and ruin. The *Lord said, cast it, &c.*: and accordingly I would remark, that the blessed God observes, with just displeasure, the slights which are put upon him by his professing people, and by those for whom he is performing the office of a watchful and a kind shepherd. And here I will,

I. Consider some of the remarkable instances in which the blessed God is slighted by a professing people. I will,

II. Show you how certain it is that he must take notice of it with just resentment. I will demonstrate,

III. What we may reasonably expect as the effect of that displeasure; and then I will conclude with hinting at a reflection or two. But having been so large in opening

the context, you will easily perceive that I have left myself very little time for the discussion of these more obvious, yet very important particulars.

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I. I will consider some of the most remarkable instances, in which the blessed God is slighted by a professing people. Now he is plainly slighted and despised by all the contempt that is thrown on his ordinances, his servants, his laws, and his Son.

1. The blessed God is despised and affronted in all the contempt which is cast upon his ordinances. It is a very high favour which he does to us in establishing ordinances; and our souls might be humbled in the dust, that he should have appointed solemn seasons and solemn meetings, in which such poor sinners, as we know ourselves to be, should come to him, and present our petitions, and hear the instructions of his word. A prince that would receive a petition from the hands of the poorest of the people, how condescending would he seem! How glad would the poor, necessitous, oppressed creatures be to have such a privilege. We have an infinitely greater privilege on every day, and especially on every sabbath; and shall

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we slight it? Shall we neither speak to the blessed God, nor come to hear from him? What is that but virtually declaring that we have nothing to say to him, and that we do not desire to know what he has to say to us: and is not this an insolent affront? *Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; thou hast been weary of me, O Israel*<sup>3</sup>. It is in effect, saying to God, *depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways*: and you know that is spoken of as a most audacious affront, and given as the character of some of the worst of men. A conduct on which Job makes this lively reflection, *Lo, their good is not in their hands: the counsel of the wicked is far from me*<sup>4</sup>; far be it from me to be guilty of such madness, when it is certain that the proudest sinner has no good in his hand which he can call his own, and is likely every moment to be stripped of what he seemeth to have by that God whom he thus despises and neglects.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah  
xliii. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Job xxi.  
16.

2. The blessed God is affronted by his professing people when his ministers are despised, and set light by. This was particularly the case as represented in this prophetic vision; and, therefore, is very proper to mention here. You know that they are

spoken of as *men of God*, as *ambassadors from him*; and, therefore, it might very reasonably be expected that, amidst all their acknowledged and lamented imperfection, yet, for his sake whose name they bear, whose person they represent, to whose service they are especially devoted, they should be kindly regarded; yea, that they should *be esteemed in love for their work's sake*: and so they are by those who are indeed of the flock of God. When they are injured, the insult rises much higher than its immediate objects; *He that despises you*, says Christ, *despises me*: and upon that the apostle ventures to say, *He that despises, despises not men, but God*. It is, therefore, an argument of very great profaneness, when ministers, as ministers, are treated with contempt. A wicked minister indeed is worthy of contempt, as being a wicked man, and that under peculiar advantages of goodness, and peculiar obligations to it; and therefore we find the prophet who spoke lies is represented as the meanest of all sinful wretches in a very sinful people: *The prophet that speaks lies, he is the tale*. But if some deceive themselves, and make themselves vile, others who behave worthy

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, 16.

3. The blessed God is affronted when his laws are violated. What can be a greater affront than to trample upon the authority of the Supreme Legislator? When he has not only intimated his will, but declared it, every instance of wilful transgression is, as it were, treason against his crown and dignity. And so it is interpreted, *Wherefore do the wicked contemn God*<sup>6</sup>? Every act of sin is a practical blasphemy, either of his infinite knowledge, as if he did not see what was done, or of his unspotted holiness, as if he were not displeased, though he sees it; or of his almighty power, as if he were not able to make his creatures to see and to feel any sad

<sup>6</sup> Ps. x. 13.



consequences of his displeasure. And all this being under a revelation, in which *his wrath is declared from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men*, it is an additional affront to his veracity, and to his wisdom too, as if he would not execute his threatenings, and had intended them only to give a vain alarm; yea, and left them in the power of those, to whom he addresses them, by their sagacity and penetration, to find that there was nothing dreadful in them. Now is not this audacious conduct, especially, as I said, in a professing people; in a people who pretend to believe in him, and to do him homage? He speaks of that homage with a just contempt, when obedience and a holy life did not witness its reality: *This people draw near to me with their mouth, &c. but they have removed their heart far from me; surely in vain do they worship me*<sup>7</sup>: intimating that *he who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination*<sup>8</sup>, instead of an acceptable homage. And, to complete all,

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<sup>7</sup> Isaiah  
xxix. 13.  
Matt. xv.

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs  
xxviii. 9.

4. The blessed God is affronted by a professing people, when his Son is neglected and rejected: and this is the affront which, if persevered in, he will never forgive; but he

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seals up the offender in wrath and vengeance irrecoverable and everlasting. You know that it is spoken of in the parable as the last effort of the injured goodness of the husbandman, that last of all he sent his own son: *and he said, they will reverence my son*; especially such a son, sent in such a manner, and for such purposes! one would think that it should at once awe and melt every heart. Lord! didst thou send thy only begotten and beloved Son, *the brightness of thy glory*, to come into this world, to live, and to die, for such poor sinners as I am: by his authority to bind, by his love to constrain me to obey; and shall I reject him? It is, as you know, called *trampling under foot the blood of the Son of God*; and will that be a little thing? *Of how much sorer vengeance*, says the apostle, *do you suppose such shall be thought worthy?* Think of the vengeance due to the violation of Moses's law, and compare it with this, and you will find no proportion: I appeal to your own consciences. *He that despises me*, says our Lord, *despises him who sent me*; and *take heed that ye despise not him that spoke from heaven*. For a sinner practically to say, I will not have the righte-

ousness of Christ to justify me ; I will appear before God in my own righteousness : I will not have the grace of Christ to renew and sanctify me ; I will go on as I am : I will not have the Son of God to rule over me ; I will do my own pleasure ! I leave it to you to think if it be not a most daring affront, if it be not worthy of the severest displeasure. But I proceed very briefly to show you,

II. How certain it is that the blessed God will take notice of all these affronts with just resentment : and here I would only observe that God cannot but see every instance of this kind ; and that he has a full view of all its aggravations.

1. He cannot but see every instance of this kind. For you well know that *his eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good* ; that all the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and *he pondereth all his goings* ; that he takes as exact a view of every man's conduct, of his temper, of his words, and of his thoughts, as if that one creature were all that he had to observe. The eye of a minister is soon lost in a large congregation : this and that person may neg-

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lect Divine worship, and he not so much as know it; or, if he observe, he may not be able to judge of the reason of it: but God sees and knows all; marks the absence, and the cause of the absence. His eye likewise penetrates our secret retirement, and sees the slight which we there put upon him by a neglect of duty; or by the trifling and irreverent performance of it. He hears every disrespectful word spoken of his servants, though ever so secretly; as he elsewhere expresses it, before the wall and in the doors of the house. He is witness to all the violation of his laws, in thought and word, as well as in deed: and he knows the secret contempt of Christ which is rising in the heart of the sinner, though he dare not vent it in words; sees the secret disgust, it may be, to the very name of a Saviour, though that name be as ointment poured out. Thus God sees in every instance, and knows how long these things have continued. And I must add too,

2. He has a full view of all the aggravating circumstances which attend the slights that we have put upon him. You know that any affront offered to a superior is to be estimated by the dignity of the person, and the oppor-

tunity which we have had of knowing him. Now God, and indeed God alone, sees and knows his own infinite dignity and majesty, perfection and glory. He alone, likewise, sees and knows all the opportunities which we have had of being acquainted with this glory, and of fixing it upon our own minds. He not only sees what we do know of him, but what we might have known. He knows all the messengers whom he has sent to us, and every message that each of them delivered through succeeding sabbaths and succeeding years: and I must further observe, that he also most distinctly knows for what trifle it is that he is slighted; he knows how much less the consideration often is than thirty pieces of silver, for which his worship is neglected, his laws violated, and his gospel despised. And it is observable that he mentions this with just resentment and indignation, that he had been offended on such trifling considerations: *My people have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, for broken cisterns, &c.:* and *they moved me to jealousy with that which is not good; they have provoked me with their vanity*<sup>9</sup>. No words can express, no thoughts can imagine, the mean and contemptible view in which such con-

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<sup>9</sup> Deut.  
xxxii. 21.

SERM. duct as this must appear in the eyes of the  
 X. blessed God; even *this goodly price at which*  
*he is valued*, when in a hundred and a thousand instances his professing people sacrifice his favour for that for which they would hardly displease a stranger, and much less any valuable friend; as if his friendship were of all things in the world least to be valued, his displeasure least to be apprehended. And he knows that sometimes the apprehension which they have of his great goodness, which ought to engage the greatest reverence, and the tenderest care to avoid every thing offensive, is made the consideration to embolden them to affront him. Of all this he has a distinct view; and, therefore, he must be highly displeased with it. Let me briefly remind you,

III. Of what may reasonably be expected as the effect of this righteous displeasure. And what indeed may we not expect, when we consider his almighty power, in connexion with that perfect view of the case which we have already represented, and with that strict holiness which must render all these offenders abominable to him; what are such to expect but that he should withdraw the tokens of

his despised care, and leave us to utter rejection and reprobation?

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1. Sinners may expect that he should withdraw the abused tokens of his despised care. Where this is the case with any considerable number of men, he may disown the pastoral relation in which he has stood to them: he may say unto them, *Loammi, you are not my people, neither am I your God: I will take no further notice of you. You have neglected my ordinances, and my ordinances shall be withdrawn from you. You have despised my ministers, and your teachers shall be driven into corners. You have trampled on my law, and you shall hear no more of it. You have slighted the grace of my Son, and you shall be importuned no longer with it. How much reason have we to fear that it should come to this, with a nation that has so evidently made light of God as we have done! that the gospel should be lost, or all its power and purity; so that nothing but a dead disguised carcass of Christianity should be left, hardly to be distinguished from heathen superstition! for that is apparently the case in the papal church; and it might justly be our case. God might send us to see what he did to Shiloh, the*

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place which was called by his name, and declare that he would do so with us. The Lord Jesus Christ might send us to see what he did to Ephesus, when he removed the candlestick out of its place; to Pergamos, when he fought against them with the sword of his mouth; to Laodicea, whom he threw up with loathing, after he had long been standing at the door, and knocking for admission. He might break the pastoral rods, *beauty and bands*, destroy all the comely order of his sanctuary, all the bonds that join us together, whether civil or sacred, and give us up to a discord that should end in ruin, and the dissolution of the *house and kingdom divided against itself*. Yea, it is assuredly to be expected by every one that goes on to despise him,

2. That he will finally leave such in a state of rejection and reprobation. It is undeniably certain that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*; and it is as certain that a supreme love to God, founded on the highest esteem for him, and a most earnest desire of his favour, is an essential principle of holiness. And if, after all that you have heard of your obligations to God, and all the tokens of his care which you have enjoyed here, you go on



finally to slight and to despise him, the wrath of the Lord will arise, and there will be no remedy. He will disown you, and will have no more to do with you. You will be left on your dying beds without any support; either terrified, as many are, with the view of approaching damnation; or hardened, even whilst you stand on the very brink of ruin. When death has done its dreadful work, the blessed God will take no favourable notice of such souls; will not command his angels to receive and to guard them; but will leave them to be seized by the malignant spirits of hell, as helpless sheep assailed by so many devouring lions, and looking in vain towards the fold from which they have wandered, and wishing in vain for the shepherd which they have forsaken. In the great day, when before him shall be gathered all nations, such wretches will be separated from the flock of God, and placed among the goats on the left hand. In vain will it be to plead the privileges which they have once enjoyed, though they could say, *Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, as well as heard thee teaching in our streets?* he will declare, *I know not whence you are; depart from me,*

SERM. *ye workers of iniquity.* And that will be the  
 X. final end of them. God sometimes returns  
 again to a nation and a church, which  
 he has for awhile cast off and abhorred;  
 though it is generally after a long interval:  
 and seventeen hundred years are now elapsed  
 since he gave up Israel, that was once his  
 chosen people. But, oh! to the soul, that  
 finally slights and despises him, he will never,  
 never return. What were seventeen millions  
 of ages, compared with the miserable eternity  
 to which such soul shall be condemned! *Oh!*  
*consider this, ye that forget God*; consider it,  
 all ye that are going on to neglect him.

To conclude with only hinting at the improvement which I have not time further to pursue, let us bless God that this is not already our case; that, after having so long slighted God, and undervalued his favour and care, we are not yet given up as a people and a nation; though God only knows how soon it may be our case. And let us adore him, especially, that we are not abandoned to the final despair and misery of those who know that he has cast them off for ever, and will be favourable to them no more. Let us, this day, and every day, humble ourselves

deeply in his presence, acknowledging our offences, and deprecating his deserved displeasure. Let us, with a more attentive view, survey the many benefits which we have enjoyed by his care, and the blessed consequences, both for time and eternity, which we may expect from his favour; especially when all the happy purposes of this pastoral office shall be answered. And, to conclude all, let us take great care that we do not strengthen each other's hands in slighting God and religion. It is a very contagious evil: poor foolish creatures are ready to embolden one another. But let it be remembered that there is no association which will signify any thing against the blessed God: *though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.* All that they will gain by their confederacy is to be associates in punishment, and perhaps mutual instruments of the Divine justice in punishing one another. If, therefore, we would express a real and solid friendship to each other, let it be by doing what we can to promote a sense, a deep, powerful, serious sense of practical religion. Associations for this purpose are very desirable. Ministers especially strengthen each

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SERM. X. other's hands in God. And I would particularly recommend them to young people; and especially to those who are designed for the ministry; and this, not only as a matter of private, but of public importance; for though the most faithful prophets of the Lord are sometimes slighted, yet I believe, and it is generally to be seen, that as those who desire to honour him in their office are themselves personally most honoured, so God is also most valued and revered in those societies over which such preside, and in those nations where such ministers abound; as, on the other hand, the ministrations of an idle shepherd are the sad forebodings of the sword of the Divine vengeance.


## SERMON XI.


PAUL GIVEN BACK TO THE CHURCH  
THROUGH THE PRAYERS OF HIS CHRIS-  
TIAN FRIENDS.

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PHILEMON, verse 22.

*I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.*

As God has been pleased by his afflictive SERM.  
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hand for some time to interrupt the usual   
services of my life, which I number among  
its greatest comforts, you will not wonder  
that I do upon this occasion further interrupt  
my discourses upon that excellent subject in  
Titus, which has been so long before us; and  
which may afford us so much more matter of  
useful meditation. It is the duty of all to  
consider the dealings of Divine Providence  
towards them, and to acknowledge all its  
gracious interpositions in their favour. Pri-  
vate Christians, when they have been for suc-  
cessive sabbaths confined from the house of  
God, owe, on their restoration to it, a public

SERM. XI.  song of praise to God their deliverer. But they who bear a public character, when similarly restored, do still more owe the psalm of thanksgiving: and it becomes them not only to praise God themselves, but to invite others to do it. As David, when God had saved his life from imminent danger, not only says, *I will praise the Lord at all times, and his praises shall continually be in my mouth*; but adds, *the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. Oh! magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together*<sup>1</sup>. And in the 118th Psalm, 18—20, when he had said, *The Lord has chastened me sore, but has not delivered me over to death*, adds, *Open to me the gates of righteousness, I will go into them, and praise the Lord: even into this gate of the Lord, into which all the righteous shall enter; there will I praise thee, for thou hast heard me, and art also become my salvation*. I have formerly, as I remember, discoursed to you from these words on an occasion like this; otherwise I should have judged none more suitable at this time. Yet there are some circumstances which render these words of Paul so peculiar to this

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxxiv.  
1—3.

conjuncture, that I have no reason to regret any circumstance which prevented my making choice of the other. When the apostle had dispatched the affair of Onesimus, about which he wrote; and in which, considering the person pleading, the cause pleaded, and the manner in which it was managed, we have great reason to believe that he succeeded; he adds a few circumstances, and among the rest this: he hoped Philemon would endeavour to get him a lodging; probably he meant in his own house; because he trusted, that though he were now, as he says, *a prisoner of Jesus Christ*, yet that he should, through the prayers of Philemon, and his other Christian friends, be ere long *given unto them*. Concerning which you will observe four things, which may at present be matter of useful meditation :

I. That the apostle was deeply apprehensive of the interposition of Divine Providence, as interesting itself in his confinement or enlargement :

II. That he looked upon it as a desirable thing, that, if it were the will of God, he might enjoy continued life and liberty :

III. That he considered the prayers of his

SERM. XI. Christian friends, as of great efficacy for this purpose:

IV. That he speaks of himself, upon the supposition of his being thus enlarged and restored, as the property of the church, as given to them.

We observe then,

I. That the apostle was deeply apprehensive of the interposition of Divine Providence, as interesting itself in his confinement or enlargement. *I trust*, says he, i. e. I trust in God, *that I shall be given unto you*; that he will be pleased to stretch out his hand, and to break my fetters, and give me the opportunity which I have so long desired of conversing with my Christian friends again, and of ministering to them in the public offices of my function. Paul had indeed particular reason to acknowledge this, not only as the importance of his station in life might seem to render him in some peculiar manner the object of a Redeemer's care, whose special messenger he was; but likewise as there had been extraordinary predictions referring to this very event. When he was going up to Jerusalem, and was addressing himself to



the elders at Ephesus, he observed that *the Holy Ghost testified in every city, that bonds and AFFLICTIONS awaited him*<sup>2</sup>; and Agabus<sup>3</sup>, while they were at Cæsarea, had not only uttered a prediction of these coming evils, but had given a prophetic sign of them: and when the great apostle was seized at Jerusalem<sup>4</sup>, a further vision of Christ assured him, that he must go to Rome, there to repeat the testimony which he had borne elsewhere. But Paul was so well instructed in the doctrine of his Divine Master, that he knew not only that his affairs, and those of his fellow-christians, were under the disposal and administration of a Divine Providence; but that God's government extended itself even to the irrational, and to the inanimate world; and that *not a sparrow fell to the ground*, or a drop of rain descended from heaven, *without our Heavenly Father*. We know, and believe this too. Let us bring the thought to every circumstance of life, and particularly to those which are the most afflictive. "Am I, like Paul, interrupted in a course of active services? Am I shut up in circumstances of confinement, of one kind or another? Are my capacities for service brought within

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 2 Acts xx.  
 23.  
 3 Acts xxi.  
 11.  
 4 Acts  
 xxiii. 11.

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a very narrow sphere, perhaps for the present entirely cut off? It is a dark dispensation; but it is a dispensation of providence.” Paul knew that God could easily have influenced the minds of the Jews, so that they should not have desired his imprisonment; or those of the Romans, that they should not have granted it; or his own, so that he should not have appealed to Cæsar; which if he had not done, he would have been set at liberty: yea, that had the Almighty so pleased, he could have delivered him, as he did Peter, from his confinement, by sending an angel to strike off his chains, and to unbar the gates of his prison. But he was wisely persuaded, that God had good reasons for not doing any of these things, and he acquiesced in them. Some of these reasons he could trace, as he observed that the things which had happened to him, happened for the furtherance of the gospel: and in other respects he believed that all was right, and was quite satisfied in what God had done, and was doing concerning him: that if ever deliverance came, as one way or another he knew that it would; he was sensible, that it must be a providential deliverance: that he who had cast him down must raise him up: that he who had

given him to the rage of his enemies for awhile, (yet still under a powerful restraint, so that upon his life they had no power) must give him to the prayers and embraces of his friends, if he ever were to enjoy the liberty of conversing with them again. “O Lord, my expectation is from thee. *I have said, thou art my God, my times are in thy hands*.” <sup>5 Ps. xxx. 14, 15.</sup> SERM. XI.

And how does it revive my soul, to think that they are so! If I am imprisoned in my chamber, and in my bed, thou fulfillest the thing which thou hast appointed for me. Thou fixest the days and the hours for which I am to be confined; and in thine appointed time thou openest the doors of my own house, that I may go out of it; the doors of thine, that I may enter into it; that I may join my praises with those of thy people, and that I may speak thy word *in the great congregation.*”

II. It further intimates that he looked upon it as a very desirable thing, if it were the will of God, that he might enjoy continued life and liberty. He speaks of this consummation as the object of his trust, and therefore no doubt of his hope, and of his desire, that he should

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be given to the church again. We well know that this was not owing to a fond attachment to the world, or to any unwillingness to have done with the things of time and sense, and to enter upon the invisible state. Paul was, through the divine grace working upon his heart, dead to the world: it appeared a very little matter to him: he had said before his imprisonment, *none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear*<sup>6</sup>: and he had said under his imprisonment, *God forbid, that I should glory in any thing, save in the cross of Christ, whereby the world is crucified to me, and I to the world*<sup>7</sup>. The believing view I have had of my crucified master has made me quite like a dead man to the world, and has quite blasted its charms in mine eyes; as all the natural comeliness of a man is gone when he is dying in the agonies of crucifixion. And as for the other world, that wore a most comfortable aspect; insomuch that, as he had formerly said, *while the outward man perished, the inner was renewed*, in consequence of looking at things unseen; so he also, under this very imprisonment, speaking of his views, says, *I*

<sup>6</sup> Acts xx.  
24.

<sup>7</sup> Gal. vi.  
14.

*have a desire to depart; and to be with Christ, which is far better*<sup>8</sup>, incomparably better, beyond any thing which I can express: to be dissolved, to be loosened, to be allowed to weigh anchor, and set sail for this pleasant land, where my Redeemer dwells, and where he reigns! Oh! a moment there is better than one thousand years here, if personal enjoyment alone were to be considered. And when martyrdom came in a nearer view, his soul was not at all terrified: *I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand*<sup>9</sup>, &c. Yet notwithstanding all this, as he believed, he did not make haste. He considered that Christ had an interest upon earth, as well as in heaven, and though he had very low and humble thoughts of himself, as in some respects *the least of the apostles, and not worthy to be called an apostle, yea, as less than the least of all saints*; yet still he knew, that through grace he was a chosen vessel; that God had fitted him for some peculiar services; and that as he had already preached Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum, so there were still large scenes of labour before him. Spain and Britain, it seems, were still to be visited by him; and the eastern

SERM.  
XI.<sup>8</sup> Phil. i.  
21.<sup>9</sup> 2 Tim.  
iv. 6—8.

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countries to be revisited, new churches to be planted, and those already planted to be watered, and other epistles to be written by him, for the comfort and edification of the church in the present age, and in all those which were to succeed; and this made him willing to bear a delay of glory, and to sustain the evils and sorrows of life for future days and years. And thus he expressly states the case for me, *to abide in the flesh is more needful for you; and having this confidence, I know that I shall abide*<sup>1</sup>. I in this view desire to continue in life. A soul of so active a disposition as Paul's must desire freedom, not merely or chiefly for his own sake, that he might go whither he pleased, and do what he would; but that he might be capable of acting for the service of Christ, and the good of souls, without that restraint he was now under. This indeed had been moderated: he had not been all the while in a dungeon, though he had been in chains; but he had dwelt in a hired house of his own, where he received all who came unto him<sup>2</sup>. Yet one cannot suppose any large assemblies were held there; and some think, that after these two years were expired, he was brought under a strait

<sup>1</sup> Phil. i.  
24, 25.

<sup>2</sup> Acts  
xxviii. 30.

confinement. But he longed to be able to go from city to city, and from land to land, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concerned the Lord Jesus Christ, and the salvation of immortal souls by him. It was this which made light, and liberty, and life sweet; which sanctified his natural enjoyments, and his natural desires. We are to add, that,

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III. He considers the prayers of his Christian friends, as of great efficacy for this purpose of his deliverance. Paul was himself much in prayer, and improved the opportunity that his confinement gave him for this purpose, and bowed his knees before God, often and much for the several churches which he had planted, and in which he had laboured. And it evidently appears, that he set a great value upon their prayers to God for him. Therefore he bespeaks them in the most pressing manner, *Brethren, pray for us; pray for all saints; and for me also, that utterance may be given me, &c*<sup>3</sup>: and no where more solemnly and earnestly than, *I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together in prayers to God*

<sup>3</sup> Eph. vi.  
19.

SERM. XI. *for me, &c*<sup>4</sup>. And so here, *I trust I shall be given to your prayers.* “My dear friends, as I hope God will deliver me; and as, in humble submission to his will, I pray for that deliverance; so I assure you that I have no such arrogant opinion of myself, as to imagine that it is merely or chiefly out of regard to my own prayers it will be granted. No, I esteem yours, I desire the prayers of every one of you, the least and the meanest, and the united prayers of all; and I read the answer to your prayers, in the support God has given to me in my confinement, and in the enlargement from it which I now speedily expect. And if I am so delivered, I will as it were inscribe it upon the mercy, in legible characters, *this is an answer to the prayers of my Christian friends and brethren.* How secretly soever they have been offered by day or by night; how distant soever my praying friends have been from me, some in Judea, some in Asia, some in Greece, while I have been here shut up in Rome, they have reached the ears of God, and, with humble submission and thankfulness be it said, they have set the hand of divine omnipotence at work on this happy occasion.” And no wonder that

<sup>4</sup> Rom. xv.  
30.



Paul had such apprehensions of the matter, considering what he had read in the Old Testament, and what he had seen in his own experience, and that of his Christian friends, under the New. Often had he read, *that the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and that his ears are open to their cry; that the righteous call, and the Lord hears them*<sup>5</sup>. SERM. XI.

*Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me*<sup>6</sup>. He knew, that the prayers of the church had brought out Peter to full liberty on the very night before he was to be brought out to execution; and that the answer was returned before the assembly for prayer was broken up. He knew likewise that it was when he and Silas were praying, and singing praises to God, that *the foundations of the prison were shaken*, and that *every man's bonds were loosened*: and he well knew that the hand of God might work as really for his deliverance in answer to prayers, now, by second causes, which seemed to operate according to the course of nature, as if the pomp of each of those miracles had been renewed, or as if both of them had been united in one. And, oh! let it always be remembered,

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<sup>5</sup>Ps. xxxiv.  
15.

<sup>6</sup>Ps. xci.  
15.

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that *the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous* man avails much: and let it be the care of each of us to be daily praying for ourselves, that we may have the greater encouragement to pray for our Christian friends under their afflictions; and that we may have the greater interest at the throne of grace for the whole church of Christ.

IV. Paul speaks of himself, upon the supposition of his being thus enlarged and restored, as the property of the church, as *given to them*. Indeed, he had long, and that very justly, been used to consider himself, and other Christian ministers, in this view. He knew, that as magistrates are not ordained for themselves, but for the good of those whom they preside over, that societies may be maintained in the peaceful possession of their natural rights; so likewise *ministers* were constituted, that they might be, as their very name imports, *servants* of the churches. So in the epistle to the Ephesians, iv. 11, 12, he tells us that our ascended Lord *gave apostles, and prophets, and evangelists, and pastors, and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and*

for the edifying the body of Christ. And this he testifies in very strong and expressive terms to the Corinthians, when too ready to contend about this or that particular minister: *All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas*<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, says he elsewhere, *we preach ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake*; and in that which seems to be the last of his epistles, and written long after this to the Corinthians, *I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ with eternal glory*<sup>8</sup>. And as this feeling animated him in his bonds, so when he thought of approaching liberty, still he considered it as a liberty to be employed for Christ, his master, and for his dear brethren in him. *None of us, says this good man, lives to himself*<sup>9</sup>. God forbid that we should think so erroneously. *Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price*<sup>1</sup>; and *as Christ loved me, and gave himself for me, I am not my own*. When free, he knew that he was Christ's servant, and therefore the servant of the church. *I trust I shall be given to you*. "If I am restored, as I am persuaded that I shall be, I shall in a great measure owe it to your prayers; and I shall consider that now you have an

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XI.<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. iii.  
21, 22.<sup>8</sup> 2 Tim. ii.  
10.<sup>9</sup> Rom.  
xiv. 7.<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vi.  
19.

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additional right to the best services which I can do for you; because you have been the means, through the fervour of your intercessions at the throne of grace, of prolonging my life, which otherwise perhaps had been taken off; and of procuring my liberty; whereas, perhaps, if I had not been happy in such kind, and praying friends, I might have languished much longer in confinement. And I wish, from my whole heart, that you may find your account in my release: I wish that it may please God to make my labours, when I am restored to you, of any real benefit. However, as God shall enable me, I will attempt to do good; and will consider my time and my strength as yours, and my gifts and Christian experiences as yours, so far as I may be able

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. i. 6. to use them for your advantage<sup>2</sup>. I doubt not but these were sentiments quite agreeable to the very heart of St. Paul; and I bless God that I can say in his presence that they are the sentiments of my heart too. And I have brought in so much of the workings of my own soul in his person, and for the illustration of his words, that I have left myself little to say, when, in the last place,

V. I am to apply these things a little more particularly to the circumstances in which Divine Providence has lately been pleased to bring us, and those in which we now are.

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And here, I am sensible, that it becomes me publicly to acknowledge your kind and endearing concern for me, expressed in the most agreeable manner, not only by affectionate inquiry after me, for which I think myself much obliged, but also, and above all, by your earnest importunity with God on my account. I thank you for the prayers which you were offering together on that day of solemn prayer, when it was my inexpressible grief to be separated from you; and which day I would gladly have redeemed at the expense of several days of pain and illness, had it been in my choice. I thank you for those prayers which you have since repeated, whether in your retirements and your families, where I am sure that you have not forgotten me, or in those little social meetings, where I have particularly heard of the earnest and affectionate manner in which you sought my life and health from the great Lord of both. I greatly rejoice that God has cast my lot amongst a praying people. I believe that I have frequently owed my re-

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covery from former distempers, under God, to your prayers; and it is with great pleasure that I trace a remarkable answer to them now. And, as I am particularly sensible of the kindness of several of my young friends, in spending a considerable part of the night upon my account in prayer, in which they continued instant, as I am told, even to the tenth prayer; so I think it my duty publicly to observe, that it was on that very night, and, so far as I can learn, at that very hour when they were so engaged, that my distemper took so favourable a turn; and that the fever left me, after having continued upon me between three and four days, rising at last to a violent height, which gave my friends about me, who were most capable of judging of my case, a very painful alarm. I do, therefore, beseech you that, having obtained this mercy of God in prayer, you join with me in acknowledging the remarkable answer which God has given, and in returning our humble and united thanks to him for that great goodness which he has caused to pass before me, both in supporting me, under the illness, in such calmness, composure, and joy, that I have never known more: and, at

length, after having made a sick bed not only tolerable, but very comfortable to me, in raising me up from it, and restoring me, after so short an interruption as two sabbaths, to my beloved work amongst a people so justly dear to me. And I earnestly desire the further continuance of your prayers, that it may appear indeed that I am given to you; that I may remember that my life is not my own, but yours; and that it is to be employed for your service. It was a very great comfort to me, upon a bed of sickness, to reflect that I had endeavoured to serve you, in the main, with all good fidelity, though amidst many imperfections; that I had faithfully *declared to you the whole counsel of God*; and that, if every one of you had been near my dying bed, if God had appointed that it should have been so, I could have borne my joyful testimony to the truths which I had always taught you, could have appealed to God with my last breath that I had built on the foundation to which I had directed you, and could have witnessed that I found the consolations of that gospel which I have so constantly and so earnestly recommended to you as the foundation of your hope, and as the rule of

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your life. Unite your prayers with mine, that I may go on testifying with great seriousness, and overflowing affection, the great and important truths of it, *repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.* Pray that I may abound in every good word and work. When I reviewed the course of my ministry under confinement, there were two things which chiefly lay upon my mind, that I might be more careful to take convenient opportunities of instructing and exhorting you in your own houses; and that I might revive the work of catechising, as soon as possible, and carry it on to the best purposes I can, either by myself or others, both in town and country. And that I might more effectually address to those serious Christians who are not yet entered into our communion, to prevail upon them to comply with that gracious call, by which Christ says, *Come, and his Spirit says, Come,* and his church says, *Come.* To these three things, if God is pleased to restore my health, so that I may without restraint pursue them, I propose immediately to apply; and I earnestly desire your prayers that my efforts may be effectual. In the mean time it was some small



comfort to me that God had been pleased to spare my life to finish that work on the Rise and Progress of Religion, which I thought would have been my legacy to you: but as Providence has ordered it otherwise, I beg your prayers that I may live to see it the means of doing good, and that it may, in some remarkable manner, be owned of God, to subserve the purposes of conversion and of edification. And I beseech your further prayers for me, that God would keep alive upon my mind those experiences which he has been pleased to give me during the course of this affliction, and that, in consequence of them, I may be enabled to speak in a more serious and useful manner concerning what I have now seen and known. Give me leave to conclude the discourse with a few touches of this kind with all imaginable plainness and simplicity. Learn, I beseech you, from what has happened to me, how uncertain our lives are. Reflect on the uncertainty of mine, and of your own.

Reflect on the uncertainty of *my* life: that if you really do enjoy any advantages by it, you may improve them; the consciousness of which will be a great comfort to me, when

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God shall take me away. No congregation can be more careful not to grieve a minister by any personal unkindness: on the contrary, I bear witness for you all, that you are, as a congregation, remarkable for your care to make me easy, comfortable, and happy; and that my satisfaction in my situation among you is such that I desire, if it be the will of God, heaven may be my next remove. But let me have joy of you that you are your own friends, that you love and value your own souls, and take effectual methods for their happiness. Let me have joy of you that you walk with a holy circumspection, as becomes the gospel, and in such a manner as to adorn it, and to cut off all occasion of reflection and reproach from those who would gladly seek it; for be assured that every thing which wounds you in this respect must wound me. And I must add, let this be an engagement to you to give yourselves up to the church, while it has a pastor; lest, if you trifle, you should lose the opportunity, remain perhaps for some time unsettled, or, not being able at first to use that freedom with a stranger which you may with me, after so many years intimate acquaintance as I have had with

several ; on whom, nevertheless, to my great grief, I have not yet been able to prevail in my exhortations to them on this head.

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Let me beseech you also to consider the uncertainty of your own lives. This year we may die, as I told you, in the beginning of it ; and my death had like to have attested the truth of what I spoke : perhaps yours may attest it. Let me remind you, on this occasion, that to find yourselves on a sudden, in the midst of life and health, business and schemes, seized by a distemper which shall be likely to carry you on a sudden into eternity, will be a very awful circumstance. You will need to have strong supports when you come to death ; perhaps two or three days may be the period of life to you. You will need then to have the testimony of your conscience that you have devoted yourselves to God in his covenant ; that you have taken hold of Christ by faith ; that the service of God has been your business, and this world has not been your portion ; that you have been daily conversant with God, and have made it your business *to lay up a treasure in heaven*. You will need, I am sure that you will need, all the comfort of these

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internal witnesses. See you to it that there be a just foundation for them. And, to add no more to a discourse, already too long, give me leave to observe that the serious Christian may learn, by what has passed with regard to me, not to be slavishly afraid of affliction, or of death itself. We see, in abundance of instances, that God can make a sick and a dying bed abundantly easy. We see that he can chain up the great enemy of souls, so that even when the blood and the animal spirits are in the greatest hurry, he shall not be able to terrify the soul with one moment's fear. We see that God can make his promises unutterably sweet, and can entertain the mind with a continual succession of them, so that it shall need neither books nor prayers nor ordinances; and that even when the kindness of friends obliges them to spare their own words, and to lay an embargo upon others too, that God can speak to us, and enable us to speak to him with unutterable delight; that he can unite, as it were, all the promises in one, and send them into our hearts, as in a stream of glory; so that every solicitude about sickness or health, about recovery or death, shall be quite suspended in

a joyful sense that we and all our concerns are in the hands of a Heavenly Father, who will deal well with us according to his word. This (I praise his name) he has done for me, and I hope for many others that hear me on this day ; and therefore let us thank God, and take courage, and, *casting all our care upon him*, be heartily willing to be prosperous or afflicted, well or ill, to live or to die, as he pleases, faithfully attending our duty to-day, and leaving it to God to determine whether we shall honour him on to-morrow, by acting or by suffering ; and whether we shall spend the third day without or within the veil.

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## SERMON XII.

THE DUST RETURNING TO THE EARTH,  
AND THE SPIRIT TO GOD.

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ECCLESIASTES, xii. 7.

*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.*

SERM. XII. SOLOMON, the greatest of princes, and the wisest of men, was here in pursuit of a design, at once the most important and the most difficult that can be imagined. Solicitous to inculcate true religion on a thoughtless world; to teach men this as the conclusion of the whole matter, as the result of all his observations and all his experiences, various and advantageous as they were, *to fear God, and keep his commandments*, which is, indeed, the whole of man, his whole duty and his whole interest: and this he was especially solicitous to inculcate on young men, to whom it was, in some respects, particularly difficult, and particularly important to teach it. And behold the methods which he takes

for that purpose! He leads them, as it were, into the situation into which we have lately been led, to the brink of the grave; and points out to them the end of all living. After having most eloquently described the infirmities of broken age, he warns them likewise of the possibility that, before those reached them, the curious machine of the human body might be fatally disordered; and then, in my text, he mentions the awful consequence of this with regard to both the parts of our natures, our mortal bodies and our immortal souls. *Then, says he, shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.* And surely if this consideration will not affect men's hearts; if this will not draw them off from the chase of vanity, even when the youthful blood is boiling in their veins, and all the fallacious prospects of this precarious life are rising in their brightest charms, nothing will do it. If they will eagerly pursue the gratifications of the body, which must so soon moulder in the dust; if they will neglect the interests of a deathless spirit, which so soon must return to God, its author, there is no hope that Solomon, or *a greater than Solomon,*

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the Lord Jesus Christ himself, can open more awful prospects upon the mind, or urge a consideration of greater importance than that the body must soon be put off, and the naked spirit go to receive from God its final doom: if this will not engage us *to fly for refuge to lay hold of the hope which is set before us*; if this will not teach us to seek true riches, when we are so shortly to be stripped of our earthly all; yea, if this will not excite in us an earnest desire to be found clothed with his righteousness, and washed with his blood, that we may appear before God with courage, men must even be left to spend their days in vanity, till, in a moment, *they go down into the pit*; till the records of their folly be written in the dust, and the sight of the Divine tribunal teach them what they will not now believe of its insupportable terrors to all who have neglected a due preparation for it.

But we will hope better things than these: we will hope that, by the blessing of God upon this awful representation, so well suited to the solemn occasion of our present assembly, that you will be wise, that you will understand this, that you will consider your



latter end. May the Divine grace secure this happy event! *Teach us, O Lord, to know our end, and the measure of our days*, what it is, that we may know how frail we are! *So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

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With the most affectionate desire to promote your true happiness for time and eternity, and of being an instrument in the hand of God, of leading you into the only way of *finding mercy of the Lord in that day*, give me leave to assist your meditations on these two awful and obvious consequences of death; *the return of the body to the dust, and the return of the soul to God who gave it*; and then to conclude with some application of both.

I. Let us for a little while survey the return of the body to the dust: *The dust shall return to the earth as it was.*

This reminds us of the original of this corporeal part of our natures; that it was formed from the dust. All the strength and all the beauty of human nature are but a certain modification of animated dust: that man in his best estate might be kept humble, God reared the goodly frame of his body from

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these weak and mean materials; according to the sacred historian, *And the Lord God made man out of the dust of the ground*<sup>1</sup>: but a spirit of nobler original waked the well proportioned statue into life, sensation, and action: *God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and so he became a living soul*; and had man continued in that state of innocence and holiness in which he was created, he had, notwithstanding the low original of his corporeal part, been immortal as the angels, immortal as the saints shall be when inhabiting that glorious body into which this tenement of clay shall be refined and transformed. But sin, having entered into our world, brought death in its train; and this is one sad consequence of death, not only that the soul must be separated from the body, but that the body must moulder into its original dust. Such is the efficacy of that sentence pronounced on the very day of the first fatal apostacy, *Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return*. It is an awful and a mortifying, but it is a wise appointment. Let us for a few moments contemplate it in each of these views.


<sup>1</sup> Gen. ii.  
7.

It is an awful and a mortifying appoint-

ment that the dust should return to its earth ; that all its strength and all its beauty should be dishonoured and consumed. *All the goodliness of the flesh*, says the prophet, *is as the flower of the field* : like that, indeed, for frailty, but, how unlike it in another respect ! The flowers of the field are often fragrant in their decay, and the last remainders of them have something grateful to the sense : but the fairest human flower, through what horrid forms of putrefaction does it pass in its return to its original dust, so as to become intolerable to those who most fondly admired it, perhaps almost to adoration ; and to extort from the most affectionate surviving relations the words of Abraham with regard to the once beautiful Sarah ; who, in the decline of life, had captivated princes, *Bury my dead out of my sight*<sup>2</sup>. Thus does God show his righteous indignation against sin ; and what can be more awful than that, pursuing, as it were, even the dead corpse of the criminal, and executing his judgment upon it, as a kind of emblem of that more dreadful judgment which would pursue the soul in a future and invisible state for this treason against the King of heaven, did not infinite mercy in-

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<sup>2</sup> Gen. xxv.  
4.

SERM. XII.  terpose for its rescue: and, oh! who would be proud of that form which must so soon become odious and insupportable; or who would pamper that flesh, which must so soon be covered by earth, and be devoured by worms?

But this hint of improvement leads me further to add, that it is on the whole a wise appointment of Providence that the body should return to dust: and this, not only as it is an act of wise justice, which tends also, as you have seen, to inculcate some profitable lessons, both of humility and mortification, but in some other views likewise. I mean not here so much the usefulness of the dust to other purposes, when it becomes, as it at length does, clean mould; though one of the finest of the ancient writers, I mean Xenophon, represents a dying hero rejoicing in that, that even the dust of which his body had been composed should be useful among other earth to future generations of mankind: but what I principally have in my view is this, that the tendency of the corpse to dissolution obliges, as I just now hinted, the fondest relatives to part with it, and to lay it out of their sight; which is a circumstance

of no small importance for healing the sorrow which their death would otherwise have occasioned. You that have known what it is to look with streaming eyes and a bleeding heart upon the deserted clay of a much loved wife or a darling child, when stretched upon the bed of death, you can testify what an additional sorrow it was to you to part with the corpse, and how glad you would have been to have preserved it, pale and blasted as it was, and to have visited it for succeeding days, and have fed your meditations and your sorrows with it, perhaps, till you yourselves had become corpses too, and been laid by your dead, to perpetuate the distress of your surviving friends. But the invincible and salutary laws of fermentation and putrefaction forbid this flattering kind of self-murder: the same fluids, which once gave the fair fabric its beauty and vivacity, which rendered it so charming, now under a different kind of agitation, turn it into rottenness, and tear it in pieces: and were all the art of Egypt and all the spices of Arabia employed to embalm it, it must be covered in order to its being preserved, and almost as effectually taken from the eyes of the living, as if it had been

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dissolved to atoms, and scattered by all the winds at their pleasure. And thus the deep wound in the friendly heart gradually heals, being thus, as it were, bound up from external injury; and time does that by insensible degrees which the aids of philosophy and the infinitely more powerful succours of religion effect at first, alas! with so much difficulty.

And, to conclude this head, the wisdom of the appointment further appears, as hereby God glorifies at once all the wonders of his power, his faithfulness, and his mercy, in raising the body from the dust to which it has been reduced; in recovering it from this variety of new forms which it has assumed; in bringing bone to its bone, and muscle to its muscle; in changing dust and rottenness into a form of glory, exceeding even that of the sun, in that day when God will say to his church, *Thy dead men shall live; thy corpses shall arise: awake, and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for a dew shall fall upon you like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast forth her dead.* Then, if we are Christians indeed, shall the power and grace of Christ be illustrated in changing *these vile bodies, that they*

*may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body*<sup>3</sup>. And in this view methinks the dissolution and abasement of the grave is matter of triumph rather than of horror; and the Christian may say, though in a sense quite different from what the words originally had, with regard to this humbling and mortifying event, *gladly will I glory in my infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*. But enough; perhaps more than enough, of the dissolution of the body in the grave. Let us now,

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<sup>3</sup> Phil. iii.  
21.

II. Trace the soul in its flight; and contemplate for awhile that important subject, the return of the soul to God who gave it. Two thoughts are indeed suggested, that God gave the soul, and that at death it is to return to him.

1. We are reminded that God gave our souls: they are of a divine original; they were so, as you have already heard: in the first formation of human nature God *breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living soul*. And it is so with regard to every particular son and daughter of Adam; and therefore God is spoken of as forming the spirit of man within him<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Zech. xii.  
1.

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Consider him, my Christian friends, as the former of your spirits, who created them and sent them into these bodies, which they now inhabit, to lodge in them for a few years: but observe, I say not for a few years more; no, perhaps they are just ready to be dislodged. But whether their stay be for a longer or shorter time, he placed them in that abode. He sent them into this world; and sent them, to be sure, on some important errand. There was a cause for which, as our Lord says, we were born; a cause for which we came into the world; and when we consider what these spirits of ours are; when we consider how much of the natural image of God they still bear, even in this fallen state; and how much of his moral image they are capable of bearing, we must be sure that we were sent into existence upon some great and important occasion. Yes, sirs, the errand was great: but oh, how little do we consider it! that we might glorify God, that we might do good, that we might minister in our respective spheres to God's great and gracious design of making his creatures happy; that, having conversed with our heavenly Father upon earth, through



the dear Redeemer, by whom alone in this fallen state we can attain to the knowledge of him, we might be found fit to dwell with God above, in the assembly of wise and holy, benevolent, devout, and happy spirits. Behold and remember the purpose for which God formed our spirits, and for which he lodged them in these frail bodies. He is yet waiting to see how these purposes will be answered: but oh! remember that we are further reminded,

2. That at death this spirit, this heaven-born spirit, is to return to God.

*The spirit shall return to God who gave it.*

Return to be judged by him, to be examined, so that it may be ordered to its long, to its everlasting abode in heaven, or in hell. This is the obvious, but important truth which this expression suggests: a truth which we all know; but which, because we are so apt to forget it, I must illustrate a little further.

Our spirits shall return to be examined by God: they are now observed by him in all their actions, in all their secret operations, and frames, and dispositions; and this is a most awful thought. *Thou, Lord, hast*

SERM. XII. *searched me out and known me, thou knowest my down sitting, &c*<sup>5</sup>. *The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his eyes behold the nations: his eyes behold, and his eyelids try, the children of men*<sup>6</sup>. And he is represented as keeping a book of remembrance. Yes, sirs! while we live in this careless manner; while we take no account of our time, but the days and months of the years begin and end unnoticed and unregarded: amidst this crowd of vanity, our actions, our words, and even our thoughts are observed and noted down: O how impartial and exact a history of our lives! how might we tremble even to read one page of it! But it is all complete thus far. The follies of our childhood; the sins, may I not say with regard to some? the enormities of our youth; and the, in many respects, more aggravated transgressions of our riper years, are all there; and the books shall be opened. So says the wise man in this very chapter, and leaves that as the concluding word. God will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. And though the solemnity of the general judg-

<sup>5</sup> Psal. cxxxix.

1, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Psal. xi.

4.

ment may lie at a very considerable distance, yet, as you perfectly know, the case of every particular soul will be determined at death, invariably determined; and, upon this return of the spirit to God, it will be either applauded or condemned; and it will have an abode immediately assigned to it among blessed or cursed spirits, among angels or devils, in the paradise of God, or in an infernal prison. Believest thou this? that it will certainly be? And what is more, dost thou believe that thou art surely and speedily to have this interview with the great Father of thy spirit; and to be treated as an obedient or a rebellious child? *Lord, we believe; help thou our unbelief!* Help our forgetfulness, our inconsideration; and oh! teach us the practical, the saving application of this obvious, this incontestable, but forgotten truth; certain as the return of the body to the dust; written in the dust of all preceding generations; yet, alas! too much like characters traced in dust, in the power of every breath of air to efface.

III. It is what we are in the third and last place to attempt, the practical improvement

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of what you have been hearing. And, oh! to what purpose has it been heard, if it be not practically improved? If the heart be not impressed with it, to what purpose would the ear, or the imagination have been amused? If this be as an empty tale, what can be worthy of serious regard? Let it teach us,

1. To realize this to ourselves, as our own certain doom and end. As Job, *I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all the living. My body must return to dust; my soul must return to God who gave it.* Think of this as a certain, as a nearly approaching event. Is it not indeed certain? Is this a matter of doubtful disputation, whether it be *appointed to men once to die, and after death the judgment?* Bring it then home to yourselves; look upon this well built body, and say, let the fairest, let the most vigorous, let the most temperate, (whose life might seem more secure than any vigour could otherwise make it) say, “My body must return to dust, my parents, my children, my companions, my friends are in the grave; and I shall probably ere long lie by some of them, or, at least, lie as cold and as insensible as they. Vain world,

thou art vanishing from mine eyes! I have very little more to do with thee. My spirit, thou must return to God: thou must deal with him in another character than thou hast ever done. He will not meet thee as a man: the examination will not be slight; and such as a little artifice, or a few bold falsehoods may evade. No; O my soul! his eyes are piercing as lightning, and infinitely more penetrating; they reach to the secret recesses of the soul. Artifice and fraud subsist not before him; but to be detected, to be exposed, to be punished. O my soul! thou hast entered on an existence which must end in heaven or in hell; must end, did I say? let me correct the expression, must continue there without end. And thou art liable every week, every day, every hour, to be called into this tremendous presence. Thou wast not made to be an unaccountable creature. Thou art sure that human souls were formed to be judged by God; and if other human souls, then thine also. O my soul! for what am I that I should be exempted from what is so reasonable, so necessary, the lot of all?" Think of it with this self-application, and it will probably impress your mind

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SERM. much more forcibly than if it were to be con-  
 XII. sidered only as a general doom: and then,

2. Consider in what posture your spirits are for their return to God, by whom they are continually liable to be reclaimed.


I would hope the best of those to whom I am now speaking; but would it be a wise charity to imagine that, in such an audience, every soul were in a due posture for this solemn transaction? Alas! what is this world wherein we live? You know what Solomon thought of it when he wrote this book: *The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go down to the dead.* As soon as their fit of lunacy is over, they drop down and die: and it is reasonable to suppose with regard to most of them, that had they lived longer, their madness would have continued; and that so before they thought of it, they would find themselves at once in the presence of God; and would grow serious for ever, when seriousness can only introduce everlasting despair and everlasting lamentation; such lamentation, and such despair, that, next to annihilation, and the long sleep of eternal oblivion, a perpetual lunacy were even to be

desired, that rational thought might not work in that terrible degree in which it must then exert itself in looking backward and forward.

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Do I aggravate the matter in this representation? Look around you, sirs, you that are wise and knowing men, you that are acquainted with the world; look round about you and see what many are; and how they are employed, and take this thought with you, that they are quickly to return to God. Why, some of us are disputing and quarrelling about religion instead of practising it: one is judging his brother, and another is setting at nought his brother, forgetful of the judgment seat at which we are both to appear: some of us, perhaps, are serving divers lusts and pleasures; pursuing the road of sensual amusements, as if we had no spirit at all, but were merely a system of animated flesh, furnished with such and such organs of sensation in common with the brutes; and others of us, who are wiser than the rest, are laying schemes for being rich, and, perhaps, great in the world; as if we were never to leave the world; or as if God had sent one generation of men into it merely that they might heap up treasure for the rest, who are to succeed them

SERM. in their respective families. And is this pre-  
 XII. paring for our return to God? or do these men seriously believe that they are to return to their Creator? Do they believe that they are to return to a holy God, while they neglect, and, perhaps, deride holiness? to a righteous God, who will vindicate the honours of his broken law, while they are breaking that law every day? Do they believe that they are to return to a God, who is *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*; and who sent him into the world to reconcile sinners to himself; while they are continually neglecting and despising him, and entertaining an aversion to his very name? Surely, had Solomon beheld this scene, he would have been as ready as ever to cry out of *madness in the heart of man*: yea, he would have been more strongly struck with the view, when he saw the prescriptions even of the great Physician, of one much greater than Solomon, so ineffectual to bring them to the sound exercise of their reason.

But you will say that you all intend, some time or another, to attend to these things; and to get your souls in readiness for your return to God. You will do it! but not now;



there is an aversion, horrible thought! there is an aversion in our degenerate and depraved minds from the great Father of our spirits; and if we think of returning to him, it is only upon force, not that we love him, not that we desire to converse with him, but that we fear his vengeance, the rod of his anger; and therefore look on our return to him as a disagreeable thing, to be avoided if possible. We put it off as long as we can, till at last it is never done; and we are snatched away in this wretched temper and state. And, oh! that you would seriously consider what it must be for such souls to return to God. Oh! how can they stand before him! how can they escape! how can they endure his anger!

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Be entreated, my friends! not to make this your own case. Indeed, I fear for you. I fear lest death should come upon you in an evil hour, while you are trifling and sinning away the day of life and of grace; and, therefore, I would persuade and exhort you, to what? to this or that religious profession? as if a whole congregation of men were to be saved or condemned as they had worshipped God in this place or in that? Blessed be God!

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*we have not so learned Christ.* No, I have something infinitely greater and more important in my view! Let me entreat and exhort you, in the words of the inspired writer, since you are so soon to return to God, to *acquaint yourselves with him, and to be at peace.* And how can this be but by the Lord Jesus Christ? *for he is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing unto us our trespasses. No man comes to the Father but by him.* See to it, therefore, that since you are so soon to go and appear before God, you secure the kind offices of his Son to take you under his protection, to apply his blood for the pardon of your sins, and his righteousness for the justification of your souls in the Divine presence. We testify no other things than Paul and his brethren testified; and would to God that we might do it with the like energy and success, even *repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and bringing forth works meet for repentance.* Attend, and attend without delay. Presume not that you are already safe. Alas, sirs! do not your hearts misgive you? Why do you fear to die suddenly, when the last day of life is so grievous; medicine so nauseous; the dying

bed so restless ; the last adieu so piercing ; the agonies so violent ? and yet you pray that you may not die suddenly : why ? but because you are secretly conscious to yourselves that you are not ready. Oh ! remember that God may reject the prayer : he may snatch you away at once, or may leave you even on your dying bed, quite incapable of any further reparation. Be entreated, then, to have compassion on yourselves, upon your precious, but endangered, though immortal souls, *to-day, while it is called to-day*. How happily then will the case be changed ; what security, what serenity will succeed ! and this leads me to add,

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III. Let those who, through Divine grace, are prepared, not be averse from passing through this solemnity, whenever God shall appoint it. What ? though a part of the prospect be inevitably disagreeable ; what ? though flesh be naturally unwilling to return to dust ; balance that with the glorious counterpart, *The spirit shall return to God who gave it* : and, oh ! how comfortable is it to the spirit of a good man, having returned to God by humble penitence and faith, to think

SERM. XII. of returning to him in that other sense in which my text speaks; how does it gladden the heart amidst all the infirmities of flesh, and sorrows of death! “I shall return to God; I shall go to that glorious Being; to *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and in him my God and Father; the guide of my youth; the comfort of my riper years: and, oh! how shall I rejoice when I am in his presence; rejoice to prostrate myself at his feet, and say, Holy Father, I am come unto thee; through thy grace I have escaped from that world of imprisonment, of darkness, of temptation, and guilt, and sorrows; and now I am come, at thy call, to dwell with thee, according to thy gracious promises, which I have trusted, according to the purpose of thy grace, in sending Christ into the world, and in sending his gospel and grace into my heart, to purify it, and to fit it for thyself.”

Do not some of you, my friends! feel the hope reviving? What! is the short abode of the flesh in the grave, and its dissolution to dust, to be set against such a prospect? I hope and believe that it was with these views our departed brother saw the gradual approach of

death, and met it after so long a warning. I shall say nothing more of him than this, that I believe that all, who intimately knew him, can attest that his religion did not consist in mere notion or form; but that he was an upright as well as an inoffensive man; yet when I was with him in some of the last hours of his life, when reason in a great measure failed him, he recovered it so far as to declare, with his dying breath, that he saw nothing in himself to trust, but fixed his confidence in Christ alone. There let us fix ours; and let us take care that we do nothing to disgrace that confidence, or dishonour him in whom we repose it; and he will approve himself the faithful *Shepherd of our souls*, will extend his care to the latest moments of our lives, till he takes the charge of our departing spirits to bring them to God, that they may be presented to him with acceptance, and fixed in that presence of his, where *there is fulness of joy, even at his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.* Amen.

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## SERMON XIII.

THE BELIEVER COMMITTING HIS DEPART-  
ING SPIRIT TO JESUS.

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ACTS, vii. 59.*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*

SERM. DEATH, in whatever view it is considered, will  
XIII. appear most awful and important: but most  
awful, and most important, when considered  
as the separation of an immortal soul from a  
mortal body; as launching out into an invi-  
sible and unfathomable ocean, from whence  
we can return no more; as being fixed in an  
unknown world, where we are to have an  
abode, not for a few years or centuries, not  
merely for as many ages as we have passed  
moments upon earth, but for eternity. The  
soul, conscious of its deathless existence, feels  
its infinite value, and demands a suitable  
support: and, oh! to whom shall it then be  
consigned? We may commit our possessions,  
when we are ourselves dying, to those who

may improve them: we may commit our children to those who will be their faithful friends; and will, perhaps, take a yet more prudent and effectual care of them than we could ourselves have done: we may commit our unfinished works to those who may complete them with advantage; but to whom shall we commit the soul? to whom, indeed, but to a faithful Creator, to a merciful Redeemer?

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This, in the general, we know; therefore it is grown into a form among us. When we are making our last will and testament, first of all, as indeed it is the greatest care, we commit our souls into the hands of God through Christ; but God forbid that we should do this merely as an empty form; as if, when we are distributing what little substance we have to survivors, our legacy to our Creator were to be an unmeaning compliment; or as if it were to be taken for granted that he must receive the soul of course, whatever it were, however disposed, if it were but in words consigned to him. To be able, with true faith and upon good grounds, to consign a departing spirit into the hands of Christ is a glorious privilege, and it requires serious preparation;

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and we may think ourselves happy in every opportunity of being instructed how we may do it aright. The instructions now to be offered on a subject, at all times so important, will, I hope, be attended with particular regard, as they came so lately from the lips of a dying friend, who, taught by Divine grace to use them herself in her last moments, does, as it were, yet speak to us, and recommend them to us, to be now seriously weighed, that they may be in our last conflict courageously and cheerfully used. They have their weight as coming from a dying Christian: they will have some additional weight too, when we consider them as the words of a dying martyr; for you know, that they are the words of Stephen; when the barbarous Jews were stoning him for the testimony of Christ, which he had so faithfully delivered.

It is remarkable that, as the first death which we meet with in the Old Testament is that of righteous Abel, so the first which we read of in the New, after the plantation of the church by the effusion of the Spirit, is a violent one too; that of Stephen. He had been pleading the cause of his Master under the evident tokens of his miraculous presence:



for it is expressly said that all the members of the Jewish sanhedrim, who were present as his judges, looking steadfastly upon him, *saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel*; which, I presume, refers not merely to the sweetness, cheerfulness, and benevolence of his aspect, but to some extraordinary radiancy on his face, like that on the face of Moses, when he came down from the mount of God; so that, perhaps, he in some measure resembled what he shall be in his glorified state, after the resurrection: and yet these wretches, who, perhaps, would not have spared even his glorified Master, had he been accessible to their power, vented their rage in its last excesses on his faithful servant. Perhaps, indeed, this lustre was transient, and might vanish, when for a few moments it had, in a kind of lambent flame, played around his features. But if the visible glory of an angel was momentary, a zeal and courage worthy of the celestial spirits breathed to the last of his defence; and, when he had from their own history alleged a number of most pertinent facts for their instruction and his own vindication, he concludes in these memorable words, and with this plain and pungent re-

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monstrance: *Ye stiffnecked, and uncircumcised in heart and in ear, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as did your fathers, so also do ye: which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them who showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been the betrayers and murderers. They could endure no longer; but were even cut to the heart, and enraged to such a degree that, as so many savage beasts, they gnashed upon him with their teeth, as if they could have devoured him alive; and just in that moment, when the purposes of murder were in their hearts, and they were going to take up the instruments of effecting it, the Lord Jesus Christ, by the vision of himself, was pleased to encourage his servant to meet death, as became the soldier of such a general. For though he was now under the covert of a roof, and, had the heavens really been opened, he could not have seen them without a miracle, he looked up steadfastly toward them, probably lifting his soul to his Lord in prayer, and, being full of the Holy Ghost, he saw in vision the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, rising, as it were, out of his seat to succour and to*

receive him ; and, in the raptures of sacred joy which he felt on that occasion, he could not forbear proclaiming it in their ears : but scarcely would they hear him out ; and, as soon as they perceived the tenour of what he was saying, some of them stopped their ears, and others of them set up a loud cry, with which to drown his voice, while their hands were employed in dragging him out of the city, through the gate which lay nearest to the temple : and as soon as they had got him thither, they proceeded to execution ; and, that the murder might be committed in the name of the Lord, the witnesses, according to the precept of the law, began it ; and then he was the happiest who could have his hand most deeply engaged in it. In the mean time, while they were stoning him, he invoked the blessed Saviour, thereby with his dying breath doing an homage to his Divine perfections and glory ; and *saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit* : my enemies cannot kill that ; as my greatest treasure I consign that to thy faithful care : and then, with a prayer for his murderers, that *this sin might not be laid to their charge, he fell asleep*, calmly and pleasantly : amidst this shower of stones he dis-

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missed his spirit, and lost the terror and bitterness of such a death in the presence and care of such a Saviour. *Let me die the death of the righteous; and let my last end be like his!* like his in its peace and security, though it were to be like his in every external circumstance most horrible to nature.

But the grand circumstance on which I am to endeavour to fix your attention and my own is that of Stephen committing his departing spirit to Christ. He said, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*, i. e. in the general, take it under thy patronage and care. May it be the language of our dying lips! and may our hearts say it, even when the power of language shall cease!

Dismissing every inquiry of less importance, it shall be my business here to consider,

I. With what temper the departing spirit of a believer is to be committed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. What encouragement there is to consign it to him: and,

III. What blessed consequences will attend our doing it aright: after which I shall,

IV. Conclude with a brief application.

Frail mortals! hear it with attention: for

there is not a soul of you unconcerned in it. Oh! may I speak it in the view of my own dying bed; and may you hear it in the view of yours! Yes, sirs! let me charge you, by the remembrance of that solemn moment, that you set your hearts to the instruction: and may we then feel the efficacy of considerations like these, when all the joys of life shall have lost their relish, and the dearest of our human friends will be but miserable comforters.

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I. I am to consider with what temper the departing spirit of a believer is to be committed into the hands of Christ.

You will not fail all along to retain in your mind that I am speaking of a believer. I am not speaking of one who is then beginning to form an acquaintance with Christ, or to inquire after him. No, sirs! I will not encourage any of you to suppose that this may be a case susceptible of any comfort. If a minister of Christ be called to attend any of you in that dreadful situation, let him search for something which may prevent your distressed spirits from sinking into absolute despair: but I will here say nothing of a

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case like this. I speak of those who, like holy Stephen, have sought the friendship of Christ in life, and have committed their souls unto him in well doing, by an humble faith, which, while it renounces all righteousness of its own, desires at the same time to fulfill it; and to make Christ the end of life as sincerely as the hope of death. Now such believers, and such I assuredly believe our deceased friend was, and such I pray that you may all be; such believers, I say, should commit their departing spirits to Christ with the humblest sense of that need which they have of his patronage and favour; with the most cheerful confidence in his power and grace; and with the most grateful and sincere purpose of devoting for ever to his service that immortal life which they hope to receive from his mercy.

1. Believers should commit their departing spirits to Christ with an humble sense of the need which they have of his patronage and favour.

Humility should surely run through the Christian's life; and peculiarly does it become his death. For death, as death, brings sin to remembrance; and the nearest pros-

pect of the tribunal of a righteous God will naturally represent us as exceedingly sinful; and will give an awful weight to many of those sore blemishes and imperfections of life, of which at other times we are ready to think lightly. This, therefore, should surely be the expiring Christian's language: "Blessed Jesus! now my heart is overwhelmed within me; now my heart and my flesh fail. I fly to thee as my refuge and my hope. It is a poor, weak, sinful soul which I am now committing into thy hands; unfit, indeed, to appear before thy Father's presence; unfit to find a place among *the spirits of just men made perfect*: but, oh! do thou receive and make it fitter to be introduced into such a presence and assembly! Now, O my Lord! do I fly to thy righteousness, to thy blood, to thy grace, with as much solicitude, after these years of service, if such have passed, alas! hardly worthy to be called service, as when I first sought and received the tokens of thy opening mercy: yea, my Lord! I have still greater reason to be humble, as the sins and follies of these succeeding years have been so many: but, oh! let thy righteousness cover, let thy blood cleanse them all. I

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renounce every other dependence, and hope, and cast myself wholly upon thee. Lord! I am distressed at the thought of what I have been; but do thou undertake for me.

“ A guilty, weak, and helpless worm  
On thy kind arms I fall;  
Be thou my strength and righteousness,  
My Jesus, and my all!”

Words which you well know have been used by some of the most eminent saints and ministers, with which this part of the church of Christ has ever been blessed, in their dying moments; and words than which I know none that I should rather wish to be my own.

2. The departing spirit is to be committed to the Redeemer with a most cheerful confidence in his power and grace.

It is a kind of homage to be paid to him after the homage and service of life is over. “ Blessed Jesus! though thou art invisible, I believe that thou art, and that thou art near me, though thou seemest to be forsaking me to the last triumph of my last enemy. I believe that thou canst make that triumph subservient to thine own. Lord, I believe



that thou livest, and reignest over all worlds; I see in thy almighty hand the keys of death, and the invisible state: thou openest, and no man shutteth. I go not out of thy empire and dominion, O Lord! when I leave these mortal scenes. I adore thee as the appointed guardian of departing spirits; as *able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by thee.* All the legions of angels, O Lord, are under thy command; nor will the noblest spirit around thy throne disdain to convey a creature so inconsiderable as I am, if he may by it testify his obedience to thee. I ask no blessings, but what are in thy hand; and desire no salvation, but such a one as is thine to bestow.”

And with this confidence in a Redeemer's power is to be joined a cheerful persuasion of his readiness to employ it to the most gracious purposes. “ Lord! I confess my unworthiness; thou mightest abandon me; thou mightest deliver me over to mine enemies; thou mightest banish me to an eternal distance from thee: but I will confide in thy tender mercy, for *I have once heard, I have twice been told, this, that unto the Lord belongs power, and to him belong mercies too.* Com-

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passionate Saviour! thou hast given thy life to redeem me, and thou wilt not disdain me: thou hast led me through life, and thou wilt not abandon me in death. With pleasure do I lay down my dying head in so compassionate a bosom, and feel the sweetness of thine embrace diffusing a sacred delight over my soul, which the icy hand of death cannot chill."

3. The departing spirit is to be committed into the hand of Christ, with the most grateful and sincere purpose of devoting for ever to his service that immortal life which we hope to receive from his mercy.

"O my Lord! thy grace has taught me to say, that *to me to live is Christ*; and I could hardly pronounce *it gain to die*, how happy soever the change might in every other circumstance be, if I did not hope that I should be honoured as the instrument of doing thee some homage. My Lord! if I long for a crown and palm, it is that I may lay them at thy feet: if I wish to receive a golden harp, it is that I may sound forth thy beloved name: and sing to it *the song of Moses and the Lamb*. Poorly and weakly have I attempted thy service here: with

such imperfection, with such interruptions, that nothing which I have done is worthy of the name of service; but I hope, Lord, with those elevated capacities to which thou mayest hereafter raise me, to be able to do much better. I am not curious, Lord, to know how or where thou wilt employ me; be it how or where thou pleasest: if all my intercourse with earth be cut off, thy grace has taught me to say that wherever thou hast an interest, I have an interest too. There is not an unknown region in universal nature to which my spirit shall not rejoice to dart itself at the signal of thy sacred will; nor an office so low, that I shall not esteem it my honour, though placed among the princes of heaven, when it is to be performed for thee. Nor shall this be my sentiment only when I am new born into that world of lustre and glory; but as long as this immortal soul of mine has a being; and thou knowest that I rejoice in its immortality chiefly, as thereby it may be qualified to render thee an immortal tribute of praise, of love, and of obedience."

And now who would not wish, with such sentiments as these, to commit his departing

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spirit to Christ? But who shall presume to do it? Rather, what true believer should hesitate concerning his right to do it? It is necessary, and will, I hope, be pleasant in this view,

II. To consider the great encouragement which every believer has thus to commit his spirit into Christ's hands, in cheerful hope that he will receive it.

Now here, waving many comfortable thoughts that might naturally be suggested, I will only touch a little upon these three. He is constituted, by the Father, the Redeemer and Saviour of souls, that he might thus receive them; he has himself experienced the pains and solemnity of dying, and, therefore, is better qualified to have compassion on his people in such a circumstance; and others have experienced his assistance, in such a season of extremity, to be so powerful, and so sweet, as abundantly to encourage our humble confidence, if, which is here you remember supposed, we be Christians indeed.

1. He is constituted the Redeemer and Saviour of souls, that he might receive them when dislodged from these bodies.

*For this cause was he born, and for this cause came he into the world, that he might do the will of his Father; and this, says he, is the will of my Father that sent me, that I should give unto my sheep eternal life.* Christians! the end and purpose of the blessed Saviour's appearance will never be answered till that hour comes, which alas, our feeble faith often looks upon with a secret kind of dread. He left the regions of glory, he dwelt here on earth, he laboured, he bled, he died; for what? that immortal souls, when unclothed of flesh and blood, might not fall into the hands of the infernal spirits; might not wander helpless and wretched in that unknown world; but that they might have a friend near them, and be conveyed to regions of light and glory. And if, *while enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; how much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life?* How natural to say, *Lord! into thy hands I commit my spirit, when we can add, for thou hast redeemed it, O Lord God of truth!* All that the blessed Saviour has done by his Spirit to sanctify, to reform, to refine, and to renew the soul, speaks also his readiness to receive it. The end of his

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grace imparted to us was not merely to raise us to this beginning of divine life and enjoyment, which it experiences here; but to dress it for the courts of heaven; to make it fit to be conducted thither, and to be fixed there in a final abode. So that to refuse the patronage and care of it in this last extremity, would be to frustrate the grand purpose of his mission, of his love, and even of his death: which leads me to add, that

2. He has himself known the solemnity and pain of dying; which may be a further encouragement to this blessed hope.

It is said in general, *that he suffered being tried, that he might know how to succour those that are tried*; and this was the great trial. He once hung upon the cross: he once felt the pain of dissolving nature; and, when he was in all the vigour of manhood and prime of life, his soul was, as it were, racked out of his body by the bitterest agony; and, in the hour of darkness and desertion, he committed it into his Father's hand, crying out with a loud voice in those memorable words, bearing so near a resemblance to those before me, "*Father, into thy hand I commend my spirit:*" nor has he forgotten the awful scene,

and all the smart, and sorrow, and natural horror of it. Methinks, when the Christian suspects his compassion in such a moment, we may consider him as showing his hands and his feet, and saying, "*be not faithless, but believe*: scruple not to consign a departing spirit to a Saviour, who himself was once dying and dead; to consign it into hands once nailed to the cross, to make them fitter for an office like this." Nor should I forget to plead,

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3. The experience of multitudes, who have been favoured with his powerful and gracious assistance in this season of extremity and distress.

The heavenly world is peopled with an innumerable army of witnesses to this. There are millions who have been carried safely, and vast multitudes of them calmly, joyfully, I might say triumphantly, through every stage of this dark *valley of the shadow of death*. Nor might I upon this occasion appeal only to the history of former ages; though many of them are extremely memorable, especially where, as in the instance of Stephen in my text, martyrdom in its most terrible forms has been disarmed by the sen-

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sible presence of Jesus, and the soul borne above every painful sensation by his miraculous interposition; but every age has produced its illustrations of this truth, that Christ is near to his dying servants, to overcome, as it were, with his imperial presence, the king of terrors. We have heard it, and we have seen it; and though none of us have as yet felt it, yet I persuade myself that we have felt something nearly approaching to it. I doubt not in the least but in such an assembly many of us have imagined ourselves on the very verge of eternity; and, perhaps, have then been favoured with such consolations, such lively views of approaching glory, so sweet a sense of our interest in Christ and all the blessings of his everlasting gospel, extending far into that unchangeable world, that we have known no hours in life so sweet as those in which we thought ourselves in the neighbourhood of death; and lest any should object, that, after all, there are in this gloomy vale shades of horror to any of the living unknown, I must remind you of what many have discovered when really dying; and, not to mention the case of most advanced and experienced Christians, I can-



not forbear saying that in this respect *he has out of the mouths of babes and sucklings ordained strength.* Yes, my friends, I cannot forbear testifying that I have seen little children transformed, as it were, by the presence of Christ into heroes on their dying beds. I have seen some, who had not arrived at the twelfth year of their age, deliberately meeting death in its gradual advances with so much serenity, with so much dignity, with so much elevation of soul under a declared sense of the supporting presence of Christ, that I can deliberately say that I shall esteem myself highly honoured if the close of my life may be like theirs: and who does not feel the encouragement of an experience like this? I doubt not but that it has been intended, not merely for the comfort of these dear lambs of the flock, but for the relief and encouragement of others, not excepting even the shepherds of it. It is pleasant to view such deaths as these; but, oh! how much more pleasant still to trace the ascending spirit; and to pursue, in our meditations,

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III. The blessed consequences which attend the committing of the soul aright into

SERM. XIII. the hands of Christ, and crown a death in itself so happy.

But who shall treat on this subject in a worthy manner? Who but a glorified saint? and surely, were God to send down to our assembly the least in that number; were he to send down a spirit that has been entered on the heavenly world but for a single hour, or since I began this discourse (for while it proceeds, no doubt, in one place or another, many are entering upon it) we might hear from such a soul ten thousand times more than the ablest divine can tell, by all that he can discover, from the reason of things, or from the word of God. But when we endeavour to trace the ascending soul in its wondrous way, there are two thoughts which naturally present themselves; and, obvious as they are, and frequently as they occur in our discourses, I cannot be entirely silent with relation to them. Christ will immediately admit the soul to dwell with him in a perfectly holy and happy state, till he bring it with him in the great day, and dress it anew, that it may grace his final triumph, and reign with him in eternal glory.

1. Christ will immediately admit the soul

to dwell with him in a perfectly holy and happy state.

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The soul, as a great treasure, is committed to him by the believer, who has been taught to prize it in some proportion to its worth, and who rejoices in having been taught that knowledge, as, in conjunction with that of the only true God and Jesus Christ, a summary of all wisdom; and, accordingly, the regards of Christ are fixed upon that. The body he suffers to fall, not unnoticed indeed, but without any present marks and tokens of his intention, that it may dissolve in the grave, as other animal bodies do, whether they be human or brutal; but the soul is immediately received by a detachment of angels; who, in their master's name, and, in obedience to his express command, and not merely as their own act of kindness, take the charge of it; cheer it in the first moments of dissolution, probably by the amiable forms in which they appear; and so, by the first appearance, dissipate for ever every remaining apprehension of danger, if there was any such remaining; and immediately undertake the guidance of it in those trackless paths. They guard it from surrounding dangers, if

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such there be in the region through which it ascends: they open the gate of paradise, no longer forbidden by the flaming sword: they present it before Jesus, the great Lord of the place: he owns it; he embraces it, in token of the most cordial and joyful welcome: he assigns to it a dwelling, and an employment; a dwelling, perhaps, in that colony of happy spirits, where its kindred and acquaintance dwell; an employment, perhaps peculiarly suited to the rank and office in which it has been placed below. At least of this we are sure, that believers shall, when absent from the body, be present with the Lord; with that beloved Saviour, to whom our souls have so long aspired, and whose presence and converse, even here in this imperfect form and degree, have been their joy, and even their life. We are sure that they shall be transformed into his image, far more completely than now in their highest attainments. The cure of their souls, so happily begun and advanced here, shall be perfected: they *shall be anointed with the full effusion of the oil of gladness*: a table of eternal blessings shall be prepared for them, and their cup shall run over: and,

amidst these delights of the paradise of God, shall every soul that he has received wait, till, SERM.  
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2. He will bring it with him in the great day to dress it anew, that it may grace his final triumph, and reign with him in eternal glory.

That illustrious day, for which even now every true Christian is looking, and toward which he is hastening, will, amidst all the joys of the intermediate state, be still the object, not of impatient, but of ardent expectation: for it is chiefly to that that this solemn transaction, the committing the soul to Christ, refers; as Paul expresses it, *I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed to him until that day*, that well known, that long expected day. And it shall dawn; it shall spring up with a lustre distinguishable, even in those realms of perpetual and celestial light. Christ shall give the signal, and all the millions of the redeemed shall flow, as it were at once, to his standard, and range themselves in beautiful order to attend their once more descending Lord. Nor will he, when he calls over the list of apostles and prophets, of martyrs

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and confessors, forget the least and weakest of those souls that have humbly committed themselves to him. No, if he died and rose for its redemption, he cannot forget it when that redemption is to be completed. If we believe that Jesus died and rose again in such a view, as the apostle argues, *them also who sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him.* He shall speak the word, and the new glorious body shall be formed and rise from the dust; far more beautiful and splendid than Adam's in that day in which he was created: and the souls, before a part of his joyful train, shall by an unknown and inconceivable operation and change find themselves newly dressed in robes of splendour, and, upon the whole, capable of new delights, suitable to the perfection of the world and the state in which they are for ever to dwell. Then shall he be glorified in each of his saints, and admired in all them that believe. Then shall the fidelity of their great Lord appear, though the performance of the promise has been during so many thousands of years suspended with regard to many of them, those found alive, and those who slept, *shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air,*

to appear conspicuous as the monuments of his power, his faithfulness, and his grace; being openly acquitted themselves, they shall join with him in the sentence of his righteous vengeance upon apostate angels and impenitent sinners. *This honour have all the saints: praise ye the Lord!* This is the great hope that the gospel sets before us, and this, I must not say the happy end, that were improper indeed; but this the happy lot of every soul, whom Christ has redeemed: and he will maintain their lot; will for ever guard them inviolable by his almighty power, and will be an inexhaustible spring of life, holiness, and happiness to them, through eternal ages. Let the glorious hope be attested as often as our sorrows arise, and transmitted down to every succeeding generation of Christians, while they stand around the graves of those that sleep in Jesus.

And now I have hardly reserved to myself time so much as to hint at the improvement of this excellent subject, which would furnish us with abundance of matter, both by way of instruction and of consolation; and this

SERM. XIII. in both views, with respect to ourselves and to others.

1. The instruction is that we should immediately commit our souls into the hands of Christ, and endeavour to engage those who are dearest to us to do it likewise.

To this all that I have now been saying most evidently tends; to engage us to commit our souls into the hands of Christ. Adored be his name! he has not yet received all the number of his people, so that there should be room for no more. I am persuaded that it is most agreeable to his will that proclamation should from time to time be made in the full assembly of professing Christians, to engage them to this devotion of their souls. Accordingly I now entreat you by the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, by all the solemnity of a dying hour which is approaching, by all the worth of an immortal soul, that you do not omit it. Yes, you say, we hope that we shall not; but when? and how shall it be done? when our souls are trembling on our lips, and just ready to take their flight. Yes, if we have the exercise of reason, we shall then surely



do it anew : but what madness will it be to defer it till such an hour, amidst so many well known uncertainties, so often represented in such a connexion as this. I call you, sirs, to do it now. Oh ! that God may give grace to those of you who have never yet done it, to do it now for the first time. Oh ! that he may incline you all, even while I speak, to do it anew. Wherever you are, Christ is not far from any of you ; for he is the life of the whole creation : but especially is he present where not only two or three, but so large an assembly, are met together in his name. Look to him while I speak, and pour out your hearts before him. “ Blessed Jesus ! I have heard of thy power and thy love ; and I believe what I have heard of them. Conscious that I have in my breast an immortal spirit, and trembling in a survey of its infinite importance, I humbly beg leave to consign it to thy faithful care. *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit !* I would now call upon thee with all the earnestness of a dying creature : from this hour, from this moment, receive it ! Oh ! take it under thy care ; wash it in thy blood ; adorn it with thy righteousness : form it, O

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Lord! by thy Spirit, to every branch of the Christian character; to every lineament of thy blessed image; to a full conformity to that employment and happiness for which the spirits of thy people are intended. And, oh! watch over it, while I travel through this dangerous wilderness; and when it breaks loose from the flesh, fold it in thine embrace. Remember, O Lord! if I should not be able to repeat it, remember the humble petition which I have now uttered. *Remember thy word unto thy servant, on which thou hast caused me to hope*; and be surety unto me for good against all the terrors of death and hell; against all the frailties of this degenerate nature, in the mean time yet more to be feared." I hope and trust that your souls say amen to such language as this: but I testify to you, in the name and presence of God, that if they do not, I have no hope to administer to you; and that souls not thus secured will infallibly be lost: that they will assuredly be the prey of fiends, and dragged by them to the seats of perpetual despair and misery.

And let this case affect our minds with regard to those who are dear to us. You

who are parents, look upon your children on this day; look upon them, and lift up your hearts to God for them: "Oh! that they might live before thee: Oh! that these souls which thou hast put into bodies which proceed from us may be lodged by thee, may be received by thee. Oh! plead with them as for their lives: oh! show them that it is their great interest to do it; and plead earnestly with God for those supplies of his grace which may enable them to do it aright. And carry this solicitude through life with you for all to whom you profess friendship; yea, for all with whom you have intercourse, that their immortal souls may be safe, being committed to Christ in his appointed way; that they may escape the shipwreck, the eternal ruin, with which they are threatened; and may arrive happily on the shore of immortality.

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2. And let it be improved for our consolation too, where we have reason to believe that the soul has been thus committed to Christ. Let it comfort us even in the view of our own dissolution; and let it cheer our hearts with regard to those once dearest to us, concerning whom we have reason to entertain

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this blessed hope, that the Lord Jesus Christ has received their spirits.

For ourselves, it is surely the most reviving thought which can enter into our hearts. "Whatever becomes of me in this mortal life, my immortal interest is safe. My soul! thou art going; thou art going from all this painful scene; far, far advanced on thy journey: thou art dropping mortality, and its cares, and its sorrows; and Christ will receive thee. Peace, be still: let nothing in life discompose thee; let nothing in death terrify thee: but study to maintain that sweet tranquillity for which there is so good a foundation, that thou mayest pass smiling into the hands of thy Lord, and meet him, as it were, with a song."

And as for the pious dead, what a noble subject of consolation and of congratulation with respect to them! They have committed their spirits into the hand of Christ, and he has received them: they are in his hand, from whence nothing can pluck them; in which nothing can molest them. How ought we to congratulate them in our thoughts! and how to admire and adore the condescension and grace of that Jesus, who has

added this to all his other favours to us, that he has received those who were most dear to us to so holy and happy a state. “Yes, Lord! we believe thy love, and their felicity in it; and, while they are praising thee for it above, we will praise thee below, and will consider thy love to them, thy care of them, as an additional engagement to animate us in every tribute of duty and gratitude to thee, as well as a sovereign balm for that grief which the loss of them could not but impart to us.

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This balm, I doubt not, may most properly be applied to the wound which we this day lament. Our deceased friend, though not free from some mixture of doubt, which her own humility, joined to the sense of the infinite importance of her eternal interest, suggested, yet found prevailing hope and peace in her death. She reflected upon it, in the nearest views of eternity, with delight, that she loved Christ; that she had sought him early: and those who knew most of her reflected with pleasure that she had, from her childhood, walked closely with God; and had, by a truly Christian behaviour, answered those obligations which she had brought upon her

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XIII. by a solemn dedication of her soul to God,  
often renewed with pleasure, and, through  
the Divine grace, productive of the happiest  
effects.

Neither the limits of my time, nor my judgment in these matters, allow me to enlarge; but I mention it with peculiar pleasure that she was enabled to make the words on which I have been discoursing some of the last, if not the very last, which she uttered: and, while I bless God for that abundant fund of consolation which this must open upon my mourning friends in this view, I conclude with recommending her example in so early an application to Christ, in so early a commending of her spirit into his hand, to you, my dear young friends, of whom I see so large a number around me this day. Let me beseech and entreat you to follow the example; to imitate it immediately, by the assistance of the Divine grace, which will not fail you if you humbly seek it. Nothing, I am sure, can be a greater joy to your faithful minister, to your pious parents, to your Christian friends: but your

own souls will, above all, have the delight as they will the benefit. So will you be safe and happy, though death should surprise you ever so soon; and if, which I heartily pray may rather be the case, Providence shall see fit to lengthen your lives, you will grow up dear to God and to man, the blessings of the rising age, the ornaments and support of the church in years to come; and I am well persuaded that it will be a sweet alleviation of the sorrows of those who are mourning, on this day, under so awful a breach, if what has been now delivered may be the happy occasion of so great, so infinite a good.

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## SERMON XIV.

THE DIVINE PRESENCE IN DEATH THE  
SUPPORT OF THE GOOD MAN.

[A Funeral Sermon.]

PSALM xxiii. 4.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy  
staff, they comfort me.*

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THERE is not in the whole frame of our nature a more tumultuous passion than fear: there is not in the whole compass of the objects of that passion any thing more dreadful than death; in the view in which it must appear to one who has nothing more than nature for his support. But it is the glory of our religion to bear the soul above this object of our natural apprehension, and to provide us with an antidote against those terrors which would otherwise have been most overwhelming. It is the prerogative of the Prince of glory alone that he disarms the king of ter-



rors: *He hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, and thereby delivered those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.* SERM.  
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And, as before the sun arises above our horizon, his beams are reflected to us, and make a pleasant twilight, which, especially in the advance of it, unveils a thousand beauties in this visible world, which were before covered by the curtains of the night; so, before the gospel appeared, saints under the Mosaic dispensation had some faint reflected rays of the *Sun of righteousness*; and were encouraged to rejoice in those consolations which are now more plainly exhibited, and are more copiously communicated to believers.

Few books of the Old Testament discover more of this happy temper than that of the Psalms: few of the Psalms of David do, in this respect, exceed that which is now before us; so that the Christian, in his most pleasing and delightful moments, when he comes to the house of the Lord, and even when he sits down at his table, can hardly find any words more expressive of his present joy, or of his future triumphant hopes, than those which

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the sweet Psalmist of Israel here suggests to him, in language as sweet, and yet as nervous and expressive as poetry could dictate, or devotion could wish. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, &c.* And such joy and confidence had David in his pastoral care that there was no path through which he could not venture, when supported *by his staff, and guarded by his rod. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me.*

I need not be large in explaining these words. You see that they intimate two distinct things; the gloomy scene, in which the Psalmist supposes himself to be; and the comfort which he promises himself that he should find even there. The gloomy scene is *the valley of the shadow of death.* The phrase is an evident allusion to what might often happen in the wilderness, where the shepherd might drive his flock through some valley, where rocks and mountains hung over a narrow way in such a manner as to darken the passage, and make the sheep afraid to enter into it. Thus the expression, *the valley of the shadow of death,* may properly express any

danger; yet would there have been no foundation to have used it here, unless the case of dying had been included: and then the Psalmist adds, that in this circumstance he would fear no evil; not because he had a natural bravery of soul, accustomed in general to despise danger, which he had faced a thousand times in all its most dreadful forms, in the bloody field; and least of all, because he was entirely careless of all that lay beyond the grave: but because he promised himself that he should have the Divine presence, and that God would there treat him in the character of a shepherd; that he would stretch forth his rod and staff, instruments of his pastoral care, both to guide and to direct him; as by the rod the shepherd leads his flock, and by his staff drives away dogs, and sometimes fiercer beasts, who might be ready to fall upon the feeble, and, in themselves, helpless sheep.

The words naturally present us with three remarks, which, together with the improvement of them, will be the entire subject of my discourse on this solemn and affecting occasion; a subject which those who know the circumstances in which our deceased

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friend finished her course will see to be peculiarly adapted to them.

I. The best of men cannot but discern something gloomy and uncomfortable in the prospect of death.

II. The good man has, nevertheless, reason to conclude that he shall then have the favourable presence of God : and,

III. There is something so comfortable in the prospect of such a support as to disarm death of its terrors.

Hearken, my brethren and friends, to what is now to be spoken ! Hearken, as dying creatures ; and lift up your souls to God in earnest prayer, that each of you may share these consolations ; and that each of you may have a comfortable evidence of his own title to them ; for better would it have been for us not to have been born, than that we should see ourselves reduced to the wretched necessity of passing through this valley without this support.

I. The best of men cannot but discern something gloomy and uncomfortable in the prospect of dying.

I will not here argue from those apprehen-

sions of death which some of the most eminent Christians, whose names are recorded in scripture, have there expressed; nor even from that reluctance which the blessed Jesus himself felt, when going forth to encounter with it. I will only touch on some obvious particulars, in which we are all concerned, which make the matter so plain as not to require any further confirmation: to bid a final adieu to all the pleasures and entertainments of life; to feel the agonies of dissolving nature; to drop this body to moulder in the grave; and to go with the soul into the presence of God as our Judge, to be immediately fixed by him in an unalterable eternity: these are objects of terror and distress, which may in some measure affect even the best of men.

1. To bid a final adieu to all the pleasures and enjoyments of life cannot, to any human being, be an object of indifferency.

As barren a wilderness as earth may appear to a soul that hath been acquainted with the prospect of heaven, yet we must acknowledge that there are some pleasant spots to be found in it; some palm trees, and fountains of water, which the heavenly pilgrim himself may be in some degree unwilling to leave. Truly light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing

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to behold the sun. So is this world enriched and adorned by the Divine goodness, that imagination labours when it would paint out a more delightful scene; and we plant paradise itself with the productions of our native soil.

In many circumstances we cannot forbear to be entertained with the company of our fellow travellers; and when we see a road so narrow that it will admit but one single passenger at a time, we are grieved at the separation, and are ready to take, perhaps, too fond a farewell of our former companions on the way. *I shall no more behold man, even the inhabitant of the earth*, was the reflection and complaint of a very eminent saint, when he apprehended *the residue of his days to be cut off* in the midst; and we cannot wonder that it was the occasion of some lamentation. Again,

2. The apprehended agony of dissolving nature makes the view of death painful even to a good man.

Christians! those of us who have borne extreme pain know how much it tries not only the strength of nature, but of grace too. How does it naturally throw the mind off its bias, and how extremely difficult is it to com-

pose our thoughts, when the body is, as it were, upon the rack! How tedious do the moments then seem to pass: how natural then is it, in the morning, to say, *Would God it were evening!* and, in the evening, *Would God it were morning!* How dreadful would the repetition of some of our former sufferings feel, if we knew that we were to go through all the same smarting pains again? and pains untried, perhaps, seem more formidable than they, from a secret apprehension that there is something in them unknown, which may, perhaps, exceed all that we have felt. If a man knows that a leg or an arm is to be taken off, how many terrifying ideas has he of the operation? I say not that it is certain, nor do I apprehend that it is by any means probable, that death is more painful; yet it is evident that the generality of men are willing to avoid it even at this dreadful rate, which on some accounts it is our duty to do; and in scripture the pains of death are proverbially used to express the extremest which nature can endure; or rather those under which it must sink. Innocent nature must, therefore, shrink back from them: how much more nature enfeebled by the fall, and taught

SERM. XIV. to look upon sickness and pain as parts of the curse consequent on sin! I may add,

3. The prospect of a separation from the body, and the dissolution of this animal part in the grave, is another circumstance which exasperates the views of death, even to the best of men.

*No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it.* Whatever philosophical views we may sometimes have of its being a burthen and confinement to us; yet, being designed by God to be the inhabitants of these bodies, we have a natural and a necessary love for them; and it would be a trouble to us to drop them if they were to be annihilated, or all the particles which belonged to them were to be dispersed and pass away in such a manner as no longer to be capable of being traced. But a righteous God, in further token of his displeasure against sin, has appointed such an end to these mortal bodies as carries in it something very humbling and very mortifying. They must putrify in the grave; they must be devoured by most contemptible reptiles: and, though this is a much wiser and more gracious constitution than if they had continued



durable, as so many statues of marble, to feed the fond sorrows of surviving friends, and to make the transports of their grief proportionably lasting ; and, though it may give a benevolent man some pleasure to think that the very atoms of which his body is composed may be in some measure useful to succeeding generations ; yet it must be acknowledged that, with respect to the immediate prospect, it is no little triumph of faith to claim kindred with the grave, and *to say*, with an easy and a cheerful heart, *to corruption, thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister.* It must be allowed that these things have their weight ; yet, in some respects, and, I fear, in many cases, it may be said that *all these things are only the beginning of sorrows* : for,

4. It is much more tremendous to think of passing by death into the immediate presence of God, and being fixed in an unalterable eternity.

*In many things we offend all ; and those offences which, weighed in the balances of men, may appear light, will seem heavier than lead in God's balances. What shall I do when God rises up ; and when he judges,*

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*what shall I answer?* If now, while my state of probation continues; if now, while there is room to apply to God for pardon, my soul shrinks with an inward horror; what will it do when this decisive moment comes? when all my eternal interests are to be unalterably determined? when prayers and tears must have no farther room, and the tree is falling as it must lie for ever? If there be so much as a doubt what the event may be; and, much more, if fears should prevail, there will be something more awful in this part of the prospect than in any other: *for those terrors of death, which are seen, are temporal; but those which are unseen are eternal.*

Yet this is the valley through which we are all to pass; so dark that sun, moon, and stars will be lost there, and not one earthly object seen which can give us any delight. We must tread this solitary, this thorny path, till one part of our nature be torn from the other; and, when we come to the end of the passage, we must see the unfathomable ocean of eternity before us; and, as soon as we see it, we must launch into it. Whose heart would not fail him in such a prospect, if he had no friend to support him; or if that friend were

other than almighty? It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I add,

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II. That the good man has reason to conclude that he shall have the favourable presence of God with him in this solemn and important hour.

David has said, *When I go through this dark valley, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me*: and, in this sense, he that is feeble amongst us shall be as David. For, blessed be God! it is not so difficult to find arguments to prove that God will then be with his people, to succour and deliver them; as it is to avoid enlarging on a topic where such a variety of matter will arise beyond the room which we must allow for this part of our subject. I might otherwise argue this matter at large from the relation which the blessed God bears to his people as their Father; and what parent is there that stands unaffected by the dying bed of a dear child, or that can desert it in circumstances of such peculiar distress? I might argue from the rich provision which God has made for the happiness of his people beyond the grave, which must imply a correspondent care in guarding them through it;

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otherwise this provision would be in vain. I might also plead all the promises which God has made to this purpose, all the engagements which he has laid himself under of being *with them in six troubles and in seven, and when they pass through the fire and the water*; and if it be said, as it truly may, that many of these refer to less considerable dangers, I readily acknowledge it; but from hence we may strongly infer that if he be with them in these, how much more will he be with them in those which are so much greater and more extreme. And, once more, I might send you to the experience of many Christians, whom he has caused *to be joyful in glory*; and, if I may allude to the words of the Psalmist originally bearing a very different sense, *to be joyful in glory, and sing aloud on their beds*. But I forbid myself to enlarge on these things, having had such frequent occasion to touch upon them, and being desirous to leave myself some room for what may remain to be offered under the third general; where I am to observe,

III. That the gracious presence of God with us may disarm death of its terrors.

Christians! you shall die, even the best of you; you who have lived nearest to God; you who have enjoyed the sweetest foretastes of an immortal life. The graves are ready for you, and the strong hand of death is stretching itself out to seize you. You shall die, as was hinted above, uncheered by human society, unsupported by human aid; for *who can deliver his brother from going down to the pit*, or boast a friendship that shall follow him beyond it? But then you are not entirely alone; oh, blessed be God, far from it! *The Lord of hosts is with you; the God of Jacob is your refuge, selah.* The eternal God is your refuge, and *underneath are his everlasting arms.* And now let us take courage; let us challenge this haughty conqueror to draw forth, as it were, all his battalions, and to set all his terrors in array before us: surely we may say to them all as Isaiah, in the spirit of faith, to the enemies of Israel: *Associate yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; for God is with us:* and if he be with us, he can moderate our agony; can silence our fears; can restrain our enemies; and even delight our souls, in the greatest extre-

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mities of nature, with joyful prospects and triumphant hopes.

1. The presence of God with us in our dying moments can soften the agonies of nature.

He is the great God of nature, and therefore has all its operations and all its sensations under his direction and controul. What is pain but an idea which he raises in the mind? and therefore it has no degree of strength but what he is pleased to give to it; and he often shows that he can abate its keenness under circumstances which have naturally the greatest tendency to produce it. He who, in favour of the Hebrew worthies, *quenched the violence of fire*, and brought them forth out of the flames of a seven times heated furnace, unconsumed, unhurt, un-singed, has sometimes in an extraordinary manner rendered his people insensible even of their dying agonies; sometimes, and especially in martyrdom, by filling their minds with such strong consolations as have seemed to raise them above the body, even while they have been united to it; and, in other instances, we have, no doubt, observed that tender and timorous spirits have been given

up, during the most violent stages of a mortal distemper, to a kind of delirium, in which they have been quite insensible of their disease: the important moment of dissolution has passed while they knew not that they were near to it; and they have probably been as much surprised on their entrance into eternity, as if they had died by some sudden accident, or in the sleep of health. Now, when we seriously reflect upon this, we shall find it an astonishing fact, though the commonness of it may make it little regarded; and, though it may be infinitely more dreadful than any pain or terror which a dying sinner could suffer, it may be ordered as a dispensation of singular love towards those of God's dear children, whose hearts might otherwise be ready to fail them; and who, without extraordinary support, might be discomposed in the immediate view of eternity, though they had no just foundation for fear. But I am to add,

2. That the presence of God in our dying moments can hush the tumult of our fears.

They may then be very busy: they may form phantoms of horror, which, as but half seen through the darkness of the valley, may

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on that very account become so much the more grisly, while imagination supplies what is concealed. But God has a voice which can reach them all; can silence and can dispel them in a moment; while, instead of all their clamour and their din, it only hears its Father saying, *Fear not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God, &c.* This will give sufficient strength to the feeble, and increase power to those who have no might. So have we heard; and, blessed be God! so have we seen. I can say, with delight, that many are gone into eternity from my ministerial care; and others, through the Divine goodness, are still continued under it, who have stood upon the very borders of the grave with all possible calmness and serenity; and who have actually obeyed, or prepared themselves to obey, a sudden summons into the other world, with as much composure as if they had only been called to go up to the house of God; and, after the worship of an hour, had been to return to their houses again. And this is a noble display of what we are next to mention:

3. The power which God has to restrain Satan.



That malignant spirit would delight to terrify and torment, where he cannot destroy. Fain would he exclude the soul from heaven; but if he cannot do that, fain would he prevent those anticipations of heaven, which it may enjoy here upon earth; fain would he aggravate all natural apprehensions, and perhaps suggest supernatural terrors, that he might rob the dying Christian of his triumph; that he might rob survivors of that edification and comfort which the joyful saint administers; and that, if possible, he may discourage them by what of an opposite nature they may observe, perhaps, in some instances where they least expected it. For this purpose he often *comes down with great rage, because he knows he hath but a short time.* But remember that this wretched malignant spirit is a condemned rebel, whom God holds in his chain. He could not without permission touch the body of Job, nor so much as a swine of the Gadarenes. God can either order him away, or he can make his presence, if he be present, near the dying bed of a believer, to be a scene of torture to him, as I doubt not that it often is. Yes, my brethren! Christ can, by the death of his saints as well

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as by their resurrection, renew the triumphs of his own, by which *he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly*. And if he suffers him for a moment to afflict his servants, it will soon be over, and over for ever. “*O thou enemy,*” shall the celestial victor quickly say, in an anthem of melody unknown to any but those blissful regions, “*O thou enemy! destruction and terror are now come to a perpetual end.*” Yea, he is often enabled by faith to say it even in the language of mortals, and while lying among them in what seems his most helpless state; which leads me to add,

4. That God can strengthen our faith in approaching glory and a happy resurrection; and thereby not only disarm death of its terror, but turn it into joy.

What can do it more effectually than such faith in lively exercise? It was in the full view of this that Paul cried out, *O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?* Nor let us object that Paul had his peculiar reasons to say it, because he had *been caught up into the third heaven*, and had heard its songs, and had seen its unutterable glory: God can let in a Divine ray upon the departing

spirit, and show it how great, and how sure, and how near is its approaching happiness. The great Father of spirits can by his secret influences separate the soul of a dying Christian from all attachment to sense, ere yet it is separated from the body; and elevate his thoughts to a holy fervour, even while the icy hand of death is chilling the blood in his sinking veins, and stopping his feeble, labouring pulse; and can give him to say, *I see heaven opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; Jesus, my Saviour, my Intercessor, and my Forerunner, to whose dying love all these delightful prospects are owing. I see his smiling face, and I see heaven there; I see the general assembly and church of the first-born, drinking in from the view of him immortal pleasure, and my thirsty soul shall drink its fill among them. He that thirsted, and, when the agonies of death were upon him, condescended to taste the vinegar for me, is now putting into my hand the cup of salvation, and unsealing for me the sources of immortal life. I shall drink, and forget my poverty here below, and remember my misery no more, if that may, upon the whole, be called misery, which has been tempered*

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with such hopes. I bid adieu to my friends on earth for a little while, for I am going to the best of friends, to a whole assembly, each of whom is, with respect to what is most desirable, better than all with whom I have here conversed. And there is Jesus, the best of friends, holding out the crown to bind my immortal brow, and opening his gracious arms to embrace me, and by that embrace to diffuse all heaven at once over my soul. These glories are mine. Death, instead of separating me from my God, shall convey me to him; and though, in its immediate consequences, it renders this vile body yet far viler than it has even hitherto been, yet shall it prove the happy occasion of refining and transforming it: it shall break it in pieces, that it may be cast, as it were, into a new mould, and come forth a resplendent immortal image of my Saviour's most glorious body. Let death, therefore, come with all its terrors, and hurt me if it can, while my Lord is so near, and thus sheds his secret and vital presence over my heart. Let animal nature feel the shock, and sink under it, the more it feels, the sooner it will sink, and set at liberty a superior spirit, which, having so often en-

snared, it is fit that it should for a while afflict. Welcome the gentle blow which at once strikes off my fetters, and wakes my soul to quit its prison! And, O my God! if what I now suffer may illustrate the strength of faith, and thereby the glory of him who is the great author and support of it, I will greet these sufferings, and rejoice, not only though I die, but because I die, and say that death be mine, if by my death any the least additional tribute of honour may be thine.

And here I must observe that, through the Divine goodness, what I have been now saying was remarkably illustrated in the death of our dear friend. Concerning her character I am allowed to hint some particulars, of the truth of which I am fully assured, in part from my own observation, and, in other respects, from the testimony of those who are persons of undoubted credit, and who were most intimately acquainted with her. She was, as many of you well know, a very amiable woman; her temper was singularly happy, her turn in conversation remarkably agreeable, and her heart formed to the tenderest sentiments of generous and endearing friendship. In the relation of a wife she was affectionate and obliging; she had all the tender-

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ness of a mother, under the direction of an ardent love for the souls of her children, which dictated daily and fervent prayers for their happiness. She was a Christian of the considerate and substantial sort; a warm lover of God and of divine things; a sincere and affectionate believer in Christ and his grace, which, living and dying, was unspeakably precious to her soul. She delighted in the sabbath, and in the ordinances and people of God; was a great lover of reading and religious retirement; and was close and exact in walking with God in the daily duties of the closet.

As to the dealings of God with her in her last sickness, it is very remarkable that, some weeks before it seized her, she was powerfully impressed with God's message to Hezekiah, *Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live.* She was soon carried above the alarm, and was patient and submissive under the hand of God. She was much in ejaculatory prayer during her composed intervals, committing her soul with ardent and lively faith into the hand of Jesus her Mediator and Redeemer, and rejoicing in the views of his righteousness, as what gave her confidence in her appearance before God. She took

various opportunities, by day and by night, of exhorting her friends, that were around her, *to keep the way of the Lord*. She took a solemn, composed, and yet very affectionate leave of the companion of her life and of her children, whom she committed to a covenant with God and his grace. In this frame and posture of soul death did its office upon her; and, while passing through the dark valley, she *feared no evil*, as it so evidently appeared that *God was with her, and his rod and his staff gave her so much comfort*, as spectators could not but behold with wonder and delight. Adored be Divine grace for such favours to her! May surviving friends remember her virtues, and imitate them; remember her consolations, and rejoice in them!

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I could have said a great deal more, but am willing to leave myself a little room for those reflections with which I am to conclude the discourse; in which I shall address myself, first, to sinners; then, to saints who have conquered the fears of death; and, lastly, to such as are still combating with them.

1. I would address myself to sinners, even to all such that are neglecters of true religion.

Let me ask you, sirs, is it not *appointed*

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*for all men once to die?* and appointed for you among the rest? If you have a warrant of exemption, produce it; but if you have not, be persuaded to look towards the grave, where you must soon lie; to think of that which you must soon feel. Say, my friends, what support have you in death? Is there any secret thing with you, any spring of consolation as yet unknown? From the world it cannot spring; its sweetest enjoyments will only add bitterness to the everlasting divorce. From God it cannot arise; for we now suppose that you have no interest in him. What then is your hope? what is your confidence? Unhappy creature! you have no confidence, no hope. You must pass the valley alone, amidst all its horrors; without God for your friend, yea, what is infinitely more terrible, with God for an enemy. In vain might you wish to find the path of paradise; were you arrived at the very gates of it, you would there meet cherubim and a flaming sword, to drive you to an everlasting distance, not as our first parents were driven, into a world like this, which, though in comparison of Eden, a desert, yet would be more than an Eden compared with those seats of horror which Divine justice has pre-



pared for wretches like you, and which are represented by a lake that burns, not only with fire, but with brimstone. Think, therefore, of your present miserable case; miserable enough, one would imagine, to destroy any pleasure which you can take in any other thought; and, as you desire the support of God in your death, seek his favour now, even now. Seek it in the method in which alone it can be found; by an humble return to him through Christ, and by a believing application to the blood and righteousness of the great Redeemer, whose office and glory it is to deliver from the wrath to come.

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2. I would apply to those who have conquered the fear of death.

And you, my brethren! I would solemnly call this day, and every day, to admire from your very hearts that Divine grace which has prepared these consolations, and has handed them out unto you; that has laid in such cordials as these, and applied them to your souls, to keep them from sinking under what to nature is most terrible. Assume a becoming courage in the strength of such supports. View death with a steady composure, in whatever form he may appear;

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though it should be by the hand of violence, or some sudden accident, or by some furious distemper, generally much more terrible and painful, by which the soul should, as it were, be torn out of the body by slow degrees; or though it should come upon you in a moment, in the midst of your youth, of your comforts, of your designs: be the valley ever so long and ever so gloomy, God will be seen, as it were, in the light of his own glory; and if the passage be instantaneous, what can be more desirable than at once to close our eyes and see our God? When he has secured our eternal hopes upon the basis of such a promise, it is beneath the dignity and magnanimity of a Christian to make himself uneasy about those precarious circumstances which God himself did not judge important enough to insert into the engagement of the covenant. Far be it from us to be anxious about them; as if we could not be content to die in the embrace of God, and to be raised in this embrace to his heavenly kingdom, unless it be in this or that circumstance of time and place.

3. Let me address myself to those who, though it has been their sincere desire to lay hold of the covenant of God in a Redeemer,

are nevertheless still pressed with anxious fears of dying. These fears, though they arise from various causes, may all be resolved into the want of faith, the lively exercise of which would banish them all. Now that a foundation may be laid for exerting it with greater vigour and advantage, let me conclude with such exhortations as these. Solemnly record, as it were, in the presence of God the surrender of yourselves to him. Be as express as possible in committing your souls into his hands, and laying hold of his covenant in the Lord Jesus Christ his Son. Do it expressly in your secret retirements; do it with public solemnity at his table. Be diligently on your guard against sin, which tends to terrify and affright the mind in the view of the Divine Being, and makes it start back from its only support. Let me add, do not content yourselves merely with guarding against sin, but labour to exert yourselves in the service of God; that, conversing more and more with him in the discharge of every duty, you may form a more intimate and endearing acquaintance, and with greater pleasure think of retiring, with him, from all that you esteem and love here upon earth, secure of nobler entertainments. Your graces

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will grow with exercise, and your assurance will advance with your graces. And, to conclude, be every day laying up a stock of prayers against a dying hour, that if then you should be incapable of repeating your addresses, God may, as it were, look over those which are already upon record, and answer you in that moment of distress.

This is the way to which I would direct you; and I bless God that I can say it is the way in which I have myself found rest and peace, hope and joy. Daily act on such motives as these, and you may comfortably hope that the God, whom you have loved, and whom you have served, with whom you have walked, and whom you have sought, will smile upon your souls when every other object disappears from your eyes, and will enable you to say when, perhaps, your lips are too feeble to utter the words, *Into thy hands I commend my spirit; for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth!* Amen.

END OF VOL. III.



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